

The Crystallization

The Great Mystery of Christ and the Church

In the Bible only the mystery of Christ and the church is called a great mystery. From Matthew through Revelation, the great mystery of Christ and the church serves as the means and the goal of God's eternal plan. The central vision that God wants us to see in this age is the vision concerning Christ and the church. God's purpose in giving us the Bible is that through His Word we may know the great mystery that has been revealed—Christ and the church.

The Bible speaks of Christ as our life. Christ came to die for us on the cross, redeeming us so that He could come into us as the life-giving Spirit to be our life. If we desire to live practically by Christ as life, we must consecrate ourselves. Only a person who gives himself completely to the Lord can be a person who truly knows Christ as life. In addition to consecrating ourselves and maintaining our consecration in love, we need to have constant fellowship with the Lord, looking to Him, inquiring of Him, and taking counsel with Him in our daily life concerning all matters, whether great or small. If we truly know Christ as our life and live by Him in everything, we will be built up with all the saints together in the Holy Spirit as the church.

The great mystery of Christ and the church is presented in various ways throughout the New Testament, beginning with the Gospel of Matthew and consummating with the book of Revelation. The revelation of the church is based upon the revelation of Christ as the Son of the living God. The Father's revelation to Peter concerning Christ's being the Son of the living God is the first half of the revelation of the great mystery. Christ's immediate reference to the church is the second half of the revelation of the great mystery.

The church as revealed by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 16 and 18 has two aspects: the universal aspect and the local aspect. The church revealed in 16:18 is the universal church, the unique Body of Christ. The church mentioned in 18:17 is the local church, the expression of the universal Body of Christ in a specific locality. The one universal church—the organic, mystical Body of Christ—becomes in space and time the many local churches—local expressions of the Body of Christ. The universal church is the goal; the local churches are the procedure that God takes to reach His

goal. In the book of Revelation the Lord Jesus directed the apostle John to write in a scroll what he had seen and to send it to seven churches. Then He mentioned seven cities: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. In each of these seven cities in Asia, there was one and only one church. Each church was in one particular city. Thus, as the Lord was speaking to each of the seven churches, He linked the church to the city in which the church was located.

Experientially speaking, a local church is a manifestation of God's economical process of imparting Himself in Christ as the Spirit of reality into the believers for the producing of the church as the issue of Christ's glorification. Through an entrance by faith into a spiritual union with Christ, the believers in Christ become a divine-human incorporation of the Triune God with the regenerated believers, in which He and they mutually indwell each other. The church is revealed as such an incorporation in John 14 through 16 through the Lord's speaking concerning the Father's house, the Son's vine, and the Spirit's child.

The Lord Jesus revealed the church as the Father's house in chapter 14. The Father's house refers to the coinherence—the mutual indwelling—of the Triune God and the tripartite believers. The Father's house is a mutual abode in which the Father in the Son as the Spirit indwells the believers and the believers indwell the Triune God. The Triune God Himself is a divine, mystical, and eternal incorporation. From eternity to eternity the Father, the Son, and the Spirit coexist, mutually coinhere, and work together. Through the incarnation of Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God, this divine incorporation was brought into humanity. Further, through the Son's death the believers were redeemed by His precious blood, and in His resurrection they were regenerated with the divine life in order to be brought into God so that they could mutually dwell with the coinhering Triune God.

The Lord's speaking in John 15 concerning the true vine is a continuation and development of His speaking in John 14 concerning the Father's house. Both the Father's house and the Son's vine refer to the same divine reality: the church as a mutual abode of God and man, a universal, divine-human incorporation of the processed Triune God and the

regenerated believers. The function of the Son's vine is for the Triune God to have a divine organism in the Son for the Father's glorification through branches bearing fruit as the multiplication and propagation of His life. The Lord's speaking concerning a newborn child in John 16 portrays not only the resurrection of Christ but also the bringing forth of the church as the corporate Christ in resurrection.

John 14 through 16 reveals that the church as the issue of Christ's glorification through His resurrection is the increase of Christ as life imparted into the believers. The Father's house with many abodes is the increase and enlargement of Christ as the personal dwelling place of God. The Son's vine with many branches and much fruit is the increase and spread of Christ as the embodiment and manifestation of the Triune God. The Spirit's newborn child—the corporate Son of God, composed of the firstborn Son of God as the Head and the many sons of God as the Body—is the increase and reproduction of Christ, the beloved Son of God.

Even though the church, both universally and locally, is a divine and mystical incorporation, in time there is still a need of sanctification for the sake of glorification. This can be seen in the case of the church in Philippi, which many regard as an exemplary church in the New Testament. In its outward order the church in Philippi had proper administrative arrangements, but it also manifested an atmosphere of disharmony from not thinking the same thing, from not having the same love, from not being joined in soul, and from not thinking the one thing. These subjective obstacles filled the church in Philippi with murmurings and reasonings. In response to these obstacles, Paul exhorts the believers to incorporate the organic mind of Christ, which issued in His humiliation and exaltation, that is, to let His mind become their mind, their organic thinking.

In many respects, the inward disorder in the church in Philippi was a consequence of a prideful response to their outstanding outward order. The remedy for the elimination of the soulish disharmony in Philippi was for the believers to not just appropriate a new way of ethical thinking but to let the active, ongoing thinking of Christ, as revealed in His pattern of humiliation and exaltation, organically fill their thinking, becoming their mind.

The thinking within the mind of Christ produced a willingness to set aside the expression of His deity, a willingness to assume a lower status to serve humanity as a slave, and a willingness to die as a man to make the redemption of humanity possible and attainable. Paul presents Christ's pattern to the saints in Philippi in order to show them the distinctive thinking in the mind of Christ that

also can be organically manifested in them when they are experientially joined to Christ. This is a thinking that accepts humiliation, which, in turn, produces exaltation. A transfer from a pattern rooted in the natural mind to a pattern emanating from the divine mind cannot be accomplished by outward imitation. For this, it is necessary to inwardly receive and experience the divine life in Christ, which is expressed through an ongoing realization of a pattern of humiliation and exaltation.

Paul's experience corresponds, in principle, with the pattern of Christ's humiliation and exaltation in every aspect. Paul's testimony in Philippians 3 mirrors the pattern of Christ in chapter 2, not as a matter of mere coincidence but as a consequence of his appropriation of the organic mind of Christ, which was imparted as life into him through his knowing of Christ, through his knowledge of Christ's excellency, and through his gaining of Christ. Paul's experience mirrored Christ's experience because he was joined to Christ, and Christ's mind was his mind. In our experience of our organic union with Christ, His pattern will be applied to the varied treasures that we grasp, it will lead us to empty ourselves and go along with the lowly, it will cause us to be found in a transformed fashion, it will empower us to take up the cross of Christ in obedience to the righteous promptings of the divine life within us, and it will issue ultimately in exaltation through the out-resurrection of the dead as a reward.

When Paul's proper adjustment of the church in Philippi is received by the believers, it is possible for a local church to manifest the different aspects of the church revealed in the Epistle to the Hebrews, with the church being a corporate partnership, the house of God, the Sabbath rest in this age, the New Jerusalem in this age, the unshakable kingdom of God, and the flock of God. The church in Hebrews is also identified as the church of the firstborn, being associated with Christ, the Firstborn. The terms *firstborn* and *Firstborn* imply not only a divine birth but also that others would in time be born of the same divine life.

As the Body, the church has the life of the resurrected Jesus. The church is also one with the person of Christ, having His mind, expressing His love, and being fully aligned with His will. The church is not only one with the Firstborn in both life and expression; it is also the same in status and position as the Firstborn. Hence, the church is the corporate firstborn participating in all the blessings and rights that are attributed to the Firstborn. Our participation in all these blessings begins with our seeing a vision of the great mystery of Christ and the church. **A&C**

by the Editors