Message Three

The Vision of the Church, the Body of Christ

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:17-18, 22-23; 4:16; Matt. 16:18; 18:17; 1 Cor. 12:12-13

I. The church is the heart’s desire of God; the desire of God in this age is to have the church—Eph. 1:5, 9, 22-23:

A. The church is the hidden mystery in God’s eternal economy—vv. 11, 22-23; 3:4, 9-11; Col. 2:2.
B. According to Ephesians 3:9, there is a relationship between creation and the church; God’s intention in His creation of all things, including man, was that man would be mingled with God to produce the church—Rev. 4:11; Rom. 12:2.
C. Concerning God’s purpose for the church in the economy of God, there are three main items:
   1. God’s purpose for the church is that the church would have the sonship and that God would be expressed through many matured sons—Eph. 1:5:
      a. God’s eternal purpose is to work Himself in Christ into us so that He may be thoroughly mingled with us and expressed through us—3:16-17, 21.
      b. We were predestinated, marked out, by God to be sons of God before we were created; hence, as God’s creatures, we need to be regenerated by Him that we may have His life to be His sons—1:5; John 3:3, 6.
      c. Sonship implies having not only the life of a son but also the position of a son; God’s marked-out ones have the life to be His sons and the position to inherit Him—Rom. 8:14-15, 17, 29; Heb. 2:10.
   2. God’s purpose for the church is to make His wisdom known to the enemy and to deal with His enemy through the church—Eph. 3:10; Gen. 1:26:
      a. The church is the means through which God’s multifarious wisdom is made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies—Eph. 3:9.
      b. The church in the economy of God is God’s greatest boast in making known His multifarious wisdom for the shame and defeat of His enemy—v. 10; Rom. 16:20.
      c. We need a vision of how the Lord will use the church to defeat His enemy and recover the earth—Gen. 1:26-27; Rev. 11:15; 12:10.
   3. God’s purpose for the church is to head up all things in Christ through the church—Eph. 1:10, 22:
      a. Verse 22 reveals that this heading up is to the church so that the church may share in all that is of Christ as the Head.
      b. The church is for the heading up of all things in Christ through the working of Himself into us as life that we may be full of light—vv. 10, 22-23.
      c. The church is built up by this life, and we are under the control of the light of life under Christ’s headship—4:15-16; John 8:12; Col. 1:13.
D. The church is both universal and local—Matt. 16:18; 18:17.
E. We need to be captured by the vision of the church and pay the price to be governed by this vision and live according to it—Acts 26:18a; Rom. 12:2.

II. After we have seen the vision of the church, we need to see the vision of the Body—Eph. 1:17-18, 22-23; 4:16; Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:13, 27:
A. The Body of Christ is the intrinsic significance of the church—Eph. 1:22-23:
   1. The church of God is the frame, and the Body of Christ is the organism:
      a. If there were no Body, the church would have no meaning.
      b. Without the Body, the church makes no sense, but with the Body, there
         is the intrinsic significance of the church.
   2. If we consider ourselves as individual churches or as individual believers,
      we are through; we should consider ourselves as one Body—Rom. 12:4-5.

B. The Body of Christ is a divine constitution of the Triune God with the believers
   in Christ—Eph. 4:4-6:
   1. The Father, the Son, the Spirit, and man are blended and built together to
      become the Body of Christ, a four-in-one corporate organic entity—vv. 4-6.
   2. The building up of the Body of Christ is the constitution of the Triune God
      and the tripartite man in the Spirit of God and the spirit of man—1 Cor.
      6:17; Rom. 8:16.
   3. The Body of Christ is an organism, both divine and human, to express
      Christ—Eph. 1:23.

C. The Body of Christ is the means for God to carry out His administration—Rom.
   12:4-5; Eph. 1:22-23; 1 Cor. 12:12-13, 25, 27:
   1. The Body of Christ is thoroughly and absolutely related to God's administra-
      tion; apart from the Body of Christ, God has no means, no way, to carry out
      His administration.
   2. God's eternal purpose is to have a group of saved and regenerated people
      who have become one to be an organic Body to carry out His administration—
      Eph. 3:10-11; 4:16; 1 Cor. 1:2; 12:12-13, 27.
   3. The Body of Christ, the church, is for Christ's move on earth; the Head is
      now operating God's administration through the Body—11:3; 12:12.

D. The Body of Christ is the corporate Christ—vv. 12-13:
   1. In verse 12 the Christ refers not to the individual Christ but to the corporate
      Christ, the Body-Christ.
   2. The corporate Christ is composed of Christ Himself as the Head and the
      church as His Body with all the believers as His members—Acts 9:4.
   3. All the believers in Christ are organically united with Him (Rom. 12:4-5) and
      constituted with His life and element (Col. 3:4, 11) and have thus become
      His Body, an organism to express Him; hence, Christ is not only the Head
      but also the Body—the corporate Christ—1 Cor. 12:12.

E. The unique Body of Christ, the universal church, is expressed in many localities
   as the local churches—Col. 4:15-16; Eph. 4:4; Rev. 1:4, 11:
   1. The one Body is the one church of God, manifested as many local churches—
   2. A local church is an expression of the Body of Christ in a certain locality—
      v. 2; 10:32b, 17; 12:12-13, 20, 27.
   3. The local churches are many in existence but are still one Body universally
      in element; the local churches are and should be one Body universally, doc-
      trinally, and practically—Eph. 4:4; 1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33; 16:1.