

THE CHURCH: THE EXPRESSION OF CHRIST

The book of Ephesians and Colossians along with excerpts from other books reveal tremendous things about God's eternal purpose and the church which is His body. For years I have wanted to do a verse by verse study of the book of Ephesians because I always have the doubt that I understand the depths of what it says. Sometimes I think I have almost touched a reality but then I can't uncover it. The mystery of Christ's body, the church, is indeed a great mystery that only is uncovered by revelation. God is in charge of His mysteries. Then we have to ask; Why would not God freely reveal this mystery in the scripture? If this is the dispensation of the church, why should there still be mysteries after 2000 years. PRO 25:2 It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, But the glory of kings is to search out a matter. God conceals these things to give us the opportunity to search them out. He who does not seek will not find.

In the studies from Matthew 5, 6 & 7 we have seen the practical expression of the Kingdom of Heaven on the earth. The manifestation of the Kingdom of Heaven is the practical Christian life. We also saw that these things are far beyond the capacity and ability of man. Why would God put "practical Christian life" beyond man's ability? Because the Christian life is totally dependent upon God. Unless God does something supernatural within us the demands of the Kingdom are beyond us, out of our reach. While God already knows that, man must still find it out. It is true that every generation has to learn this truth again and again. Jesus said it this way: "Without Me you can do nothing". Man apart from Christ is totally helpless, hopeless and impotent. Outside of Christ man is totally bankrupt. God knows that but each of us must find it out personally. Even though this fact is clearly stated in scripture, we each need the revelation of it before it becomes real to us, personally. Even though it is clearly stated it is still hidden until we search it out.

From Ephesians 1 we find that before the foundation of the world God had an eternal purpose. God chose us "In Christ" before the foundation of the world. God predestined us "To Himself" through Jesus Christ. "In Christ" God has redeemed us. According to what God purposed "In Christ" He made known the mystery of His will. God did this with a view or an intent involving an administration or a government designed for the fullness of times or the completion of times when He gathers together and sums up everything in Jesus Christ.

In verse 11 we see that each of us has been predestined "according to His purpose". Then we see that our inheritance is directly related to "His purpose". Some are hoping they will receive "an inheritance" simply because they believe something about Jesus.

The scriptures reveal that "IN Christ" after we believed "the gospel of our salvation" we were sealed "In Him" with the Holy Spirit of promise. The Holy Spirit has been given to us as a down payment upon our inheritance "with a view" to or "with the intent" of God fully redeeming or obtaining "His possession". The Holy Spirit is given as a seal or a personal mark that the one who is redeemed is God's purchased possession. To clarify this we could say that many have accepted Christ but they have no proof that God has accepted them. The Holy Spirit is the seal that God has accepted you as His purchased possession.

Up to verse 15 we have the revealed truth of the gospel that can be preached and understood by

the work of the Holy Spirit. From verse 15 onward a direct revelation of God is necessary for us to comprehend these further truths. We will leave these for the moment.

Ephesians 2 begins with the tremendous blessing that God has extended toward us who believe. He has redeemed us from death, imparted His life, raised us up with Christ and seated us with Christ in heavenly places. God did all that so that in the ages to come He might reveal the riches of His grace toward us. All the grace and mercy that has already been shown us in Christ is just a preview of all the grace that is to be revealed in the ages yet to come. In verse 10 God reveals that we have been recreated "In Christ Jesus" for good works that God designed, ordained and prepared "beforehand" that we should walk in them. In God's eternal purpose He predestined that both Jews and Gentiles should be gathered together in one body, in Jesus Christ. To bring both Jews and Gentiles together to form "one new man". The cross of Calvary has brought to an end all enmity between Jew and Gentile. Through Jesus Christ both Jews and Gentiles have access by the one Spirit, to the Father.

The stated purpose of all that is that God is building a temple but not one made with men's hands. In Jesus Christ God is bringing the whole temple together, fitting it together so that the temple grows up to become the dwelling place of God through the Spirit. This is surely speaking of the church which is His body.

In chapter 3 Paul explains something about this mystery that was revealed in a former letter that he wrote but that we have no access to fully understand what he meant. However, he summarizes the mystery by saying that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow partakers of the promise in Christ and fellow members of the body of Christ.

This also strongly implies that outside of Christ the Jews have no means of salvation and no covenant before God and no place in God's revealed plan and no place in the church which is His body. The sloppy gospel that teaches that somehow the Jews are going to find salvation through the earthly temple or through the law and sacrifices ignores this clear teaching. Israel's salvation is "in the messiah" only, plus nothing, the same as for the Gentiles. If they refuse to be included with the Gentiles they are excluded from the body of Christ.

Now, Ephesians 3: 8-13 shows that the mystery of Christ which has been hidden in God throughout all past generations up until the church was manifested, is now **to be made known through the church**. This was according to God's eternal purpose which God ordained through Jesus Christ. The totality of that mystery is called "the manifold wisdom of God". Manifold is translated from a word that means "many times more". Other places it is translated "diverse". Paul preached the unfathomable riches of Christ but God has purposed that the church preach **much, much more of the wisdom of God**. PRO 25:2 It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.

Let us pause here to summarize what we have seen. Before the worlds were God had an eternal purpose. Whatever God created it was to fulfill His eternal purpose. Since the Devil has not been thrown into the bottomless pit yet it means that God is using him to fulfill His eternal purpose. Since the church has not yet been caught up to meet the Lord in the air it means that God's eternal

purpose is not yet complete. That also means that the "manifold wisdom of God" still must be made known through the church.

Within His eternal purpose God has designed the body of Christ, the true church, **to have a prominent part in the fulfillment.** EPH 2:21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; EPH 2:22 **in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.** EPH 3:16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; EPH 3:17 **so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;**

God's eternal purpose for the church can only be realized by the indwelling triune God. Therefore, the church is created to be the temple of God, where God dwells. These simple phrases (1) A holy temple in the Lord (2) A dwelling of God in the Spirit (3) Strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man (4) That Christ may dwell in your hearts expresses the triune God distributing Himself through out the church. Each member of the true church holds his portion of the triune God. Christ's body which manifests the triune God is the true church.

In other studies on God's eternal purpose we have shown that God purposed to have a man rule over all the works of His hands. In Heb. 2 we saw that man that God obtained was the Lord Jesus Christ. He fulfills the type of the first Adam. However, in the plan of God there was also the first woman because it was not good for the first man to be alone. It is also not good that the last Adam be alone. Therefore, God has designed for the church, which is His body, to be the fulfillment of the first Eve. For that reason we could say that **God's eternal purpose revolves around Christ and His wife, the perfected church.** Jesus Christ has already fulfilled His part of the eternal purpose. The time now in this dispensation is for preparing the bride of Christ and bringing her to perfection.

COL 1:28 And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete (perfect) in Christ. COL 1:29 And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.---- Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; EPH 5:26 that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, EPH 5:27 that **He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.**

When we see the magnitude of God's plan we wonder how God is going to accomplish this great work of perfection in men who only want to do their own will and serve themselves. God's plan is to distribute Himself into redeemed man. We begin by receiving Jesus Christ as our life. 1JO 5:12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. COL 3:4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. Or He becomes our "life". By the Spirit of Christ we are born again and receive a new spirit. 1PE 1:23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, {that is,} **through the living and abiding word of God.** Next God's desire is for the Holy Spirit who has been with us, be in us by the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Jesus then "baptizes us with the Holy Spirit" and fills us with the Spirit. Both the Spirit of Christ and the Holy Spirit are at work in

us to develop our character, our attitudes, our knowledge and our disposition so that we can love Jesus and keep the word of God and do it. JOH 14:23 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; **and My Father will love him**, and We will come to him, and **make Our abode with him**. JOH 14:15 "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. JOH 14:16 "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; JOH 14:17 {that is} the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, {but} you know Him because **He abides with you, and will be in you**.

From this it is clear that for God's eternal purpose to be completed through the church, the triune God must distribute Himself within the church. He does this by distributing Himself within each member of the body of Christ. This is no small thing when you consider that the God who created the universe and all that is in it has offered to come and dwell in us. The Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of God, the Father are all SPIRIT. Therefore, the triune God can dwell in each of us by the Spirit. When we get a valid revelation of that blessing we can proclaim that it is no longer I who lives but Christ (and the Father and the Holy Spirit) who lives in me. With that revelation we will have confidence that He who began a good work in me will finish it for the day of Christ. God is able to bring to perfection that which he has brought to birth.

The triune man is perfected by the triune God. Redeemed man is spirit, soul and body. God must work in all three areas of man's life. 1TH 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your **spirit and soul and body be preserved complete**, (perfect) without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- (1) EPH 4:4 {There is} one body and **one Spirit**, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;
- (2) EPH 4:5 **one Lord**, one faith, one baptism,
- (3) EPH 4:6 **one God and Father** of all who is over all and through all and in all.

The general order of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are reversed here.

- (1) The Holy Spirit is related to the church, the body of Christ and our corporate calling.
- (2) The Lord Jesus Christ is related to our faith and one complete baptism.
- (3) God the Father is the architect and the distributor of Himself within the redeemed.

When we see all the elaborate design and planning to initiate His purpose through the church, we begin to sense the magnitude of what God purposed.

(A) EPH 3:16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; EPH 3:17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; {and} that you, being rooted and grounded in love, EPH 3:18 may be able to

comprehend with all the saints **what is the breadth and length and height and depth**, EPH 3:19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, **that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.**

(B) EPH 4:13 **until we all attain** to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, **to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.**

(C) COL 1:18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so **that He Himself might come to have first place in everything.** COL 1:19 For it was the {Father's} good pleasure **for all the fullness to dwell in Him,**

(D) COL 2:9 **For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,**

(E) EPH 1:22 And **He put all things in subjection under His feet**, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, EPH 1:23 which is His body, **the fullness of Him who fills all in all.**

In the popular "gospel of salvation" that is preached, man is the center of the whole gospel. Man has an unsurmountable problem. He is dead in trespasses and sins. He is alienated from God and without a covenant with God. He is destined for hell along with the devil and his angels. Since man's only hope is by faith in Jesus Christ, the gospel appeals to man's self interest in eternity and tries to persuade man to repent and accept Jesus as personal savior and save himself from eternal destruction. As soon as man's need is met man has reached the goal of the "gospel of salvation".

In the unpopular "gospel of the Kingdom", God is the central figure. His eternal purpose is the central issue. His will, His desire, His plan, His purpose and His goals are the principal concern. The principle concern is not if man's needs are met and if man is comfortable and happy and full of joy. The focus is simply upon is God happy, has His need been met and is His plan being fulfilled. Whether man is satisfied or not is totally irrelevant.

The popular gospel is designed to give man the first place in everything. Man is given the opportunity to "pray" and send God on all kinds of errands. Man is invited to command God and demand certain blessings that are "promised" in the scriptures. If man's "prayers" are not immediately answered he is instructed to hold the scriptures up in God's sight and remind Him that He said it and now He better do it. In other words man is the president and C.E.O. of the earth and God is an employee.

In God's eternal purpose Jesus Christ has been made "HEAD" over all things "to the church". He is to have "first place in everything". God desire is for the church to experience "all the fullness of Christ" and to grow up in all things "into Him". In God's plan the church grows to the "measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ". Also that the church become the fullness of Him that fills all in all.

"Religion" ignores the gospel of the Kingdom and puts rituals, rules, laws, customs, traditions and the teachings of men in first place. The "doctrines" come to have first place in everything. This is one primary reason why the "church" doesn't grow after it has been redeemed. COL 2:18 Let no

one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on { visions } he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, COL 2:19 and **not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.** Whatever replaces "the Head" as the central focus of the church causes "the body" to be just a comatose shell, with no growth from God.

The unenlightened will ask "But are they still saved?" That is beside the point! The question is "Is God satisfied and is His plan being fulfilled?" What kind of life can support the body or a member detached from the head. The gospel of the Kingdom warns us to be either grafted into the Vine which is Christ and remain or else be thrown into the fire. JOH 15:6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. Being grafted into a culture, or a custom or a tradition or a doctrine or religious concepts will be very disappointing at the judgement seat of Christ. Well, Lord I held to the traditions of my father, will be a pitiful excuse. The excuse that our church rejected the gospel of the Kingdom is not acceptable. Our group focused upon unity of opinions and fellowship rather than being grafted into Jesus Christ. The fire is waiting.

In God's eternal purpose He is perfecting a mate for His Son who will rule with Him and like Him. The perfected church, which is His body and His wife, will sit with Him on His throne. REV 3:21 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. However, the wife will rule in the same character, attitude, disposition and integrity that He, Himself, is. The perfected church will have an eternal function throughout eternity. The question that must be answered is this; When is she being trained, how is she being trained and to what degree of integrity is she being trained? She is being trained now (in each generation) by on the job training. She is being corrected, disciplined, matured and tested by various trials and experiences. She must come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. She must grow up in all things into Him Who is the Head.

This is precisely why the church must function today. The "church" that is content to sit in a pew and let "the professionals" function will not be trained by "on the job training". A great part of the churches' maturity is in the function.

EPH 4:11 And He gave some {as} apostles, and some {as} prophets, and some {as} evangelists, and some {as} pastors and teachers, EPH 4:12 **for the equipping of the saints for the work of service,** to the building up of the body of Christ; EPH 4:13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, **to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.** EPH 4:14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; EPH 4:15 but speaking the truth in love, **we are to grow up in all {aspects} into Him, who is the head, {even} Christ,** EPH 4:16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, **causes the growth of the body** for the building up of itself in love.

The various gift ministries are functioning for the sole purpose of equipping and perfecting the saints that THEY should do the work of ministering. (Amplified Bible). The purpose is the development of the body to Christ's own measure, stature, fullness and completeness. In the popular system of "clergy" and "laymen" this has not yet happened and is not now happening and will not happen because the "system" is not God's design. Since the saints are in on the job training they must be trained to minister and then practice ministering. This alone is discipleship. This is "the functioning body of Christ".

In the pulpit-pew type of church only a small percent of the "members" actually function. This promotes "the comatose body" type of church that is so popular today. One reason the "body" doesn't function is because it has not developed a unity connection with the Head. To bear fruit the branch (body) must be firmly grafted into the vine (the Head). The reason this "graft" has not taken place is because the "pew" type of member is not ready to give up his freedom and come under the absolute direction of the Head. Even though no member has a function separate from the Head they continue to "minister" as independent, free lance "members". This is even a great problem in the pulpit. It is not enough to discern a "minister's" success by the size of his ministry, it can only be discerned by whether it is functioning at the direction of the Head. The ministry may be of the independent, free lance type. Unless the function has it's source from the Head it is not valid even if it is successful.

From Eph 4:11-14 it seems that ministry that has it's source in the Head will be equipping the saints so they are prepared to do the work of ministry. In their individual function they will be matured, trained, completed and grow to the comprehension of the full, accurate knowledge of the Son of God. (Amplified Bible) The "law of the body" is; No Head- No function.

From over the earth there will be hundreds of testimonies of ministers that received that revelation in the early 1970's and tried many different systems to implement the truth of functioning discipleship. Nearly all will adamantly declare that it did not work and it probably will not work. We tried it and it turned out to be a great disaster. We also promoted "every member ministry" with less than spectacular results. Since then we have reluctantly went back to the pulpit-pew type of ministry but always asking God why it doesn't work. I believe I have the answer. It will only work within "members" who are in a vine- branch union with the Head. Otherwise how will the members function with a valid ministry unless their source is only from the Head? Independent "members" with an independent, free-lance ministry will always be a disaster.

The Eph. 4 gift ministries must focus upon equipping the saints by first getting them into the restriction and limitation of a vine-branch union with the Head. Discipleship type of "ministry" to independent and detached "members" will always be a tremendous waste of time and effort.

In God's eternal purpose we see that the body functions only following the taking up the eternal cross. In the Tabernacle of Moses we see that the Lampstand has no valid function except following the consecration offering and the confrontation with TRUTH. While this appears to be so simple, most discipleship type ministry begins in the outer court preceding the consecration offering. Is discipleship wrong? No! But the disciple must be right and standing on discipleship ground. That means beyond the second veil! We have trained the "clergy" for the pulpit but we

have neglected the priesthood of the believer. In the Tabernacle of Moses the priests were "captured" by God at the consecration offering and their hands were filled. Until we are captured by the Head and held in that life union with Christ in the vine-branch relationship, we will not bring forth any fruit even if we have completed the "discipleship course" and received our diploma. It occurs to me that the "experts" in the pulpit are wasting their time preaching "messages" to detached "members".