

Sunday, December 9, 2012—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 83 The Early Dispensational Witness of H.A. Ironside, Part 2

The Mysteries of God (1908), Continued

Chapter VII The Mystery of the Rapture of the Saints

- Chapter VII begins with another clear statement regarding Pauline truth and the revelation of the mystery.
 - “To the epistles of Paul alone do we turn for the revelation of the mystery. He was the special vessel chosen to make known the heavenly calling. The twelve were, as we have seen, connected primarily with the testimony to Israel. Paul, as one born out of due time, was selected to be the messenger to the nations, announcing the distinctive truths of the present dispensation.” (74-75)
- This chapter contains the only allusion in the book to the Acts 2 dispensational position.
 - “First then, let it be noted that Old Testament prophecy never refers to the dispensation in which we live (extending from Pentecost to the Lord’s coming for His own) save in a most indefinite way, as, for instance, in Dan. 9:26, a passage which will come before us a little father down. From Moses to Malachi, Scripture is mainly occupied with one nation, Israel, (Amos 3:2, Deut. 7:6, Ps. 147:19-20), and the hope of that nation, namely, the raising up of the Prophet (Duet. 18:15), Priest (Ps. 2:6), who is to bring them into everlasting blessing as a people (Ps. 132:11-18, Isa. 35:10, 51:11, 61:7), though not until their regeneration (Ezek. 36:24-30). The Gentiles shall share in that blessing (Isa. 56:6, 65:1), but not as on the same footing with Israel; rather in subjection to them (Isa. 14:1-3, 60:3-5, 62: 1-2). . . The prophetic clock, as noted before, stopped at Calvary. It will not start again till “the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.” The present is a timeless epoch, parenthetically introduced between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks, in which God is taking out from among the Gentiles a people for his name (Acts 15:14). Not that he has utterly given up the Jew now, but both Jew and Gentile stand on one footing—“there is no difference, for all have sinned (Rom. 3).” Both alike are saved through faith in Christ, and all such are made members of the one Body, the Church by the Holy Ghost united to the Lord Jesus Christ as Head in heaven, according to the revelation of the mystery which we have already considered. The Church began with the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. How long will it exist on earth? Will it remain here throughout “the time of Jacob’s trouble,” and until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled?” (80-81)
- Despite the obvious references to the church beginning in Acts 2, most mid-Acts dispensationalists would agree with the general order of events laid out by Ironside. The dispensation of grace was parenthetically inserted into the sentence of prophecy between the end of the 69th week and the beginning of the 70th week of Daniel’s prophecy.

- With respect to the final question raised by Ironside in the passage quoted above, “Will it (the church) remain here (on earth) throughout “the time of Jacob’s trouble,” and until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled?” Ironside answers with an emphatic no! Ironside believed that another mystery was revealed to Paul dealing with the close of the current dispensation of grace.
 - “Scripture answers No! Another mystery was made known to the apostle Paul, declaring the close of the Church’s history by a mighty miracle which may take place at any moment. . . (quotes I Cor. 15:51) . . . This is the proper hope of the Christian, and it is this marvelous event which marks the “fullness of the Gentiles.” The “time of the Gentiles” will not end until the tribulation period is over, which begins upon the rapture of the Church. The Church has no part in that time of trouble. It belongs to heaven, and will be taken home to glory ere it begins. . . I would note briefly the characteristics of that period of judgment. It will be a short dispensation, in which divine wrath will be poured out upon Israel, apostate Christendom, and the nations at large. . . This is the great tribulation; but we search in vain for any mention of the Church or the heavenly saints on earth during that fearful time. No! they are above it all—with the Lamb who redeemed them, and who shall have taken them to be with Himself.” (81-83)

- The *Grace History Project* agrees with Brother Ironside that the Rapture/catching away of the saints to meet the Lord in the air is the hope of the Church. We must, however, respectfully disagree with Mr. Ironside in one detail with respect to this event. The only saints that are resurrected to meet the Lord in the air according to I Thessalonians 4 are members of the body of Christ from the current dispensation of grace. Ironside taught that saints from previous generations would also take part in this unprophesied event.
 - “This is the mystery of the rapture. The shout of the Lord will awaken all the sleeping Church; the voice of the archangel (Michael, who is the prince of Israel) will summon the saints of by-gone dispensations from their tombs; the trump of God will sound (the last trump of I Cor. 15:52), closing up this dispensation; and in a moment all the redeemed, whether raised or changed, shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.” (84)

Chapter VIII “The Mystery of Lawlessness”

- In Chapter VIII, Ironside addresses the subject of “the mystery of iniquity” in II Thessalonians 2:7. An analysis of his thoughts concerning the subject is both impressive and instructive. Simply stated, Ironside believed that when God revealed the mystery concerning the body of Christ, Satan responded by changing the way he operated.
 - “Far otherwise: even in his own days, when Christianity was but in its infancy, the apostle wrote, “The mystery of lawlessness (iniquity KJB) doth already work,” and that effectually, for so the last word implies in the original (II Thess. 2:7). Side by side with the proclamation of the truth has ever been the satanic work, energetically carried on, to corrupt the truth, introducing poisonous counterfeits that delude the souls of all who receive them. . . Invariably Satan works by imitation. God has revealed holy mysteries to

His servants. The devil too must have his deep things, which thus appear to the spiritually proud and carnally-minded. The mystery of lawlessness is, in fact, the working of the human mind, energized by Satan, in divine things. Refusing the sure testimonies of the Lord, and walking in vain confidence, the ear is readily given to fables, and the mind revels in wonderful and strange teachings, which delight and bewilder, but are not only to no profit, but to the actual subverting of those who run greedily after them. The object of Satan is to turn the eye from Christ; hence the mystery of lawlessness makes much of man and, by means whatever, puts the Lord Jesus at a distance.” (85-86)

- According to Ironside, the goal of the mystery of iniquity is to obscure the truth of the mystery from the minds of Christians. This is done by causing believers to sink down to the level of the world rather than keeping their affections on things above.
 - “In its earliest inception, this mystery consisted in taking up the hopes, forms and ceremonies of the Jewish dispensation, and transferring them gradually to the Church of the present period. This accomplished, the heavenly calling would be lost sight of; the great mystery of Christ and the Church would be effectually hidden; and believers would thus sink down to the level of the world, becoming in spirit, dwellers on the earth and forgetting that their *politeuma* is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). . . Hence we soon see that the truth of the priesthood of all believers, each one having immediate access to God, displaced by the teaching that, as in Judaism and in heathenism, so now, there is a special priestly order who alone have to do directly with the mystery of religion, and now act as mediators and go-betweens for the laity, or the commonalty. This was one of Satan’s most cunning devices to put the people at a distance from God. How well it has succeeded the centuries witness! By degrees, more and more power, with its accompanying pomp, was delegated to this superior hierarchy; gorgeous vestments were adopted, magnificent titles accorded, and thus the simple Christianity of early days seems almost crushed out of existence.” (87-88)
- While the mystery of iniquity is already working, the presence of the church on earth is hindering its full onset. Once the Rapture occurs and the church is removed, the mystery of iniquity will be allowed to run its course. It will ultimately culminate with the worship of Satan himself, according to Ironside.
 - “Suffice it to say that so effectual has been the working of this mystery of lawlessness that there remains no one doctrine of Scripture that has not been denied, and an imitation foisted upon the ignorant in its place. Thus it went on spreading, not only through the Roman communion, but among so-called Greek orthodox, and now among Anglican and even Protestant denominations, as well as heretical sects like Christian Science, New Thought, etc. But it has not yet attained its full growth, nor will it while the Church, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, remains upon the earth. In II Thess. 2 we read of a hindrance to the full manifestation of the evil of the mystery of lawlessness referred to, which is evidently the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church on earth. He “lets,” or hinders

until “He be taken out of the way” . . . when the Church will be gone, the secret of iniquity will be headed up in one man, the Antichrist of prophecy; and all who had chosen the earth in place of the heavenly portion will be given over to the strong delusion. . . Thus shall Babylon’s power be broken, and all worship and homage be paid to a man—“the man of Sin”—who heads up in himself the mystery of lawlessness. This is the subject of the 13th chapter of Revelation, which in point of time seems to be subsequent to chapter 17, for there we see no woman riding the beast. Her doom has already come, and now the man of sin is fully revealed, and all pay homage to the Antichrist, the false Messiah. This is the devils masterpiece, and the culmination of the mystery he has been developing for so long. But his triumph shall be but momentary; for when iniquity is at its height, and Satan’s power seems to be supreme, the heavens shall be opened, and He shall ride forth whom John saw in vision, as described in chap. 19 of the same book.” (89-93)

Concluding Thoughts on *The Mysteries of God*

- The *Grace History Project* acknowledges that *The Mysteries of God* is not totally a mid-Acts work. Ironside clearly thinks that the body of Christ began on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2; however, the work does contain many points that are consistent with the mid-Acts view. When one considers the timing of its publication in 1908 on the eve of the publication of the *Scofield Reference Bible* and the same year as the conversation between Charles Welch and E.W. Bullinger, *The Mysteries of God* is truly unique. First it has more in common with the mid-Acts view than does the *Scofield Reference Bible*. Second, it does not exhibit the excesses of the Acts 28 view that was developing in Great Britain at the same time.
- *The Mysteries of God* shares the following views in common with the mid-Acts position.
 - Clear distinction between prophecy and mystery.
 - Israel’s king and kingdom is the subject of prophecy and deals with God’s dealings in the earth.
 - The Church was a mystery pertaining to the secret plan and purpose of God concerning the heavenly places.
 - The reasons the church is so confused today are that the word of God has not been rightly divided between these two purposes of God.
 - Roman Catholicism has sought to obscure the truth of the mystery by using the term to refer to her sacramental system.
 - The unbelief of Israel and her rejection of king and kingdom is what has wrought out the revelation of God’s secret plan and purpose concerning the body of Christ. When the

Gentiles abuse the grace of God as Israel did, they will be cut off and God will resume and finish his dealings with Israel.

- The mystery was a unique Pauline revelation completely unknown in Scripture before it was revealed to Paul. Furthermore, the revelation of the mystery fulfilled or completed the word of God.
- The catching away of the Church to meet the Lord in the air will end the current dispensation of grace. This was even part of the revelation of the mystery and completely unknown before the time of Paul.
- Satan has attacked the revelation of the mystery through the mystery of iniquity. The mystery of iniquity has sought to obscure the truth of the heavenly calling and purpose of the body of Christ by trying to get the church to think and function like Israel. Presently, the body of Christ on earth is hindering the full onset of the mystery of iniquity. Once the body is taken out of the way i.e., raptured, the mystery of iniquity will proceed unabated to the worship of the Antichrist.

Sailing With Paul: Simple Papers for Young Christians, (1913)

- Written in 1913, Ironside's *Sailing With Paul* also contains some historically significant information with respect to the development of dispensational truth. As the title suggests, this work contains 18 short papers on various aspects of what it means to sail with Paul in the Christian life. In this work, Ironside challenged his readers to give heed to Pauline authority in their Christian lives.
- Regarding Luke's account of Paul's voyage to Rome recorded in the book of Acts, Ironside asks his readers,
 - "Do you sail with Paul? It is not now a question of temporal but of eternal salvation. The voyage I have in mind is not from one earthly port to another, but that vastly more important voyage from earth to heaven, from the City of Destruction to the Celestial city. One thing is certain: You are on a voyage, sailing over the sea of time bound for eternity. Do you sail with Paul? All who do shall reach the port of endless glory at last, whatever vicissitudes they many pass through on the voyage. All who do not sail with the great apostle to the nations will fail of final salvation; let their hopes be never so high and their passage never so calm and peaceful. What is it to sail with Paul? It is to know Paul's Saviour and to share Paul's blessings. Are these things true of you? There are untold thousands in Christendom today, who are nominal believers, who belong to the Church in its outward aspect, who partake of the sacraments and are more or less zealous in what is called Christian work, but who do not sail with Paul. He repudiated all such things as a ground of confidence, and trusted alone in the matchless grace of God.

- Time and space will not permit an exhaustive analysis of *Sailing With Paul*, so we will limit our comments to only those areas that are most reflective of Pauline truth. In each of the following sections, the italicized title corresponds with a chapter from the book followed by some summary quotations from that chapter. Please note that every chapter is not discussed.

Conversion to God

- “He who sails with Paul has been truly and definitely converted to God. Conversion is a turning from self to Christ; it is ceasing to rely on one’s own fancied merits and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. . . remember it is not the right faith that saves, but faith in the right person. You might have the strongest possible faith in yourself, in the priest, in the church, in the sacraments, in visions or dreams, and be lost forever. But, on the other hand, the feeblest faith in Christ Jesus, God’s Lamb, saves for all eternity, and puts you forever in Paul’s company. . . let nothing make you doubt that you are converted, and therefore eternally saved, if Christ is the One to whom you have turned for deliverance.” (10-11)

Forgiveness of Sins

- “No unforgiven soul sails with Paul: which is to say that Scripture recognizes no such person as a believer in Christ Jesus who has not already received forgiveness of all his sins. . . The word (feel) does not belong to the Christian, you see, but to the heathen who have no written revelation. Our word is “faith” or “believe.” We do not know because we feel; but we believe God’s word, and thus we know. . . We read in Scripture of the witness of the Spirit to us, and the witness in us. Until we receive the witness to us, we cannot have the witness in us. This is of supreme importance and, I hope, will be carefully noted. . . The Spirit’s witness is not a happy feeling in my heart. It is the record of the word of God as to the work of Christ and its results.” (12-15)

Justification From All Things

- “The just shall live by faith;” it remained for the apostle of the Gentiles to fully develop and widely proclaim the great doctrine of justification by faith. It is the cornerstone of “the mystery of the gospel.” No other apostle or apostolic writer so much as mentions it, save Luke, as the inspired historian, tells us how Paul preached it. . . It is “the sentence of the judge in favor of the prisoner.” And yet it is the ungodly who are justified by a holy God on the principles of absolute righteousness. How can such an event be brought about? . . . The Lord Jesus Himself had taken the place of the guilty, borne the judgment due to sin, and, having fully glorified God in this respect, had been raised from the dead and seated in highest glory as Man, in token of God’s full satisfaction in His finished work (Rom. 4:25-5:1). . . It is the very simplicity of it over which men stumble. That He, the Holy One, should have been made a sin-offering that we might become the righteousness of God in Him is something mere human reason would never have conceived. Yet this is the very pith and marrow of the gospel. . . Sin is not merely pardoned. It is atoned for. Guilt is not simply overlooked. It is gone forever from the eye of God in the cross of His Son. Iniquity is not only forgiven, it is purged by the blood of the Son of the Highest, and the transgressor is justified from all things. . . He Himself took the condemnation, endured the wrath

of God and has made full satisfaction for all the believers' sins. Faith rests on this and fears no more." (16-19)

Regeneration

- "God not only clears the believer from every charge, forgiving his sins and justifying him from all things, but he makes him a new creature, giving him a new nature and introducing him into a new creation of which the risen Christ is the Head. . . Paul never speaks of being born again, though he uses other terms that mean practically the same thing. He looks at man as dead and needing life, so he says to believers, "When we were dead in sins we were quickened together with Christ (Eph. 2:5). We have become sharers of Christ's life; hence we are born from above. And now we belong to the new creation of which Christ is the Head. . . Once in the new creation, I am in Christ, and can never again be separated from Him." (20-23)

Acceptance

- "It is a precious truth that God accepts every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, not according to any real or fancied goodness in himself but according to the Father's estimate of His beloved Son. . . And being thus brought so near to God in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ our security naturally follows. We are in Him and, consequently, as safe from judgment as He is. He died in our stead and faith reckons His death as our death. Now He lives forever beyond the reach of death and judgment. And in Him we are accepted! If He falls, then do we also fall; but He has said, "Because I live ye shall live also." We have died out of the old relationship, in which we had part by nature, but we have now been raised with Christ and our life is here with Christ in God. . . But let it never be forgotten—no merit attaches to the believer because of his godliness and devotedness. He needs none. He is already accepted in the Beloved, and nothing can be added to this. No loving obedience he can render can make him one whit dearer to the heart of God." (32-35)

The Assembly As The Body of Christ

- "At the time of his conversion on the Damascus turnpike, the germ of a great truth was revealed to Paul, which later became the chiefest in the galaxy of doctrines which it was his mission, as an apostle, to make known "for the obedience of faith." . . But this doctrine of the one body is never referred to by any other apostle than Paul. He calls it "the dispensation of the mystery" which he had especially been entrusted with. Indeed it was the characteristic truth of his large and varied ministry. . . the truth of Jew and Gentile being formed by the Spirit into one body, upon being born of God, and by that same Spirit linked up to Christ as Head in heaven, was a truth never before made known. The Old Testament will be searched in vain for it. It is not there because it was "hid in God." It was the secret purpose of His heart, only to be revealed after the rejection of His Son. It actually became a fact when the Holy Spirit was given on Pentecost. . . though until the special revelation given to Paul, it was not seen that this involved membership in the body of Christ. The fact existed prior to the knowledge of it. Now, every saint should have clear light as to it, because it is everywhere declared, or taken for granted, in Paul's epistles." (44-48)

Baptism and Connected Truths

- “Baptism is the initiatory ordinance of Christianity. It expresses subjection to the Lordship of Christ. To fritter away what God has said concerning this beautifully expressive ordinance, as some do today, on the plea that it did not belong to the special revelation given to Paul, and consequently has no place in the dispensation of the mystery, is to ignore or pervert what our apostle has himself left on record regarding it.” (54)
- When one considers this last statement regarding baptism it is important to keep in mind that it was made in 1913. This is before the time of O’Hair, Stam, or Bultema, the early champions of Pauline mid-Acts dispensationalism in the United States. One should ask himself of whom is Ironside speaking? Who was out there teaching no water baptism prior to 1913? From the standpoint of the *Grace History Project* there are only two potential answers to this question, E.W. Bullinger and Charles Welch. Not only were these men teaching that water baptism is not for today but they were also using the exact verbiage “dispensation of the mystery” in their writings.
- Once again an evaluation of *Sailing With Paul* reveals that it is not totally consistent with the mid-Acts dispensational perspective, however, the book does teach many great truths with which most mid-Acts dispensationalists would agree. Unfortunately, as we will see in future lessons, Ironside changed his mind on some of these doctrines later in his ministry.

Works Cited

Ironside, H.A. *The Mysteries of God*. New York, NY: Loizeaux Brothers, 1908.

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