

**LESSON TWELVE**

**THE CHURCH – THE EXPRESSION AND OVERFLOW OF CHRIST**

**Scripture Reading:**

Section 1-2:

**Eph. 1:23** Which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

**Eph. 3:8** To me, less than the least of all saints, was this grace given to announce to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel

**Eph. 3:17** That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

**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. 5:18** And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissoluteness, but be filled in spirit,

Section 3-4:

**Eph. 1:23** Which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

**Eph. 3:19** And to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God.

**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,

**John 1:16** For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.

## **Questions:**

### **Section 1**

1. Why must the church be the expression of Christ and not of anything else?
2. How do the riches and the fullness of Christ relate to the expression of Christ?

### **Section 2**

1. What/Who should we pay attention to today in the church?
2. What/Who should be expressed in the meetings of the church and how can this be done?

### **Section 3**

1. In what ways do social organizations differ from the church?
2. What is the true focal point of God's eternal economy?
3. How is spiritual transformation different from outward adjustment?

### **Section 4**

1. What does it mean for Christ to "make His home in our hearts"?
2. How do we increase in the measure of this stature?
3. Why is it more important to receive Christ's fullness rather than just learn or imitate Him?

## **[Section 1]**

### **THE CHURCH—THE EXPRESSION OF CHRIST**

The church is the expression of Christ. It is not the expression of such things as doctrine, gifts, or power. Nevertheless, subconsciously or unconsciously, many think that the church should be characterized by the manifestation of spiritual gifts. Some believe that whenever Christians meet together there should be the exercise and demonstration of the so-called charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit. However, the book of Ephesians, a book on the church, does not mention this kind of gift. There is not a word in this Epistle about speaking in tongues or healing. When Paul speaks of gifts in Ephesians 4, he is referring to persons who are made gifts to the Body. For example, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers are gifts. As we have pointed out elsewhere, every member of the Body is a gift to the church. Hence, in Ephesians a gift is not what we have or what we do; it is what we are. To be such a gift is to be constituted with Christ as life. This causes our very being to become a gift to the Body.

### **INDIVIDUALISM AND DIVISIVENESS**

We thank the Lord for the many Christians who have been helped through the experience of charismatic gifts. However, we cannot agree with the claim that all Christians will become one if they have certain charismatic experiences. According to my experience and observation, those who emphasize the Pentecostal or charismatic experiences are the most divisive. The more certain believers exercise their spiritual gifts, the more individualistic and divisive they become. This is the reason that there have been so many divisions among those who stress spiritual gifts. In Christian meetings they may not care much for the edification of others, but care primarily for the manifestation of their own gifts. Some excuse their individualism by saying that they take heed only to God, not to man, and claiming that everything they do is of the Spirit's inspiration.

### **FILLED IN SPIRIT UNTO ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD**

In 1:22 and 23 Paul indicates that the church is the Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. The church is the fullness of Christ. In 3:8 Paul says that he preached the unsearchable riches of Christ. (Paul does not say here that he preached doctrine or gifts.) We need to know the difference between the riches of Christ and the

fullness of Christ. Most Christians confuse these terms, thinking that the riches of Christ are the same as the fullness of Christ.

In chapter three Paul goes on to speak of Christ making His home in our heart, with the result that we are filled unto all the fullness of God. Furthermore, in 4:13 he says that we need to arrive “at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” In 5:18 he says that we should be filled in our spirit. Surely this is related to being filled unto all the fullness of God. Such a filling takes place in our spirit, not in the mind. In 5:18 Paul is not saying that we are filled with the Holy Spirit; he is emphasizing the fact that we need to be filled in our spirit, even filled unto all the fullness of God.

In 5:18 Paul presents a contrast between being drunk with wine and being filled in spirit. To be drunk with wine is to be filled in the body, whereas to be filled in our regenerated spirit is to be filled with Christ unto all the fullness of God. To be drunk with wine in the body causes us to be dissipated, but to be filled with Christ, the fullness of God, causes us to overflow with Him in speaking, singing, psalming, and giving thanks to God (vv. 19-20) and to subject ourselves one to another (v. 21). How important it is for us to be filled in spirit unto all the fullness of God!

### **THE RICHES OF CHRIST AND THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST**

Let us now consider the difference between the riches of Christ and the fullness of Christ. The riches of Christ are what Christ is to us in all His divine attributes and human virtues. These riches are unsearchable. The fullness of Christ, the Body, issues from the enjoyment of the riches of Christ. Through the enjoyment of Christ’s riches, we become His fullness to express Him. Christ, who is the infinite God without limitation of any kind, is so great that He fills all things in all things. Such a Christ needs the church to be His fullness for His complete expression.

We have pointed out that the riches of Christ are unsearchable. Included in these riches is Christ’s divinity. He is the very God. Since Christ is the Son of God, another aspect of His riches is sonship. Furthermore, according to Isaiah 9:6, the Son is even called the eternal Father. This indicates that He has not only the sonship, but also the fatherhood. Second Corinthians 3:17 says that Christ the Lord is the Spirit. This is another item of Christ’s unsearchable riches. Other items include Christ as light, life, love, righteousness, holiness, humility, patience, and submission. How long the list would be if anyone

could enumerate all the aspects of the riches of Christ!

Christ’s riches need an expression. When these riches come forth to be expressed, that expression is the fullness of Christ. When Christ was incarnated, God’s riches were expressed. However, the incarnation by no means exhausted these riches. Rather, it was the overflow, the fullness, of the riches of God. Christ came forth from the bosom of the Father ( John 1:18 ). But His coming forth did not at all exhaust the divine riches in the Father’s bosom. On the contrary, the more that came forth, the more there was to come forth. Therefore, with Christ there were not only the riches, but also the fullness. For this reason, John 1:16 says, “For of His fullness we all received, and grace upon grace.” Christ is the fullness of the Godhead. When He came to earth, He was the overflow of the riches of God. Hence, He became the fullness of God. Not only were the riches within Him, but the very fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Him bodily ( Col. 2:9 ).

Christ is the fullness of God, and the church is the fullness of Christ. Christ’s riches are so extensive that not only is Christ Himself filled with them, but these riches also fill up the members of His Body, the church. As we are filled with Christ’s riches, we become His fullness. In this way the church becomes the fullness of Christ.

### **[Section 2]**

### **THE UNLIMITED EXPRESSION OF THE UNLIMITED CHRIST**

The fullness of Christ comes out of the enjoyment of the riches of Christ. For the church to have the riches of Christ and not the fullness of Christ would be an indication that Christ is limited. But the fact that the church not only has Christ’s riches but also is His fullness indicates that the Christ experienced and enjoyed by the church is unlimited. Limited riches cannot produce fullness. Only unlimited riches are capable of producing the fullness. As the expression of the unsearchably rich Christ, the church is the unlimited expression of the unlimited Christ. This means that the church is the fullness of Christ who is Himself the embodiment of the fullness of God. My burden in this message is simply to point out that the church must be such an expression of Christ.

### **BACK TO CHRIST**

The church is not the expression of anything other than Christ. We have seen that many Christians

are occupied with spiritual gifts. These gifts, however, are not Christ Himself. In like manner, doctrine and power are not Christ. Not even the Bible itself is Christ. Christ, a living and wonderful Person, is the embodiment of God. We should not allow anything to take the place of Christ. Spiritual gifts may be a means to partake of Christ, power may help us to realize Christ, and doctrines may be instruments used to impart Christ. However, many Christians allow gifts, power, teachings, and even the Bible to become substitutes for Christ. Instead of taking Christ and experiencing Christ directly, many devote their attention to gifts, power, and doctrine. This indicates that the means and the instruments that God intends to be used to gain Christ are actually used to replace Christ. The situation must be altogether different in the Lord's recovery. In the recovery, the Lord intends to bring us back to Himself, not to the various means or instruments. We thank the Lord for the gifts, the power, the teachings, and, in particular, for the holy Word. But most of all, we thank God for His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. God's intention is to bring us back to Christ, back from everything that has become a substitute for Him or has distracted us from Him. Therefore, when we Christians meet together, we should pay our attention not to the manifestation of gifts or even to the teaching of the Word, but to the expression of the living Christ. In the meetings we should not be concerned about the way of meeting, but with the expression of the living Christ.

### **CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD**

In the Lord's recovery we are fighting a battle. Primarily we must fight against the use of good things as substitutes for Christ. In his subtlety, the enemy, Satan, uses many things to attract people away from Christ. Some are distracted from Christ by teachings or by their concept of what is correct Bible doctrine. For this reason, some condemn the practice of calling on the name of the Lord. They claim that this is not according to Scripture. Some have accused us of inventing new ways of worship. Others have asked us why we cannot go along with the methods of worship that have been practiced by Christians for centuries. What is wrong with calling on the name of the Lord? It is not my intention to cause other Christians trouble. But the Lord has charged me to tell His people of the need to call on Him. This is not a new teaching. Such a practice is first spoken of in Genesis 4:26. This verse says, "Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord." This verse and dozens of other verses as well indicate that to call on the name of the Lord is certainly a scriptural teaching and practice. Verse after verse in both the Old Testament and

in the New Testament encourages us to call on the name of the Lord.

### **PRAY-READING**

Others are offended by pray-reading and criticize us for this practice. According to them, this is our invention. It is not my desire to argue with anyone about things such as this. However, I wish to point out that Ephesians 6:17 and 18 speak of taking the word of God by means of all prayer. Hence, if we are truly scriptural, we will take the Word not only by reading, studying, and searching, but also by praying. With verses such as Ephesians 6:17 and 18 before us, who can say that to pray-read the Word is not according to the Bible? How much we need to turn from the traditional understanding and come back to Christ Himself and to the pure Word of God! This is the Lord's recovery.

### **EXPRESSING CHRIST IN THE MEETINGS**

As Christians who live by Christ, whenever we come together we should follow the indwelling Spirit to express Christ. There is no need to have a set way in the meetings. The Spirit knows how to express Christ. In each meeting we should simply open to Him and follow Him. It is not always necessary to open the meeting with a hymn. Perhaps someone will stand and offer living praises to God. We should not come to the meeting according to our concept, for it is too much under the influence of religious tradition. However, if we would express Christ in the meeting, we need to experience Him in our daily life. Some have very little of Christ with which to function and to minister because they have little experience of Him. Hence, they are "pew members." In the meetings of the recovered church life, the saints who live by Christ need to express Christ in a living way. Only the Spirit knows the way to do this.

In some of the coming messages we shall consider the matter of speaking Christ to one another. Ephesians 5:18 and 19 exhort us to be filled in spirit, speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. We need to stand up to declare what Christ is to us and how we have experienced Him. In this way we shall speak Christ to one another, and Christ will be richly expressed in the meetings. Then in a very practical way the church will be filled unto all the fullness of God, with the overflow of all that God is. The church life will be not the expression of gifts, knowledge, or power, but the expression of the living Christ.

### [Section 3]

#### **THE FULLNESS OF THE VAST CHRIST**

The words “all in all” in 1:23 refer to the universe. Christ fills the entire universe. This is proved by 4:10 which says, “He Who descended is the same Who also ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things.” For Christ to fill all things is for Him to fill the universe. Christ is so universally vast that He fills all things. This vast Christ needs a Body to be His fullness.

The fullness of Christ is the overflow of Christ. Christ is so unsearchably rich that He has an overflow, a fullness, a surplus. As His Body, the church is Christ’s fullness, His surplus. This is a matter of great significance.

In God’s economy outward things have relatively little value. God’s economy is Christ with the church. The church comes into existence as we inwardly experience the riches of Christ and thus become His fullness.

#### **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND A SOCIAL ORGANIZATION**

There is a big difference between the church and a social organization. The church may seem to be a social group composed of different kinds of people. Worldly people view the church in such a way, as just another social organization. We need to see the difference between the church and a social club. Social clubs may have high requirements for their members. They may insist on superior standards of dress, behavior, and character. Outwardly, the members of such clubs may be better than the saints in the churches. However, no matter how good a club may be, it is merely a human organization. In contrast to the church, it has nothing of Christ. But the church is the overflow, the surplus, of Christ.

The members of a club may be regulated outwardly according to certain requirements. Those who fulfill these requirements may have a very good appearance in the eyes of man. In certain respects, they may seem better than those in the churches. However, in the eyes of God the best of human standards and behavior is nothing but dung. In the church we do not need outward improvement or correction. On the contrary, we need Christ to swallow up all our shortcomings with Himself. If the members of the church are short in certain respects, this indicates that they need more of Christ. We must resist the temptation to change the church into a social club with standards and regulations. This has nothing to do with the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ

is constituted solely of Christ wrought into the saints.

#### **THE FOCAL POINT OF GOD’S ECONOMY**

I am fully aware that in Ephesians, a book concerned with the church, Paul speaks about such things as wives submitting to their husbands, husbands loving their wives, children obeying their parents, and slaves obeying their masters. These things, however, are not the focal point of God’s eternal economy. God’s economy is not to have a good family life; it is to have a Body for Christ. If we are in the Body of Christ in a proper and practical way, we shall no doubt have a proper family life. However, we may have an outstanding family life and yet have nothing to do with the Body of Christ. I have known unbelievers whose family life was better than that of many Christians. Although the family life of these unbelievers was good, it had nothing to do with Christ or with God’s economy. It is crucial for us to see that the focal point of God’s economy is not a standard of character or behavior; it is Christ with the church.

In his subtlety, Satan, the enemy of God, has used such things as Bible knowledge, spiritual gifts, and evangelism to keep believers from seeing God’s economy. During the time of the Lord Jesus on the earth and of the Apostle Paul, Satan utilized the Old Testament to veil the Jewish people. When the Lord Jesus appeared to them as the very incarnation of God, they were not able to recognize Him. On the contrary, with the Scriptures in their hands, they sentenced the Lord Jesus to death. According to their concept, they were serving God in so doing.

Christians today should not regard themselves as superior to those Jewish religionists. It is entirely possible for Christians today to be deceived just as the Jews were. The enemy still uses the knowledge of the Bible to keep people from seeing Christ. Furthermore, he will use almost anything as a substitute for Christ and to keep people from seeing the revelation of God’s economy concerning Christ and the church.

#### **TRANSFORMED TO BECOME CHRIST’S OVERFLOW**

We have pointed out that the church is the overflow of Christ. In order to be in reality the overflow of Christ, we need to be transformed. Second Corinthians 3:18 says that as we behold and reflect the glory of the Lord with an unveiled face, we are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory. Yes, the saints still have their shortcomings and failures, but they are

nonetheless undergoing the process of transformation. The more we are transformed, the more we become the overflow of Christ.

It is easy to adjust people outwardly by asking them to conform to certain regulations. But it takes time for the divine life to grow within us. For example, in a very short period of time you can make an artificial flower. But to produce a real flower, a flower that has life and fragrance, may take several months. If we regulate others outwardly, we shall only delay the process of the growth in life. Therefore, we should be patient and allow the Lord to grow in the saints. Eventually, the growth in life will produce the desired change. This is the difference between the church and a social club.

As the Body of Christ, the church is a living organism constituted of the divine life. The divine life came into us at the time of regeneration, and now it is working within us to saturate every part of our being and to swallow up all our negative element. By this process the church becomes the Body in a practical way.

#### **[Section 4]**

### **EXPERIENCING CHRIST FOR THE CHURCH LIFE**

In the recovery the Lord is not working mainly to recover teachings, gifts, or practices. On the contrary, the recovery is a matter of experiencing Christ as life for the church life. If some feel that the goal of the Lord's recovery is the recovery of certain teachings and gifts, I would say that time will prove that this is a false expectation. More than ten years ago certain ones claimed that the Lord desires to recover the vast field of Pentecostal gifts. Those who made this claim were living in a dream, and they are no longer in the Lord's recovery. At the time I told them that they were dreaming and that if they would not wake up from their dream, they would suffer loss. They would be deceived by their dream. Those who did not give up that dream have in fact suffered loss spiritually. Today many of them are apart from the Lord's presence and grace.

The indwelling Christ can keep us safely in the way of the Lord. It is crucial that we all know the indwelling Christ and allow Him to make His home in our hearts. We should not desire to do a great work. Instead, we should be satisfied to allow Christ to live in us and for Him to use us to impart His element into others. If this is our situation, it is not we who work for the Lord, but Christ who does the work from within us. If we experience Christ in this way, then in reality and

in practicality the church will be the Body of Christ. The church as the Body comes out of Christ Himself, for it is His overflow, His surplus.

Some years ago I spent ten hours talking to a certain brother. He did not believe that the Lord's work could be accomplished by the indwelling Christ. Rather, his full confidence was in the recovery of Pentecostal gifts. I told this brother that the Lord does not intend to have a great movement. On the contrary, His move will be on a relatively small scale, perhaps, as it often is, in a hidden way. The Lord will not do anything that is out of proportion to His Body.

### **NO FOREIGN ELEMENT IN THE BODY**

Furthermore, anything that is of the Body of Christ must be of the life of Christ. For example, nothing artificial can truly be part of our physical bodies. Not even the best dentures are part of our bodies because they do not have the life of our bodies. Only what is produced by the life of our bodies can be part of our bodies. If you lose an arm, it may be replaced by an artificial limb, but that limb will not be a genuine part of your body. In the same principle, the Body of Christ must be of the life of Christ. There can be no foreign element in the Body. However, in today's Christianity there are many foreign elements or artificial things. None of these has anything to do with Christ as life. However, as we have pointed out, the church as the Body of Christ is the very fullness of Christ.

### **THE MEASURE OF THE STATURE OF THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST**

In 4:13 Paul says, "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." According to this verse, we need to arrive at three things: at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, and at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The fullness of Christ, which is the Body, has a stature, for Paul speaks of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The stature of the fullness of Christ is equal to the stature of the Body of Christ. Chapter one reveals that the Body of Christ is the fullness of Christ, and chapter four, that the fullness of Christ has a stature. Therefore, the stature of the fullness of Christ is the stature of the Body of Christ.

In 4:13 Paul speaks not only of the stature of the fullness of Christ, but of the measure of that stature. As the Body of Christ, the church has stature. Because this stature grows, 4:13 speaks

of its measure. This measure is the full-grown man.

In many believers the stature of the fullness of Christ has not grown very much. For this reason, with them there is very little measure. But as Christ grows within them, they will gradually increase unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. We need to press on until we all arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Presently we are on the way toward a full-grown man, toward the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The day is coming when we shall all arrive at a full-grown man. Until then, we are still in the process. Because we are in the process, Paul speaks of the time when we shall “be no longer babes tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching” (4:14).

As the Body of Christ, the church is the fullness that is daily growing within us. It is vital for us all to see that the church is an organism that comes out of Christ. Anything that is not of Christ cannot be part of the church. No matter how disciplined, regulated, or improved we may be, none of this is of the church if it does not issue out of Christ. Self-regulation, self-discipline, and self-improvement may produce an excellent society, but it cannot produce the church. As far as the Body of Christ is concerned, nothing that we have in ourselves has any significance. In relation to the Body, natural goodness is of no advantage. Whether we are good or evil, we still need Christ. Those who are evil surely need Christ. But those who are very good need Christ just as much. No matter what kind of disposition we may have, our natural being needs to be swallowed up and even consumed by the indwelling Christ. Then in reality we shall be the Body of Christ, His fullness.

### **RECEIVING OF HIS FULLNESS**

John 1:16 says, “For of His fullness we all received, and grace upon grace.” What is important is not that we merely learn about Christ or that we imitate Christ, but that we receive of His fullness. Christ is so rich that He has an overflow called the fullness. Of this fullness we may all receive grace upon grace. If we daily receive of His fullness, we shall eventually become His fullness, for we shall be constituted according to what we have received. This means that the more we receive of His fullness, the more we shall be constituted of His fullness and become His fullness. If we see this, we shall say, “Lord, save me from anything that is not Your fullness. Lord, I am willing to pay any price to

enjoy You and to partake of Your fullness.” May the Lord be merciful to us that we may daily experience Him and enjoy Him and thereby become the church that is His very fullness, His overflow.

### **References:**

Life-Study of Ephesians msg. 81 & 82