

## A Spirit-Filled Church -The Mystery of the Body

The text before us is one of the most fascinating passages in the NT because it interweaves the mystery of Christ and His body, His church with the mystery of the marriage relationship.

In our verse-by-verse study of Ephesians, we have learned that the overarching theme of this letter is the mystery of the body of Christ. In verse 32 Paul says, **"This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church."** So today I want to examine the mystery of the body, the church and next time we will apply what we learn about our relationship with Christ to our relationships in marriage.

Let me refresh your understanding of the theme of the letter, the mystery. In biblical terminology, a **"mystery"** is something that was once hidden but has now been revealed. Although there are several truths in the NT that are described as mysteries, the primary mystery in Ephesians is the body of Christ. Let's quickly review this theme in the letter.

Turn back to Ephesians **1:9-10**. Here we see that God has **"made known to us the mystery of His will"** that at the **"fullness of times He might gather together IN ONE [that is one body] all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth in Him."**

Now move down to **1:21-23**. Jesus who is **"far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name..."** the Father gave to be **"head over all things to the church which is His body..."**

In **2:11-12**, Paul writes of the Gentiles who were **"aliens... and strangers... having no hope and without God in the world"** but through Christ we have been **"brought near by the blood of Christ."**

Then in **2:14-16** Jesus is our **"peace."** He has **"made both [Jews and Gentiles] one."** He has **"broken down the middle wall of separation."** He has created **"in Himself one new man [new humanity] from the two, thus making peace."** He did this to **"to reconcile them both to God in one body."** In **2:19-22**, we see that those in this **"one body"** are described as **"fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God."** We are **"a holy temple in the Lord... a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."**

Look ahead now to **3:1-6**. Again, the **"mystery"** (vv. 3-4) is that **"the Gentiles should be fellow heirs of the same body"** (v. 6). Verse 10 says the **"intent"** is that **"the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church...according to the eternal purpose"** (v. 11) of God.

Ephesians 4:4 says **"There is one body"** just as there is **"one Spirit... one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all..."** (v. 5-6). Jesus Christ Himself gave gifted leaders to the church (4:11), **"for the edifying of the body of Christ,"** (4:12). So that we **"may grow up in all things into Him who is the head; Christ;"** (4:15) **"from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."**

This same "**body**" made up of redeemed Jews and Gentiles of all the ages is still the subject as we come to Ephesians 5:22-33:

- 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.
- 22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.
- 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.
- 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.
- 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,
- 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,
- 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.
- 28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.
- 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.
- 30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.
- 31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."
- 32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.
- 33 Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

In some passages in the New Testament, the body of Christ is synonymous with the term "**church**." The word church is *ekklesia* and it means an assembly or literally "the called-out ones." Of the 115 appearance of "**church**" in the NT, almost all relate to individual, particular local congregations (i.e. Acts 11:2, the church in Jerusalem; Acts 13:1, the church at Antioch, 1 Cor. 1:2, the church at Corinth, Gal. 1:2, the churches of Galatia). However there are a few instances in which the term "**church**" must have a larger meaning than the local assembly. Here in Ephesians 1:22-23 Paul speaks of "...**the church, which is His body**." Col.1:18 says Jesus is "**the head of the body, the church**." In our text today Ephesians 5:23 Paul says, "**Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body**."

It may be helpful here to understand the difference as what some have called the *functioning* church and the *forming* church.

New Covenant Baptist Church is a *functioning* church. We are a group of baptized believers gathered together for evangelism, discipleship, worship, fellowship and ministry.

However, we are also a part of the *forming* church, which is the eternal body of Christ made up of believers of all the ages, both in heaven and earth, saints who

are called out and set apart from the world and shall one day be assembled in heaven at the end of the age (**Heb.12:22-23**).

You might be thinking, "*Pastor, why are you explaining all this in such detail?*" It will help us to understand the passage before us. In Ephesians 5:32, when Paul writes about "**the great mystery ... concerning Christ and the church.**" (v. 32). The "**body**", the "**church**" spoken of here is not just a local church, but it is the forming church, "**the church which is His body.**"

The essence of "**the great mystery**" is that all believers are ONE in Jesus. We are ONE with Jesus and ONE with each other. Because of this relationship we have intimacy, unity, love, respect and submission to Christ. And here's the point: because we are in Christ, our human relationships with each other should have these same characteristics—intimacy, unity, love, respect and submission.

As 2:14 says, Jesus has broken down "**the wall of separation.**" Any walls that divide us in this church were put there by men. Any walls that divide our marriages, we built. Any walls that separate us from our children, we built. Any walls that hinder our working relationships with other believers, we built. The mystery of the body applies in every aspect of our lives.

In order to grasp the truths of human relationship in the succeeding verses, let's dig in deep today in the meat of the mystery of the body.

## **I. Christ is Head and Savior of His Body (vv. 23-24).**

### **A. Jesus is the Head of His Body (v. 23).**

What does this verse mean when it says, "**Christ is the head of the church?**" The head directs the body. As our head Jesus gives life to the body. Without Him we are dead. We are absolutely dependent on Him for everything.

Most of us have seen people whose physical bodies do not respond to their heads. We see people who are paralyzed, crippled or spastic. Their body is unable to respond to the thoughts in their head. Did you know that there can be some members of Christ's body who are spiritually paralyzed because they have stopped responding to Jesus, the "**Head?**"

Because Jesus is the Head of the forming church, He should also be the Head in the local church. Have you ever gotten your picture taken in one of those cut-outs they have at tourist traps, the ones that have a body without a head? You insert your head into the cut-out and someone snaps a picture. So we get a picture of a body with a head that doesn't really fit. It looks funny and we laugh at those pictures. Let me ask you today, does the Head of the church, Jesus Christ, look like He goes with the body here at New Covenant?

### **B. Jesus is the Savior of His Body (v. 23).**

Not only is Jesus the "**head of the church,**" He is also the "**Savior of the body.**" We become part of the body of Christ by virtue of salvation in Jesus.

In Acts 20:28 as Paul described us to the elders of the Ephesian as "**the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.**" Jesus shed His own blood to pay the price of sin and save those who are the "**church which is His body.**"

He loves, died for, cares for, protects, provides, and eventually will glorify His body. Through His blood Jesus saved us from the penalty of sin (past tense); He is saving us from the power of sin (present); and He will save us from the presence of sin (future).

A grandpa was on a walk with his young grandson. "**How far are we from Home?**" he asked the grandson. The boy answered, "**Grandpa, I don't know.**" The grandfather asked, "**Well, where are you?**" Again the boy answered, "**I don't know.**" Then the grandfather said, "**Sounds to me as if you are lost.**" The boy said, "**Nope, I can't be lost. I'm with you.**" Being in the body unites us with Jesus. If He is our Savior, we can't be lost.

### **C. The Body is Subject to Jesus (v. 24).**

Because Jesus is our "**Head**" and our "**Savior**" we are "**subject**" to Him. Jesus submitted or humbled Himself in order to save us. If He can "**submit**" to meet our greatest need, then we can "**submit**" to Him and we can also "**submit**" to meet the needs of others in the body (v. 21).

## **II. Christ Loved and Gave Himself for His Body (vv. 25-27).**

### **A. Jesus Loves His Church (v. 25).**

God's nature is love. He loves us even though we are unlovely and totally undeserving of His love. Our love is often conditional, we love others if they love us or can do something for us. Jesus loved us when we didn't love Him. Rom.5:8 says, "**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**"

### **B. Jesus Gave Himself for His Church (v. 25).**

Jesus' love is sacrificial.. He "**gave himself**" to meet our greatest need. He said in John 15:13 "**Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.**" Two reasons He gave Himself:

#### **1. To SANCTIFY and CLEANSE His body (v. 26a).**

"**Sanctify**" comes from the same word as "**saint**" and it means "to set it apart." "**Cleanse**" means to purify. In salvation Jesus set us apart, sanctifying us *positionally* and by the work of the Holy Spirit we are being sanctified or cleansed *practically*.

How does the Holy Spirit do this cleansing work in us? Primarily "**with the washing of water by the word,**" through applying God's Word to our hearts. As we apply "**the Word**" of God to our lives it is like "**the washing of water**" it washes the dirt out and washes obedience in. Most of us wash our bodies every day. If we don't our body gets sticky and stinky. Our spiritual life needs daily cleansing as well. That is one reason why it is so important to prayerfully read the Bible every day. As you read, ask God, "*Is there some action, behavior, habit, or sin in my life that needs to be washed out?*" Confess those things and He will cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). But the God not only wants to wash out of us all the unrighteousness, He wants to wash into us His righteousness. So then go to God's word again and ask, "*Are there some good things that You want to wash into my life?*"

Verse 27 gives us the result of this process:

## 2. That she might be a GLORIOUS Church (v. 27a).

"**Glorious**" comes from a Greek word that means "splendid, gorgeous." Note four descriptions of this bride in v. 27. She is without "**spot**" (spotless) or "**wrinkle**" (wrinkle-free!). She is "**holy**" (perfect purity) and is "**without blemish**" (blemishless, free of defects). This verse paints two vivid pictures..

*a. First, it is a JEWISH picture.* On her wedding day, a Jewish girl in Jesus' time took a ritual nuptial bath symbolizing her virginity. Her friends helped her put on her beautiful, embroidered linen wedding dress and sandals. She is glorious, pure, without any spot, wrinkle or blemish.

Later on the wedding day, the groom and his groomsmen would literally take the bride from her father's house and bring her to his house. It would be a parade of sorts. The picture is that of waiting for the groom to come.

Some of you ladies no doubt have vivid memories of your wedding day. Remember putting on that dress, getting your hair just right, waiting for the time in breathless anticipation, crying at the prospect of leaving your old life and beginning a new life as a bride!

*b. Second it is a PROPHETIC picture.* It pictures those of us who are the saved, the redeemed, the body, the forming church. We have been made clean, pure and holy positionally by His death on the cross. We are being made without spot, wrinkle or blemish practically by "**the washing**" of the Word. We are to wait with that same anticipation for the day we will be presented to Jesus as His "**glorious**" bride. Are you anxious? Are you looking?

## III. Christ Nourishes and Cherishes His Body (vv. 25-27).

### A. Jesus Nourishes His Body (v. 29a).

"**Nourishes**" carries the idea of "brought up to maturity." It means to provide nutritious food, adequate rest, proper clothing and shelter so that a person's body is healthy.

Paul rightly says, "**No one ever hated** [neglected] **his own flesh**." When our bodies have a need, we respond. When we are hungry we eat, when tired we rest, etc...

This is "**just as the Lord does the church**." Because we are His body, He meets our every need! He feeds us, clothes us, and protects us from harm.

### B. Jesus Cherishes His Body (v. 29b).

"**Cherishes**" means, "to warm." It carries the idea of brooding over, like a mother hen. This is how Jesus feels about us. He broods over us. He knows our every thought, watches our every move, and contemplates our smallest needs. Such is His love for His body.

### C. The Reason Jesus Nourishes and Cherishes His Body (v. 30).

Vv. 30-31 may well be the heart of this passage. Why does Jesus pay such attention to us, why does He nourish and cherish us so? Because "**we are members of His body**," We are "**of His flesh and of His bones**."

This takes us all the way back to Genesis to the Garden of Eden. God said that His creation was "**very good**" except for one thing, the first man Adam was alone and that was "**not good**." When God decided to make a mate for Adam, he could have made the woman from the dust of the ground just as he had Adam, but He didn't. He made her from Adam's rib.

The Hebrew term for man is *ish*. Woman is *isha*, meaning "out of man." When Adam saw Eve, he said in Gen.2:23, "**This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.**" The second Adam, Jesus was also "put to sleep" in the tomb. His side was opened, but we weren't taken out, we were put in. We are "**in Christ**."

God chose the institution of marriage to symbolize the intimate unity of Christ to His people. V. 31 echo's the Word in the first marriage in Eden, "**... and the two shall become one flesh.**"

Verse 32 says, "**This is a great mystery.**" What is the mystery? That we, the saved, the redeemed have become "**one flesh**" with Christ. Paul says, "**I speak concerning Christ and the church.**"

Our relationship is so close, so intimate, so deep that Paul can only say, we are "**one flesh**." We are ever joined to Him.

A young girl was sharing the gospel with some friends. She told of saving grace and how Jesus had changed her life. She concluded by quoting Jesus' word in John 10:28-29, "**And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, who gave them to me, is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.**" A doubter said, "**Suppose you slip through His fingers?**" Quick as a flash, she replied, "**Never, never! You see, I'm one of the fingers!**" She may not have been versed in the language of theology, but she understood that she was a member of His body, one flesh with Him.

CONCLUSION: Let's examine four practical applications of the mystery of Christ's body, His church.

1. *First, nothing can separate us from Jesus.*
2. *Second, He always cares for our every need.*
3. *Third, we are "**one flesh**" with Him by grace, not works.*
4. *Fourth, we share this intimate relationship vertically and horizontally.*

Jesus came to break down the wall that divides. Let's not rebuild it in this local church, in our marriage, our families or any other relationship.