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"PREHISTORIC CREATURES ON DISPLAY"

BY RICHARD JODAN

Because we are creatures of time it is very difficult for us to grasp the "timeless" concept of eternity. This is, no doubt, at least part of the reason that we find it much easier to envision things always going on and on into the future, than to look back into the past and imagine when nothing was!

As truly impressive and intricate as our minds are, as vast a range of capabilities as they demonstrate, we are still finite creatures and soon come to our limits, Thus it is good that we have the Word of God to give us some insight into eternity--past and future. In this connection the epistles of Paul prove especially helpful.

A PREHISTORIC PLAN

"IN HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE, which God, that cannot lie, PROMISED BEFORE THE WORLD BEGAN" (Tit. 1:2).

Here we learn that far back in eternity past the triune God held, as it were, an "Eternal Life Conference." There, in the absence of any creature, He made a promise to Himself--a promise of eternal life for poor sinners!

In a similar line of thought Paul reminds Timothy that

"God hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to HIS OWN PURPOSE AND GRACE WHICH WAS GIVEN US IN CHRIST JESUS BEFORE THE WORLD BEGAN" (2 Tim. 1:9).

It is clearly "in Christ Jesus" that this promise of life finds its reality, as Paul repeatedly emphasizes. For ex- ample:

"That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of HIS PROMISE IN CHRIST by the gospel.

"ACCORDING TO THE ETERNAL PURPOSE WHICH HE PURPOSED IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD" (Eph. 3:6, 11).

Thus he declares:

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS; of whom I am chief" (1Tim. 1:15).

And Paul leaves no doubt as to when this "eternal purpose" was manifested in time. Each of the above passages when quoted in their entirety, forcefully bear out this point: "...God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began,

"But hath IN DUE TIMES MANIFESTED His WORD THROUGH PREACHING WHICH IS COMMITTED UNTO ME ACCORDING TO THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD OUR SAVIOR" (Tit. 1:2,3).

"...His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,

"But is NOW MADE MANIFEST by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ....

"WHERE UNTO I AM APPOINTED A PREACHER, AND AN APOSTLE, AND A TEACHER OF THE GENTILES" (2 Tim. 1:9-11).

"That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs. . .of His promise in Christ by the gospel:

"WHEREOF I WAS MADE A MINISTER, ACCORDING TO THE GIFT OF THE GRACE OF GOD...

"UNTO ME, WHO AM LESS THAN THE LEAST OF ALL SAINTS, IS THIS GRACE GIVEN, THAT I SHOULD PREACH AMONG THE GENTILES THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST" (Eph.3:6-8).

"Howbeit, FOR THIS CAUSE I OBTAINED MERCY, THAT IN ME FIRST JESUS CHRIST MIGHT SHOW FORTH ALL LONGSUFFERING, FOR A PATTERN TO THEM WHICH SHOULD HEREAFTER BELIEVE ON HIM TO LIFE EVERLASTING" (1 Tim. 1:15,16).

All this emphasizes the fact that the "promise" and "purpose" which God established before the world began is indeed the great subject of Paul's epistles. In fact he calls this message:

"...THE PREACHING OF JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO THE REVEIATION OF THE MYSTERY, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest. . ." (Rom. 16:25).

GENUINE PREHISTORIC CREATURES

Just as the "promise" is linked with the "purpose" made "before the world began " they both in turn are found in Ephesians 1:3,4:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

"ACCORDING AS HE HATH CHOSEN US IN HIM BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD, that We should be holy and without blame before Him in love."

Thus we see that the members of the Body of Christ are, indeed, genuinely "prehistoric creatures," having been "chosen in Him before the foundation of the world!"

And this is all the more revealing as we more carefully examine the phrase "before the world began,"

First, there is a clear dispensational truth here. The Body of Christ is said to issue forth from a purpose and promise made "before"--before Abraham, before Adam, yes, even "before the foundation of the world." Thus it is separate and distinct from that which pertains to the earthly promises and blessings belonging to Israel, for these are said to have been prepared "from the foundation of the world:"

"WHEN THE SON OF MAN SHALL COME IN HIS GLORY, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory:

"And before Him shall be gathered all nations....

"Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come ye blessed of My Father, inherit THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR YOU FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD" (Matt. 25:31-34).

The distinction is clear: "prepared from the foundation of the world" vs "chosen before the foundation of the world." The difference is the difference between prophecy and the mystery--the two great subjects of the Bible. That this is not an artificial distinction is demonstrated by the fact that both Peter and Paul use this very distinction to summarize their ministries. Listen as Peter explains to his Pentecostal hearers just where they stood in the program of God, describing his message to them as that "which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:21). Then hear Paul entitle the message committed to his trust as "the preaching of Jesus Christ

according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Rom. 16:25). If words have meaning these two programs are not the same!

God had a prophetic purpose--one which He has spoken about and made known since He placed man on the earth. He also, we now know, had a secret purpose--one which He did not speak about and make known until it was revealed to the Apostle Paul (see Eph. 3:1-9, Col. 1:24-26). The prophetic program centers in His purposes for His kingdom nation, Israel. The mystery program centers in the Body of Christ and His purposes for it. Two distinct programs; two distinct agencies to accomplish these programs. In the former we see God's purpose to restore the earth under His authority through the instrumentality of a kingdom vested in the nation Israel; in the latter is demonstrated His intent to do the same with "the heavenly places" through the instrumentality of the Body of Christ--a purpose now revealed during the interval occasioned by the setting aside of Israel and the interruption of the prophetic program.

God's purpose for the Body of Christ was established before Genesis 1:1 but was kept secret-- "the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:9). Only now, "in due time," has He manifested His "eternal purpose" in Christ through the revelation given to and through the Apostle Paul.

And that these two programs have a common goal is also clear. Through the revelation committed to Paul we are enabled to understand the ultimate in "insider information"-- "the mystery of the Father's will"! Speaking of the blessings which the Father has bestowed on member of the Body of Christ, he writes:

"HAVING MADE KNOWN UNTO US THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself:

"THAT IN THE DISPENSATION OF THE FULNESS OF TIMES HE MIGHT GATHER TOGETHER IN ONE ALL THINGS IN CHRIST, BOTH WHICH ARE IN HEAVEN, AND WHICH ARE ON EARTH; EVEN IN HIM" (Eph. 1:9, 10).

The Father's ultimate intention is to have all of heaven and earth center in and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, that He along might have the preeminence (cf. Phil. 2:9-11, Col. 1:16-19).

That the Body centers in Christ is touchingly illustrated by the phrase "before the foundation of the world." It occurs only three times in our Bible--each having to do with Christ Himself or with the members of His Body. If the three passages are placed side by side the obvious connections are easily seen:

John 17:24 "Father. . . .Thou LOVEDST Me before the foundation of the world."

Eph. 1:4 "...He hath chosen us before the foundation of the world, that we should be HOLY AND WITHOUT BLAME before Him IN LOVE."

1 Pet. 1:19,20 "...Christ...a lamb WITHOUT BLEMISH AND WITHOUT SPOT: who was verily ordained before the foundation of the world..."

Just as Christ was loved by the Father before the foundation of the world, so the Body of Christ was "chosen in love." And just as Christ was foreordained before the foundation of the world to be a "lamb without blemish and without spot," so His Body was likewise chosen to be "holy and without blame."

What is true of Christ before the foundation of the world is now said to be true of the members of His Body. So closely are we united to Him that Scripture declares us to be "complete in Him" and "blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." As the Father views the believer today, He sees us in the spiritual accomplishments of His Son and thus we are repeatedly demonstrated to be "one with Him:" Crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:3-6), buried with Christ (Rom. 6:4, Col. 2:12), resurrected with Christ (Rom. 6:5, Eph 2:6), quickened with Christ (Eph. 2:5), seated with Christ (Eph. 2:6), suffering with Christ (Rom. 8:17, Phil. 3:10), even glorified with Christ (Rom.8:17, Col.3:4)! So truly one with Him are we today, that we may each one join in singing the old chorus,

So near to God am I,
Nearer I could not be;
For in the Person of His Son,
I am as near as He!

And, blessed thought, this was so in the mind of the Father "before the foundation of the world."

ON DISPLAY: THE FUTURE IN VIEW

There is at least one more aspect of this connection which we must consider:

"And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

"THAT IN THE AGES TO COME HE MIGHT SHOW THE EXCEEDING RICHES OF HIS GRACE IN HIS KINDNESS TOWARD US THROUGH CHRIST JESUS.

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which GOD HATH BEFORE ORDAINED THAT WE SHOULD WALK IN THEM" (Eph. 2:6,7,10).

God's purpose from eternity past is in fact His "eternal purpose," for it even stretches into and across the horizon of eternity future. In "the ages to come" He will place on public display--indeed, on universal exhibition "the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." Then we will truly be "Prehistoric Creatures on Display"!

What an incentive and encouragement all this should be for us to keep eternity in view-- and thus be faithful to Christ, so that even now "the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor. 4:10,11). This is the secret of proper worship today! And we have the solemn assurance of the Word of God to us:

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us A FAR MORE EXCEEDING AND ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY:

"While we look not at the things which are seen...for THE THINGS WHICH ARE SEEN ARE TEMPORAL, BUT THE THINGS WHICH ARE NOT SEEN ARE ETERNAL" (2 Cor.4:17, 18).

DID THE BODY OF CHRIST BEGIN IN ACTS 2?

Pastor Clyde Pilkington

Many Christians assume the Body of Christ began on the day of Pentecost. Without ever stopping to prove why (1 Thess. 5:21) they then move ahead to establish their doctrines concerning this dispensation with this as the key. Have you ever considered what actually took place on Pentecost? What follows is a list of fourteen reasons why the church could not have begun at Pentecost.

1. There was already a church in existence on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:47,47). This church was not the church which is His body (Eph. 1:22,23) because this was hid until it was revealed to Paul (Eph. 3). The church, to which the believers of Pentecost were added, was the kingdom church and was based on the confession of Peter that Jesus was the Christ (or Messiah). Peter was then given the keys to this kingdom church and power to "bind " and "lose" (cf John 20:23).
2. Peter preached the "Last Days" off Israel at Pentecost, and not the first days of the church, which is His Body (Acts 2:16,17).
3. There is no indication in Acts 2, or anywhere in scripture, that the Body of Christ is being formed on Pentecost.
4. Pentecost was a Jewish feast day given in the Law of Moses (Lev.23, Deut. 16). In the dispensation of the grace of God there is no observance of days and they are spoken of as "weak and beggarly elements" and "bondage" (Gal 4:9-11). It is inconceivable that the Lord would begin a church on a feast day which He had for another economy.

5. There was no casting off of the nation Israel on the day of Pentecost, as was necessary for the establishing of the Body of Christ (Rom 11:11-15,32). On the contrary, the first real offer of the kingdom was made by Peter on Pentecost. The kingdom was not offered during the Gospels, it was only said to be "as hand". It actually was impossible for it to have been offered until after the New Testament was established by the death of Christ (Luke 17:24,25;24:26). Christ must first have suffered and then enter into His glory (1 Peter 1:11).

6. This Body of Christ is a joint body of Jews and Gentiles. Peter only addressed Jews at Pentecost. Notice the words, "Ye men of Judea," "Ye men of Israel", "Ye", "you", "your," "Men and Brethren", and "the House of Israel" throughout the passage.

7. Part of Pentecostal celebration was the two wave loaves of Lev.23. This is used as a type of the "Jews and Gentiles" by many dispensationalists but this cannot match the clear teaching of I Cor. 10:17 which shows that the Body of Christ is one bread.

8. Part of the message that Peter preached on Pentecost involved water baptism as a requirement for salvation (Acts 2:38). Water baptism has not part in the gospel message committed to Paul for the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 1:17, Eph. 4:5).

9. On the day of Pentecost the promise of the Father was fulfilled to Israel. This was a spiritual baptism where Christ was the baptizer and Israel was baptized with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11-12; Act 1:5). This spiritual baptism is quite different from the baptism of this dispensation, where the Holy Spirit is the baptizer and the believer is baptized into the Body of Christ. The student of the Bible should learn to make a difference where God makes a difference. There are two different spiritual baptisms. One is to the kingdom church and the other is to the church which is His body. One is associated with signs and wonders, and the other is not (I Cor. 12:13, Rom 6:3,4).

10. Pentecost was a fulfillment of prophecy (Acts 2:16,33;3:24) whereas the Body of Christ was a mystery which had been kept secret since the world began (Col. 1:24- 26).

11. If there was any dispensational change the Apostles were completely unaware of it for they continued at the Temple (Acts 2:46; 3:1,3,8,11; 5:20,21,25,42).

12, The Twelve and the kingdom church at Jerusalem also continued, throughout the book of Acts, to observe the Law (Acts 22:12; 27:20-25).

13. The kingdom church, in accordance with the kingdom teaching of Christ, sold their possessions and established a common treasury (Acts 2:44,45; 3:6; 4:32- 35).

14. Peter, in his message on the day of Pentecost, did not preach salvation by grace, which is the clear and distinctive message of Paul given to him by revelation.

Some would argue at this point that God started the Body of Christ there, despite the accounts given in Acts 2, and that Peter was simply ignorant of it being formed. This is

hard to believe since Peter had his understanding opened (Luke 24:45), the indwelling of the Spirit (John 20:22), the baptism with the Holy Ghost (Acts 1:5) and the filling with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4). No, Peter was not ignorant--he was completely aware of the program which Christ was attempting to carry out at Pentecost and was right on target.

It is obvious that, apart from the knowledge of dispensational truth, the believer will not be intelligently adjusted to the present will and purpose of God in the world. Such knowledge alone will save him from assuming the hopeless legality of the dispensation that is past or from undertaking the impossible world-transforming program belonging to the dispensation which is to come."

Lewis Sperry Chafer

Knowledge is free on the pages of the Bible; just bring your own container!
