
MEGAMYSTERY (Part I)

“For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church”. (Ephesians 5:29-32)

The New Testament is replete with mysteries; especially the book of Ephesians, which is intensely Paul’s epistle of mystical Christian realities, but the Greek adjective *megas*, is used in respect to a mystery only twice in the Bible. The only other time it appears is in I Timothy 3:14-16, *“And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness”*. In both of these appearances, the megamystery contemplates *“the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth”* (I Tim. 3:15).

My good friend John Reisinger and I were both simultaneously but separately and independently struck with the crying need for a better understanding of this great mystery. He was somewhat more diligent in getting to it and has already published a five part series in *Sound of Grace* under the title of *Ekklesia*, practically all of which I heartily applaud. If you have not received this excellent work, you may order copies of it from 5317 S. Wye Creek Drive. Frederick, MD, 21703-6938.

So why am I going ahead with my offering, since he has already done an exceptional work on the subject? While John’s ministry has been widespread and comprehensive, it has been particularly concentrated in Reformed Baptist churches. His soul has been intensely provoked by the error and abuse that prevails among many of these “deep water Presbyterians”. Those matters, therefore, are understandably the chief focus of his conclusions on the whole issue of the nature of the Christian church. My concern on the other hand is considerably broader than that. Ignorance and error about this great and glorious mystery is at the root of all sorts of weaknesses, abuse and false doctrine in Christian churches of virtually every stripe in existence. This first part will be chiefly concerned with the identity of what we call “the church”. There is mega-confusion here.

Two Confusing Words

The Greek word rendered “church” in the English Bible is *ekklesia*. It is a composite of two other words, a preposition *ek* (out) and a derivative of the verb *kaleo* (to call). Hence the word has reference to “the called out”. Although churches are popularly referred to as “assemblies”, and *ekklesia* is thrice translated “assembly” (in reference to a civic gathering) in the English Bible, the

idea of assembly is not even implicit in *ekklesia*. More will be said about this later. *Ekklesia* can only apply to a particular marked out **people**. It cannot, by any stretch of imagination, be rightly applied to a building, an organization, an institution or an establishment.

The English word “church” is derived from a translation of the Greek *kuriakon*, (house of the Lord) which always has reference to a pagan temple of idols. The word is nowhere in the Bible used in reference to God’s people, the Christian church. The rendering of *ekklesia* as “church”, therefore, is not an honest translation, but an erroneously contrived interpretation. Doubtlessly this was based on a flawed ecclesiology. Exactly who to blame, and why, is anyone’s guess. It is likely the Reformers, wishing to nullify the Roman Catholic claim to the one universal church thought to do so by turning people’s attention to an individual local church by identifying it with the building in which the people met. Whatever the cause, the curse of this error rests heavily upon us today. The failure of the word “church” to adequately represent what the *ekklesia* really is permits legitimacy to be claimed by everything from any frivolous play-church organization to the great whore. At the same time, the true called out of the Lord remain largely unrecognized or ignored. A great mystery indeed!

This word confusion is further aggravated by the usage of the word “church”. It is used of a denomination in distinction from all other denominations of Christianity. It is used of a building where people meet for religious purposes. It is used of all Christians in a state or nation. It is used in the name of a particular association of professing Christians who regularly assemble in a certain locality. Then it is also used of all the elect and redeemed people of God. The last two are the only biblical usages of the word *ekklesia* in respect to professing Christianity. Of these two, only one can fully represent the essential meaning of the word, the other being a secondary usage. It is vitally important that the *ekklesia* upon which our eyes are focused and which we have in our minds is the one Jesus spoke of in Matthew 16:18, *“upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”* If the idea we have of “the church” does not meet the criteria for that one, we have no interest in it whatsoever. It is merely another human organization, is nothing, and will come to nothing.

Only One People of God

When Jesus announced the building of His church, He was, on the one hand, speaking of something new, but on the other hand he was only stating an ancient reality in new terms. Since the creation God has never

been without a people to bear His Name, reflect His image, and prophesy His word. And He has never had more than one people at a time to do that. That one people have always been indivisible. They have gone under many various names, each one describing a particular property or characteristic or nature of such people, but in every case the same one people. The oneness of God's people was expounded in particular in a previous *Gatepost* article entitled "*God's People Are One*". (A free copy will be sent upon request.) For the present purposes we will simply call attention to oneness in Creation, oneness in the Fall, and oneness in election and redemption. Oneness in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Rom. 2:28-29, Phil. 3:3, Gal. 3:29). Oneness in Christ (Eph. 2:13-15). There is a difference in God's Old Covenant people, who were merely an outward people and not necessarily regenerate, and God's New Covenant people who are an inward people (people of the heart), and who are all regenerate. But even among the Old Covenant outward people there were those of the inward spiritual character of the New Covenant. These are all of that great company of eternally elect people who constitute the one people, the one *ekklesia* of the Living God of all ages (Matt. 8:11-12).

There are those who contrive distinctions between many concurrent peoples of God. According to these theories, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, redeemed ethnic Israel, and the church, are all entirely different entities which all have entirely different eschatological destinies. Even the redeemed will be divided in glory, some on earth, some inside the holy city, some outside, some included in the Bride, others merely guests. All of these various "peoples of God" permit vital criteria of the one true church to be stripped from her and bestowed upon these other entities, leaving the *ekklesia* of God to be whatever is necessary to fit man's own arrogated purposes.

I wish to assert at the outset that irrespective of the many names and figures and states in which we find the people of God in the scriptures, if they are indeed God's evangelically elect people, those people are the true *ecclesia*, the church of the living God. By "evangelically elect" I mean their standing before God has always been according to the gospel. Abraham and "Abraham's seed" must be included, since he was justified by faith. Lot, who is declared "just" and a righteous soul, must also be included in those saved by the merits of Jesus Christ, called out to His *ekklesia*. All Israel who are such inwardly, who are "circumcised in heart" (Rom. 2:28-29) must be counted a part of the *ekklesia* of God. Such inward circumcision can only come by divine regeneration, the birth from above wrought by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven by the Lord Jesus. Can the true church be described in any more concise yet comprehensive terms than in Phillipians 3:3? That

spiritual Israel under the Old Covenant is one with the New Covenant church is irrefutably established in that the New Covenant was made, not with an entirely different people, but with "the house of Israel and the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31-34). We have this *ekklesia* of Christ, prefigured, prophesied and described in the Old Testament as Mount Zion, Jerusalem, the Temple (where God dwells, from which proceeds God's prophetic word, where offerings are made and received, prayers are made, heard, and answered. Christ in His church is Daniel's Rock hewn out of the mountain (Dan. 2) which grinds all the governments of men to powder and becomes a mountain filling the whole earth. It is the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, the light of the world, a city set on a hill, the pillar and ground of truth. It is the bride of Christ, His body in distinction from Himself as Head. It is the temple of God, a "habitation of God by the Spirit". It is a holy nation made up of kings and priests unto God. It is the "whole family of God in heaven and earth". John saw the church in the New Jerusalem descending down from heaven (Rev. 21:1-3). We who come to Christ do not come to Mt. Sinai, but to "*Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel*". (Heb. 12:22-24).

The Church That Christ Builds

In the interest of simplicity in the remainder of this paper I will use the word "church" to designate the *ekklesia* of Christ. There are absolute criteria that church must meet, otherwise it is not the church of the living God. Here they are:

1). It is inseparably identified with Christ. The megamystery in I Timothy 3:16 is prefaced by Paul's introduction of the subject of "*the church of the Living God, the pillar and ground of truth*". This is immediately followed by a declaration of the saga of the Divine incarnation, preaching, and glorification of Christ. The church is the single cause of the incarnation. Christ came down to redeem for Himself a Bride. The megamystery of Ephesians 5:32 illustrates the bonding of man and woman by the inseparability of the one body of Christ and His church. Every member of this church is a member of Christ and of every other member of Christ (Eph. 5:30, 4:25). There are no hypocrites or false professors in it. There are no unconverted "covenant children" in it. Each individual member, together with this whole church, has real organic mystical union with Christ. We are each and every one "members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones" (Eph. 5:30). This is graphically illustrated in Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:21-24). We really do participate in

His Life (Gal. 2:20). Christianity is not imitating Christ but partaking of Him (I Cor. 10:17, Heb. 3:14).

2). Christ is really the Head of this church. It has real infallible government and leadership. (Rom. 8:14, John 14:18-23). All humanly contrived church governments are fallible, whether they be episcopal, presbyterian, or congregational. They all claim Christ's headship but obviously do not have it, for they all make terrible blunders, abuses and ungodly actions. Christ does not rule and guide as an organic Head in either the denominational or the local church. Men do. Neither of these could possibly be what Jesus spoke of in Matthew 16.

3). This church is constituted by all the elect of God, all of those for whom Christ died, all that shall finally be saved. Every single saint belongs to this church. It is this church, these particular souls whom the Father gave to the son (John 6:37-39). All of them will surely come to Christ, for He effectually *calls them out to Himself* (John 6:44). They are the *ekklesia*, and all who come to Christ will surely be received.

4). It is this church, and only this church, that has true and real spiritual unity. They all believe the same thing so far as essential truth and spiritual life. Select a score of them utterly isolated geographically, culturally, tribally, and ethically. Then examine them concerning their faith. It will be found that they are in exact agreement concerning the One true God, the Savior, repentance, faith, spiritual life, righteousness, godliness, the word of God, the resurrection, judgment and eternal life. Paul's request that the Corinthian church be perfectly joined in the same mind and same judgment is perfectly reasonable. It could not be otherwise in the church that Christ builds since they are all taught by Him (John 6:45, Eph. 4:21), indwelt by the same Spirit, and partakers of the same mystical body. One body absolutely mandates one Lord (Head), one faith and one baptism. Without this real spiritual unity the intercessory prayer of our Lord is made vain (John 17:20-23), and we may have no confidence in the efficiency of His present intercession. Our hope is vain. We are still in our sins! Needless to say, this unity is not, nor will ever be found to live and survive in a denominational church or among local churches. In fact it is one of the primary activities of denominations to promote **disunity** with other Christians by preaching their creeds and confessions rather than the word of God.

5). All members of this church have true holiness. They are not sinners. They are saints. Every one of them! They were sanctified by the Holy Spirit when He called them by regeneration of the Spirit and the word of God. (Jn. 17:17; Eph. 5:26; I Cor. 6:11). Separation is a condition without which none will be received as God's children (II Cor. 6:17-18), and without this holiness none shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). Such one hundred

percent holiness is not found either in the denominational or the local church.

6). It is this church, and this church only which is the "salt of the earth", the "light of the world", the "city set on a hill", the "pillar and ground of truth". It is the one upon which the Holy Spirit falls and makes men "witnesses of Christ", and by whose love all men recognize the disciples of Christ. The world encounters the institutional church and is utterly unimpressed. It sees in it the same politics, divisions, fleshy, petty, jealousies, envies, strife, hatred, greed, pride, unbelief, and foolishness that is found in every other organization of this world. Organizations and institutions make no impact on souls. Only God in a bonafide Christian can do that. Let a sinner meet the church of the Living God in one God-filled Christian and he will never again be able to convince himself that God did not redemptively visit this earth in the person of Jesus Christ. He may never be converted; he may hate and persecute the church, but he can never dismiss it from his mind. It is this church, and this church alone that does "greater works than Christ did" through the power of the diffused Spirit.

7). This church, and this church alone, is invincible, indestructible, incorruptible, and absolutely secure, both in each and every member and in its entirety. Not one of its numbers shall ever fall away, apostatize and perish. All other churches will very soon apostatize, dwindle away to nothing, close their doors, sell out and disappear. In twenty centuries of our Lord's reign and Headship, everything that has been polluted by man's tools has perished, while the one church that He built abides. Every local church and every denomination has found its way into the same ecclesiastical dunghill. None of these can be the church that Christ built.

The members of this church have been, and yet are, persecuted, oppressed, tortured, beaten, murdered, hounded out of society, driven to the wilderness and the caves in the earth. It has often survived there, its enemies foolishly imagining they have driven it out of existence. But such only makes it pure and strong, and it soon appears again, utterly unchanged from its primal purity. You may hear many a lamentation about the deplorable condition of today's church. When you hear such, you may be sure the speaker's eyes are not on the one true church of the Living God, but that poor travesty seen in denominational and local churches. The Bride of Christ is not declining. If anything she is becoming more glorious. Christ is doing to it according to his unchanging and indefeatable purpose, and presenting it to Himself unblemished without spot or wrinkle.

This megamystery is not something created out of time and mortality. She and her Husband are eternal entities. It is something that has ever existed in the Mind of the Almighty having been brought into manifest light in the fullness of time. And because she always has been,

she forever will be. That is our personal future, we having obtained an inheritance according to His predestined purpose among them that are sanctified.

All of this being true, the one true church of the Living God, the one that Christ is building, His Body and His Bride, can only be the “invisible,” or “universal,” *ekklesia*, the “called out” of God. It is invisible because it is one with the kingdom of God, of which Christ told the Pharisees it “does not come with observation” (Luke 17:20-24). It is universal in that it cannot be localized. Like salt and light it is diffused everywhere from one end

of the earth to the other all at the same time (Luke 17:23-24). It literally fills the earth. (Daniel 2:34-35, 44-45). If an answer as to where the Kingdom and the church may be found, the answer must be, wherever Christ is, it is (Luke 17:37). It is irresistibly called out to Him.

The big question looming now is, “what about the local church which is a powerful living reality abundantly testified in the epistles?” That will be the subject of the next issue.
- C. M.

GRACE BIBLE CAMP

Thursday Evening February 8 – Sunday Morning February 11, 2001

GRACE CHURCH OF BENTLEY, 681 ROCK HILL RD., BENTLEY, LA

NO CHARGES for meals, dormitory lodging, R.V. Hookups. Bring linens if you wish dormitory lodging.

Note: Dormitory beds are limited. First come, first served. But if beds are exhausted when you arrive and you cannot afford motel lodging, we will find lodging for you. No one turned away! Some must leave early, making more beds available on Saturday evening.

MOTELS

Pineville: (14 miles from Camp) Day’s Inn (800)-325-2525. **Alexandria, McArthur Dr.** (about 18 miles from Camp) Holiday Inn (800)-787-8336; Hampton Inn (318) 4887-8530; Travelodge (800)-255-3040; Rodeway Inn (800) 228-2000; **Alexandria, I-49** (about 21 miles from Camp) LaQuinta Inn (800) 687-6667; Howard Johnson Express (800) 446-4656; Super 8 Motel (800)848-8888.

AGENDA

Thursday

5:00 P Supper
6:30 P Prayer
7:00 P Roy Cook, Natchitoches LA
8:00 P Malcom Ellis, Colmesniel TX

Friday

7-8:30 A Beverages, Rolls, Cereal
8:30 A Group Devotionals
9:00 A Gilbert Barr, Simmesport LA
10:00 A Robert Jennings, Sedalia MO
Brunch
3:30 P Questions & Discussion
4:15 P Brian Bravo, Ponchatoula LA
Supper
7:00 P Prayer
7:30 P Malcom Ellis

Saturday

7-8:30 A Beverages, Rolls, Cereal
8:30 A Group Devotionals
9:00 A Don Currin, Oakwood GA
10:00 A Robert Jennings
Brunch
3:30 P Questions & Discussion
4:15 P Johnie Carter, McArthur AR
Supper
Prayer
7:00 P Malcom Ellis

Sunday

7-8:30 A Beverages, Rolls, Cereal
8:30 A Group Devotionals
9:00 A Mark LaCour, Baton Rouge LA
10:00 A Don Currin
Brunch Adjourn

Grace Bible Camps are sponsored by Grace And Truth Enterprises in conjunction with Grace Church of Bentley and other sister churches in the region. A cordial welcome to preachers, men, women, youth, children, whole families...any and all wishing to come aside for a few days of soul refreshing encouragement in the word of God and Christian Fellowship.

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