

## **Col. 1 vs. 25-27 The Mystery of the Body of Christ**

Tonight, I want to target Paul's use of the word "mystery" in Col. 1:25-29;

"I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily."

You notice that Paul centers his 'stewardship', his responsibility before God, on what he calls a hidden mystery.

In the Bible, a "mystery" isn't something hard to understand; it's something hidden that, at some point, God decides to reveal.

The truth about the character and purpose of the age we are living in was hidden to all who lived before this dispensation, but has now been revealed through the apostles and prophets. Paul also addresses this in his letter to the Ephesians:

"If indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets." (Eph. 3:2-5)

This mystery is the explanation of what the Church is as the body of Christ and why it exists; what Paul is talking about is the single most important thing that a Christian needs to understand to be able to live this life as God intended.

Because of what we saw last time regarding the apostasy that the Church is moving into, and that this apostasy has, as its foundation, a lack of understanding the distinction between the new creation in Christ and the old creation in Adam, I want to review these truths and try to bring some present day application to us so we can be who we *really* are and not who Western Christianity currently *wants* us to be.

I'll divide this into two sections – the first will deal with the fact of the two different humanities and the second will focus on the nature and calling of the Church.

I'm praying that lights will flash as we see the implications of these things unfold in our generation.

The history of the human race involves a consistent Biblical emphasis on two Men – Adam and Christ.

Through Adam, sin entered the world and all who are born into this world are born spiritually dead with the nature of Adam, the nature of sin. Adam reproduced after his kind, according to his likeness.

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all.” (Romans 5:12)

“When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.” (Gen 5:3)

Those who are born again receive the life of Christ and are united with Him.

Throughout the Church Age God has been calling out of fallen humanity a race that is to belong to Him. He has been transitioning that race out of the old humanity into the new.

The cross is the historical division. At the cross God gathered the entire Adamic race into Christ and judicially condemned fallen humanity.

Christ was our representative as the “last Adam”. In terms of God’s judicial decree, that was the end of Adam’s race.

The resurrection was the *beginning* of the new humanity in Christ as the “Second Man”. Here’s Paul’s explanation:

“The first man, Adam, became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.” (1 Cor. 15:45-49)

This is why being “born again” is stressed so emphatically in the scriptures, because that which is born of flesh remains flesh (Adam’s race), but that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (the new race in Christ).

There is a vast chasm that exists between the flesh and the spirit. They are forever at enmity against one another. You might have noticed that, in the civil war we seem to always have going on within us.

Probably the best illustration I heard of this was this author’s summation:

“In the four gospels we see the introduction of God’s Man into human history. He is put there alongside Adam’s race. You cannot read these gospels from that standpoint without being shocked. Look at the reactions of people to this Man. We see malice, hatred, prejudice, against Whom? Why, what has my Lord done? Why this rage? We hear the screams for His blood, ‘Crucify Him!’” (TAS).

Never doubt the necessity of having everything within and around us that represents Adam’s race thoroughly dealt with.

We must love what God loves and hate what God hates, and have the discernment to know the difference, which is more difficult than many realize, because Adam's race, the world of the flesh, includes the morality and religion of the natural man.

All the so-called "good" in this world is tainted with evil at its core, but it's not easily recognized for what it is.

The world is filled with people who appear religiously and morally beautiful (the outside of the cup is clean), but those who see with the eyes of Christ can see through to the heart of what is there.

This becomes even more challenging for the Christian as he seeks to distinguish between flesh and spirit in the Church or even himself. Having our spiritual senses exercised to discern between good and evil is a vital necessity; as the author to the Hebrews writes in Heb. 4:11-14;

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food. Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (Heb. 4:11-14)

When we put our trust in the Lord, we receive His life. It's not the life of this world but life from His world. In the deepest part of who we are, we are not of this world; we possess a completely new life, a new nature.

Our entire history as born again believers is meant to be the experiential transition from one humanity to another, from the self-life which characterizes Adam to the resurrection life of Christ in us, the "spiritual" life.

This lifelong transition into what Christ has given to us is what spiritual growth all about; it's becoming who we are in Christ. It's more than academic; it's the formation of the character of Christ in us. Like Paul wrote to the Galatians;

“I travail in birth until Christ is fully formed in you.” (Gal. 4:19)

The way this happens is twofold:

1) Gaining an increasing knowledge of Christ

“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 3:18)

2) Experience – God's application of all that was accomplished in the Cross involves stripping away the flesh from us, which is painful, and making room for the development of Christ's life within us.

The only way the grip of the flesh can be broken in us, and the only way spiritual life can be brought to others through us, is to submit to God's dealings with us – by whatever path He chooses. He's working *for* us, not against us; but that's not usually the way it feels.

The inward working of the cross of Christ not only frees us from the dominion of our old humanity, the flesh, but it also makes way for the resurrection life of Christ, our new humanity, to increase in measure in us.

As Watchman Nee put it, “No life manifests more beauty than the one who is broken.”

When the power of the flesh, the self-life, is broken by God's application of the Cross to our lives through what the writer in Hebrews 12 calls God's discipline (lit. “child training”) what surfaces is our new life in Christ. As the grain of wheat falls into the ground and is broken, the life within it comes out.

Whether we realize it or not, people begin to see the life of Jesus manifest through our mortal flesh.

“For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.” (2 Cor. 4:11)

We have to experience what one author calls, “A practical devastation of our old humanity”. The cross is more than a doctrine; it is the way in which God frees us from the old so we can experientially enter the new.

What God has done *for* us in the death and resurrection of Christ is now being worked out *in* us as we grow spiritually.

If we continue to grow in our knowledge of the Lord, God will do whatever is needed in our lives to bring us into the fullness of the life of Christ within us.

Based on what we've seen so far, I'm sure you can see why it is so important to the enemy to hide these truths from us, to bring deception and anything he can to keep us from experiencing the life we have in Christ.

God is patient with us as we grow and discover these things, but there comes a point when infancy has to give way to a pursuit of maturity, or the childlike believer begins to lose ground and will eventually embrace a false Christianity;

. . . which is happening on a massive scale in our country.

Nothing of what God is shaping us into has anything to do with Social Justice or fighting the New World Order or even Christian activities as religion – what the Lord is after is the formation by the Spirit of the likeness of Christ in us and the manifestation of that life through us to others.

Our pursuit is not meant to be a religion or political activism, not even the Christian religion; it's a living relationship with a Person Who has become the Source of our true spiritual life.

Paul said, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”. This happens progressively when we transfer all our faith and confidence away from ourselves to Christ.

Most of us never even begin to move in this direction until we have failed badly enough and long enough to *genuinely* believe that apart from Him, we can do absolutely nothing . . . not just as a theological concept, but as a deep, personal, painful reality, we come to see corruption in even the best we have to offer.

At that point we gladly lose our lives in order to find life in Christ – which was His purpose for us from the beginning.

We are simply not of this world in any way – we are from above, not beneath, and we are here on mission from Christ, not to help fix this world (which can’t be fixed) but to save people out of this world before it’s too late; which includes delivering Christians who are becoming entangled in the confusion and fear that is all around us.

2 Tim. 2:4; “A soldier refrains from entangling himself in civilian affairs, in order to please the one who enlisted him.”

Now, let’s move beyond the individual to the corporate – to Paul’s “stewardship” related to the body of Christ.

Not only are we not of, or from, this world, but we are the actual, literal, spiritual body of the Lord from Heaven.

As we saw in our passage in Colossians, this truth was intentionally hidden from all generations in the past and revealed only after the ascended Christ was in Heaven electing, creating and drawing a new species of humanity to Himself.

A new humanity who, unfortunately for the most part, would rather bring Him down into our world than move more and more into His.

Unfortunately, our tendency is to not “*seek those things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God*” but instead, we “*seek the things of earth*” and plead for His help with *our* agendas.

The Church has been in God’s heart from before the creation of the world. She is completely unique in all that God has ever planned.

The mystery was that the Second Person of the Trinity would indwell and join to Himself all those who would believe in Him throughout this dispensation.

The Father’s plan was that Christ would be the Head, the First Born of a new race.

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation (lit. a completely new and unprecedented creative act of God – something He had never done before).  
(2 Cor. 5:17)

The Church began at Pentecost and ends at the rapture. We are just about there.

Once complete, Christ will be displayed in the fullness of His glory *through* the Church. Just like our own bodies express the character and thoughts of *our* soul, the body of Christ will express the thoughts and character of Christ.

And as L.E. Maxwell puts it,

“This is no mere mechanical thing, no mere legal position. I am actually and vitally joined to Christ.”

Another author puts it this way,

“What, then, is the Church? Let us not think of it as something somewhere outside of and apart from ourselves. The answer is a very simple one. The Church is Christ Himself, not Christ personally alone, but Christ in you and in me. It is just here that all the mistakes have been made about the Church, with such disastrous results.

The Church is simply Christ Himself living in all those in whom He dwells. That’s all. That is the Church. Seek to root out of your mentality any other idea of the Church. It is Christ in you and in me that is the Church. It is the measure of Christ formed in us that constitutes the Church, the one Christ by the one Spirit in all those in whom He dwells. That is the Church.”

Everything else has been a creation of the religious flesh of man.

Here's an explanation by Miles Stanford that might help:

“In Christ risen we were totally regenerated, not just renovated. A butterfly is a new creature, but not a new creation. Our new life and nature are a completely new creative act of God.”

Or as this author put it,

“Now, when we say that Christ's life has come into us to displace ours, what do we mean? We do not mean that this life of the Lord Jesus has come into displace our personality. It is not that this new life of the Lord Jesus comes in to take the place of our personality, to take the place of our faculties created by God, but His life comes in to take the place of the sinful life which is operating in and driving our personality and using our faculties. The vessel is the same, but the contents are different – the same vessel, the same person, but the contents are different. No longer this dominating sinful element, but the holy nature of the Lord Jesus Christ filling and permeating.

“Our Father is not seeking to abolish us as human beings and have the Lord Jesus replace us. He is seeking to restore us as human personalities so that we may be the vehicle through which Christ will express Himself. Redemption is the recovery of the man, not the destruction of the man. And when the Lord Jesus in us is brought to the place He is aiming for, there will not be an atom of the old life left, but the man will be left – glorified in union with the Lord Jesus Christ.”

When Christ was here on earth His relationship with His Father allowed His Father to clothe Himself with the humanity of Christ in order to express Himself and make Himself known to those who couldn't see Him, since God is Spirit (He's invisible).

The invisible glory, the character and thoughts and nature of God, were made visible in His Son.

“The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only Begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.”  
(John 1:14)

And now, Christ has clothed *Himself* with the Church;

To whom God was pleased to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope (confidence) of glory. (Col. 1:27)

To God be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. (Eph. 3:21)

Just as our visible human bodies give expression to our invisible thoughts, the Church is the instrument through which the express image, the mind of Christ, the wonder of who He is, will be seen and known to all creation.

As H.A. Ironside summarizes this truth,

“But the great truth for our age is that God is now calling out a people for the heavens to be the Body of His Son throughout the ages to come, and through whom He will administer the affairs of a redeemed universe.”

It's not simply what we do, but who we are, who we become in Christ, that fulfills God's original thought for us.

Let's close with looking at the implications of the “surpassing riches of His grace”.

As we see in Revelation chapter 21, God will destroy this present creation and create a totally new heavens and earth.

This creation we have lived in, even in its perfected state in the Garden of Eden, was temporary.

It was only the beginning of Gods creative power – it is nothing compared to what's coming, which will be more wonderful than we can even imagine.

The expansion of the new creation will never end and the plan of God will be the eternal increase of our happiness.

As the Lord in eternity continues to expand our joy, He will increase our capacity to receive what He desires to give us.

This will continue forever, world without end.

I shared this author's comments a few years ago, but we need to look at it again as we close;

“It is essential to a right consideration of this subject that the magnificence of the New Testament concept of the Church be apprehended. It is there seen as the ideal, invisible, inviolable company of the redeemed of this present age. It’s calling and glory are heavenly, its relationship holy and intimate, and its destiny bound up in the Lord in splendor inconceivable.

“Through the centuries of our era each marching generation brings a contribution to it. While historically its members are being called one by one and incorporated into it, in its completeness and glory it is ever before the eye of God. Indeed, it has been in His heart from before all time.

“Through the swift ebbing years of this age Christ Himself is its Builder. Adding stone to stone in this exceedingly magnificent Temple, Himself the while abiding that day when at last complete, sanctified, beautiful, spotless, radiant with heavenly glory, it shall be presented to Himself and taken into the full enjoyment of blessedness; the features of which are at present undisclosed.”

Compare that to the contemporary Christian mindset; to “who will I vote for, I just don’t like either one?” “If God doesn’t get me over this cold He allowed me to get, it’s going to totally screw up my vacation in Hawaii”. “Rapture? Not yet, please! I have so much to do before I have to leave here!”

It’s no wonder the Church is so susceptible to apostasy. Christianity thinks and lives like the world lives, so it’s easy to see why they would adopt a worldly Christian religion and run with it.

The best description I’ve heard of American churches is that Sunday is little more than a rock concert followed by a TED talk. True worship and in-depth teaching are things of the past. Now it’s all about emotion and ‘how to live your best life now’.

When you take what we learned last week about the dangers of the deception that is falling on this planet and the Church, and compare those realities with the self-centered, political, social, cultural mindset of believers in our nation, you can see why the persecuted Church in other countries sees us as Laodicea.

And the only way any of us can escape this is to see what the Bible *really* says about who and what we are in Christ – and have *that* reality capture our hearts and our vision.

But since those things are rarely if ever being taught, the Christianity we see in America is living *without* the light of the full knowledge of Christ.

God has been very gracious to us; none of what we have learned has been because we deserved to know it – it always has been, and always will be, grace; and it would be selfish to withhold information that could keep others from being taken captive to what is coming on this world.

The Church needs our prayers and they need to have us offer them the truth, which we can only do if we *understand* that truth and if we are willing to suffer the rejection that often comes by sharing what we know.

One of the reasons we did this study tonight is because the ability to discern truth from error doesn't come as much from examining error, but from having a good enough understanding of the truth to easily recognize anything that contradicts it.

If you can combine what we saw last week with what we've covered tonight and get a good grasp of both, you will be better equipped to deal with everything that is working against us.