

The Meaning of the Universe Is Hidden in God

It is in the heart of God that we discover what is hidden in God. The phrase “hidden in God” is used a number of times in the New Testament ministry. The apostle Paul speaks of that which “has been hidden in God” and that which “has been kept in silence.” To discover what is hidden in God is to unlock the meaning of the universe. What is hidden in God explains why there is an earth, why there is a universe, and why there is animal life, plant life, and human life.

Have you ever thought about it? What are you doing here? As a human being, this is something that cannot be known by man’s wisdom. It has not come up in the heart of man, neither have we seen it or heard it until God reveals it and opens up what is hidden in His heart. The universe was created based upon what was there in God before creation. What was in Him is spoken of in Ephesians as “the good pleasure of His will.” He has a good pleasure. It comes right out of Him. It is what He wants, what He desires the most — the good pleasure of His will. It was out of this “good pleasure” that God created all things. He wanted to secure His good pleasure. So we need to know what that desire is which has been hidden in God from the ages.

God’s Heart’s Desire Focused in Christ

The Word of God gives us such a revelation of God’s heart’s desire. His desire is connected to His Son, His *Only* Begotten and His *First* Begotten from the

dead. It all revolves around His Son. It is wholly related to the fullness of His Person. In fact, Colossians 1:16 tells us that everything was created “*in Him . . . through Him and unto Him.*” This verse covers the entire story about the meaning of everything in the universe. First, for all things to have been created “*in Him*” means that He is the intrinsic power of the universe. Furthermore, Colossians 1:17 says, “*In Him all things hold together*” (NASV). Thus, He is also the cohesion of the universe.

John 1:3 declares, “*All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him not one thing came into being which has come into being*” (RV). This verse focuses our attention on Christ in a way that

links all things in creation to Him. Second, for all things to be created “*through Him*” indicates that He is the means and the agent through which God did His creation work. Finally, for all things to be created “*unto Him*” reveals that Christ is the goal of the universe. Indeed, from every angle He is the focus of all creation.

We see the centrality of Christ in creation and we also see the centrality of Christ in what was hidden in God from all ages. That which has been hidden in God reveals what is His heart’s desire. This desire is not only centered in Christ, but it is centered in Him in a particular way — as the Head of His Body, the church. In other words, that which was hidden in God, which is also the meaning of all creation, is Christ *expressed* in His one Body. This includes all of us who have been reconciled “*in one Body to God*” (Eph. 2:16). The Body is central in the heart of God because the Body *is the Body of Christ!* He as the Head is filling all the members of His Body, the church (Eph. 1:22-23). These are Paul’s

**THE ADMINISTRATION
OF THE
MYSTERY**

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utterances: ²² “And gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, ²³ which is His Body, the fullness of [Him] who fills all in all.” And in Colossians 1:18 Paul says, “He is the Head of the Body, the church”; and then in verse 19 he says, “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell.” In other words, the way this fullness dwells in Him is directly related to Him being the Head of His Body. He has dispensed Himself into our spirit, making us an organic, life-part of Himself. Now the mystery of Christ is revealed, explained, and displayed through all His members. The life flowing from you and the life flowing from me is the life flowing from the Head. He is filling each one of us so that there will be a full, complete expression of how rich our God is. Hallelujah!

So we could see that in this universe there was something hidden in God, and that was His desire to have a Body for His Son. This corporate entity is also described as the Father’s house. We are the many abodes in that house, and we are His dwelling place (John 14:2; Eph. 2:22). He desires to live in us, walk in us, and move through us (2 Cor. 6:16). This is God’s home. This is what He wanted in this universe — to have all His chosen and redeemed people indwelt with His very life.

This was what God had in His heart when He thought about creating an earth. Thus, we could say, “Earth, this is your meaning. Trees, grass, atmosphere, stars, moon, your meaning is for our God to have a dwelling place in man.” Amen! This is the meaning of the universe — Christ with His Body, the church.

The Church Being in the Category of Revelation

We are only testifying to what the apostles saw concerning what was hidden in God. For the church to be a matter hidden in God shows that the church is not in the category of man’s invention, wisdom, or concept. The church is absolutely in the category of mystery. A mystery in the Bible is not like those ancient Greek mysteries that you could not know. Mystery, in the Biblical sense, is something that cannot be known apart from God unveiling it, explaining it, and revealing it. It is unknown. It is not something that comes up in man’s heart (1 Cor. 2:9). We do not know “the mysteries of God” (1 Cor. 4:1) unless God reveals them. The church is “the mystery of Christ”; thus, it is in the category of revelation (Eph. 3:3-6). We do not originate it, organize it, name it, or define how it meets. This is not under our jurisdiction. It is God’s revelation. We must see that the church is in this category.

Let us turn to Ephesians 3 and look into the understanding of this mystery of Christ. Our burden is to see something about the administration of this mystery.

Verses 2-3 say, ² “If indeed you have heard of the stewardship of the grace of God which was given to me for you, ³ that by revelation the mystery was made known to me, as I have written previously in brief.” Paul is saying that this mystery was made known, and he had written of it previously in a brief way. Then verse 4 says, “By which, in reading it, you can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ.” Paul is saying that he wants us to see and perceive this understanding that he has. Then he says in verse 5, “Which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in spirit.” Here we are talking about this mystery of Christ. Paul has understanding about it, he wrote previously in brief about it, and now he desires that we would get the same understanding.

Paul then describes the details of the mystery in verse 6: “That in Christ Jesus, the Gentiles [the nations] are fellow heirs and fellow members of the Body and fellow partakers of the promise through the gospel.” So right away he shows that the mystery of Christ includes all the redeemed ones, regardless of race or background. God did something new. On the cross and through the cross He created a new man in Himself, where Christ is all and in all. He made the Jews and all the nations parts of this one Body. By this they became co-heirs, co-members, and co-partakers together of the unsearchable riches of Christ in the gospel.

This is a corporate entity that Paul is speaking of. When he speaks of the mystery of Christ, he is speaking of the Body. This corporate entity is made up of all kinds of peoples who have been baptized into Him and are parts of Him organically by the indwelling of His life (1 Cor. 12:13). When Paul speaks of the mystery of Christ He is speaking about the church.

Paul continues in Ephesians 3:7, “Of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God which was given to me according to the operation of His power.” Paul recognizes that there has been a divine activity going on in his life. It was altogether by grace that he was made a minister — not in a professional sense — but someone who could serve and minister God to others, someone dispensing God.

Enjoying the Unsearchable Riches of Christ

Paul says in verse 8, “To me, less than the least of all saints, was this grace given to announce to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel.” He begins to explain some of the details of this mystery — how this unique one Body is actually realized on the earth. It is realized by all the members together enjoying the unsearchable riches of Christ. It is discovering in your daily life the unique answer for

every situation which exists. This includes what exists in you inwardly — your inward problems, turmoils, your inward state — and what you face outwardly — your environments, the things happening around you and to you that affect you. The unique revelation in all your environments is to prove how rich Christ can be in you and to you. Instead of living in your moods and your anxiety, you make a transfer. This transfer happens by calling that lovely name, Jesus. When you call that name, Jesus, you put yourself under a transmission of the riches of this Head who is connected to your spirit. You activate your spirit and God begins to move in you. Hallelujah! There is a flow. John 7:38 describes this flow: “Out of [your] innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.” This means we enjoy the unsearchable riches of Christ again and again in whatever we pass through. Paul says that he is telling all the nations about these unsearchable riches of Christ.

This is how the church happens. This is how the Body takes place on the earth. You do not organize it. You do not name it. You do not set up shop. You do not get entertainment. You do not set up programs. There is nothing like that. That is all like a facade and a substitute for Christ. Instead, you just get people — ordinary people, redeemed people — and gather them together and let Christ flow out. Amen!

This is the church. It is just Christ with His unsearchable riches. In other words, the church should just be a group of people who embody and reveal the unsearchable riches of Christ. So here Paul is explaining the secret of the universe, the meaning of creation. He is telling us the kernel of it. It is these unsearchable riches of Christ enjoyed by all His members.

Enlightenment concerning the Mystery of Christ

Ephesians 3:9 says, “And to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery” (NASV). Paul’s ministry was clearly focused on two main items: first, to announce the unsearchable riches of Christ; and second, “to bring to light,” that is, to enlighten the saints concerning the significance of the church in God’s administration. These two items complement one another. Enjoying the unsearchable riches of Christ brings in the reality expressed through the church; and the church brings in a participation in the riches of Christ that otherwise would not be so abundantly available. The church is described as the fullness of Christ in Ephesians 1:23. This fullness comes out of the enjoyment of the unsearchable riches of Him. Thus, Paul wants to make all men see that the church is the administration of the mystery hidden in God from the ages.

Enlightenment concerning the mystery of Christ sheds light on the meaning of creation itself. The

phrase, “Who created all things,” in Ephesians 3:9 is strategically placed by the Holy Spirit to connect the meaning of creation with the church. Although the church was hidden in God for ages, it is the revealed reason for creation. Thus, creation is the context in which God wants to be glorified through Christ and the church (Eph. 3:21).

It is no wonder that Paul was burdened for all men to know what the administration of the mystery is. Every man has a right to know why he was created. Christ together with the church as the mystery of Christ sums up the meaning of the universe. This mystery is the one Body of Christ, and its *administration* refers to the practical working out of it through the church on this earth.

The Mystery Conceived in Eternity Past

Concerning this mystery Paul says, “I have written previously in brief.” This refers back to what he had written in Ephesians chapters 1 and 2. So, the mystery is being unveiled progressively in this book. In chapter 1 the one Body was conceived in God in eternity past. Verses 4 and 5 say, 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.” These verses tell us that the mystery was *conceived* in eternity past according to the good pleasure of God’s will.

Ephesians 1:9 tells us that it is also God’s good pleasure to *reveal* this mystery: “making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself.” These are big words. These are lofty words. Yet, if I am a human being and have any sense at all, I am going to take the time to position myself before this word. If God has spoken about the meaning of my human life, then I should know what He has said. It is worthwhile to consider this word, regardless of whether or not I am interested. It has to do with the meaning of why I am alive. Verse 9 says that God has *made known* to us the mystery of His will. What is the will of God in this whole created universe? What is that will? It is a mystery. This means it must be revealed to us. None of us are going to come up with it on our own. God has made it known through the channel of the New Testament ministry. He unveiled it in the writings of the New Testament. This is God’s way. He gave it to Paul, who was simply a steward, a person who was handling this mystery. This was not Paul’s philosophy of life. He was handling revelation concerning God’s hidden desire. This is the proper understanding — it was conceived in eternity past and then made known in the New Testament.

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*The Mystery Produced
through Death and Resurrection*

After we see how the mystery of the one Body of Christ was *conceived* in eternity past, then we need to see how it was *produced*. In the first part of Ephesians 1 we see its conception; then in the last part of the chapter and in chapter 2 we see how this mystery is actually produced. Ephesians 2:13-16 says, ¹³ “But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have become near in the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, He who has made both one and has broken down the middle wall of partition, the enmity, ¹⁵ abolishing in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances, that He might create the two in Himself into one new man, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile both in one Body to God through the cross, having slain the enmity by it.” These verses unveil not only what was conceived in God’s heart, but also how He produced it.

According to the above verses, the mystery was produced by God through the death of Christ on the cross. When the Lord Jesus was on the cross, not only were *our sins* laid upon Him, but also *our divisions*. The *division* of humanity was abolished. Not only do I have the enjoyment of being freed and pardoned from all sin, but I am also freed from all the ordinances that divided us. The factors that have separated us in such individualistic ways were also abolished on Calvary. When He died, He terminated not only sin, sins, the flesh, and the old man, but also our race, our national distinctions, our background, the old creation — everything that separates man. He recreated us all in Himself, producing the new man, where Christ now is all and in all. That is what He did on Calvary! Division is over. It is gone forever. Hallelujah! Calvary says so. This one Body was produced by the process of His all-inclusive death and resurrection.

On one hand, through Christ’s death we see how our relationships in the old creation were terminated; on the other, through Christ’s resurrection we also see how our relationships were recreated in Him to make us His one Body. In Ephesians 1 Paul describes how this one Body was produced in resurrection. He is praying for the saints to see. In verses 19-20a he prays, ¹⁹ “And what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the operation of the might of His strength, ²⁰ which He caused to operate in Christ in raising Him from the dead.” Watch this resurrection. Look at its process. Look at what is happening in this resurrection. Verses 20b-21 say, ²⁰ “and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenlies, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every name that is named not only in this age but also in that which is to come.” Keep watching the resurrection. Verses 22-23

say, ²² “and He subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, ²³ which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.” Hallelujah!

By considering these verses, we see clearly that the one Body, the mystery of Christ, was produced through death and resurrection. When Paul speaks of the resurrection, you have to follow it all the way out of the tomb, into the heavens, to the throne, to the descending of Christ as the Head into all the members, and to His baptizing us as an organic part of Himself to make us His Body. Now there is a Body of Christ. Christ has a fullness. Look at the church. Look at the saints. Look at their lives. Look at the expression of the Head in His members. That is Christ in His enlargement. That is Christ living, filling, flowing, expressing Himself. He is the One who is now filling all in all. This one Body was not only conceived, but through death and resurrection it was produced.

The Mystery Administrated through the Church

When we come to Ephesians 3, the mystery which was conceived in chapter 1 and produced in chapters 1 and 2 is now administered. There is an administration of the mystery. The vision in eternity past of God’s heart’s desire and the producing of it through death and resurrection is now translated into a practical expression, affecting our relationships and our existence together on this earth. After we have seen the content of this mystery, Paul wants us to see what is now the administration of it. That is, he wants us to know the practical working out of what was conceived in eternity past and what was produced through Christ’s death and resurrection. This is what he opens up in chapter 3.

In Ephesians 3:9 Paul tells us that this administration was hidden in God. Then he continues in verse 10, “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*.” Then immediately, so that we will not put the church on a low level and despise or think lightly of it, Paul adds a qualifying phrase in verse 11, “according to the eternal purpose which He made [*ποιέω / poieo* = made, produced] in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This shows that the church is not a mere afterthought of God’s, but rather the chief priority of His heart. The church was produced in the sphere of Christ Jesus our Lord according to the eternal purpose. Thus, the church is not God accommodating Himself to some expediency in the universe. The church is the good pleasure of His will. It is what He prefers above all else. It is what has been cherished and kept hidden in His heart from ages past.

The administration of the mystery is the church

meeting on this earth according to what was conceived and what was produced — nothing more and nothing less. The church cannot be man’s innovation or man’s creation. The church is the place where God’s manifold wisdom is displayed. Ephesians 3:10 says that God’s manifold wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies is made known *through the church*. In other words, the church as the ἐκκλησία / *ekklesia* — the called out ones, the assembled, gathered saints — is God’s administrative unit on this earth and in this universe. Hallelujah! What is the administration of this mystery? It is the church meeting on this earth, expressed in local churches.

It is an awesome thing in the universe that the church is on this earth. Because of this, God’s administration has a way to work itself out. Not only do we enjoy the riches of Christ, but we are gathered as the church on this earth where this administration is displayed and opened up.

The Timing of God’s Administration

Ephesians 1:9-10 says, ⁹ “Making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself, ¹⁰ unto the [administration] 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.” When Paul says that he made known to us this mystery, the making known of it is “*unto* the administration of the fullness of the times.” That means God allowed history to go on for so many ages without fully opening up this mystery. But once it was made known, once it was unveiled to someone, once it got into some people — into some apostles, into some saints — it was *unto* a practical working out of the church. This is the significance of the phrase, “*unto* the administration of the fullness of the times.” It means that *the time has now come* to head up the universe through the church.

The mystery has had a gradual unfolding through the ages. It was conceived in eternity past (Eph. 1:4-5), it was produced through Christ’s death and resurrection (Eph. 1:19-23; 2:14-16), it has been revealed to the apostles and prophets in spirit (Eph. 3:3-6), it is written in the Scriptures (Rom. 16:25-26), and now it is being made known to all the nations to evoke the response of faith. The phrase “*unto* the administration of the fullness of the times” means that it is time to have the church life on this earth. Once we see the church, it is time for us to be in the church. When light comes to us concerning the church, that is the time to rise up to have the church life on this earth. Once it is made known to us, that knowledge is *unto* the fullness of the times. In other words, do not waste your time anymore. Do not play with childish things anymore. Having the revelation of

the church ushers in the administration, the working out of it. It is time now! God wants to head up the universe. He wants to head up the heavens and the earth in Christ. This revelation is waiting for “the obedience of faith” (Rom. 16:26).

So this means that once the revelation comes to us, that *is* the divine command and call, “Get into the church life.” This is why we are human beings. It is to experience Christ and to assemble on the earth in cities where there is a testimony of Jesus until this Christ comes back and sets up His kingdom over the whole earth. Amen!

The churches today in God’s administration are the present reality of the kingdom. This reality is for the coming kingdom to be manifested over the whole earth. The Lord said to pray, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). Thus, the churches have to do with God’s plan for the earth. This is *why* the churches on the earth are so crucial to God. So we can see it is time for the recovery of the church life in order that Christ may head up all things.

The Relationship between the Church and the Kingdom

The church has direct correlation to the Lord’s kingdom on the earth. Knowing this helps us put into perspective why the church meets in a geographical way in the New Testament. For example, you read of “the church which was in Jerusalem” (Acts 8:1); “in Antioch, in the local church” (Acts 13:1); “the church of God which is in Corinth” (1 Cor. 1:2); and “the churches of Galatia” (Gal. 1:2). The practical administration of the mystery through the church is expressed in a way that corresponds to God’s will of His kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven. This is why “the keys of *the kingdom* of the heavens” are mentioned immediately following the Lord’s declaration, “I will build *My church*,” in Matthew 16:18-19. Thus, we must ask, What kind of church is found in the New Testament? What is the significance of the churches meeting according to cities (Titus 1:5)? To answer this we need to see that God’s “administration of the mystery” in the form of local churches is directly related to the kingdom on this earth (Rev. 1:4a and 6a).

God’s Original Purpose for the Earth

To understand the kingdom we need to go back to God’s original purpose for the earth. We need to look at Genesis 1:26-28: ²⁶ “Let Us make *man* in Our image, according to Our likeness; let *them* have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing

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that creeps on the earth.²⁷ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” Here God defines His image in man as male and female. This is a picture of Christ and the church making up the singular image of God. We must notice that the male and the female have a singular image. It is “Our *image*.” Although the image is singular, it consists of male and female. This shows the intimate union between Christ and the church that makes them one. In other words, it is the oneness of the male and the female that makes up the singular image. The oneness is the image! This is the expression that God desired for the whole earth. He wanted this image. The picture in Genesis 1 and 2 is a type of what God desired from the beginning (Rom. 5:14). He wanted Christ and the church as His image to fill the earth and subdue it. This corresponds exactly with what He predestined before the foundation of the world. According to Romans 8:29, we are all to be “conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers.”

Genesis 1:28 tells us what this image is for: “Then God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over . . .” In God’s original thought for the earth there was something related to man — man in the sense of the corporate man, male and female. It was for Christ and the church not only to have the image, but also to have dominion. God’s original thought was to subdue. But why speak of subduing? Because there was an enemy. There was a devil around. There was a serpent that had rebelled in the heavenly realm and became the devil. God’s original thought and purpose for the earth is there in Genesis 1, but in Genesis 3 the serpent came in to frustrate that purpose.

Understanding the church and how it meets is absolutely related to God’s original thought in the beginning, which was to have His image and His dominion everywhere. That means He wanted His kingdom to be from shore to shore. His desire was that everything would be subdued by this image. By this male and female expressing Him, He would have dominion. Under this dominion were the creeping things which were upon the earth. The serpent was among those creeping things. In Genesis you see a picture of Christ and the church treading on the enemy and having dominion. This is the picture in the beginning.

This vision and revelation from Genesis 1 never changes or fluctuates. God’s purpose does not change to something different. He continues in the same purpose. Now let us go to the end of the Bible to look at the final accomplishment of what God purposed in the beginning.

God’s Final Accomplishment on the Earth

Revelation 11:15 tells us what happens at the end of the tribulation, which is at the close of this age: “And the seventh angel trumpeted; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever.” The kingdom of the world is under the usurpation of Satan who is deceiving the whole earth, fooling people with his whims and ways and lusts. One day the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. This will take place when the Lord visibly and personally descends from the heavens with a shout. The trumpet of God will sound and the kingdom will be manifested on this earth in an outward, visible way.

What God desired in His original thought in Genesis 1 now happens in Revelation 11 when the earth becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. This means dominion is there. At the beginning of the kingdom you discover what takes place. Revelation 20:1-2 says,¹ “And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand.² And he laid hold of the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.” Hallelujah. The angel has a key and a chain, and he comes down, lays hold of the enemy, and throws him into the abyss for a thousand years. Then verse 3 says, “and cast him into the abyss and shut it and sealed it over him, that he might not deceive the nations any longer until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be loosed for a little while.”

Verse 4 continues, “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and of those who had not worshipped the beast nor his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” This is the revelation concerning the destiny of the earth when the Lord comes and reigns for a thousand years in the coming kingdom. He is going to take over the earth.

In the beginning, God said that image and dominion should go and subdue the whole earth. But the serpent came in, ruined humanity, created a cosmos, a world, in order to catch us in purposes other than God’s — to waste our life in vanity, emptiness, and meaninglessness. Satan comes to frustrate. At the end we see the picture. Christ is coming to this earth, and His kingdom will be here in power. He will put that enemy in the abyss, and then eventually into the lake of fire.

*How the Church Meets and
God's Purpose for the Earth*

God has a grand purpose for this earth. He never abandons it. He never turns from it. It is here and it is before us. It is in this light that we must understand the significance of the church and how it meets.

After Satan's frustration came in, God had a need. He had to have an administration. He had to work out His purpose in some way. The majority of mankind had been spoiled. Noah's day became so corrupt that God could only find one man and his family. So He flooded the earth to start all over again. By this God is telling us that He has a purpose. Someone must live for His purpose. If the whole earth goes away from His purpose, He will find a family and start all over again.

Even after this the enemy came. Everyone was in idolatry. The earth was crazy with lusts and all kinds of things. But God needed to find someone, so He went down to Ur of the Chaldeans to a man called Abraham. There, as the God of glory, He appeared to Abraham. Summing up all the promises God gave to Abraham, it was like He said, "Come on out. I am going to take you to a piece of the earth. If I cannot get the whole earth, I will take a piece of it. I will take a part. This land is a place that you and your seed are going to possess. There I am going to put My name. I am going to set up a little scale model of what I wanted from the beginning and what I am going to get at the end. Even though I do not have it at the moment, I am going to get it in miniature form. I am going to get it in the temple in Jerusalem. I am going to send you to Canaan. I am going to give you a piece of land. It is going to be My administration. It is going to be tangible, visible. The queen of Sheba can come and visit, losing her breath when she sees it all. It is not going to be an invisible temple; it is going to be *visible!* I am going to work it out."

But the temple was destroyed and the entire Old Testament history revolved around getting back to that piece of land and rebuilding the temple, because God had to have a place for the soles of His feet. He had to have the soles of His feet on this earth (Ezek. 43:7). And the place for the soles of His feet was the temple. God just needed a little piece of the earth.

Then the Old Testament history ends, and the economy of God with His Son comes in. Christ lives and dies for this fallen situation. He then gets into us and makes us His members. Now He has a way to administrate this purpose which was from the beginning and which will consummate in the kingdom on this earth. The way He brings in His administration is by gaining cities where a testimony of the kingdom can be displayed through the church. This administration happens according to cities — through the church in Ephesus, the church in Jerusalem, the church

in Philadelphia. These local churches are the administration of the mystery and a testimony of the kingdom.

*The Significance of Churches
Being Identified with Cities*

What is the meaning of the church meeting in this way? What is the significance of the churches being identified by geographical locality? Why does God have one church in one city? And why does the church identify itself just as the church in that locality? It is not just another way of meeting. It is not just the New Testament way of meeting. The church in these localities is based upon God's original purpose for the earth and what the earth will consummate in. In between this original purpose and its consummation, while the enemy is usurping the earth, God gets "a church *in* Scottsdale." In this part of the earth, the believers are gathered and enjoying Christ. By this they are transformed into His image. What is happening in the church is image and dominion. This part of the earth has a testimony to the universe that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." Amen! Hallelujah!

This is the meaning of what we call "the ground of the church." The ground of the church is not just one church/one city, as a philosophy of meeting. No. It is the revelation of God's heart for this earth. It is the church *in* this city and the church *in* that city. This terrifies the enemy. It is not a Baptist church. It is not a Pentecostal church. It is not a Presbyterian church. It is not a Lutheran church. This is too short. You and I are the church, and we are on this earth. We are on this earth experiencing Christ and seeing the enemy defeated. The church life is a little miniature of the kingdom on this earth right now. The reality of the kingdom is among us, and one day the Lord will bring in the full manifestation.

The way we meet — as the church in a city — is not according to my thought or your thought. It is according to the divine revelation of God, which is that this earth is the Lord's. When the Lord comes in Revelation to speak to the saints, He unveils Himself to bring in the last things for His coming. Revelation 1:4-6a says, ⁴ "John to the seven churches which are in Asia: grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is coming, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and has released us from our sins by His blood ⁶ and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father." Notice the phrase in verse 4, "*to the seven churches which are in Asia.*" Then notice the phrase in verse 6, "*and made us a kingdom.*" Together, these

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phrases clearly reveal the relationship between the churches and the kingdom.

Brothers and sisters, the churches are a kingdom. They are testifying that on this present rebellious earth, where the rulers and the principalities are trying to ruin everyone's human life, the Lord has churches, practical churches, meeting according to a city. To meet according to a city is an awesome thing in God's government. We are meeting according to revelation. It is not "my church," "your church," or "his church." We are on the earth as the church for the Lord's original purpose, which will consummate one day in His kingdom over the whole earth.

This is why it is just the church in a city — because God's purpose consummates in a city. It consummates in a holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, with a new heaven and a new earth. We are not just going to be invisible spirits wandering in the universe. We will have resurrected bodies. We will be visible. God's purpose is going to be realized on the new earth. There will be a display; there will be an expression.

God's administration of the church in this present age is according to a city, just like it will be in the coming age (cf. Luke 19:17-19). In Paul's letter to Titus, he instructs and charges him to care for all the saints on the island of Crete. Many in the cities of Crete were saved and growing in the Lord, but there was no proper church life for them. Thus, Paul says in Titus 1:5, "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order [the things that are lacking], and appoint elders [κατά / according to a] city as I directed you" (NASV). Paul gives a clear instruction to Titus to "ἐπιδιορθώω / *epidiorthoo* / set in order" things lacking for the church life. The Greek meaning of this word is to "set everything straight." Paul wanted Titus to make things straight and clear for the churches meeting on the island of Crete. Part of the "setting in order" that Titus was to carry out was appointing elders according to a city. He was telling Titus to let the churches happen locally, according to a city. It was like Paul was saying, "Do it that way, Titus, as I commanded you. I have given you my charge. Do not set up *your* church (3 John 9), a church for Paul (1 Cor. 1:12-13), a church for vegetarians or Sabbatarians (Rom. 14:1-5), a church for a favorite doctrine (Eph. 4:14)." Titus was to set up just the church, having the saints gather themselves according to cities. They were not to get distracted with doctrines, people, ways, personalities, or methods. They were simply to be believers on the *earth* representing God's heart's desire from the beginning. They were to be under the vision of an administration of the mystery hidden in God, which was being worked out in this city and that city. This was all for the testimony of Jesus.

The Lord addresses the churches in Revelation 1:10 saying, "I was in spirit on the Lord's Day and heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, saying, What you see write in a scroll and send it to the seven churches." Then He simply says, "to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamos and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." Here the Lord was telling him to send it to parts of the earth: send it to this part and that part of the earth so that there will be a testimony of Jesus set up locality by locality where the saints gather. This will be for the Lord's coming. We are here together enjoying Christ, the church, the Father's house. As we are waiting for our lovely Bridegroom and saying, "Come, Lord Jesus," He is setting up a scale model here in this city. He is setting up a testimony. He will set up this testimony more and more on the earth — wherever saints gather, dropping division, names, emphases, methods, in order to stand on this earth as the church where they are and let Christ be expressed!

O brothers and sisters, this is the administration of the mystery. It is in local churches. The enemy hates it when the saints stand together as local churches for the fullness of Christ to be expressed. He will frustrate you from coming into a practical church life. He gave you trouble to become a Christian and he will give you trouble to grow in the Lord. But he will really give you trouble to attach yourself to other members to have the church life on earth. Why? Because it is his undoing! The Lord declared, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." Then He said to Peter that He would give him the keys of the kingdom. So the building of the church on this earth becomes the way for the kingdom to be expressed. May the Lord grant us grace to stop our vain living and consecrate ourselves on an altar and give all to God. Amen.

— Bill Freeman

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