

# THE BODY, THE MYSTERY, AND THE MISSION

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*How the Life of Christ Flows Through His People Together,  
the Hidden Purpose Now Revealed,  
and the Work That Remains Until He Comes*

*A Third Study from the Scriptures,  
the Gospels, the Letters, and the Revelation*

*Written by Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus  
for the sake of you Gentiles—  
assuming that you have heard of the stewardship  
of God's grace that was given to me for you.*

*To the churches everywhere,  
who are being built together into a dwelling place for God,  
and to all who are discovering that they are not alone in this life—  
and were never meant to be.*



## Before We Begin

Grace and peace to you, beloved.

In my first letter, I showed you the trail—how all the Scriptures, from Genesis to the Prophets, pointed to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. That was the foundation: what God has done in history.

In my second letter, I showed you the life—how to understand the Source, how you have been united with Him, and how to recognize the fruit of that life flowing through you. That was the personal reality: what God has done in you.

Now I must show you something that, I confess, burns in me with a fire I cannot contain. It is the thing I call “the mystery”—not because it is obscure, but because it was hidden for ages and generations and has now, at last, been revealed.

*“The mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to His saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”*

— *Colossians 1:26–27*

Christ in you. Not Christ in me alone. Christ in you—in all of you, together. The life that indwells each believer was never meant to remain individual. It was meant to flow into a Body. A household. A temple. A Bride.

This third letter is about that corporate reality. It answers the question that follows naturally from the first two:

“If Christ is my life, and Christ is your life—what are we to each other? And what are we together to the world?”

The answer, brothers and sisters, will take your breath away. Because it is far greater than anything we could have imagined.

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# PART ONE: THE BODY

You are not alone in this life—and you were never meant to be.

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## I. One Body, Many Members

The first thing you must understand is that when Christ saved you, He did not save you into isolation. He saved you into a Body.

*“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.”*

— *1 Corinthians 12:12–13*

One Body. Not a collection of individuals who happen to believe the same thing. Not a club. Not an association. A Body—a living organism in which every part is connected to every other part, and all are connected to the Head.

Consider your own physical body. Your hand does not function apart from your arm. Your eye does not see apart from your brain. No member exists for itself. Every member exists for the whole, and the whole exists for every member.

So it is with Christ’s Body.

The Lord Himself established this reality from the beginning of His ministry. He did not call one disciple. He called twelve. He did not send them out alone. He sent them in pairs. When He taught them to pray, He did not say “My Father”—He said:

*“Our Father in heaven.”*

— *Matthew 6:9*

Our. From the very first word of the prayer, you are reminded: you do not come to God alone. You come as part of a family. You have brothers and sisters. You belong to something larger than your individual experience.

***The Christian life is inherently corporate. You cannot live it alone any more than a hand can function apart from the body. The same Spirit that connects you to Christ connects you to every other believer. You are members of one another—and that is not a metaphor. It is a spiritual reality as concrete as the blood running through your veins.***

## II. Christ the Head

But this Body is not a democracy. It is not organized by human wisdom or governed by human authority. It has a Head—and there is only one.

*“And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent.”*  
— **Colossians 1:18**

*“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**

From the Head, the whole body is joined and held together. From the Head, direction flows. From the Head, life is distributed. From the Head, every member receives its purpose and its function.

This means something practical and profound: no man is the head of the church. No elder, no apostle, no teacher, no gifted leader—however valuable their service—is the head. Christ alone holds that position. And when the Body functions properly, every member takes its direction from Him—not from human tradition, not from organizational hierarchy, not from the loudest voice in the room.

The Lord was emphatic about this:

*“But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ.”*  
— **Matthew 23:8–10**

You are all brothers. That is the fundamental relationship. Not leaders and followers. Brothers and sisters, all receiving from the same Head, all animated by the same Spirit, all drawing from the same Source.

***The church is not a human organization with Christ as its figurehead. It is a living organism with Christ as its literal Head—the source of direction, coordination, and life for every member. When we disconnect from the Head and begin following human systems, human traditions, or human personalities, the Body***

***malfunctions. Not because the members are broken, but because they are no longer receiving from their Source.***

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### **III. Every Member Has a Function**

Now here is where it becomes personal for each of you. You are not a spectator in this Body. You are a functioning member. And the Body needs you—specifically you, with your specific gift, in your specific place.

*“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”*

— **Romans 12:4–5**

Individually members one of another. You belong to the other members, and they belong to you. This is not optional. This is the structure of the life you have received.

*“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**

Every gift is from grace—not earned, not self-generated. And every gift exists for the Body, not for the individual. The eye does not see for itself. It sees for the body. The hand does not grip for itself. It grips for the body. Your gift—whatever it is—was given to you by the Spirit for the building up of the whole.

*“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”*

— **1 Corinthians 12:7**

For the common good. Not for your reputation. Not for your spiritual resume. For the building up, the strengthening, the nourishing of the Body.

And no gift is insignificant:

*“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.”*

— **1 Corinthians 12:21–22**

The parts that seem weaker are indispensable. The quiet member who prays faithfully. The one who shows up early and arranges the room. The one who notices the person

sitting alone and sits beside them. These are not lesser members. They are indispensable. The Body cannot function without them.

***You were not saved to sit and watch. You were saved to function—to contribute the life of Christ through you into the life of the Body. Your gift may seem small to you. But the Spirit gave it to you on purpose, and the Body is incomplete without it. When you withhold your function, the whole Body suffers something it should not have to suffer.***

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## **IV. The "One Anothers" — How the Life Flows Between Members**

Now let me show you what it looks like when the life is actually flowing between members of the Body. Throughout the letters of the apostles, there is a constellation of commands that all share the same structure: do this to one another. These are not rules imposed from outside. They are descriptions of what happens naturally when the Source is flowing between connected members.

### ***Love One Another***

*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”*  
— **John 13:34**

This is the foundation of all the others. The love of Christ flowing between members is the bloodstream of the Body. Without it, every other function is mere performance.

### ***Bear One Another's Burdens***

*“Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”*  
— **Galatians 6:2**

The law of Christ. Not the law of Moses—which exposed our inability to carry our own weight. The law of Christ—which says you were never meant to carry it alone. When a member is suffering, the Body gathers. When a member is falling, the Body catches. This is the life in action.

## **Encourage One Another**

*“Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”*

— **1 Thessalonians 5:11**

*“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”*

— **Hebrews 3:13**

Every day. Not just on the day of gathering. Daily. Because the deceitfulness of sin is daily, and the antidote is a voice from outside yourself—a brother, a sister—speaking the truth of the gospel back to you when you have forgotten it.

## **Confess to One Another**

*“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”*

— **James 5:16**

This may be the hardest one. The self-sourcing nature wants to hide—just as Adam hid in the garden. It wants to maintain the appearance of self-sufficiency. But the life of Christ moves in the opposite direction. It moves toward the light. It confesses. It is vulnerable. And in that vulnerability, healing happens—not because the other person has power over you, but because sin loses its power when it is brought out of darkness.

## **Forgive One Another**

*“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”*

— **Ephesians 4:32**

As God in Christ forgave you. That is the measure. Not “forgive when you feel like it.” Not “forgive when they deserve it.” Forgive as you have been forgiven—which is to say, completely, costly, and before the other person earned it. This is the most supernatural act a human being can perform, and it is only possible when the Source is flowing. Unforgiveness is the surest sign that a member has disconnected from the vine.

## **Serve One Another**

*“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”*

— **Galatians 5:13**

The Lord Himself modeled this in the most striking way imaginable:

*“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside His outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around His waist. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet.”*

— *John 13:3–5*

Knowing that all authority was His, He knelt. Knowing He was God, He washed feet. The greatest served. And He said:

*“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.”*

— *John 13:14–15*

***The “one anothers” are not a burden. They are the evidence that the Body is alive. When members love, bear, encourage, confess, forgive, and serve one another, the life of Christ is visibly flowing between them. This is what the world cannot produce on its own. This is what makes the church not an institution but a living testimony to the reality of the resurrection.***

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## **V. When the Body Gathers — The Presence in the Midst**

Something happens when believers gather that does not happen in isolation. The Lord Himself promised this:

*“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”*

— *Matthew 18:20*

There am I among them. Not merely with each of them individually—but among them. In their midst. There is a manifestation of Christ’s presence in the corporate gathering that exceeds what any individual can experience alone. This is not magic. It is the nature of the Body: when the members come together, the whole Christ is more fully displayed.

I described to the Corinthians what a gathering should look like:

*“What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done*

*for building up.”*

*— 1 Corinthians 14:26*

Each one has something. Not one person speaks while everyone else watches. Each one contributes. The Spirit distributes through multiple members, and the Body is built up as each member brings what the Head has given them.

And the breaking of bread—the Lord’s Supper—is the central act of this gathering:

*“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”*

*— 1 Corinthians 10:16–17*

One bread. One body. When you break the bread together, you are declaring: we share one life. The same Christ who is in me is in you. We are sustained by the same death and the same resurrection. We are one.

***The gathering of the Body is not a religious obligation. It is the visible, tangible expression of an invisible, spiritual reality. When believers come together—each one functioning, each one contributing, each one receiving—Christ is present among them in a way He is not present anywhere else on earth. Do not neglect the gathering. It is not an event you attend. It is a life you participate in.***

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## PART TWO: THE MYSTERY

What was hidden for ages has now been revealed.

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### VI. The Mystery Revealed — Paul’s Consuming Revelation

Brothers, I must tell you about the thing that consumes me. The thing for which I am in chains. The thing I would gladly die for, and have nearly died for, many times over.

It is called a mystery—not because it is unknowable, but because it was hidden. Concealed in the purposes of God from before the foundation of the world, hinted at in the Torah, whispered in the Prophets, but never fully stated until now.

*“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.”*

— *Ephesians 3:4–5*

And what is this mystery?

*“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.”*

— *Ephesians 3:6*

Fellow heirs. Same body. Partakers of the same promise. Jew and Gentile—the most fundamental division in the ancient world, the wall that defined all of human religion and culture—dissolved. Not by a treaty. Not by a compromise. By the cross.

*“For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.”*

— *Ephesians 2:14–16*

One new man in place of the two. Not Jew becoming Gentile. Not Gentile becoming Jew. Something entirely new—a new humanity, created in Christ, in which the old divisions no longer define identity. In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female. You are all one.

This was hinted at from the beginning. God told Abraham:

*“In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*  
— **Genesis 12:3**

All the families. Not just Israel. All nations. The Torah whispered it. The Prophets amplified it. Isaiah saw it:

*“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”*  
— **Isaiah 49:6**

A light for the nations. Salvation to the end of the earth. The scope was always global. But the means—through the cross, through one Body, through Jew and Gentile made one in Christ—that was the mystery. That was what was hidden. And that is what has now been revealed.

***The mystery is not merely that Gentiles can be saved. It is that they are equal members of the same Body, inheriting the same promises, filled with the same Spirit, sharing the same life as the covenant people of God. The wall is down. The division is over. In Christ, there is one new humanity—and this was God’s plan from before the world began.***

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## **VII. The Household of God — Built on Apostles and Prophets**

This Body has a structure. Not a human structure—a divine one.

*“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**

A dwelling place for God. Do you understand what this means? In the Torah, God dwelled in the Tabernacle—a tent of skins and gold, carried through the wilderness. Then He dwelled in the Temple—a building of stone and cedar, fixed in Jerusalem. But now He dwells in you. In us. Together. The church is the temple—not a building made

with hands, but a living structure of human beings, indwelt by the Spirit, joined together by Christ.

Peter saw this too:

*“You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

— **1 Peter 2:5**

Living stones. Not dead bricks arranged by human architects. Living stones, each one placed by the Master Builder, each one fitted to the others, each one necessary for the integrity of the whole structure.

And the foundation is not human invention. It is the testimony of the apostles and prophets—what they saw, what they heard, what was revealed to them by the Spirit. And the cornerstone—the stone that determines the alignment of every other stone—is Christ Jesus Himself.

***You are not building the church. God is building the church. You are being built into it. Your role is not to construct but to yield—to be a living stone that allows the Builder to place it where He wills, fitted to the stones around it, mortared together by love, and filled with the Spirit who makes the whole structure a dwelling place for the living God.***

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## VIII. The Bride — The Ultimate Purpose

Now I must tell you the deepest truth about the church. It is not merely a Body. It is not merely a temple. It is a Bride.

*“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”*

— **Ephesians 5:25–27**

Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. The cross was not only a legal transaction. It was an act of love—the love of a bridegroom for His bride. He gave everything to have her. He bled to cleanse her. He died to win her. And He is

preparing her—even now, through the Spirit, through the word, through the refining of suffering—to present her to Himself in splendor.

*“This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”*

— *Ephesians 5:32*

This mystery is profound. Even I, to whom this revelation was given, stand in awe of it. The love between a husband and wife—the deepest human bond—was always a picture of something greater. It was always pointing to the love between Christ and His church. The Torah’s first marriage—Adam and Eve in the garden—was a shadow of the last marriage: the Lamb and His Bride.

And John saw the consummation of this:

*“Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give Him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His Bride has made herself ready.”*

— *Revelation 19:6–7*

The marriage of the Lamb. This is where history is heading. Not merely to judgment. Not merely to the end of evil. To a wedding. A celebration. A union so complete and so joyful that all of heaven erupts in praise.

***The church is not a temporary arrangement. She is the eternal companion of Christ. He gave His life to have her. He is sanctifying her now. And He will present her to Himself—radiant, spotless, glorious—at the end of all things. When you gather with believers, you are not attending a meeting. You are participating in the preparation of the Bride.***

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## **IX. The Manifold Wisdom of God — What the Church Displays**

Here is something that may astonish you. The church is not only God’s instrument on earth. She is His display to the heavenly realms.

*“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.”*

*— Ephesians 3:10–11*

Through the church. The manifold wisdom of God. Made known to rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Do you understand what this means? When you—a former idolater—sit at a table with a former Pharisee, and you break bread together as brothers, the angels watch. The principalities and powers look on and see something they have never seen before: the manifold, many-sided, endlessly creative wisdom of God displayed in a community that should not exist by any natural law.

Enemies made brothers. Strangers made family. The proud brought low and the humble lifted up. The rich sharing with the poor. The strong carrying the weak. All of it sustained not by human agreement but by the life of the risen Christ flowing through a Body of sinners-made-saints.

The Wisdom literature anticipated that God’s ways would surpass all human understanding:

*“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways!”*

*— Romans 11:33*

***The church is God’s masterpiece. Not just His project—His poem, His work of art, His display of wisdom to the cosmos. When the Body functions as it was designed to function—diverse members united in one life, serving one Head, loving one another across every human boundary—it is the most powerful witness in the universe to the reality and the character of God.***

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## PART THREE: THE MISSION

The life was never meant to stay inside the walls.

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### X. Ambassadors of Reconciliation

Brothers, the life that flows through the Body is not meant to circulate only among ourselves. It is meant to flow outward—to the world that does not yet know. We are not a fortress. We are a fountain.

*“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”*

— *2 Corinthians 5:20*

Ambassadors. Representatives of a kingdom that is not of this world, carrying a message of reconciliation to a world at war with its Creator. God is making His appeal through us. Not through angels. Not through thunder from heaven. Through us—broken, clay-pot people filled with an unbreakable treasure.

The Lord gave this commission before He ascended:

*“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

— *Matthew 28:18–20*

All authority is His. Therefore, go. The mission is not powered by our authority, our persuasiveness, or our strategy. It is powered by His authority—the authority of the One who conquered death. And He goes with us. To the end of the age.

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

— *Acts 1:8*

Witnesses. Not salesmen. Not debaters. Witnesses—people who have seen something, experienced something, been transformed by something, and now cannot stop speaking about it.

***The mission of the church is not to build a religious empire. It is to carry the life of Christ to every person who is still dead in the old Adam-life, still self-sourcing, still covering themselves with fig leaves, still trying to produce what can only be received. We carry the message: there is a death that counts as yours, a resurrection that gives you new life, and a Body waiting to receive you. Be reconciled to God.***

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## **XI. The Gospel to the Nations — Abraham’s Promise Fulfilled**

Remember what God said to Abraham:

*“In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*  
— **Genesis 12:3**

This was not a vague sentiment. It was a mission statement for the ages. And the church is its fulfillment.

When I carry the gospel to the Gentiles—to Asia Minor, to Greece, to Rome—I am not departing from the Scriptures. I am fulfilling them. The blessing of Abraham is reaching the nations. The light for the Gentiles that Isaiah prophesied is shining. The knowledge of the LORD that Habakkuk foresaw is filling the earth:

*“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”*  
— **Habakkuk 2:14**

And the Psalmist sang:

*“All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You.”*  
— **Psalms 22:27**

This is Psalm 22—the psalm of the crucified one. And its final verses describe not just His suffering but the result of His suffering: all nations turning to God. The cross produces a global harvest. The grain of wheat dies and bears much fruit—and that fruit reaches the ends of the earth.

I wrote to the Romans about this drive within me:

*“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”*  
— **Romans 1:16**

The power of God. The gospel is not merely information. It is power—the same power that raised Christ from the dead. And when it is proclaimed, that power is released. Dead hearts are awakened. Blind eyes are opened. The Spirit moves, and people who were far from God are brought near.

***The mission is global because the promise was global. God did not say “in you one nation shall be blessed.” He said all families. Every tribe, every language, every people group on earth—the gospel is for them. And we are the vessels through which it travels. The life that flows through the Body flows outward to the world.***

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## **XII. The Priesthood of All Believers — Every Member a Minister**

In the Torah, only the Levites served as priests. Only Aaron’s descendants could approach the altar. The people stood at a distance. The priesthood was limited, specialized, and exclusive.

But Peter declares something revolutionary:

*“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”*  
— **1 Peter 2:9**

A royal priesthood. Not just the leaders. Not just the apostles. You. All of you. Every believer is a priest—with direct access to God, with authority to offer spiritual sacrifices, with the responsibility to proclaim His excellencies to the world around you.

John saw this confirmed in the Revelation:

*“To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever.”*  
— **Revelation 1:5–6**

The veil is torn. The priesthood is universal. Every believer stands in the Holy of Holies. And every believer carries the ministry of reconciliation wherever they go—to their neighbors, to their workplaces, to the marketplace, to the nations.

I described this to the Ephesians:

*“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.”*

— *Ephesians 4:11–12*

To equip the saints for the work of ministry. The leaders’ role is not to do the ministry on behalf of the people. It is to equip the people to do the ministry. Every saint is a minister. Every member is a priest. The mission belongs to the whole Body, not to a professional class.

***You do not need a title to carry the gospel. You do not need a position to minister the life of Christ. You are a priest. You have direct access to God and direct commission from Christ. The person sitting next to you at the market, the neighbor who is grieving, the stranger who is searching—you are the vessel through which the Source can reach them. You are the Body of Christ in their world.***

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## **XIII. The Word and the Spirit — The Two Instruments of Mission**

The mission is carried out by two instruments that always work together: the Word and the Spirit.

The Word of God is the seed:

*“The sower sows the word.”*

— *Mark 4:14*

*“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*

— *Hebrews 4:12*

Living and active. The word we carry is not dead text. It is alive. When the gospel is proclaimed—when the story of what God has done in Christ is told plainly and faithfully—the word itself carries power. It penetrates. It exposes. It offers life.

And the Spirit is the one who makes it effectual:

*“My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”*

— **1 Corinthians 2:4–5**

Not in plausible words. Not in clever arguments. In demonstration of the Spirit and of power. The Spirit takes the word we speak and drives it into the human heart. He convicts. He illuminates. He regenerates. We plant the seed. He gives the growth.

*“So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”*

— **1 Corinthians 3:7**

We are not the power. We are the conduit. The word is spoken through human mouths, but the life is given by the Spirit. And this liberates us from the crushing pressure of thinking that the results depend on our eloquence, our cleverness, or our strategy. They depend on God.

***Your mission is simple: speak the word, and trust the Spirit. Tell people what God has done in Christ. Tell them about the death that counts as theirs, the resurrection that offers new life, the Spirit who indwells all who believe. You supply the word. God supplies the power. And the harvest belongs to Him.***

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## **XIV. Suffering and Mission — The Cross-Shaped Path**

I must be honest with you, brothers. The mission is not easy. It is glorious, but it is costly. And it is costly for the same reason the gospel itself is costly: it follows the pattern of the cross.

*“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”*

— **2 Timothy 3:12**

Will be. Not might be. Will be. This is not a threat. It is a description of how the life works in a world that rejects the Source. Light provokes darkness. Love disturbs selfishness. Truth offends lies. And the bearers of the gospel will suffer for it—as I have suffered, as the Lord suffered, as the prophets before us suffered.

The Lord told us plainly:

*“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”*

*— John 15:18–19*

But here is the paradox the world cannot understand: the suffering is not a detour from the mission. It is the shape of the mission. The grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die. The cross always precedes the resurrection. And the power of the gospel is most visible not when we triumph by worldly measures, but when we endure, love, and hope in the face of opposition that should destroy us.

Peter understood this:

*“But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”*

*— 1 Peter 3:14–15*

A reason for the hope that is in you. When people see you suffer and still hope—when they see you persecuted and still love—when they see you lose everything the world values and still have joy—they will ask. And that question is the open door through which the gospel enters.

***The mission is cross-shaped. It costs. But the cost is not loss—it is seed. Everything given up for the sake of the gospel is a grain of wheat falling into the ground, and it will bear fruit. The blood of the martyrs has always been the seed of the church. Do not fear the cost. The One who sends you is the One who went before you—and He conquered death.***

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## PART FOUR: THE RETURN

Everything moves toward this: He is coming back.

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### XV. The Blessed Hope — He Will Return

Brothers and sisters, the mission has a horizon. We are not laboring toward an uncertain end. We are working toward a promised return.

*“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.”*

— **1 Thessalonians 4:16–17**

He will come. As He left—visibly, bodily, unmistakably—He will return. And when He does, the dead will rise, the living will be transformed, and we will be with Him forever.

The Lord Himself promised this:

*“In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”*

— **John 14:2–3**

I will come again. He said it without qualification. Without doubt. He is coming. And everything we do—every act of love, every word of testimony, every sacrifice for the gospel—is preparation for that day.

I wrote to Titus:

*“Waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works.”*

— **Titus 2:13–14**

Our blessed hope. Not a fearful expectation. A hope. A longing. The Bride waiting for the Bridegroom. The Body waiting for the Head to appear visibly, publicly, finally.

***The return of Christ is not a distant theological concept. It is the event toward which all of history is moving. Every gathering of the church is a rehearsal. Every celebration of the Lord's Supper is a proclamation: until He comes. Every act of mission brings the gospel one step closer to every nation, every tribe, every tongue—and when the gospel has reached them all, the end will come.***

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## **XVI. The Resurrection of the Body — The Final Transformation**

When He returns, something will happen to our bodies that completes what began at our new birth.

*“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.”*

— **1 Corinthians 15:51–53**

Changed. Transformed. The mortal puts on immortality. The perishable puts on the imperishable. The body of dust becomes a body of glory. The groaning ends. The decay stops. The seed that was planted in the ground at death sprouts into eternal, indestructible life.

John tells us:

*“Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.”*

— **1 John 3:2**

We shall be like Him. The life that has been working in us invisibly—transforming our character, producing His fruit, sustaining us through suffering—will finally transform even our bodies. The clay pot will be replaced with a vessel of glory. And we will see Him—not in a mirror dimly, but face to face.

I wrote to the Philippians:

*“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious*

*body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself.”*  
— *Philippians 3:20–21*

***The resurrection of the body is the completion of salvation. Spirit was reborn at conversion. Soul is being renewed day by day. And body will be raised at His coming. The whole person—spirit, soul, and body—fully redeemed, fully restored, fully alive in a way that Adam never was, even in the garden. This is the hope that sustains us through everything.***

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## **XVII. The New Heaven and the New Earth — All Things Made New**

And then the final vision. John saw what lies at the end of the trail—past the cross, past the resurrection, past the mission, past the return:

*“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”*

— *Revelation 21:1–2*

A new heaven and a new earth. Not the destruction of creation but its renewal. The curse lifted. The groaning ended. The creation itself set free from its bondage to decay.

*“And He who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.””*

— *Revelation 21:5*

I am making all things new. Not destroying and starting over. Making new. Redeeming. Restoring. Completing what was begun in creation, derailed in the fall, anticipated in the Torah, accomplished at the cross, and applied by the Spirit through the church across the centuries.

And in this new creation:

*“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things*

*have passed away.”*

— **Revelation 21:3–4**

God with man. No veil. No temple needed—because the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. No sun needed—because the glory of God is its light. No more death. No more tears. No more pain. The Sabbath rest, entered fully and eternally.

And there, at the very end of the Revelation, we find what was lost at the very beginning of Genesis:

*“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed.”*

— **Revelation 22:1–3**

The tree of life. Accessible. Abundant. Its leaves for the healing of the nations. What was barred in Genesis 3 is open in Revelation 22. The story that began with a garden ends with a city—a garden-city, where God and man dwell together, where the river of life flows free, where the curse is no more, and where the nations are healed.

***This is where the trail ends. Not in judgment alone—though judgment comes. Not in destruction—though the old order passes away. But in restoration. In reunion. In the fulfillment of everything God intended from the moment He formed man from dust and breathed life into him. The Source and the vessel, together, forever. The vine and the branches bearing fruit for eternity. The Head and the Body, the Bridegroom and the Bride, united without end.***

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## A Final Word

Beloved, we have now walked three trails together.

The first showed you what God has done—the work of Christ testified to by all the Scriptures, from creation to the cross.

The second showed you what God has done in you—the Source, the union, and the fruit of a life that is not your own.

And this third trail has shown you what God is doing through us—together—as one Body, one Bride, one temple, carrying one gospel to one world, until one Lord returns.

And I want to leave you with this:

You are not alone.

The life you received was never meant to be lived in isolation. You were baptized into a Body. You were placed among brothers and sisters. You were given gifts for the building up of the whole. And you were sent—together—into a world that desperately needs what you carry.

The world will oppose you. It opposed the Lord. It opposed the prophets. It has opposed me. But the life within you is greater than the death around you. The Source does not fail. The Head does not sleep. The Spirit does not withdraw. And the mission will not be thwarted.

*“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

*— Romans 8:38–39*

Nothing can separate you. Nothing.

Not death. Not persecution. Not your own failures. Not the hostility of the world. Not the passing of time. Not the powers of darkness. Nothing in all creation can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And the day is coming—it is nearer now than when we first believed—when the trumpet will sound, when the dead will rise, when the living will be changed, when the Bridegroom will appear, and when every tear will be wiped away forever.

Until that day: abide in Him. Love one another. Carry the message. Endure the cost. And fix your eyes on the One who is the Author and Perfecter of your faith—who for

the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now seated at the right hand of the throne 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.**

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ  
be with your spirit, brothers and sisters.*

*Paul,  
a bond-servant of Christ Jesus,  
called to be an apostle,  
sent to proclaim the mystery of the gospel—  
for which I am an ambassador in chains.*

*Pray that I may declare it boldly,  
as I ought to speak.*