

Through The Church

I. Introduction

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. – Ephesians 3:1-13

- As is often the case in Scripture, a chapter break contains wording that tells us we need to go backwards to contextualize what is being said. “For this reason”, Paul writes. What reason? It is found in the last four verses of Ephesians 2, or really all of Ephesians 1 and 2.

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” – Ephesians 2:19-22

II. How Important is the Church?

1. The Church is the “mystery” made visible!

This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

- We are so far removed from 1st Century life, and the antagonism and racism that existed between Jew and Gentile that it can be hard for us to grasp the grandeur of what Paul is writing.
- The gospel of Jesus Christ has brought miraculous togetherness, and that togetherness finds visible expression in and through The Church!

- This togetherness isn't intended as only a future reality in the consummated Kingdom; it is for here and now! Indeed it will take eternity for us to become perfected but it should not take until eternity for us to demonstrate in visible ways the overcoming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ!

2. The Church becomes ministers of the “mystery”!

Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things...

- Paul became a servant, a minister of the gospel mystery; could there have been a least likely candidate!
- Paul's privilege, expressed in the unique way God had called him, is also our privilege!
- Ours is the privilege to live out the mystery, serve the mystery, and preach the mystery.
- The Church is the secret, the mystery of the Gospel made visible.

3. Angels are the audience of a cosmic drama called, “Through The Church!”

- We don't talk enough about angels. Yet they are the ones in the audience of what R. Kent Hughes calls the “cosmic drama”...

“Here it will help us to imagine a cosmic drama. The theatre is history. The stage is the world. The actors are the Church. The writer is God, who directs and produces the drama. And the audience? Cosmic beings – “the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.” The history of the Christian Church is the “graduate school for angels.”¹

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. – 1 Peter 1:11-12

- Like an audience at a musical, angels lean forward to watch intently God's unfolding plan of redemption. We have a far bigger audience watching the

¹ R. Kent Hughes, Ephesians, pgs. 108-109

Church than we ever imagined! For all the angels know, they don't know everything, so they watch. As they watch God reveals his manifold wisdom. This phrase, manifold wisdom, is the same phrase used to describe Joseph's coat of many colors. In other words angels are watching as God creates a third race of many tribes, tongues and nations that he calls the Church!

- God uses the church to reveal his glory to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places! The church is a witness to glory! The glory that the angels are witnessing is to make a people from every tribe, tongue and nation who are being made perfect and will culminate in the largest mega-church worship service ever known!

"The heavenly hosts are to look at those of us in the church with all our sin, differing personalities, cultural prejudices, and color differences and say, "How did God do that?! How did he get such difficult and disagreeable creatures together in one body to praise him? The manifold wisdom of the Creator God really is great!" Just as Paul's sin makes the grace of God more apparent (I would add ours to the mix!), the uniting of sinners in the body of Christ makes the grace of God more brilliant – even to the hosts of heaven. By our unity in Christ's body, the church, we are preaching to the angels about the power, wisdom, and glory of God who made us. This is the apex of Paul's thought about the church."²

- So look at Ephesians 3:13 with me from this celestial vantage point...

So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. – Ephesians 3:13

- Here is why this matters: we can come to faith in Christ and be enraptured by grace. There is so much joy, desire to serve and build and advance God's mission, but persevering in this over time is another matter altogether. Everything will get put to the test over time. When Paul wrote this he was in prison, charged with bringing some Gentiles into the temple area of the Jews (Acts 21:28). Paul did so much for the church, and Paul suffered so much for the church. There is pain on the way to glory! There are hard days in the process of a diverse, antagonistic people becoming one.
- Paul persevered because he kept Heaven before him. He saw his sufferings through the suffering of Christ for him and all those he served. Dying to self to live for God will mean loving the unlovely, giving grace to the angry, patience with the bitter, forgiving toward the hurtful, overlooking a lot. The angels are watching and waiting for the grand culmination!

² Bryan Chapell, Ephesians, pg. 145

III. Implications

1. The Purposes of God for the Church Demands a High View of the Church!

- Of what other force on the Earth has the Lord promised that the gates of Hell will not prevail against?
- Of what other creation do angels sit poised on the edge of their seats to watch?
- Gospel and Church are two of the most familiar words within a Christian's life, and possibly two of the most misunderstood!
 - Gospel and Church, those words by themselves can exist in an inanimate way, but Gospel is the reconciliation of people, and Church are those people who have been reconciled!
 - "Metro Life Church of Greater Orlando Inc" is a church, but not the Church; we are the Church! The manifold wisdom of God to reconcile Jew and Gentile, black and white, rich and poor, male and female, young and old...is not revealed through brick and mortar or legal documents; but by each one of us!
 - Angels are grasping the wisdom of God by looking at us! That should elevate any small thoughts we have about our actions and ourselves.
- Jesus lived, died and rose again not only to save us, but also to create a single emissary; suddenly, we, His Body - The Church, are very important!

2. A High View of the Church means a church is Central to Our Lives!

"A temple has bricks. A flock has sheep. A vine has branches. And a body has members. In one sense, church membership begins when Christ saves us and makes us a member of his body. Yet his work must then be given expression in an actual church."³

- Being a Christian means being vitally connected to the body of Christ, expressed in a local church.

"I am not saying you have to go to church to be a Christian, but you also do not have to go home to be married."⁴

- The Gospel (made manifest) is Christ and the Church!

3. Bow and Ask for More Comprehension!

³ Nine Marks, Committing To One Another in Church Membership, pg. 12

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, Ephesians, pg. 110

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. – Ephesians 3:14-21

The Church is the Gospel demonstrated!

**“Metro Life Church of Greater Orlando Inc.” is not the Church; we are the Church!
We Are The Church!**

I. We Are All Responsible

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that (*result*) we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. – Ephesians 4:7-16

1. The Calling of an Elder and the Calling of Every Church Member is Essentially the Same, though Our Part in the Calling May Differ

- We are all called to build up one another, to pursue the unity of the faith, to maturity, to fullness in Christ, to grow up into Christ, to be parts that work properly.
- Beyond Ephesians 4 we all share in the responsibility and we all are called to:
 - Holiness
 - Glorifying the Lord
 - Prayer

- Seeking the lost
 - Sharing the gospel – sharing at Duffy’s: we all share this, not unique to me as an elder!
 - Discipleship
 - Care for one another (and all the one another’s!)
 - Service to others with zeal and excellence
- Keep in mind what we saw in Ephesians 3; this calling is given to the church, and the church is people!
 - “Metro Life Church of Greater Orlando Inc.” is inanimate; it isn’t called to love, serve, or glorify God. It holds no responsibility and cannot be held accountable. But we, the Church (body of Christ), are ambassadors of God. We are called; we are responsible for reflecting God’s glory to those around us. A church is only as healthy and impactful as we the Church are.
 - “This church is amazing!!” - What does that mean?
 - “The church failed to care for me.” – What does that mean?
 - “The church will do it.” – What does that mean?

2. Elders Equip and the Saints Minister For The Same Purpose; A Church Built up in Love.

- Every single one of us has the same function, which is to serve the church. It’s where we get the word deacon. Deacon and servant mean the same thing. So in a real sense, we are all deacons, including Jesus himself! But how we express our service is related to the particular grace and gifting God gave each of us for accomplishing the same thing; a maturing, united, loving one another, radiating the reconciliation of Jesus...church!
- Seems simple but it’s actually radical and countercultural! As a question; “How many does it take for a local church to be a healthy, new testament church? How many members are responsible (or should be)?”
 - All! Part of being in the body of Christ means I am responsible for you and you are responsible for me; we are responsible for one another. That isn’t just countercultural now in America; it’s always been counter to our sinful natures!
- The parts we do or do not play as the body directly impacts the health of our local church. This is why the body metaphor and house metaphor are so helpful; we get it!
 - If you want to run a ToughMudder but your ankle is sprained, you can’t just say, “Well, the rest of my body is fine, so I’ll just do it anyway!”

- This was the Corinthian folly!

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts,[b] yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. – 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

- Yet this is how much of the body of Christ functions and does not think it strange that they do!
- Perhaps more than at any other time in church history we live in a time where many in the body of Christ don't think it makes a difference whether they are actively engaged in the lives of others or not.
- How does my personal vision for the church actually enable us to say “no” to a host of things that are good and acceptable in themselves, but weaken or marginalize my link, my service, my gift, my part in the local church?
- It's increasingly common for Christians to make decisions that are not wrong, but that demonstrate that the local church and the part we play in the fabric of other people's lives does not “weigh” on us the way higher pay, better climate, change of seasons, or “see the world” can weigh. Additionally, it can be assumed that we will easily knit in elsewhere. The result is that the church becomes one of the last, if not the last consideration in decision making. “The pastor is the last to hear.” Signing up Johnny for travelling soccer each weekend is an easy decision because the church is often not a factor in the decision. Now, the danger

here is misunderstanding. We aren't talking about legalism, and we aren't talking about putting family and everything on the sacrificial alter of "serve the church." But we can just as easily swing the pendulum the other way, where we don't think enough about how God prioritizes the church.

- Let's not apologize for desiring to see God raise up an army of brothers and sisters that we will call Metro Life Church, who are abandoned to God's vision for the vital difference their part in the body makes in fulfilling his purposes in our little part of the Earth! Am I preaching to the choir? Our opportunity as leaders is to help 2-3 or more people in our local church catch what we've caught!

II. What Does it Look Like for each Part to Work Properly?

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. – Acts 6:1-7

1. The Apostles/Elders Could Not Do Their Part if Others Weren't Raised Up To Do Their Part.

- All are called to serve. In the case of the twelve they understood the specific expressions of their service were to primarily focus on the ministry of the word (preaching/teaching/equipping) and prayer. It wasn't that they couldn't serve tables, as if that were below them, but rather, if they began to give inordinate time to serving tables they would neglecting their primary calling to serve in the ministry of the word in its various forms and to prayer.

2. Leaders Of Various Kinds in the Church Support The Ministry of the Elders Whose Primary Obligations Lay Elsewhere.

- Not better, not more significant; just different parts of the body. The body will only be built up in love when each part is working properly.
- In Acts 6:

- It wasn't only physical but spiritual needs as well.
- This wasn't a small issue; the unity of the early church was at stake!
- Caring for physical needs for the people within a local church is the responsibility of the church. While the apostles owned that responsibility in one sense, they rightly understood the need to turn that responsibility over to another group within the church.
- Various ministry team leaders and deacon type people within a local church are supporting not only the individuals being served and the church as a whole; they are freeing up others, elders included, to do what they are called to do in service to the church.

3. The Fruit of Every Member Ministry in the Local Church is Glorious!

And the word of god continued to increase, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. – Acts 6:7

- Consider the converse: it was left to the apostles to do table waiting, which took away from their primary call to minister the word, which took away from more people in Jerusalem hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ, which took away the multiplication of disciples in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were not added to the faith.
- I am not inferring that it all depends upon us; not at all. However, there is an inseparable and undeniable link to the health of a local church and its evangelistic fruit and a fully functioning priesthood of believers, each doing their God appointed and gifted part to his glory and in love to the body of Christ and the world.

III. Our Church will only be as healthy and effective as we are.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, *when each part is working properly*, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." – Ephesians 4:15-16

Every believer is gifted by Jesus with varied grace. Every member matters.

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. – Romans 12:6-8

The mission of our Church does not belong to the elders; it belongs to the body, the flock, the saints, the believers; all of us. The picture is not of a pyramid, with the elders perched precariously on the pinnacle, with members below us in descending ranks. Nor is it a picture of a bus, where a pastor does all the driving while the congregation slumbers in peaceful bliss behind him during the journey. It is a body! We all have our parts and our parts are equally important!

My calling is essentially the same as the elders.

I am part of a body; without me, the rest of it suffers.

The health of my church family and the impact it has on our community is my responsibility.

My church is family is made up of brothers and sisters in Christ, not elders and members.

I'm called to care for all brothers/sisters in Christ; including my church leadership team.

Like any brother/sister in Christ; we need your grace, patience, encouragement, counsel, prayers and help.

Elders and their wives like sports, to laugh, play games...you know the same stuff you do! Invite us over for that too 😊