

THE RECOVERY OF THE CHURCH

(Saturday—First Morning Session)

Message Seven

The Status of the Church—the Body of Christ

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:22-23; 4:16; Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; 14:26

I. Ephesians 1:22 and 23 reveal that the church is the Body of Christ:

- A. The church is not an organization but an organic Body constituted of all the believers, who have been regenerated and have God's life, for the expression of the Head—John 3:3, 5-6, 15; 1:12-13; 1 John 5:11-12.
- B. The Body is the fullness of the Head, and the fullness is the expression of the Head—Eph. 1:22-23.
- C. Christ, as the One who fills all in all, needs the Body to be His fullness; this Body is the church to be His fullness—3:10; 1:22-23; 4:10.
- D. The church is the Body of Christ, and Christ is the Head of the church (Col. 1:18; 2:19); hence, the church and Christ are one Body, the mysterious, universal great man (3:10-11; Eph. 2:15; 4:24), having the same life and nature:
 1. Christ is the life and content of the Body, and the Body is the organism and expression of Christ—Col. 3:4; 1:18; 2:19; Rom. 12:4-5.
 2. As the Body, the church receives everything from Christ; therefore, everything of Christ is expressed through the church—Eph. 1:22-23; 3:8, 10.
 3. The two, Christ and the church as His Body, are mingled and joined as one, with Christ being the inward content and the church being the outward expression—vv. 16-21.

II. We need to see clearly how the Body of Christ has been formed:

- A. In Christ's resurrection the processed and consummated Triune God has been wrought into His chosen people—John 20:22; 1 Cor. 15:45b; 6:17; 1 Pet. 1:3.
- B. In Christ's ascension the all-inclusive, compound Spirit, as the consummation of the processed Triune God, descended upon His chosen people—Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; 2:4, 32-33.
- C. Within them God's chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people have Christ as the embodiment of the processed and consummated Triune God, and upon them they have the consummated Spirit—John 20:22; Luke 24:49.
- D. In this way the believers in Christ become the Body of Christ, an organism produced through the mingling of the processed and consummated Triune God with the transformed tripartite man—1 Cor. 12:13, 27; Eph. 5:30.

III. The reality of the Body of Christ is the Spirit of the reality of the Triune God—4:4; John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13-14; 1 John 5:6:

- A. Reality refers to the real condition of persons and things.
- B. The Body of Christ is the church, and all its reality is the Spirit of the reality of the consummated Triune God—Eph. 1:22-23; 4:16; John 16:13-14:

1. The reality of the processed Triune God is His consummated Spirit of reality—14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:6.
2. The reality of all that the Triune God is, has, and can do is this Spirit of reality—John 16:13-14.
3. The reality of the death and resurrection through which the Triune God has passed is also in the Spirit of reality—Eph. 2:5-6.
4. The Spirit of reality makes everything of the processed Triune God a reality in the Body of Christ—1 John 5:6; Eph. 4:4.
5. All that the Triune God is, including righteousness, holiness, life, light, power, grace, and all the divine attributes, are realized by the Spirit of reality to be the real attributes of the Body of Christ—Rom. 15:16b; 14:17; Eph. 3:16-17a.
6. These attributes have been realized in the church by the Spirit in the Body of Christ; the church therefore possesses the reality of the divine attributes—4:24; Col. 3:12-15.
7. All that the Triune God in Christ experienced, including incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, are likewise realized by the Spirit of reality to be the real experiences of the Body of Christ—Rom. 6:3-6; Phil. 3:10.

IV. The church as the Body of Christ is the corporate Christ—1 Cor. 12:12:

- A. In 1 Corinthians 12:12 *the Christ* is not the individual Christ but the corporate Christ, the Body-Christ, composed of Christ Himself as the Head and the church as His Body, with all the believers as its members:
 1. The Bible considers Christ and the church as one mysterious Christ; the two have been joined together to become one mysterious Christ, the Body-Christ—Eph. 5:32.
 2. All the believers of Christ are organically united with Him and constituted of His life and element to become His Body, an organism, to express Him—Rom. 12:4-5; Col. 3:4, 15.
- B. As a vine includes not only the stalk but also the branches, so the corporate Christ, the Body-Christ, includes not only Christ Himself but also the members of Christ's Body, who are the members of Christ, parts of Christ—John 15:1, 4-5; Eph. 5:30; 1 Cor. 12:27; Rom. 12:5:
 1. Christ is the element, the factor, that makes us parts of Him—Col. 3:10-11.
 2. In order to be parts of Christ, members of His Body, we must have Christ wrought into our being—Gal. 1:15-16; 2:20; 4:19; Eph. 3:16-17.
 3. The church can be the Body of Christ, the corporate Christ, only as the members are constituted of Christ, possessing His life and nature—Col. 3:4, 10-11.
- C. The baptism into the one Body has positioned us all to drink of the one Spirit, and by drinking of the Spirit, we are constituted to be the Body, the corporate Christ—1 Cor. 12:13:
 1. By drinking the Spirit, we experience the dispensing of the Divine Trinity into our being and are constituted to be the Body.
 2. The more we drink the one Spirit, the more the divine element becomes our constituent to make us the one Body, the Body-Christ—vv. 12-13.

V. For the building up of the Body of Christ, we need to practice the scriptural way to meet and to serve—14:26; Heb. 10:24-25:

- A. Without the biblical way for us to meet and to serve, the way that is shown in the New Testament, the Lord's words concerning the building up of the church cannot be fulfilled—Matt. 24:35; 16:18; Eph. 4:11-16.
- B. If 1 Corinthians 14:26 and Hebrews 10:24-25 are not fulfilled, there is no way for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ.
- C. The scriptural way to meet and to serve, with all the saints functioning as living members of the Body of Christ, is versus the traditional way, the natural way, to meet and to serve, which is in the principle of the clergy-laity system—Rev. 2:6, 15:
 - 1. The traditional way fits man's natural and fallen condition, is religious, and accommodates the dead man's taste—cf. Matt. 25:23-30.
 - 2. The traditional way binds and annuls the organic function of the living members of Christ and chokes and kills the members of Christ—Rev. 2:6.
 - 3. The scriptural way is spiritual, fits the taste of the living and spiritual man, and requires us to be living and in the spirit—John 4:23-24; Acts 13:52; Gal. 5:16; Rom. 8:4; 2 Tim. 1:6-7.
 - 4. The scriptural way is able to develop the organic ability and function of the members of Christ and able to build up the Body of Christ—Eph. 4:12-16.
- D. The Lord desires to recover the organic building up of the Body of Christ:
 - 1. The organic building up of the Body of Christ is the increase of the Triune God in the believers for their growth in Christ—Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:15-16.
 - 2. The Lord desires to recover the church meetings in mutuality with all prophesying (speaking for the Lord) for the building up of the church; prophesying is the excelling way to dispense the riches of Christ into God's people for the organic building up of the Body of Christ—1 Cor. 14:4b, 12, 31; cf. Matt. 16:18.

Excerpts from the Ministry

EXPERIENCING THE BODY-CHRIST

Being Knit Together

Colossians 2:2 says, "That their hearts may be comforted, they being knit together in love and unto all the riches of the full assurance of understanding, unto the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ." Having our hearts knit together is a Body matter. We cannot enjoy Christ adequately until our heart is knit together with the hearts of all the saints. We can gain a little of Christ as individuals, but we can gain much more as the church. We need to come together as the church in a united, knit-together way, having our heart and mind knit together with all the saints. If the church decides to do something that we do not agree with, we should not be dissenting but should simply go along with the church. As a result, we will see the Lord's blessing. If the church remains one, it will receive a great blessing. The Lord knows how to care for His Body, and we need to care for the oneness of His Body. We should never be dissenting against the church but should always be knit together with the church. If we are knit together with the church, we will have the full assurance of understanding and the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ.

Receiving and Walking in the Corporate Christ

Verse 6 says, "As therefore you have received the Christ, Jesus the Lord, walk in Him." The One in whom we need to walk is the incorporated God. To receive Christ is to receive the Body-Christ, because Christ today is a corporate Body (1 Cor. 12:12). We need to receive this Christ.

Regrettably, however, many Christians today would say that they care only for Christ and not for the church. If we care only for Christ and not for the church, we can gain only a limited portion of Christ. We can gain much more of the riches of Christ when we care for both Christ and the church. Thus, we need to pray, "Lord Jesus, I care for You, and I care also for Your Body, because I know that You are the Head and that the church is the Body. I cannot have the Head without the Body." We should pray, "Lord Jesus, I know that today You are no longer only the individual Christ but also the corporate Christ, the Head with the Body. You are the Body-Christ. Therefore, Lord Jesus, I receive You as well as Your Body. I receive the Body-Christ, and I desire to walk in this Christ."

It makes a great difference in our Christian life to walk in the corporate Christ. Most Christians today have been robbed of the riches of Christ. Most are spiritually poor and weak simply because they care only for Christ and not for the church.

Many of us in the Lord's recovery can testify that since the day we came into the church and began to care for the church, there has been a great difference in our spiritual life. We have the inner sense that we are rich. Everyone in the church is a spiritual billionaire; we are all rich.

The Church Being Composed of the Unsearchable Riches of Christ

Colossians 2:9 says, "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." In the Body-Christ, whom we have received and in whom we are walking, dwells all the fullness of the Godhead. Because all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ, He is unsearchably rich. Thus, Paul says in Ephesians 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." In order to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, Paul was given not a miraculous gift but grace. To preach doctrine, we need a gift. However, to preach Christ Himself with all His unsearchable riches, we need grace, which is Christ Himself.

When by grace we preach all the unsearchable riches of Christ, the church is produced (v. 10). The church is produced by, with, and out of all the riches of Christ. How rich, weighty, and high the church is depends upon how much we enjoy the riches of Christ. The church is a composition of all the riches of Christ. Paul preached the riches of Christ so that the church may be produced.

Calling on the Lord and Pray-reading to Partake of the Riches of Christ

The way to partake of the riches of Christ is to call on the name of the Lord at every time. First Corinthians 15:45 reveals that Christ is the life-giving Spirit. The Lord's person comes when we call on His name, and His person is the life-giving Spirit. Jesus is the name, and the Spirit is the person (2 Cor. 3:17). Thus, we receive the Spirit by calling, "O Lord Jesus!"

Furthermore, Romans 10:6-8 reveals that Christ is the living Word. Christ is not only the life-giving Spirit but also the Word of life (1 John 1:1). We need to identify the living Word with the written word to make these two words one. We can do this by calling on the

name of the Lord, the living Word, when we are pray-reading the Bible, the written word. Reading alone will not cause us to enjoy the riches of Christ. Jeremiah 15:16 says, “Your words were found and I ate them.” The way to eat the word is to pray-read. We breathe the Spirit by calling on the name of the Lord, and we eat the word by pray-reading. The Lord has shown us a wonderful way to feed on His word. By pray-reading we receive nourishment (Eph. 6:17-18).

To call on the name of the Lord is to breathe the Spirit into us, and to pray-read is to eat the word, which is Christ. All that Christ is, is embodied in the word (1 Cor. 15:45b; John 6:63; 15:4, 7). For this reason we are nourished when we take in the word. It is not sufficient simply to breathe Jesus; we also need to eat Jesus. When we call on the name of the Lord and pray-read, we receive the Spirit as our spiritual breath and the word as our spiritual food. In this way we are nourished and enjoy all the riches of Christ.

Calling and Pray-reading Corporately

We should learn to call on the Lord and pray-read not only by ourselves but also with others. At home we can do this with our spouse. I often enjoy the Lord in this way with my wife. A person cannot have a feast by eating alone. We may have many dishes on the table, but if we are eating alone, that is not a feast. A feast requires a group of people to come together to eat. Eating in a corporate way is a great enjoyment. We partake of much more of the riches of Christ when we enjoy Him with others than when we enjoy Him alone. Whenever possible, we should call on the Lord and pray-read with the saints.

We also need to call and pray-read with the whole church. First Corinthians 12:13 says, “In one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body...and were all given to drink one Spirit.” Drinking is not only an individual matter but also a Body matter. We have all been positioned to drink by being baptized into one Body. The position for drinking is in the Body. We need to drink in the Body by coming to the church meetings to call and pray-read together with all the saints.

Being Strengthened to Apprehend with All the Saints the Vast Dimensions of Christ

Ephesians 3:8-10 shows that Paul preached the riches of Christ, from which the church is produced. Eventually, in verse 17 Paul prayed, “That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith.” This verse mentions many hearts but only one home. This is the Body.

Verses 17 through 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.” By ourselves we do not have sufficient strength. We need to be with all the saints to be strengthened with power to apprehend the dimensions of Christ. The dimensions of Christ—the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth—are immeasurable and unsearchable. The universe is immeasurable, and the immeasurable dimensions of the universe are the dimensions of Christ.

Being Filled unto All the Fullness of God

Verse 19 goes on to say, “To know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God.” We need to be strengthened to apprehend with all the saints the dimensions of Christ so that we may be filled unto all the fullness of God. Being filled unto all the fullness of God is the experience of the Body-Christ. It is impossible for us to be filled unto all the fullness of God individually. For this we need the church.

The Lord's Recovery Today Being the Recovery of the Body-Christ

Before the Lord comes back, He will recover the Body-Christ. To participate in all the riches of Christ, we need the Body. To drink of the all-inclusive Spirit, we also need the Body. For this reason, it is wonderful that we are in the church. The Lord's recovery today is absolutely and altogether the recovery of the Body-Christ in the church life. The Body-Christ is all-inclusive. Our experience confirms this. When we come to the church and participate in the church life, we sense that we are home and are satisfied. We are satisfied in the church life because here we have a foretaste of the New Jerusalem. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1973-1974*, vol. 1, "The Vision and Experience of the Corporate Christ," pp. 495-499)

THE TOP ENJOYMENT OF CHRIST BEING THE ENJOYMENT OF THE CORPORATE CHRIST, THE BODY-CHRIST

Many Christians may feel that the Sunday morning service is too poor and that because of this it is more profitable to stay home and study a good reference Bible with concordances, word studies, and notes. This is not bad; it is better than nothing. However, whoever does this will not receive as much enjoyment of the Lord as he could receive in a meeting of the church. Regardless of how much we enjoy Jesus in our personal study of the Bible, we still cannot enjoy the corporate Christ in this way. In order to enjoy the corporate Christ, the Body-Christ, we need to come to the church meetings. We must be in the Body in a practical way. First Corinthians 12:13 says, "For also in one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit." To be given to drink is to be positioned to drink, which, according to the whole verse, is to be put into the Body. If we stay away from the meetings yet still try to pray-read, call on the Lord, and even shout, we will have a certain amount of enjoyment, but this enjoyment will be restricted and limited. It is difficult to make a fire with only one piece of wood. It is better to have many pieces. Then one piece will burn another. When one person says, "O Lord," another says, "Hallelujah," and a third person says, "Amen," we burn one another. We strengthen, minister to, and supply one another. In this way we enjoy not only the Head but the Head with the Body, and not only the individual Christ but the corporate Christ, the Body-Christ.

First, verse 12 tells us that just as the body has many members but is one body, so also is the Christ. Then verse 13 begins with the word *for*, indicating that it is a continuation, definition, and explanation of the foregoing verse. All the members are one Body, and this Body is Christ, because in one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body. As we pointed out before, without our spirit our body would be a corpse. When the spirit leaves the body, the body decomposes. However, with our spirit still in our body, the many members of our body are living and are one. It is our spirit that keeps all the members joined as one. In the same way, we as the many members of the Body of Christ are one because we have been baptized in the Spirit. Moreover, the one Spirit in whom we have been baptized is Christ, who became the life-giving Spirit. Therefore, the Body is Christ, and Christ is the Body.

We have all been positioned in the Body to drink of the one Spirit. Again, this one Spirit is the life-giving Spirit, who is Christ. We have been put into Christ, the life-giving Spirit, and we have been positioned in the Body. Now, since we are in the Body, we need to drink this one Spirit, who is Christ. Eventually, we are filled, flooded, saturated, and permeated by the Spirit. Therefore, we are one with one another and with Christ as one Body, which is Christ Himself.

When we enjoy Christ, we enjoy the Body, including all the members. For more than forty

years I have been continually enjoying the Body-Christ in a corporate way. Without the Body, I could try to declare that Christ is rich, but eventually I would no longer be able to speak. When I am with the Body, however, the more I speak, the more I have something to speak. This is because the more my speaking supplies the Body, the more I am supplied by the Body. While I am ministering to the Body, the Body is ministering to me. If the saints were to listen to my speaking without responding, the supply of the Body would be cut off from me, and I would not be able to speak. Without the supply of the Body, I have nothing with which to supply the Body. On the other hand, if while I am speaking, all the members are responding, the Body is ministering to me. Then there is a current, a circulation, in the Body-Christ. Today we are enjoying the Body-Christ.

Many good teachers have pointed out that in 1 Corinthians Christ is power, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption, the deep things of God, the foundation, our Pass-over, our spiritual food, spiritual drink, and spiritual rock, and the Head. However, most teachers would not tell us that Christ is the life-giving Spirit or that He is the Body-Christ. We are enjoying Christ all the way from the power and wisdom of God to the firstfruits, the second man, the last Adam, the life-giving Spirit, and the Body. Moreover, the issue of the enjoyment of all the items of Christ is the Body-Christ. The Body-Christ comes out of the full enjoyment of the riches of Christ. To enjoy Christ as the power of God is wonderful, but it cannot compare with the enjoyment of Christ as the Body-Christ. To enjoy Christ as power is to enjoy Him in one aspect, but to enjoy Him as the Body-Christ is to enjoy Him in fullness.

Our enjoyment of the Body-Christ is the reason we sing, “We come together—there’s nothing better” (*Hymns*, #1196). Coming together as the Body-Christ is better than waiting for a heaven that is far away and in the future. In the church we come together here and now. There is nothing better than this, because nowhere else can we enjoy the Body-Christ. If we stay at home, we may be able to enjoy Christ as our power, wisdom, or other items, but in order to enjoy the Body-Christ, we must be in the church. We may miss many other things, but we should not miss one meeting of the church. It is in the church that we are in the position to drink the Body-Christ, the Christ who is the life-giving Spirit in the Body. There is no other place to drink the Body-Christ but in the coming together of the church. Even in the meetings of the local churches we do not enjoy Christ as much as we do in the conferences of the churches. In the conference meetings we enjoy an even greater Body-Christ. Therefore, it is worthwhile to pay the price to come to the conferences. We cannot obtain such an enjoyment anywhere else. Hallelujah, in the church we enjoy the Body-Christ! (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1973-1974*, vol. 1, “The Enjoyment of Christ for the Body in 1 Corinthians,” pp. 185-188)