

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

(Saturday—Second Morning Session)

Message Eight

## **The Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ (2) Through the Inner Experience of the Indwelling Christ**

Scripture Reading: Eph. 3:16-21; 2:21-22; 4:12, 16

- I. Ephesians 1:10 reveals that in the economy of the fullness of the times, God will head up all things in Christ through the church; this aspect of God's purpose for the church involves building—2:21-22; 4:16:**
  - A. The building is in the divine life and under the headship of Christ to bring us all into proper order; in life we are built up under the headship of Christ, and through this God has the ground to make His multifarious wisdom known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies so that He may put His enemy to shame—1:10; 3:10-11.
  - B. The Head and the Body are a great corporate man, and within this man is the Triune God—2:15; 3:16-17a:
    1. Christ is the Head, and by being life to us He saturates, transforms, and transfigures us to bring us into the proper order under His headship.
    2. It is through this Body that the Head, Christ, will head up all things; this requires the building up of the church as the Body of Christ according to the revelation in the book of Ephesians—4:12, 16.
- II. If we would participate in the work of the divine building, we need to know the economy of God and the central work of God and allow God in Christ to build Himself into us—3:9, 17a:**
  - A. God's New Testament economy is for the processed and consummated Triune God to be wrought into us to become our life and our very being—1 Tim. 1:4; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 3:16-17a; Rom. 8:9-10, 6, 11:
    1. The most crucial and mysterious matter revealed in the Bible is that God's ultimate intention is to work Himself into His chosen people—Gal. 4:19; Eph. 4:4-6.
    2. God's eternal purpose is to work Himself into us as our life and our everything so that we may take Him as our person, live Him, and express Him; this is the desire of God's heart and the focal point of the Bible—1:9; 3:11; Phil. 1:20-21a.
    3. God's economy and goal according to His heart's desire are to build Himself into man and to build man into Him—2 Sam. 7:12-14a; Eph. 3:17a.
  - B. God's central work, His unique work in the universe and throughout all the ages and generations, is to work Himself in Christ into His chosen people, making Himself one with them—Gal. 4:19; Eph. 3:17a.

- C. God's intention in His economy is to build Himself in Christ into our being—2 Sam. 7:12-14a; Eph. 3:17a; John 14:20:
  - 1. God desires to work Himself in Christ into us; everything that Christ is and everything that Christ has accomplished are for this one thing—Phil. 2:13; Eph. 3:17a; Col. 3:10-11.
  - 2. We need God to build Himself in Christ into our humanity, working Himself in Christ into us as our life, our nature, and our person—Eph. 3:17a.

**III. The building up of the church as the Body of Christ is through the inner experience of the indwelling Christ—vv. 16-17a; 4:12, 16; 2:21-22:**

- A. Ephesians is a book on the church, the Body of Christ, and this book speaks about the unsearchable riches of Christ and how this Christ as the Spirit is making His home in us—1:22-23; 3:8, 17a.
- B. The key to the building up of the church is the inner experience of Christ as our life—v. 17a; Col. 3:4; 1 John 5:11-12.
- C. Christ builds the church by building Himself into us, that is, by entering into our spirit and spreading Himself from our spirit into our mind, emotion, and will to occupy our entire being—2 Tim. 4:22; 1 Cor. 6:17; Eph. 3:17a.
- D. In Ephesians 3:16-21 Paul prayed concerning the believers' inner experience of the indwelling Christ for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ:
  - 1. Paul prayed that we would be strengthened into the inner man with the result that Christ could make His home in our hearts and thereby occupy, possess, permeate, and saturate our whole inner being with Himself—vv. 16-17a:
    - a. Since our heart is the totality of our inward parts, the center of our inward being, and our representative with regard to our inclination, affection, delight, and desire, when Christ makes His home in our hearts, He controls our entire inward being and supplies and strengthens every inward part with Himself.
    - b. The more Christ spreads within us, the more He settles down in us and makes His home in us, occupying every part of our inner being, possessing all these parts, and saturating them with Himself.
  - 2. When Christ is able to make His home in our hearts, occupying all the inward parts of our being, we will be able to be built up with all the saints—2:21-22; 4:12, 16:
    - a. In order for Christ's word in Matthew 16:18 concerning the building up of the church to be fulfilled, the church must enter into a state where many saints will allow Christ to make His home deep in their heart, possessing, occupying, and saturating their entire inner being.
    - b. The more Christ occupies our inner being, the more we will be able to be built up with others in the Body—Eph. 2:21-22; 4:12, 16.
  - 3. Ephesians 3:17 speaks of being rooted and grounded in love:
    - a. That we are rooted indicates that we are plants, and our being grounded means that we are a building.
    - b. Together the two aspects, rooted and grounded, indicate that we need to grow and be built up.

4. According to verse 18, we are able to apprehend the dimensions of Christ—the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth—not by ourselves individually but “with all the saints,” that is, corporately and jointly; this reveals that we need to be built together.
  5. When Christ makes His home in our hearts, we will be filled unto all the fullness of God; this fullness is the church, the Body of Christ, as the corporate expression of the Triune God—v. 19.
  6. We should focus on this prayer to the extent that we do not know what to pray other than this.
- E. Ephesians 3:16-21 shows Paul’s spirit, attitude, prayer, and faith:
1. By revelation the mystery of Christ was made known to Paul (vv. 3-6); thus, his spirit and attitude—what he saw, what he said, and what he cared about in his heart—were related to the vision of the building up of the church as the Body of Christ through the inner experience of the indwelling Christ:
    - a. This matter filled Paul’s entire being; hence, what he saw, what he spoke, and what he cared about were related to the building up of the church through Christ’s being wrought into us.
    - b. Paul was obsessed with this vision, and it became his spirit and attitude; therefore, he had such a prayer as recorded in Ephesians 3:16-21.
  2. We need to have this spirit, attitude, prayer, and faith when we serve God in the church.
  3. If we have seen the vision of the building up of the church as the Body of Christ and of how Christ builds the church by building Himself into us, we will have this kind of spirit and attitude, and we will also have this kind of prayer and faith.

**Excerpts from the Ministry:**

**THE MAIN CONTENT OF THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS**

The book of Ephesians does not talk about the material things, and it does not contain mere knowledge. There are not even many Old Testament quotations in this book. Moreover, it does not mention the miraculous gifts. In this book the gifts are persons, such as the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers (4:11), not the gifts of healing and other miraculous things. The book of Ephesians is a book on the church, the Body of Christ (1:22-23). This book speaks about the unsearchable riches of Christ and how this Christ as the Spirit is in us (3:8, 16-19). This is not an outward Christ but an inward Christ, because He is making His home in us. He is our Head and our life, and our heart—our mind, emotion, will, and conscience—is His home. No one can measure His breadth, length, height, and depth, but such a Christ is making home in our heart. Eventually, we are filled, not with material things or even with knowledge, gifts, or power, but unto all the fullness of God.

In chapter 1 there is the sealing of the Holy Spirit (v. 13). The Holy Spirit as a seal in us is inward, not outward. In chapter 2 there is the new man created by Christ and in Christ (v. 15). This also is something apart from material things, mere scriptural knowledge, and gifts. The new man created in Christ and by Christ is

fully of Christ, and it is even Christ Himself. In Genesis 3 Eve was a part of Adam and came entirely out of Adam. In the same way, the new man is a part of Christ and was taken from Christ. Then in Ephesians 3 we realize the unsearchable riches of Christ, and Christ makes His home in our hearts (vv. 8, 17). In chapter 4 we grow and arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. We are no more carried away by every wind of teaching, even good teaching, but we grow up into Christ in all things (vv. 13-15). We receive something from Christ as the Head, and we minister it to others. In this way the church is built up (v. 16).

#### **THE WAY FOR THE CHURCH TO BE BUILT UP IN LIFE**

We need to spend more time to see how the church is built up. Like many young Christians, I was hungry for scriptural knowledge after I was saved. I met a certain group of believers who stressed that in order to be good Christians we must know the Bible. Therefore, I spent much time to know the Bible. Later, about six or seven years after I was saved, there was a “spiritual grace” movement in north China, which was a branch of the Pentecostal movement. It was very prevailing, and in only a few years it swept over the whole of north China. Thousands of people were saved, and there were many miracles and signs. To a certain degree I was influenced by that movement, so I studied the situation. Eventually, I was made clear by the Lord that the Body of Christ could not be built up in that movement. At that time I was not clear about the central content of Ephesians, but through my experiences the Lord showed me that the church can be built up only by our experience of Christ as life, not by knowledge, gifts, or the so-called Pentecostal manifestations. Knowledge and gifts help a little, but the church, the Body of Christ, cannot be built up by these alone. The church must be built up by Christ as our life.

#### **The Key to the Building Up of the Church Being the Inner Experience of Christ as Our Life**

Some may argue for the gifts, saying that they are mentioned in 1 Corinthians. However, out of all the sixty-six books of the Bible, the main book on the church is Ephesians. In this book on the church the gifts are not mentioned. Rather, it speaks of the unsearchable riches of Christ. This Christ with His unsearchable riches wants to make His home in our hearts. This is what we need. In the Bible there is some ground for knowledge, gifts, miracles, signs, and power. However, these are not the main items needed to build up the Body of Christ. The main item needed for the building up is Christ Himself as life to us. We admit that there is a certain need for knowledge and gifts, but too many Christians do not admit the need for the inner experience of Christ. We admit that sometimes we need medicine, but too many do not acknowledge that we mainly need regular food.

Since we have become Christians, we may have heard very few messages about the inner experience of Christ. In the book of Ephesians, however, the experience of Christ is very prominent. Every chapter deals with this matter. Although some Christians realize that Ephesians is about the church, many still neglect the key to the building up of the church. The key is the inner experience of Christ. Without the inner experience of Christ we can never have the reality of the church.

## **The Central Portion of the Book of Ephesians**

The book of Ephesians is the very heart of the Bible. The heart is the most crucial part. People today fear a heart attack more than anything. We may be able to move, speak, and do many things, but if our heart stops, we are finished. Since Ephesians is the heart of the Scriptures, the enemy, Satan, attacks people's understanding of this book. People today talk about this book, and many realize that this is the most profound book on the church, but they neglect the secret, the key point, of this book. The heart and key of this book is 3:16-19.

### ***Our Inner Man Needing to Be Strengthened***

Verses 14 and 15 begin, "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father, of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named." *For this cause* refers to God's plan mentioned in the previous chapters and verses, including our predestination unto sonship, the riches of Christ being ministered to us, Christ heading up all things, making the multifarious wisdom of God known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies, putting the enemy to shame, and other matters. Verse 16 continues, "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man." The inner man is our human spirit, regenerated by the Spirit and indwelt by Christ. This spirit needs to be strengthened.

Man is tripartite, having a spirit, soul, and body, but of these three parts the soul is often the strongest. The soul itself is a composition of the mind, emotion, and will, and of these three parts the mind is the strongest. Our biggest problem is that we are too strong in our mind, while our spirit is very weak. We can prove this in the following way. Every kind of person likes to talk. If we say, "Let's have some time to talk," our mind will be active, strong, and positive. However, when we say, "Let us have a time of prayer," everyone is silent. Right away the room may become like a cemetery; everyone will be "grieving at the tomb," silent and in order. This is our case because we are too weak in our inner man, our spirit. This is why the writer of Ephesians says that he prayed not in a light way but by bowing his knees, for the cause of the church as God's purpose, that the Father in the universe would grant us to be strengthened into the inner man.

Our spirit needs to be strengthened. There is no need for us to discuss, talk, or argue. The more we talk and argue, the more we exercise our mind. Our mind has been over-exercised and over-developed, but we still try to develop it even more. When a part of our body over-develops, it becomes a cancer that brings death. We need to forget this natural mind, which has been taken over by the enemy. It is more profitable to change our discussion into prayer. Let us be humble to forget our thoughts, imagination, understanding, and concepts, and let us bow our knees before the Father and pray to exercise our spirit, not only once but constantly.

### ***Our Heart Needing to Be Opened by the Repenting of Our Mind and the Exercise of Our Conscience***

In order to exercise our spirit to pray, we need to repent. *Repent* in Greek means to turn the mind. To repent is to turn our mind to the Lord and have a change of

mind. Our mind must be turned from everything other than the Lord back to the Lord. When we turn our mind to the Lord, our conscience shows us how we are wrong with the Lord, so we need to confess. To repent is to turn the mind, and to confess is to exercise the conscience. The mind and the conscience are the two main parts of the heart, and the heart surrounds our spirit. Therefore, the heart is a gateway to our spirit. Through our repenting and confessing, the two main parts of our heart—our mind and our conscience—spontaneously are opened. Then when the gateway is opened, the spirit is free, so the Lord is able to strengthen our spirit and spread into our heart.

Verse 17a says, “That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith.” The heart is a composition of the mind, emotion, will, and conscience. When our mind is set on other things, our conscience is hardened, our emotions are not for Him, and Christ is imprisoned in our spirit. Therefore, we must repent, turn our mind to the Lord, recognize our sinfulness, and confess our failures. We need to say, “Lord, I love You, and I am for You.” In this way our whole heart is exercised and open, so our spirit is wholly free. Then Christ will fill and strengthen our spirit, and spontaneously He will spread from our spirit into our heart to make His home in all the parts of our heart. This means that our whole being will be a dwelling place for Him.

***Apprehending the Unlimited Dimensions of Christ  
by Being Built Up with All the Saints***

Verses 17b and 18 continue, “That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are.” That we are rooted indicates that we are plants, and our being grounded means that we are a building. Together these two aspects mean that we need to grow and be built up.

We are able to apprehend the breadth, length, height, and depth not by ourselves individually but corporately and jointly. This means that we must be built together. We can never be built up together by doctrinal knowledge. The more knowledge we have, the more fighting and divisions we will have. As Christ makes His home in us, we will forget about mere knowledge, fighting, and divisions. Rather, we will say, “O Lord, be merciful to me! I am filled with knowledge, and I may have the gifts, but I am short of apprehending You with all the saints.” It is when Christ makes His home in our hearts, occupying and taking over every inward part of our being, that we are able to apprehend the unlimited Christ with all the saints. This means that we are able to be built together with all the saints, that we are no more individual but rather corporate. In this way we realize that Christ is immeasurable and without limit. No one can tell what the measure of the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth are. These are the dimensions of Christ. Christ is the length, the breadth, the height, the depth. He is immeasurable and unlimited. Together with all the saints we will realize the unsearchable riches of Christ in the spirit.

***Being Filled unto All the Fullness of God***

Finally, verse 19 says, “To know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that

you may be filled unto all the fullness of God.” We are not being filled with material things, scriptural knowledge, or the so-called spiritual gifts but unto all the fullness of God Himself. It is in this way that we are built up together, and it is in this way that we can realize the Body life. Otherwise, we can talk about the Body, but we still will not have its reality. The reality of the Body is this very indwelling Christ experienced by us in an inward way.

We all need a further time to kneel by ourselves in our room to pray over these verses until the heavenly vision is revealed into our spirit. This will revolutionize us, and our whole concept will be changed. What we need is not something outward or mere knowledge, gifts, signs, powers, and other such matters. What we absolutely need is the inner experience of the indwelling Christ. Ephesians 3 says that we are strengthened into the inner man, that Christ makes His home in our heart, and that we are filled (not covered or clothed) unto all the fullness of God, that is, the very being, essence, and element of God. The riches of Christ and His immeasurable dimensions include so much that we would need many days to explain even a little of our experience. It is through this inner experience of the indwelling Christ that we apprehend with all the saints the unlimited measure of Christ, and it is by this that we are built up.

***The Building Up of the Church by All the Saints  
through the Inner Experience of the Indwelling Christ***

Verse 1 of chapter 4 begins with, “I beseech you therefore.” *Therefore* indicates that what Paul is about to say is based on what was mentioned in chapter 3. Chapter 4 goes on to deal with the building up of the Body. As we have stressed previously, Christ the Head does not build His Body directly. Rather, He builds up the church through the gifted persons—the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. Even these gifted persons, as the gifts given to the church, do not build the church directly. They perfect the saints as the members of the Body by ministering the unsearchable riches of Christ to them so that they may have the inner experience of the indwelling Christ. Christ makes His home in their hearts to occupy their whole being, and they grow up into Christ in all things. Then they are joined and knit together, and they receive something of the very indwelling Christ whom they have experienced to minister to one another. It is in this way that they are built up as the Body.

The key point concerning the building up of the church is the inner experience of the indwelling Christ. The gifted persons—the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers—do not minister gifts to people. Rather, they minister the unsearchable riches of Christ to the saints so that they may be perfected in life and in the experience of Christ in order to grow. (*The Vision, Practice, and Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ*, pp. 63-70)