

MEGAMYSTERY PART III

“...the house of God which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” (I Tim. 3:15-16) “This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” (Eph.5: 32)

We have been exploring this “great mystery” which is the church of the living God. In today’s vocabulary “church” is applied to a denomination, a state church or simply a building. There is no mystery in any of these. The principle controversy centers on the only Biblical applications of *ekklesia*: That of a local church, consisting of only those members who assemble regularly at a particular location, and that of a universal church consisting of all the redeemed people of God everywhere throughout all time. There is no mystery whatever about a local church organized and operated by men, ruled by human authority, consisting of membership and activities, which are qualified and governed by humanly devised constitutions, by-laws and creeds. That sort of thing is altogether common among organizations of men. The only concept that meets the scriptural criteria of the church that Christ builds and whose real spiritual life, glories, powers, privileges and possessions render it a *great mystery*, is that of the universal church, the real mystical body of Christ. In a previous issue we noted that although the word *ekklesia* can properly only designate the truly called of God, the universal church, it has a secondary usage in the Bible by which it is commonly applied to local churches.

The above quoted text in I Timothy is immediately followed by a prophecy of corruption and apostasy. This corruption can only occur in the denominational or local church which, for the sake of brevity, we will designate the “institutional” church, in contrast to the real mystical Body of Christ which is a living organism. In this issue we wish to focus on the true church, the body of Christ as typified in Ephesians 5:23-32 by godly marriage.

Its Builder and Its Emergence

The founder and builder of the church of the living God is Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:13-19). The church, of course, is an eternal entity. We were given to Christ by the Father in the eternal counsels of God (John 10:29, II Tim. 1:9), and are only brought into manifestation and appearance in these last days (II Tim. 1:10). That the church has been a hidden mystery in times past, and has only now been made manifest cannot, in the slightest, be interpreted as its being non-existent until the earthly

ministry of the Savior or until Pentecost (Eph. 3:3-6). This hidden, eternal pre-existence and temporal appearance in the fullness of time is part of that “great mystery of godliness” testified in II Tim. 3:16:

Christ’s incarnation. “God was manifest in the flesh”. **His vindication in His resurrection.** “justified in the Spirit”. **Witnessed by heaven’s messengers.** “Seen of angels”. **Universally preached.** “Preached unto the gentiles”. **Universally believed.** “Believed on in the world”. **Glorified.** “Received up into glory”. While Christ was on earth, He was the Incarnate Word of truth and godliness, the only light of the world. With His departure and subsequent outpouring of the Spirit, the church became, and remains, Christ’s godliness and light in this world, the pillar and ground of truth.

The rock-solid foundation upon which this church, this great mystery of piety, is built is by means of a God-given revelation of the Person of Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:17-18). This is nothing less than regeneration, a divine infusing of spiritual life into the souls of God’s elect people imparting life and light to dead, blind, spiritually senseless sinners. This is also known as the effectual call. That is what creates the *ekklesia*, the called out! Nothing less can bring them to Christ. Nothing more is needed, for it unfailingly gets the job done (John 6:37). They are *compelled* to come to Him, not unwillingly, but joyfully. This is the “seal and foundation of God” that stands sure (II Tim. 2:19). The Lord knows who are His.

None can get into the church who do not know Christ. Every member of this church is *added* to the church by divine revelation and understanding. He does not “join” it by being voted in by other members or through acceptance by the presbytery. He is *taught* by Christ himself (Eph. 4:20-21). The called and separated are invariably gathered in specific localities and a local church appears. That is the fixed pattern in the Bible.

Sorrowfully, there is a ruinous departure from this pattern among sincere, but ambitious and misled men. Christ did not send us to plant, organize or build churches. He alone is the Builder. He sent us to preach the gospel, to make disciples of people. We are exhorted to evangelize, to edify, to feed the flock of God, to build them up in the faith. When we do that, existing churches are strengthened, and new local churches appear where there were none before. But when men undertake to plant churches after their own liking and brand, giving them creeds and confessions (which the people are largely unable to even understand let alone pledge themselves to), what results is an institution that can only be called a thing! It is not the *ekklesia* of God. The

leaven of this well-intended, but misguided, practice has corrupted the whole local church scene! We create this thing then wring our hands and wail over its carnality and deadness! In vain we may cry out for “revival” or “reformation” of these. Men’s fleshy inventions may be reformed a thousand times, but will still be carnal. That which is of flesh is flesh. These, our Ishmaels, will never live before God, and cannot be “revived”.

Its Purification and Presentation

“*That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,*” (Eph. 5:26) The sanctification of the church, the body of Christ, is not a post-conversion experience or a series of climaxes. Nor is it a process that is gradually being brought to pass in this present life. That is growth in grace, a blessed reality, but it is not purification or sanctification. Nor is it something that is accomplished just before our death or in our translation at His coming. No, our sanctification is our *calling*! The *ekklesia* is sanctified in its very inception, by the call itself! The call is *out*! It utterly separates us from sin, the world, the flesh, and the devil. It may take a while to get the fish, melons, onions, garlic, and cucumbers out of our palates, but Egypt has been left behind for good. That is the condition of our becoming sons and daughters. Paul quotes the condition of acceptance before God from Isaiah 52:11. “*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters*” (II Cor. 6:17-18). This is not an admonition for the church to purify itself, but a condition of coming to Christ. Christ is light and has *no* communion or fellowship with darkness (II Cor. 6:14-16). Anything less than separation is not salvation. Whoever has not been separated from the darkness of this world is not in the body of Christ. Christ has no fellowship with Satan and the darkness of his works; neither can His body. We are told in I John 1:6 that if we profess fellowship with Christ and yet walk in darkness we lie. If we, on the other hand, confess our sins He is faithful and just to “*forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*” (I John 1:9). We are not told the church ought to be subject to Christ in all things, but that it is! (Eph. 5:24) The institutional church that is not separated from the world and which is not subject to Christ in all things is not the *ekklesia* of God, but a thing!

It is absolutely necessary that the church be purified, made unblemished and spotlessly perfect in its initial calling, for it is to be immediately presented to

Christ as His Bride. When a man marries a woman, he does not gradually remove her from her father’s house: he immediately separates her away from her former life and brings her home with him. Christ united with His church is a condition that exists on this earth already. It could not illustrate anything if it were not something very real that can be presently pointed to. The church is not said to be Christ’s fiancée, but His bride! As His wife she is said to be in subjection to Him in all things. The marriage of Christ to His church is not something that will take place in heaven after the resurrection and judgment. Those who are being taught to look forward to a future “Marriage Supper of the Lamb” may be in danger of missing the wedding completely! Every redeemed sinner is called out of darkness into the Light and immediately presented to Christ in legal and vital union with Him. We do not have to be waiting around, longing for the day when we will be united forever with Him. We are exhorted to reckon on and abide in that oneness with Him now. We should be living in the glorious reality that we have been raised up and are sitting in heavenly places with Him now! As surely as we are now, already, the sons of God (I John 3:2), the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:27), the habitation of God (Eph. 2:22), new Jerusalem from above (Gal. 4:26), we are now the Bride of Christ. The Bride is the wife (Rev. 21:9). As the Bride of Christ, the people of God are known as God’s peculiar possession, His inheritance (Duet.32: 9), the glory of which He would now have displayed and known (Eph. 1:18).

Its Glory

Christ presents the church to Himself “a glorious church” (Eph. 5:27). Her glory is in her holiness and spotlessness. That holiness is wrought in His separating her to Himself by the washing of the word. Such glory that is may not yet be seen in its fullness, but it is already what it shall be seen to be (I Jn. 3:2). Full revelation of the purity of the church is hindered by the sinful mortal bodies to which we are bound until they are put off, and we are clothed with glorified ones. Then when all those spots and blemishes of the mortal body are seen no more she will shine in her full beauty. That is why Paul could declare in Col. 1:27-28, “*Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*”

Effectually, all her glory is bound up in Him. As in the hymn, “*The Lamb is all the glory in Immanuel’s Land.*” Such glory of the Bride that is hers by virtue of union with her Husband is put on full display now (Eph. 3:10). “*Unto Him be glory in the church by Jesus Christ throughout all ages, world*

without end" (Eph. 3:21). How is Christ glorified and magnified in His church?

He is glorified in her faith, her obedience, and her perseverance in trials, persecution and suffering.

He was glorified in Abraham when he forsook his country, his people, struck out not knowing where he was going or how he would know when he arrived, a wealthy prince living as a transient hobo, looking for a city whose builder and maker is God. Glorified when he spared not his only God-given son, confident God was able to raise him up, since he was promised to be the patriarch of many nations.

He was glorified in Joseph, who shrank not from declaring the truth of God's revelation at the cost of incurring the hatred of his brethren. Glorified when he fled the embrace of his master's wife, incurring her wrath and prison, rather than dishonor the name of his God.

He was glorified in Moses, he who could have been the Pharaoh, but who esteemed the *reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt!* He chose rather to suffer affliction with the *people of God* than the pleasures of sin for a season.

He was glorified in Joshua and Caleb, who in defiance of the "majority report" believed and followed God wholly with all their hearts and hastened to engage fearsome adversaries, counting their God able.

He was glorified in Achan who, rather than dishonor the righteous commandment and judgment of God, confessed his sin and willingly accepted the weight of penalty for his sin.

He was glorified in Rahab who, forsaking her own native country, at risk of her own life and those of her family, believed God, protected His messengers and, as Ruth the Moabitess, made the people of God her people, casting her lot with them.

He was glorified in Job, who proved the devil to be a liar and false accuser, refusing to abandon his faith though he lost everything.

How mightily He was glorified in Stephen, Peter, Paul, John, and in all the Apostles. How sublimely He is glorified in suffering martyrs of every generation and in every saint who forsakes all to follow Christ!

Christ is glorified in the church's love for Him and for one another. He is glorified in the saint's self-giving sacrifices and service to one another. He is glorified in her kindness, gentleness, forgiveness, and selflessness. He is glorified in her unabashed, robust, hearty worship and adoration of Him, her perpetual bold and confident witness in the face of a sneering, contemptuous, hostile world.

If these and other graces of the Lord Jesus are not unmistakably displayed in what claims to be the

church, it is not the *ekklesia* of God, but an institution planted and organized by men, the Thing!

The Church's Supper

Christ feeds his Bride, the church. "*For no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church.*" (Eph. 5:29) Tables, dining (drinking and eating) consistently signify the communion of religious life and faith all through the Bible. They speak of vital nourishment necessary to sustain *life!* Paul, in speaking of Israel's apostasy in Romans 11:9 quotes from Psalm 69:22, "*Let their table become a snare*". Jesus made prominent use of the supper as an illustration of the offer of the gospel, and of the gathering in of God's elect, in the parables of Luke 14: 18-24 and Matthew 22. Paul speaks of the impossibility of fellowship with both demons and Christ by declaring, "*Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils; ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table and the table of devils*" (I Cor. 10:15-21). In this respect all humanity has spiritual communion, dines at one (or more) of three tables: The table of man (Eccl. 6:7)...fleshy lusts, the table of demons (religion less Christ); or the table of the Lord: "*Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!*" (Luke 14:15 b)

No other figure in Christianity is more prominent in scripture than that of Christ feeding His people. He is the Good Shepherd (feeder). He feeds, folds, cares for, protects, and shelters His sheep. He is the Door by Whom they go in and out and find pasture for their souls (John 10). They never want for any thing. He leads them beside still waters, makes them to lie down in green pastures, and prepares a table for them in the presence of their enemies. Their cups overflow (Psalm 23). Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled! The primary, thrice repeated command of Jesus to Peter was "*feed my sheep*". Why did He repeat it three times? Above all, He will have His sheep fed! The elder's first responsibility is not "soul-winning" or administration, but to feed the flock of God which He has purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28). That this is a universal table, and includes the saints of all ages, is testified in Matthew 8:11 and Luke 22:29-30.

The church's supper is not what is called "The Sacrament of Communion", or the ordinance of The Lord's Supper. That is a ritual, an enactment, symbolizing the death of our Lord, given us in order to keep His sacrifice fresh in our remembrance. The elements are sparse, and the ceremony itself ineffectual to nourish any one. The real Lord's Supper is that abundant robust spiritual food upon which the saints feast every day. This is the real mystical "marriage supper of the Lamb" to which we are called.

What is served at this "Marriage supper of the Lamb"? What do we feed upon? We feed on truth, light, the word of God. We feast on the glorious realities, presence, power, comforts of the Living God, His glories, wonders, attributes, perfections, and faithfulness. We feast on fellowship with the saints. The joy, comforts, edification, and encouragement that flow between one another in the church; that nutrition that flows from the Head through all the "joints and bands" (Col.2: 19). We also feed one another. But most of all, we feed on Christ Himself. He is the living Bread that came down from heaven. We are nourished by ingesting Him and all His graces. He is the continued manna, fresh and plentiful every morning. He is that

fresh, aromatic showbread arousing and stimulating our spiritual senses every morning; continually renewing, empowering, enabling and invigorating the inner man. Christ Himself is that Bread that came down from heaven of which we eat and never hunger again, that River of Living Waters of which the thirsty drink and never thirst again, for He is ever springing up within us.

Christ, He Himself, is our present, and forever, ever-living, reigning Head, Husband, and Provider. We will never be neglected, abused, un nourished, unprotected, unclothed, unhoused, widowed or left alone. We are His Bride, and He is our Husband forever!
-C. M.

GRACE BIBLE CAMP

681 Rock Hill Rd., Bentley LA 71407

Thursday Evening, Nov. 1 – Sunday Morning, Nov. 4, 2001

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; Super 8 Motel, 445-6541; Quality Inn, 1-800-228-5151. **Alexandria, I-49** (about 21 miles from Camp) LaQuinta Inn (800) 687-6667; Howard Johnson Express (800) 446-4656; Super 8 Motel (800)800-8000.

AGENDA OF SPEAKERS

Thursday

7:00 P Ira Campbell
8:00 P Don Johnson

Friday

9:00 A Robert Jennings
10:00 A Paul Washer
3:30 P Questions & Discussion
4:15 P Glenn Ramey
7:30 P Don Johnson

Saturday

9:00 A Charles Leiter
10:00 A Paul Washer
3:30 P Questions & Discussion
4:15 P Bill McLeod
7:30 P Don Johnson

Sunday

9:00 A Mark LaCour
10:00 A Don Johnson

About the Speakers

Ira Campbell Pastor, New Testament Baptist Church, Natchitoches LA
Don Johnson Pastor, Grace Baptist Church, Batesville AR
Robert Jennings Pastor, Hwy M Chapel, Sedalia MO
Paul Washer Evangelist/Missionary. HeartCry Ministries, Metropolis IL
Glenn Ramey Pastor, West Dunlap Baptist Church, Phoenix AZ
Charles Leiter Pastor, Kirksville MO
Bill McLeod Evangelist, Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada. (In whose pastorate the 1970 Canadian revival first appeared.)
Mark LaCour Pastor, Grace Bible Fellowship, Baton Rouge, LA

Continental Breakfast in dining hall each morning at 7:00 AM
Group devotionals at 8:30 AM. Brunch served at 11:00 AM
Dinner served at 5:00 P.M. Group prayer meetings one half hour before each evening meeting.

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. H Conrad Murrell Donald D. Denny

Telephone (318) 899-5677, 5321, or 3983 Fax. (318) 899-5677 Email : hcm@centurytel.net.

