

# THE VISION, PRACTICE, AND BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

(Friday—Second Morning Session)

Message Five

## Crucial Experiences in the Practice of the Church Life (2) Aspects of the Church Life as a Living in the Body of Christ, the One New Man

Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:12-14, 16, 18, 20-21, 24, 27, 29-30, 32

- I. If we would practice the church life as a living in the Body of Christ, the one new man, we need to experience the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity—Eph. 4:12, 16, 18, 21, 24, 30:**
- A. The divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity is the base for our daily living as believers and members of the Body of Christ and parts of the new man—2 Cor. 13:14.
  - B. The life of God is for the supplying of His children with His riches in His divine dispensing—Eph. 4:18.
  - C. The reality in Jesus is the practicality of the life of God, that is, the practicing of the life of God that took place in Jesus while He lived on earth—v. 21:
    - 1. This is the divine life realized and practiced as the reality in Jesus’ humanity.
    - 2. The reality in Jesus is for infusing the believers with Christ’s godly living in His humanity.
  - D. Ephesians 4:30 speaks of “the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed unto the day of redemption”:
    - 1. This Spirit is the sealing Spirit, even the sealing “ink” with which we all have been sealed—1:13.
    - 2. The contents, the elements, and the essence of the sealing Spirit are the divine life plus Jesus’ practical humanity—4:18; Acts 16:7.
    - 3. The sealing Spirit saturates, permeates, and soaks us with the processed and consummated Triune God—2 Cor. 13:14.
  - E. The Father’s life is the reality in Jesus, and this reality as the practicality of the life of the Father becomes the sealing Spirit—Eph. 4:1, 21, 30:
    - 1. The sealing Spirit saturates, permeates, and soaks us with the divine life in the practicality of Jesus’ daily life, making our life a reproduction of Jesus’ life.
    - 2. Through the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity with the Father’s life, the reality in Jesus, and the Spirit’s sealing, we may have a daily life that is a living in the Body of Christ, the new man—vv. 12, 16, 24.
- II. For the church life as a living in the Body of Christ, the one new man, we need to arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God—v. 13:**

- A. The oneness of the Spirit in Ephesians 4:3 is the oneness of the divine life in reality, and the oneness in verse 13 is the oneness of our living in practicality:
  - 1. The oneness of reality needs to be practiced and thereby become the oneness in practicality—vv. 3, 13.
  - 2. The word *arrive* in verse 13 indicates that a process is required for us to arrive at the oneness of our living in practicality; the oneness of reality is the beginning, and the oneness in practicality is the destination.
- B. The oneness in practicality is the oneness of the faith—v. 13:
  - 1. *The faith* in verse 13 refers not to our act of believing but to the things in which we believe, such as the divine person of Christ and His redemptive work accomplished for our salvation—1 Tim. 1:19; 6:10, 12, 21; Jude 3.
  - 2. In the church life we have only one thing that is special—the faith; for receiving the believers, to insist upon anything besides the faith is to be divisive—Rom. 14:1; 15:7.
- C. The oneness in practicality is also the oneness of the full knowledge of the Son of God—Eph. 4:13:
  - 1. The full knowledge of the Son of God is the apprehension of the revelation concerning the Son of God for our experience—Matt. 16:16.
  - 2. The oneness of the faith altogether depends on the full knowledge of the Son of God; only when we take Christ as the center and we focus on Him can we arrive at the oneness of the faith, for only in the Son of God can our faith be one—John 20:31; Gal. 1:15-16; 2:20; 4:4, 6; 1 Cor. 2:2.

**III. In order to preserve the church life as a living in the Body of Christ, the one new man, we must discern the intrinsic factor of the winds of teaching for their purpose—Eph. 4:14:**

- A. The winds of teaching are the devilish blowings of the evil one that bring storms into the church—Matt. 13:19.
- B. Any teaching, even a scriptural one, that distracts believers from Christ and the church is a wind that carries believers away from God’s central purpose—1 Tim. 1:3-4; Eph. 3:9-11, 17, 21; 5:32.
- C. The intrinsic factor of the winds of teaching is the sleight of men, man’s subtle ways of cheating, the craftiness of men with a view to a system of error—man’s plotted deception to induce people into the satanic system of error; the system of error is of the enemy, Satan—4:14.
- D. The purpose of the winds of teaching—the evil purpose of Satan versus the economy of God—is to overthrow the faith of some believers (2 Tim. 2:18), to devastate the church (Acts 8:3), to frustrate and tear down the building up of the organic Body of Christ, and to divide the members of the Body (1 Cor. 1:10-11), instead of keeping the unique oneness of the Body in love and kindness.

**IV. In the church life as a living in the Body of Christ, the one new man, we all need to learn Christ—Eph. 4:20:**

- A. To learn Christ is to be molded into the pattern of Christ’s death, that is, to be conformed to the image of Christ as the firstborn Son of God—Rom. 8:29:
  - 1. Christ is not only life to us but also an example—John 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:21.
  - 2. In His life He set up a pattern, as revealed in the four Gospels, and then He

- was crucified and resurrected to become the life-giving Spirit so that He might enter into us to be our life—1 Cor. 2:2; 15:45b; Rom. 8:10; Col. 3:4.
3. We learn from Christ according to His example, not by our natural life but by Him as our life in resurrection—John 11:25; 1 John 5:11-12.
- B. The basic elements in our learning Christ are reality and grace—John 1:14; Eph. 4:21, 24, 29:
1. Reality is the truth, the principle, the pattern, the standard; we have been placed by God through baptism into the pattern, the standard, the principle, set up by the living of the Lord Jesus; this is the reality in Ephesians 4.
  2. As members of the Body of Christ, we are learning Christ as the reality is in Jesus—vv. 20-21.
  3. In order to live out such a standard, we need grace—Christ as our enjoyment and supply—v. 29.
- C. On the positive side, the basic factors of learning Christ are the life of God and the Spirit of God; on the negative side, the basic factor is the devil, who is always seeking an opportunity to gain an advantage over us and to damage us—vv. 18, 27, 30.
- V. In order to maintain the church life as a living in the Body of Christ, the one new man, we should be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ has forgiven us; in the Spirit and by the divine life, we can forgive as God forgives—v. 32.**

**Excerpts from the Ministry:**

**ARRIVING AT THE ONENESS**

**Of the Faith**

The Greek word rendered “arrive” in Ephesians 4:13 may also be rendered “attain to.” This indicates that a process is required for us to attain to or arrive at the practical oneness.

The oneness of the Spirit in verse 3 is the oneness of the divine life in reality, whereas the oneness in verse 13 is the oneness of our living in practicality. We already have the oneness of the divine life in reality. We only need to keep it. But we need to go on until we arrive at the oneness of our living in practicality. This aspect of oneness is of two things: the faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God. The faith does not refer to the act of our believing but refers to what we believe in, such as the divine person of Christ and His redemptive work for our salvation. The faith is used in this sense in Jude 3, 2 Timothy 4:7, and 1 Timothy 6:21.

**The Full Knowledge of the Son of God**

The full knowledge of the Son of God is the realization of the revelation concerning the Son of God for our experience. *The Son of God* refers to the Lord’s person as life to us, whereas *Christ* refers to His commission to minister life to us that we, as members of His Body, may have gifts for function. The more we grow in life, the more we shall cleave to the faith and to the realization of Christ and the more we shall drop all the concepts concerning minor doctrines which cause divisions. Then

we shall arrive at, or attain to, the practical oneness; that is to say, we shall arrive at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Many Christians do not know the difference between the oneness of the Spirit and the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. The first is the oneness of reality, and the second is the oneness of practicality. Because the Spirit is the reality of our oneness, the oneness of the Spirit is the oneness of reality. Oneness is nothing less than the Spirit Himself. If there were no Spirit, then there would be no oneness. Although we have the oneness in reality, there is still the need for the oneness of practicality. This means that the oneness of reality must be practiced; that is, it must become the oneness in practice. Hence, in verse 13 Paul speaks of the oneness of practicality.

Between the oneness of reality and the oneness of practicality there is a distance. For this reason, there is the need to “arrive at” the oneness of practicality. The oneness of the Spirit is the beginning, whereas the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God is the destination. This indicates that we must journey from the oneness of the Spirit to the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. In other words, we must travel from the oneness of reality until we arrive at the oneness of practicality.

As believers, we already have the oneness of reality. But we need to keep it. The best way to keep the oneness of reality is to go on, to proceed, toward the oneness of practicality.

We have pointed out that *the faith* in verse 13 does not refer to our act of believing but refers to the object in which we believe. Every believer in Christ accepts this faith. When we first believed in the Lord Jesus, we were very simple. All we had was the faith. But afterward we became quite complicated by taking in various doctrines, teachings, and concepts, nearly all of which are divisive.

Several young men may be saved at the same time, through the preaching of the same evangelist. On the day they are saved, they all accept the faith. Afterward, however, they take in different doctrinal concepts. These concepts cause them to be divided from one another. In order for these believers to arrive at the oneness of the faith, they need to be perfected through the work of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. This work of perfecting will cause them to care for the oneness of the Spirit and to lay aside the divisive doctrines. As they arrive at the oneness of the faith, they no longer care for the various divisive doctrines but care only for the unique faith concerning Christ and His redemptive work. By the perfecting work they also arrive experientially at the full knowledge of the Son of God. They do not pay attention to divisive doctrines or practices but care only for Christ as the Son of God. They care for the full knowledge of the Son of God as life experientially. They desire more and more to experience Christ in their daily life. By arriving at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, these believers have not only the oneness of reality but also the oneness of practicality. Now they are able to come together without division and to enjoy oneness in a practical way.

The oneness in the Lord's recovery is such a practical oneness. Our oneness is the oneness of our unique faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God in our daily experience of Him as our life. I believe that most of us in the Lord's recovery have arrived at the oneness of practicality. Therefore, we are one both in reality and in practicality.

Today many Christians who love the Lord, including a good number of pastors and ministers, have not seen the oneness of practicality. However, they do have the oneness of reality, which is the oneness of the Spirit. Many of these Christians say that as long as we are genuine believers in Christ and have the indwelling of the Spirit, we all can be one. In a sense, this is true. But this oneness is not yet the oneness of practicality. It is real, but it is not practical. Therefore, such Christians need to journey the distance between the oneness of reality and the oneness of practicality. I praise the Lord that so many of us have traveled from the beginning, the oneness of the Spirit, to the destination, the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. We have made the journey from the oneness of reality to the oneness of practicality.

#### **WINDS OF TEACHING**

##### **A Teaching That Differs from God's Economy**

In verse 14 Paul does not speak of the wind of heresy, but he speaks of the wind of teaching. Any teaching, even a scriptural one, that distracts believers from Christ and the church is a wind that carries them away from God's central purpose. First Timothy 1:3 and 4 reveal that some in Paul's time were teaching differently. This does not mean that they were teaching heresy; it means that they were teaching something different from God's New Testament economy. Their teaching was not the teaching of the New Testament ministry. In the New Testament there is one ministry. This ministry is the dispensing of the Triune God into the believers for the building up of the churches. We must beware of any teaching or supposed ministry that teaches something different from God's economy, that is, that teaches something other than God's dispensation for the building up of the churches.

As a whole, Christians today have been carried away by various winds of teaching. Every denomination or independent group is under the influence of some kind of doctrinal wind. What Christians today are not being tossed by waves or carried about by winds? We need to ask ourselves whether we are still under the influence of such waves and winds. I can strongly proclaim that I am not tossed by any waves or carried about by any winds, because I care only for Christ and the church. Some have asked me about pray-reading. I have answered that I am not for pray-reading but that I am for Christ and the church. As a result, I do not make myself different from other Christians. However many Christians have made themselves different from me.

For example, some strongly disagree with immersion and advocate sprinkling. I can say to such a one, "Brother, I don't care for sprinkling, but I certainly care for you. I simply receive you as my brother in the Lord." By receiving him in this way, I am the same as he. But by insisting on sprinkling, he makes himself different

from me. Therefore, he, not I, must bear the responsibility for any difference between us.

Before you came into the Lord's recovery, you were probably concerned about certain things besides Christ and the church. You may have cared for a particular doctrine, practice, or work. But in the church life in the Lord's recovery, we care only for Christ and the church. It is crucial that we have the clear vision that the New Testament economy is for nothing other than the dispensing of the Triune God into people for the building up of the Body of Christ. This is our goal and our testimony. It is also God's recovery. If we have this goal always before us, we shall not receive any teaching, concept, or opinion that distracts us from the central lane of God's economy.

### **In the Sleight of Men**

In Ephesians 4:14 Paul speaks of the "sleight of men." The Greek word for *sleight* signifies the cheating of dice players. The teachings that become winds, carrying believers away from the central lane of Christ and the church, are a deception instigated by Satan in his subtlety and utilizing the sleight of men, in order to frustrate God's eternal purpose to build up the Body of Christ. No matter how good a teaching may appear to be, if it distracts us from Christ and the church, it is something of the sleight of men. The sleight of men is even worse than deceit, for not only is it false, but it also involves an evil plot. Even if a doctrine is scriptural, it may be utilized in such a wicked plot.

### **In Craftiness**

In this verse Paul also mentions *craftiness*. This word indicates that a certain evil skill is involved. Hence, the sleight of men involves both the formulation of a plot and the use of skill to deceive.

### **With a View to a System of Error**

Finally, Paul says, "With a view to a system of error." These teachings that divide are organized and systematized by Satan to cause serious error and thus damage the practical oneness of the Body life. The plot is apparently of man, but the system is of Satan. We have seen that God's economy is to dispense the Triune God into us for the building up of the Body of Christ. Satan hates this. Therefore, he uses teachings, concepts, doctrines, and opinions in craftiness as part of an evil plot to carry people away and eventually to lead them into a system of error. How devilish! May the Lord expose the subtlety of the enemy so that we may detect the system of error related to the deceitful teachings that are designed to distract the saints from Christ and the church life.

### **LEARNING CHRIST**

Verses 17 through 19 are a dark background for what Paul says in verse 20: "But you did not so learn Christ." The New Testament strongly indicates that we should live Christ. In Philippians 1:21 Paul declares, "To me to live is Christ." But here in Ephesians 4:20 we are told that we have learned Christ. Notice that Paul uses the

past tense in speaking of our learning Christ. He also uses the past tense in the next verse, which says, "Since indeed you have heard Him and been taught in Him as the truth is in Jesus." This matter of learning Christ as the truth is in Jesus is difficult to comprehend, and we need to consider it very carefully.

Christ is not only life to us but also an example (John 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:21). We learn from Him (Matt. 11:29) according to His example, not by our natural life but by Him as our life. According to the New Testament, the Lord Jesus did not come into us as life directly. Rather, after living on earth for thirty years, He ministered for another three and a half years. During the thirty-three and a half years of His life on earth, He set up a pattern, a mold, a model. This is a matter of great significance. One reason the four Gospels were written was to show the pattern of the life that God desires, the mold of the life that can satisfy God and fulfill His purpose. For this reason, the New Testament gives us a unique biography, the biography of the Lord Jesus, written from four directions. After the Lord Jesus set up the pattern revealed in the Gospels, He was crucified on the cross and then He entered into resurrection. It is in resurrection that He comes into us to be our life.

According to the New Testament, to be saved is to be put by God into Christ. First Corinthians 1:30 says, "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus." When God put us into Christ, He put us into the mold. Just as a sister shapes dough into the form of a mold, so God intends to form us into the mold of Christ. Hence, Romans 8:29 indicates that we are to be conformed to the image of Christ, the Firstborn among many brothers. To be conformed is to be molded. The Firstborn is the pattern, and the many brothers of the Firstborn are those who are to be conformed to this pattern. To learn Christ is simply to be molded into the pattern of Christ, that is, to be conformed to the image of Christ.

By means of baptism God has put us into Christ, who is the pattern. To be baptized is to be placed into Christ as the mold. Both Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27 speak of being baptized into Christ. To be baptized into Christ is to be buried into Him. The tomb of this baptism is the pattern, the mold. In God's eyes, we were put into this mold when we were baptized. Through being placed into the mold, we have put off the old man and have put on the new man. By being buried into Christ, we have been brought out of Adam and the old creation. By baptism we have been put into Christ, who is both our life and our pattern. This explains why Paul uses the past tense in speaking about learning Christ. We learned Christ when we were buried into Him in baptism. This means that to learn Christ is to be put into Christ as the mold. It is to be molded into the pattern set up by Him during His years on earth.

After Christ established the pattern, He was crucified, and then He entered into resurrection, becoming in resurrection the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). It is as the Spirit that He comes into us to be our life. We have pointed out that at the time we believed in Christ and were baptized in Him, God put us into Him as the pattern, the mold. Therefore, Paul could tell the Ephesians that they "did...learn Christ." According to the light of the New Testament and according to our experience, to learn Christ is to be placed into Christ by God. On God's side, He has put us into Christ. On our side, we have learned Christ by being put into Him.

After a person is saved, deep within him he desires to live a life in the pattern established by the Lord Jesus. However, many either ignore this desire or cultivate it in a mistaken way, thinking that by self-effort they can succeed in imitating Him. It is a mistake to think that we can imitate Christ by the exercise of our natural life. The believers in Christ should imitate Him, but they should not do so according to their natural life.

The truth in Jesus is the real situation of the life of Jesus as recorded in the four Gospels. In the godless walk of the nations, the fallen people, there is vanity. But in the godly life of Jesus there is truth, reality. Jesus lived a life always doing things in God, with God, and for God. God was in His life, and He was one with God. This is the truth in Jesus. We, the believers, regenerated with Christ as our life and taught in Him, learn from Him as the truth is in Jesus.

We have pointed out that it is a mistake to endeavor to imitate Christ by the efforts of our natural life. We have also seen that when we believed in the Lord Jesus and were saved, God put us into Christ as the mold. This mold is the life of Jesus recorded in the four Gospels, a life absolutely according to truth. Truth is the shining of light, the expression of light. Since God is light (1 John 1:5), truth is the expression of God. Every aspect of the life of Jesus recorded in the Gospels is an expression of God. In everything He said and did, He expressed God. This expression of God is the shining of light; hence, it is the truth. This life of Jesus according to truth is the pattern in which God has placed us. In this pattern we have learned Christ as the truth is in Jesus. This means that we have learned Christ according to the truth shown in the Gospels, that is, according to the life of the Lord Jesus, which was wholly according to God's truth. This life is the shining of light. The shining of the light is truth, and truth is the expression of God. Therefore, in the life of Jesus there is truth. The essence of the pattern set up by the Lord Jesus is truth. This means that the essence of the life of Jesus is truth. We have learned Christ as the truth is in Jesus.

The truth, the reality, in Jesus in verse 21 is in contrast to the vanity of the mind in verse 17. The nations walk in the vanity of their mind, but we believers live a life as the truth is in Jesus. When the Lord Jesus was living on earth, He never walked in vanity. Rather, He always walked in truth, that is, in the shining of the divine light. This means that the Lord Jesus lived and walked in the expression of God. We have learned Christ according to this very truth that is in Jesus. (*Life-study of Ephesians*, pp. 366-369, 378-380, 392-395)