

THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS

PREFACE

As with the three previous series (The Heavenly Gift, Ministers of the Spirit, & The Glorious Gospel), these articles were first printed separately.

For greater clarity, they have been revised from the form in which they were originally printed.

The titles of the articles in the present booklet are as follows:

1. The Mystery of God
2. No longer I but Christ (or, the Great Mystery)
3. The habitation of God
4. The image of God
5. The renewed man

Although each is self-contained, it forms part of a unified overall theme:

- ◆ The first study gives a general overview of the mysteries of Scripture.
- ◆ The second looks in detail at that particular mystery which is the keynote of the present series.
- ◆ The following two look at the theme of the second study from two different angles.
- ◆ The concluding article is a brief look at the breathtaking goal of the mystery of godliness i.e. what a normal man is, having experienced the reality of the earlier articles.

John L Birkin
March 2014

© 2014 John L Birkin

1

The Mystery of God

“WHERE there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18a)

It is essential for the Church have a full revelation of her ultimate calling and destiny. Behind much religious activity there is a distinct lack of divine direction. Things that are but stepping-stones to the ultimate goal of the Church can so easily become substitutes for the ultimate.

The mystery of Godliness

Nothing that God does is without purpose. Behind all history runs a coherent, unified plan, “the *eternal purpose*” (Ephesians 3:11).

Conceived before the world began, at first it was a mystery, “*kept secret since the world began*” (Romans 16:25; cp Ephesians 3:9). But in the present dispensation this mystery, “*which in other ages was not made known... is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit*” (Ephesians 3:5).

Several phrases incorporate the word “mystery” in the New Testament. At first sight this seems to suggest there are several different mysteries. Closer examination, however, shows that these are but different facets or stages of one grand overall purpose, “*the mystery of God*” (Revelation 10:7).

This mystery is described in general terms as “*the mystery of the gospel*” (Ephesians 6:19), or “*the mystery of the faith*” (1 Timothy 3:9). But these terms simply speak of the *fact* of a mystery at the heart of the faith of the gospel. They throw no light upon the *content* of that mystery.

Considerable light is shed, however, by another phrase: “*the mystery of Christ*” (Ephesians 3:4; Colossians 4:3). This expression does not mean the mystery that Christ *taught*. Rather, it signifies the mystery that *is* Christ i.e. the *content* of the mystery. This is stated plainly in Colossians 2:2 (NASV): “*God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself*”.

But *why* is Christ termed “*the mystery of God?*”

This is explained by 1 Timothy 3:16: “*great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.*” Here is the kernel and essence of the mystery of God: God revealed in flesh.

Before His incarnation Christ, the Word, had been revealed in human *form*. The cardinal importance of the virgin birth, however, is that in the fulness of time He was *made flesh*. (This is why a test of an antichrist spirit is the confession that Christ is come *in the flesh* (1 John 4:2-3)). Christ overcame sin in the flesh, and fulfilled the eternal

purpose: to reveal God *in flesh*. This *is* the mystery of godliness. Jesus perfectly expressed God in a body of flesh.

But this is not the end of the trail. There is one further stage to fully sound out of the depths of the mystery of God.

We have seen how Christ is the perfect revelation of God's once secret purpose. But even when God had a Man who fully expressed Himself, His eternal purpose was not fully satisfied. That was only the first stage.

He then planned for this Man to be the prototype of a new creation, a new man, to replace the old fallen man.

This is why Christ is called "***the beginning of the creation of God***" (Revelation 3:14) and "***the first-born of every creature***" (Colossians 1:15). This new creation was to be brought about by Christ, who had fulfilled God's original plan, indwelling His people. This would reproduce God in flesh not now in just one Man, but worldwide, across the ages.

Thus we see the progression in the unfolding of the mystery of God. So far we have considered:

- ◆ the general term to describe the fact of the mystery, "*the mystery of the gospel;*"
- ◆ the more enlightening term as to the content of the mystery, "*the mystery of Christ.*"

Now we come to the final stage of the one overall purpose of God: "*this mystery ... which is Christ in you*" (Colossians 1:27).

Christ, then, was not only the fulfilling and consummation of God's mystery. He was also its beginning.

This helps explain two apparently contradictory references.

- ◆ In Ephesians 3:11 we read of *the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus.*" The AV "purposed" means "effected" or "carried into effect." So, Paul is saying that God's age-long purpose was realised and executed in Christ. Christ Himself was the fulfilment of the eternal purpose. So, it seems quite definite that the mystery of God has been completed.
- ◆ Yet Revelation 10:7 says that "*in the days of the voice of the seventh angel the mystery of God should be finished.*" So, the completion of the mystery of God was still future in the days of John.

How do we reconcile this *future* fulfilling of the mystery of God with Ephesians 3:11?

Quite easily. The essence of the mystery of godliness is that "*God was manifest in the flesh*". Although this was certainly achieved in Christ, there is a wider future fulfilment. Just as in Christ "*dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*" (Colossians 2:9), Paul prayed that we too "*might be filled with all the fullness of God*" (Ephesians 3:19).

So, the fulfilling/finishing of the mystery of godliness is more than the Man Christ

Jesus. It extends to the manifestation of Christ in the flesh of His Church.

Although this latter aspect is in the process of being finalised, its climax has not yet been reached.

In Colossians 1:27 we see that the fulfilling of the mystery of God is linked with our future glorification. It clearly shows our glory to be the result of Christ in us: *“this mystery.... which is Christ in you, the hope of glory”*.

This hope can only be fulfilled when Christ appears, for *“then shall ye also appear with him in glory”* (Colossians 3:4). One glorious day the mystery of God shall be finished, and the bride shall descend out of heaven, *“having the glory of God”* (Revelation 21:11a).

Thus we see how the mystery of God has both been fulfilled and is yet to be fulfilled. Christ was the firstfruits; afterwards the Church.

The more the mystery of godliness is examined the more it will be seen to be at the very core of the plan of redemption and of God’s objective in history.

It may be considered from different angles such as the hope of glory, or the habitation of God. In all cases, however, these are but different strands of the one grand theme.

Furthermore, a recurring three-fold pattern is found: from whatever angle the theme is approached, we find it foreshadowed in the Old Testament, realised in Christ and carried on in the Church.

Each strand merits detailed individual attention. For the present, however, my purpose is limited to a general outline of the overall theme.

The mystery of iniquity

Running parallel, but diametrically opposed, to the plan of God is that of the evil one.

Like God, he too is not without purpose. Two parallel and conflicting mastermind plans lie behind all history. The Spirit of God is working out all things in accordance with God’s design. That ancient serpent, attempting to fulfil a counterfeit plan in imitation of God’s, opposes this. The devil has no originality; he only imitates and perverts that which is of God.

Since the mystery of godliness is so central to God’s eternal purpose, it is not surprising to read of a parallel *“mystery of iniquity”* (2 Thessalonians 2:7). Just as God’s objective is to manifest Himself *in* flesh, the essence of this satanic mystery is the quest of the serpent for a *body* through which to fully express himself. (Incidentally, this should throw some light on the reason for demon possession).

Not only are there two parallel yet antagonistic purposes. Both are drawing to a climax together as the Church age comes to an end.

- ◆ The man of sin will be the full manifestation of the evil one, the consummation of the workings of the mystery of iniquity.

- ◆ As the time of his manifestation approaches, so the Church is coming to *“the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ”* (Ephesians 4:13b).

This is not the place to develop *“the mystery of the woman and of the beast”* (Revelation 17:7). But the sharp contrast with the divine mysteries should serve to throw the latter into greater relief.

The Spirit of wisdom and revelation

To understand these two parallel plans, spiritual discernment is imperative: *“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth (Marg = discerneth) all things...”* (1 Corinthians 2:14-15a). Without the eyesalve of the Holy Ghost, all that will be seen will be the outward events of history instead of the two mastermind plans at work *behind* those events.

This is why Paul prayed for the Ephesians that God would give them *“the spirit of wisdom and revelation”* (1:17), and for the Colossians that they *“might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding”* (1:9).

He meant far more than merely knowing whether it be God’s will to be a missionary, housewife or factory worker. Paul was referring to knowing *“the mystery of His will”* (Ephesians 1:9), that our eyes might be opened to see the riches of the glory of the mystery of God and His master plan for the Church.

The Spirit of wisdom and revelation is no less necessary to discern the counterfeit plan of the evil one. In Revelation 17:9 we read, *“Here is the mind which hath wisdom.”* The context is understanding *“the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carrieth her”* (17:7). Cp Revelation 13:18. Likewise, when warning of the coming *“abomination of desolation,”* Jesus added, *“whoso readeth, let him understand”* (Matthew 24:15).

The fellowship of the mystery

This study is an attempt to satisfy the imperative need to grasp God’s eternal purpose and the place of the Church in it.

To see this will broaden immensely the vision of believers, bringing a complete reappraisal of priorities and goals and a greater appreciation of the heartbeat of God. An insight into His inner longings, when received in a simple loving spirit, brings richer fellowship with the Lord.

When this theme is developed and broken down in greater detail, it causes us to view many well-known aspects of the Christian life (e.g. prayer, objectives of the ministry, the nature of holiness) from a very different perspective. There will frequently be found a need for a thorough re-assessment of these aspects when placed in their wider context.

“The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant” (Psalm 25:14).

2

NO LONGER I BUT CHRIST

(The great mystery)

ONE of the most remarkable passages of Scripture is Ephesians 5:30-32: “we are members of His body, and of His flesh and of His bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.”

In it we see the amazing extent of the unity between Christ and the Church. She is not only to align herself with Christ, seeking to do His will in all things. She is actually part of Him. Just as Eve was part of Adam even though distinct from him (Genesis 2:22-23), so it is with Christ and the Church.

Little wonder Paul called this a *great* mystery.

This mystery is closely connected with those other mysteries of Scripture that are different facets of “*The mystery of godliness.*” The central theme of these mysteries is “*God was manifest in the flesh*” (1 Timothy 3:16). The truth of God’s uniting with man is at the very heart of the plan of redemption. Not just God in Christ, but Christ in man.

Let us consider some practical implications of this truth by examining several specific areas of our lives.

The Spirit of Christ

A man’s spirit is perhaps the deepest level of his personality: “*For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God*” (1 Corinthians 2:11).

Unity of spirit between two people, therefore, is an extremely deep level of unity.

And this is precisely the level of the unity between Christ and the believer. It is not just that our human spirit has common ground with His. We *have* the Spirit of Christ: “*if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His*” (Romans 8:9b). Paul refers to our partaking of the Spirit of Christ in Philippians 1:19: “*I know that this shall turn to my salvation through the supply of the Spirit of Christ.*” This does not mean the supply provided by the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit of Christ *is* the supply.

If our partaking of Christ is so far-reaching as to include even His Spirit, it is not surprising that it also embraces the remainder of His personality.

The mind of Christ

I Corinthians 2:16 says: *“we have the mind of Christ.* “This is variously translated: *“we have the very thoughts of Christ,”* and *“our thoughts are Christ’s thoughts.”* This is far more than *knowing* Christ’s thoughts. It means actually *sharing* them. Jesus knew the thoughts of His critics. But He most certainly did not share them!

Some know much about Christ’s thoughts through their theological studies. Others actually feel and share them. They love what He loves, hate what He hates, and desire what He desires.

The Word of Christ

Paul wrote to his opposers, *“ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me”* (2 Corinthians 13:3). In other words, he claimed that Christ actually spoke in him.

This is more than Paul’s simply quoting words that Christ had spoken. It is also more than Christ’s putting words into Paul’s mouth. The Lord spoke through a dumb ass (2 Peter 2:6), and through Caiaphas (John 11:51). But in neither case was He joined to them in Spirit, even though they spoke by the Spirit.

When Christ spoke in Paul, he and the Lord were of one mind and one spirit. There were times when Paul’s mind and spirit were so closely united to those of Christ, that when he spoke he could say it was Christ Himself speaking.

The love of Christ

Jesus said in John 15:12; *“This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you.”*

This does not simply mean that we are to observe how Jesus loved, and then to seek to imitate Him. We may actually possess within ourselves the self-same love that Christ has.

This is why Paul wrote, *“the love of Christ constraineth us”* (2 Corinthians 5:14). It was not love *for* Christ that constrained Paul; it was the very love *of* Christ. Paul and Christ had become one. Paul’s love *was* Christ’s love.

The bowels of Christ

A similar situation is found in Philippians 1:8: *“I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.”* Paul’s bowels had become Christ’s bowels. He was so joined to Christ that his feelings towards others were Christ’s.

This is far richer and deeper than saying that Paul had very deep compassion given him *by* Christ. It was the very compassion *of* Christ.

This is the very essence of the mystery of godliness, God has not merely given us all He *has*, He has given us all He is:

*“God and man in oneness blending —
Oh, what fellowship is mine!”*

The sufferings of Christ

At times believers must suffer for Christ (cp Acts 9:16; Philippians 1:29). But the union between Christ and the believer is far deeper than this. Not only do we suffer *for* Him; we suffer *with* Him.

In Colossians 1:24, Paul made a remarkable statement. *“Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind (i.e. lacking) of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body’s sake”*. Christ’s sufferings for His Church are not complete. (Not those for our redemption, of course). And Paul for one could say that he was sharing in his own body in what still needed to be endured of Christ’s sufferings.

This throws light upon Paul’s earnest desire to know *“the fellowship of His sufferings”* (Philippians 3:10). He did not mean a Catholic-style re-living of our Lord’s past sufferings at Calvary. Nor did Paul mean he wanted to *understand* Christ’s sufferings better. He wanted to *share* them. Paul wanted not only to suffer for his faith as Jesus once did. He wanted to share with Christ in *His* present sufferings.

This theme recurs in I Peter 4:13 *“rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings”*. Doubtless we do go through similar experiences to those which Christ suffered in His past earthly ministry. But we also partake with Him now in what He suffers in the present.

There is a converse to the foregoing. As we suffer with Him (cp Romans 8:17), He also suffers with us.

This is why Jesus said to Saul on the Damascus road: *“why persecutest thou Me?”* (Acts 9:4). Saul never met Christ in the flesh. But when Paul persecuted the Church he was persecuting Christ. Similarly we read: *“when ye sin against the brethren., ye sin against Christ”* (I Corinthians 8:12).

What a deep fellowship! Christ suffers with us; we suffer with Christ. Truly, *“he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit”* (1 Corinthians 6:17).

The life of Christ

It is possible to go on itemising one aspect after another of our lives showing how these can be manifestations of the nature of Christ.

Our joy, for example, is not just a joy that He gives. God gives all men a certain joy through His natural provision (Acts 14:17b). But the joy *we* have is Christ’s own joy (John 15:11; 17:13). What causes Him joy causes us joy, for our interests are one.

If we share the Spirit of Christ, it automatically follows that we share His mind, His words, His love, his bowels, His sufferings and His joy. Indeed, every facet of our life ceases to be our own. It becomes an incarnation of Christ.

This throws added light on a well-known verse: *“to me to live is Christ”* (Philippians 1:21). This means far more than to live *for* Christ. For Paul, to live *was* Christ. He was so one with his Lord that his actions were but expressions of Christ. To put it in other words, *“I live yet not I, but Christ liveth in me”* (Galatians 2:20).

The communion between Christ and the believer is to be very deep. It is much more than communion *with* Christ.

This explains the wording of Hebrews 3:14: *“we are made partakers of Christ.”* We are far more than partners of Christ and partakers of all that He has to give us. It is *Himself* that we partake of. He not only *gives* us life; He *is* our life: *“Christ who is our life”* (Colossians 3:4). He gives life to all creation, but to us He gives *His* life. He not only gave His life *for* us; He gave His life *to* us.

This reality should be reflected when we break bread. Although the emblems are not transformed into Christ’s flesh and blood, we are nonetheless intended to partake of Christ at the table: *“Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood ye have no life in you... he that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in Me and I in Him.”* (John 6:53,56).

Conclusion

It should now be quite clear how the *“great mystery... concerning Christ and the Church”* is closely bound up with the central theme of the *“mystery of godliness”*.

Christ was the incarnation, the visible expression in flesh, of the invisible God. The Church is to be the incarnation and revelation of Christ. Christ was the express image of God. The Church is to be conformed to the image of Christ.

This gives an even deeper significance to verses such as, *“put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 13:14) and, *“as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ”* (Galatians 3:27). To put on Christ means precisely that. It does not mean to *copy* Him. It is to *become* Him.

This throws light on 1 Corinthians 12:12: *“as the body is one and hath many members... so also is Christ”*. We know Christ is the *head* of the body. But He is also said to be the *body*. How can this be? Are not *we* the body? The blessed conclusion from this verse is that the Church is to be what Christ is. And this is precisely what Ephesians 1:22-23 says, *“the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him.”* In other words, the Church is to contain within herself all that He is.

How very rich is the fellowship to which we are called!

Great indeed is the mystery of godliness.

3

The Habitation of God

“GOD was manifest in the flesh” (I Timothy 3:16).

This is the very essence of salvation. God’s desire to reside in and to reveal Himself in flesh is the grand goal of His plan of redemption. In other words, His goal is that the saved man should be both the habitation and the image of God. A man indwelt by God of necessity reflects Him. Those two aspects (God tabernacled in flesh; God revealed in flesh) sum up concisely the mystery of godliness.

In the present study I wish to develop the first of these themes: man as the habitation of God. This will be done chiefly by considering three temples:

- ◆ the temple of Solomon,
- ◆ the temple of His body, and
- ◆ the temple of the Holy Ghost.

These show how God’s quest for a dwelling-place was:

- ◆ foreshadowed in the Old Testament,
- ◆ fulfilled in Christ, and
- ◆ through Him, satisfied in the Church.

(This same three-fold pattern is a recurring feature of the mystery of godliness theme.)

The temple of Solomon

From the beginning God has desired a body in which to dwell Although He appeared from time to time in human *form* (e.g. Genesis 18:2), this was not His goal. He desired to live in flesh.

The Old Testament tabernacle and temple provided a temporary solution. In ancient times a sanctuary was not only where people went to worship and offer sacrifice to their local deity. It was also believed to be where he lived, i.e. his house.

Although it is certainly true that the Lord dwelt in a special way in the tabernacle and temple, they could never provide a permanent residence. They offered at best only short-term lodgings.

David once vowed: *“I will not give sleep to mine eyes... until I find out... an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob”* (Psalm 132:4-5). In this he revealed the depths of his understanding of the longing of his God.

At first sight David satisfied that longing for God said to him: *“the Lord hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation. This is my rest for ever here will I dwell”* (Psalm 132:13-14). But it is clear from other Scriptures that it was not the *literal* Zion that provided the Lord with a settled home forever. This was but the shadow of another Zion: the heavenly Jerusalem, the bride.

We find a similar situation with the temple. At its dedication Solomon prayed: *“I have built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever”* (I Kings 8:13). Yet in the same prayer he also said: *“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have builded?”* (verse 27).

The fact that neither the tabernacle nor the temple could ever provide God with a permanent habitation is stated clearly in Acts 7:46-49: *“(David) desired to find a tabernacle for... God... But Solomon built him an house. Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: What house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?”* (Cp Isaiah 66:1-2; Acts 17:24).

God’s only lasting place of rest is a body of flesh. The glory sojourning behind the badger-skin veil of the temple of Solomon foreshadowed another temple in which the glory would find a permanent abode behind a veil of human flesh.

The temple of His body

There is no doubt that the tabernacle of Moses was *“an example and shadow of heavenly things”*, that is, of *“the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man”* (Hebrews 8:5,2). In other words, the tabernacle was a shadow of heaven itself.

But that was not all. It also shadowed Christ. Let me illustrate:

- ◆ According to Hebrews 10:20, Christ’s flesh was the veil of the Holy of Holies.
- ◆ Behind the veil was the mercy seat. This also is a type of Christ. Romans 3:25 (Weymouth) says: *“He it is Whom God put forward as a mercy-seat”*. (The word “propitiation” used in the AV properly means *place* of propitiation, i.e. mercy seat).
- ◆ Beneath the mercy seat lay the golden pot with the manna. Did not Christ say that *“He was “the true bread from heaven”* (John 6:31-33)?

The fact that the tabernacle of Moses was a shadow of the body of Christ gives added meaning to John 1:14: *“the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”*. The term “dwelt” means literally “tabernacled”. In other words, the Word pitched His tent amongst us. And His body was the tent. Thus, God dwelling behind the badger-skin veil was a shadow of the day when He would tabernacle behind the skin of the man Christ Jesus. Christ’s flesh was the tent or tabernacle containing the Glory of God. His body was the reality foreshadowed by the tabernacle of Moses.

Not only is Christ’s body the reality shadowed by the tabernacle. It is also the reality shadowed by the temple. In John 2:19-21, for example, Jesus referred to *“the temple of His body”*. The Greek word used here makes it quite clear that it is the inner sanctuary and not the outer precincts of the temple that is referred to. In other words,

Jesus' body was a sanctuary.

Now, as mentioned earlier, a sanctuary was not merely a place to worship a deity. It was also his dwelling-place. So when Jesus called His body a temple, He was really saying that it was the dwelling-place of God.

And this is the very essence of the mystery of godliness: God manifest in *flesh*. Christ's *body* was the tabernacle and temple of God. His *body* was the dwelling-place and rest of God.

Here then is the revelation of the place of God's rest: in a body of flesh.

The human body was specifically designed as the intended home of the Shekinah Glory. As already seen, God does not dwell in temples made with hands. But the body of Christ was a temple made without hands (Mark 14:58). Therefore all the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Christ (Colossians 2:9).

The temple of the Holy Spirit

The story did not end when God found in Christ the dwelling-place He had sought so long. He intended that Christ should be but the first of a whole new race of men likewise containing God within themselves.

The first man, Adam, fell. But the second Man, Christ, fulfilled all that God originally intended man to be. He was the prototype of a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17; Revelation 3:14). This new race does not bear the image of Adam, but is "*conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren*" (Romans 8:29).

That new race is the Church. Since Christ was the dwelling-place of God, so is the Church. This is why Paul speaks of "*the house of God which is the church of the living God*" (1 Timothy 3:15). Similarly, we are called "*a spiritual house*" (1 Peter 2:5), which is just another way of saying "*an habitation of God through the Spirit*" (Ephesians 2:22).

As already mentioned, the tabernacle and temple are not only earthly shadows of heaven. They are also types of Christ. But that is not all. They are in addition shadows of the human body.

Just as the body of Christ was quite literally a temple, so also is ours. "*Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?*" (1 Corinthians 6:19; Cp 3:16).

God's tabernacling *among* His people in the wilderness was a shadow of the day when He would tabernacle *in* them. This is clearly seen in Leviticus 26:11-12: "*I will set My tabernacle among you., and... walk among you*". Although at first sight this is a straightforward statement, a fuller meaning is brought out when Paul quotes this passage in 2 Corinthians 6:16: "... *as God hath said. I will dwell in them, and walk in them..* ." There is a big difference between *among* and *in*.

Here again, then, is the mystery of godliness. A *body* is the only true temple of God.

Not just the body of Christ, but the body of His Church.

How awesome that our bodies are designed to be more fully the tabernacle and temple of God than the original structures ever were!

Fashioned like unto His glorious body

Although it is correct to say that the Church is *already* the temple of the Holy Ghost, there is a sense in which that temple is still in the process of being built.

In Ephesians 2:20-21, for example, we read: *“the whole building being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God...”* (NASV). The same thought recurs in I Peter 2:5: *“you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house”* (NASV).

In other words, the revelation of the Church as the dwelling-place and rest of God has not yet reached its climax. The building process is a work in progress.

The climax will come at the *“redemption of the body”* (Romans 8:23).

At that time we shall have a *spiritual body*” (1 Corinthians 15:44). The Lord shall *“fashion anew the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory”* (Philippians 3:21, RV). So, if even now our natural body is a temple of the Holy Ghost, what will it be when *“our earthly house of this tabernacle”* is dissolved? At that time we shall have *“a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens”* (2 Corinthians 5:1).

A redeemed, glorified and spiritual body filled with the cloud of glory will be the culmination of the purpose of God for man in Christ.

Let us sum up. *“God dwelleth not in temples made with hands”*. So the Old Testament temple and tabernacle could never satisfy His desire for a permanent dwelling-place. They were only types and patterns:

- ◆ firstly, of the true tabernacle in the heavens *“not made with hands”* (Hebrews 9:11);
- ◆ secondly, of the body of Christ also *“made without hands”*; and
- ◆ lastly, of the body of redeemed man, likewise *“not made with hands”*.

God tabernacled in the body of redeemed man is the goal of the mystery of godliness. The human body was specifically designed for the express purpose of being the container and sanctuary of God. When that temple is finally complete, and we are clothed with our redeemed, spiritual bodies, like Christ we shall be filled with all the fullness of God. The glory will fill the house.

And the Holy of Holies will be the human body.

How rare indeed is the hope of our calling!

4

The Image of God

GOD'S desire to dwell and express Himself in flesh is central to the plan of redemption. It is concisely expressed in I Timothy 3:16: "*Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.*"

This priceless theme appears in several different forms. One is the image of God.

In the present study I wish to show how this image was:

- ◆ revealed in the first man, but marred;
- ◆ realised in the second man;
- ◆ reproduced in the new man.

In the process I also wish to show exactly what the image of God is, and the results of bearing it. Arising out of this, I desire to show precisely what a normal man really is.

Man, the Image of God

God's original purpose for man is seen in Genesis 1:26: "*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.*" But in what way did man bear the image of God? Clearly not in outward appearance, for He is invisible.

The answer lies in 1 Corinthians 11:7: "*man... is the image and glory of God.*" The Old Testament nowhere speaks of man as the *glory* of God. So this term appears to explain the meaning of the image of God. So, to be the image of God is to be the glory of God. Conversely, to lose His glory is to lose His image.

Sadly, that is just what happened. Man sinned. Consequently, "*all have... come short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). This does not simply mean that man now fails to attain unto God's glory. It also means he is devoid of a glory which he once actually possessed

Since he lost his glory, man also lost the divine image. Adam was created in the image and after the likeness of God. But Adam's son was merely "*in his own likeness, after his image*" (Genesis 5:3).

The original image had been marred. Man can only reproduce after his kind. So all men since Adam have been but pale shadows of the glorious original man.

Incidentally, one of the paradoxical results of the fall was idolatry. Men "*changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man*" (Romans 1:23). How ironical that man, who was himself once the image of God, should be

reduced to making graven images of God! The most perfect image of God was man as he once was.

So from Adam until Christ no true man walked the face of the earth. This is proven by Paul's description of Christ as only "*the second man*" (1 Corinthians 15:47). If Adam was the first man and Christ was the second, then all males born between them are not Biblically men. Why? Because a man devoid of the image and glory of God is no longer a true man at all. He is merely a pale reflection of the original masterpiece.

Christ, the express image of His person

Just as Adam was once "*the image and glory of God*" so Christ was "*the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person*" (Hebrews 1:3). But the first man only *revealed* God's intention; the second Man *realised* it.

The words translated "*image*" in the New Testament throw more light on what exactly this means. First of all, notice again how in Hebrews bearing the image of God stands alongside having the glory of God. This alone unlocks a whole wealth of meaning.

The phrase "*express image*" refers to the impression made by a die or engraved stamp used for making coins. Christ is thus the exact impress of the divine nature. To be "*the express image of his person*" means to bear the stamp of the essential being of God.

A different Greek term is used in Colossians 1:15, where Christ is described as "*the image of the invisible God.*" It gives us the English "*icon.*" This word was used in legal documents to describe the sum of a person's distinctive features which taken together distinguish him from anyone else, and prove him to be who he is. So, when Jesus is called the "*icon*" of God, this means He bears all the distinguishing marks of God.

When we examine the life of Christ, we see just how accurate these words are. It illustrates in everyday terms what it means to bear the image of God. In every detail He reflected the Father:

- ◆ in deeds (John 5:19, 30a; 14:31);
- ◆ in judgement (John 5:30b);
- ◆ in doctrine (John 7:16);
- ◆ in speech (John 3:32-34; 8:38a; 12:49-50; 14:10, 24; 17:8a, 14a);
- ◆ in will (John 4:34; 6:38; 8:42b).

Jesus was the mirror image of God in every situation. No wonder then that He could say to Philip: "*he that hath seen me hath seen the Father*" (John 14:9).

This theme is beautifully summed up in John 1:18: "*No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son. . . he hath declared him.*"

The word "*declare*" can mean to bring forth, to narrate in full, to interpret, translate, explain. Thus Jesus interprets the Father to men. As the Amplified version says: "*He has brought Him out where he may be seen.*" He expresses the invisible Father in visible terms. For those who do not understand the invisible God, Jesus translates Him into everyday terms. To see how Jesus reacts in any particular situation is to see how

the Father would react. He reveals what the Father would have done in the same circumstances.

The essence of this lovely verse is not that Jesus explained the Father by His *teaching* about Him. He explained Him by *revealing* Him. It is not that He *brought* an explanation of God. He Himself *was* the explanation.

In other words, He was the image of God.

Conformed to the image of His Son

Where Adam failed, Christ succeeded. The man of earth failed to reveal God in flesh as originally intended. But the Man from heaven mirrored God perfectly, revealing, for the first time since Adam, what a man really is. He was a living demonstration of what God intended man to be. Without in any way wishing to detract from the uniqueness and deity of our Lord Jesus, I stress that He also revealed what an ordinary, normal man is. What we call "men" are merely substandard, subnormal shadows of the original design. An authentic man must bear the image and glory of God.

But this is not the end of the story. The original purpose revealed in the first man, and realised in the Second, was then reproduced in the new man. And since Christ was the perfect image of God, the new man must be modelled on Him.

So, in Romans 8:29 we read that God has predestined us "*to be conformed to the image of his Son*." Or, as 1 Corinthians 15:49 puts it, "*Just as we have born the image of the man of dust we shall also bear the image of the Man of heaven*" (RSV). Jesus was the express image of God. The Church is to bear the image of Christ. Therefore, in Him, she too shall be the image of God. God's design for the new man is just as it was for the first man. This is why Paul describes the new man as being "*renewed after the image of him that created him*" (Colossians 3:10).

Together with the lost image, the new man also recovers the lost glory.

These two words are again brought together in the case of the new man just as with the first man (1 Corinthians 11:7) and the second Man (Hebrews 1:3). 2 Corinthians 3:18 explicitly states that the image into which we are being changed is the glory of the Lord: "*we all beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory*". This glory is seen "*in the face of Jesus Christ*" (2 Corinthians 4:6), "*who is the image of God*" (4:4). This again shows how conformity to the image of Christ is the means of being changed into the image of the glory of the Lord.

The new man, therefore, is being recreated both after the image and after the glory of God. Although full and final restoration awaits the appearing of Christ, our renewal and transfiguration is in continual process even now. As the Spirit's work advances, the divine image becomes more and more distinct.

This explains Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 3:3: "*Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ*." Or, as Phillips puts it, "*You are an open letter about Christ*." In other words, his converts were living letters. To read their daily lives was to read about Christ.

Similarly, in 1 Peter 3:1 we read of unconverted husbands being won by their wives' manner of life, without the Word. Although they refused to read the written Word, they were reading the illustrated edition every day, their wives! These were living epistles of the incarnate Word Himself.

I have already mentioned that conformity to the image of Christ automatically results in conformity to the image of God. Therefore, since Jesus makes the invisible God visible (John 1:18), so should the Church. And that is exactly what happens: *"No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us..."* (1 John 4:12). What is the link between God's being invisible and our loving one another? Precisely this: God is love; to the degree that we love, therefore, we reflect Him; we become the image of the invisible God. He not only dwells in us; He shines out of us. We make God visible.

To sum up, Christ realised God's original purpose, from which Adam fell. He then became the firstborn of a new creation. This new man is even now progressively being renewed after the image and glory of God. God walks in his shoes, looks out of his eyes, speaks through his lips, touches with his hands.

The new creation succeeds where the old failed. The renewing of the Holy Ghost shall one day be completed. God shall be satisfied and our joy shall be full.

"I shall be satisfied when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psalm 17:15b).

5 THE RENEWED MAN

“WHAT is man...?” asked the awed psalmist (Psalm 8:4).

His question was provoked by the sharp contrast between the insignificance of man and the awesome power and glory of God. Why should so majestic a God pay any heed to mortal man? And why should He crown him with glory and give him dominion?

I wish to take the psalmist's question and give it a Scriptural answer. Instead of dwelling on the insignificance of man, however, let us concentrate on his glory.

The new man

To ask what is a man is not so foolish a question as it may seem. After all, according to the Scriptures, not all men are men. This is proved from 1 Corinthians 15:47: “*the second man is the Lord from heaven*”. If Adam was the first man (verse 45) and Christ was the second, then what were all those males from Adam to Christ?

Whatever else they were, Biblically they were not men.

To understand what a man is we need to look at three men:

- ◆ the first man
- ◆ the second Man
- ◆ the new man

The first man was a revelation of a normal ordinary man as God designed him. But sadly he transgressed. Because the first man was marred, so was his seed. As a result no descendant of his by natural generation was ever a true man in the original sense of the word.

When Jesus came, for the first time since Adam the world saw a normal man. So God made Him the beginning of a new creation to replace and fulfil the original purpose of His original creation. Jesus was to be the blueprint of the new man. The new man was, therefore, to be a new creation. He was to be a man in Christ. Hence the well-known words, “*if any man be in Christ he is a new creature*” (2 Corinthians 5:17). (The word “creature” may also be translated “creation”). Compare Ephesians 2:15: “*for to make (Greek = create) in Himself of twain one new man*”.

So, where the first man failed, the second Man succeeded. He therefore became the firstborn of a new creation, the new man.

The renewing of the Holy Ghost

Although Christ has created in Himself a new man, our experience of being made new

is not yet complete. This process is called in the Bible "*the renewing of the Holy Ghost*" (Titus 3:5). It is in continuous operation: "*our inner man is being renewed day by day*" (2 Corinthians 4:16 NASV).

The precise nature of this renewing is very beautiful.

According to several paraphrases of the verse just quoted, It merely means a spiritual refreshing or strengthening. But the renewing of the Holy Ghost is far more than that. To be made new means nothing less than to bear once again the divine image and glory.

An initial hint of this is given in the following verse: "*our light affliction... worketh for us an ... eternal weight of glory*". This growing weight of glory is not simply something being stored up for us for the future in heaven. It is a progressive inner glorification even now.

This interpretation of the word renewing is confirmed in Romans 12:2: "*be ye transformed by the renewing of your' minds*". The word "transformed" means literally "transfigured", just as on the mount of transfiguration. The same word (translated "changed" in the AV) is found in 2 Corinthians 3:18, where the context shows that It means to be changed from one degree of glory to another (i.e. glorified).

Now since Romans 12:2 shows that it is the renewing of our minds that transfigures us, then to be renewed means to be glorified. Thus a new (or renewed) man is a glorified man. A man being renewed is a man who is being transfigured, or glorified.

Not only does the renewing of the Holy Ghost mean progressive glorification. It also means being progressively changed into the divine image.

In Colossians 3:10 (RV) we read "*the new man, which is being renewed after the image of Him that created him*". In other words, the process of being made new means progressively coming to bear the image of God. And according to 2 Corinthians 3:18, that image is explained as the divine Glory.

This is further brought out in Ephesians 4:24: "*the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*". Just as the first man was "*the image and glory of God*" (1 Corinthians 11:7), so the new man is also "*alter God*". This phrase does not mean that he was created *by* God. It means *according to* God. In other words, the new man was created like God, resembling Him.

(Phillips misses the whole point when he translates "*after God*" as "by God's design". His rendering fails to tell what that design is. After all, God also designed fish and trees, but they do not bear the image of God. Man, as originally designed, does.)

So then, the expression "*the renewing of the Holy Ghost*" means far more than a spiritual refreshing. It means nothing less than full salvation. It sums up the purpose of God in redemption: to create man again in the image and glory of God. In other words, to make a new man who would show just what a man as originally designed was really like.

Only to the extent that a man has been renewed, therefore, is he a genuine man. The new man *is* man.

Unto a perfect man

Before examining the grand climax of our renewing, let us first consider to what degree we may expect to taste the renewing power of the Holy Ghost whilst yet on earth. It is very frustrating to aim for a goal that is unattainable. On the other hand, we do not wish to come one whit short of that which *can* be reached.

There may well be a case for saying that we shall never here attain fully to that stature which is the grand goal of our being made new. But we do need to strive to lay hold on that for which Jesus laid hold of us.

It may well be that here we may not be made new in the sense of "*when He shall appear we shall be like Him*" (1 John 3:2). But even so we are here and now in the process of being renewed after His image. And there are ministries specifically given to bring the Church into this full maturity.

In Ephesians 4:11-15, for example, we are told that Christ gave apostles and prophets etc "*for the perfecting of the saints for the edifying of the body of Christ till we all come unto a perfect man ... that we henceforth be no more children ... but may grow up into Him in all things*". It makes only for frustration if God were to give His ministers an unattainable task. So it must be possible for our renewing to progress substantially unto the ultimate goal of "*a perfect man*".

So, although it has always been possible for the believer to experience daily the renewing power of the Holy Ghost in an ever-deepening way, we have in these days an added encouragement. The flow of Church history is bringing the renewing process far nearer to its grand climax than at any time since the early Church.

Church history may be summed up as a progressive decline from the full counsel of God, followed by a progressive return to it. The turnaround came at the Reformation. From then on the Church has drawn progressively nearer to the glory and stature which she lost, and to which she was first called.

Let us now look more fully at the nature of that full stature which is the Church's rightful inheritance and first calling.

Unto the fulness of Christ

The climax of the renewing work of the Spirit is reached when we came unto a perfect (i.e. mature, fully developed) man.

But exactly what is a fully developed man?

The breathtaking answer as found in Ephesians 4:13: "*unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*". In other words, a mature man is defined as a man who measures up to the full stature of Christ Himself.

And He is the fulness of God (Colossians 1:19; 2:9)!

So, *Christ Himself in all His fulness is the only yardstick and measuring rod of the degree to which a human being is indeed a true man.*

This awesome truth is confirmed by Colossians 3:10-11: *“the new man... where... Christ is all and in all”*. In other words, as John Wesley would put it, the new man is all Christ. This explains why in Ephesians 4:24 we are told to *“put on the new man”*, but in Romans 13:14 to *“put on the Lord Jesus Christ”*. In effect, the new man is Christ. The two are interchangeable.

Now the new man is only the fulfilment of what the first man should have been. In other words, the new man reveals what a normal man should have been. So a man is only a true man to the extent he has Christ. Since the fall, Christ was the first demonstration the world has ever seen of a normal man functioning as originally designed. All other men are subnormal. They are not real men at all. They are merely the degenerate remnants of the original creation.

This then is the grand goal of the renewing ministry of the Holy Ghost: a man in whom Christ is all and in all, and who is thus filled with all the fulness of God. As Jesus is the Man of heaven (I Corinthians 15:47-49), the new man also is a heavenly being. So, to the degree that a man abides in Christ he reflects and reveals on earth the character, atmosphere and authority of heaven.

What, then, is man? A normal man is the image and glory of God. He is all Christ. He is a being who reflects on earth the image of heaven.

In the light of this, no longer do I *ask*, “What is man?” I *exclaim*, “What is man!”