

The Church as the Kingdom in Ephesians

by John Pester

The Epistle to the Ephesians contains deep and detailed revelations concerning the church, including the church as the Body of Christ, the corporate expression of Christ; the church as the one new man, the corporate manifestation of Christ's person; the church as the bride of Christ, the corporate counterpart of Christ; and the church as the corporate fighter engaged in spiritual warfare with Christ. Ephesians also contains brief references to other aspects of the church, including the church as the household of God, the dwelling place of God in spirit, and the kingdom of God. These latter aspects are referenced in just one short passage. The seemingly lesser emphasis on these aspects, at least when considering the number of verses devoted to the other aspects, however, is by no means an indication of lesser significance. On the contrary, the singular reference should be regarded as a confirmation of the actual ubiquitous presence of these aspects throughout the New Testament.

God's household is a spiritual building, and the church is this spiritual building. The New Testament is filled with references to the church as God's building (Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 3:9), one that is being built up (Rom. 14:19; 1 Cor. 14:4-5, 12; 2 Cor. 12:19; Eph. 2:21; 4:12, 16). The revelation that the church is God's dwelling place is also confirmed by numerous references to the indwelling Spirit (John 3:6; 7:39; 14:17; 20:22; Rom. 8:9, 11, 16; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor. 1:22; 2 Tim. 1:14). As the Spirit, God indwells the regenerated human spirit of a believer; this indwelling is both personal and corporate (4:22; Eph. 2:22; 1 Cor. 5:4), making the church God's corporate dwelling place. The extensive New Testament focus on the kingdom also underscores the primacy of its revelation. As such, there is no need for a lengthy emphasis on these aspects in Ephesians. There is only a need to tie these aspects to the church with a brief reference to them. This is in contrast to the need for a greater emphasis on the other four aspects: the revelation of the church as the Body of Christ is stressed only in Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians; the revelation of the church as the one new man is mentioned only in Ephesians and Colossians; the revelation of the church as the bride is referenced only in Ephesians and Revelation; and the revelation of the church as a spiritual warrior is stressed only in Ephesians and Revelation. Hence, there is a need for a more detailed presentation of these aspects, both for emphasis and explanation. But this is not so with the aspect of the church as the kingdom.

The Kingdom in the New Testament

The kingdom is stressed throughout the New Testament because it is the principal means through which God works out His desire for unchallenged dominion, which is a paramount focus in the creation of humanity in God's image and likeness: "Let them have dominion" (Gen. 1:26). The kingdom has two principal expressions: the kingdom of God, which spans from eternity to eternity across the bridge of time, and the kingdom of the heavens, which encompasses, within the bridge of time, the invisible reality of the kingdom in the dispensation of grace, the church age, and the visible manifestation of the kingdom in the millennium.