

**LESSON SIX**

**HOW CHRIST GLORIFIES THE CHURCH &**

Scripture Reading:

**Eph. 4:13** Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

**Eph. 4:14** That we may be no longer little children tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching in the sleight of men, in craftiness with a view to a system of error,

**Eph. 4:15** But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ,

**Eph. 4:16** Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.

**Questions:**

Section 1:

1. How will Christ present the church to Himself glorious?
2. How does glorification take place in us? Please explain it with an illustration.

Section 2:

1. Please present the contrast between religion and God's economy.
2. Why don't we have the confidence to say that we are glorious today? What do we need to do to become more glorious?

### Section 3

1. What does truth refer to? How to hold the truth in love?
2. Why did the winds of teaching cause us to be tossed about according to verse 14?
3. How does our love for one another cause us to hold the truth?

### Section 4

1. How do we grow up into the head?
2. We need to grow up into the One who is the Head, what does it indicate?
3. What is the most difficult matter in which to grow up into Christ?

## [Section 1]

### HOW CHRIST GLORIFIES THE CHURCH

We have seen that Ephesians 5:25-27 presents Christ in three stages. In the first stage, the stage of the flesh, Christ gave Himself up for the church. In the second stage, He as the life-giving Spirit is sanctifying, cleansing, nourishing, and cherishing the church. Eventually, in the third stage, He will present a glorious church to Himself as His bride.

### HOW CHRIST PRESENTS THE CHURCH TO HIMSELF

We need to consider how Christ will present the church to Himself as a glorious church. When I was young, I thought that Christ was merely in the heavens and that the church was on earth. My concept was that at His coming back from the heavens to the earth, He would suddenly take up the church and present her to Himself. According to this concept, Christ is far away in the heavens, and we on earth are making ourselves ready to be presented to Him. I realized later, however, that this is a natural concept that makes Christ too objective.

God's economy is altogether different from the natural concept and from religion. In His

economy God is working Christ into us. Eventually, Christ will present the glorious church to Himself not by coming merely in an objective way but by expanding within us and then by coming out of us.

Romans 8 indicates that God has not only called us and justified us but that He will also glorify us. Years ago I was taught that one day the Lord would suddenly descend from the heavens and sweep us up into glory. But this concept of glorification is not according to God's economy. 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). If we do not take Christ as our life and our person, we will have no way to enjoy the glory that is within us. We need to say, "Lord Jesus, I take You as my life and my person. Lord, I offer my heart to You. Take my heart, Lord. Possess it, occupy it, and make Your home in it." If you practice this, spontaneously, you will come to know the glory within you.

### THE SHINING OF THE INNER GLORY

Many of us were taught that the light of God shines upon us from outside of us. Our experience of the Lord's shining, however, is different from this. According to our experience, the light shines not from the outside but from within us. When you take Christ as your life and your person, do not expect the heavens to open and a great light

to shine upon you in an outward way. If your experience is like that of so many, the Lord's shining will be inward, a shining from within. Such a shining is an expression of the inner glory. Our hope of glory is Christ in us. 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.

#### **SWALLOWED UP BY CHRIST AS GLORY**

Contrary to the religious concept, our glorification will not be a sudden event. Rather, it will take place gradually as Christ expands within us and saturates us with Himself. Christ glorifies us as He "eats us up" little by little. We all need to be eaten, devoured, swallowed up, by Christ as the glory within us. Within us we have Christ not only as our life and our person but also as the very glory of God.

We may use the metamorphosis of an ugly caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly as an illustration of glorification. A caterpillar is not instantaneously transformed into a butterfly by a beauty that suddenly descends upon it and envelops it. No, the beauty of the butterfly is contained within the life of the caterpillar. As the law of this life functions within the caterpillar, the caterpillar is gradually transformed into a butterfly. As this process takes place, the beauty of the butterfly swallows up the ugliness of the caterpillar.

In the same principle, Christ is in us to be our hope of glory. As the indwelling glory, He takes every opportunity to expand within us. The inner glory saturates us and even swallows us up. One day our entire being will be saturated with the divine glory. On that day we will be brought into glory in a full way.

This is completely different from the religious teaching that tells us we must try to behave ourselves until someday when we hope to be suddenly transported into a realm of glory. According to the religious concept, we must try our best to please the Lord. If we are pleasing to Him, one day He will swoop down from heaven and carry us away to glory. What a contrast between this and God's economy! God's

economy is to dispense Christ into us. As believers, we have Christ in us as our glory. Our need is not to behave ourselves or to endeavor to please God; it is to take care of Christ as the hope of glory and to allow this glory to be our life and person.

#### **CHRIST COMING FROM WITHIN US**

What we have within us is not simply life or the Spirit but Christ Himself as the very glory of God. This Christ will present the church to Himself as a glorious church. However, He will do this not in a religious way but in the way that is according to God's economy. This means that He will expand within us and saturate us with Himself until we have been wholly swallowed up by the inner glory. Then He will come forth from within us.

Most Christians expect Christ to come from the heavens. I am very familiar with the verses that speak of this. On the one hand, Christ will come from the heavens. But on the other hand, much to the surprise of many, He will come from within us. Objectively, Christ is in the heavens, but subjectively and experientially, He is in us. As the One indwelling us, He will come from within us.

Since the day Christ came into us, He has been seeking a way to come out through us. It is easy for Him to get into us, but it is not easy for Him to get out of us. For example, we can easily sow a seed into the soil, but it takes time and it requires a process for this seed to grow out from the soil. Nevertheless, just as the seed eventually grows and comes out from the earth, so Christ eventually will saturate us, swallow us up, and then come out through us.

### **Section 2**

#### **THE CONTRAST BETWEEN RELIGION AND GOD'S ECONOMY**

Most Christians today miss the mark of God's economy because they are veiled by religious concepts. They simply do not know what God's economy is. The contrast between religion and God's economy can be illustrated by the Lord's human living. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, the temple with all its rituals, practices, and ordinances was still in Jerusalem.

In the temple the priests presented the offerings, burned the incense, and lighted the lamps. However, God was not in the temple—He was in the Lord Jesus. Sometimes the Lord stayed in the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary in Bethany. He visited with them and spoke with them in a normal, human way. Nevertheless, while He was in that house in Bethany, the priests continued to perform the rituals in the temple. With the priests in the temple we see the practice of religion, but with the Lord in Bethany we see God's economy. God's economy is to work Himself into man. His economy was carried out not in the temple but in that house in Bethany, for there Christ, the embodiment of the fullness of God, was present. Those who worshipped in the temple were practicing their religion, but Lazarus, Martha, and Mary enjoyed the presence of the Lord Jesus. The local churches today should not be like the temple in Jerusalem but should be like that home in Bethany. This means that the churches should not be places of religion but should be places where God's economy is being carried out.

Religion teaches that God will bring us into a sphere, a realm, of glory. According to the religious concept, the Lord will instantaneously transport us into this objective glory. Until then we must behave ourselves and seek to order our lives according to the Scriptures. In everything and in every way we must try our best to be scriptural. Then, according to this teaching, we will be qualified one day to be caught up into the realm of God's glory.

Contrast this concept with the economy of God. According to God's economy, the glory has already come into us and is now dwelling within us. This glory is the very Christ who is our life and our person. Christ will present a glorious church to Himself not by suddenly coming down upon the church but by expanding within the church until the church has been wholly permeated, saturated, and swallowed up with Himself. How different this is from trying to please God in an outward way! Glorification is altogether a matter of Christ's expanding within us and swallowing us up with Himself. This is God's economy.

Let us turn from religious teachings and give ourselves absolutely to God's economy. The

Bible reveals that in His economy God is working Christ into us. On the day we repented and believed in the Lord Jesus, Christ came into us as the element of glory. Now He is in the process of presenting a glorious church to Himself by spreading Himself within us. According to Ephesians 3:17, Christ's expanding within us is actually His making His home in our heart. Christ is saturating us and even "eating us up." This will go on until He comes out of us. By this process Christ is presenting the church to Himself as a glorious church.

### **NOT ONLY VICTORIOUS BUT ALSO GLORIOUS**

Ephesians 5:27 does not say that Christ will present to Himself a nice church or even a victorious church, but it says that Christ will have a glorious church. It is possible to be victorious without being glorious. Many books tell us how to be victorious, but I do not know of a book that tells us how to be glorious. Likewise, many messages have been given on the way to have victory. But have you ever heard a message about how to be glorious? Christ wants a glorious church, not merely a victorious one.

### **BACK TO THE INDWELLING CHRIST**

Not many of us have the confidence to say that we are glorious. The reason for this is that we realize that we have not given the Lord the full opportunity to saturate us and to come out through us. After receiving the Lord Jesus into us, many of us became distracted or snared by religious teachings. Instead of concentrating on the indwelling Christ, we paid attention to other things. Therefore, in the Lord's recovery we all must be brought back to the indwelling Christ. From the depths of our being we need to tell the Lord that we want to take Him as our life and our person and give Him the full ground within our being.

If the Lord were only in the heavens, He could not be our life and our person. But Christ is both in the heavens and in us. It is this indwelling One whom we must take as our life and person. When we do this, He makes His home in our heart. He expands in us, saturates us, and gradually swallows us up. Eventually, at the time

of His coming back, He will be fully expressed from within us. This is God's economy in life.

### **THE PROCESS OF GLORIFICATION**

In God's economy Christ is even now in the process of presenting the glorious church to Himself. As this process takes place, He is making His home in our heart by becoming our life and our person. In this way He saturates our inner being with Himself. It is not His intention to correct us, adjust us, or improve us. His aim is to glorify us. In order to achieve this goal, He is now carrying on the process of glorification within us.

No matter how nice, good, right, or victorious you may be, you are not yet glorious. Christ's intention is not to obtain a church that is nice, right, or good but to obtain a church that is altogether glorious. Hence, Christ cares only to glorify us by saturating us with Himself and by swallowing us up. Day by day He is devouring us and replacing us with the element of what He is. This process transpires in the depths of our being. Oh, how we need to experience such an intimate, personal Christ! Our Christ must not be a Christ in teaching but be a Christ making His home in our heart, a Christ saturating our being with His element.

### **A MUTUAL EATING**

A well-known hymn tells us to trust and obey. God's economy, however, is more than just trusting and obeying; it requires that we be "eaten up" by Christ. Christ wants us to eat Him, and He wants to eat us. Hence, in God's economy there is a mutual eating. My burden in this message is to point out that Christ's intention is to "eat us up." When we have been consumed by Christ in a full way, He will then present the church to Himself as a glorious church.

Do you know why the church today is not very glorious? The reason is that not many have allowed Christ to eat them up. If the church is to become glorious, we need to allow the indwelling Christ to consume every part of our inward being. According to verse 25, Christ gave Himself up for the church. Now He is working within us to saturate us and to come out of us. However, He does not intend to come out of us and leave us aside. On the contrary, He wants to come out of

us by saturating us and devouring us. We need to pray, "Lord Jesus, eat me up!" When Christ has finished consuming us inwardly, He will be able to boast to Satan, "Satan, look at My glorious church!"

The goal of God's economy is to gain a glorious church. God has predestined us unto glory (1 Cor. 2:7). This is not an objective glory but a glory that is subjective and experiential. Such a glory is actually the very Christ whom we eat and by whom we are being eaten up. Our desperate need today is to eat the Lord and to allow Him to consume us. Only in this way will the church become the glorious church for which Christ is longing.

### **[Section 3]**

Verse 15 says, "But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, Who is the Head, Christ." The fact that Paul begins this verse with the word "but" indicates that the truth in verse 15 is in contrast to the sleight of men, the craftiness, and the system of error in verse 14. Holding to truth in love is in contrast to the sleight of men and error in verse 14. To be carried away by the winds of teaching in the sleight of men unto a system of error is not holding to truth.

### **III. HOLDING TO TRUTH IN LOVE**

There is some disagreement among translators concerning the rendering of the Greek word for "holding to." Some prefer the translation "speaking." Those who advocate this translation regard truth in verse 15 as that which is opposed to a lie. Hence, to them speaking the truth is in contrast to telling lies. I do not say that this understanding is wrong. However, if we consider this verse in its context, we shall see that in its spiritual meaning a great deal more is involved here than merely speaking truth instead of lies.

#### **A. Truth**

Truth here means things that are true. According to the context, it refers to Christ and His Body. Both are true things. We should hold to these true things in love so that we may grow up into Christ.

To hold the truth in love is to handle the truth in love. The word truth in verse 15 denotes that which is real. In this universe the real things, the

true things, are Christ and the church. Only by speaking concerning Christ with the church do we actually handle the truth. This means that although we may refrain from telling lies, we still may not be speaking the truth. For example, certain reports in the newspapers may not be lies; however, these reports are not the truth, the reality. On the contrary, they are vanity. Anything apart from Christ with the church is a vanity and a falsehood. If I am a person without Christ, my very being is vanity. A person may be extremely wealthy and possess an abundance of material things, but if he does not have Christ, all those riches and material items are nothing but vanity. The book of Ecclesiastes says that all is vanity (1:2). Apart from Christ with the church, nothing is true, nothing is real. To those who love the Lord Jesus and who are for today's church life, the only reality in the universe is Christ with the church. Day by day, we may talk about many things. But if we do not speak concerning Christ and the church, we are handling vanity; we are not handling the truth.

Instead of being carried about by winds of teaching, we should handle the truth and embrace it. Suppose someone comes to you advocating a particular doctrine, such as the doctrine of foot-washing. Although his particular teaching may be true, even this true teaching can distract you from Christ and the proper church life. Thus, even something such as foot-washing may become a falsehood, a vanity. I know of a brother who became distracted and eventually dissenting over this very thing. This indicates that we may talk about scriptural doctrines but still not be handling the truth.

The entire fourth chapter of Ephesians is a chapter of truth. The first item of truth in this chapter is the oneness in two aspects: the oneness of the Spirit and oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. If you truly desire to handle the truth and to speak the truth, you must care for the oneness of the Spirit and the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. Furthermore, you must take care of Christ, who is the center of God's New Testament economy. God's economy today is nothing less than Christ with His Body. However, many Christians care neither for the Head nor for the Body. Instead, they are occupied by secondary teachings. To neglect Christ as the Head and the church as the Body and to speak about secondary matters is not handling the truth. This is not the speaking of the truth; it is the speaking of vanity.

Holding to truth in love means to handle, embrace, and speak Christ with the church.

Others may teach differently, emphasizing doctrines or opinions that distract people from Christ and the church. However, we should not speak in such a way. Rather, we should speak those things that bring us into contact with Christ and that build us up as the Body of Christ. To speak in this way is to handle the truth.

According to verse 14, the babes are tossed to and fro by waves and carried about by winds of teaching. No doubt these waves and winds refer to various teachings and practices. Although these teachings may be scriptural or fundamental, they do not minister Christ to people. Their effect is to distract people from Christ and the church. Others may be tossed or carried about by such teachings, but we must hold to the truth in love; that is, we must hold to Christ and the church. This is what we speak, and this is our fellowship. It should even be the focal point of our prayer.

## **B. Love**

In verse 15, Paul says that we should hold to truth in love. This is the love of Christ in us, by which we love Christ and the fellow-members of His Body. The love here is not our love, but the love of God with which He first loved us. Now with the very love with which God has loved us, we love the Lord and one another. It is in such a love that we hold to the truth, that is, to Christ with His Body.

If we speak about things other than Christ and the church, we are not acting in love. We may not only waste time, but also bring in elements that are foreign to the Body. If we truly love others, we shall be exercised to hold the truth and speak concerning Christ and the church. Instead of being influenced by the winds of teaching, we shall hold to Christ and the church in love.

## **[Section 4]**

## **II. GROWING UP**

### **A. Into the Head, Christ**

By holding to truth in love we grow up into Christ in all things. To be no longer babes (v. 14) we need to grow up into Christ. This is to have Christ increase in us in all things until we attain to a full-grown man (v. 13). The word Head here in verse 15 indicates that our growth in life with Christ should be the growth of the members in the Body under the Head.

The fact that we grow in Christ by holding to truth in love proves that holding to truth involves more than not telling lies. Do you believe that you can grow in Christ simply by telling the truth instead

of lies? This is not what enables us to grow in Christ. There are a good number of unbelievers who are honest and who do not tell lies. Nevertheless, their speaking of the truth does not cause them to grow up in Christ.

To grow up into the Head means that we care only for Christ and the church. We grow by caring only for Christ and the church, that is, by handling truth in love. We do not grow by some kind of honesty or sincerity related to ethical behavior.

In this verse the matter of growth is specifically related to growing up into Christ, the Head, in all things. Verses 13 through 16 all point to the need for growth. If we would be a full-grown man, we need to grow. Likewise, if we would be no longer babes tossed to and fro and carried about, we also need to grow. But we should grow up into Christ, not up into ourselves or into something else apart from Christ.

Paul clearly says that we are to grow up into the One who is the Head. This indicates that our growth must be in the Body. In order to grow into the Head, we must surely be in the Body. Many Christians are apparently growing spiritually; however, their supposed growth is not in the Body. I have known some Christians who have actually become more dissenting as they have had this kind of growth. It seems that the more they grow, the more critical they become. When they have relatively little growth, they are no problem in the church life. But as they grow, they become troublesome. This is an indication that their growth is not growth into the Head. As long as anyone's growth is not into the Head, it is not growth in the Body.

It is of great importance that Paul does not tell us to grow up into the Savior, into the Master, or into the Lord. He says specifically that we are to grow up into the Head. This can take place only in the Body. If you do not remain in the Body, you may have a certain kind of growth, but it will not be the growth into the Head.

### **B. In All Things**

In verse 15 Paul tells us that we must grow up into the Head in all things. In certain aspects you have grown up into the Head, but in other aspects you probably have not. According to my experience, the most difficult matter in which to grow up into Christ, the Head, is in our talking. Psalm 141:3 says, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips." Because it is so hard for us to control our speaking, we should make this our prayer also. Whether you are young or old, a brother or a sister, this is an area in which

all of us desperately need to grow up into Christ as the Head.

If we bring to the Lord this matter of growing up into Him in all things, we shall see that there are many small things in which we have not yet grown up into the Head. How much we still need to grow up into Christ! May this need for growth touch our heart and turn us afresh to the Lord.

## **III. OUT FROM THE HEAD**

Verse 16 says, "Out from Whom all the Body, fitted and knit together through every joint of the supply, according to the operation in measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love." Our growth in life is to grow into the Head, Christ, but our function in the Body is to function out from Him. Firstly, we grow up into the Head. Then we have something which is out from the Head.

Verse 16 indicates that growth is not for individuals, but for the Body. Any growth that is not for the Body is not genuine. The words "each one part" refer to every member of the Body. Every member of the Body of Christ has its own measure, and this measure works for the growth of the Body. The Body causes the growth of itself through the supplying joints and working parts. Both the joints of the supply and every single part with its measure are needed for the church to build itself up. The growth of the Body is the increase of Christ in the church. This results in the Body building itself up.

### **A. Every Joint of the Supply**

In this verse Paul speaks of "every joint of the supply." This refers to the specially gifted persons, such as those mentioned in verse 11. The article before the Greek word rendered "supply" is emphatic. It indicates that the supply should be a particular supply, the supply of Christ. As the leading ones, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers have the supply, the particular supply. Yes, we all can be today's sent ones. Nevertheless, among the saints there are those who have the particular supply. This supply is not common to all.

Once again we see the twofoldness of the truth in the Scriptures. It is correct to say that all the saints can do the work of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. However, not all have the particular supply spoken of in this verse. In the Body the leading ones are the joints with the particular supply.

### **B. Causing the Growth of the Body**

If we read verse 16 carefully, we shall see that it says that all the Body causes the growth of the Body. This means that the Body grows by the Body itself. The Body makes the growth of the Body. It is not wrong for churches to invite certain ones to come to minister the Word to them. However, a local church is not built up in this way. A local church must grow by the local church itself. Even a very small church must grow by itself. If you cannot cause the church in your locality to grow, then you should not be there as the church. Do not expect that visits from those brothers who share in the ministry of the Word will cause the growth of the church in your locality.

Verse 16 speaks of the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love. This indicates that a local church must build itself up in love through every joint of the supply and according to the operation of the measure of each one part. Those with the particular supply are not only in the Body as a whole, but also in the local churches, which are the practical expression of the one Body. Even if the number of saints in a church is very small, perhaps only fifteen, there will still be some with the particular supply. This should be an encouragement to every local church. Through the particular supply of the leading ones and through the operation in each part, the church will cause the growth of itself in love. In this way we shall see the growth of the members for the building up of the Body of Christ.

References:

Life-Study of Ephesians msg. 44 & 45