The Conclusion OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

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The Church (cont.)

Witness Lee

THE CONCLUSION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

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MESSAGE TWO HUNDRED FIVE

THE CHURCH—THE MEETINGS OF THE CHURCH (1)

In this message we shall begin to consider the meetings of the church.

IX. THE MEETINGS OF THE CHURCH

The meetings of the church are very important. The church should meet continually, for meetings enable the believers to be supplied, established, and perfected that God's goal may be accomplished.

Attending the meetings of the church is God's ordination for the believers. Hebrews 10:25 says, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." Here the assembling refers to the church meetings. God has ordained a way in which every living thing in the universe should exist. If a living thing obeys the law that governs its existence, that thing will survive and be blessed. The principle is the same with the believers. God's ordination for us, which becomes our law of existence and blessing, is the church meetings. As fish must live in water and birds must exist in the air, so we must maintain our spiritual existence and living by the church meetings.

The meetings of the church are also a requirement of our spiritual life. Every kind of life has its own characteristic and usually many characteristics. The spiritual life we have received, being the life of God in us, also possesses many characteristics. One of these characteristics is that of flocking together, of meeting together. John 10:3 and 16 reveal that since we are saved and have the divine life, we are the Lord's sheep. The characteristic of the sheep's life is to flock together and to dislike isolation from other sheep. Hence, the Bible says that we are not only the Lord's sheep but also His flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2). In order to be a sheep which shares in the blessing of the flock, we must meet together with the flock, the church. The characteristic of the spiritual "sheep life" within us requires that we attend the meetings of the church.

A. Gatherings of the Believers by the Lord into His Name

The basic principle of the meetings of the church is that the meetings are a gathering of the believers by the Lord into His name. A church meeting must be a gathering of the believers by the Lord. This is indicated by the Lord's word in Matthew 18:20, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst." This verse does not say that two or three come together to meet or that they meet together but that they are gathered together. The verb is not in the active voice but in the passive voice. The two or three do not meet together; they are gathered together. They are gathered together by the Lord. If we say that the two or three meet together, this meeting is initiated by those who meet. For two or three to be gathered together, however, indicates that they are gathered by the Lord.

The fact that the verb in 18:20 is in the passive voice indicates that whenever we come together to meet we should not be the ones who take the initiative. Rather, it must be the Lord who initiates the meeting. He gathers us. Our meeting, therefore, is not initiated by anyone except the Lord Jesus. Every time we meet together it should be He who gathers us together. Apparently it is we who take the initiative to meet together. Actually it is the Lord who takes the initiative to gather us together. It is He who gathers us into His name, initiating every meeting. Any meeting initiated by us may not be genuine, and the motive may not be pure or singly for the Lord. For this reason, every gathering of the church must be initiated by the Lord as the gathering One.

In gathering us together in His name, the Lord rescues us from all kinds of worldly and earthly distractions and occupations. This means that if we are not gathered by the Lord, we may remain in many other things. We may be occupied, detained, kept, and to some extent imprisoned by many things. Apart from the Lord's gathering us together, not many of us would come regularly to the church meetings. Therefore, we need a powerful One to rescue us from all occupations and distractions and to bring us out of them. We especially need to be brought out of the self. We cannot be gathered into the Lord's name if we stay in the self. For every church meeting we need the Lord to bring us out of everything other than Himself and to gather us together into His name. This is a basic principle of meeting for any kind of gathering—for prayer, for the Lord's table, for the reading of the Word, for building up. Whatever kind of meeting—small meetings in homes or large meetings in the halls—the principle is first that we are gathered out of all kinds of occupations into the Lord Himself.

According to the original language, Matthew 18:20 says that the Lord Jesus gathers us not in His name but into His name. In the principle of the New Testament, the name denotes the person. The name is the person. Hence, to be gathered into the Lord's name is to be gathered into the Lord Himself. Furthermore, the name of the Lord Jesus is very much linked to the Holy Spirit. Actually, the Spirit is the reality of the Lord's name. The Lord's name denotes His person, and the reality of the Lord's person is the Spirit. This means that to be gathered into the name of the Lord, that is, into the Lord Himself, is to be gathered into the Spirit.

When we are gathered by the Lord into His name, we enjoy His presence. In 18:20 the Lord especially promises that where two or three are gathered together into His name, He will be "in their midst." This indicates that we enjoy His presence in a special way. His presence surely brings us enlightenment, grace, supply, and all kinds of blessing. How precious this is!

B. The Categories of the Gathering

According to the New Testament, there are different categories of the gathering. These categories include the gathering for the Lord's table, the gathering for prayer, the gathering for edification by exercising the spiritual gifts, the gathering for reading the Word of God, the gathering for listening to messages, the gathering for preaching the gospel, and the gathering for fellowship regarding God's move.

1. The Gathering for the Lord's Table

The first category of the gathering is the gathering for the Lord's table. Acts 20:7 says, "On the first day of the week, when we gathered together to break bread." To break bread is to eat the Lord's supper, to participate in the Lord's table, remembering the Lord who died for us (1 Cor. 11:20, 23-25). This should be the first kind of regular meeting for us who have been redeemed by the Lord's death.

The first day of the week was the Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10). On the first day of the week the believers gathered together to break bread in remembrance of the Lord. This indicates that at that time the apostle and the church considered the first day of the week a day to meet together for the Lord, gathering for the Lord's table. The first day of the week, the Lord's Day, is the day of the Lord's resurrection and the beginning of a new week, signifying

that the old things have passed away and that a new life has begun. Therefore, it is most appropriate to break bread to remember the Lord on this day.

In 1 Corinthians 10:21 Paul uses the term "the table of the Lord," and in 11:20 he uses the term "the Lord's supper." There is an important difference between the Lord's table and the Lord's supper. The Lord's table refers to the enjoyment of the Lord in fellowship. Hence, the significance of the Lord's table is enjoyment for participation, enjoyment for fellowship. When we say that we take the Lord's table, we mean that we enjoy the Lord in the fellowship of Him. This is for our enjoyment and satisfaction. The Lord's supper, however, is for His satisfaction. It is for the remembrance of Him.

Regarding the Lord's table and the Lord's supper, there is mutuality. The Lord's table is for our enjoyment, but the Lord's supper is for His enjoyment. Sometimes we may say, "Lord, we come to Your table and partake of it." This indicates that we are enjoying the Lord. At other times we may say, "Lord, we thank You that we can have Your supper." This indicates that we are remembering the Lord for His enjoyment and satisfaction.

a. To Remember the Lord

The gathering for the Lord's table is first to remember the Lord. Luke 22:19 says, "Having taken a loaf, when He had given thanks, He broke it, and gave it to them, saying, This is My body which is given for you; do this unto the remembrance of Me." First Corinthians 11:25 tells us, "Similarly also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in My blood; this do, as often as you drink it, unto the remembrance of Me." The gathering for the Lord's table is not for anything other than remembering the Lord, with the remembrance of the Lord as its center for the Lord's enjoyment. Everything in this meeting, whether hymn singing, prayer, Bible reading, or words of inspiration, should take the Lord as the center, speaking either concerning His person and work, His love and virtues, His living or suffering on earth, or His honor and glory in heaven, that others may consider these things in order to remember the Lord Himself. In such a meeting we should think of the Lord in our hearts and behold the Lord in our spirit that we may be inspired concerning Him. Then we shall express our inspiration through songs, prayers, reading of the Bible, or words, so that the feeling of the meeting will be directed to the Lord and that all will remember Him.

At the Lord's table we remember the Lord by eating the bread, which signifies His body given for His believers (1 Cor. 11:24), and by drinking the cup, which signifies His blood shed for their sins (Matt. 26:28). The bread denotes life (John 6:35), the life of God, the eternal life, and the cup denotes blessing (1 Cor. 10:16), which is God Himself as our portion. As sinners, our portion should have been the cup of God's wrath (Rev. 14:10). But the Lord Jesus drank that cup for us (John 18:11), and His salvation has become our portion, the cup of salvation (Psa. 116:13) that runs over (Psa. 23:5), the content of which is God as our all-inclusive blessing. Such bread and such a cup are the constituents of the Lord's supper, which is a table, a feast, set up by Him so that we may remember Him by enjoying Him as such a feast. Thus we testify of His rich and marvelous salvation to the entire universe and display His redeeming and life-imparting death (1 Cor. 11:26).

By attending the Lord's table we receive proper nourishment for our growth in life. Yes, we come to the Lord's table to remember the Lord. Nevertheless, we need to realize that participating in the Lord's table is the best way for us to be spiritually nourished. In no other meeting do we emphasize eating and drinking as we do in the Lord's table meeting. At the Lord's table we eat and drink. Nourishment comes into us through this eating and drinking. When we eat the Lord's body and drink His blood, we not only receive nourishment but also enjoy the Lord Himself and all that He has accomplished for us by giving His body and shedding His blood. To receive and enjoy the Lord in this way is to remember Him. It is when we eat, drink, and enjoy the Lord that we truly remember Him.

b. To Worship the Father

The gathering for the Lord's table is not only to remember the Lord but also to worship the Father (Matt. 26:26-30; Heb. 2:12). The gathering for the Lord's table is a meeting for the believers' worship. According to the procedure in God's salvation, we first receive the Lord and then draw near to the Father. Thus, in this meeting for worship, we should first remember the Lord and then worship the Father. The center of the section of the meeting on remembering the Lord is the remembrance of the Lord, and the center of the section on worshipping the Father is the worship of the Father. In this section all the prayers, hymns, and words should be directed toward the Father.

Matthew 26:30 says, "Having sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." This hymn was a praise to the Father by the Lord with the disciples

after the Lord's table. A principle is implied and established here, that is, after we have broken bread to remember the Lord, we ought to be led by Him to worship the Father together. Therefore, it is based upon this verse that we sing praises to the Father at the end of the Lord's table.

Another verse related to the worship of the Father is Hebrews 2:12. "I will declare Your name to My brothers; in the midst of the church I will sing hymns of praise unto You." This verse reveals that the resurrected Christ sings hymns of praise to the Father in the midst of the church. Although the Lord Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, through death and resurrection He regenerated us who believe in Him (1 Pet. 1:3) that we might become the many sons of God. He then became the firstborn Son of God (Rom, 8:29), leading us, who are the many sons, with Him to the Father. After He was resurrected, He came among the disciples (John 20:19-29) and declared the Father's name to His brothers. Then in His status as the firstborn Son of God, He led His many brothers, who are God's many sons, to sing praises to the Father together, that is, to worship the Father together. According to this fact, after we have broken bread in remembrance of the Lord, we should be led by the Lord to worship the Father.

As we worship the Father, singing praises to Him, Christ, the firstborn Son, sings in our singing. Throughout the centuries the firstborn Son has been singing hymns of praise unto the Father in the church. He does this in all of His brothers. Because He is in us, He sings praises unto the Father in our singing. His singing is in our singing. When we sing, He sings, because He is within our singing. In this way, at the Lord's table the firstborn Son, who dwells in His many brothers who compose the church, sings praise to the Father from within them.

When we gather together for the Lord's table, we should remember to worship the Father. We should never neglect to have a time at the end of the meeting devoted to the worship of the Father. The Father surely is worthy of our worship, for He has made His Son one with us, and He has made us sons with His Son. Now the Son is taking the lead among the many brothers to worship the Father.

2. The Gathering for Prayer

The second category of gathering is the gathering for prayer. The Lord Jesus speaks of such a gathering in Matthew 18:19 and 20. "Again I say to you

that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything, whatever they may ask, it shall come to them from My Father who is in the heavens. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst." Here the Lord is speaking concerning the prayer of a meeting. This kind of prayer is more powerful than the prayer of an individual because it is able to bind on earth what has been bound in heaven and to loose on earth what has been loosed in heaven (v. 18).

Acts 1:14 says, "These all were persevering with one accord in prayer, together with the women." The prayer mentioned here is also the prayer of a meeting. It was this prayer that brought in the blessing of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Acts 1:14 speaks of praying with one accord. The Greek word translated "one accord" is homothumadon, from homo, same, and thumos, mind, will, purpose (soul, heart). In Matthew 18:19 the Lord spoke concerning two or three agreeing in prayer. The word "agree" in that verse is not as strong as the expression "one accord" in Acts 1:14. The Greek word for one accord is strong and all-inclusive. In the book of Acts the one hundred and twenty prayed together in one mind, in the same mind, in the same will with the same purpose around and within the soul and the heart. Whenever we pray, we should surely exercise our spirit, but we should also be in the same mind and the same will with the same purpose around and within our soul and heart.

Another verse that speaks of a gathering for prayer is Acts 4:31. "As they were beseeching, the place in which they were gathered was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke the word of God with boldness." In those days the disciples were under persecution, but they met together to pray with one accord. That kind of prayer caused them to be filled outwardly with the Holy Spirit and to speak the word of God with boldness.

Acts 12:5 and 12 also speak of a gathering for prayer. Verse 5 says, "Prayer was being made fervently by the church to God concerning him." Verse 12 tells us that in the house of Mary "a considerable number were assembled together praying." On the day when Peter was imprisoned, the church prayed fervently for him, and a considerable number were assembled together in a sister's house, praying for him specifically. That prayer caused God to perform a great miracle, delivering Peter out of prison.

The fact that the church prayed for Peter indicates that behind the scene there was a battle between spiritual forces, a battle between God and Satan.

Apparently the conflict was between Herod and Peter; actually it was between God and Satan. Therefore, the church fought the battle with God against Satan, the evil one. This battle was fought not by the flesh but by prayer. This prayer was offered in the house of Mary. This indicates that the prayer concerning Peter was offered mainly in the home of a sister. From this we see that in the church life the sisters should take the lead in the matter of prayer. This was the situation in Peter's case. After he was released from prison, he went to Mary's house, where many of the saints were still praying.

MESSAGE TWO HUNDRED SIX

THE CHURCH—THE MEETINGS OF THE CHURCH (2)

In this message we shall continue to consider the different categories of the gathering, and then we shall go on to see the way of gathering.

3. The Gathering for Edification by Exercising the Spiritual Gifts

In addition to the gathering for the Lord's table and the gathering for prayer, there is the gathering for edification by exercising the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 14:26-35). In this kind of gathering, a meeting for mutual building up, there is not one special person doing a specific thing, but everyone is exercising the spiritual gifts. Each one may participate with the goal of building up and edifying others.

a. In Mutuality

First Corinthians 14:26 indicates that the gathering for edification by exercising the spiritual gifts is a gathering in mutuality. "What is it then, brothers? Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up." "Has," used five times in this verse, is the translation of the Greek word echo, a word widely used, with many meanings, three of which are the main ones: (1) to hold, to possess, to keep a certain thing; (2) to have a certain thing for enjoyment; (3) to have the means or power to do a thing. The first two meanings should be applied to the first three of the five things listed in this verse—a psalm, a teaching, a revelation—and the third meaning to the last two—a tongue and an interpretation of a tongue. This indicates that when we come to the church meeting, we should have something of the Lord to share with others, whether a psalm to praise the Lord, a teaching (of the teacher) to minister the riches of Christ to edify and nourish others, a revelation (of the prophet, v. 30) to give visions of God's eternal purpose concerning Christ as God's mystery and the church as Christ's mystery, a tongue as a sign to the unbelievers (v. 22) that they may know and accept Christ, or an interpretation to make a tongue concerning Christ and His Body

understandable. Before coming to the meeting, we should prepare ourselves for the meeting with things like these from the Lord and of the Lord, either through our experience of Him or through our enjoyment of His word and fellowship with Him in prayer. After coming into the meeting, we should not wait for inspiration; there is no need to wait. We should exercise our spirit and use our trained mind to function in presenting what we have been prepared with to the Lord for His glory and satisfaction and to the saints for their benefit—enlightening, nourishing, and building up.

This meeting in mutuality may be compared to the feast of tabernacles in ancient times. In that feast the children of Israel brought the produce of the good land, which they reaped from their labor on the land, to the feast and offered it to the Lord for His enjoyment and for mutual participation in fellowship with the Lord and with one another. We must labor on Christ, our good land, that we may reap some produce of His riches to bring to the church meeting to offer. Thus, the church meeting will be an exhibition of Christ in His riches and a mutual enjoyment of Christ shared by all the attendants with one another before God and with God for the building up of the saints and the church.

In every meeting of the church we should keep the principle of mutuality. According to the New Testament, the church meeting is altogether a meeting in mutuality. In 1 Corinthians 14:26 one has a psalm, another has a teaching, another has a revelation, another has a tongue, and another has an interpretation. All these are in mutuality. There is not simply one or a few who function; on the contrary, all function in mutuality. Hebrews 10:25 encourages us not to stay away from the meetings but to be "exhorting one another." This indicates that the church meetings should be in mutuality. Mutuality is a basic principle of the church meetings. A church meeting that does not involve mutuality is wrong. In our meeting the speaking of the divine Word should be mutual, not individual. Mutuality, not individuality, should be prevailing.

b. By Speaking

We exercise the spiritual gifts for edification by our speaking (1 Cor. 14:26-31). A proper church meeting, therefore, must be unique in two things—in mutuality and in speaking, a speaking that is genuine, positive, nourishing, and edifying. This means that whenever we come together, we should have speaking in mutuality, not the speaking of only one or two. Every

saint should have the equal right and opportunity to speak concerning Christ, to speak for Christ, and to speak forth Christ. Relying on others to speak, to pray, and to call hymns is a tradition that kills the church life, for it annuls the function of the members of the Body of Christ. Instead of following the traditional practice, we should function in the church meetings in the way of mutuality. This will edify, improve, and develop the functioning ability of all the attendants of the church meetings.

The way to meet by mutuality in speaking is the way God invented and ordained. This is God's created way, and no one can improve it. Therefore, we must turn away from the traditional practice of having only one or a few speakers and recover the Lord's ordained way of speaking in mutuality. We need to fully come back to the God-invented and God-ordained way to meet.

Even when the whole church meets together we should practice mutuality in speaking. First Corinthians 14:26 indicates that when the whole church comes together in one place, we should practice mutuality. Mutuality in speaking is clearly revealed in 1 Corinthians 14. There is not a hint in the New Testament that in a church meeting there should be just one or two persons speaking. The church meeting must be open to all attendants that all may function.

c. Kept in Peace

The gathering for edification by exercising the spiritual gifts in mutuality and by speaking should be kept in peace. This means that the meeting should be carried on in a good order. For this reason, in 1 Corinthians 14:33 Paul says, "God is not a God of confusion, but of peace." This indicates that the church meeting should be kept in a peaceful and becoming order according to what God Himself is.

d. The Sisters to Be Silent in Giving Teachings

In the church meetings the sisters should be silent in giving teachings. First Corinthians 14:33b-35 says, "As in all the churches of the saints, let the women be silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but let them be subject, as the law also says. But if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is a shame for a woman to speak in the church." The phrase "in the churches" means in the meetings of the

church. According to 11:5, women can prophesy (of course, in public) with their head covered, and Acts 2:17 and 18 and 21:9 confirm that there were women prophesying. But in 1 Timothy 2:12 women are not permitted to teach, that is, to teach as an authority (there teaching is related to the exercising of authority), defining doctrine. Hence, according to the New Testament principle, for women not to be permitted to speak in the church meetings means that women are not permitted to teach with authority concerning the defining of doctrine. In this sense they should be kept silent in the church meetings. They are not permitted to speak because they should be subject to man. This is related to the matter of authority ordained by God in His government. In God's governmental ordination women are not permitted to speak with authority over man. They may pray and prophesy, that is, mainly to speak for the Lord and speak forth the Lord. However, they must do this under the covering of the brothers because they are charged to be subject (1 Tim. 2:11).

First Corinthians 14:34 should not be understood in isolation from the rest of the Bible. According to the teaching of the entire New Testament, sisters may prophesy, but they do not have the authority to define doctrines. This must be left to the brothers. Furthermore, it is a fact of history that some of the most serious heresies have come in through women. On the one hand, the sisters should not be prohibited from giving testimonies or edifications in the meetings. On the other hand, the sisters should be careful to stay within the boundary and not presume to teach in the sense of defining doctrine.

In 1 Timothy 2:11 Paul says, "Let a woman learn in quietness in all subjection." Quietness here means silence. For a sister to learn in silence and in all subjection is to realize her position as a woman. This safeguards the sisters from the presumption of overstepping their position in the local assembly.

In 2:12 Paul goes on to say, "But I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man, but to be in quietness." To teach here means to teach with authority, to define and decide the meaning of doctrines concerning divine truth. For a woman to teach in this way or to exercise authority over a man is to leave her position. In God's creation man was ordained to be the head, and woman was to be in subjection to man (1 Cor. 11:3). This ordination should be kept in the church.

4. The Gathering

for Reading the Word of God

"Having gathered the multitude together, they handed them the letter. And when they read it, they rejoiced at the consolation" (Acts 15:30-31). These verses tell us that when Paul and his companions arrived in Antioch, they gathered the saints together to read to them the letter written by the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem under the leading of the Holy Spirit. This indicates that we also may need to meet together occasionally to read the word of God in the Bible.

In Colossians 4:16 Paul says, "When this letter is read among you, cause that it may be read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you also read the one from Laodicia." This verse also refers to a gathering for reading the Word of God.

5. The Gathering for Listening to Messages

In the church we also may gather together for listening to messages. According to the record in Acts, this kind of gathering is not frequent. One verse that refers to such a gathering is Acts 20:7. "When we gathered together...Paul discoursed with them, about to go forth on the next day." On that day, the believers in Troas met together to listen to Paul discoursing with them concerning the spiritual things of God so that they might be edified and established. This indicates that sometimes we also should meet to listen to spiritual messages spoken for God by the Lord's minister of the word that we may be edified and established.

6. The Gathering for Preaching the Gospel

Another kind of gathering is the gathering for preaching the gospel. Acts 5:42 refers to this kind of gathering. "Every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and bringing the good news of Jesus as the Christ." Here we see that the apostles preached the gospel in the temple and in the houses of the believers. Today we should follow this practice of gathering to preach the gospel from house to house.

7. The Gathering for Fellowship regarding God's Move

Finally, there is the gathering for fellowship regarding God's move. Acts 14:27 says, "Having arrived and gathered the church together, they declared

all that God had done with them, and that He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles." Here we see that after Paul's first journey of ministry, he came back to Antioch, called the church together, and related to the church what God had done through his ministry, telling them of God's move. This indicates that we may sometimes gather together to have fellowship regarding God's move.

We have covered seven categories of the gatherings of the church: the gathering for the Lord's table, the gathering for prayer, the gathering for edification by exercising the spiritual gifts, the gathering for reading the Word of God, the gathering for listening to messages, the gathering for preaching the gospel, and the gathering for fellowship regarding God's move. These are the only kinds of gatherings of the church mentioned in the New Testament.

C. The Way of Gathering

1. To Be Gathered into the Lord's Name

The first aspect of the way of gathering is for us to be gathered into the Lord's name. In Matthew 18:20 the Lord Jesus says, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst." The predicate here is not in the active voice but in the passive voice, saying that two or three are gathered. Furthermore, the Greek word translated "in" is better rendered "into." The way of gathering in the church is to be gathered by the Lord into His name for the enjoyment of His presence. We are not gathered into an organization or a teaching or a practice. We are gathered into the name of the Lord Jesus. The name of the Lord always denotes His person. A name denotes a real and practical person, and the person of the Lord Jesus is the Spirit. Jesus Christ today is the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b). Second Corinthians 3:17 says, "The Lord is the Spirit."

We must link Matthew 18:20 with 1 Corinthians 12:3, which says, "No one can say, Lord Jesus, except in the Holy Spirit." First, to meet together is to be gathered into the name, the person, of the Lord Jesus, and to be gathered into His person means to be gathered into the Spirit. Second, whenever we meet together, no matter how large or small the gathering may be, we must practice calling on the name of the Lord that we may get into the Spirit. When we get into the Spirit, we are in the person of the Lord Jesus. When we are in the person of the Lord Jesus, we are in the reality of the name of the Lord Jesus.

In order to have a proper church meeting, we need to be gathered into the name of the Lord. Before the meeting, however, we may be occupied with other things. Therefore, when the meeting time comes, the Lord Jesus gathers us out of these preoccupations into His name. We turn our heart to the Lord and call upon the name of the Lord from deep within our spirit. As a result, we get into the name, the person, the Spirit, of the Lord. In such a Spirit, under such a condition, we gather together for a church meeting.

2. From House to House

The way of gathering is first to meet from house to house (Acts 2:46; 5:42). Acts 2:46 tells us that the believers broke bread "from house to house," and 5:42 says that "from house to house, they did not cease teaching and bringing the good news of Jesus as the Christ." The believers first met in homes beginning on the day of Pentecost. Three thousand met from house to house. The Greek indicates that they met according to houses, which means that every house had a meeting. There was a meeting in every new believer's house.

The Greek words rendered "from house to house" also mean "at home," in contrast with "in the temple." The Christian way of meeting together is fitting to God's New Testament economy, differing from the Judaic way of meeting in the synagogues (Acts 6:9). The Christian way of meeting in homes became a continual and general practice in the churches (cf. Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philem. 2).

In the home meetings, according to Acts 2:46 and 5:42, they were preaching the gospel, teaching the truth, breaking bread to remember the Lord, and praying. This should prove to us that meeting in the homes was a custom and became a habit in the early days of the church. Based upon this we can say that the basic way for the believers to meet is in the homes. The church in Jerusalem had a large number of saints. According to Acts 5:14, "believers were all the more being added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and of women." Surely the basic way for these believers to meet was from house to house.

Meeting in the believers' homes is for all the members of Christ to function. In a big meeting it is difficult for the saints to function. However, in a small meeting in a home everyone can function.

3. The Whole Church

Coming Together in One Place

The church should also have large meetings in a larger place for the whole church to come together. In 1 Corinthians 14:23 Paul speaks of the whole church coming together in one place. Therefore, there should be two kinds of meetings: small meetings in the homes of the believers and large meetings in a larger meeting place. However, these large meetings should not be held often. Holding larger meetings should not be a constant practice. If we practice the large meetings constantly, we shall deaden the situation in the church.

Regarding the church meetings, we need to be balanced and learn to have the two kinds of meetings—meetings from house to house and meetings of the whole church coming together. Just as God's design of the human body is symmetrical, with two ears, two eyes, two arms, and two legs, so we also should be balanced concerning the two kinds of meetings. On the one hand, we need to meet in the homes; on the other hand, when the need arises, we should hold large meetings in a larger meeting place. But in the larger meeting place, we should not have any definite speaker with all the congregation listening to this speaker. On the contrary, we must meet in the way of mutuality, with all the attendants participating in the building up of the church through their functions. Everyone can and should have something of Christ for the meeting.

4. Not Forsaking the Assembling Together

Hebrews 10:25 says, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the custom with some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day drawing near." The Greek word translated "custom" may also be rendered "habit." We should not have the custom, the habit, of forsaking the assembling together. In Hebrews 10:24 Paul speaks of the believers considering "one another for inciting to love and good works." This indicates that the church meetings can cause us to consider one another for inciting to love and to exhort one another for good works. This causes us to have spiritual fellowship with the saints to receive the life supply from them. Therefore, we should not forsake the meetings, and so much the more as we know that the Lord will soon come back. Our Christian life is not like the life of a butterfly, which does well on its own; our life is like the sheep's life, requiring that we flock together and live a meeting life. Consequently, we need to meet. The meetings are crucial to us, and we should not forsake them.

MESSAGE TWO HUNDRED SEVEN

THE CHURCH—
THE STATUS OF THE CHURCH (1)
THE ASSEMBLY

In this message we come to the status of the church. As we consider the status of the church, we shall see the reality concerning the church and the real definition of the church. Therefore, we need to get into the depth of each aspect of the status of the church.

X. THE STATUS OF THE CHURCH

The church has a sevenfold status: the assembly, the house of God, the kingdom of God, the Body of Christ, the counterpart of Christ, the new man, and the golden lampstands.

A. The Assembly

1. The Called Out Assembly, or the Assembly of the Called Out Ones

In the Bible the church is first called the assembly. This is revealed by the Lord Jesus Himself in Matthew 16:18, where He speaks concerning the universal aspect of the church, and in 18:17, where He speaks concerning the local aspect of the church. The Greek word translated “church” in these verses is ekklesia, composed of two words: ek, out, and kaleo, called. Put together, these two words mean a called out congregation or an assembly of the called ones. Hence, according to the literal sense of the word, the church is the assembly of those called out of the world by God.

In ancient times the mayor of a city would sometimes call the people together as a congregation, as an assembly, for a particular purpose. The Greek word used to denote such a gathering is ekklesia (cf. Acts 19:41). The point we would emphasize here is that the word ekklesia, according to biblical usage, refers to the church as a called out congregation. The church is a congregation called out of the world unto God for His purpose. It is much better to translate ekklesia not as church but as assembly. The Brethren

teachers insisted on this, and the congregations among the Brethren were known as the Brethren assemblies. I agree with their use of the word assembly. The word assembly is better than the word church.

Although there is no plain mentioning of the church in the Old Testament, there is a picture concerning the church as the assembly. When the children of Israel went out of Egypt, they came to the foot of Mount Sinai. There they were formed into one coordinated entity to assemble before God with the tabernacle as the center and the twelve tribes as the circumference encamping around the tabernacle (Num. 2). Thus, they became one corporate body, the ekklesia, the assembly of God's called ones. For this reason, the New Testament calls them the ekklesia (Acts 7:38, the word assembly is ekklesia). On the one hand, they were called out by God from Egypt (signifying the world); on the other hand, they were the congregation gathering before God. The children of Israel did not have the nature of the church; they were merely a type, a picture, showing us that the church is the assembling together of those who have been called out of the world by God through His redemption and saving power.

Because the church has the status of the assembly, the ekklesia, we need to gather together. We must assemble and meet in order to have a congregation for God to work and move among us. When God's called out ones meet together, this is the church. Without such a gathering together of the believers in a locality, there is no practical church life. The practical church life consists in the gathering of the saints in a certain locality. If believers live in a particular city but do not assemble, then in a practical way there is no church in that city. The basic concept of the church as the assembly is that the church is a gathering of the called out ones.

The word church has been damaged by traditional usage. Today many people use this word to denote a physical building with a tower. When these people speak of going to church, they mean that they are going to a building. This concept is absolutely off. The church is not a lifeless building but something organic and full of life. The church is not a physical building without life—the church is an assembly of living persons called out of the world by God for His purpose.

We need to be impressed with the fact that, as used in the New Testament with respect to the church, the Greek word ekklesia indicates that the church is a congregation called out of the world so that God may carry out His

purpose. According to Genesis 1:26, man was created by God to bear His image and to carry His authority. However, man fell again and again. Eventually, in the last stage of his fall, man fell into the world, the system of Satan. In the eyes of God, as a result of the fall the entire human race has actually become the world. In John 3:16 human beings as a totality are called "the world." Since fallen man is in the world and has even become the world, how can God fulfill His purpose with man and through man? The only way is for God to call out a part of the human race. God has done this very thing. In applying His salvation to us, the first thing God does is to call us. Therefore, the first status of the church is that of the assembly of those who have been called out of the world by God to Himself for the fulfillment of His purpose.

Because the church as the assembly is separated from the world, we may say that the church is composed of the real Hebrews. The root of the word "Hebrew" (Gen. 14:13) means "to pass over"; it especially means to pass over a river from one region to another and from one side to another. Hence, the word Hebrew denotes a river crosser, one who crosses a river. The church is composed of the believers who, as real Hebrews, have been called by God out of the world and have "crossed the river" from one realm to another. Now as believers in Christ we are the called out ones, the assembly, the congregation called out by God, the ekklesia in opposition to the world, which is on the other side of the river we have crossed. Just as our forefather Abraham was called out of the land of Chaldea, so we have been called out of the world by God to be His assembly.

Whenever we speak of the church as the assembly, the ekklesia, we need to realize that this means that the church has been separated from the world. The first status of the church indicates a thorough separation of God's called out ones from the world. There must be a great and thorough separation between the church as the ekklesia and the world as the system, the cosmos, of Satan. As the assembly, the church is separated entirely for God so that He may have a means to carry out His eternal purpose.

2. Called by God

The church as the assembly of the called out ones is composed of those who have been called by God. First Corinthians 1:2 says, "To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, theirs and ours." Another verse that speaks of the called ones is

Romans 1:7a: “To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called saints.” God begins to save us by calling us. In eternity God foreknew us, chose us, and predestinated us. Then in time, after we had been created and had become fallen, God came in to save us. The first thing in God’s salvation is His calling of us. This means that the One who foreknew us, chose us, and predestinated us from the foundation of the world one day came to visit us. The believers, therefore, have been called by God Himself. God’s calling is not originated or initiated by the called ones. Rather, it is initiated by God, the One who calls.

3. Obtained (Acquired) by God with His Own Blood

The church, the assembly, has been obtained, acquired, by God with His own blood. In Acts 20:28 Paul speaks of “the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood.” God obtained the church by purchasing it. In order for anything to be purchased a price must be paid. According to Paul’s word in 20:28, God obtained the church by paying the price of “His own blood.”

The phrase “His own blood” is very unusual. God is God; He is not a man or a creature. How, then, can God, the Creator, have blood? Prior to incarnation, God certainly did not have blood. But through incarnation our God, the Creator, the eternal One, Jehovah, became mingled with man. As a result, He was no longer only God—He became a God-man. As the God-man, He surely had blood with which to obtain, acquire, the church.

When Christ, the God-man, died on the cross, He died not only as man but also as God. The One who died on the cross was the One who had been conceived of God and born with God. Because He was a God-man, the element of God was in Him. The divine element was mingled with His humanity. In this way God joined Himself to humanity to be the Savior (Luke 2:11) who died and shed His blood for us.

The blood that has redeemed fallen human beings is the blood of Jesus, the Son of God. As human beings, we need genuine human blood for our redemption. Because the Lord Jesus was a man, He could fulfill this requirement. As a man, He shed human blood to redeem fallen human beings. The Lord is also the Son of God, even God Himself. Therefore, with His blood there is the element of eternity, and this element insures the eternal efficacy of His blood. With this blood God has obtained the church by purchasing it.

The God who purchased the church with His own blood is the processed God, the God who became a man called Jesus and Emmanuel, God with us. As such a One, He is no longer merely God—He is God mingled with man. In the matter of His being God only, He surely did not have blood. But in the matter of His being God incarnate, God mingled with man, He surely, in His humanity, had blood to shed on the cross to purchase the church. This is the reason Paul could say that the very God who called us has obtained us, acquired us, purchasing us with the price of His own blood.

4. Of God

Because the church is composed of those who have been called by God and because the church has been purchased by God, the church is of God. In 1 Corinthians 10:32 Paul refers to "the church of God." God is the Possessor of the church; the church is His possession. God is the Owner of the church because He is the Purchaser. Furthermore, to say that the church is of God means that the church is constituted of God, that it is constituted of the divine and spiritual essence. The church is produced of God as the source.

5. Sanctified in Christ

The church, which is of God, is an entity sanctified in Christ (1 Cor. 1:2). When God purchased the church with His own blood as the price, He immediately put this church into Christ. Now the church is not only of God but also in Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 1:2 Paul speaks of those who have been "sanctified in Christ Jesus." To be sanctified in Christ Jesus is to be sanctified in the element and sphere of Christ. Christ is the element and sphere that separated us unto God, made us holy unto Him, when we believed in Him, that is, when we were brought into an organic union with Him through our faith in Him.

To be sanctified in Christ means that we have been put into Christ. Christ is a holy sphere, a sphere of holiness. Not only is Christ holy—Christ Himself is holiness. Because God has put us into this Christ (1 Cor. 1:30), we have been put into the sphere of holiness. Now that we are in Christ as the sphere of holiness, we are sanctified.

In Greek, the word rendered "sanctified" is actually a verbal form of the word for holiness. The word for holiness is hagios, and the verb that means sanctify is hagiazo. To be sanctified is to be made holy. Therefore, for the

church to be sanctified in Christ Jesus is for the church to be made holy in Him.

6. Loved by Christ Who Gave Himself Up for It

Ephesians 5:25 says that Christ "loved the church and gave Himself up for her." This reveals that Christ is a church-loving Christ. Galatians 2:20 says that Christ loved me and gave Himself for me. Although we may pay attention to this verse, we may not pay adequate attention to Ephesians 5:25, where we are told that Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for the church. The Christ into whom the church was put by God loved the church and gave Himself up for it.

Christ's loving the church and giving Himself up for the church was for redemption and for the impartation of life. According to John 19:34, blood and water came out of the Lord's pierced side. The blood was for redemption, and the water was for the impartation of life so that the church might come into existence. In Ephesians 5:25 we have the church coming into existence through Christ's loving her and giving Himself up for her.

7. Of Christ

Because the church is sanctified in Christ and is loved by Christ who gave Himself up for it, the church becomes of Christ. This is the reason the New Testament tells us that the church is not only of God but also of Christ.

Romans 16:16 speaks of "the churches of Christ." Wherever the churches are located, they must be the churches of Christ. We should never think that the church in a particular place is the church of any elder or worker. The church in every locality must be the church of Christ. With Paul we need to learn to say "the churches of Christ."

8. Composed of the Saints

The church as the assembly is composed of the saints (1 Cor. 1:2; Heb. 2:12). This means that the church is composed of all those who have believed into Christ and who possess His life. Any person who has not believed into Christ and has not been saved cannot be a component of the church.

In 1 Corinthians 1:2 Paul says, “To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints.” According to grammar, “to the church of God” is in apposition to “to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints.” This indicates that “to the church of God” equals “to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints.” This strongly indicates that the church is a composition of the saints, and the saints are the constituents of the church. The two should not be considered separate entities. Individually, we are the saints; corporately, we are the church. Thus, the church is not only constituted of God but is also composed of the saints, of those who have been separated, set apart, to God for the fulfillment of His purpose.

9. Of the Saints

Since the church is composed of the saints, the church is of the saints. First Corinthians 14:33 calls the churches “the churches of the saints.” In the New Testament there is only the church of God, the church of Christ, and the church of the saints. There is not a church of the elders or of the apostles in the New Testament. The elders are slaves serving the churches. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:5, “We do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake.”

To say that the church is the church of the saints means that the saints are the owners, the possessors, of the church. However, neither the apostles nor the elders are owners of the church. The elders are the servants of the saints, the apostles are the slaves of the saints, and the saints are the owners of the church.

The church is of God, because God has purchased it with His own blood. The church is of Christ, because Christ loves the church and gave Himself up for the church and because the church is in Christ. The church is also of the saints, because the saints are the components of the church and the owners of the church. Such a church is altogether an entity separated from the world unto God for the carrying out of His eternal economy. Hence, the church is the assembly, the ekklesia, a congregation called out of the world by God and separated from the world. The church belongs to God, to Christ, and to all the saints. This is the church as the assembly.

MESSAGE TWO HUNDRED EIGHT

THE CHURCH—THE STATUS OF THE CHURCH (2) THE HOUSE OF GOD

In this message we shall consider the status of the church as the house of God and in the next message, the status of the church as the kingdom of God. In the Bible there is the principle that the house of God is closely related to the kingdom of God. In fact, the house of God and the kingdom of God cannot be separated.

The first mention of the house of God in the Bible is in Genesis 28. One night, when Jacob was escaping from his brother, he had a dream. In his dream he saw "a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it" (v. 12). When he awoke from sleep, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (vv. 16-17). Then Jacob "took the stone that he had put for his pillow, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel" (vv. 18-19a), which means the house of God.

This first mention of the house of God in the Bible is a seed that grows and develops elsewhere in the Scriptures. The Lord Jesus refers to Jacob's dream in His word to Nathanael in John 1:51. "He said to him, Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." This is the fulfillment of Jacob's dream, for Christ as the Son of Man with His humanity is the ladder set up on the earth and leading to heaven, keeping heaven open to earth and joining earth to heaven for the house of God—Bethel.

Jacob poured oil (the symbol of the Holy Spirit, the last person of the Triune God to reach man) upon the stone (symbol of the transformed man) that it might become the house of God. In chapter one of John we have the Spirit (v. 32) and the stone (v. 42) for the house of God with Christ in His humanity. It is significant, therefore, that according to the record of John 1, when Simon was brought to Jesus, the Lord looked at him and said, "You are

Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas (which translated means a stone)." The Lord referred to this word of His when He spoke to Peter in Matthew 16:18 about the building of the church. Peter never forgot what the Lord said to him in John 1:42. It must have been from that word that Peter obtained the concept of living stones for the building of a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5), which is the church.

In the Old Testament the house of God, the temple, was in the city of Jerusalem. The holy temple was in the holy city. In two of the recovery books, Ezra and Nehemiah, this is emphasized. Ezra's return to Jerusalem was for the rebuilding of the temple, but Nehemiah's return was for the rebuilding of the city. God first has a house, and then this house is expanded, enlarged, into a city. In the Bible a city signifies a kingdom. The temple was a symbol of God's house, and the city of Jerusalem was a symbol of God's kingdom. Hence, the temple and the city, the house and the kingdom, are inseparable. Eventually, at the end of the Bible, in the book of Revelation, the house will be enlarged to become the city of New Jerusalem. Because the temple has become the city, John tells us that in this city he did not see a temple (Rev. 21:22). This indicates that the house of God has become the kingdom of God. God begins with the house. As the consummation of His work, the house becomes the kingdom. Therefore, God's house cannot be separated from God's kingdom nor can God's kingdom be separated from God's house. These two are a pair. Eventually, in the New Jerusalem, this pair becomes a single entity, for the entire kingdom will be God's house. This means that the New Jerusalem will be a city-house, that is, a kingdom-family. This is the principle concerning the relationship between the house of God and the kingdom of God.

B. The House of God

Three verses which reveal that the church is the house of God are 1 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 3:6; and 1 Peter 4:17. In 1 Timothy 3:15 Paul says, "If I delay, that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth." As God's dwelling place, the church is both God's house and His household, His family. In the Old Testament the temple and God's people were two separate things, but in the fulfillment in the New Testament the dwelling place and the family are one. According to God's New Testament economy, God's house is His family.

Another verse that speaks of the church as the house of God is Hebrews 3:6. This verse refers to "Christ, as a Son over His house, whose house we are." In Old Testament times, the house of God was the house of Israel (Lev. 22:18; Num. 12:7), symbolized by the tabernacle or the temple among them (Exo. 25:8; Ezek. 37:26-27). Today the house of God is the church. The children of Israel, as people of God, are a type of us, the New Testament believers (1 Cor. 9:24—10:11). Their history is a prefigure of the church.

The church has a twofold function. To Christ, the church is the Body; to God, the church is the house. Christ is the Head, and the church is the Body of the Head. This is one function of the church. God is the Father, and the church is His house. This is another function of the church. Just as Christ is the Head and the church is His Body, so God is the Father and the church is His house. The church as the Body of Christ is an organism. In like manner, the church as the house of God is a living entity, a living house.

First Peter 4:17, another verse that refers to the church as the house of God, says, "Because it is time for the judgment to begin from the house of God." Here we see that disciplinary judgment begins from God's own house. God's house, or household, is the church composed of the believers. From this house, as His own house, God begins His governmental administration by His disciplinary judgment over His own children, that He may have strong ground to judge, in His universal kingdom, those who are disobedient to His gospel and rebellious to His government.

In speaking of the church as the house of God, Paul specifically refers to God as the living God. The living God who lives in the church must be subjective to the church and not merely objective. The God who not only lives but also acts, moves, and works in His house, the church, is living. Because God is living, the church is also living in Him, by Him, and with Him. A living God and a living church live, move, and work together. The living church is the house of the living God. Therefore, in our meetings, service, and ministry we should give people the impression that the living God is living, moving, speaking, and acting among us.

The church, the house of the living God, is living in the Father's name and in the Father's life. This means that the church is living in the Father's reality. God's house is a living composition of His many children in the Father's life and reality. This means that where the house of God is, there is God the Father with His life and reality. This is similar to the church being the Body of

Christ. Christ is not separate from the members of the Body, for, as the Head of the Body, Christ dwells in all the members. For this reason, Christ should not be counted as a separate member of the Body, because He is in all the members of the Body. The principle is the same with the church as God's house. The Father is not a separate member of the household, the house, but is in all the children.

The first characteristic of the status of the church is that it is an assembly called out of the world. The second characteristic is that the church is God's house composed of those who have been born of God. This second characteristic is a matter not merely of separation but of a spiritual, divine birth. In order to be the assembly, we need to be sanctified, that is, separated from the world. But to be a component of the house of God, we need to be born of God. Anyone who has not been born of God cannot be part of His house, part of His family.

1. The Dwelling Place of God

As the house of God, the church is the dwelling place of God. Ephesians 2:22 says, "In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit." The word "you" here refers to the local saints. Paul is saying that the local saints, the saints in Ephesus, were being built together in Christ into a dwelling place of God.

The church, the dwelling place of God on earth, is the place in which God can have His rest and put His trust. In this dwelling place God lives and moves to accomplish His will and satisfy the desire of His heart.

Because the church is God's dwelling place, the church is where God expresses Himself. A house is always the best place for a person to express himself. The kind of person you are is expressed by your house. Hence, if you look at a person's house, you will be able to tell what kind of person he is, because a person's house is his expression. The principle is the same with the church as the dwelling place of God. In His house, His dwelling place, God expresses Himself on earth. This is the reason 1 Timothy 3:16 reveals that the church is God's manifestation in the flesh. God not only desires to make home in the church and to have a resting place there; He also wants to express Himself in the church. He wants to practice His New Testament economy, speak forth His desire, and manifest His glory in the church. All that He is, all

that He is doing, and all that He wants to obtain are to be manifested, expressed, in the church as His dwelling place.

a. In the Believers' Spirit

Ephesians 2:22 tells us that God's dwelling place is in the believers' spirit. Here Paul says that we are "being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit." This refers to the believers' regenerated human spirit indwelt by God's Holy Spirit. God's Spirit is the Dweller, not the dwelling place. The dwelling place is in the believers' spirit. God's Spirit dwells in our regenerated spirit. Therefore, the dwelling place of God is in our spirit. Our spirit is the place of God's habitation.

We all need to see clearly that God's dwelling place is in our spirit, not in our heart or in our mind. Realizing that we have a spirit and that God dwells in our regenerated spirit is crucial. If we do not know how to exercise our spirit, it will be impossible for us to understand anything concerning God's house, because this house, the dwelling place of God, is in the believers' spirit.

b. A Spiritual House

First Peter 2:5a says, "You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house." The word "spiritual" here denotes the qualification of the divine life that lives and grows (v. 2). The house of God subsists mainly by the divine life; hence, it is a spiritual house.

As believers in Christ, we need to grow and be transformed for the building up of God's spiritual house. God's goal in the believers is to have a house built up with spiritual stones, not separated and scattered stones, not even a pile of stones merely gathered together, but stones built up with one another. Hence, feeding on Christ by the nourishing milk in the word of God (vv. 2-3) is not only for growing in life but also for building up. Growing is for building up. Although the nourishing milk of the word is for the soul through the mind, it eventually nourishes our spirit, making us not soulish but spiritual, suitable for building up a spiritual house for God.

c. The Temple of God

The dwelling place of God is the temple of God. First Corinthians 3:16 says, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you?" Here "a temple of God" refers to the believers collectively in a certain

locality, as in Corinth, whereas “the temple of God” in verse 17 refers to all the believers universally. The unique spiritual temple of God in the universe has its expressions in many localities on earth. Each expression is a temple of God in that locality.

God’s building (1 Cor. 3:9) is not an ordinary building; on the contrary, it is the sanctuary of the holy God, the temple in which the Spirit of God dwells. We, the builders of such a holy temple, should realize this that we may be careful to build not with the worthless materials of wood, grass, and stubble but with the precious materials of gold, silver, and precious stones (vv. 10-12), which correspond to God’s nature and economy.

Another verse which reveals that the habitation of God is the temple of God is Ephesians 2:21. “In whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord.” The Greek word translated “temple” denotes the sanctuary, the inner part of the temple. Because God’s building is a living one, it is growing. It grows into a holy temple. The actual building of the church as the house of God is by the growth in life of the believers. Furthermore, the entire building of God’s house as His temple, His sanctuary, is in Christ the Lord.

2. The Household of God

The church is a composition of the believers, and the believers are children of God, born of Him and having His life and nature. Thus, they become members of the household of God.

In Ephesians 2:19 Paul says, “So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God.” Both the Jewish and the Gentile believers are members of God’s household. God’s household is a matter of life and enjoyment; all believers were born of God into His household to enjoy His riches. The members of God’s family added together become the household of God, which is the house, the dwelling place, of God.

God’s dwelling place is His household, His family, and His family comes into being by God’s begetting. If we had not been begotten of God, God could not have a family. But God does have a great family, the largest family in the universe, composed of those who have been born of Him to be His children. Eventually, God’s children will grow up to be His mature sons, and then they will become heirs.

We would emphasize the fact that the church is not only the assembly of God but also the household of God. The church is not only something separated from the world but something born of God, regenerated by Him. God does not simply separate sinners from the world and put them together to be His household. In addition to separation, there must be a change of life and nature through regeneration. For this reason, after God separated us from the world, He put Himself into us, germinating us, begetting us as His children. It is in this way that we have become His household. This household then becomes God's house, His dwelling place in our spirit. Intrinsically speaking, therefore, the church as God's household is in our God-created, God-regenerated, and God-indwelt spirit. It is crucial for us to see this.

3. The Pillar and Base of the Truth

In 1 Timothy 3:15 Paul tells us that the church as the house of the living God is "the pillar and base of the truth." The church is the supporting pillar and holding base of the truth. Here truth refers to the real things revealed in the New Testament concerning Christ and the church according to God's New Testament economy. The church is the supporting pillar and holding base of these realities. A local church should be such a building that holds, bears, and testifies the truth, the reality, of Christ and the church.

God's New Testament economy is composed of two mysteries: Christ as the mystery of God (Col. 2:2) and the church as the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4). Christ and the church, the Head and the Body, are the contents of the reality of God's New Testament economy. As the pillar which bears the truth and the base which upholds the pillar, the church testifies the reality, the truth, of Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ.

According to the context, we may say that the truth in 1 Timothy 3:15 denotes the mystery of godliness, the manifestation of God in the flesh, in verse 16. The unique truth, the unique reality, in the universe is the manifestation of the Triune God in the flesh. As we shall now see, this manifestation is not only in Christ but also in the church.

4. The Manifestation of God in the Flesh

First Timothy 3:15 and 16 indicate that the church as the house of God is also the manifestation of God in the flesh—the mystery of godliness. God is

manifested in the church, the Body of Christ and the house of the living God, as the enlarged, corporate expression in the flesh.

First Timothy 3:15b and 16 say, “The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth. And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness, who was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.” In Greek, the antecedent “who” is omitted but easily recognized. The antecedent is Christ, who was God manifested in the flesh as the mystery of godliness. The transition from “the mystery...” to “who” implies that Christ as the manifestation of God in the flesh is the mystery of godliness (Col. 1:27; Gal. 2:20). This mystery of godliness is the living of a proper church. Such a living is also the manifestation of God in the flesh.

First Timothy 3:15 and 16 imply that not only Christ Himself as the Head is the manifestation of God in the flesh but also that the church as the Body is the manifestation of God in the flesh. When the church grows in Christ with the growth of God (Col. 2:19), it will function as the house of the living God for His move on earth and as the supporting pillar and holding base of the truth, bearing the divine reality of Christ and His Body as a testimony to the world. Then the church will become the continuation of Christ’s manifestation of God in the flesh. This is the great mystery of godliness: Christ lived out of the church as the manifestation of God in the flesh. Such a church is the continuation, the enlargement, and the expansion of God manifested in the flesh. The church, then, is the increase, the enlargement, of the manifestation of God in the flesh. This is God manifested in the flesh in a wider way according to the New Testament principle of incarnation.

The conjunction “and” at the beginning of verse 16 indicates that Paul’s speaking about the church in verse 15 is not finished. This conjunction indicates that, as the house of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth, the church is also the mystery of godliness. According to the context, godliness denotes the living of God in the church, that is, God as life lived out in the church to be expressed. This means that the church life is the expression of God. Both Christ and the church are the mystery of godliness, expressing God in the flesh. Therefore, the mystery of godliness is the living of a proper church, and such a living is the manifestation of God in the flesh. This manifestation began with Christ when He was on earth, and now it continues in the church. May we all see this vision of the church as the house of God.

MESSAGE TWO HUNDRED NINE

THE CHURCH—THE STATUS OF THE CHURCH (3) THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In this message we shall see another aspect of the status of the church—that of the kingdom of God.

C. The Kingdom of God

Ephesians 2:19 says, "You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God." The term "fellow citizens" indicates the kingdom of God. All the believers, both Jewish and Gentile, are citizens of God's kingdom, which is a sphere wherein God exercises His authority. As long as anyone is a believer, he is a citizen of the kingdom of God. This citizenship involves rights and responsibilities, two things that always go together. We enjoy the rights of the kingdom, and we bear the responsibilities of the kingdom.

In 2:19 Paul covers two aspects of the church: the kingdom, indicated by the term "fellow citizens," and the family of God, indicated by the phrase "the household of God." God's house is a matter of life and enjoyment; all believers were born of God into His household to enjoy His riches. God's kingdom is a matter of rights and responsibilities; all believers who were born into the house of God have the civil rights of and their responsibility in the kingdom of God. Therefore, in 2:19 two profound matters are covered: the kingdom of God with its rights and responsibilities and the house of God with its enjoyment of the Father's life and riches.

Ephesians 2:19 speaks of the saints, the household of God, and the kingdom of God. The saints are individuals, but the household of God is corporate and results in the kingdom of God. If there were no household, there could be no kingdom. First, we are saints, individuals. Then, corporately, we are the house of God resulting in the kingdom of God.

It is significant that in verse 19 Paul refers to the kingdom of God before the household of God. Paul's thought here concerns our former status as

strangers and sojourners. Strangers and sojourners are related to a kingdom, not to a household. Those who are aliens in this country are not aliens in relation to a family but in relation to the nation. Because strangers and sojourners are aliens to kingdoms, not to families, Paul mentions the kingdom first. In this verse Paul's main concept is that of citizenship in God's kingdom. The kingdom, however, is composed of families. For this reason, Paul also mentions the household of God, that is, the family of God.

Ephesians 2:19 affords us the basis for saying that the church today is God's kingdom. The citizens mentioned here are related to a kingdom, a nation, not to a family. A family is composed of members, not of citizens. On the one hand, we are members of God's household; on the other hand, we are citizens of God's nation, of God's kingdom.

Although the church today is God's kingdom, we are in the kingdom in reality only when we live and walk in spirit. Whenever we behave according to the old man or live in the flesh or the self, we, in a practical way, are out of God's kingdom. This means that when we are in the flesh, we are in the old realm of the fallen human nature, which has been fully usurped by Satan to form his kingdom. Therefore, a genuine Christian, if he lives in the flesh instead of in the spirit, may live in a practical way not in the kingdom of God but in the kingdom of Satan. Only when we live, walk, behave, and have our being altogether in our spirit, not in our natural man, are we in the kingdom of God and, in reality, are the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God, like the house of God, is a corporate person. The church as the house of God is a corporate person because this house is the family of God, the household of God. The kingdom is likewise a corporate person because it is also a corporate entity. Whether we are living in the church as the house of God or as the kingdom of God depends on whether we are living as members or as citizens. To live as members of the house of God is a matter of enjoyment, but to live in the kingdom of God is a matter of bearing responsibility and of being regulated. We are members of our Father's household, and we are citizens of our God's kingdom.

1. Being the Reality of the Church

The kingdom of God is the reality of the church. According to the New Testament, the church is intimately related to the kingdom. In Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus declared, "On this rock I will build My church," and in verse 19

He went on to speak of the kingdom of the heavens. The words "the kingdom of the heavens" in verse 19 are interchangeably used for the word "church" in verse 18. This is a strong proof that the genuine church is the kingdom of the heavens in this age.

Without the kingdom as the reality of the church, the church cannot be built up. For the building up of the church, we need the kingdom as the reality of the church. Although the kingdom is the reality of the church, we cannot say that the church is the reality of the kingdom. We can say only that the kingdom is the reality of the church.

2. Being the Living of the Church

The kingdom of God is the living of the church. A verse that strongly proves this is Romans 14:17. "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." According to some Bible teachers, the kingdom has not yet come. They claim that now is the dispensation of the church, and the next dispensation will be that of the kingdom. But in 14:17 Paul does not say that the kingdom of God shall be; he uses the present tense and says that the kingdom of God is. According to the context of Romans 14, which speaks of receiving the believers, the kingdom is today's church life. The reality of the church life is the kingdom. Romans 12 speaks of the Body life and Romans 14, of the kingdom life. This indicates that, in Romans, the kingdom life is the reality of the Body life.

In a sense, it is correct to say that the present age is the church age and that the coming age will be the kingdom age. However, in another sense, the kingdom of God is here today, for the kingdom is the reality of the church and the living of the church. Hence, the church is the kingdom. Since the church is the kingdom today, it is not correct to say that the kingdom has been suspended altogether until the coming age. Romans 14:17 proves definitely that the kingdom is the living of the church today.

Furthermore, in Acts, which is concerned with the church, there is frequent mention of the kingdom (8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). In Acts the believers preached the kingdom of God as the gospel (8:12). The gospel is even called the gospel of the kingdom. Therefore, it is not correct to say that the kingdom is altogether separate from today's church life.

According to the revelation in the New Testament, the proper church life is the kingdom life. If we live under the rule of the living God within us, that is,

under the rule of the kingdom of the heavens, we shall have the kind of life recorded in chapters five, six, and seven of Matthew. We shall also have a life of the kingdom practiced in the church life. Hence, we should not separate the kingdom of God from the church.

In Romans 14:17 we see that the kingdom of God as the living of the church is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. When the authority of God's kingdom operates in us, righteousness, peace, and joy will characterize our daily life.

Righteousness, peace, and joy are actually the expression of Christ. When Christ is expressed, He is our righteousness toward ourselves, our peace toward others, and our joy with God.

As the believers live the kingdom life in the church, they will live righteously toward themselves. This means that we must be strict with ourselves and make no excuses for ourselves.

To live the kingdom life in the church also means that we live peacefully toward others. Our relationships with others must be characterized by peace. Toward others we must endeavor to pursue peace, continually seeking to be at peace with them. This peace is Christ Himself lived out from our being.

Living the kingdom life in the church also requires that we live joyfully to God in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of joy. If we are not joyful, this indicates that we are not in the Holy Spirit. If we are truly living the kingdom life, we shall be joyful with God, praising Him. Whenever we live righteously toward ourselves and peacefully toward others, we shall live joyfully to God in the Holy Spirit. Such a living is the kingdom of God as the living of the church.

3. Those Not Worthy to Remain in the Church Life Shall Not Inherit the Kingdom of God

Those who are not worthy to remain in the church life shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Inheriting the kingdom of God is different from entering into the kingdom of God through regeneration (John 3:3, 5). Having entered into the kingdom by being regenerated, we now need to grow and develop in the divine life. Then, as a result of this growth and development, we shall inherit the kingdom of God.

First Corinthians 6, Galatians 5, and Ephesians 5 all speak of inheriting the kingdom of God. First Corinthians 6:9a says, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" To inherit the kingdom of God in the coming age is a reward to the saints who seek righteousness (Matt. 5:10, 20; 6:33). Believers who are not righteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. Because God's kingdom is established upon righteousness, we must be righteous in order to inherit it.

In 1 Corinthians 6:9b and 10 Paul speaks of different kinds of persons who will not inherit the kingdom of God. Here Paul does not speak of entering the kingdom of God but of inheriting the kingdom of God. To enter the kingdom of God we simply need a new birth, but to inherit the kingdom of God we need to live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today. No sinful person or unrighteous person can have any part in the coming kingdom of God.

The word "inherit" in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 10 implies enjoyment. To inherit a certain thing is to enjoy that thing. Today the kingdom is not an enjoyment but an exercise. However, when the Lord Jesus comes back, the kingdom will be our enjoyment. At that time we shall enjoy the kingdom, for we shall be kings ruling with the Lord Jesus.

In Galatians 5:21 Paul, referring to the works of the flesh, says, "Those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Here inheriting the kingdom of God refers to the enjoyment of the coming kingdom as a reward to the overcoming believers. Those believers who practice the works of the flesh listed in Galatians 5:19-21 will not inherit the coming kingdom as a reward.

In Ephesians 5:5 Paul once again speaks of those who have "no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." The kingdom of Christ is the millennium (Rev. 20:4, 6; Matt. 16:28) and also the kingdom of God (Matt. 13:41, 43). The believers have been regenerated into the kingdom of God and, in the church life, they are living in the kingdom of God today. However, not all believers will participate in the millennium. The unclean, defeated ones will have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God in the coming age.

4. Those Developing and Growing in the Life of God in the Church Life Shall Be Richly and Bountifully Supplied

with the Entrance into the Kingdom of God

In 2 Peter 1:3-11 we see that those believers who develop and grow in the life of God in the church life shall be richly and bountifully supplied with the entrance into the kingdom of God. After we have entered into the kingdom of God through regeneration, we need to go on to have a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. On the one hand, we have entered the kingdom; on the other hand, we still need a rich entrance. The initial entry into the kingdom is regeneration, but the rich entrance is through the full growth and development of the divine life revealed in 2 Peter 1:5-11.

Verse 11 says, "For so shall be richly and bountifully supplied to you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." The bountiful supply we enjoy in the development of the divine life and nature (vv. 3-7) will bountifully supply us a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord, which will be a reward to His faithful believers, who pursue the growth in His life unto maturity and the development of the virtues of His nature, so that they participate, in the millennium, in His kingship in God's glory (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:4, 6).

In 2 Peter 1:5-7 we have the development of the divine life with the divine nature from stage to stage. Verse 5 says, "Adding all diligence, supply bountifully in your faith virtue, and in virtue knowledge." The word "supply" in verse 5 actually means develop. Hence, to supply virtue in faith is to develop virtue in the exercise of faith, in the exercise of the like precious faith allotted to us by God (v. 1) as the common portion of the New Testament blessing for the initiation of the Christian life.

The virtue in verse 5 refers to that mentioned in verse 3, where Peter speaks of the One who has "called us to His own glory and virtue." Furthermore, this virtue is related to the divine nature (v. 4), which denotes the riches of what God is. The virtue in verses 3 and 5 is, therefore, the issue of the experience of the divine nature in verse 4. When we partake of the divine nature, the different aspects of the riches of what God is, these riches become our virtues.

In verse 5 Peter also tells us to supply "in virtue knowledge." Virtue, the vigorous action, needs the bountiful supply of the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord (vv. 2, 3, 8) regarding the all things related to the divine life and godliness and the partaking of the divine nature for our enjoyment in the

development described in verses 5 through 7. This knowledge is actually the knowledge of all things related to life and godliness. We must have this knowledge developed in our virtue.

In verse 6 Peter continues, "And in knowledge self-control, and in self-control endurance, and in endurance godliness." Self-control is the exercise of control and restraint over the self in its passions, desires, and habits. Whereas self-control is related to the self, endurance is related to others and to our circumstances. As to ourselves, we must have self-control, and as to our circumstances, no matter what they may be, we need endurance. Then in our endurance we need to develop godliness, a living that is like God and expresses God. As we exercise control over the self and bear with others and with circumstances, godliness needs to be developed in our spiritual life so that we can be like God and express Him.

In verse 7 Peter concludes, "And in godliness brotherly love, and in brotherly love love." The Greek word translated "brotherly love" is philadelphia, composed of phileo, to have affection for, and adelphos, a brother; hence, brotherly affection, a love of delight and pleasure. The Greek word for love in verse 7 is agape, the word used in the New Testament for the divine love, which God is in His nature (1 John 4:8, 16). It is nobler than phileo, and it adorns all the qualities of the Christian life (1 Cor. 13; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13-14). It is stronger in ability and greater in capacity than human love (Matt. 5:44, 46), yet a believer who lives by the divine life and partakes of the divine nature can be saturated with it and express it in full. Such a love needs to be developed in brotherly love, to govern it and flow in it for the expression of God, who is this love.

Faith may be considered the seed of life, and love, the fruit in its full development. This development includes virtue, knowledge, self-control, endurance, and godliness. Eventually, we have the full development and maturity from the seed of faith, through the roots of virtue and knowledge, the trunk of self-control, and the branches of endurance and godliness, to the blossom and fruit of brotherly love and love. Verse 11 indicates that, as a result of the growth and development of the divine life unto maturity, the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly and bountifully supplied to us.

According to Peter's word in 1:5-11, to grow to maturity is to develop what we have already received. We have been allotted the like precious faith, which

is an all-inclusive seed. All the divine riches are in this seed, but we must be diligent to develop them into virtue. Then we need to develop in our virtue, knowledge; in knowledge, self-control; in self-control, endurance; in endurance, godliness; in godliness, brotherly love; and in brotherly love, love. Through such a growth and development we eventually shall reach maturity and shall have a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The fact that those who develop and grow in the life of God in the church life will have a rich entrance into the coming kingdom implies that certain believers will not have a share in the coming kingdom, because they have not been living in the proper church life and have not had the adequate growth in the divine life. For this reason, at the time of the manifestation of the kingdom, they will have no participation in the kingdom. But those who grow and develop in the divine life to the full extent will be supplied with a rich and bountiful entry into the coming kingdom.

We have seen three aspects of the status of the church: first, the church as an assembly separated from the world; second, the church as the house of God composed of those who have been born of God; and third, the church as the kingdom of God, which is the reality and living of the church today. We all need to grow in the divine life in the church life so that in the coming age we may have a rich entrance into the kingdom of God.

MESSAGE TWO HUNDRED TEN

THE CHURCH—THE STATUS OF THE CHURCH (4) THE BODY OF CHRIST

In this message we shall present a general view of the church as the Body of Christ, paying special attention to the formation of the Body by Christ, the embodiment of the processed Triune God. Then in the following two messages we shall cover the details regarding the Body.

D. The Body of Christ

Ephesians 1:22 and 23 reveal that the church is the Body of Christ. "He subjected all things under His feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all." The church is not an organization but an organic Body constituted of all the believers, who have been regenerated and have God's life, for the expression of the Head. The Body is the fullness of the Head, and the fullness is the expression of the Head. Christ, as the One who fills all in all, needs the Body to be His fullness. This Body is His church to be His expression.

The church is the Body of Christ, and Christ is the Head of the church (Col. 1:18). Hence, the church and Christ are one Body, the mysterious, universal great man, having the same life and nature. Christ is the life and content of the Body, and the Body is the organism and expression of Christ. As the Body, the church receives everything from Christ; everything of Christ, therefore, is expressed through the church. The two, Christ and the church, are mingled and joined as one, with Christ being the inward content and the church, the outward expression.

Because Christ and the church, the Head and the Body, are one, the formation of the Body is intimately related to Christ in His person as the embodiment of the processed Triune God. Of course, in the New Testament the revelation of Christ's person is a great matter. Certain aspects of His person are revealed in the words of John the Baptist. First, John declared concerning the Lord, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). The term "the Lamb of God" is significant and rather

complicated. Because God loves the world, He wanted to do something to take away the corrupting sin from the world so that He could call His chosen people out of the world to be born of Him that He may have a household. All this is related to Christ's person.

John also told us that the Lord Jesus is not only the Lamb of God but also the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit and fire (Matt. 3:11). This indicates that the Lord's baptism is either for eternal life in the Holy Spirit, or for eternal perdition in fire. Those who truly repent and believe in the Lord will be baptized by Him in the Holy Spirit that they may have eternal life. Those who do not repent and believe in Him will be baptized in fire and thereby be cast into the lake of fire for eternal punishment.

In addition to speaking of Christ as the Lamb of God and as the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit and fire, John also referred to Him as the bridegroom. "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices with joy because of the bridegroom's voice" (John 3:29). The very One who is the Lamb of God and the Baptizer is also the Bridegroom. As the Bridegroom, Christ will have the bride, who is the totality of God's people ultimately consummating in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2, 9).

The three aspects of Christ's person as the Lamb, the Baptizer, and the Bridegroom reveal much concerning Him. However, what is revealed concerning Christ in the New Testament is far greater than this. We shall see much more concerning Christ's person as we view Him in relation to the formation of the church as His Body. The formation of the church, the Body, is by Christ being the embodiment of the processed Triune God and becoming the life-giving Spirit to be breathed into God's chosen people. What a great matter this is! The Christ who is the factor, the element, the essence, for the formation of the church as the Body of Christ is the embodiment of the processed Triune God.

The Bible reveals not only that God is triune but also that He has been processed. In the first chapter of Genesis there are indications that God is triune. This chapter speaks of God (v. 1) and also the Spirit of God (v. 2). Furthermore, the words "word" and "light," the means for producing God's creation, actually refer to Christ. Later in this chapter, in verse 26, the plural pronouns "us" and "our" are used in relation to the Godhead and refer to the divine Trinity.

The Triune God unveiled in the first chapter of Genesis began to be processed in the first chapter of Matthew. Verse 18 says, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was in this way: His mother, Mary, having been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit." In this verse the Greek word translated "birth" is better rendered "origin." Although Christ was born of Mary (v. 16), He was a "child of the Holy Spirit." The Greek preposition translated "of" in verse 18 literally means "out of." Before Mary and Joseph came together, she was found to be with child, and this child was out of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 20 says, "While he thought on these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, fear not to take Mary your wife, for that which is begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit." The expression "begotten in her" is strong; it may also be translated "born in her." This means that what took place in Mary of the Holy Spirit was not merely a conception but a birth. From the time the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary (Luke 1:35), someone was born into Mary. The One born in her was the very God. This is God's incarnation, which was God's birth in Mary. This was the beginning of the process through which the Triune God has passed.

At the end of nine months, a child was delivered from Mary. This child had two natures, two essences—the divine and the human. This is Jesus, the God-man, the One who is the complete God and also a perfect man. The fact that the Lord Jesus is the God-man is indicated by the names given to Him in Matthew 1. First, He was called Jesus, the name given by God (Matt. 1:21). The name Jesus means Jehovah the Savior. By incarnation, Jehovah became a man, and this man is our Savior. Therefore, in the name of Jesus we see an indication of His two natures, the divine nature and the human nature. This is also indicated by the second name given to Him in Matthew 1, the name Emmanuel, "which being interpreted is, God with us" (v. 23). The name Emmanuel ends with the letters el. In Hebrew "el" means God. Hence, the name Emmanuel denotes the Lord's divinity as well as His humanity. The Lord's two names—Jesus and Emmanuel—indicate that He is unique, for He is not merely God nor merely man but the God-man. As the complete God and a perfect man, He is Jehovah becoming the Man-Savior. Furthermore, in our understanding, He is Emmanuel, God with us.

At the beginning of the Old Testament, the Triune God had not yet been processed. But at the beginning of the New Testament we have the first step of God's process—incarnation. The Triune God, who created everything,

entered into the womb of a human virgin and remained there for nine months. This certainly was a process.

John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." God here is the Triune God. This Triune God, as the Word, became flesh (v. 14). Christians often say that the Son of God became flesh, but they rarely say that the Triune God became flesh. However, the Bible does not say that the Son of God became flesh. Instead, the Bible says that God was manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:15-16). The God who became flesh, who was manifested in the flesh, was not a partial God but the whole God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—the Triune God. This very God was begotten of the Holy Spirit in the womb of a human virgin and came forth from the womb with the human essence, the human nature. Therefore, in this wonderful One we can see both the divine essence and the human essence, both divinity and humanity. Our Jesus is both the complete God and a perfect man. He is the God-man.

Eventually, after spending some time in Egypt, the Lord Jesus was brought to Galilee and grew up in Nazareth. Thus, He became a Nazarene. As a Nazarene, He lived in the home of a poor carpenter for thirty years, doing the work of carpentry. For the Triune God to remain in the womb of a human virgin for nine months was amazing, but for the God-man, as a Nazarene, to live in a poor carpenter's home for thirty years and do the work of carpentry was even more amazing.

At the age of thirty, the Lord Jesus came forth to minister. When He was baptized by John, "the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and coming upon Him" (Matt. 3:16). Then, as the One who was begotten of the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin to be the God-man, He, with the Spirit upon Him, began to minister. In His ministry He called certain ones to follow Him, attracting them to Himself.

One day, the Lord Jesus brought three of His disciples to the top of a mountain. There on the mountaintop "He was transfigured before them, and His face shown as the sun, and His garments became white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah were seen by them, conversing with Him" (Matt. 17:2-3). While Peter was making the foolish suggestion that they build "three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (v. 4), "a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying,

This is My beloved Son, in whom I delight; hear Him!"(v. 5). God was telling the disciples not to hear Moses and Elijah but to hear His Son.

After the Lord was transfigured, He spoke to His disciples about His death and resurrection (Matt. 17:22-23). Following this, He went to Jerusalem, where He was judged by the Jewish religion and the Roman government, and then He was crucified and buried. The disciples, of course, were deeply disappointed.

On the third day, the Lord Jesus was resurrected from among the dead. In the evening of the day of His resurrection, He appeared to the disciples in a very mysterious way, in a way that we cannot understand. It is difficult to say whether He appeared physically or spiritually, because He had a physical body that could be touched, yet He suddenly appeared in the room without coming through the door. At that time, "He breathed into them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). The wonderful One, who is the embodiment of the processed Triune God, had become, through death and resurrection, a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b). He became the pneumatic Christ. As such a One, He breathed Himself into His disciples.

Referring to the type of the meal offering, we may say that the Lord mingled Himself as the all-inclusive oil with the disciples as the fine flour to make a cake. This was the initial stage of the formation of the Body of Christ, the stage in which the Lord made fallen sinners, the descendants of Adam, into members of His Body by breathing Himself into them as the life-giving Spirit, who is the totality of the processed Triune God. As a result, the processed Triune God as the all-inclusive Spirit was mingled with His chosen people to become one entity with them. This entity is the church, the Body of Christ.

For a period of forty days, the Lord Jesus appeared to the disciples and spoke to them concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). During this time He trained them to experience and enjoy His invisible presence. After these forty days, He, in His humanity, ascended to the heavens. His ascension was clearly seen by His disciples (Acts 1:9). Seeing the Lord's ascension edified them, perfecting them to be the church as a "loaf" constituted of the mingling of the oil with the fine flour.

The New Testament reveals that the ascended Christ "received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father" (Acts 2:33) and then poured out what He had received upon His disciples. The exalted Christ's receiving of the promise of the Holy Spirit was actually the receiving of the Holy Spirit Himself. Christ

was conceived of the Spirit essentially for His being in humanity, and later He was anointed with the Spirit economically for His ministry among men. After His resurrection and ascension, He still needed to receive the Spirit economically again that He might pour Himself out upon His Body. That outpouring was the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and it accomplished the second stage of the formation of the church as the Body of Christ.

First, as the embodiment of the processed Triune God becoming the life-giving Spirit, the Lord breathed the Spirit into His disciples essentially. Then He ascended to the heavens and passed through a process involving the Father with the Spirit, a process that involved the mystery of the Triune God. Having received from the Father the promise of the Spirit, He poured out this Spirit upon His believers. Actually, what He poured out was Himself as the embodiment of the Triune God consummated into the all-inclusive compound Spirit as the totality of the processed Triune God. Now the embodiment of the processed Triune God becoming the life-giving Spirit is within the disciples, and the consummated, all-inclusive Spirit is upon them. This is a mingling of the processed Triune God with His chosen, called, redeemed, regenerated, and transformed tripartite people to become one entity—the Body of Christ.

Now we can see clearly how the Body of Christ was formed. First, in resurrection the processed Triune God has been wrought into His chosen people. Then, in Christ's ascension, the all-inclusive, compound Spirit as the consummation of the processed Triune God descended upon His chosen people. As a result, within them they have the embodiment of the processed Triune God, and upon them they have the consummated Spirit. In this way they become the Body of Christ, an entity produced through the mingling of the processed Triune God with the transformed tripartite man. This is the church.

First Corinthians 12:13 says, "In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit." Here we see that as members of the Body we need to drink Christ as the one Spirit. By drinking Him as the Spirit we grow to be His increase, His enlargement, His reproduction, His continuation. Eventually, we shall arrive "at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). This means that we shall be the full expression of Him who fills all in all. We shall grow until we are "filled unto all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19) to express the processed Triune God in His embodiment. The ultimate consummation of this expression will be in the New Jerusalem. Therefore, the

Body of Christ should increase, becoming the enlargement, the reproduction, and the continuation of Christ until the Body reaches the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, the full expression of the One who fills all in all.

We all need to see that the Body of Christ is the totality of the processed Triune God mingled with transformed, tripartite man. This mingling, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem, is completed in three stages. The first stage extends from God's incarnation to Christ's breathing Himself in resurrection as the processed Triune God into God's chosen people to make them intrinsically the constituent for the formation of the Body. This was completed on the day of the Lord's resurrection. After this, the Lord ascended to the heavens. In the heavens there was a transaction between the Father and the Son concerning the Spirit. This is the reason we are told clearly that the ascended Christ received of the Father the promise of the Spirit. Hence, in ascension the Son received of the Father the promised Spirit. Then the Lord poured Himself out as the consummated, all-inclusive, compound Spirit upon the believers. This was the completion of the second stage. Now a third stage is needed for the increase of the Body unto all the fullness of God, unto the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

Although the first two stages have been completed, the third stage is still going on. In this stage we who have believed into Christ to have an organic union with Him need to drink of Him as the one Spirit. After the Lord breathed Himself into God's chosen people and poured out Himself as the Spirit upon them, He gave them to drink the one Spirit. From this we see that the first stage involves breathing; the second stage involves outpouring; and the third stage involves drinking. The drinking of the Spirit must take place continually until all God's people are transformed and increased unto the measure of the stature of Christ. This increase will result in the fullness, not merely of Christ as the embodiment of the processed Triune God, but of the Triune God Himself. As the process of the third stage continues, God's tripartite people experience Christ in His unlimited dimensions, that is, Christ in His breadth, length, height, and depth (Eph. 3:18). Furthermore, by their experience they will know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ (Eph. 3:19a). This third stage will consummate in the uttermost fullness of the Triune God for His eternal expression in the New Jerusalem.

MESSAGE TWO HUNDRED ELEVEN

THE CHURCH—THE STATUS OF THE CHURCH (5) THE BODY OF CHRIST (2)

Paul is the unique one in the New Testament to speak concerning the Body. Neither Peter nor John uses this term. Paul mentions the Body in four of his Epistles: Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians. It was through Paul that the revelation of the Body of Christ was brought in.

In the book of Ephesians the church is revealed as the new man, the household of God, the commonwealth or citizenship of God, the habitation of God, the fullness of God, the bride, and the warrior. However, the basic aspect of the church revealed in Ephesians is that of the Body; all the other aspects are subsidiary. Actually, Ephesians speaks of the Body as the new man, the household of God, the commonwealth of God, the habitation of God, the fullness of God, the bride, and the warrior. The Body is the main point.

God planned the church for the purpose of expressing Christ. For this reason, the church is the expression of Christ. The only way for the church to be the expression of Christ is for the church to be the Body of Christ. If we consider ourselves, we shall realize that our body is our expression. In like manner, the Body of Christ is His expression. There is no way for Christ to be expressed by the church except by it being His Body.

Some Bible teachers say that, in the New Testament, the Body of Christ is merely a parable illustrating how close we are to Christ. However, it is not correct to teach that the Body of Christ is a parable, for the Body is a fact, a reality, not a parable. We may consider the vine in John 15 a parable, but we should never say that the church as the Body of Christ is a parable.

The New Testament reveals clearly that the Body is one with the Head, Christ. If we do not have the Head, we cannot have the Body. We must honor Christ's headship and apply it to the practicality of today's church life. Only when we have the Head do we also have the Body.

The church as the Body implies life and function. The Body is a living organism. If it did not have life, it could no longer be the Body. The Body

must have life. It also must have function, the function of all the members. If we are sincere in saying that we are the church, then we must all function as members of the Body. Therefore, the Body of Christ has the three crucial matters of the Head, the life, and the function.

1. Composed of the Members

The Body of Christ is composed of the believers, who are the members of the Body. Romans 12:5 says, "We, being many, are one body in Christ." The phrase "in Christ" is very significant, for it indicates the believers' organic union with Christ. As believers in Christ, we are organically one with Christ; we have a life union with Him. Because we have been organically united with Christ, we have been planted into Christ's Body organically. Now, in Christ, we are organic parts of the Body.

The Body life is a corporate life. We can realize this by considering our physical body, which is a corporate entity composed of many members, all of which have their life and function in the body. If a member becomes separate or detached from the body, it loses its life and function. This indicates that no member of the body can be independent of the body or become individualistic. The principle is the same with the Body of Christ. None of the believers as members of the Body is a complete entity; rather, every believer is a member of the Body. Therefore, we need to remain in the Body for life and function.

Romans 12:5 reveals that we are members one of another in one Body. We, being many, are one Body, one entity. In the Body we can function and express Christ in a corporate way. We are many members, not many separate units. As members, we need to coordinate with each other so that we may be a living, functioning Body.

a. As the Members

In 1 Corinthians 12:14-22 Paul speaks of the indispensability of each member of the Body. Then in 12:23-27 he goes on to speak of the tempering of the members. In verse 27 he says, "Now you are the body of Christ, and members in particular." Every believer in Christ is a member of the Body. Hence, no believer should have the concept that he is not of the Body. In the Body every member is indispensable, for the Body exists in the functioning of all the members.

b. For Functions with Different Gifts

The believers practice the Body life by functioning with different gifts. The many members of the one Body have different functions. “As in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another” (Rom. 12:4-5). If we realize this, we shall not think too highly of ourselves (v. 3) but shall respect others.

In Romans 12:6a Paul says, “And having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them accordingly.” Grace is God in Christ as our life and enjoyment. This means that grace is the divine element coming into our being to be our life for our enjoyment. Grace, therefore, is the element of the divine life which is wrought into our being and which gives us some skill or ability. When this grace, the divine element, which is the divine life, comes into our being, it brings with it certain skills and abilities, and these are the gifts. The gifts, the spiritual abilities, come from the divine element which we have enjoyed. As we enjoy the processed Triune God, receiving and assimilating His element into us, out of this element proceeds some skill, gift, or ability. These gifts differ according to the divine element which we have enjoyed and which we have assimilated into us. As members of the Body, we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, that is, according to the grace we have enjoyed and assimilated.

The fact that the gifts in Romans 12 are according to grace means that these gifts are granted according to the measure of life. If we have enjoyed the life of God to a high degree, we shall receive a higher gift. However, if our enjoyment of the life of God is limited, our gift also will be limited, for the measure of our gift is limited by the extent to which we have enjoyed the divine life as grace within us.

2. Baptized in the One Spirit

First Corinthians 12:13 says, “In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit.” As the Spirit is the sphere and element of our spiritual baptism and in such a Spirit we were all baptized into one organic entity, the Body of Christ, so we should all, regardless of our races, nationalities, and social ranks, be this one Body. Christ is the life and constituent of this Body, and the Spirit is the reality of Christ. It is in this one Spirit that we were all baptized into this one living Body to express Christ.

The believers of Christ are baptized through water and in the Spirit into Christ, the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3), the name—the person—of the Triune God (Matt. 28:19), and the Body of Christ. Baptism ushers the believers into an organic union with Christ and the Triune God, making them living members of the Body of Christ.

The baptism of the Spirit is not for individuals; it is for the Body. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 Paul says clearly, "In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." This Body is an organic entity. We know from Matthew 28:19 and Galatians 3:27 that we have been baptized into the Triune God and into Christ. The Triune God and Christ are organic and living. From Romans 6:3 we know that we have been baptized not only into Christ but also into His death. Positively, we have been baptized into the Triune God and into Christ; negatively, we have been baptized into the death of Christ. This negative aspect of baptism clears away such negative things as sin, the flesh, the self, and the old creation. The ultimate issue of baptism is that we are put into the Body. We have been baptized into the Triune God, into Christ, into the death of Christ, and into the Body of Christ. However, the destination of such a baptism is not the Triune God, Christ, or the death of Christ; the destination is the Body of Christ.

a. Given to Drink the One Spirit

In 1 Corinthians 12:13 Paul tells us not only that in one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body but also that we "were all given to drink one Spirit." To be baptized in the Spirit is to get into the Spirit and be lost in Him. To drink the Spirit is to take the Spirit in and have our being saturated with Him. By these two procedures—baptism and drinking—we are mingled with the Spirit. To be baptized in the Spirit is the initiation of the mingling and is once for all. To drink the Spirit is the continuation and accomplishment of the mingling and is perpetual, forever. Therefore, after being baptized in one Spirit, we need to drink of the one Spirit to be saturated and permeated with the Spirit.

First Corinthians 12:13 indicates that we drink the one Spirit in the Body. In one Spirit we have all been baptized into one Body to drink one Spirit. The Spirit is in the Body. As long as we stay in the Body, we may drink the Spirit.

To be baptized in the one Body is to experience something once for all, but to drink one Spirit is a continuing experience. In the Body life we have both

baptism and drinking. We have baptism as the procedure to receive and accept the fact, and we have the drinking as the moment-by-moment experience. Now we are in the Body to drink. In one Spirit we have all been baptized, and now we are in the Body drinking of one Spirit.

b. Having the One Spirit

In Ephesians 4:4 Paul speaks of "one Body and one Spirit." The Body is mentioned before the Spirit because the oneness among us is related to the Body and is for the Body. The reason we need to keep the oneness of the Spirit (v. 3) is that we are all one Body.

There is a deep relationship between the one Spirit and the one Body. The Spirit is the essence of the one Body. Without the Spirit, the Body would be empty and lifeless. The Body in Ephesians 4:4 is the Body of Christ, and the essence of the Body of Christ is the Spirit. Hence, the Body and the essence of the Body are one. It is impossible for the Body of Christ to have more than one essence. The unique essence of the Body is the Spirit.

The Spirit is in the Body, as indicated in 1 Corinthians 12:13. This verse reveals that the one Spirit is not only the essence of the Body but also the life and life supply of the Body.

In Ephesians 4:3 Paul speaks of the oneness of the Spirit, and this Spirit is the Spirit in the Body. The Spirit is not only for the Body but in the Body. The Spirit is in the Body, not just in individual members.

"One Body and one Spirit" means that this one Spirit is wrought into our being and constituted into our being that we may be constituted into one Body. The Body is the constitution of the one Spirit. When we say, "One Body and one Spirit," we mean that the Body is the constitution of the one Spirit, that the one Spirit has been wrought into the being of the one Body. Eventually, because the Body is the constitution of the one Spirit, we can say that the one Body is one with the Spirit. The one Body and the one Spirit, therefore, are not two separate entities. On the contrary, the one Body is one with the Spirit, and the one Spirit is one with the Body.

3. Constituted with the Unsearchable Riches of Christ

The Body of Christ is constituted with the unsearchable riches of Christ. In Ephesians 3:8 Paul says, "To me, less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach to the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel." Paul preached the unsearchable riches of Christ that the church as the Body of Christ might come into existence. The Body comes out of the riches of Christ.

Along with the term "the unsearchable riches of Christ," the book of Ephesians speaks of "the fullness of the One who fills all in all" (1:23). There is an important difference between the riches of Christ and the fullness of Christ. The riches of Christ are all the items of what Christ is. The fullness of Christ is the church, the Body, the issue of the enjoyment of the riches of Christ. In our natural man we are not the fullness of Christ, the Body. But when we enjoy the riches of Christ, we become the Body as His fullness.

All the riches of Christ are for the producing of the Body. This takes place through the divine dispensing of Christ into the believers. The church is not produced by teaching or organizing; the church is produced by the divine dispensing. The more Christ with His unsearchable riches is dispensed into us, the more life we have, the stronger life we have, the richer life we have, and the more uplifted the Body life becomes.

The riches of Christ produce the Body through the believers' experience and enjoyment of Christ. On Christ's side, it is a matter of dispensing; on our side, it is a matter of experience and enjoyment. When we experience and enjoy the riches of Christ dispensed into us, we become, in a real and practical way, part of the proper Body life.

The experience of the riches of Christ results in the fullness of Christ, the Body as Christ's expression. As the various aspects of the riches of Christ are experienced, enjoyed, and assimilated by us, we become the Body of Christ as His fullness to express Him. Thus, the Body of Christ is constituted with the riches of Christ that have been enjoyed and experienced by us. The Body is the issue of the believers' experience and enjoyment of the unsearchable riches of Christ.

a. Apprehending the Breadth, the Length, the Height, and the Depth of Christ

Experiencing and enjoying the riches of Christ is related to apprehending the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth of Christ. Ephesians 3:18

speaks of the believers being "strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth." The breadth, length, height, and depth are the dimensions of Christ. In our experience of Christ, we first experience the breadth of what He is and then the length. This is horizontal. When we advance in Christ, we experience the height and depth of His riches. This is vertical.

The dimensions of Christ—the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth—are the dimensions of the universe. Only God Himself knows the measurements of the universe. The very dimensions of the universe are also the dimensions of Christ. This implies that Christ is our real universe, for His dimensions are the dimensions of the universe. Ephesians 1:23 speaks of the fullness of Him who fills all in all, and 4:9 and 10 reveal that He who descended into the lower parts of the earth also ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things. When we enter into the new heaven and new earth to dwell in the New Jerusalem, we shall realize that Christ the Lord is our universe. Nevertheless, at present, in the Body life, we can apprehend with all the saints the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth of Christ.

b. Knowing the Knowledge-surpassing Love of Christ

Being constituted with the unsearchable riches of Christ is also related to knowing the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ mentioned in Ephesians 3:19a. The love of Christ surpasses knowledge, yet we can know it by experiencing it. According to our mentality, the love of Christ is knowledge-surpassing. Our mind is not able to know it. But in our spirit we can know the love of Christ through our experience.

The love of Christ is Christ Himself. Therefore, we should not regard the love of Christ as something belonging to Christ. This love is Christ. Furthermore, just as Christ is immeasurable, so His love is also immeasurable. Also, because Christ is immeasurable, His love is knowledge-surpassing. We can know this love not by mental knowledge but in our spirit by our experience.

Comparing what we have thus far experienced of the immeasurable love of Christ to all there is to experience is like comparing a raindrop to the ocean. Christ in His universal dimensions and in His immeasurable love is a vast, limitless ocean for us to experience in the Body and for the Body.

c. Under the Transmission of Christ in His Resurrection, Ascension, and Transcendency to Be the Head over All Things

The Body is under the transmission of Christ in His resurrection, ascension, and transcendency to be the Head over all things. God has wrought the surpassing greatness of His power "in Christ in raising Him from among the dead, and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenlies, far above all rule and authority and power and lordship, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is coming; and He subjected all things under His feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church" (Eph. 1:20-22). The words "to the church" in verse 22 imply a transmission. Whatever Christ, the Head, has attained and obtained is now being transmitted to the church, His Body. In this transmission the church shares with Christ all His attainments: the resurrection from among the dead, His being transcendent over all, the subjecting of all things under His feet, and the headship over all things. The church as the Body comes out of this transmission, for the little word "to" indicates the source of the church.

The words "to" in verse 22 and "toward" in verse 19 both indicate a transmission from Christ to the church, a transmission from the Head to the Body. Christ is Head over all things to the church, and the surpassing greatness of the power that operated in Him is toward us who believe. This transmission is not once for all; on the contrary, it will continue for eternity.

When Christ is transmitted into us, the transmission joins us with Christ and makes us one with Him. By means of such a transmission we are the Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

MESSAGE TWO HUNDRED TWELVE

THE CHURCH—THE STATUS OF THE CHURCH (6) THE BODY OF CHRIST (3)

In this message we shall consider further details regarding the church as the Body of Christ.

4. With Christ as the Head

Christ is the Head of the Body. In Ephesians 5:23 Paul says, "Christ is Head of the church, being Himself the Savior of the Body." The Savior is a matter of love, whereas the Head is a matter of authority. We love Christ as our Savior, but we must also be subject to Him as our Head.

As the Head of the church, the Body, Christ is joined to the Body. Just as in one's physical body the head and the body are one, so Christ, the Head, and the church, His Body, are joined and therefore are one. The Body is one with the Head in the divine life and in the divine Spirit.

All that Christ has accomplished, obtained, and attained as the Head is not only for the Body but also to the Body (Eph. 1:22-23). This means that what the Head has gained now belongs to the Body, for it is transmitted to the Body. The Body, therefore, comes into existence from the transmission of the Head. Whatever Christ has passed through, obtained, and attained is now being transmitted into the Body.

a. In Resurrection

Christ is the Head of the Body in resurrection. This is indicated by Paul's word in Colossians 1:18. "He is the Head of the Body, the church; who is the beginning, Firstborn from among the dead." The fact that Christ is the Firstborn from among the dead indicates that He is the Head of the Body in resurrection. Before His resurrection, Christ was not yet the Head of the Body. Ephesians 1 indicates that after His ascension, Christ was made the Head over all things to the church. Hence, Christ's headship is in resurrection. Because Christ's headship is in resurrection, the experience and enjoyment of Christ

spontaneously brings us into resurrection and saves us from our natural being.

b. With Preeminence

Christ is the Head of the Body in resurrection and with preeminence. Colossians 1:18 reveals that Christ, the Head of the Body, is the Firstborn from among the dead "that He might have the first place in all things." In both the old creation and the new creation, Christ is the first and occupies the first place, the place of preeminence. Both in the universe and in the church, Christ is the preeminent One. If we see this as a vision, not as a mere doctrine, our living and our church life will be revolutionized. We shall realize that in all things Christ must be first, that He is the Head of the Body with preeminence.

Because Christ is the first both in the universe and in the church, He must be all things in the universe and in the church. As the first, He is all. God's way of reckoning in this matter is different from ours. According to our estimation, if Christ is the first, then something else should be the second, third, and others in sequence. However, from God's point of view, for Christ to be the first means that He is all. Hence, for Christ to be the Firstborn from among the dead means that He is everything in the new creation, the church, which is His Body.

Because Christ is the Head of the Body, we need to hold the Head so that the Body may grow with the growth of God (Col. 2:19). For the Body to hold the Head means that the Body does not allow itself to be separated from the Head. If we truly hold Christ as the Head, we shall not be separated from Him by anything. We shall remain in Him without any insulation between us and Him.

The growth of the Body depends on what comes out of Christ as the Head. If we do not receive the supply that comes from Christ as the Head, the Body cannot grow. But when the Body is supplied by holding the Head, the Body grows with the growth of God. The Body grows out from the Head, for all the supply comes from the Head.

5. With the Individual Christ to Be the Corporate Christ

In the Bible “Christ” sometimes refers to the individual Christ, the personal Christ, and sometimes to the corporate Christ, to Christ and the church (1 Cor. 12:12). The Bible considers Christ and the church as one mysterious Christ. Christ is the Head of this mysterious Christ, and the church is the Body of this mysterious Christ. The two have been joined together to become the one mysterious Christ, a universal great man. All the saved ones in all times and in all space added together become the Body of this mysterious Christ. Individually speaking, we, the saved ones, are particular members of the Body (1 Cor. 12:27). Corporately speaking, we are the mystical Body of Christ. Every saved one is a part of the Body of Christ.

First Corinthians 12:12 says, “As the body is one and has many members, but all the members of the body being many are one body, so also is Christ.” Christ here is not the individual Christ but the corporate Christ, the Body-Christ. In Greek “Christ” in this verse is “the Christ,” referring to the corporate Christ, composed of Christ Himself as the Head and the church as His Body with all the believers as its members. All the believers of Christ are organically united with Him and constituted of His life and element to become His Body, an organism, to express Him. Hence, He is not only the Head but also the Body. As our physical body has many members, yet is one, so is this Christ.

As a vine includes not only the stalk but also the branches, so the corporate Christ, the Body-Christ, includes not only Christ Himself but also the members of Christ’s Body, who are the members of Christ, parts of Christ. According to our natural constitution, we cannot be members of Christ’s Body. Christ Himself is the element, the factor, that makes us parts of Him. Therefore, in order to be parts of Christ, as members of His Body, we must have Christ wrought into our being.

In order to become the corporate Christ, the Body-Christ, Christ had to pass through the steps of a process. First He, the very God, became flesh for our redemption. Then in resurrection He became the life-giving Spirit to come into us and work within us. In this way He becomes the Body-Christ. Now in the church life we enjoy not only God, the Redeemer, and the life-giving Spirit but also the Christ who is the Body.

The church can be the Body of Christ only as the members are constituted of Christ, possessing His life and nature. If we consider our physical body, we shall realize that anything that does not have our life and nature cannot be

part of our body. Just as our body is part of us, so Christ's Body, the church, is part of Him. As members of the Body, we are parts of Christ, constituted of Him.

Because the reality of Christ is the Spirit, the way to be constituted of Christ to be His Body is to drink the Spirit. The Body has been formed by the baptism in the one Spirit. In one Spirit we have all been baptized into one Body (1 Cor. 12:13). The baptism into the one Body has positioned us all to drink, and by drinking of the Spirit we are constituted to be the Body. By drinking the Spirit we experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity into our being and are constituted to be the Body.

The building up of the Body of Christ is altogether a matter of constitution. The Body is an organic entity constituted of the divine element of the processed Triune God. It is through such a constitution that we become the Body of Christ. Therefore, what the Body of Christ needs is not organization but a unique constitution, a constitution which consists of the divine element wrought into our inner being through our drinking of the one Spirit. The more we drink the one Spirit, the more the divine element becomes our constituent to make us the one Body, the corporate Christ.

a. As the New Man

The Body as the corporate Christ is the new man (Col. 3:10). The book of Ephesians reveals that the church is the Body of Christ, the kingdom of God, the household of God, and the dwelling place of God. This book reveals further that the church is the new man (4:24). The Greek word for church, ekklesia, means those called out for a gathering; hence, an assembly. This is the initial aspect of the church. From this, Paul goes on to the aspects of fellow citizens of the kingdom of God and members of the household of God. These are higher than the initial aspect but not as high as the aspect of the church as the Body of Christ. Yet the new man is still higher than the Body of Christ. Thus, the church is not merely an assembly of believers, a kingdom of heavenly citizens, a household of God's children, nor even a Body for Christ. In an even higher aspect the church is the new man to accomplish God's eternal purpose. As the Body of Christ, the church needs Christ as its life, but as the new man, the church needs Christ as its person. This new corporate man should live a life as Jesus lived on earth, that is, a life of truth, expressing God and causing God to be realized as the reality by man.

The desire of God's heart is to have the new man, which is constituted of the Christ who is our life (Col. 3:4). If we take Christ as our life and person and live Him, the new man will be expressed to satisfy God's desire. Ultimately, the Christ we experience and enjoy becomes the constituent of the new man. In this new man, the Body, the church, Christ is all and in all.

b. Having Christ as All the Members and in All the Members

The new man has Christ as all the members and in all the members. In Colossians 3:11 Paul, referring to the new man, says, "Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all and in all." Because the new man has Christ as all the members and in all the members, there is no room for race, religion, culture, or social status. In the new man there is room only for Christ. Since He is everything in the new man, He actually is the new man.

In Colossians 3:11 the word "all" refers to all the members who make up the new man. This verse first reveals that Christ is all the members of the new man. For us to experience the reality of Christ being all the members of the new man, we need to take Christ as our life and person and live Him, not ourselves. When we all live Christ, Christ will be all of us, every member of the new man.

Colossians 3:11 also reveals that Christ is in all the members of the new man. Because Christ is all the members, there is no room in the new man for any natural person. Nevertheless, the members of the new man continue to exist, for Christ not only is all the members but is in all the members. The fact that Christ is in all the members of the new man indicates that the members continue to exist. The members exist not without Christ but with the Christ who dwells in them as their life and person.

6. To Be the Fullness of Him Who Fills All in All

The church as the Body of Christ is the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Ephesians 1:23 says that the church "is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all." Grammatically, "the fullness" is in apposition to "His Body." This indicates that the Body is the fullness and the fullness is the Body. The Body of Christ is His fullness. The fullness issues from the enjoyment of the

riches of Christ (Eph. 3:8). Through the enjoyment of Christ's riches, we become His fullness to express Him.

This fullness is the fullness of the One who fills all in all. Christ, who is the infinite God without limitation, is so great that He fills all things in all things. Such a great Christ needs the Body to be His fullness for His complete expression.

It is in the divine transmission from the Head to the Body that the Body of Christ is the fullness of the One who fills all in all, because the Christ who fills all in all is in this transmission. The transmission connects us to the all-filling Christ. In this way the church becomes the Body, the fullness, of the all-filling Christ.

Ephesians 4:10, referring to Christ, says, "He who descended is the same who also ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things." The thought here is profound. First, Christ was in the heavens. In His incarnation He came to earth as a man and lived on earth for thirty-three and a half years. Then He died on the cross and descended into Hades, ascended in resurrection from Hades to earth, and then ascended to the third heaven. By means of such a descending and ascending He fills all things. Now Christ is everywhere, on the earth as well as in the heavens. The Body is the fullness, the expression, of such an all-filling Christ.

a. Arriving at the Measure of the Stature of the Fullness of Christ

Since the Body is the fullness of Christ as the One who fills all in all, we, the members of the Body, need to arrive at "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). Christ has a fullness, the fullness has a stature, and the stature has a measure. We must arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. This is our goal, and we must diligently press toward it until we all reach it together.

The fullness of Christ is simply the expression of Christ. As Christ's fullness, the Body is Christ's expression. Christ's fullness, the Body, has a stature, and with this stature there is a certain measure. To arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ is to arrive at the full building up of the Body of Christ. It is to arrive at the full completion of the building up of the Body.

b. To Be Filled

unto All the Fullness of God

To be the fullness of Christ, who fills all in all, is to "be filled unto all the fullness of God." If we get into the depths of Ephesians 3:19, we shall see that the fullness of God is the church. The highest definition of the church is that the church is the fullness of God. In verse 21 Paul says, "To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus." According to the context, the church in verse 21 is the fullness of God in verse 19. When in our experience we are filled unto all the fullness of God, the church comes into being in a practical way. It is at such a time that Paul says, "To Him be the glory in the church." This glory is the expression of God. Hence, in the fullness of God there is the expression of God. The fullness of God is the church as God's expression.

Some translations of verse 19 say, "filled with all the fullness of God." According to this rendering, the fullness of God would have to be the element, the essence, with which we are filled. But this is a mistaken understanding of this verse. Here Paul is saying that we shall be filled unto all the fullness of God, that is, we shall be filled to be the expression of God.

Chapter three of Ephesians is concerned with the constitution of the church. The church is metabolically constituted in us through our experience and enjoyment of the riches of Christ. In order for the church to be constituted in a practical way, we need to be strengthened into our inner man. Then Christ must make His home in our hearts, occupying all the parts of our inner being and saturating them with His riches. Then we need to be rooted and grounded in love, rooted for growth and grounded for building. Following this, we must grasp the dimensions of Christ, experiencing Christ in His universal dimensions both horizontally and vertically. Along with this, we come to know in our experience the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ. As a result of all these experiences, we are eventually filled unto all the fullness of God. Therefore, being filled unto the fullness of God is the outcome of the deeper, higher, and richer experiences of Christ described in Ephesians 3.

In the New Testament the fullness is the expression through the completeness of the riches. This is the reason that in 3:8 Paul speaks of the unsearchable riches of Christ and then in 1:23 and 4:13, of the fullness of Christ. As we enjoy the riches of Christ, these riches are assimilated into our being metabolically. Then they constitute us into the fullness of Christ, into the Body of Christ, as His expression. Therefore, the fullness of Christ in 1:23 is the very fullness of God in 3:19. The fullness of God is the issue of the

believers' being constituted metabolically through their experience and enjoyment of the riches of Christ.

We need to be impressed with the fact that the fullness of God is the expression of God. According to John 1:16, the fullness of God came with Christ, who is the embodiment of God's fullness (Col. 2:9; 1:19). With Christ the expression was an individual matter. This expression, therefore, needed to be enlarged, to be expanded, from an individual matter to a corporate matter. The church as the Body of Christ today is to be the fullness of God in a corporate way. In the church the Triune God is not expressed through an individual; He is expressed corporately through the Body, through the believers who have been filled to the brim with the riches of Christ. In this way, the fullness of God is embodied in the church. Therefore, the church, the Body of Christ, the embodiment of the fullness of God, is the expression of the Triune God.

MESSAGE TWO HUNDRED THIRTEEN

THE CHURCH—THE STATUS OF THE CHURCH (7) THE COUNTERPART OF CHRIST (1)

In this message we shall begin to consider the church as the counterpart of Christ.

E. The Counterpart of Christ

In his exhortation in Ephesians 5:22-33, Paul presents the church as the counterpart of Christ. This reveals that the church is actually a part of Christ, for the church comes out of Christ and is unto Christ, just as Eve came out of Adam and was unto Adam (Gen. 2:21-23).

The first couple in the Bible, Adam and Eve, is a picture of Christ and the church. In His creation, God did not create a man and woman at the same time. He first created a man, and then from the man He created a counterpart to help him (Gen. 2:18). When the fowl, the beasts, and the cattle were brought before Adam, Adam named them one by one. But for Adam "there was not found a help meet for him" (Gen. 2:20). Adam desired to have a counterpart, to have someone to match him. However, among the fowl, the beasts, and the cattle, he could not find his counterpart. In order to produce such a counterpart, God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam (Gen. 2:21), and He took a rib out of Adam and built a woman with the rib (Gen. 2:22). The name of the woman was Eve. Eve was the same as Adam in life, nature, and form. Therefore, she could be his counterpart. When God brought Eve to Adam, Adam exclaimed, "This time it is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23, Heb.). At last, Adam had found one who could be his counterpart.

Genesis 2:24 indicates that a man and his wife are one flesh. The husband and the wife are two halves of a whole person. This is a marvelous picture of Christ and the church. Eve had the same life and nature that Adam had. This signifies that the church has the same life and nature that Christ has. Furthermore, Eve had virtually the same image and nearly the same stature as

Adam. This indicates that the church bears the same image and has the same stature as Christ.

The church as the counterpart of Christ implies satisfaction and rest in love. Every husband needs satisfaction and rest, which are found in love. The brothers who are husbands can testify that our satisfaction and rest can only be in our wives. If we say that we are the church, then we must ask if Christ has His rest among us. This is a serious matter. A group of Christians should not be so quick to claim that they are the church. To be the church is to render to Christ the adequate satisfaction and rest in love. Christ needs such a counterpart. The church is not merely a gathering of God's called ones. The church, as Christ's counterpart, is a satisfaction and rest to Christ in love.

1. A Great Mystery with Regard to Christ and the Church

In Colossians 2:2 Paul speaks of the mystery of God, which is Christ, and in Ephesians 3:4, of the mystery of Christ, which is the church. In Ephesians 5:32 Paul says, "This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church." The fact that Christ and the church are one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), as typified by the husband and wife being one flesh, is the great mystery. It surely is a great mystery that the church as Christ's counterpart comes out of Christ, has the same life and nature as Christ, and is one with Christ.

2. The Church as the Bride, the Wife, of Christ as the Bridegroom, the Husband

The church is the bride, the wife, of Christ, who is the Bridegroom, the Husband. The word of John the Baptist in John 3:29 indicates that Christ is the Bridegroom. "He who has the bride is the bridegroom." The bridegroom is a most pleasant person, who comes for the bride. The church should be a corporate bride prepared for Christ. To us He should be the attraction, the pleasure, and the satisfaction. As those who constitute the counterpart of Christ, we should enjoy Him as such a pleasant Bridegroom.

In 2 Corinthians 11:2 Paul speaks concerning Christ as the Husband. "I am jealous over you with a jealousy of God; for I betrothed you to one Husband, to present a pure virgin to Christ." Here we see that Christ is the believers' Husband, the unique Husband for us to love. We should belong only to Him, and we should appreciate Him and love Him. As our Husband, Christ has

attracted us, and we have been presented as a pure virgin to Him. Now we should care only for Him, allowing nothing to replace Him in our hearts. Our love for Him should be pure, and our whole being should be focused on Him.

As Eve was Adam's increase, so the church as the bride, the wife, of Christ as the Bridegroom, the Husband, is Christ's increase. After John the Baptist referred to Christ as the Bridegroom, he went on to say, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). The increase in verse 30 is the bride in verse 29. For the Lord to increase means that He must have the bride. All the following must go to Him. All those who believe in Him should follow Him to be His bride as His increase.

3. To Be Married at Christ's Coming Back

In Revelation 19:7 and 8 we see that Christ and His counterpart, His bride, will be married at His coming back. Verse 7 says, "Let us rejoice and exult, and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has made herself ready." The marriage of the Lamb is the issue of the completion of God's New Testament economy. God's economy in the New Testament is to obtain for Christ a bride, the church, through His redemption and divine life. By the continual working of the Holy Spirit through all the centuries, this goal will be attained at the end of this age. Then the bride will be ready.

The words "His wife" in Revelation 19:7 refer to the church (Eph. 5:24-25, 31-32), the bride of Christ. However, according to Revelation 19:8 and 9, the wife, the bride of Christ, here consists only of the overcoming believers during the millennium, whereas the bride, the wife, in Revelation 21:2 is composed of all the saved saints after the millennium for eternity.

As the Lamb, Christ needs a wedding. The Gospel of John reveals that Christ is the Lamb who came to take away sin (1:29) and also the Bridegroom who came that He might have the bride. Christ's goal is not to remove sin; His goal is to have the bride. In the book of Revelation we see that Christ is the Lamb and the coming Bridegroom. As the Bridegroom, He must have a wedding.

We need to emphasize the marriage of Christ and His bride so that we may know that our position is that of the bride and the position of the coming Christ is that of the Bridegroom. We are on earth preparing to become the bride to meet Him, and He is on the throne in the third heaven prepared to

come as the Bridegroom to meet us. Therefore, He is coming as the Bridegroom, and we are going as the bride. When we meet Him at His coming back, we shall have a wedding.

Revelation 19:7b says, "His wife has made herself ready." The readiness of the bride depends on the maturity in life of the overcomers. Furthermore, the overcomers are not separate individuals but a corporate bride. For this, building is needed. The overcomers are not only mature in life but are also built together as one bride.

Revelation 19:8 says, "It was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and pure; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints." "Pure" refers to the nature, whereas "bright" refers to the expression. The Greek word translated "righteousnesses" may also be rendered "righteous acts." These righteousnesses do not refer to the righteousness (which is Christ) we received for our salvation (1 Cor. 1:30). The righteousness we received for our salvation is objective so that we may meet the requirement of the righteous God. The righteousnesses of the overcoming believers who compose the bride in Revelation 19:8 are subjective so that they may meet the requirements of the overcoming Christ. Hence, the fine linen indicates our overcoming life, our overcoming living. It is actually the Christ whom we live out of our being.

The fine linen with which the bride in Revelation 19 is clothed is equal to the marriage garment in Matthew 22:11 and 12. According to the revelation of the Scriptures, the believers need two garments—one for our salvation and another for us to be prepared as the bride. For our salvation we need a robe to cover us. This is the robe that was put on the prodigal son in Luke 15:22. Such a robe signifies Christ as our righteousness, and it is for us to be justified by God in His presence. All believers in Christ have this robe, the first robe, Christ as our righteousness, our justification, which enables us to stand before the righteous God. However, we also need the second garment, which is the wedding garment in Matthew 22:11 and 12 and the fine linen in Revelation 19:8. Whereas the first garment qualifies us to meet God for His salvation, the second garment qualifies us to attend the marriage feast of the Lamb as His bride. The second garment is the work of the Holy Spirit within us. It is the very Christ whom we live and who is expressed through us in our daily living. This is the righteousnesses of the saints in Revelation 19:8.

4. To Be Consummated

in the New Jerusalem

The consummation of the church as the counterpart of Christ will be the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and the new earth for eternity. Revelation 21:2 says, "And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." The New Jerusalem is a living composition of all the saints redeemed by God throughout all generations. It is the bride of Christ as His counterpart. As the bride of Christ, the New Jerusalem comes out of Christ and becomes His counterpart. She is prepared by participating in the riches of the life and nature of Christ.

Revelation 21:9b and 10 say, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me away in spirit onto a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." Whereas the bride is mainly for the wedding day, the wife is for the entire life. The New Jerusalem will be the bride in the millennium for one thousand years as one day (2 Pet. 3:8) and then the wife in the new heaven and new earth for eternity. The bride in the millennium will include only the overcoming saints, but the wife in the new heaven and new earth will include all the redeemed and regenerated sons of God (Rev. 21:7).

5. To Be a Couple in Eternity

Revelation 22:17a says, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." This verse reveals that Christ and the church as His counterpart will be a couple in eternity. The Spirit, who is the totality of the processed Triune God, becomes one with the believers, who are now fully matured to be the bride. Therefore, the Spirit is the ultimate expression of the processed Triune God, and the bride is the ultimate expression of the transformed tripartite man. By the time of Revelation 22:17, the processed Triune God—the Spirit—and the transformed tripartite man—the bride—will be one and speak as one.

In Revelation 22:17 the Spirit and the bride together as a couple say "Come." It is significant that this verse does not say that the Bridegroom and the bride speak together but that the Spirit and the bride speak together. This means that the end of the New Testament eventually reveals to us that the One who has the bride is the Spirit. This Spirit is the all-inclusive, life-giving Spirit as the consummation of the processed Triune God who, in Revelation 22:17, has become one with the bride.

In Revelation 22:17 there are two consummations: the Spirit as the consummation of the processed and dispensed Triune God and the bride as the consummation and the aggregate of God's regenerated and transformed tripartite people. First, the Triune God went through a process—incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension—to become the Spirit, the totality, the consummation, of the processed Triune God to be the Bridegroom. Second, the believers, who compose the bride, have gone through a process—redemption, regeneration, and transformation—to become the consummation of God's chosen, redeemed, regenerated, and transformed people to be the bride. Therefore, the consummation of the processed Triune God and the consummation of God's chosen, redeemed, regenerated, and transformed people will become one in a universal marriage and will be a couple in eternity.

This couple is the ultimate consummation of the divine romance revealed in the Bible. According to the entire Bible, there is a divine romance between God the Creator, the Redeemer, who is the male, and His redeemed people, who are the female. This is a basic matter revealed in the Scriptures. In the Old Testament God told His redeemed people Israel that He was their Husband and that they were His wife (Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:14; 31:32; Hosea 2:19). In the New Testament Christ is revealed as the Bridegroom coming to take the bride, which is the church. In Ephesians 5 Paul tells us that the church is typified by the wife and Christ by the husband. Therefore, Christ is the Husband and the church is the wife. In Revelation 19:7 this wife is the aggregate of the overcoming saints. Ultimately, the New Jerusalem will be the consummation of God's counterpart, the aggregate of all His redeemed and perfected people.

The Bible begins and ends with a marriage. The Bible begins with the marriage of Adam and Eve in Genesis and ends with the marriage of the Spirit and the bride in Revelation. This final marriage is the marriage of the processed, consummated, and dispensed Triune God as the Husband with His regenerated and transformed people as the bride. For eternity this universal couple will be the full manifestation of the Triune God expressed in all His glory. Therefore, the transformed tripartite man will match the processed Triune God forever for His full expression and satisfaction. This is the conclusion of the New Testament and also of the entire Bible.

At the conclusion of the Bible there is a couple—the Spirit as the consummation of the processed Triune God with the bride as the aggregate

and consummation of the redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified tripartite man. Here is an eternal, universal couple expressing the Triune God for eternity.

MESSAGE TWO HUNDRED FOURTEEN

THE CHURCH—THE STATUS OF THE CHURCH (8) THE COUNTERPART OF CHRIST (2)

In this message we shall see more concerning the church as the counterpart of Christ.

6. Typified by Eve as the Counterpart of Adam

The church as the counterpart of Christ is typified by Eve as the counterpart of Adam (Eph. 5:31-32). Adam in Genesis 2 was a type, a prefigure (Rom. 5:14), of Christ. Speaking figuratively, we may say that Adam was Christ. When we see Adam in Genesis 2, we see Christ. Apparently Eve was only a woman, Adam's wife, his counterpart. However, if we have the spiritual vision from Ephesians 5, we shall see that Eve in the garden was a type, a prefigure, of the church. If we have this perspective, we shall realize that whatever happened to Adam in Genesis 2 was an experience of Christ and that whatever happened to Eve was related to the church. In figure, Adam was Christ and Eve was the church.

God created the heavens, which are for the earth, and the earth, which is for man. Then He created man, who is for God, with a spirit to receive Him. Adam typifies God in Christ as the real, universal Husband who is seeking a wife for Himself.

After Adam was created, God said of him, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his complement" (Gen. 2:18, Heb.). Although Adam was perfect, he was not complete. The principle was the same with God in Christ as the real Husband. Although God is absolutely and eternally perfect, He is not complete. To say that God is imperfect is to speak blasphemy. Our God is eternally perfect. Nevertheless, without the church, He is incomplete. Therefore, when God said that it was not good for Adam to be alone, it indicated that God Himself was incomplete and that it was not good for Him to be alone. Adam's need for a wife as his counterpart

typifies and portrays Christ's need to have the church as His counterpart. If we see this, every aspect of Genesis 2 will be clear.

The first couple in the Bible, Adam and Eve, presents a significant and complete picture of Christ and the church. According to the book of Genesis, God did not create man and woman at the same time and in the same way. First, God formed man's body from the dust of the ground. Then He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul (Gen. 2:7). After creating man, God declared that it was not good for the man to be alone and that He would make a counterpart for him. The animals and the fowl were brought to Adam, and Adam named them. But for Adam "there was not found a help meet for him" (Gen. 2:20). Within Adam there was the desire to have a counterpart, to have someone to match him. But among the cattle, the beasts, and the fowl, there was no counterpart to Adam. In order to produce such a counterpart, "the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam" (Gen. 2:21). While Adam slept, the Lord took one of Adam's ribs and used it for the building of a woman (Gen. 2:22, Heb.). In life, nature, and form the woman was the same as the man. Therefore, when God brought the woman to Adam, Adam exclaimed, "This time it is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23, Heb.). Adam knew that at last he had found his counterpart.

Because there was no counterpart for Christ in the created universe, God caused Christ to die on the cross. His death was typified by the deep sleep that God caused to fall upon Adam. As the Lord Jesus "slept" on the cross, His side was opened, and blood and water came forth (John 19:34). Because in Genesis 2 the problem of sin had not come in, that chapter mentions only the rib that was taken out of Adam; it says nothing about blood. But John 19 speaks of blood, which solves the problem of sin. The water signifies the flowing life of Christ, the eternal life, which produces the church. This life is also typified by the rib that was taken out of Adam's side. According to John 19, not one of the Lord's bones was broken when He was on the cross. The unbroken bone of Christ signifies Christ's unbreakable eternal life. Hence, Adam's rib typifies the unbreakable life of Christ. It is with this eternal life that the church is built up as the counterpart prepared for Christ. In this building up of His counterpart, Christ gains the church as a match for Himself. Just as Eve, the counterpart of Adam, was a part of Adam, so the church, the counterpart of Christ, is a part of Christ.

a. Being a Part of Adam (Christ)

After the woman had been built from his rib and brought to him, Adam exclaimed, "This time it is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (v. 23a). In typology, this indicates that the church is a part of Christ; it is nothing less than Christ Himself.

The church, Christ's counterpart, is the element of Christ in the believers. When this element in so many believers is added together, it equals the church. This indicates that the church is not a composition of people of different races, nationalities, and cultures. On the contrary, the church is the totality of the Christ who is in all His believers. Although we are regenerated people, if we live and act according to the natural man, we are not in reality members of Christ, parts of His counterpart. A member of Christ is a person produced with the element of Christ, who is the life-giving Spirit in our spirit. Christ as the life-giving Spirit indwells His believers. When this Christ in His believers is added together, the sum equals the church, His counterpart, which is actually a part of Christ Himself.

b. Having Come Out of Adam (Christ)

Eve was a part of Adam because she came out of Adam. Likewise, the church as the counterpart of Christ is a part of Christ because she has come out of Christ. Genesis 2:22a says, "And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, built he a woman" (lit.). Here we see that the rib, the bone, taken out of Adam was built into a woman, Eve, Adam's counterpart. Ephesians 5 indicates that this is a type of Christ producing the church. As Eve came out of the side of Adam, so the church comes out of the side of Christ.

The bone in Genesis 2 is a type of the Lord's resurrection life, which is unbreakable and which was released through His death. This unbreakable resurrection life is for the producing of the church, the spiritual Eve, the spiritual wife to match Christ.

Every aspect of the Lord's death was according to God's sovereignty. Under God's sovereignty, not one of the Lord's bones was broken (John 19:31-33, 36). The Lord's having none of His bones broken was typified by the bones of the Passover lamb. In the institution of the Passover, God ordained that none of the lamb's bones should be broken (Exo. 12:46; Num. 9:11-12). This was a wonderful type. Later, in Psalm 34:20 this was also prophesied. Both the type and the prophecy were fulfilled in the Lord's death on the cross.

In Genesis 2:21-23 we have the Scripture's first mention of "bone," which was a rib taken out of Adam for producing and building Eve as a match for Adam. Eve was a type of the church produced with Christ's resurrection life, which was released out of Him through death. In other words, the church comes out of the resurrection life, the unbroken life, of Christ. His is the life that can never be hurt, damaged, or broken. As Eve came out of Adam's bone, so the church comes out of Christ's resurrection life, typified by Adam's bone. Eve was made from a bone, and the church is produced by the divine life.

The Lord's side was pierced, but not one of His bones was broken. This signifies that although the Lord's physical life was killed, His resurrection life, the divine life, could not be hurt or damaged. This is the life with which the church is produced and built.

After Eve had come out of Adam, she was presented to him. Adam said of her, "She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Gen. 2:23b). This clearly reveals that Eve came out of Adam. In typology, this indicates that the church as Christ's counterpart comes out of Christ.

c. Having Returned to Adam (Christ)

After Eve, a part of Adam, came out of Adam, she returned to Adam. This is indicated in Genesis 2:22b, where we are told that the Lord God "brought her unto the man." In typology this indicates that the church, which is a part of Christ and which has come out of Christ, returns to Christ. Only that which comes out of Christ can be recognized by Christ. Only that which comes out of Christ can return to Christ and match Him. Only that which comes out of the resurrection life of Christ can be His complement, His counterpart. Only that which comes out of Christ and which is actually Christ Himself can be one with Him as His counterpart.

d. Becoming One with Adam (Christ)

Genesis 2:24 says, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." Adam and Eve eventually became one flesh, one complete unit. By this we see that the wife, Eve, was the complement to her husband, Adam. Without Eve, Adam was incomplete. Eve was taken out of Adam and returned to Adam so that the two of them might become one flesh. This is a figure of God in Christ as the Husband and His redeemed people as His counterpart being joined as one. In typology, Adam and Eve became one flesh. In actuality, Christ and the church

are one spirit, because he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). According to Paul's word in Ephesians 5, the marriage union between husband and wife signifies the great mystery concerning Christ and the church.

God's desire is to be one with man. This goal has been reached through Christ's death and resurrection, which produced the church. The church represents the proper humanity to match God in Christ as the Husband. In this union, which will last for eternity, redeemed, regenerated, and transformed humanity is one with divinity. The coming New Jerusalem in the new heaven and the new earth will be the ultimate consummation of the union of the processed Triune God with His redeemed people, for the New Jerusalem will be a living, complete unit composed of divinity and humanity.

Together Adam and Eve made a complete unit. In the same principle, Christ and the church make a complete unit. We may say that the church is Christ's "other half." Without the Lord, we are not complete. Likewise, without the church, Christ is not complete. It is a marvelous fact that Christ and the church have been joined to make a complete unit.

e. Possessing the Life and Nature of Adam (Christ)

Because Eve was a part of Adam, having come out of Adam, she possessed the life and nature of Adam. Since Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 are a type of Christ and the church, this signifies that the church has the same life and nature that Christ has.

In the church as the counterpart of Christ, there is no place for our natural life and fallen human nature. The human life and nature are not adequate to match Christ. In order to be His counterpart, we need to be one with Christ in life and in nature. This means that Christ and the church as one unit have the same life and nature. We should not merely know this as a doctrine but see it as a heavenly vision. We need to see why we must receive Christ as our life and partake of His divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). Because the church is the counterpart of Christ, we who compose the church must experience Christ as our life and partake of His divine nature.

f. Having the Image and Form of Adam (Christ)

Eve, who had the life and nature of Adam, also had the image of Adam. This indicates that the church bears the same image as Christ. Moreover, in stature Eve was very nearly the same as Adam. This indicates that the church should have the same stature as Christ. If we see this as a heavenly vision, we shall realize why we need to be "transformed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18). We shall also realize why the church must attain to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13). Because we are to be Christ's counterpart, we need to be fully transformed into His image, and we need to be fully grown until we arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

g. Becoming Adam's (Christ's) Counterpart (Helpmate—Helper as His Complement, Like Him, Corresponding to Him)

The result of Adam's sleep in which his side was opened to release a rib was that he gained Eve as his counterpart, his complement, to match him. This signifies that the result of Christ's death with His side pierced to release His divine life was that He obtained the church as His counterpart, His complement. Henceforth, God is no longer alone, for Christ has gained a counterpart to match Him. Therefore, chapters twenty-one and twenty-two of Revelation show us that the New Jerusalem as the consummation of the church will be the wife of Christ for His full complement to match Him eternally.

May we all see the heavenly vision of the church as Christ's counterpart. The church, the counterpart of Christ, is part of Christ, has come out of Christ, and is built up with Christ. Eventually, the church returns to Christ and becomes one with Him, possessing His life, nature, image, and form. In this way the church becomes the counterpart of Christ, His complement.

MESSAGE TWO HUNDRED FIFTEEN

THE CHURCH—THE STATUS OF THE CHURCH (9)

THE COUNTERPART OF CHRIST (3)

Concerning the church as the counterpart of Christ, we have seen that Christ and the church are a great mystery, that the church is the bride and that Christ is the Bridegroom, that Christ and His counterpart will be married at His coming back, that the counterpart of Christ will be consummated in the New Jerusalem, and that Christ and His counterpart will be a couple in eternity. We have also seen that, as the counterpart of Christ, the church is typified by Eve as the counterpart of Adam, being a part of Adam, having come out of Adam, having returned to Adam, being one with Adam, possessing the life and nature of Adam, having the image and form of Adam, and becoming Adam's counterpart as his complement. In this message we shall cover further aspects of the church as Christ's counterpart.

7. Loved by Christ

a. Christ Having Given Himself Up for Her

In Ephesians 5:25b Paul says that Christ "loved the church and gave Himself up for her." This reveals that Christ is a church-loving Christ. Galatians 2:20 says that Christ loved me and gave Himself for me. Although we may pay attention to this verse, we may not also pay attention to Ephesians 5:25, where we are told that Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for the church. Christ gave Himself on the cross not just for the believers individually but for the church. When we think about Christ's death, we often consider ourselves individually. Yes, Christ loved us and died on the cross for each one of us. However, His death was mainly for the church.

Christ's loving the church and giving Himself up for her was for redemption and for the impartation of life. According to John 19:34, blood and water came out of the Lord's pierced side. The blood was for redemption, and the water was for the impartation of life so that the church might come into

existence. In Ephesians 5:25 we have the church, the counterpart of Christ, coming into existence through Christ's loving her and giving Himself up for her.

b. That He Might Sanctify Her

The purpose of Christ in giving Himself up for the church and in giving Himself to the church is to sanctify her (Eph. 5:26a). To be sanctified is not only to be separated from what is common but also to be saturated with the element of Christ. Hence, one aspect of sanctification is to be separated positionally, to undergo a change of position. Another aspect of sanctification is to become holy dispositionally by having Christ dispensed into us. Therefore, as Christ sanctifies the church, He not only separates her to Himself from anything common but also saturates her with Himself that she may be His counterpart. This is accomplished by His cleansing her with the washing of the water in the Word (v. 26b).

Ephesians 5:25-27 is actually one long sentence. In these verses Paul is saying that husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. He did this that He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of water in the Word, in order that He might present the church to Himself glorious, without spot, wrinkle, or any such things. Christ's purpose in loving the church and in giving Himself up for the church was to sanctify her by the washing of the water in the Word. Sanctifying is by cleansing, cleansing is by washing, washing is by water, and water is in the Word.

Having given Himself up for the church and to the church, Christ is now sanctifying the church, not only separating the church to Himself but also saturating the church with Himself.

After the church has come into existence, the church needs Christ's sanctifying. The process of sanctification includes saturation, transformation, growth, and building up. Although sanctification includes separation, the main aspect of sanctification is saturation. The church needs to be saturated with all that Christ is. Saturation is accompanied by transformation, growth, and building. Through such a process of sanctification with all these aspects, the church becomes complete and perfect, the reality of what is typified by Eve in Genesis 2.

Without separation, saturation, transformation, growth, and building, the church cannot be perfected and grow into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13). Only through an all-inclusive process of sanctification can the church become complete and attain to the measure of the stature of Christ's fullness so that Christ can present a perfect church to Himself as His counterpart.

God's intention in His economy is not to correct us or to improve us. Neither is it His intention to have good people in place of bad people. In the sight of God, it does not matter whether we are good or bad, for the only thing of value in His economy is Christ Himself. Therefore, God's desire is to work Christ into us. Whether we are good or bad, we need the element of Christ added into us. This involves Christ's work in sanctifying us, a work that involves the addition of the element of Christ to us. We need to be impressed that sanctification is not a matter of outward behavior or improvement. God desires daily to dispense the element of Christ into our being. It is this element alone that causes us to be sanctified so that we may be the counterpart of Christ for His satisfaction.

c. Cleansing Her by the Washing of the Water in the Word

Christ's work of sanctifying the church is accomplished by cleansing her with the washing of the water in the Word. According to the divine concept, the water in Ephesians 5:26 refers to the flowing life of God typified by flowing water (Exo. 17:6; 1 Cor. 10:4; John 7:38-39; Rev. 21:6; 22:1, 17). The washing of such water is different from the washing of the redeeming blood of Christ. The redeeming blood washes away our sins (1 John 1:7; Rev. 7:14), whereas the water of life washes away the blemishes of the natural life of our old man, such as "spot or wrinkle or any such things" (Eph. 5:27). In sanctifying the church, the Lord first washes away our sins with His blood and then washes away our natural blemishes with His life. Spots are something of the natural life, and wrinkles are signs of oldness. Only the water of life can metabolically wash away such defects. All the spots and wrinkles in the church will be washed away through the inner cleansing of the water in the Word. We all need such an organic, metabolic washing to take away our defects and the marks of our oldness. As the church is washed organically and metabolically in this way, the church is renewed and is without blemish. We

are now in such a washing process in order that the church may be holy and without blemish.

With Eve in Genesis 2 there was no need of cleansing because in that chapter she had not fallen. Rather, she was pure and without mixture. But because we are fallen, contaminated, and defiled, we need to be cleansed. Many things in us need to be purged away: the flesh, the self, the old man, the natural life. Furthermore, we have many spots and wrinkles from which we need to be cleansed.

In the process of sanctification, something of Christ is added to us, but in cleansing something of us, especially our natural disposition, is subtracted. As we are cleansed by the washing of water in the Word, our natural disposition is washed away.

Disposition is the most inward aspect of our constitution; it is the root of our being. We were born with a certain disposition. Disposition, therefore, is altogether inward. As Christ is adding His element into us, He is also cleansing us and subtracting our natural disposition. His cleansing washes away the natural element from the depths of our being. The washing away of our natural disposition cannot be accomplished by teaching but only by the impartation of the element of Christ into our being.

While the element of Christ is being added to us, something of ourselves is being carried away. Therefore, on the one hand, we have the addition of Christ; on the other hand, we have the subtraction of the natural disposition. Gradually, Christ is being added into our being, and our natural disposition is being subtracted. The result of this process is transformation, a metabolic change in which the new element is constituted into us and the old element is carried away. The more we open to Christ as the life-giving Spirit within us and tell Him that we are willing to take Him as our life and our person, the more He will work within us as the life-giving Spirit to add Himself to us to carry away our oldness and our natural disposition. This is the work of the living Christ in sanctification and cleansing.

d. That He Might Present to Himself the Church

After Eve had been prepared for Adam by being built out of Adam's rib, she was presented to Adam, the source from which she came. In like manner, the church as Christ's counterpart will be presented to Christ, who is her source.

This presentation will not be done by God but by Christ Himself. Ephesians 5:27 says, "That He might present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she should be holy and without blemish." Here we see that Christ will present the church to Himself. Hence, He will be both the presenter and the receiver.

In the past, Christ gave Himself up for the church. In the present, He is sanctifying the church. Eventually, in the future, He will present the church to Himself as His counterpart for His satisfaction.

(1) Glorious

The church Christ will present to Himself as His counterpart will be glorious. Glory is God expressed. Hence, to be glorious is to be God's expression. Eventually the church presented by Christ to Himself will be a God-expressing one; it will be the expression, the manifestation, of God. Because Christ's sanctifying of the church causes her to be saturated with the essence of God, the church will become the expression of God. The only way for us to become God's expression is to be continually saturated with the divine essence. The more we are saturated in this way, the more we become the expression of God.

In His New Testament economy, God is working Christ into us. Eventually, Christ will present a glorious church to Himself not by coming merely in an objective way but by expanding within us and then coming out of us. Christ will glorify us not by descending upon us from the heavens but by coming forth from within us. The hope of glory is not the Christ in the heavens but the Christ who is in us (Col. 1:27). Hence, when God glorifies us, He will not need to send the glory from above; rather, He will cause Christ to shine forth from within us. This indicates that glorification is a subjective experience of the indwelling Christ. Even now Christ is in the process of presenting a glorious church to Himself. As this process takes place, He saturates our inner being with Himself.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul says, "We all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit." Our need today is to behold and reflect the glory of the Lord. As we behold His glory, we are transformed from glory to glory, that is, from one degree of glory to another degree. The more we behold the Lord's glory and are transformed by the Lord

Spirit from glory to glory, the more the Lord will gain the glorious church He desires.

(2) Not Having Spot or Wrinkle or Any Such Things

The glorious church Christ presents to Himself will be a church "not having spot or wrinkle or any such things" (Eph. 5:27). Spots are something out of the natural life, and wrinkles are signs of oldness. Humanly speaking, there is no way for us to remove such things. However, God has a way. The water of life in the Word can metabolically wash away these defects by the transformation of life. The more Christ sanctifies the church and cleanses her through the washing of the water in the Word, the fewer spots and wrinkles there will be. The spots and wrinkles will be removed metabolically. This means that every flaw, defect, and imperfection will be removed by Christ's transforming life.

The spots and wrinkles must be removed in order for the bride, Christ's counterpart, to be prepared for Christ. To be sure, the bride presented to Christ will not have any spots or wrinkles. Revelation 19:7 says, "Let us rejoice and exult, and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has made herself ready." Certainly by this time the bride will have been purified from all spots and wrinkles.

The spots and wrinkles do not affect the function of the church. However, they very much detract from the beauty of the church. The church as Christ's bride must be beautiful. For this reason, Paul goes on from the function and daily living of the church as the new man in Ephesians 4 to the presentation of the church as the bride without spot or wrinkle in Ephesians 5. In order to be the bride of Christ, the church must become beautiful and have all spots and wrinkles removed.

(3) Holy and without Blemish

The church Christ presents to Himself will be "holy and without blemish." To be holy is to be saturated and transformed with Christ, and to be without blemish is to be spotless and without wrinkle, with nothing of the natural life of our old man. The church will be separated to the Lord from all common things and then saturated and permeated with the divine nature, with all that God is. The church that has become holy in this way will also be without blemish. The word "blemish" in Ephesians 5:27 may be compared to a defect in a precious stone. A defect comes from mixture within the stone. If we

would be pure, we must be without mixture; that is, we must not have anything other than God in our being. One day, the church as Christ's counterpart will be like this. The church will not only be clean and pure but also without blemish, without mixture. The church will be the expression of the processed Triune God Himself mingled with the resurrected, uplifted, and transformed humanity. This is the glorious church, the church that is holy and without blemish. In the future such a glorious church will be presented by Christ to Himself. Today, however, the church is undergoing the process of Christ's sanctifying with His nourishing and cherishing.

e. Nourishing and Cherishing Her

As the Lord Jesus sanctifies and cleanses the church, He also nourishes and cherishes her. Paul refers to this in Ephesians 5:29. "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ also the church." To nourish is to feed. For Christ to nourish us means that He supplies us with His riches.

When we are nourished, something enters into our being to meet our need. Nourishment, therefore, must come out of a supply. Without a supply, it is impossible to have nourishment. Christ has a marvelous supply with which He nourishes the church. Christ nourishes the church with all the riches of the Father. Christ is the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead (Col. 2:9). Hence, all the riches of God are in Him, and He enjoys these riches. Then He nourishes the church with the very riches of the Godhead that He Himself has enjoyed.

This nourishment causes transformation. Because we are what we eat, the more we eat Christ, receiving His nourishment, the more we are constituted of Christ. Then we shall be transformed by the element of Christ that has been dispensed into us. Therefore, through Christ's work of nourishing the church we are transformed, becoming new persons with a new element and substance.

According to Ephesians 5:29, Christ's care of the church has two aspects, an inner aspect and an outer aspect. The inner aspect is the nourishing, and the outer aspect is the cherishing. To be nourished is to have something imparted into us inwardly, whereas to be cherished is to be warmed and comforted outwardly. Therefore, along with Christ's nourishing we have His cherishing.

To cherish is to nurture with tender love and foster with tender care. To cherish is also to soften by warming. As a mother cherishes a child by holding the child close to her breast, the Lord Jesus cherishes us by holding us close to Him. In this way we are warmed and softened. The Lord warms us and softens us as we enjoy His tenderness, sweetness, and lovingness. How tender, sweet, and warm the Lord Jesus is! In preparing the church to be presented to Himself as His counterpart, He surely is the nourishing and cherishing One.

We need to connect Ephesians 5 to Revelation 19, which speaks of the readiness of the bride. Apart from Ephesians 5, there is no way for the bride to be prepared, and hence no way for Revelation 19 to be fulfilled. It is crucial, therefore, that we experience Christ's nourishing, cherishing, sanctifying, and cleansing to remove our defects and oldness. When all such things have been removed, we shall become a church that is holy, glorious, and without blemish. Then we shall be the bride in Revelation 19. When the bride has been prepared, Christ will come as the Bridegroom.

8. Joined to Christ

As the counterpart of Christ, the church will be joined to Christ. This is indicated by Paul's word in Ephesians 5:31. "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh." This indicates that the church, which comes out of Christ, will go back to Christ just as Eve, who came out of Adam, went back to Adam. As Eve became one flesh with Adam, so the church, which goes back to Christ, will be one spirit with Christ (1 Cor. 6:17).

9. Having Christ, the Savior, as Her Head

The church, the counterpart of Christ, has Christ, the Savior, as her Head. This is indicated by Paul's word in Ephesians 5:23. "For a husband is head of the wife as also Christ is Head of the church, being Himself the Savior of the Body." As head of the wife, a husband typifies Christ as the Head of the church. In addition to being the Savior of the Body, Christ is also the Head of the church. The Savior is a matter of love, whereas the Head is a matter of authority. We love the Lord as our Savior, but we must also be subject to Him as our Head.

a. As the Body of Christ

The church, the counterpart of Christ, is the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:23; Col. 1:18). As the Body of Christ, the church must surely hold Christ as the Head and honor Him as the Head.

b. Being Subject to Christ the Head

Christ is the Head of the church, His Body and His counterpart. For this reason, the church must be subject to Christ the Head (Eph. 5:24a).

MESSAGE TWO HUNDRED SIXTEEN

THE CHURCH—THE STATUS OF THE CHURCH (10)

THE NEW MAN (1)

Concerning the status of the church, we have seen that the church is the assembly, the house of God, the kingdom of God, the Body of Christ, and the counterpart of Christ. In this message we come to the church as the new man.

F. The New Man

The book of Ephesians reveals that the church is the Body of Christ (1:22-23), the kingdom of God, the household of God (2:19), and the temple, the dwelling place of God (2:21-22). In 2:15 and 4:24 we see that the church is the new man. Ephesians 2:15 says, "Having abolished in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances, that He might create the two in Himself into one new man, making peace." Ephesians 4:24 says, "And have put on the new man, which according to God was created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." Furthermore, Colossians 3:10 says, "And having put on the new man, which is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him." The Greek word for church, ekklesia, means those called out for a gathering; hence, an assembly. This is the initial aspect of the church. From this aspect we need to go on to the aspects of the house of God and the kingdom of God. These are higher than the initial aspect but not as high as the aspect of the church as the Body of Christ. Yet the new man is still higher than the Body of Christ. Thus, the church is not just an assembly of believers, a kingdom of heavenly citizens, a household of God's children, nor even a Body for Christ. In an even higher aspect, the church is the new man to accomplish God's eternal purpose. The emphasis on the church being the Body of Christ is on life, whereas the emphasis on the church being the new man is on the person. As the Body of Christ, the church needs Christ as its life. As the new man, the church needs Christ as its person. The body without life is not a body but a corpse. However, when the body makes a move, it is decided not by life but by the person. Hence, in the new man we need to take Christ as our person. The new man as a corporate person should live a life as

Jesus lived on earth, that is, a life of truth, expressing God and causing God to be realized as reality by man.

God's creation of man in Genesis 1 is a picture of the new man in God's new creation. This means that the old creation is a figure, a type, of the new creation. In God's old creation the central character is man. It is the same in God's new creation. Therefore, in both the old creation and the new creation man is the center.

God created man in His own image (Gen. 1:26) and then gave man His dominion. Image is for expression. God wants man to be His expression. Dominion, however, is a matter not of expression but of representation. God wants man to represent Him in His authority for His dominion. In the old creation man was created to have God's image to express Him and also to have His dominion to represent Him.

The image refers to God's positive intention, and dominion to God's negative intention. God's positive intention is that man would express Him, whereas God's negative intention is that man would deal with God's enemy, Satan, the Devil. In the universe God has a problem, the problem of dealing with His enemy. Since God's enemy, the Devil, is a creature, God will not deal with him directly Himself; instead, He will deal with him by man, a creature of His creation. God deals with His enemy through man. Hence, in God's creation of man there were two intentions. The positive intention is that man would bear God's image for His expression; the negative intention is that man would have God's dominion to represent Him to deal with His enemy.

In the old creation the dominion given to man was limited to the earth. This means that in the old creation the dealing with God's enemy was restricted to the earth. However, in God's new creation the dominion has been enlarged to the entire universe.

Eventually, the church as the new man is the man in God's intention. God wanted a man, and in the old creation He created a figure, a type, not the real man. The real man is the man Christ created on the cross through His all-inclusive death. This man is called the new man.

The term "the new man" reminds us of the old man. The old man did not fulfill God's dual purpose. However, the new man in God's new creation does fulfill the twofold purpose of expressing God and dealing with God's enemy.

1. Created by Christ

Ephesians 2:15 reveals that the church as the new man was created by Christ. Christ created the one new man with God's nature wrought into humanity. This action was something new. In the old creation God did not work His nature into any of His creatures, not even into man. In the creation of the one new man, however, God's nature has been wrought into man to make His nature one entity with humanity.

The new creation, like the old creation, is not something individual but something corporate. In the old creation God did not create millions of men; on the contrary, He created one man, Adam, who includes all men. The principle is the same with God's new creation. In the new creation we are all parts of the new man, the church, composed of the many sons of God.

There is a basic difference between the new creation and the old creation. God's life and nature are not wrought into the old creation, but the new creation does possess the divine life and the divine nature. Although the old creation came into being through the work of the mighty God, He Himself does not reside in it. Hence, the first creation has no divine content. The divine nature does not dwell in the old creation, and that is why it has become old. Adam did not have the life of God or the nature of God. We can receive the divine life and the divine nature only by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and being regenerated by the Spirit. When we believed in Christ, God's life and nature were imparted to us and made us a new creation.

Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold, they have become new." Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old things of the flesh have passed away through the death of Christ, and all has become new in Christ's resurrection. To be in Christ is to be one with Him in life and in nature. This is of God through our faith in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; Gal. 3:26-28).

The words, "Behold, they have become new," are a call to watch the marvelous change of the new creation. The word "they" refers to the old things. The old creation does not have the divine life and nature; however, the new creation, composed of the believers born again of God, does have the divine life and nature (John 1:13; 3:15; 2 Pet. 1:4). Hence, the believers are a new creation, not according to the old nature of the flesh but according to the new nature of the divine life.

The new creation is actually the old creation transformed by the divine life, by the processed Triune God. The old creation was old because God was not part of it; the new creation is new because God is in it. We who have been regenerated by the Spirit of God are still God's creation, but we are now His new creation. However, this is real only when we live and walk by the Spirit. Whenever we live and walk by the flesh, we are in the old creation, not in the new creation. Anything in our daily life that does not have God in it is the old creation, but what has God in it is part of the new creation.

If we would be in the new creation, we must enter into an organic union with the Triune God. Apart from such a union we shall remain in the old creation. But now, by the organic union with the Triune God, we are in the new creation. As believers in Christ, we are the new creation through an organic union with the Triune God.

In Adam we were born into the old creation, but in Christ we were regenerated into the new creation. Here in the new creation we are not only God's assembly, God's house, and God's kingdom and not only Christ's Body and counterpart—we are also the new man. God's intention is to have a corporate, universal man. God wants such a man for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose. On the one hand, we were created in God's old creation and became the old man; on the other hand, we have been re-created in God's new creation and have become the new man.

a. In Himself

In Ephesians 2:15 we see that the new man was created by Christ in Himself. The phrase "in Himself" here is very significant. It indicates that Christ was not only the Creator of the one new man, the church, but also the sphere in which and the essence with which the one new man was created.

Christ is the element of the new man. Nothing of our old man was good for the creation of the new man, for our former essence was sinful. But in Christ there is a wonderful essence, in which the one new man has been created. This new man, created by Christ in Himself, is corporate and universal. There are many believers, but there is only one new man in the universe. All the believers are components of this one corporate and universal new man.

b. On the Cross

The new man was created by Christ in Himself in a particular way. This particular way was Christ's death, for Christ created the new man when He was on the cross. While Christ was being put to death, He was working to create the one new man. In His death He created the different peoples into the new man. His death, therefore, was a tool used to work out the new creation.

The new man, unlike the old, was not created out of nothing. On the contrary, the new man was created out of the old man. This is indicated by the fact that, according to Ephesians 2:15, Christ brought the Jews and the Gentiles to the cross and there, through His death, created them into the one new man.

c. By Abolishing in His Flesh the Law of the Commandments in Ordinances

On the cross Christ created the new man in Himself by abolishing in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances (Eph. 2:14-15a). When Christ died on the cross, not only did He deal with sins, the old man, Satan, and the world; He also dealt with the ordinances. On the cross Christ abolished in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances.

(1) The Middle Wall of Partition

Ephesians 2:14 speaks of "the middle wall of partition." This middle wall of partition is "the law of the commandments in ordinances" in verse 15, which was given because of man's flesh. The first of these ordinances is circumcision to cut off man's flesh. This became the middle wall of partition between the circumcision and the uncircumcision.

(2) The Enmity

In Ephesians 2:14 Paul also speaks of "the enmity." The middle wall of partition, which is the distinction (mainly made by circumcision) between the circumcision and the uncircumcision, became the enmity between the Jews and the Gentiles.

It is crucial for us to see that, for the creation of the one new man, Christ abolished in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances, breaking down the middle wall of partition, the enmity. Ephesians 2:14 and 15a say, "He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the

middle wall of partition, the enmity, having abolished in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances." Here we see that Christ died on the cross to abolish all the ordinances among mankind. Due to man's fall, among mankind there are many ordinances, many customs, habits, ways to live, and ways to worship. All these differences among peoples have divided, scattered, and confused mankind. Therefore, among the human race there is no peace. Christ died on the cross to abolish all these ordinances. In particular, He died to take away the partition between the Jews and the Gentiles. Not only was there a partition between the Jews and the Gentiles; there were also partitions between every nationality and race. Without the removal of these partitions, there would be no way for us to be one in Christ as the new man.

All the ordinances were abolished by Christ on the cross. When He was crucified, His death abolished, annulled, the different ordinances of human life and religion. Furthermore, the differences among the races and the differences of social rank have been abolished by the death of Christ.

Ephesians 2:14 says, "He Himself is our peace." The word "our" refers to both Jewish and Gentile believers. Through the blood of Christ we have been brought near both to God and to God's people. Christ, who has accomplished full redemption for both Jewish and Gentile believers, is Himself our peace, our harmony, in that He made both one. Because of the fall of mankind and the call of the chosen race, there was a separation between Israel and the Gentiles. Through Christ's redemption, this separation has been removed. Now the two are one in the redeeming Christ, who is the bond of oneness.

In the law of Moses there were two kinds of commandments: moral commandments, such as the commandments concerning stealing and the honoring of parents, and ritual commandments, such as the commandments concerning the keeping of the Sabbath. The commandments regarding circumcision and the eating regulations were ritual commandments, not moral commandments. The moral commandments will never be abolished, not in this age nor in the millennium nor in eternity. The ritual commandments, on the contrary, are not permanent. By the middle wall of partition Paul meant the law of commandments in ordinances, the ritual commandments related to circumcision, the Sabbath, and diet. The law of ritual commandments was a middle wall of partition between the Jews and the Gentiles. Actually, any ordinance or ritual is a middle wall of partition.

In Ephesians 2:15 Paul tells us that Christ abolished “in His flesh” the law of commandments in ordinances. Because mankind became flesh (Gen. 6:3) and was thus kept from God and His purpose, God ordained His chosen people to be circumcised from the flesh. This ordinance was given because of man’s flesh. It was in the flesh that Christ was crucified. When He was crucified, His flesh, which was typified by the separating veil in the temple, was rent (Heb. 10:20). By breaking down the middle wall of partition on the cross, Christ has made peace.

Christ brought all the races and nationalities with their different kinds of ordinances, habits, and regulations, to the cross. Then on the cross He put the old creation to death and abolished all the ordinances among the old creation. This Christ did in order to create in Himself the one new man.

MESSAGE TWO HUNDRED SEVENTEEN

THE CHURCH—THE STATUS OF THE CHURCH (11) THE NEW MAN (2)

In the foregoing message we saw that the new man was created by Christ in Himself on the cross by His abolishing in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances. In this message we shall first see that the new man was created according to God and in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Then we shall go on to consider other aspects of the church as the new man.

d. According to God

Ephesians 4:24 says, "And have put on the new man, which according to God was created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." The old man was created according to the image of God outwardly without God's life and nature (Gen. 1:26-27). But the new man was created according to God Himself inwardly, with God's life and nature.

Actually, for the new man to be created according to God is for the new man to be created according to God's image. To be created "according to God" means to be created according to the image of God.

Because the new man has been created in Christ and with Christ according to God, the new man bears the image of God. Eventually, the new man will bear the image of God in holiness and righteousness of the reality.

e. In Righteousness and Holiness of the Truth

Ephesians 4:24 tells us that the new man was created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Righteousness is being right with God and with man according to God's righteous way; the denotation of the word "holiness" here in Greek, different from that of the word "holy" in Romans 1:2, is being godly and devout before God. Righteousness is mainly toward men, and holiness mainly toward God.

Righteousness and holiness here refer to the two main characteristics of the life of Jesus in His humanity as indicated in verse 21. The new man is created according to God in both of these aspects.

The righteousness and holiness of the new man are of "the truth." The article before "truth" in verse 24 is emphatic. As the deceit in verse 22, related to the old man, is the personification of Satan, so truth here, related to the new man, is the personification of God. This truth was exhibited in the life of Jesus, as mentioned in verse 21. In the life of Jesus righteousness and holiness of truth were always being manifested. It was in the righteousness and holiness of this truth, which is God realized and expressed, that the new man was created.

Dean Alford says that in 4:24 truth denotes the essence of God, for God is truth. This is in contrast to the lusts of the deceit mentioned in verse 22. Deceit is the essence of Satan, who is a liar, but truth is the essence of God, who is truth. Thus, the lusts are of Satan, who is the deceit, whereas righteousness and holiness are of God, who is the truth. M. R. Vincent points out that in these verses deceit and truth should be personified. The new man is created according to God in righteousness and holiness, two aspects of God's essence.

Righteousness, holiness, and the truth in 4:24 are actually God Himself. All these are embodied in Christ. Therefore, righteousness is Christ, holiness is Christ, and the truth is Christ. When Christ created the new man on the cross through His death, He did this according to God in Himself as righteousness, holiness, and the truth. This is marvelous. In the present age we cannot exhaust the experience of Christ as righteousness, holiness, and the truth. When we are in the New Jerusalem, however, we shall realize and understand how Christ created us into the new man through His cross according to God in righteousness and holiness of the truth. We shall understand that all these are attributes of Christ. Christ created us according to God in Himself as all these attributes. He is the model, the mold. In His work of creation on the cross, He molded us in Himself. As a result, we shall bear His image; that is, we shall bear His righteousness, holiness, and the truth.

Whereas Ephesians 4:24 says that the new man was created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the truth, Colossians 3:10 says that the new man is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him. The image of Christ in Colossians 3:10 is the righteousness

and holiness of the truth in Ephesians 4:24. Christ is the image of God and the embodiment of God (Col. 1:15; 2:9). When He was on earth, He was a man who was righteous and holy and full of love and light. This was God's image expressed in the Man Jesus. Today the church as the new man bears the image of God; that is, the new man bears God's righteousness and holiness and also His love and light.

2. Of the Two Peoples—the Jews and the Gentiles

The new man is of the two peoples—the Jews and the Gentiles. This is the reason Paul in Ephesians 2:15 speaks of Christ's creating "the two in Himself into one new man." The word "two" in this verse refers to the Jewish and the Gentile believers.

a. Reconciled to God

Ephesians 2:16 says, "And might reconcile both in one Body to God through the cross, slaying the enmity by it." The word "both" refers to the Jews and the Gentiles. Not only the uncircumcised Gentiles but also the circumcised Jews needed reconciliation to God through the redemption of Christ accomplished on His cross.

Originally, we were not only sinners but also enemies of God. Enmity is the greatest problem between man and God. Through the redeeming death of Christ, God has justified us, the sinners, and has reconciled us, His enemies, to Himself. We were reconciled to God when we believed in the Lord Jesus. By faith we have received God's reconciliation.

Ephesians 2:16 says that the Jews and the Gentiles have been reconciled in one Body. This one Body, the church (1:22-23), is the one new man in the previous verse. It was in this Body that both the Jews and the Gentiles were reconciled to God through the cross. We, the believers, both Jews and Gentiles, were reconciled not only for the Body of Christ but also in the Body of Christ.

We usually regard reconciliation as an individual matter; we do not often think of corporate reconciliation. However, the proper and genuine reconciliation is in the Body. The Body is the instrument, the means, by which we were reconciled to God.

This corporate concept of reconciliation pervades the New Testament. Our concept, however, is that we were reconciled to God as individuals. But in the sight of God, we have been reconciled to Him in the one Body. The exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt is a clear picture of this. In Egypt the children of Israel were, in a sense, far off from God. After they were brought out of Egypt and had passed through the Red Sea together, at Mount Sinai they were reconciled to God as one congregation, not as individuals. That was a type of our being reconciled to God in the one Body. We need to have this corporate concept. Instead of thinking that we have been reconciled individually, we need to see that we have been reconciled to God corporately in one Body.

b. Brought into Peace

Because the Jews and the Gentiles have been reconciled to God, they have been brought into peace. By Christ's abolishing in His flesh the separating ordinances and creating the Jewish and Gentile believers into one new man, peace was made between all believers. For this reason, in Ephesians 2:15 Paul speaks of Christ's "making peace." Christ has abolished on the cross all the differences due to ordinances. In so doing, He has made peace for His Body. Now this peace should bind all believers together and thus become the uniting bond (Eph. 4:3).

Before Christ was crucified, there was no peace between the Jews and the Gentiles. According to 2:15, by Christ's abolishing in His flesh the separating ordinances and creating the Jewish and Gentile believers into one new man, peace was made between all believers. Furthermore, on the cross, Christ dealt with all the negative things between us and God. This means that He also made peace between man and God. Now there is no longer a separation between the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers nor between us and God. However, at the time Ephesians was written, some of the Jewish believers still held the concept that they should be separate from the Gentile believers. For this reason, Paul said that the middle wall of partition has been broken down and that the Jewish and Gentile believers must be one. Otherwise, there can be no oneness, and without oneness there cannot be the one Body. If we would be brought into peace and stay in the peace, we need to realize that the differences between the Jews and the Gentiles have been abolished on the cross.

3. Equaling the One Body

The new man equals the one Body. The new man, the Body, is of Christ. Hence, it is not individual but corporate (Col. 3:10-11).

The creating death of Christ created not the Body but the new man. The Body was formed in Christ's resurrection and ascension. Eventually, however, the new man created by the creating death of Christ equals the Body formed in Christ's resurrection and ascension. Ephesians 2:16 clearly indicates that the new man created out of two collective peoples, the Jews and the Gentiles, is the Body of Christ. Hence, the new man and the Body are synonymous terms and may be used interchangeably.

The fact that the new man is the Body and that the Body is the new man is a strong indication that the new man is not an individual entity but a corporate entity. Therefore, it is a serious mistake for some versions of the Bible to speak of putting on the new self. The New American Standard Version makes this very error in Ephesians 4:24 by adopting the rendering "put on the new self." The Greek word does not mean self; it means man. According to Ephesians 4:24, what we have put on is the new man, not the new self.

4. No Room for Greek and Jew, Circumcision and Uncircumcision, Barbarian and Scythian, Slave and Freeman

In the church as the new man there is no room for Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian and Scythian, slave and freeman. After referring to the new man in Colossians 3:10, Paul goes on to say in verse 11a, "Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman." The word "where," referring to the new man in verse 10, means in the new man. There is no natural person in the new man. Furthermore, there is no possibility, no room, for any natural person.

M. R. Vincent says that in the Greek language the words translated "cannot be" are very strong and mean that there is no possibility. In the new man there cannot be Greeks, who are for philosophical wisdom, and Jews, who are for miraculous signs (1 Cor. 1:22). There cannot be circumcision and uncircumcision. Circumcision refers to the observers of the Jewish religious rituals; uncircumcision refers to those who do not care for the Jewish religion. Furthermore, in the new man there cannot be barbarian, Scythian, slave, or freeman. A barbarian is an uncultured person, the Scythians were considered the most barbarous people, the slaves were those sold into slavery, and the

freemen were those who had been freed from slavery. No matter what kind of person we may be, as far as the new man is concerned, we must regard ourselves as nobodies. In the new man there is room only for Christ, not for any kind of natural person.

In saying that there cannot be any natural person in the new man, Paul in verse 11 is very strong. It is a great mistake, therefore, to translate the Greek here as "the new self," as is done in the New American Standard Version. It is foolish to say that in the new self there is no Greek and Jew, no circumcision and uncircumcision. According to the context, the new man in Colossians 3:10 certainly does not denote the new self, for the new man is made up of believers from many different cultural backgrounds. This is not true of the so-called new self. No doubt, the new man here is a corporate man, the church, Christ's Body. Although many different kinds of people make up the new man, all are part of Christ. They are no longer the natural person.

5. Christ Being All the Members and in All the Members

In Colossians 3:11 Paul says not only that in the new man there is no room for any natural person but that in the new man "Christ is all and in all." In the new man there is room only for Christ. He is all the members of the new man, and He is in all the members. He is everything in the new man. This means that actually He is the new man.

The word "all" in verse 11 refers to all the members who make up the new man. Christ is all these members. Because Christ is all the members of the new man, there is no room in the new man for any race, nationality, culture, or social status. For us to experience the reality of Christ being all the members of the new man, we need to take Christ as our life and person and live Him, not ourselves. If Christ is the living of all the saints, all the members of the new man, then in reality only He will be in the new man. When all the saints, whatever their nationality may be, live Christ, then in a real and practical way Christ will be all the members of the new man.

In 3:11 Paul also says that Christ is in all. On the one hand, Christ is all the members of the new man; on the other hand, He is in all the members. It is very significant that Paul said both that Christ is all and that He is in all. If Paul did not say that Christ is in all, only that He is all, we may think that in the new man Christ is needed and that we are not needed. We should not

think that, because Christ is all the members in the new man, we are nothing and are not needed. On the one hand, Paul does say that in the new man there is no place for the natural person because Christ is all the members. Nevertheless, he also says that Christ is in all the members. The fact that Christ is in all the members of the new man indicates that the members continue to exist.

When we take Christ as our life and person and live together with Him, we shall have the sense deep within that we are one with Christ and that Christ is us. However, simultaneously we shall also sense that Christ is in us. Therefore, it is true to say that Christ is both in us and that He is us. We are parts of the new man with Christ in us. We continue to exist, but we do not exist without Christ. Rather, we exist as those who are indwelt by Christ. This is what it means to say that in the new man Christ is everyone and that He is also in everyone. It is crucial for us to see that in the new man Christ is everyone and in everyone. In the new man there is nothing but Christ.

MESSAGE TWO HUNDRED EIGHTEEN

THE CHURCH—THE STATUS OF THE CHURCH (12) THE NEW MAN (3)

In this message we shall see that the church as the new man needs to be put on by the believers.

6. To Be Put On by the Believers

Ephesians 4:24a and Colossians 3:10a both speak of putting on the new man. Although the new man has already been created, we still need to put him on. We need to put on the new man who has already been created in Christ. This new man is the Body of Christ. Hence, to put on the new man means to live a life by the Body. Before our salvation, we were living in the old man, in the old society, but now we are members of Christ, living in His Body. We should put off the old man with the old social life and put on the new man, the church. In this new man there is nothing natural, nothing of social rank, for everyone is full of Christ. Christ is everyone and is in everyone (Col. 3:10-11). There is nothing but Christ in the new man. Our life is Christ, our living is Christ, our intention is Christ, our ambition is Christ, our will is Christ, our love is Christ, and everything else about us is Christ. He saturates our entire being.

According to Ephesians 4:17-32, the new man lives a life by grace and truth. These are the two main factors in the living of the new man to fulfill God's purpose. God needs such a new man on earth to fulfill His purpose, to carry out His intention.

a. By Being Renewed in the Spirit of Their Mind

The believers put on the new man by the renewing in the spirit of their mind. In Ephesians 4:23 Paul says that we are being renewed in the spirit of our mind. To be renewed is for our transformation to the image of Christ (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). The spirit in Ephesians 4:23 is the regenerated spirit of the believers mingled with the indwelling Spirit of God. Such a mingled

spirit spreads into our mind, thus becoming the spirit of our mind. It is in such a spirit that we are renewed for our transformation. In this way our natural mind is conquered, subdued, and put under the spirit. This implies a process of metabolic transformation. As this process takes place, the mingled spirit spreads into our mind, takes over our mind, and becomes the spirit of our mind.

By the spirit of the mind we are renewed to fulfill in experience what was accomplished in the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man through baptism. The putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man are actually accomplished facts. Now we need to experience and realize these facts by being renewed in the spirit of our mind.

The way to put on the new man is for the spirit, which is mingled with the Spirit, to become the spirit of our mind. Our mind dominates and directs our whole being. For the spirit to become the spirit of our mind means that the spirit directs, controls, dominates, and possesses our mind. When the spirit directs our mind, it governs our entire being. When this is the case, our being is under the control of the spirit. It is in this spirit of our mind that we are renewed, and by means of this spirit we put on the new man experientially.

It is crucial for us to see that the new man has already been created and, by regeneration, has been put into our spirit. The need now is for our spirit to become the dominant part of our being. This means that our spirit mingled with the Spirit of God must become the spirit of our mind. If our spirit is the spirit of our mind, then all our living will be by the spirit, and whatever we do will be according to the spirit. This spirit of our mind will then become the renewing spirit. As we are renewed by this spirit, we put on the new man.

How much in experience we put on the new man depends on how much our spirit directs our being. Therefore, experientially speaking, putting on the new man does not take place once for all. On the contrary, it is a life-long matter, a gradual process that goes on throughout our Christian life. When we were regenerated, the new man, created with Christ as the divine essence, was put into our spirit. Now day by day we need to put on this new man by permitting the spirit to control our being and renew our mind. Every time part of our mind is renewed, we put on a little more of the new man. Hence, the more we are renewed through the spirit controlling our mind, the more of the new man we put on.

b. By Being Renewed unto Full Knowledge according to the Image of Him Who Created the New Man

Ephesians 2:15 says that the new man was created, but Colossians 3:10 says that the new man is "being renewed unto full knowledge." Although Ephesians and Colossians are sister books, what they say concerning the new man is not exactly the same. How can we say that, on the one hand, the new man has been created and that, on the other hand, the new man is being renewed? Because the new man was created with us who belong to the old creation, he needs to be renewed. This renewing takes place mainly in our mind, as indicated by the phrase "unto full knowledge." In our spirit the new man has already been created. Before the new man was created in our spirit in resurrection, we did not have the Spirit of God or the life of God within us. Although we had a spirit, our spirit did not contain the divine life. But when the new creation took place in our spirit in resurrection, the Holy Spirit with the divine life was added into our being. This addition of the Spirit and the divine life to our spirit produced a new being, a new man. For this reason, we can say that in our spirit the new man has been created.

However, there is still the need for renewing in our soul and even in our body. Our mind, which represents our soul, needs to be renewed. Eventually, when our body is transfigured, it also will be renewed. Therefore, our spirit has been regenerated, but our soul is being renewed. On the one hand, in our spirit the new man was created with new elements, the elements of the divine life and the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, in our soul the new man is being renewed.

In Colossians 3:10 Paul says that the new man is being renewed unto full knowledge "according to the image of Him who created him." The image here refers to Christ, God's Beloved, as the expression of God (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). It was God the Creator who created the new man in Christ (Eph. 2:15).

Ephesians 4:24 indicates that the new man was created according to God directly. But Colossians 3:10 reveals that the new man is being renewed unto full knowledge, which is according to the image of God. Because the new man was created according to God, in a very real sense the new man is the same as God. Nevertheless, in our experience the new man must be renewed unto the full knowledge, that is, according to the image, the expression, of God who

created him. The creation of the new man according to God has already been completed, but in our experience the new man is renewed unto full knowledge little by little. In this way the new man experienced by us becomes the expression of God. The more we put on the new man, the more we are renewed according to what God is, and the more we bear His image, the expression of what He is.

The more we are renewed in the spirit of our mind, the more the new man with the divine element will spread from our spirit into our soul. This spreading within us is according to Christ, who is the image of God, God's expression. The more renewing that takes place in our soul, the more we shall be able to express God. In other words, the more renewing we experience in the soul, the more we shall have of the image of Christ.

c. Fighting against the Enemy of God

Ephesians 6:10-20 reveals that the church, which is the new man, needs to fight against the enemy of God. Elsewhere we have pointed out that the church is a warrior. However, the warrior is not a status of the church but an aspect of the church as the new man. The new man has the obligation of fighting against God's enemy. This is indicated in Genesis 1, where we are told that when God created the old man, He commissioned him to bear His image for His expression and to have His dominion for His representation to deal with the enemy. From this we see that in the old creation the old man had a twofold obligation. The new man in the new creation also has the twofold obligation of bearing God's image to express Him and of fighting against God's enemy. Therefore, the church as the new man is a warrior fighting against God's enemy, for the new man is now fulfilling God's purpose to express God and to fight against God's enemy for God's dominion, God's kingdom.

In Ephesians 6:12 Paul says, "Our wrestling is not against blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies." "Blood and flesh" refers to human beings. Behind men of blood and flesh are the evil forces of the Devil, fighting against God's purpose. Hence, our wrestling, our fighting, must not be against men but against the evil spiritual forces in the heavenlies. The principalities, the authorities, and the world-rulers of this darkness are the rebellious angels who followed Satan in his rebellion against God and who now rule in the heavenlies over the nations of the world. "This

darkness" refers to today's world, which is fully under the dark ruling of the Devil through his evil angels. "The world-rulers of this darkness" are the princes Satan has set up to rule the various nations. Because of the working of Satan, who is the authority of darkness, the earth and its atmosphere have become "this darkness." "The spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies" are Satan and his spiritual forces of evil in the air. The warfare between the church and Satan is a battle between us who love the Lord and who are in His church and the evil powers in the heavenlies. We must fight against these spiritual forces.

(1) Being Empowered in the Lord

In Ephesians 6:10 Paul says, "Be empowered in the Lord and in the might of His strength." The Greek word translated "empowered" here has the same root as the word "power" in Ephesians 1:19. To deal with God's enemy, to fight against the evil forces of darkness, we need to be empowered with the power that raised up Christ from the dead and seated Him in the heavens, far above all the evil spirits in the air. First we are empowered by the power that raised Christ from among the dead and made Him to be the Head over all things, and then we know God's might and strength.

In 6:10 Paul charges us to be empowered "in the Lord." The fact that we are to be empowered in the Lord indicates that in the spiritual warfare against Satan and his evil kingdom we can fight only in the Lord, not in ourselves. Whenever we are in ourselves, we are defeated.

(2) Putting On the Various Attributes of Christ as the Whole Armor of God

The new man fights against God's enemy not only by being empowered in the Lord but also by putting on the various attributes of Christ as the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:11, 13-17). The whole armor of God is for the entire Body, not for any individual member of the Body. The church as the corporate new man is the warrior, and the believers together make up this new man. Only the corporate new man as the warrior can wear the whole armor of God; no individual believer can wear it. Therefore, we must fight the spiritual warfare not individually but in the Body, in the new man.

In Ephesians 6:14-17 we have the various attributes of Christ as the whole armor of God: the girdle of truth, or reality, the breastplate of righteousness,

the firm foundation of the gospel of peace (the shoes), the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. Of these six aspects of Christ as our armor, only the sword is for offensive warfare. All the other items are for defense.

Ephesians 6:14 says, "Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth." Truth refers to God in Christ as reality in our living, that is, God in Christ realized and expressed by us as our living. This is actually Christ Himself lived out by us (John 14:6). Such truth, such reality, is the girdle which strengthens our whole being for spiritual warfare.

Ephesians 6:14 also speaks of "the breastplate of righteousness," which covers our conscience, signified by the breast. In fighting against Satan, our accuser, we need to have our conscience covered with the breastplate of righteousness. The righteousness which covers our conscience and guards us from Satan's accusations is Christ Himself (1 Cor. 1:30). Therefore, we are covered by Christ as our righteousness.

Ephesians 6:15 says, "Having shod your feet with the firm foundation of the gospel of peace." Our feet need to be shod in order to strengthen our stand in the battle. The phrase "the firm foundation of the gospel of peace" means the establishment of the gospel of peace. Christ made peace for us on the cross both with God and with man, and this peace has become our gospel (Eph. 2:13-17). This has been established as a firm foundation, as a readiness for our feet to be shod with. Thus, we shall have a firm footing that we may be able to fight the spiritual warfare. The peace for such a firm foundation is also Christ (Eph. 2:14). Christ is the peace for us to be one with God and the saints. This peace is the firm foundation that enables us to stand against the enemy.

Ephesians 6:16 continues, "With all these, having taken up the shield of faith, with which you shall be able to quench all the flaming darts of the evil one." In order to quench these flaming darts, we need to take up the shield of faith. Faith comes after truth, righteousness, and peace. If we have truth in our living, righteousness as our covering, and peace as our standing, we shall spontaneously have faith as a safeguard against the flaming darts of the enemy. Christ is the Author and the Perfecter of such faith (Heb. 12:2).

In Ephesians 6:17a Paul says, "Receive the helmet of salvation." This is for covering our mind against the negative thoughts directed at us by the evil one. Such a helmet, such a covering, is God's salvation. This salvation is the saving Christ we experience in our daily life (John 16:33).

In verse 17b Paul tells us to receive also "the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God." The antecedent of "which" is Spirit, not sword. This indicates that the Spirit is the word of God, both of which are Christ (2 Cor. 3:17; Rev. 19:13). The Spirit is the sword itself, not the one who uses the sword, and the word of God also is a sword. The sword is the Spirit, and the Spirit is the word. Here we have three things that are one: the sword, the Spirit, and the word.

(3) Withstanding to Stand

Ephesians 6:13 and 14 say, "Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness." To withstand is to stand against. In fighting, the most important thing is to stand. In fighting against God's enemy, we need to be able to stand. Having done all, we still must stand.

(4) Praying and Watching

Ephesians 6:18 begins with the phrase "By means of all prayer and petition." This phrase modifies the predicate "receive" in verse 17. By prayer we receive both the helmet of salvation and the word of God. This indicates that we need to receive the word of God by means of all prayer and petition.

The modifier "by means of all prayer and petition" actually is related to all six items of the armor in verses 13 through 17. It is by means of all prayer and petition that we gird our loins with truth, put on the breastplate of righteousness, have our feet shod with the firm foundation of the gospel of peace, take up the shield of faith, and receive the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Prayer is the unique way to apply the armor of God.

The believers wrestle against the Devil and his spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies not only by being empowered in the Lord and in the might of His strength and by putting on the whole armor of God, but also by "praying at every time in spirit, and watching unto this in all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints" (v. 18). Here Paul specifically says that we are to pray in our spirit, that is, in our regenerated spirit indwelt by the Spirit of God. This is the mingled spirit, our spirit mingled with God's Spirit. Whenever we are in our spirit, we are also in the Holy Spirit, for our spirit is one with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17). Therefore, Paul's charge to pray in spirit implies that we

should pray in the Spirit of God, for the Spirit and our regenerated spirit are mingled in us.

In Ephesians 6:18 Paul speaks of "watching unto this in all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints." This indicates that we need to be watchful, on the alert for this prayer life. Furthermore, we need to watch unto prayer in all perseverance, making petition concerning all the saints and the apostles (vv. 19-20). As the new man, we must watch and pray so that we may fulfill the negative side of God's purpose to fight against His enemy.

MESSAGE TWO HUNDRED NINETEEN

THE CHURCH—THE STATUS OF THE CHURCH (13) THE GOLDEN LAMPSTANDS (1)

In this message we shall begin to consider the final aspect of the status of the church—the church as the golden lampstands.

G. The Golden Lampstands

One of the crucial symbols in the Bible is that of the lampstands. Revelation 1:12 says, "I turned to see the voice that spoke with me; and having turned I saw seven golden lampstands." Revelation 1:20b explains that "the seven lampstands are seven churches." The church, therefore, is signified by a golden lampstand.

In the Bible the lampstand is always related to God's building. The first time it was mentioned was in Exodus 25:31-40 when the tabernacle was built. The second instance was in the building of the temple in 1 Kings 7:49. The third instance had very much to do with the rebuilding of God's temple in Zechariah 4:2-10. In Revelation 1 the lampstand is related to the building of the churches. In Exodus 25 the emphasis is on Christ being the lampstand as the divine light, shining as the seven lamps with the Spirit (the oil). In Zechariah 4 the emphasis is on the Spirit (v. 6) shining as the seven lamps which are the eyes of Jehovah (vv. 2, 10). The seven eyes of Jehovah are the seven Spirits of God (Rev. 5:6) for God's intensified move. This indicates that the lampstand in Zechariah is the reality of the lampstand in Exodus, and the lampstands in Revelation are the reproduction of the lampstand in Zechariah. Christ is realized as the Spirit, and the Spirit is expressed as the churches. The shining Spirit is the reality of the shining Christ, and the shining churches are the reproduction and expression of the shining Spirit to accomplish God's eternal purpose that the New Jerusalem as the shining city may be consummated.

The revelation concerning the golden lampstand is found in Exodus, Zechariah, and Revelation. In Exodus the lampstand signifies Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God. In Zechariah the lampstand signifies the

nation of Israel as God's testimony. In Revelation the lampstands signify the church as God's living embodiment for the testimony of Jesus. Hence, the lampstand is a symbol of Christ, the nation of Israel, and the church. Furthermore, as we shall see, the lampstand signifies the embodiment of the Triune God. With Christ, with Israel, and with the church the golden lampstand is a portrayal of the embodiment of the Triune God.

1. The Lampstand Typifying Christ as the Embodiment of the Triune God

The lampstand in Exodus 25 typifies Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God. As a type of Christ, the lampstand portrays Christ as the resurrection life growing, branching, budding, and blossoming to shine the light. Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the Triune God. God is in Him, and apart from Him no one can find God.

a. Gold Signifying the Father's Divine Nature, the Divine Substance, Essence

With the lampstand as a type of Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God, there are three important things: the gold, the stand, and the lamps. These three matters imply the significance of the Triune God. Gold is the substance with which the lampstand is made, the stand is the embodiment of the gold, and the lamps are the expression of the stand.

According to Exodus 25:31, the lampstand was made of pure gold. Gold was the substance, the element, of the lampstand in its entirety. In typology, gold signifies the divine nature, the nature of God the Father. If we consider this substance, this element, of the lampstand, we shall see that it signifies the divine nature. Therefore, by this we can see God the Father, the One whose nature is the substance of the lampstand. The golden lampstand exists in the nature of God the Father.

Gold is the unique material used for making the golden lampstand. Gold is the substance, the material, of the lampstand. Every material has a substance, and every substance has an essence as its intrinsic nature. The intrinsic nature of a substance is its essence. Gold is the substance of the lampstand, and within the gold there is an intrinsic nature, which is its essence. According to typology, this signifies the divine nature, the nature of God, in which is the essence of the divine Being.

God the Father is signified by the gold with which the lampstand was made. Hence, with the gold we see the first of the divine Trinity, the Father.

b. The Form Signifying the Son as the Embodiment of the Godhead in His Humanity

In Exodus 25 the lampstand made of pure gold had a definite form or shape. The form of the golden lampstand signifies the Son as the embodiment of the Godhead in His humanity (Col. 2:9). Hence, the form, the shape, of the lampstand signifies the second of the Trinity, the Son.

God the Father is invisible and abstract. God the Son is the embodiment of this invisible One. The stand is a form signifying God the Son as the embodiment of God the Father. This solid form of the lampstand is the embodiment of the gold. According to the New Testament, God the Father is embodied in God the Son. Therefore, in the lampstand we have the substance signifying the Father, and the solid form signifying the Son.

The gold of the lampstand was made into a prescribed form, which indicated its function. This form is Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15). When God created man, He created him in His image (Gen. 1:26). Since Christ is God's image, man was created according to Christ. God does not have a physical form, but He does have an expression of His image. Christ, the beloved Son, is the image of the invisible God. The function of this image, this form, is to express God. "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18).

c. The Seven Lamps Signifying the Spirit as the Expression

Exodus 25:37 says, "Thou shalt make its lamps, seven." These seven lamps signify God the Spirit being the seven Spirits of God for His expression (Rev. 4:5; 5:6). The shining of the lamps denotes expression. Thus, the seven lamps are the expression of God the Son as the embodiment of God the Father. The gold signifies the Father as the substance, the stand signifies the Son as the embodiment of the Father, and the lamps signify the Spirit as the expression of the Father in the Son. Thus, the significance of the Triune God is implied in the lampstand.

Substantially the lampstand is one, but expressively it is seven, because it is one lampstand with seven lamps. In substance the lampstand is one piece of gold, but it holds seven lamps. This indicates that, mysteriously, in substance the Triune God is one but in expression He is the seven Spirits. The Father as the substance is embodied in the Son as the form, and the Son is expressed as the seven Spirits.

We can prove from the Scriptures that the seven lamps of the golden lampstand signify the Spirit expressing Christ. If we had only the record in Exodus, it would be difficult to realize that these seven lamps are the Spirit. But as we proceed from Exodus to Zechariah, we see that the seven lamps are the seven eyes of Christ, the seven eyes of Jehovah (Zech. 3:9; 4:10). As we continue to Revelation, we see that the seven eyes of the Lamb are the seven eyes which are the intensified Spirit of God (Rev. 5:6). Hence, we have a strong basis for saying that the seven lamps are the seven Spirits, that is, the sevenfold intensified Spirit, as the expression of Christ.

(1) As the Seven Spirits of God to Express the Triune God

The seven lamps of the lampstand signify the seven Spirits of God to express the Triune God. Revelation 4:5b says, "Seven lamps of fire are burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God." If we consider Revelation 1:4 and 5, we shall realize that the seven Spirits are undoubtedly the Spirit of God, because they are ranked among the Triune God. As seven is the number for completion in God's operation, so the seven Spirits must be for God's move on earth. In substance and existence God's Spirit is one; in the intensified function and work of God's operation God's Spirit is sevenfold.

Essentially the Spirit is one, but economically He is seven. In God's economy and in His function, He becomes the sevenfold intensified Spirit. In Revelation it is not a matter of essence but a matter of function, of economy. Economically speaking, the Spirit is intensified sevenfold. In substance and existence God's Spirit is one, but in the intensified function and work of God's operation, God's Spirit is sevenfold.

In Revelation 4:5 the seven lamps of fire, which are the seven Spirits of God, signify the enlightening and searching of the sevenfold intensified Spirit of God. God will touch the earth by the seven lamps, by His seven Spirits, which are for burning, shining, observing, searching, and judging. The seven lamps

here refer to the seven lamps of the lampstand in Exodus 25:37 and Zechariah 4:2. In Exodus 25 and Zechariah 4 the seven lamps, signifying the enlightening of the Spirit of God in God's move, are for God's building. In Revelation 4:5 the seven lamps are for God's judgment, which will issue in the building of the New Jerusalem. While God executes His judgment, His sevenfold intensified Spirit will carry out His eternal building by searching, enlightening, and judging.

The enlightening, searching, exposing, judging, and burning of the seven lamps of fire are for the carrying out of God's administration. Today God is administrating His government by means of this enlightening, searching, exposing, judging, and burning. Anything that does not correspond to God's nature will be burned by His fire. This burning is the carrying out of God's administration.

Although the seven enlightening, searching, exposing, judging, and burning lamps will burn all that does not correspond to God, they will refine those things that are truly according to His nature. The dross will go to the lake of fire, but the refined gold will go to the New Jerusalem. Even now the seven Spirits as the seven lamps of fire burning before the throne of God are burning, refining, and purifying for the carrying out of God's universal governmental administration.

(2) As the Seven Eyes of the Son to Express the Son as the Embodiment of the Triune God

The seven lamps also signify the Spirit as the seven eyes of the Son to express the Son as the embodiment of the Triune God (Rev. 5:6; 3:1). Revelation 5:6 says, "I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing as having been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth." The seven lamps in 4:5 are simultaneously the seven eyes of the Lamb in 5:6. The lamps are for enlightening and burning; the eyes are for watching and observing and also for infusing and transfusing. As the redeeming Lamb, Christ has seven watching and observing eyes for the carrying out of God's administration. These seven eyes are also transfusing all that the Lamb is into our being so that we may become the same as He. This indicates that the way for us to be transformed is to come to Him and be seen by Him. As the Lord enlightens and judges us, He looks at us, and His seven eyes transfuse Himself into us.

Economically speaking, the Spirit of God in God's administration is the eyes of the administrating Son, the seven Spirits. This is for function, not for existence. In order for us to do anything, we need our eyes. In the divine administration Christ needs the Spirit to be His eyes. Without the seven Spirits, Christ does not have eyes. Christ is the Executor of God's economy; nevertheless, He needs the seven Spirits as His eyes to carry out God's economy.

We need to be impressed with the fact that the golden lampstand in Exodus 25 implies the significance of the Triune God; it symbolizes the Triune God embodied and expressed. God the Father as the divine gold is embodied in Christ the Son and then is fully expressed through the Spirit. The expression differs from the embodiment. Because our God is uniquely one, the embodiment also must be uniquely one. Thus, the embodiment must be one stand. The expression, however, must be complete, and complete in God's move. (Recall that seven is the number for completion in God's move.) Throughout the centuries, God has been expressed in His move. This is the reason that the seven lamps signify the intensified Spirit as the expression of Christ in God's complete move.

It is significant that in Revelation 5:6 the seven Spirits are the seven eyes of Christ, the Lamb. A person's eyes cannot be separated from the person himself, for a person's eyes are his expression. Our inner being is expressed mainly through our eyes. In like manner, the seven Spirits are the seven eyes of Christ by which Christ expresses Himself. As a person and his eyes are one, so Christ and the Spirit are one. Therefore, it is a mistake to say that the Spirit is separate from Christ. Since the seven Spirits are the Holy Spirit and also the eyes of Christ, then the Holy Spirit, who is the seven Spirits, is not separate from Christ. The Son is the embodiment of the Father, and the Spirit is the expression of the Son. The seven eyes of Christ, which are the seven Spirits of God, are Christ's expression in God's move for God's building. Today Christ's eyes are upon us so that we can be transformed and conformed to His image for God's building.

As we consider the substance, the shape, and the expression of the golden lampstand as implying the significance of the Triune God, we gain a practical understanding of the Trinity. The Trinity is for the dispensing of the processed Triune God into humanity for the fulfillment of God's purpose to have a corporate expression of Himself for eternity. God, the divine Being, is first embodied in Christ and then expressed through the sevenfold intensified

Spirit. Now we not only have the Triune God; in the lampstand we have the Triune God substantially and solidly embodied and expressed. The gold has been formed into the solid stand for the fulfillment of God's purpose. Without the stand, there is no way for God's purpose to be fulfilled. This stand, which is a type of Christ, is expressed through the seven lamps signifying the seven Spirits of God. The golden lampstand, then, signifies the Triune God embodied and expressed. Its essence is the Father, its form is the Son, and its expression is the Spirit. Because we have in the lampstand the element of gold signifying God the Father, the stand signifying God the Son, and the seven lamps signifying God the Spirit, we have the ground to say that the lampstand itself is the embodiment and expression of the Triune God.

Eventually, in the book of Revelation the lampstand becomes the church. If we realize this, our understanding of the church will be deepened and enriched. The church is actually the expression of the processed Triune God. In this expression we see the Father's nature, the Son's embodiment, and the Spirit's expression. In the proper church life, God the Father is the substance, God the Son is the embodiment, and God the Spirit is the expression.

In Exodus 25 the lampstand signifies Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God, but in Revelation the golden lampstands signify the churches. This indicates that the unique Christ has been reproduced, that the one lampstand has become seven lampstands. In Exodus 25 we have the masterpiece, but in Revelation 1 we have the masterpiece reproduced and multiplied. At first God's expression was only in Christ as the lampstand. Now this expression has been reproduced in the churches as golden lampstands. From this we see that Christ has been reproduced. The church is actually the reproduction of Christ. Both Christ and the church are the expression of the Triune God. It is a marvelous fact that in the church as the golden lampstand today we have the nature of the Father, the embodiment of the Son, and the expression of the Spirit.

MESSAGE TWO HUNDRED TWENTY

THE CHURCH—THE STATUS OF THE CHURCH (14)

THE GOLDEN LAMPSTANDS (2)

In the Bible the golden lampstand is revealed in three stages. The first is in Exodus 25, where the lampstand typifies Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God. The second is in Zechariah 4:2, where the lampstand represents the children of Israel who are in the position of receiving grace. The third is in Revelation 1, where the golden lampstand is the church. In the foregoing message we considered the lampstand as a type of Christ, who is the embodiment of the Triune God. In this message we shall go on to see that the lampstand signifies Israel as God's testimony and also that the golden lampstands signify the seven local churches as God's testimony.

2. The Lampstand Signifying Israel as God's Testimony in the Old Testament and in the Millennium

The lampstand is first mentioned in Exodus 25. Near the end of the Old Testament, the lampstand is mentioned again in Zechariah 4:2. "What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof" (Heb.). Here the lampstand signifies Israel as God's testimony in the Old Testament and in the millennium. In Old Testament times, whenever the nation of Israel was in a normal condition, it was God's testimony. In the coming millennium, the restored nation of Israel will once again be God's testimony symbolized by a golden lampstand.

In Exodus 25 we only have the lampstand with the seven lamps; there is no mention of what the seven lamps refer to. In Zechariah, however, we are given a definite interpretation of the seven lamps, for in this book we are told that the seven lamps are the seven eyes of Jehovah (4:10) and the seven eyes of the stone (3:9).

a. Shining through the Seven Eyes (Spirits) of Jehovah

The golden lampstand in Zechariah 4 shines through the seven eyes (Spirits) of Jehovah. Zechariah 4:10 says, “For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth.” Here “those seven” refers to the seven lamps in verse 2. Those seven are “the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth.” Therefore, the seven lamps on the lampstand are the seven eyes of Jehovah.

In Zechariah we have the seven eyes and the seven lamps but not the seven Spirits. But in Revelation the seven lamps are developed into the seven Spirits. “Out of the throne come forth lightnings and voices and thunders; and seven lamps of fire are burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God” (Rev. 4:5). Here we have a new and further development of the seven lamps as the seven Spirits, for we are told clearly that the seven lamps are the seven Spirits of God. Since the seven lamps are the seven eyes and also the seven Spirits, then the seven eyes in Zechariah 4:10 are the seven Spirits. This gives us the ground to say that the lampstand in Zechariah 4 shines through the seven eyes, the seven Spirits, of Jehovah.

b. As the Seven Eyes of Christ (the Stone-Savior for God's Building)

The seven eyes, the seven Spirits, of Jehovah are the seven eyes of Christ, who is the Stone-Savior for God’s building. Zechariah 3:9 says, “For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.” The reference to engraving the stone indicates that this stone is Christ. The Lord Jesus as the building stone, was engraved, dealt with, by God on the cross for the iniquity of God’s people. In one day, by that engraving on the cross, the Lord Jesus took away all the sins of God’s people (John 1:29). Hence, the stone with the seven eyes is Christ, the Stone-Savior.

We know that Christ is the Stone-Savior by the fact that the seven eyes of the stone in Zechariah 3:9 become the seven eyes of the Lamb in Revelation 5:6. “I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing as having been slain, having seven

horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth." The Lamb here has seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God. In Revelation 4:5 the seven lamps are the seven Spirits of God, and in 5:6 the seven eyes of the Lamb are the seven Spirits of God. Here we have a further development over Zechariah, for the seven eyes are not only the seven eyes of the stone but also the seven eyes of the Lamb. These seven eyes of the Lamb are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. This is a reference to Zechariah 4:10, where we are told that the seven eyes of Jehovah run to and fro through the whole earth. In Zechariah 3 and 4 we have the seven eyes of the stone, the seven lamps of the lampstand, and the seven eyes of Jehovah, all of which are the seven Spirits of God.

3. The Seven Golden Lampstands Signifying the Seven Local Churches as God's Testimony in the New Testament

Both in Exodus and Zechariah the lampstand is uniquely one. But in Revelation, the book of consummation, there are seven lampstands signifying seven local churches (Rev. 1:11-12, 20b). This indicates that Christ as signified by the lampstand in Exodus and the Spirit of God as signified by the seven lamps of the lampstand in Zechariah are for the reproduction of the local churches. One lampstand is reproduced in the seven lampstands. Actually, there were more than seven local churches on earth at the time of Revelation. Hence, the number seven in Revelation 1 is a representative number. All the local churches as the many lampstands are the reproduction of Christ and the Spirit as the one lampstand. This reproduction is actually a multiplication of the wonderful expression of Christ as the life-giving Spirit in a practical way.

In Exodus 25 the emphasis is on the stand—on Christ. In Zechariah the emphasis is on the lamps—on the Spirit. Eventually, in Revelation both the stand and the lamps, that is, both Christ and the Spirit, are reproduced as the local churches. The lampstands with their lamps in Revelation are the reproduction of Christ and the Spirit.

a. Having Christ, as the Son of Man, Walking in Their Midst

The seven golden lampstands signifying the seven local churches have Christ, as the Son of Man, walking in their midst. Revelation 1:13 says, "In the

midst of the lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment reaching to the feet, and girded about at the breasts with a golden girdle." Christ today is in the midst of the churches. As the Son of Man, He is moving in the churches to care for them. He cares for the churches in His humanity. Furthermore, according to Revelation 2:1, He, as the Son of Man, "walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands." Christ walks in the midst of the churches to care for them.

(1) Taking Care of the Churches, as the High Priest, in His Heavenly Ministry

Christ takes care of the churches as the High Priest in His heavenly ministry (Heb. 4:14-15). The garment in Revelation 1:13 indicates that here Christ, the Son of Man, is depicted as the High Priest. As such a High Priest, He cares for the churches in love. This requires Him to be "girded about at the breasts with a golden girdle" (Rev. 1:13). The breasts signify love, and the golden girdle signifies the divine strength. Christ, the High Priest in His priestly ministry, cares for the churches in love and with His divine strength.

(2) Trimming the Lampstands—Dealing with the Churches

As the High Priest, Christ trims the lampstands; that is, He deals with the churches (Rev. 2:4, 14, 20; 3:3, 19). He is like the priest in the Old Testament coming to the Holy Place to dress the lamps (Exo. 27:20-21; Lev. 24:1-4). To dress the lamps, the priest first had to snuff the burned out wick and then add fresh oil. The Lord Jesus appears in Revelation as the High Priest walking among the lampstands to snuff the burned out wicks and to add more oil. The burned out wick signifies something that is not according to God's purpose, and the oil is the sevenfold Spirit. In nearly every epistle to the seven churches, the Lord Jesus snuffed some negative things and added more oil, which means He added more Spirit into the churches. Christ today is trimming the lampstands, dealing with the churches, to make all the golden lampstands pure and shining.

b. Shining in the Dark Age as in the Night, Bearing the Testimony of Jesus

As golden lampstands, the churches shine in the darkness. The word "lampstand" enables us to understand much about the church and its function. The church is not the lamp; it is the lampstand, the stand which holds the lamp. Without the lamp, the lampstand is vain and means nothing. But the lampstand holds the shining lamp. Christ is the lamp (Rev. 21:23), and the church is the lampstand holding the lamp. God is in Christ, and Christ as the lamp is held by the stand to shine out God's glory. This is the testimony of the church.

The churches as golden lampstands bear the testimony of Jesus. "The testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 1:2, 9; 20:4) is an all-inclusive expression. The testimony of Jesus is the testimony of the Son coming with the Father by the Spirit to live on earth, to die on the cross to clear up the universe, to release the divine life, and to resurrect from the dead to become the life-giving Spirit, who then comes as the Son with the Father compounded with divinity, humanity, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection, including all the divine attributes and the human virtues. Such a compound testimony is the testimony of Jesus. This testimony has a symbol—the golden lampstand. The golden lampstand is the testimony of Jesus.

The lampstands shine in the darkness. If there were no darkness, there would be no need for the shining of the light of the lamp. The shining of the lamp is quite particular. In order for the lamp to shine, it must have oil burning within it. If the oil burns within the lamp, the light will shine out through all the darkness. This is the function of the church. The function of the church is not simply to preach or to teach doctrine. In the dark night of this age, the church must shine out the glory of God.

(1) With the Father's Divine Essence

As the testimony of Jesus, the golden lampstands are the embodiment of the Triune God. In the golden lampstand there are three main factors: the substance, the shape or form, and the expression. The substance, the material, of the lampstand is gold, which signifies the Father's divine essence.

There was no dross in the lampstand, for it was made of pure gold. In typology, dross signifies something other than God brought in to cause a mixture. The fact that the church is a golden lampstand indicates that we should not bring anything other than God into the church life. Even good things such as ethics, culture, education, and proper religion are dross,

because they are not God Himself. Only God, the divine Being, is the gold which is the substance of the lampstand. No doubt Paul had this realization when he told us in 1 Corinthians 3 that upon Christ, the unique foundation of the church, we should build not with wood, hay, or stubble but with gold, silver, and precious stones.

As the local churches, the lampstands are golden in nature. In typology, gold signifies divinity, the divine nature of God. All the local churches are divine in nature; they are constituted of the divine essence. These stands are not built of clay, wood, or any inferior substance; they are constructed out of pure gold. This means that all the local churches must be divine. Without divinity, there can be no church. Although the church is composed of humanity with divinity, humanity should not be the basic nature of the local churches. The basic nature of the local churches must be divinity.

(2) In the Son's Human Form

The golden lampstand is not a lump of gold but gold in a definite form and purposeful shape. The form, the shape, of the lampstand signifies the Son's human form. Christ, the Son, is the embodiment of the Godhead, the embodiment of the Father's nature (Col. 2:9). Therefore, the church should have not only the Father's divine essence but also the Son's human form.

The fact that the form of the lampstand signifies the Son as the embodiment of the Godhead indicates that the church should not be vague but should have a definite shape. In chapters two and three of Revelation the Lord Jesus, as the embodiment of the invisible God, was clearly standing as He spoke to the churches. All the churches should also stand, having the Son's shape.

(3) Through the Spirit's Expression

Furthermore, the golden lampstands as the testimony of Jesus have the Spirit's expression. The seven lamps of the lampstand shine for God's expression. These seven lamps are the seven Spirits of God. Thus, with the lampstand are the Father's essence, the Son's human form, and the Spirit's expression. Since the golden lampstand has these three aspects, we can say that the golden lampstand signifies the embodiment of the Triune God, with the Father as the substance, the Son as the form, and the Spirit as the expression.

To say that the church is the embodiment of the Triune God is not to make the church a part of deity or an object of worship. We mean that the church is an entity born of God (John 1:12-13), possessing God's life (1 John 5:11-12) and enjoying God's nature (2 Pet. 1:4). The church has the divine substance, bears the likeness of Christ, and expresses God. Because we have been born of God, we have God's life and possess His nature. Now we may enjoy this life and nature day by day and learn to live not by our natural life but by the divine life and nature. As we live this way and are transformed, there will be the fullness, the expression, the form, the appearance of Christ. Furthermore, we shall shine by the sevenfold, intensified Spirit.

As symbolized by the golden lampstand, the church is the embodiment of the Triune God to express Him. As members of Christ, we are sons of God born of Him, having His life and possessing His nature. Now we are learning to live by this life and nature that we may be filled and saturated with the processed Triune God to become His corporate expression through the sevenfold, intensified Spirit.

(4) All Being Identical, without Any Distinct Characteristic

All the golden lampstands are identical with one another, without any distinct characteristic. According to the biblical revelation, the seven churches, on the positive side, are the same, because the churches signified by the golden lampstands are exactly the same in essence, appearance, and expression. The lampstands are identical as the multiplied embodiment of the processed Triune God. Hence, in a positive sense, all the local churches should be identical.

In the seven epistles to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, the churches are different only in a negative sense, that is, in negative things. The particular characteristic of the church in Ephesus was the loss of the first love (2:4), whereas worldliness was the particular characteristic of the church in Pergamos (2:13). The specific, particular characteristics of the apostate church in Thyatira were Jezebel, idol worship, fornication, and adultery (2:20-22). The characteristic of the church in Sardis was deadness (3:1), and the characteristic of the church in Laodicea was lukewarmness (3:16). From this we see that the churches are different from one another in negative things. However, the lampstands in Revelation 1, among whom Christ as the Son of Man is walking, are identical. In the positive sense as the testimony of Jesus,

the lampstands should not be different. Jesus does not have different testimonies. He has only one testimony—the testimony of the Triune God. Thus, all the local churches as the embodiment of Christ and the reproduction of the Spirit should be exactly the same.

c. To Be Consummated in the New Jerusalem

The churches as golden lampstands will be consummated in the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem, the holy city, is the aggregate of all the lampstands. If we consider the facts that the New Jerusalem is a golden city (Rev. 21:18b), that it has one street which reaches all twelve gates (Rev. 21:21; 22:2), that the wall of the city is one hundred forty-four cubits high (21:17), and that the city itself is twelve thousand stadia high (21:16), we shall realize that the city proper must be a mountain. On top of this mountain is a throne, from which the street spirals down to the bottom to reach the twelve gates. On top of this golden mountain is the throne as the center. On the throne is Christ as the Lamb with God in Him (22:1). This Lamb is the lamp with God in Him as the light (21:23; 22:5).

This golden mountain is a stand, and upon this stand is a lamp. Therefore, this golden mountain—the New Jerusalem—is a golden lampstand. As a golden lampstand, it has Christ as the lamp with God in Him as the light shining out for eternity. Thus, the New Jerusalem, the aggregate of all the lampstands, the totality of today's lampstands, is a consummate, universal golden lampstand to shine forth God's glory in the new heaven and new earth for eternity.

(1) Being a Golden City

Revelation 21:18b says, "The city was pure gold, like pure glass." Since gold signifies the divine nature, the nature of God, the city being pure is altogether of the divine nature. The "pure gold, like pure glass" signifies that the whole city is transparent and not in the least opaque. The New Jerusalem is a mountain of gold. As a golden mountain, the New Jerusalem is the ultimate, unique, and eternal golden lampstand, absolutely composed of God's nature. If we see the vision of the New Jerusalem built with the nature of God, we shall renounce everything that does not belong to God's nature and reject anything that does not match it.

(2) Having God as the Light within Christ as the Lamp

Revelation 21:23a says, “The city has no need of the sun nor of the moon that they should shine in it, for the glory of God illumined it.” God as the light is within Christ as the lamp. The glory of God, which is God expressed, illumines the New Jerusalem. Hence, the glory of God, with God as its substance, essence, and elements, is the light of the New Jerusalem, which shines in the Lamb as its lamp.

(3) Having Christ as the Lamp Containing God as the Light

Revelation 21:23b says of the New Jerusalem that “its lamp is the Lamb.” In the New Jerusalem Christ, as the lamp of the holy city, will shine with God within as the light to illumine the city with the glory of God, the expression of the divine light. Because such a light will illumine the holy city, it will not need any other light, whether created by God or made by man (Rev. 22:5). Christ, the lamp, will shine with God as the light.

(4) Bearing the Spirit's Expression

The New Jerusalem will also bear the Spirit’s expression. Revelation 21:11b says, “Her light was like a most precious stone, as a jasper stone, clear as crystal.” Jasper, a precious stone, signifies the expression of the Spirit in His transforming work with all the unsearchable riches of Christ. Likewise, the other precious stones in the New Jerusalem signify that the city bears the Spirit’s expression.

(5) Expressing the Processed Triune God in Eternity

As the consummation of the golden lampstands, the New Jerusalem will express the processed Triune God in eternity. The New Jerusalem will be a mountain of gold with pearl gates and with a jasper wall built upon twelve layers of precious stones. Gold expresses God in His nature, pearls express Christ in His death and resurrection, and the precious stones express the Spirit in His work of transformation. Therefore, the New Jerusalem will be the triune expression of the processed Triune God—the expression of the

Father as the source, the Son as the embodiment, and the Spirit as the realization and transmission.