

KNOWING AND CARING FOR THE CHURCH

(Thursday—Second Morning Session)

Message Two

Knowing the Church as the Mystery of Christ

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 3:15; Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:3-6, 9-11; 5:32

I. Our vision of the church governs the way we conduct ourselves in the church—1 Tim. 3:15; Prov. 29:18a:

- A. In order to properly care for the church, we need to see, according to the divine revelation in the Word, what the church is, what the purpose of the church is, and what the function of the church is in the universe—Eph. 1:17-18:
 - 1. Only when the Lord gives us light will we know how to conduct ourselves in the church and care for the church.
 - 2. All our actions, decisions, and administration in the church must be governed by our knowledge of the church—3:3-6.
 - 3. In the church everything must be according to God's will, and we must reject anything that is not according to His will—Rev. 4:11; Eph. 1:5, 9, 11; Col. 1:9-10; Matt. 7:21-23.
- B. As a pure product out of Christ, the church is "Christly," "resurrectionly," and heavenly—Eph. 5:30-32; 2:6; 1 Pet. 1:3.

II. The church is a hidden mystery in God's eternal economy—Eph. 3:9-11:

- A. The eternal economy of God is of God's eternal purpose, God's determined intent; with a definite and strong determination, God intends to have the church—1:9; 3:11; 2 Tim. 1:9.
- B. God made His eternal economy in Christ—Eph. 3:11:
 - 1. The Christ revealed in the New Testament is the embodiment of the Triune God and all the processes through which He has passed—John 1:14; 1 Cor. 15:45b; Heb. 1:3.
 - 2. Christ is the element, sphere, means, goal, and aim of God's eternal economy—Eph. 1:3-6.
 - 3. Christ is the center of God's eternal economy, and all the contents of the economy of God are simply Christ—Col. 2:9.
 - 4. Christ is the element and sphere in which, with which, and through which God carries out His economy to have the church, the Body of Christ—Eph. 1:22-23.

III. According to Ephesians 3:4, the church has a particular title—*the mystery of Christ*:

- A. In God's economy, as revealed in the New Testament, there are mainly two mysteries:
 - 1. The first mystery, revealed in the book of Colossians, is Christ as the mystery of God—God embodied, God defined, God explained, God expressed, and God made visible—2:2.

2. The second mystery, revealed in the book of Ephesians, especially in chapter 3, is the church as the mystery of Christ—v. 4:
 - a. Although Christ is mysterious, the church is the manifestation of Christ—1:22-23.
 - b. The church, as the Body of Christ, is the expression of Christ—4:15-16.
 - c. When we see the church, we see Christ; when we come into the church, we come into Christ; when we contact the church, we contact Christ.
 - B. The church is a corporate unit produced out of Christ, who is the mystery of God—Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:4; 5:30-32:
 1. The all-inclusive Christ is the mystery of the mysterious God, and such a Christ as the mystery of God produces a unit, which is the church.
 2. Mystery produces mystery; Christ, who is the mystery of God, brings forth the church, which is the mystery of Christ.
- IV. The mystery of Christ has been revealed to the apostles and prophets in their spirit by revelation—3:5:**
- A. The mingled spirit is the means by which the New Testament revelation concerning Christ and the church is unveiled to the apostles and prophets.
 - B. When our spirit is mingled with the divine Spirit, our spirit becomes the organ in which the mystery of Christ is revealed—1 Cor. 6:17; Eph. 1:17; 3:5.
- V. Through the church as the mystery of Christ, God's multifarious wisdom will be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies—v. 10:**
- A. God desires to demonstrate to the powers of Satan how wise He is; therefore, through the church God makes His wisdom known not mainly to human beings but to those rebellious angels who are the followers of God's enemy.
 - B. The church through which God's wisdom is so marvelously displayed is God's masterpiece—2:10:
 1. In the eyes of God the most wonderful thing in the universe is the church, for through the church God's multifarious wisdom is made known to Satan and his angels.
 2. The day is coming when, through the church, Satan and his angels will be put to shame; they will realize that everything they have done has given God the opportunity to manifest His wisdom—3:9-11.
- VI. The great mystery—Christ and the church—is the meaning of the universe—Rev. 4:11; Eph. 5:32:**
- A. Christ and the church are the meaning of the universe and of human life.
 - B. God's intention in His creation of all things, including man, was that man would be mingled with God to produce the church—Zech. 12:1; Eph. 3:9.
- VII. The desire of God's heart is to have the mystery of Christ—the Body of Christ as the increase and expression of Christ—1:5, 9, 11, 22-23:**
- A. The Body life is the ultimate satisfaction of our spiritual experience—5:30:
 1. Unless we reach this ultimate point, we cannot be fully satisfied.
 2. We will be fully satisfied only when we realize that we are part of the mystery of Christ and live as members of the Body of Christ—Rom. 12:4-5.

- B. In order to know the Christian life, we must know the mystery of Christ—Col. 1:27; Phil. 1:19-21a.
- C. The mystery of Christ should be our daily life; without this mystery, our life would be merely the life of a human being, not the life of a Christian—Eph. 3:4; 1 Tim. 3:15-16.