

How Christ Is Central in God's Economy

The meaning of God's economy

Our Christ is central in God's economy, and we need to see *how* Christ is central in God's economy. God's economy is God's administration. It means how God works things out. Economy and administration relate to the way God does things, how God does things. So when we speak of God's economy, we speak about the way God proceeds to do things, how He does it. This is what the Scriptures signify when they mention God's economy.

If you say to me, "Are you in God's economy?" and if I say to you, "Are you enjoying God's economy?" this means, are we participating in the Lord in the way He happens to handle us, in the way He happens to allow the lines to fall in pleasant places that He has designed? If we are resisting, if we are arguing and we have a controversy with the Lord, then that means we are not in a participation of God's economy, because God's economy is just the way He is working things out.

God does things on a small scale in our own individual life. He handles us a certain way. We can be in God's economy to experience Christ, like Paul was in Philippians 4, where he was both abounding and being

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abased, experiencing the Lord in his various environments. Paul was in God's economy. He sweetened everything with Christ.

In the Old Testament, Joseph was also in God's economy. He could testify concerning his ill treatment by his brothers, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." So we can see on an individual level that God's economy is God's administration of the way He has chosen and allowed things to happen for all things to be actually working together for good to conform us to Christ. This is God's economy.

God's economy and God's administration are also seen in the major things in the universe. Creation is part of God's economy. It is the way God worked out His plan that was in His heart. He had a purpose and a plan within Himself. And then He also had a way to make that plan a reality. So He needed a universe, He needed creation. That is part of God's economy. Redemption is another step of God's economy. It is the way God handled a fallen situation. So, is this all clear? I do believe we can see that the significance of God's economy is the way God does it.

The centrality of Christ

We see the centrality of Christ in a unique way from

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Colossians 1:19: “For in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell.” Also, Colossians 2:9 says, “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” The phrase “all the fullness” is personified. You would expect that something “pleased to dwell in Him” would be the Person of God, or something personal. But “all the fullness” seems like an impersonal phrase. Yet that is the way the Holy Spirit said it, because “all the fullness” embraces all the major things in this universe — from eternity past to creation to redemption to God’s operation in all that He is doing, into the kingdom, into eternity future. All the fullness was pleased to dwell in Him. So Christ is the personification of all the fullness. He is the center. He is the centrality of the entire universe. In the Godhead we can see Christ in this way. “In Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell.”

When we talk about the centrality of Christ, every born-again believer, would sit up and say, “Amen, He is central in this universe.” But I would say that mainly speaking, the understanding and the concept of *how* Christ is central would simply be Christ out there, objectively, the living, resurrected Person, by Himself, as Lord of lords, and King of kings. And that is right. But if our understanding only goes that far, we have missed how He is revealed to be central in this universe. Yes, Christ is

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central. But it is an awesome thing for us to see in God's economy how Christ is central, the way His centrality is expressed. Why? Because it opens to us a vision and a revelation of the kind of Christ that has emerged in the universe following His process through incarnation, human life, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and then the baptism of His whole Body into Himself to become His organic Body. Now our Christ is a corporate Christ unveiled in a particular way.

How Christ is central

To fully know the centrality of Christ, we must ask one question, and that is, *how* is Christ central in God's economy? Some have said, "Well, we enjoyed it when you talked about Christ. But now you are just talking about the church." What happens with that kind of view is that a dichotomy emerges between talking about Christ as one thing, and the church as another thing. But if we enter into the spirit of the New Testament revelation of God's economy over Christ, our eyes will see something awesome — that the way this Christ is unveiled is with His Body, in His Body. This is how Christ is central.

We say Christ is central? Yes, He is central. But how is He central? How did God make Him central in this

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universe? He made Him central in a particular form — as the Head of His Body, the church. How can you have a head without a body? How can you have a vine without branches? How can you have a Father's house without many abodes? How can you have a Bridegroom without a bride? So in the divine revelation, what is unveiled to us is the kind of Christ presented to us in the New Testament. This is the revelation of the full knowledge of Him. Paul prayed that we would have the full knowledge of Him. Of course, we know that everyone needs Jesus as a Savior. We need forgiveness. We need a Deliverer. We need Another life to live day by day. These are some of our particular, individual needs on the negative side, and Christ cares for all these things. So we are all opening to our Christ to enjoy Him, to live by Him, to draw from Him, to participate in Him.

But Paul steps up a little higher and prays for all the saints who love the Lord and know the Lord, that they would have a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him. Peter's burden was the same — that you would grow in the full knowledge of Him. So the full knowledge is the knowledge of Him as the Head of His Body, the church. This is the full knowledge of God — Christ with the church.

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How Christ was considered in eternity past

Now let us look at the major points from eternity past to eternity future to see how Christ is central in God's economy. First, let us look at Romans 8:29: "Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers." Now just consider, go back to the scene in eternity past. God predestinated. That is before the foundation of the world. Just reflect on how Christ was considered in the counsels of the Godhead in eternity past. He was considered as the Firstborn, just the Firstborn, among many brothers. So the way Christ was considered preeminent, Firstborn, was with many brothers. So this shows us the way He was considered in eternity past. He was not considered just by Himself. He was considered corporately. He was considered with the church. Now put Hebrews 2:12 together with Romans 8:29. Verse 12 says that He is in the midst of the church: "I will declare Your name to My brothers; in the midst of the church I will sing hymns of praise to You." The "many brothers" in Romans 8:29 is synonymous with the church in Hebrews 2:12. So in God's counsels in eternity past, the way Christ was the Firstborn, the center, the centrality, was with the many brothers, the church.

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If we turn to Ephesians 1:3-6, we see the same thing: ³ “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ, ⁴ even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love, ⁵ predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, with which He graced us in the Beloved.” Praise the Lord. Before the foundation of the world, we were all chosen in Him. The way He will be central in this universe — Firstborn — is with the church, the chosen ones. This is the divine thought about Christ. So to know Christ apart from the church, apart from the many brothers, is missing the fullness of the intention of our God concerning how we are to know Him. This is revelation. This kind of word is truth. And truth is there irrespective of how you feel or what your opinion may be. The truth is the truth. And the truth sets us free. And the truth causes us to know where we should be.

The desire to know Christ is on the lips of millions of believers on this earth, “Lord, I want to know You. Lord, I want You. Lord, I love You. Lord, use me.” There are many cries from millions of believers. But all believers need the apostles’ revelation of how Christ becomes the

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center and the focus and the object of their heart. It is with the church. It is with the recovery of the church life on this earth. So this is what we see in eternity past.

How Christ is central in the heading up of the universe

Then we see how Christ is central in the heading up of the universe. Let us look now at Ephesians 1:7-10. In verse 7, it is speaking about redemption through His blood. We are talking about the forgiveness of our offenses. And this is according to the riches of His grace. So all that is grace. And then he says, “Which He caused to abound to us in all wisdom and prudence.” So not only did grace touch me at my lowest level — with forgiveness of sins, redemption — but now He has caused the grace to abound to us in all wisdom and prudence. Now He has brought me up higher with grace. And this grace is opening to my heart and to the eyes of my heart a revelation, and that is, “Making known to us the mystery of His will” (v. 9). God has a will. And until He reveals it, it is a mystery to us. So it is not a mystery in the worldly sense of the word — something that cannot be known. Using the term mystery according to the Biblical understanding, means that it is something we don't know on our own. It is something that God reveals.

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And the mystery of His will opened up in Colossians and Ephesians is the mystery of His one Body, the church, with Christ organically joined to that one Body as Head. The mystery of His will is the full knowledge of this Person who is now ascended and has been made all things to the church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. This is the end of Ephesians chapter 1. The mystery of His will has been made known.

The words “making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself,” show us that this was God’s thought, God’s idea, and it is something that He has made known. And that making known is in verse 10: “unto the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him.” Again, the word economy can also be understood and translated “unto an *administration* of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ.” Now as believers we all could say that Christ is heading up the universe. We all know. The Bible says it: “The fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ.” But I would venture to say that most believers’ understanding is of the individual Christ, by Himself, beating the path there, so to speak, on His own, working out God’s economy in an individual way.

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Christ is central with His Body, the church

But my question is, *how* is Christ heading up all things in the heavens and on the earth? It is according to the mystery of His will. That means the way He does it, how He does it, is with His Body, the church. This is why the church is not an optional matter. It is the administrative unit and the very means through which the Head heads up the universe. He must head up His own Body. How can He head up the universe if His own Body is not headed up? Are we not His Body? We are not just “the Body” out there. We are *His* Body. He is the Head of His own Body, the church. So what is crucial in this universe is that He heads up every member, heads up the church, and then by means of the church and through the church the universe is headed up. This is how His heading up is revealed in the Bible. Here it is in Ephesians 1.

But look now at Colossians 1:18. Here Paul says, “And He is the Head of the Body, the church; He is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that He Himself might have the first place in all things.” And that surely means the first place in the church. Then verse 19 says, “For in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell.” And then we read in verse 20, “And through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the

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blood of His cross — through Him,” listen, “whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens.” This is a reconciliation of the universe. This is an unveiling of God’s economy to reconcile all things. But look at verse 18: “He is the Head of the Body, the church.” This shows how Christ is the center heading up all things in the universe. It is as the Head of His Body, the church.

The emergence of the church is the emergence of the centrality of Christ

This is why we have said there is always a battle over the emergence of the church life. It is because it is through and by means of the church that Christ is central. He has no other way to be central. His way to be central is with His Body and it is through His Body. This was the revelation of the apostles. And this was their burden in the midst of so much opposition, so many contrary things, that took place in the book of Acts to disintegrate the churches in one way or another. This is why you have Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus, and John’s three Epistles. And you see in the book of Revelation how Satan came in to damage any kind of practice of the church life. But in all the ministry the apostles are just bringing the saints back to this vision. If I am a Christian,

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if I have Christ, and if I want to know my Christ to the full, I must know Him according to how He is unveiled throughout God's economy. In eternity past He is the Firstborn among many brothers. He is not the Firstborn by Himself. The Firstborn with His many brothers is the church. When you see the universe being headed up, He is the Head of His Body, the church. And now He is heading up all things in our experience.

The centrality of Christ in our experience

This is why in everything it is so critical that we experience Him, that we do not insult Him by trying to change ourselves. Don't insult Him by seeing yourself and then based upon that, seeking to try to change yourself. He Himself is the living Head and we behold Him. We look at Him. We call upon Him. We participate in Him. We trust in Him. We say yes to Him. We say amen to Him. Anything else is an insult to His Person and work. Paul said in Galatians 2:21, "If righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." It is like saying to Him, "You didn't need to die, to take me out of the way, because I am still kicking around here and I am still trying to do something out of myself. You didn't need to die that I could die in Your death. And You didn't

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need to be raised so that Your life could be available to be imparted into me. I can make it on my own.” This is like an insult to His death and resurrection, because He was processed with us organically in Himself in order that we would die in His death and be raised in His resurrection and then forever on participate in that life. Thank You, Jesus. Thank You, Lord! What a Christ! Amen! So the next time we go about changing ourselves, adjusting ourselves, tell the Lord, “Lord, I don’t want to insult You. I want to participate in You.”

He heads us up in His life, in His way. So we can see how He heads up, how He is central to cause the administration of the fullness of the times. The church life is God’s governmental administration to order the coming days into the next millennium. It is an ordering of God’s government. That means time has its appointed turning points. The Lord is coming. The kingdom is coming. There was the end of the Old Testament economy. There was the beginning of the New Testament economy. There was that which was hidden in God that one day was made manifest. There are junctures in God’s administration where the age is turned — from the age of the law to the age of grace, and then to the age of the kingdom. And because He has now made known to us the church, this is unto an administration. The very fact that I know the

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mystery of His will *is* the mandate for me to participate in the administration of the fullness of the times, to consummate God's economy from eternity past into eternity future, including His imminent coming and His kingdom. So this is the way He is doing it. He is doing it with Christ summing up and heading up all things. And the way He does it is with His Body, the church.

How the church emerges

The way the church emerges does not need to be a large movement on the earth. It does not even mean that every professing believer will be participating in that kind of fullness. When you read the New Testament, the way this heading up happens is by the Lord speaking to the churches, seeking to gain overcomers. "He who has an ear, let him hear. He who overcomes, I will give to sit with Me. He who overcomes, I will give to eat of the tree of life. He who overcomes, he will eat of the hidden manna." So today on the earth there is a call for overcomers who will hear and respond to this revelation and participate in a recovery of the church life, standing here and anywhere on this earth.

When we see the book of Revelation, there is the little island of Patmos, just a small island, with an area of about

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twenty five square miles. And there is John, isolated. Where was God speaking on the earth? Where was God talking on the earth in that generation, in that hour? John was there by himself. He was banished to that island, exiled there by the Roman government. But it was there that the whole book of Revelation was released. And He said to John, “What you see, write in a book and send it to only the seven churches.” So there is John on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea. And there is Asia Minor with the churches. So send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Thyatira, to all the churches, all the localities. And those localities were not megachurches. Those were small places.

First He says to send it to each of those localities: “Send it to the church.” But then from within the church He said, “He who has an ear, let him hear.” This means that we can be an “overcomer” in the church or we can be an “undercomer” in the church. We can be in the same place, but have two different sets of ears. So we can see how the churches practically are to be expressed in this awesome administration of heading up the universe — shining lampstands as the testimony of Jesus with overcoming saints hearing what the Spirit says. This is *how* the church emerges at the end of the age.

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How Christ is manifested at His second coming

Then we see how He is manifested at His coming. Let us turn to 2 Thessalonians 1:10. Look at Him coming. This is an awesome verse. “When He comes to be glorified in His saints and to be marveled at in all those who have believed (because our testimony to you was believed) in that day.” Of course, all believers believe in the second coming of the Lord Jesus. Everybody knows He is coming one day. One of the first things I understood as a Christian, when I first found the Lord in my high school days, was that He is coming. I watched the clouds a lot to see what cloud He would be coming on, because it says He will come in the same manner in which He left. So He is coming.

But my question is how does He come? In which way do you see Him coming? Look at our Christ. He is the center of this universe. And look at His coming back. It says, “When He comes to be glorified in His saints and to be marveled at in all those who have believed...in that day.” When we see His coming, we see Him being marveled at in His saints. He is wearing His Body. He is glorified in them. That is the highest thing in His prayer in John 17, that He could be glorified in them. He is wearing us, He is organically joined to us. This shows us

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our complete correspondence to Him. So He comes in that form, marveled at in all His saints.

Let us go to Colossians 3:3-4. We all know these verses. ³ “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ our life is manifested, then you also will be manifested with Him in glory.” Here Christ our life is manifested. This manifestation is the manifestation of Him at His second coming. But look at the way this manifestation is described: “Then you also will be manifested with Him in glory.” Look at how Christ is central in His second coming. Have you ever considered the way Christ is central in the Father’s counsels, in the heading up, in His second coming? Every occasion is with the saints, is with the church. This is how Christ is central. So when we interact with Him, when we turn to Him, when we experience Him, it is not just for our own personal victory. It is also for this one glorious corporate victory of Him having His Body expressed on this earth and expressed in the heavenly realm. So this is His second coming.

How Christ administrates in His kingdom

Then consider how He administrates in His kingdom. Colossians 1:12 says, “Giving thanks to the Father, who

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has qualified you for a share of the allotted portion of the saints in the light.” So here we have the saints. Then verse 13 says, “Who delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.” So now we have the kingdom. And the Father transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love. But we need to see how the Son is the King in the kingdom, how His centrality in the kingdom manifests itself. It is the kingdom of the Son of His love, but it is with all the saints.

So again we can see that the centrality of Christ in God's economy at every major juncture is absolutely related to the corporate expression and the corporate ruling for God's kingdom to be expressed. For this we have to also look at Daniel. Let us turn to Daniel 7:18. It says, “But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.” Who possesses the kingdom? The saints. The saints receive the kingdom. Then verse 22 says, “Until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for” who? “for the saints to possess the kingdom.” The kingdom is the kingdom of the Son of His love. But the kingdom is with the saints, who are co-kings, co-heirs, with Christ. Then Daniel 7:27 says, “Then the kingdom

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and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him.” So the kingdom is the kingdom of the saints. It is even given to the saints.

Then when Paul touches a matter in the church that needed to be cared for in 1 Corinthians chapter 6, he says in verses 1-2, ¹ “Does any one of you who has a case against another dare to be judged before the unrighteous and not before the saints? ² Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” In the kingdom, judgment will be given to the saints. Then Paul continues in verses 2-3, ² “And if the world is judged by you, are you unworthy of the smallest judgments? ³ Do you not know that we will judge angels, not to mention things of this life?” You didn’t know that you were that important. We will judge the world. We will judge angels. This judgment is given to the saints. But what are we saying? We are saying look at the Christ in the kingdom. He is not just a Christ isolated, administrating everything Himself. The way He is the King in the kingdom is with the saints — judging the world and judging the angels. This is our Christ. This is how Christ is central.

Then look at Psalm 2:7-9, which is a clear prophecy

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concerning the Lord Jesus. Verses 7-8 say, ⁷ “I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, You are My Son, today I have begotten You. ⁸ Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession.” This is a prophecy about Christ. It continues in verse 9, “You shall break them with a rod of iron; you shall dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” Again, this is Christ. So in Psalm 2 it is Christ who breaks the nations in pieces. But now let us look at Revelation 2:26-27. It says, “And *he* who overcomes and *he* who keeps My works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and *he*...” Who does “he” refer to here? The overcomers. In Psalm 2 it is Christ. But here it is the overcomers. “And he will shepherd them with an iron rod, as vessels of pottery are broken in pieces, as I also have received from My Father.” I do believe it is evident that it is not Christ alone, by Himself, but it is in and with the Body. At every juncture we see Christ as the center in this way. What does this do to our view of the church life? It puts an aspiration in us — “Lord, You are central in this universe. Your centrality is everything. O God.” Then our prayer can follow, “Lord, be central in Your way. Be central in Your Body.” This is how He is central.

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How Christ is expressed in the New Jerusalem

Then we see how He is expressed in the New Jerusalem. Let us look at Revelation 21, the consummation of the whole Bible. This is the end and consummation of God's economy as we know it from the pages of the Word. If you want to know how things turn out, read the end of the Book. And when you read the end of the Book you see the consummation. You see the way everything is going. Revelation 21:9 says, "And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, Come here; I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." Now, if there is any picture of the Lord that seems to be more individualistic, it is the picture of the Lamb. Look at the Lamb. He is spoken of throughout the book of Revelation. He is the Lamb upon the throne. But probably in the consciousness of most believers, Jesus is objective in the heavens, as the Lamb. This may be as far as our realization goes.

But when you come to the consummation of the whole Bible, what He says is, "Let me show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." Now let us look at what the Lamb produced and how the Lamb lives for eternity. Look at

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the bride, the wife of the Lamb. This is the consummation. The Lamb is central. The Lamb is worthy. But then look at how He expresses Himself in verses 10-11: ¹⁰ “And he carried me away in spirit onto a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, as clear as crystal.” Here we have the full description of the holy city. This city is the bride. And the bride is this city. So with the consummation of the revelation of Christ being central in this universe, ending with the throne of God and of the Lamb, is all mingled together with His wife, that city. That is how He is central. He is central through and with His wife. So we see the consummation of His expression in the New Jerusalem. This is how He is expressed.

How He is central as the Christ, the Son of the living God

It is good for us to see how He is central as the Christ, the Son of the living God, in Matthew 16. In verse 16 Peter confesses Him: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Then verse 17 says, “Jesus answered and said to him, Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because

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flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in the heavens.” So here He is the Christ. He is the Son of the living God. It is like saying, “You are the appointed One and the anointed One to carry out all of God’s heart. And that means in me, through me, You are the Christ.” He is central. “You are the Son of the living God. Lord, You are the relationship that I have with the Father. It is You.” So this is the centrality of Christ. This is revelation, and it is a confession.

But then look at the way the Lord wanted Peter to apprehend Him as the centrality: “Peter, you are saying that I am the Christ, the Son of the living God. This is revelation. But Peter, don’t stop here. The revelation is going to continue now. You are going to see that I also say to you...” In verse 18 we read those little words, “And I also say to you.” This is now the total revelation of Christ coming forth. Peter is saying, “You are the Christ.” And then the Lord is saying, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock — this vision of Me, this centrality of Myself being everything — upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” So immediately the way He is central and the way He is the Christ is for the building of the church. This is revelation. This helps us to see the kind of Christ that lives in us.

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And not only that, this revelation helps us to interpret how we experience Him in relationship to the church. When Christ is central in me and Christ is central in you, when Christ is central in our midst, it is manifested in a caring for Him in one another and with one another in the context of His building. This is the relatedness in God's building that the gates of Hades cannot prevail against. And that is why there is an atmosphere in the church. It is the atmosphere of the government that is upon His shoulders. In His building He is the Prince of peace and the God of peace to crush Satan under our feet. It is an atmosphere where the peace of Christ arbitrates. And when that atmosphere is there in the church, in the building, that is how the centrality of Christ is exhibited to the principalities and powers. It is through and by means of the church that Christ's centrality takes on its proper form. So we need to see this revelation.

How Christ is exalted from the day of Pentecost on

Then in Acts 2 we see how He is exalted from the day of Pentecost on. On the day of Pentecost the Spirit came, and the disciples were gathered together and filled. They were all together in one accord, with one heart. A church life was emerging there on the earth. And people were

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seeing this and they were hearing this. What they were seeing and hearing was the church emerging. So in verses 32-33 Peter explains to them what was happening: ³² “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we all are witnesses. ³³ Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God and having received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, He has poured out this which you both *see* and *hear*.”

So here is the exalted Christ, the One raised from the dead. And the way His resurrection and His exaltation and is manifested, the form which it takes, is what you see and hear. And what you see and hear is the church life. They were praising the Lord, prophesying, speaking in tongues, praising God. They were just beside themselves. It was hard to interpret. And when they asked for an understanding, “What does this all mean?” Peter said, “He is exalted.” And the way He was exalted was through all those filled and happy people. That was the way He was exalted. That was the form His exaltation takes.

So from the day of Pentecost on, Christ is exalted as central in the universe. But look at *the way* He is exalted. It is just the overflow in the church. He is exhibited in His Body. And then the church life just continued — the pouring out, the giving of the possessions, the selling of the houses. The church life was emerging. The testimony

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of Jesus was standing up on the earth. This was the way you could see the exalted Christ. The way He is exalted in the universe is not by putting a picture of Him on a shelf, like a knick-knack, and worshipping the picture. That is not the way. The way He is exalted is by streaming into the hearts of all the saints. Praise the Lord. This is how He is central from the day of Pentecost on.

How Christ is known in the new creation

Second Corinthians 5:14-17 reveals how Christ is known in the new creation. Verses 14-16 say, ¹⁴ “One died for all, therefore all died; ¹⁵ and He died for all that those who live may no longer live to themselves but to Him who died for them and has been raised. ¹⁶ So then we, from now on, know no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him so no longer.” This indicates that Paul had a new knowing of Christ. He no longer knew Him according to the flesh. This is the knowing of Him in the new creation. And the new creation is in resurrection. And in resurrection there is now an organic Body. So that is the way Paul knew Christ. That is how he found Him on the road to Damascus. He had been persecuting the church. And Jesus said to him, “Why are you

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persecuting Me?" That is how Paul found Christ, how he saw Christ in the new creation. It was a new knowing of Him. And the new knowing of Him is to know Him in His members; it is to know Him in His Body. This is the way Christ is central. It is in this new knowing.

How do I know Him? How do you know Him? In our experience we may have had just an individualistic knowing — "I know the Lord. He is my Lord and I know Him." And of course that is true. But one day we have an experience like Saul's. After he said, "What shall I do?" the Lord said, "Go into the city and you will be told what to do." And it was Ananias, a member of the Body, who came to Saul and opened to him God's heart concerning his whole life. So we can see that Paul was getting to know Christ through the members. And that is why there is so much "one another" talk in the New Testament: "each other, one another, fellowship one with another." It is because Christ is known not just individualistically, although we do not demean or diminish our personal experience of the Lord in any respect. But to know Him in His fullness is to know Him in the Body.

How Christ is preeminent in the universe

Colossians 1:18 says, "He is the Head of the Body, the

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church; He is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that He Himself might have the first place in all things.” The words “first place” can also mean preeminence: “That He Himself might be preeminent in all things.” So here is a specific word that touches the preeminence of Christ. How is He preeminent? In which way does He have the first place? How is His preeminence manifested? His preeminence is with the first part of verse 18: “He is the Head of the Body, the church; He is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, *that He Himself might have the preeminence in all things.*” So here is an unveiling of how Christ is preeminent. It is with His Body, the church.

How Christ is manifested as the mystery of godliness

First Timothy 3:15-16 reveals how Christ is manifested as the mystery of godliness. Paul says, ¹⁵ “But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth. ¹⁶ And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness:” Then the next word should be “who,” not just “He,” as some translators render it. So we should read it this way: “who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by

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angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.” The “who” in verse 16 is a relative pronoun that has to have an antecedent. That means it has to find something preceding it to connect itself to. In the original language, it reads “who was manifested in the flesh.” Of course, this is Christ. But where is He? Where is the Christ manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, and taken up in glory? Where is He?

Look at verse 15: “the house of God, which is the church of the living God.” You want to know where He is? You want to know that great mystery of godliness? Look, and you will find Him in His house, as the content of that house, as the content of the church of the living God, as the stock, as the rock, as the everything to the church. This is how the mystery of godliness is made manifest. It is *in* and *through* and *with* the house of God, the church of the living God. So this is our Christ in verse after verse. He is even the mystery of godliness.

Let us read what Henry Alford, a New Testament Greek scholar, has written about this passage in 1 Timothy: “It is not the objective fact of *God being manifested* of which the Apostle is speaking, but the life of God lived in the church — the truth, of which the congregation of

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believers is the pillar and basement, — as identical (John 14:6) with Him [Christ] who is its center and heart and stock — as unfolded once for all in the unfolding of Him. The intimate and blessed link, furnished by the ο{~ [the Greek relative pronoun translated “who”], assuring the Church, that it is not they that live, but Christ that liveth in them...” So the mystery of godliness — this One manifested — is *in* and *with* and *through* the church.

How Christ's unsearchable riches are made known

In Ephesians chapter 3 Paul says that he was sent to open up the unsearchable riches of Christ. And then he says, “In order that now to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies the manifold wisdom of God might be made known through the church.” And this is according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. So what we see is that the unsearchable riches of Christ are manifested to the universe through and by means of the church. And when you come to the end of Paul's prayer in chapter 3, you find out where the glory is: “Unto Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus.”

So again I say, there is just one nail here that we are hitting. And this one nail opens up one thing, and that is, how Christ is central in God's economy. He is central

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through the church, with the church. His heading up is this way. His coming back is this way. His kingdom is this way. The consummation of the age is this way. The heading up is this way. In every dimension we see such a vision.

How Christ is put on in baptism

When you put Christ on, you put Him on not just in an individual way. Galatians 3:27 says, "For as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Then right away Paul describes this Christ in verse 28: there is no Jew, there is no Greek, there is no bond man, there is no free man, for we are all one in Christ Jesus. So this shows the way we put Him on. To put on Christ is to put on the church, to put on the Body.

How Christ is preached and made known to the nations

In Romans 16 we see how Christ is preached and made known to the nations. Paul uses a qualifying phrase in verse 25: "the preaching of Jesus Christ *according to the revelation of the mystery.*" How do you preach Him? How does His Word get proclaimed to the nations? It is

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according to something. It is according to the revelation of the mystery, which is the Body, the one organic Body that He created. This is how Christ is preached and made known to the nations.

How Christ is revealed in the final revelation

Now let us see how He is revealed in the final revelation of Himself in the last book of the Bible. Praise the Lord for the revelation of Jesus Christ. There He is in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. That is how He is revealed in the book of Revelation. It is not that He is coming merely to end the age, to send the judgments, to deal with Antichrist. That is not first. What stands at the front of the book of Revelation is the revelation of Jesus Christ walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands in order to secure the overcoming saints for His bride, for His coming. The time has come to head up all things. It is time for the kingdom. So he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Amen. Oh, what a Christ! Oh, look at our Christ in this universe — how He is central, the way He is central, the way He is front and center and preeminent. It is in and with and through the church.

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Christ is both "one" and "many"

So I trust I would never again hear someone say to me, "You talked about Christ, now you talk about the church," as though Christ and the church are separated. Speaking of the church in Corinth, Paul said, "Is Christ divided?" And he also said, "For even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ." Notice that the Christ here in 1 Corinthians 12:12 is "many." That is the crucial point of this verse. The Christ is both *one* and *many*. In other words, Christ is *one* Body, and Christ is *many* members. Many, but one. So also is the Christ. So again our Christ is central in and with and through the church, His Body.

When we let Him have His way, when we open to Him and experience Him, there is building and there is the church life and there is the recovery of the church life. This means that the church life emerging on the earth is telling the universe that Christ is heading up the fullness of the times to come back for His kingdom. And the emergence of the church life may not be a mass movement, but it may be like a Patmos with some localities over in Asia Minor where the saints are enjoying this

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Person. Oh, may the Lord unveil this. May this truth wash us and renew us from every other kind of understanding concerning the centrality of Christ.

— *Bill Freeman*