Witness Lee

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Living Stream Ministry
Anaheim, CA • www.lsm.org

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Scripture Reading: Eph. 3:14-19

There are three main aspects in God's eternal plan for the church. First, it is the church that must have the sonship to express God; second, it is the church through which Satan will be defeated and put to shame; and finally, it is the church through which Christ will head up all things. God's plan is for the church to gain His life in full! The sonship is not just the birth of life, but the growth of life unto maturity. This means that God has to work Himself into us and make us not only His sons, but His heirs to inherit all that He is and all that He has, that He might be expressed. Then through this life all things will be headed up under the headship of Christ.

First of all, there is the matter of life; then there is the building. The purpose of the building is to bring us all into the proper order in life under the headship of Christ. It is through our being built up in life that God can put His enemy to shame. Then God has the ground to make His

multifarious wisdom known to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies.

It is for this purpose that God created the universe with the heavens and the earth. In the center of His creation, God created man as the vessel to contain Himself. God's intention was to put Himself as life and everything into this man in order to have many sons. We all know that the son is one who inherits everything from the father. Whatever the Father is and has will be imparted into His sons. First, God created us, and then He begot us through regeneration. By creation He brought us into existence, and by begetting us He imparted Himself into us as our life.

For this purpose God created us with a human spirit. The human spirit is just like the element of a light bulb. Without the element in the bulb, the bulb cannot receive electricity. The bulb must have the element within to be the recipient or the receiver of the electricity, and it is also that same element which enables the bulb to express the electricity. The bulb also has an outward form just as the body is our outward form. Within our body there is the spirit, just as within the outward form of the bulb, there is the element for the bulb to receive, to contain, and to express the electricity.

We are the containers made by God; therefore, He purposely created a spirit within us in order to receive Him, to keep Him, and to express Him. God in Christ as the Holy Spirit spreads Himself outward from our spirit to all the parts of our being. God does not work from the outside, in an inward direction into man, but from man's spirit He spreads Himself outward in order to permeate and saturate all of man's inward parts. He will saturate the conscience, the mind, the emotion, the will, and eventually our whole being. When God came into our spirit, we received the birth of life; and by His spreading from our spirit through our whole being, we will obtain the growth of life to full maturity. Even the body will be transfigured at the time of the full sonship. It is through this that we all will be brought into order as a corporate man under the headship of Christ. Within this corporate man, God in Christ is the Head and, as sons, we are the Body brought into order under His headship. Then, through this Body, Christ as the Head will head up all things.

However, we must see the subtlety of the enemy in distracting man away from God's eternal purpose. Upon the earth today there are three classes of people—the Gentiles, who are

the unbelievers; God's chosen people, the Jews; and the Christians, the members of the church. All three classes have been distracted from God's economy by the enemy, Satan.

In order for man to exist, God prepared many material things, including food, water, clothing, housing, and many other things. But today, all the unbelievers have been distracted by these material things. They pay their full attention to food, shelter, and clothing, along with their material way of life. All the Gentiles are distracted from God's central mark by the material things; they are fully drawn to the material things. Whether they are poor or rich, high or low, all of them have been distracted to material things which God prepared for their existence only that they might fulfill His purpose. All of these material things should be simply a means for man to fulfill God's purpose, but Satan has utilized them to distract the unbelievers from God's purpose.

Then God gave the Jewish people certain spiritual knowledge in the Old Testament, revealing His law and will, with the intention that these Scriptures might be a help for them to know God's plan in Christ. But Satan has utilized even the Old Testament to distract the Jewish people

from Christ. If we read the four Gospels carefully, there is a clear illustration of how the scribes and Pharisees were distracted from Christ by the Scripture. In John 5:39-40, the Lord told them, "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that testify concerning Me. Yet you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." They were distracted to the Scriptures and away from Christ by the subtlety of the enemy. So not only have the Gentiles been distracted from God's eternal purpose, but even the Jews, the chosen people of God, have been distracted.

When we come to the New Testament, there is something more. Satan utilized even the doctrines of the New Testament and all the gifts given by God to distract people from Christ unto the so-called gifts and teachings. If we look at the whole situation, we will realize that everything prepared and given by God for the purpose of fulfilling His economy has been utilized by the enemy to distract people from God's economy.

The so-called Christian churches of today have the Old and New Testaments, and they claim to have so many gifts, but if we have the heavenly vision of God's eternal purpose for the church, we will weep over the situation. Not

just the Gentiles and the Jews, but even Christian people are distracted from Christ and His Body unto something else. Even fundamental Christianity tells us only that God loves us and sent His Son to die on the cross in order to save us from hell. If we believe in Him, we will be saved, our sins will be forgiven, and one day we will go to heaven. This is right in a sense, but have you ever heard a message telling how God's intention is to work Himself into us through Christ as the Spirit, that Christ might be expressed through His Body and head up the whole universe under His headship? Such a concept is not even found in fundamental Christianity. All most Christians know is that God loves us; and if we believe in Him, some day we will go to dwell with Him in heaven after we die. It is really pitiful! Some Christians who say that this is not enough are looking for the manifestations of gifts to prove that God is powerful. But they still neglect God's central thought. I do not believe that they have ever seen the vision of God's economy.

I realize that we need food, water, housing, jobs, and transportation, but we are not for these things. These things must be for us! If we seek God's kingdom and His righteousness, God will

take care of all of these things (Matt. 6:31-33). All of these things must be for us, and we must be for God's purpose. We can testify after many years of experience that if we will take care of God's purpose, God will take care of our needs. He is so faithful in this matter. If we will take care of His interest, He will take care of us. Also, the Scriptures and the gifts are for God's economy. All the teachings and ministries must be for God's purpose.

In Ephesians, the major Epistle concerning the church, there is no mention of material things, knowledge, or gifts. In the fourth chapter, the gifts mentioned are the gifted persons, such as the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. Tongues, healing, and other so-called spiritual gifts are not mentioned. This book does not tell us of material things, knowledge, or gifts, but of the unsearchable riches of Christ, who is the Spirit. This is not an outward Christ but an inward Christ, because He must make His home in us.

Ephesians 3:17 says, "That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith." He has to be our life, and we must be His home. It is not our body that is to be His home, but our heart. The heart is composed of all the parts of the soul

and one of the parts of the spirit, the conscience. Therefore, the heart includes the mind, emotion, and will, plus the conscience. Christ is now in our spirit, but He is seeking to make His home in our heart. Then we will be filled unto all the fullness of God. It is not material things nor knowledge nor gifts nor any outward manifestations, but the fullness of God!

Chapter one of Ephesians mentions the sealing of the Holy Spirit (v. 13). The Holy Spirit has been put into us as a seal. This is not something outward but something inward. Then in chapter two, there is the new man created by Christ and in Christ (v. 15). Christ created in Himself one new man of the Jews and the Gentiles. The church is an entity which comes entirely out of Christ, just as Eve came out of Adam. She was a part of Adam and was taken out of Adam. The new man, which is the church, is a part of Christ and is taken out of Him. Chapter three tells us of the riches of the Christ who would make His home in our hearts. Then chapter four shows us how to grow on the basis of the experiences of the unsearchable riches of Christ mentioned in chapter three. By these experiences, we will arrive at the full stature of Christ. In this way we will not be carried away by the winds of doctrines or

teachings. Please note that Paul does not say the wind of heresy, but the wind of teaching. We will not be carried away by the winds of different teachings, but we will grow into Christ in all things. Then we will receive something from Christ as the Head to share with others, and the church will be built up.

After I was saved, like so many other young Christians, I was hungry for scriptural knowledge. At that time I met a certain group of believers who stressed the knowledge of the Bible, so I spent a lot of time with them seeking the knowledge of the Scriptures. About six or seven years after this, in North China there was a movement called the Spiritual Grace movement. It was so prevailing that in just a few years it shook all of North China. Thousands of people were saved, and there were many tongues, miracles, and signs. I went to them and studied the situation, but eventually I was made clear by the Lord that they could never build up the Body of Christ in that way. Therefore, the Body of Christ cannot be built up by knowledge; neither can it be built up by the gifts, or the so-called supernatural manifestations. I was not clear at that time about the book of Ephesians, but through experience I was made clear by the Lord that the church could be

built only by Christ as our life. The church can be built up only by experiencing Christ, not by knowledge or gifts. Knowledge and gifts help somewhat, but the church can never be built up by these things. It has to be built by Christ.

In this book about the church, there is no mention of gifts or knowledge, but only of the unsearchable riches of Christ, who would make His home in our hearts. In the New Testament, there is some ground for gifts and knowledge, miracles and signs, but the main way for the Body of Christ to be built up is by Christ Himself as our life. In a certain sense, I will admit the need of the knowledge and the gifts, but so many Christians will not admit their need of the inner experience of Christ. This is the problem. I know they may need some medicine, but they will not admit that they need some solid food. How many messages about the inner experiences of Christ have you heard since you have been a Christian? Yet nearly every chapter in the book of Ephesians deals with this matter.

Today, so many Christians say that the book of Ephesians is the book for the church, yet they neglect the key, which is the inner experience of Christ. If we do not have the inner experience of Christ, we cannot have the reality of the church.

The book of Ephesians is the heart of the Scriptures, and the heart of this book is in chapter three, verses 16-19. Let us look into these verses again, beginning from verse 14 in order that we may have a clearer vision. The apostle begins by saying, "For this cause…." What is the "cause"? Of course, it is the very cause which he has already mentioned in the previous verses and chapters—that God planned and predestinated the church to have the sonship in order to have God expressed, to make God's wisdom known to the enemy, and to head up all things in Christ. Paul says that it is "for this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (KJV). Paul bows his knees for the cause of God's eternal purpose that God would grant the saints to be strengthened in the inner man. The inner man, our human spirit which has been regenerated and indwelt by Christ, must be strengthened.

We know that God has created man with three parts—the spirit, the soul, and the body. If I were to ask, "According to your own understanding, which part is the strongest?" I believe

that everyone who is honest would say that the soul is the strongest, because the soul is the very self. The soul also is of three parts—the mind, the emotion, and the will. Now of the three parts of the soul, which is the strongest? I think we all would agree that the strongest part is the mind. We are very strong in the mind, and our spirit is very, very weak. It is easy to prove this. If we were to have a time of discussion, everyone would talk, because our minds are so strong and active. But if someone says, "Let us pray," everyone will be silent. Immediately the room will become as silent as a cemetery. The reason for our silence is that we are weak in the inner man—that is, we are weak in the spirit.

For this reason the apostle Paul does not pray lightly. For the cause of God's purpose and for the cause of the church, he bowed his knees that the Father would grant us to be strengthened in the inner man. Our spirit must be strengthened. There is no need for discussion. The more we talk and argue, the more we exercise our mind. Our mind has been overdeveloped, yet we still continue to develop it. When any cell of the body is overdeveloped, it becomes a cancer, which brings in death. It would be so profitable if we changed our talking and discussion into

prayer! We need to forget about our thoughts, imaginations, understandings, and concepts, and bow our knees before the Father to exercise our spirit to pray—not just once, but constantly!

In order to exercise our spirit to pray, we must repent. The word *repentance* in Greek means "to turn the mind." When we repent by turning our mind away from other things to the Lord, our conscience will be exercised to bear witness where we are wrong and concerning what we specifically need to confess. By repentance we turn our mind to the Lord, and by confession we exercise our conscience. The mind and the conscience are the two main parts of the heart. And since the heart surrounds the spirit, it is the very gateway of the spirit. It is by repentance and confession that the two main parts of the heart, the mind and the conscience, are opened. Then the gateway to the spirit is opened so that the Lord may come in more and more in order to fill and strengthen our spirit. When we repent and confess in this way, our emotion will follow with love to the Lord, and our will then will choose to seek the Lord. This means that the whole heart is exercised and opened so that the spirit is free to receive more of Christ. Then the Lord, as the living Spirit, will infill and strengthen our spirit; and

spontaneously, Christ will make His home in our heart.

When our spirit is strengthened, Christ will increasingly make His home in all the parts of our heart. Christ is now in our spirit, but He is imprisoned there because our mind is set on other things and our conscience is not exercised. Because Christ is imprisoned in our spirit, we need to repent by turning our mind to Him. Then we must confess our sins and tell the Lord how much we love Him and choose to seek Him. By doing this, our whole heart is opened for Christ to fill and strengthen our spirit. Then from our spirit, He will spread Himself to make His home in our heart. This means our whole being will be His dwelling place and His home.

The apostle then goes on to say, "That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, 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 and to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God" (vv. 17-19). In verse 17 the words *rooted* and *grounded* are very meaningful. To be rooted means to grow in life, and to be grounded means to be built. So

these two words mean that we have to grow and to be built up. We are to be rooted and grounded in love that we may be strong to apprehend, not by ourselves but with all the saints corporately, what the breadth and length and height and depth are. This means that when we have Christ making His home in our hearts, we will be joined with all the saints. We can never be built together by knowledge. The more knowledge we have, the more arguments and divisions we will have. But when we have Christ making His home in us, we will forget about the knowledge, the divisions, and all other things. We will only say, "O Lord, be merciful to me; I am just short of You. I am filled with knowledge, but I am short of You. I may even have a lot of gifts, but I lack You."

It is when Christ is able to make His home in our hearts, which means He will occupy every inward part of our being, that we will be able to be built up with all the saints. We are no longer individuals, but we are built up corporately with all the saints to realize how immeasurable Christ is. How broad is the breadth? How long is the length? How high is the height? How deep is the depth? These are the dimensions of Christ! Christ is the breadth, the length, the height, and

the depth; He is immeasurable and unlimited. We must realize the unsearchable riches of Christ and be filled unto all the fullness of God. We are not to be filled with material things, scriptural knowledge, nor the so-called spiritual gifts, but with God Himself. It is only by Him that the Body can be realized. Otherwise, we may talk about the Body life, but there will be no reality. The reality of the Body life is the inner experience of the indwelling Christ.

We all need to kneel and pray-read these very verses until the heavenly vision is revealed into us. I say again that it is not something outward like knowledge, gifts, and signs; it is wholly the inner experience of the indwelling Christ. The inner man must be strengthened in order that Christ may make His home in our hearts, that we may be filled inwardly unto all the fullness of God Himself. It is by these inner experiences of the indwelling Christ that we can be built up with all the saints.

As we go on to chapter four, the first verse uses the word *therefore*. This means that the writer is going to say something based on what he has already said. We all know that chapter four deals with the Body life and the building up of the Body. We are clearly told that Christ as the

Head never builds His Body directly but through the gifted ones such as the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. And even they themselves do not build up the church directly, but they perfect all the saints by ministering Christ, that the saints may grow to realize the inner experience of the indwelling Christ and grow up into Him in all things. On the one hand, Christ will make His home in their heart by occupying their whole being; and on the other hand, they will grow into Christ in all things. Then they will receive something from Christ and share Him with one another, thereby making an increase of the Body unto the building up of itself in love. It is by this experience of Christ that they will be built up as a Body.

So, the key factor of how the church will be built up is the inner experience of the indwelling Christ. The gifted persons do not minister gifts to the saints; they only minister the unsearchable riches of Christ which they have experienced, that the saints might be perfected in Christ and grow up into Him. If we read these two chapters carefully and pray-read them before the Lord, I believe He will give us the vision to see that this is the only way for the church to be built up.

I must repeat again that the church is not built

up by knowledge and gifts. The more knowledge we have, the more divisions we will have; and the more gifts we have, the more trouble we will have. It is only by the inner experience of Christ as life that we can have the reality of the church life. The inner man must be strengthened so that Christ will make His home in our hearts and we will grow up into Him in all things. Then we will be filled unto all the fullness of God, by whom we will be built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.

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