

The Church

Concept:

Paul states an interesting metaphor in Ephesians chapter 5 when he begins to talk about husband and wife becoming one and then compares that to the church and Christ. Ephesians 5:32 says, “This is a profound mystery...but I am talking about Christ and the church.” The word mystery is *mysterios* in the Greek and speaks of something previously hidden, but now revealed. It is used 27 times in the New Testament and all of those mysteries are being unfolded to us so they will no longer be hidden. It is the desire of the Lord that we receive full revelation in all areas of the scripture.

When I mention that the church is a mystery, I am sure you are thinking what is he talking about since we are well aware of what the church is all about. However, we must keep in mind that this period of time that we are living in called the church age or the time of grace was not mentioned in the Old Testament. There were certainly some symbolic references (like the life of David) that pointed to the church age, but it took the writings of Paul to paint the complete picture. We are a blessed generation since we have the opportunity to live during this Age of Grace or Church Age or The Age of the Gentiles. Whatever the name, it is a blessed time in the history of mankind. This puts a responsibility on all of us to understand the heart of God for the church age, so we can be walking in agreement with Him. We want to access the fullness of this time so we can be a blessing to the nations of the world. As in all periods of time, the reason for the blessings we enjoy is so we can share with others.

As we read the New Testament, we are constantly reading where the disciples want to know when the Lord is going to establish His kingdom on the earth. In Matthew 20:21, James and John want a place of prominence in the coming kingdom; it is easy to see they expected this kingdom to be established in their life time. We sometimes are impatient with the disciples not understanding that the Lord was setting up a spiritual kingdom and not an earthly kingdom. We should not be surprised by the disciples’ excitement because the Old Testament is very clear about the Lord ruling for 1000 years during the millennium and bringing peace and prosperity to this earth. I am excited about the millennium reign myself. Imagine having our Loving Savior as our ruler, which should really bring excitement to your heart just like it did to the disciples. This is commonly called the Second Advent, and all of us who believe in Christ as our personal Savior will be a part of this great time period. In Daniel chapter 9 there is a description of what is called Daniel’s 70 weeks. There is a gap between the 69th week and the 70th week and that is where we are living right now, I am sure you always knew that you were living in the gap. This “hole” is the age of the Gentiles or the Church Age. The 70th week will come at the close of our time period and the millennium will begin. Paul was the one who began to bring revelation of this through his writings, but the disciples did not have this revelation and expected the 69th week to end and the 70th week to start. They anticipated that Jesus would lead them right into this 70th week period and were disappointed beyond words when He was crucified. In the natural, it looked like all hope was gone of ever being moved into the millennial reign.

Paul began to teach on grace and the heart of God for all to be saved and come into a full knowledge of Jesus Christ. This could not be done under the law, so grace had to be taught and allowed to grow into a full crop. Therefore, all could see and experience the love and forgiveness of a good God. It is by grace that we are delivered from the hold of the devil and not by keeping rules or piling up good works. After we are transferred into the kingdom of God, we get to operate by faith, which is a confidence in God's power. This allows all of the promises to be by grace so the Lord can guarantee His results. This time of grace has been granted us so that we can experience and share the goodness of the Lord with a dying world that has no hope. We have the opportunity to share the kingdom good news because we are still in a time period of grace. This time period is coming to a rapid end, but we still have the time and power to preach on the goodness of God to all that will listen.

The purpose for the church age is for the Body of Christ to be the reflection of Christ to this world. When the Lord was here in the flesh, He showed all that saw Him what the Father was like and now we have that same opportunity. Matthew 16:19 states that the authority of hell will not overcome the church, but the Body of Christ will continue to grow stronger and push back the influence of hell any place it is found. There is no force of hellish nature that can keep the good news from being spread! We can boldly declare that it is the will of God to work in our lives and bring us salvation for spirit, soul, and body. We can see the release of His love and power in the lives of anyone who wants to experience the impossible in their lives. The Lord's heart is for us the "Body of Christ" to re-present Him to this world. Jesus is seated at the right hand side of the Father right now, but you and I are His body here on the earth to be a channel for His love and power to flow through. The Lord's heart is to use the church as a vehicle that will carry His love to every nation and share with every ethnic group. Just as Jesus was anointed, we as a body carry that same anointing. Together we can do great and mighty things. Making disciples, healing, deliverance, miracles, teaching, preaching, prosperity, and hope should be commonplace in a healthy body of believers, because that is what Jesus was all about. The Church now carries the mandate of showing what the Father's will is by showing the fruit of the Father's nature. What an awesome privilege to live in this time period and to have the very spirit of God indwelling us so that we can decrease and the Lord in us can increase. This is why our hearts desire should be to walk in unity. As we walk in unity then there is a focus on the body and not on the individuals of the body. There should not be any part of the body that is so out of proportion that it becomes the whole focus. We want the whole body to be the focus.

Let me finish this part by going back to that word mystery that I mentioned earlier. This mystery was hidden in the Old Testament but revealed to us. Let me list a few of these mysteries so you can get an idea of what I am trying to say. Salvation is in Christ (Romans 16:25, Romans 10:9, 10; Ephesians 2:8, 9) and revealed in us. The rapture of the Church (I Corinthians 15:23, 51-58; I Thessalonians 4:13-16) was not revealed until Paul explained it. We now call it the great hope of the church. Christ living in me was brought to light in the epistles (Colossians 1:26, 27). Every believer should now be aware that our true hope of victory is because the Spirit of God is living inside us. The spirit of lawlessness (II Thessalonians 2:7) is exposed in the New Testament. We now can begin

to see why there is so much evil and brokenness in the world, and we can have some understanding of how to deal with all of the evil. The last one I will mention is the church (Ephesians 3:1-9; Ephesians 5:32; II Corinthians 12). We see our job description is to share the love of a loving Father to a dying world. The church through the spirit is also to disciple the church until we all reach a full maturity.

I am confident that the church has a three-fold calling. One is to be a place to disciple believers into a fullness of Christ. We are commanded to go into the entire world and make disciples of all nations. We, as the church, need to teach, be accountable to grow and be the people who really reflect His nature. Second, we as the church, are a hospital for the sick to be healed. We receive broken people and they need an atmosphere that encourages healing and then encourages them to turn and be a healing agent for others. Sick people need to be healed by the power of God and then be around healthy people to have a model of a full life. Last, we are a place that reaches out to the community to make a difference. This means the church needs to be a vital part of the community, showing that the life of Christ is tangible and will make a difference in our everyday life. Jesus wants to make a difference in the market places of our lives. Our neighbor is anyone we see hurting and we need to pour on the oil and wine and then take them to the inn (the church) and see them restored.

Old Testament Types:

1. Genesis 3:8
2. Genesis 32:22-32
3. Exodus 19:10-25
4. Exodus 20:18-25
5. Exodus 34:29-32
6. Leviticus 21:16-24
7. Deuteronomy 12:4-7
8. Deuteronomy 14:2
9. II Samuel 6:12-23
10. I Chronicles 16:1-6
11. II Chronicles 5:10-14
12. II Chronicles 7:1-3

13. Ezra 7:25,26
14. Psalms 23:6
15. Psalms 27:4
16. Psalms 99:13
17. Isaiah 6:1-4
18. Ezekiel 37
19. Zechariah 2:8
20. Zechariah 9:16
21. Malachi 3:17

New Testament Scriptures:

1. Matthew 9:15-17
2. Matthew 16:19
3. Mark 11:12-26
4. Mark 16:15-20
5. John 1:15-18
6. Acts 2:40-47
7. Acts 4:4, 23-36
8. Acts 5:12-16, 20
9. Acts 6:1-7
10. Acts 7:38
11. Acts 8:1-8
12. Acts 9:1-19
13. Acts 11:21,22,30

14. Acts 12:1-5
15. Acts 13:1-4
16. Acts 14:1
17. Acts 14:23,27
18. Acts 15:2,3,4,22
19. Acts 16:5
20. Acts 17:4
21. Acts 18:8,22
22. Acts 20:17, 28, 31
23. Romans 7:4
24. Romans 12:1-5
25. Romans 16:1,5,23
26. I Corinthians 1:2,11
27. I Corinthians 6:13-20
28. I Corinthians 10:16,17,32
29. I Corinthians 11:18-22
30. I Corinthians 12:12-28
31. I Corinthians 14:4,5
32. I Corinthians 14:12,19,22,28,35
33. II Corinthians 7:2
34. II Corinthians 11:2
35. II Corinthians 12:30
36. Ephesians 1:22,23

37. Ephesians 2:19
38. Ephesians 3:6,5
39. Ephesians 4:1-17
40. Ephesians 5:23-32
41. Philippians 4:15
42. Colossians 1:18,24
43. Colossians 2:19
44. Colossians 4:15,16
45. II Thessalonians 3:10
46. I Timothy 3:1,5,15
47. I Timothy 5:16,17
48. Titus 3:1,8
49. Hebrews 2:11,12
50. Hebrews 12:23
51. James 5:14
52. I Peter 5:1
53. Revelation 1:4,11,20
54. Revelation 2:7,11,17,29
55. Revelation 3:6,13,22
56. Revelation 19:7
57. Revelation 21:2,17

Summary:

I believe the Lord reinforces in your life the basic truth about the Church Age, and that the Lord has given us the opportunity to represent Him to the nations. I am an ambassador for Christ. We get to be His “epistles” that are to be read by all men. We are to preach, teach, lay hands on the sick, and cast out the devil. He will work with us with the power to cause people’s lives to be changed. The church takes on the image of people and not a building. It is a group of diverse people in unity that are moving in His name and performing His will under His anointing. Scripture is very clear about the individual priesthood of every believer and that all of us are sons of God; but, it also encourages us to come together so we can experience a corporate anointing. When two or three are gathered in His name, there He is in the midst of us. I think that verse alone would encourage us to want to get together to experience the manifest presence of the Lord. There is something very dynamic about God’s people gathering together to worship and praise the Lord. This gathering of the “saints” presents a place for the Holy Spirit to come and help us experience Jesus. It also is an atmosphere of family, which allows all the giftedness of the family to manifest so everyone can be blessed. This family atmosphere allows everyone to grow. Ephesians 4 shares that each of us has something to offer that will help us all grow. It is like a toddler learning to walk in a loving family and that family is there to pick him up after every fall. This is what the Body of Christ is able to do as we learn to express our gifts; they enjoy the good fruit and pick us up when a mistake is made and growth takes place.

The “Body of Christ” which is the Church of the first born, is a family of love. That love allows each of its members to become all that God has for them. Since it is a time period of grace, His grace is liberally given and we can receive blessing after blessing. These blessings are so I can be a distributor of His good news to all who are a part of my world. I am blessed so I can be a blessing. I am able to love others because I am so loved by the Lord and the other members of my family. How exciting to be a “called out one”. The Lord called me out of the crowd to be an instrument in His hands to distribute His love to others.

Action Point:

Take time in your small group to encourage each other to express their giftedness. Write down how your giftedness will benefit the church. Look at all the gifts in your group and see the Lord’s wisdom in bringing your group together. Discuss how your fellowship with the Lord and the friendship with each other have helped you be a more productive member in the “Body of Christ”.