

A Look at Mushrooms Through the Spectacles of Scripture

The April showers bring May flowers...and mushrooms. Yesterday they were nowhere to be seen, but throughout the cool damp night, their ghostly forms appear here and there in the yard and sometimes in perfect circular rings. If you walk through a wooded area, you may find them growing from rotting wood or pushing from under the leaves. After a few dry days, they seem to melt away and disappear.

Although they seem to sprout out of nowhere, they really don't. A mushroom is really only a small part of a much larger organism living underground. The organism itself can be huge, covering acres of ground, but it lives unnoticed until conditions are right and parts of it absorb water and expand into what we know as a mushroom.

Mushrooms are not plants. They have no chlorophyll and do not make food with sunlight and photosynthesis like plants do. Scientists place them in the classification of fungi. Beneath the ground they grow as a network of microscopic filaments called hyphae. The filaments produce acids and enzymes that break down organic materials around them into small molecules that can be absorbed and used by the mushroom as food. These fungi, along with other living organisms serve to break down once living material to the point where they can be used again by plants.

The underground body of a mushroom can remain small and restricted to a tree stump, or if unhindered, it can continue to grow beneath the ground for miles, spreading out in all directions. Wherever there is sufficient moisture and organic material present, the fungus will continue to grow and fill the area with its network of threads. It quietly goes about its work of digesting dead plant material and storing away the nutrients until the conditions are right to send up mushrooms, puffballs, truffles, or other types of "fruiting bodies."

The mushroom itself is able to grow so quickly because it really does not "grow" with cell division, but rather inflates with water. All the cells have been prepared ahead of time to form a "miniature" mushroom that waits until the right temperature and moisture conditions. In order for a mushroom to inflate with water, a plentiful supply of water must be close at hand, and the air must have enough humidity. If the air is too dry, the mushroom will lose water into the air faster than it soaks it up. If it is too wet, the mushroom itself will rot.

The mushroom does not simply inflate for show. The mushroom is responsible for sending out spores that will get caught up with the breeze into the air to be scattered to

some other region of the earth where the work of fungi are needed. The spores are like seeds that can grow into another fungus. For this work, God has designed the mushroom to release the spores at the best time and weather conditions for the spreading of spores. Just after the rain when the air is still heavy with moisture, the mushroom quickly inflates and prepares the spores. As the air dries out spores drop like fine dust from under the canopy of the mushroom and are picked up by the dry rising air that has been heated by the sun. By the time the air has dried and the wind and heat of the day intensifies, the process of releasing spores is complete and the mushroom disappears from sight. Though no longer visible, the organism continues, alive and growing beneath the ground.

As with every other creature of God, a look at it through the spectacles of Scripture reveals the great wisdom and handiwork of God. No detail of the intricate workings of creation has been overlooked. The life, created by God, indeed fills every nook and cranny of creation and faithfully serves its purpose to the glory of God.

A look at mushrooms through the spectacles of Scripture also displays a truth about the church that remains undetected by the most powerful microscope. You may recall a sermon or catechism instruction about the church where the visible manifestation of the church was explained in distinction from the invisible church as the body of Christ that consists of all the saints throughout the whole world and throughout all time. We understand the visible church buildings and the gathering together there of local congregations of believers to be but a small visible manifestation of a much larger organism that is unseen. As with mushrooms, the visible manifestation of the church in a particular place may come and go, but the organism remains and continues to grow.