

The Iridescent Diamond Of God

The gospel concerns more than our personal salvation, because our individual redemptive stories are defined by the church. Christians do not serve God in isolation and God does not just redeem isolated individuals, but a community.

Our personal identities and eternal destinies are intertwined with God's re-creative mission in the world through the redeemed community of Christ by the power of the Spirit. So, there is an ecclesiological dimension of the gospel -- the church, the "people of God." The church plays a critical role within God's redemptive and restorative plan.

Today, God is in the process of populating His church and one day He will dwell with us forever in His kingdom, His new tabernacle, the entire earth. Paul expressed a similar idea, but much more profoundly, when he wrote: "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" (Eph 3:10-11).



The term "manifold" is a compound word in Greek, *polupoikilos*, formed from *polus* (abundant, great, so much) and *poikilos* (various, many kinds). The compound term means multi-colored, many-sided, infinite diversity, sparkling beauty, and iridescent. When God sees His people, He sees an iridescent diamond He calls the church. The wisdom of God is manifested through, in, and by the church. The church is part of the gospel and it is great news.

God loves the church and it is where His presence dwells. Through the church His mission advances and His kingdom comes. And, in the church together we wait "according to his promise" for a "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2Pet 2:13).

The New Testament refers to the church in various ways and with distinct characteristics:

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| <i>Ekklēsia</i> | In the New Testament period and in secular use <i>ekklēsia</i> referred to citizens called out for rulership, vested with state power to arbitrate conflict, assign blame, and exact punishment. Clearly, the church is a unique assembly -- gathered by God for God's sake to fulfill God's agenda on earth. |
| <i>My People</i> | The origin of God's ancient people was God, Himself. The community of God was created <i>by</i> God and <i>for</i> God. Jesus, Paul, and other New Testament writers refer to the church as "a people prepared," "His people," "my people, my beloved," "the people," "people of God," "holy nation," "God's own people," "household of God," "Abraham's offspring," and "the Israel of God." |
| <i>In Christ</i> | The Bible views every human being through his/her corporate representative: the first Adam and first man or the last Adam, Jesus Christ (1Cor 15:45). The spiritual status of every human being can be summed up "in" either Adam or Christ. Theologians teach that "in Christ" refers to our "union with Christ" and that this status is the source of all blessing. |

Christians The book of Acts reports: "In Antioch the disciples were first called Christians" (11:26). The term means "adherents (or followers) of Christ." It was likely a negative description originally, meaning the "slaves of Christ." However, just as the New Testament inverted the negative meaning of "cross," the early church redefined slavery to Christ in positive terms. Early Christians often and gladly referred to themselves as "slaves" and "servants of Christ."

God's Temple Jesus Christ is the "end-time temple builder" and the New Testament refers to God's people, the church, as the "temple of God," "temple of the Holy Spirit," "God's building," "spiritual house," "living stones," "holy priesthood," "holy brethren," "royal priesthood," and "holy nation." Ministers of the gospel are "employed in temple service" and "serve at the altar."

God's Mission In John 20:21-22 Jesus said to His disciples: "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." God has a mission and Jesus was sent to fulfill that mission. Jesus sent His disciples on that same mission and He empowered them by the Holy Spirit. The Father's mission was Jesus' mission. And, the Father and Son's mission was the Holy Spirit's mission. The disciples' mission was the Trinitarian mission of God. As the spiritual descendants of the first disciples, we participate in God's Trinitarian mission on earth.

To be in the church, therefore, is *great* news! Everyone wants to be on the winning team. Everyone wants to be loved by God and others. Everyone wants meaningful relationships. Everyone desires a life of eternal purpose and transcendent worth. For all these reasons and more the church is *very* good news.