

**ENTERING INTO THE FOURTH STAGE OF THE EXPERIENCE OF LIFE
TO ARRIVE AT A FULL-GROWN MAN
FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PURPOSE**

(Thursday—Second Morning Session)

Message Two

**The Fourth Stage of the Experience of Life
(1)
Knowing the Body**

Scripture Reading: Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12;
Eph. 1:22-23; 2:16; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:30; Col. 1:18, 24; 2:19

- I. In order to know the Body, we have to deal with and renounce the self, which is the enemy of the Body—Matt. 16:18, 21-26; Luke 9:23-25:**
- A. The self is the fallen soul declaring independence from God and, thus, independence from the Body; the greatest problem, the greatest frustration and opposition, to the Body is the self.
 - B. The shaving of the hair of the leper for his cleansing in Leviticus 14 signifies dealing with the difficulties of the self; the razor signifies the cross—v. 9:
 - 1. The hair of the head signifies the glory of man; everyone has his boasts in certain areas—some boast of their ancestry, some of their education, some of their virtues, some of their zeal in their love for the Lord; almost everyone can find an area in which to boast, to glorify himself, and to make a display before man.
 - 2. The beard signifies the honor of man; people esteem themselves honorable with regard to their position, their family background, or even their spirituality; they always have a superior feeling that they are above others.
 - 3. The eyebrows signify the beauty of man; everyone has naturally good and strong points, which did not issue from the experience of God's salvation but from natural birth.
 - 4. The hair of the whole body signifies the natural strength of man; we are full of natural strength, natural methods and opinions, thinking that we can do this or that for the Lord and that we are capable of doing all things.
 - 5. When all the aspects of the self are dealt with through the "razor" of the cross, and when we have nothing and are nothing, we shall be clean—cf. Phil. 3:7-11.
 - 6. We should utterly reject the self by doing everything through the cross and by the Spirit to dispense Christ into one another for the sake of the Body of Christ.
- II. In order to know the Body, we must see the vision of the Body—Eph. 1:17; 3:3-6:**
- A. When the Lord appeared to Saul on the way to Damascus, He showed him that persecuting the believers was the same as persecuting Him—Acts 9:3-5:

1. The Lord asked, “Why are you persecuting Me?” He did not ask, “Why are you persecuting those who believe in Me?” When Saul asked, “Who are You, Lord?” the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you persecute”—vv. 4-5.
 2. The “Me” here is a corporate “Me,” comprising Jesus the Lord and all His believers; by this, Saul began to see that the Lord Jesus and His believers are one great person—the wonderful “Me.”
 3. The Lord showed Saul that he was persecuting the Head when he was persecuting the members of the Body; every sin that offends the Body offends the Head.
 4. The day that the Lord revealed Himself to Saul was the day that he saw the Body—Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 1:22-23; 2:16; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:30; Col. 1:18, 24; 2:19.
- B. After such a high revelation the Lord did not speak to Saul directly but charged him to go into the city, and there it would be told to him what he must do (Acts 9:6); this was also a revelation of the Body:
1. The Lord committed Saul to the Body through a member of His Body—Ananias—so that Saul would be initiated into the identification with the Body of Christ.
 2. This must have impressed Saul with the importance of the Body of Christ, helping him to realize that a saved believer needs the members of the Body of Christ.
 3. The Lord sent a small disciple to lay hands on Saul, and this disciple said, “Saul, brother” (v. 17); this ushered Saul into the Body of Christ, filled him with the Holy Spirit, and brought him under the anointing.
- C. In the New Testament there are two ways to look at Christ; on the one hand, He is Jesus Christ the Nazarene—the individual Christ; on the other hand, He is Christ plus the church—the corporate Christ—1 Cor. 12:12.
- D. We do not need knowledge; rather, we need revelation to know the Body of Christ and to enter into the realm of the Body; only a revelation from God will usher us into the realm of the Body, and only then will the Body of Christ become our experience.
- E. Once a man sees the Body of Christ, he is free from individualism; he will no longer live for himself but for the Body; he becomes Body-conscious and Body-centered and is freed from being self-centered—Rom. 12:5.
- F. Everything depends on our seeing; those who see that they are members will surely treasure the Body and honor the other members—Phil. 2:3-4.
- G. If we truly see our position in the Body, it will be as though we were saved a second time—cf. John 1:49-51.

III. In order to know the Body, we must be under the limitation of the Body; as members of the Body, we must allow ourselves to be limited by the other members, not going beyond our measure:

- A. God has placed all the members of the Body even as He willed; the Head sets us in our special place in the Body and points us to our special function—Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:15-21:
1. Each one of us members has our own place in the Body of Christ; it is

- assigned by God and should be accepted by us; since such an assignment is according to God's will, every member is necessary—vv. 19-22.
2. Every member has a definite place, a definite assignment, and a particular portion with which he serves the Body of Christ; each member has his own characteristics, and each has his own capability; these characteristics constitute the place, position, or ministry of each member—Rom. 12:4-8.
- B. A basic requirement for the growth and development of the Body is that we recognize our measure and do not go beyond it—Eph. 4:7, 16:
1. We must be willing to be limited by our measure; as soon as we go beyond our measure, we go beyond the authority of the Head and move out from under the anointing—Rom. 12:3, 6.
 2. When we go beyond our measure, we interfere with the order of the Body; to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, without a sober mind, is to annul the proper order of the Body life—v. 3.
- C. Like Paul, we should move and act according to how much God has measured to us, staying within the limits of God's ruling, God's measuring—2 Cor. 10:13:
1. When we give a testimony about our work, experience, or enjoyment of the Lord, we must testify within measure, that is, within a certain limit.
 2. Although we expect the work to spread, we must learn how to be under God's restriction; we should not expect a spread that is without measure; if we spread the work according to the Spirit, there will always be a certain limit—vv. 13-15:
 - a. Inwardly, we have the consciousness that the Lord intends to spread the work only to a certain extent; inwardly, we do not have the peace to spread the work beyond a certain point—cf. 2:12-14.
 - b. Outwardly, in the environment, the Lord may cause certain matters to restrict the spread of the work; the environment does not allow us to go beyond a particular boundary line—cf. Rom. 15:24.
 3. In the church service we need to realize that God has measured out only so much to us, and we should not overstretch ourselves—12:3-4, 6a.
 4. Whatever we do should be in the Body, through the Body, and for the Body—cf. Eph. 4:4; Zech. 4:6.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE BODY OF CHRIST BEING THE EXPRESSION OF CHRIST

What is the Body of Christ? The Body of Christ is the continuation of Christ's life on earth. When He came to the earth and lived on earth, He expressed Himself through a body. Today He still requires a body to express Himself. Just as a man needs a body to express all that he is, Christ needs a body to express Himself. The function of the Body is to be the full expression of Christ. We cannot manifest our personality through any one member of our body—the ears, mouth, eyes, hands, or feet—alone. Similarly, Christ cannot manifest His personality through any one member of His Body. It takes His whole Body to manifest Him. We must see that everything of Christ is expressed through His Body. This is not all. The Body of Christ is the extension and continuation of Christ on earth. He spent more than

thirty years on earth to reveal Himself. He did this as the individual Christ. Today He is revealing Himself through the church. This is the corporate Christ. Formerly, Christ was expressed individually; now He is expressed corporately.

THE BODY OF CHRIST BEING THE CORPORATE VESSEL TO FULFILL GOD'S PLAN

God is after a corporate vessel, not individual vessels. He is not choosing a few zealous, consecrated ones to work for Him individually. Individual vessels cannot fulfill God's goal and plan. God has chosen the church, and He is after the church. Only the church as the corporate Christ can fulfill God's goal and plan.

Consider our human body. No member of our body can act independently. It is impossible for a body to depend on one hand or one leg. However, if the body loses a member, it will not be complete. The Body of Christ is composed of all the believers. Every believer is a member in the Body of Christ, and every believer is indispensable.

The Body of Christ is a reality. The church life is also a reality. The Word of God does not say the church is *like* the Body of Christ; it says the church *is* the Body of Christ. Nothing external can become part of our physical bodies. We may clothe our bodies, but the clothes do not become part of our bodies. Nothing that is of us can ever become part of the Body of Christ, because "Christ is all and in all" in the Body (Col. 3:11). Anything in us that is not a part of Christ frustrates our inward knowledge of the Body of Christ. Sin hinders us from seeing Christ, and the natural life hinders us from seeing the Body. We all must see our position in the Body of Christ. If we truly see our position in the Body, it will be as though we were saved a second time.

The Adamic life is individualistic and independent. Even though everyone in Adam shares the same life, there is no fellowship among them. We all commit sin, yet we each take our own way. Everyone in Adam lives as separate individuals. In Christ everything that is individualistic is ruled out. If we want to know the Body life, we need deliverance not only from our sinful life and our natural life, but also from our individualistic life. All individual elements must go because nothing that is individualistic can reach God's goal.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING A MEMBER AND BEING A CHRISTIAN

The New Testament shows us that there is a difference between being a member and being a Christian. Being a Christian is something individualistic, whereas being a member is something corporate. Being a Christian is something one does for himself, whereas being a member is something for the Body. In the Bible there are many terms with opposite meanings, such as purity and uncleanness, holiness and commonness, victory and defeat, the Spirit and the flesh, Christ and Satan, the kingdom and the world, and glory and shame. All these are opposites. In the same way, the Body is in opposition to the individual. Just as the Father is versus the world, the Spirit is versus the flesh, and the Lord is versus the devil, so also is the Body versus the individual. Once a man sees the Body of Christ, he is free from individualism. He will no longer live for himself but for the Body. Once I am delivered from individualism, I am spontaneously in the Body.

The Body of Christ is not a doctrine; it is a realm. It is not a teaching, but a life. Many Christians seek to teach the truth of the Body, but few know the life of the Body. The Body of Christ is an experience in a totally different realm. A man can know the book of Romans without being justified. Similarly, a man can know the book of Ephesians without seeing the Body of Christ. We do not need knowledge; rather, we need revelation to know the reality of the Body of Christ and to enter the realm of the Body. Only a revelation from God will usher us into the realm of the Body, and only then will the Body of Christ become our experience.

In Acts 2 it seems as if Peter was preaching the gospel alone and that three thousand people were saved through him. But we must remember that the other eleven apostles were standing beside him. The Body of Christ was preaching the gospel; it was not the preaching of an individual. If we have the view of the Body, we will see that individualism will not bring us anywhere.

If we realize that a Christian is nothing more than a member, we will no longer be proud. Everything depends on our seeing. Those who see that they are members will surely treasure the Body and honor the other members. They will not see just their own virtues; they will readily see others as being better than themselves.

Every member has a function, and all the functions are for the Body. The function of one member is the function of the whole Body. When one member does something, the whole Body does it. When the mouth speaks, the whole body is speaking. When the hands work, the whole body is working. When the legs walk, the whole body is walking. We cannot divide the members from the body. Therefore, the movement of the members of the Body must be focused around the Body. Everything that the members do should be for the Body. Ephesians 4 says that the Body is growing into a full-grown man. It does not say that individuals are growing into full-grown men. In chapter three the ability to know the love of Christ and to apprehend the Lord's breadth, length, height, and depth is with all the saints. No one can know or apprehend by himself. An individual does not have the time or the capacity to experience the love of Christ in that kind of way.

First Corinthians 12:14 through 27 speaks of two erroneous concepts that members may have: (1) "Because I am not...I am not of the body" (v. 15). This is to despise oneself and covet the work of others. (2) "I have no need of you" (v. 21). This is to be proud of oneself, thinking that one man can be all-inclusive and despising others. Both concepts are harmful to the Body. We should not imitate other members or be covetous of other members. In this way we will not become discouraged and give up when we find that we cannot be like others. At the same time, we should not despise other members, thinking that we are better and more useful.

THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE BODY

In the church life, we should learn to have the consciousness of the Body. When we are at odds with the brothers and sisters, it means that we are surely at odds with God. Some Christians are like butterflies; they act independently. Others are like bees; they live and move together. The butterfly flies from flower to flower, going its own sweet way; but the bee works for the hive. The butterfly lives and

works individually, but the bee has a body-consciousness. We should all be like bees, having the consciousness of the Body so that we can live together with other members in the Body of Christ. Wherever there is Body-revelation, there is Body-consciousness, and wherever there is Body-consciousness, individual thought and action are automatically ruled out. Seeing Christ results in deliverance from sin; seeing the Body results in deliverance from individualism. Seeing the Body and deliverance from individualism are not two things but one. As soon as we see the Body, our life and work as individuals cease. It is not a matter of changing our attitude or conduct; revelation does the work. We cannot enter the realm of the Body by anything other than seeing. A real inward seeing settles the whole problem. (*The Mystery of Christ*, pp. 15-19)

IN THE BODY, THROUGH THE BODY, AND FOR THE BODY

Everything we have is in the Body, through the Body, and for the Body. In 1925 Brother T. Austin-Sparks was invited to America. He met a sister there who had learned many lessons through her illnesses and who had subsequently rendered much help to many people. She had a ministry of life and was a person who supplied others with life. The lessons she learned were learned in the Body, through the Body, and for the Body. This is the kind of person God is looking for today. Our living should be in the Body, through the Body, and for the Body; this should be our standard. May the Lord deliver us from individualism into the Body. May the Lord show us the Body, and may we serve His Body with a ministry which is based on our knowledge of Christ. (*The Mystery of Christ*, p. 70)