

THE RECOVERY OF THE CHURCH

(Thursday—First Morning Session)

Message One

Seeing God's Eternal Purpose concerning the Church and Enlightening All concerning the Economy of the Mystery Hidden in God

Scripture Reading: Eph. 3:3-5, 8-11; Rom. 8:28; 16:25

- I. In order to participate in the recovery of the church, we need to see God's eternal purpose concerning the church—Eph. 1:9, 11; 3:9-11; Rom. 8:28:**
- A. A purpose is a determined intent to do something or to gain something:
 - 1. The determined will of God became the purpose of God—Eph. 1:5.
 - 2. God's purpose is His determined intent to gain the church—vv. 9, 11.
 - B. The eternal purpose (lit., "the purpose of the ages") was made by God in eternity past for eternity future—3:11:
 - 1. The purpose of the ages is the purpose of eternity, the eternal purpose.
 - 2. In eternity past, before the foundation of the world, before the heavens, the earth, and all things were created, God made a purpose for something in the future, in eternity to come; therefore, it is called the purpose of eternity, the eternal purpose—1:4-5, 9, 11; 3:11.
 - C. The word *purpose* in Ephesians 3:11 is equivalent to the word *plan*; we may speak of the eternal plan which God planned in Christ:
 - 1. God has a plan, which He planned in eternity; God's eternal purpose is God's eternal plan.
 - 2. *His purpose* in Romans 8:28 refers to the purposeful determination in God's plan.
 - 3. God's plan is to have a corporate expression of Himself in Christ the Son by the Spirit through the Body composed and built up with many regenerated and transformed people by the mingling of Himself with humanity—Eph. 1:22-23; 4:16.
 - D. Ephesians 3:10-11 reveals that the existence of the church is according to the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord:
 - 1. The church was planned by God in eternity; before time began, in eternity, God purposed to have the church—1:4-5, 9, 11, 22-23.
 - 2. In eternity past and for eternity to come, God planned and purposed to have the church in Christ and for Christ—3:10-11:
 - a. The church is not a temporary matter but an eternal matter in the eternal purpose of God; the church is the center and subject of God's eternal plan.
 - b. God planned in eternity past to have the church, and He expects to have the church in eternity to come.
 - c. The church is in this age and throughout this age, yet it is from eternity past and for eternity future—Matt. 16:18; 18:17; Rev. 21:2, 9-11.

- E. God planned to have the church composed of regenerated and transformed human beings who are coordinated and built together as a corporate Body—Eph. 1:22-23; 2:21-22; 3:14-21:
 - 1. God planned that this corporate Body would be a corporate vessel into which He would work Himself—vv. 14-17.
 - 2. God’s purpose, His determined intention, is to have a corporate Body, a corporate vessel, with which He could mingle Himself and all that He has; this vessel is the church—4:4-6, 16.
 - 3. The church is dear, lovable, and precious to God because the church is His good pleasure, the desire of His heart—1:5, 9, 22-23.
- F. The existence of the universe is according to God’s eternal purpose to have the church—Rev. 4:11; Eph. 3:9-11:
 - 1. The full revelation of the Scriptures unveils to us that all things in the universe are for the church—v. 9.
 - 2. Even the three persons of the Godhead are for the divine purpose of having the church to fulfill God’s eternal plan through the dispensing of God in His Divine Trinity into humanity so that the church may come into existence—1:3-23; Matt. 28:19; 16:18; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1:1.
 - 3. The heavens, the earth, a multitude of other things, and the tripartite man are required in order that the church may exist to express God; without these things God cannot have the church in the universe to be His corporate expression—Zech. 12:1; Rev. 4:11.
- G. God’s intention concerning the church is threefold: to express Himself through the sonship (Eph. 1:5), to make His multifarious wisdom known to the enemy (3:10), and to head up all things in Christ (1:10).

II. We need “to enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things”—3:9:

- A. The New Testament tells us that the church was a mystery in God; throughout all the generations before the New Testament time, the church was a mystery—vv. 3-6, 9; 5:32.
- B. In the Bible a mystery refers not only to things that are hidden and unknown to us but also to things that are hidden in God’s heart; this is the principle concerning the mysteries mentioned in the Bible—Mark 4:11; Rom. 16:25-26; Col. 1:26-27; 2:2; 4:3; Eph. 1:9; 3:3-4, 9; 5:32; 6:19.
- C. God’s mystery is His hidden purpose, which is to dispense Himself into His chosen people; hence, there is the economy of the mystery of God—3:9.
- D. From the beginning of the world the purpose of creation was a mystery hidden in God; no one knew what the purpose of creation was—Rev. 4:11; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16:
 - 1. Job was right in saying, “You have hidden these things in Your heart: / I know that this is with You”; what was hidden in God’s heart was the mystery of the ages—Job 10:13; Eph. 3:9.
 - 2. After creating man in His image and according to His likeness, God kept His intention hidden throughout the ages—Gen. 1:26; Rom. 16:25.

3. Before the New Testament time God did not unveil to anyone what His purpose was; the mystery, God's hidden purpose, was made known by revelation to the apostles and prophets—Eph. 3:3-5.
- E. The mystery hidden in God's heart is God's eternal economy (1:10; 3:9; 1 Tim. 1:4), which is God's eternal intention with His heart's desire to dispense Himself in His Divine Trinity as the Father in the Son by the Spirit into His chosen people to be their life and nature so that they may be the same as He is as His duplication (Rom. 8:29; 1 John 3:2), to become an organism, the Body of Christ as the new man (Eph. 2:15-16), for God's fullness, God's expression (1:22-23; 3:19), which will become the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2—22:5).
- F. In Ephesians 3:4 Paul uses the expression *the mystery of Christ* to explain the church as the Body of Christ in God's eternal economy, indicating that the church is the mystery of Christ.
- G. The economy of God's mystery is to have the church for the manifestation of God—vv. 9-10.
- H. Paul preached not only the gospel of the unsearchable riches of Christ; he also preached the gospel concerning the economy of the mystery hidden in God—vv. 8-9:
 1. The gospel concerning the economy of the mystery hidden in God is to produce the church for God's expression and glorification according to God's eternal purpose—vv. 10-11, 21.
 2. Today we must announce the gospel concerning the mystery hidden in God in order to enlighten all so that they may see what is the economy of the mystery hidden in God, who created all things for the fulfillment of His will, the desire of His heart, and His eternal purpose—1:5, 9, 11; 3:8-11.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE CHURCH PURPOSED IN ETERNITY

Ephesians 3:10-11 unveils the fact that the existence of the church is according to the eternal purpose of God which He made in Christ. The church is something of God's eternal purpose. It did not come into existence by accident but was planned in eternity. Before time began, in eternity, God purposed to have the church.

The word *purpose* here in the Scriptures is equivalent to the word *plan*. God's eternal purpose is God's eternal plan. God has a plan, which He planned in eternity—He is not purposeless; He is a God of purpose.

What did God plan? He planned to have a church composed of a group of human beings coordinated together as a corporate Body with which He may mingle Himself in His divine nature. In other words, this corporate Body would be a corporate vessel, into which He would put Himself. This is the very thing God planned, and this is the very center of His purpose. God planned to have a corporate Body, a corporate vessel, with which He could mingle Himself and all that He is. This vessel is called the church.

The church, therefore, is the center of God's eternal plan. Why is the church so dear, so lovable, and so precious to God? It is because the church is the desire of God's heart, which He purposed before time began. God in eternity planned to have the church.

ALL THINGS ARE FOR THE CHURCH

The full revelation of the Scriptures reveals to us that all things in the universe are for the church. Even the three persons of the Godhead are for the divine purpose of having a church to fulfill God's eternal plan.

We are all familiar with the three persons of the Godhead: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. These three persons of the Godhead do not exist so that we may have a doctrine of the Trinity but are for the accomplishment of God's plan to produce the church. They are for the dispensing of God Himself into humanity in order that the church may come into existence.

Some men have little purpose; therefore, their appearance is continually the same. But a man full of purpose may have several appearances. If you could visit him at his home in the early hours of the day, you would see that he is a father or a husband. After breakfast, he may go to a university to be a professor. Then at the hospital in the afternoon, you may see him in a white uniform as a doctor. At home he is a father, in the university he is a professor, and in the hospital he is a doctor. Why is he these three kinds of persons? It is because he is a man of great purpose.

Do not think that because there are three persons in the Godhead, there are three separate Gods. No, They are absolutely one. Matthew 28:19 says that we are to baptize people into *the name* of the Father and of the Son and of the Spirit. There are three persons but only *one name*. It is not into the *names* of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit but into the *name*. The father in the home, the professor in the university, and the doctor in the hospital are also three persons with one name.

Consider electricity. The same electricity stored in the generator is also installed in many buildings. How can the electricity in the generator be installed in buildings miles away? It is by the current of electricity. But is the current of electricity something other than electricity itself? No, the current of electricity is simply electricity in motion. When we apply electricity to the lights, the heater, the air conditioner, or many other appliances, it is still electricity, but it has come in three stages—the electricity stored in the generator, the electricity transmitted into the building by its current, and the electricity applied to various appliances. Are these three kinds of electricity? No, they are simply one electricity in three stages, and the purpose of these stages is that the electricity might be dispensed and applied.

There is one God in three persons for the purpose of dispensing and applying God to us. God the Father is the source of the heavenly electricity; God the Son is the current of the heavenly electricity; and God the Spirit is the application, the function, of the heavenly electricity. Thus, God Himself can be dispensed into us and applied so that the church may be produced and exist. For the producing and existence of the church, God must be in three persons. The dispensing of the Godhead is much more important than the teaching of the Trinity.

In order that the church may exist in this universe to express God, the heavens, the earth, space, and a multitude of other items are required. Without these things God could never have a church in the universe to express Himself. God is in three persons for the church. God created billions of creatures for the church. Everything is for the church, and everything is because of the church.

For the producing of the church, there is also the need of a tripartite man, a man with three parts—spirit, soul, and body. This is indeed interesting. Not only is there the need of man but of man in three parts, with a body, a soul, and a spirit. Why must man be in three parts? The body of man is related to the creation. The soul of man is related to man himself, and the spirit of man is related to God. Thus, there could be a church composed of man in the universe.

Without God in three persons, without the creation of so many things, and without man in three parts, it is impossible for the church to come into existence. For the purpose of having the church, all of these are necessary. God, creation, and man are all for the church, so eventually, we see that the church is the center, the kernel, of God's eternal plan.

THE ECONOMY OF THE MYSTERY

In Ephesians 3:9-11 many great and significant terms are used because they are related to God's eternal plan. We must all know the economy of God's mystery. This mystery has been hidden in God for generations from the beginning of creation. Even before the foundation of the world, God was exceedingly clear regarding this mystery.

All the creatures do not know this mystery. It has been hidden in God. If you could ask a tiger or a lion why they are here, they would tell you that they do not know. If you were to ask university professors the meaning of life, I believe they all would answer that they simply do not know.

But praise the Lord! This mystery has been made known. We know why God is in three persons. We know why the creation of the heavens and the earth and so many billions of items was necessary and why mankind was brought into existence. We know because God has made known to us this mystery. We know what the economy of the mystery is, which has been hidden in God from the beginning of the creation. *It is all for the church.*

THE DISPLAY OF GOD'S MULTIFARIOUS WISDOM

With this eternal purpose of God, God's multifarious wisdom is shown, and it is made known not only to man but to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies. God makes a display of His wisdom to all these angelic powers through the church. Hallelujah, this is real wisdom! It is made known through the church, not through individuals. This is why we all must respect the church and realize how much we need the church. As long as we are in the church, it is a glory to God and a shame to the enemy. But as long as we are out of the church, it is a shame to God and a kind of boast to the enemy. We must have the church.

We are chosen, redeemed, saved, and regenerated not for heaven but *for the church*. The church is God's goal. The church is God's aim. The church is the center of God's plan.

GIFTED PERSONS AND THE CHURCH

Ephesians 4:11-12 tells us that all the gifted persons—the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers—are for the church. They are for the perfecting of the saints so that the building up of the church may be realized.

It is indeed regrettable that today so many so-called Christian workers, ministers, and teachers are doing a work without much regard for the church. They only care for their work; they care little for the church. The work they are doing, in a sense, is frustrating, destroying, and damaging the church. All the gifted persons must be for the church. To be an apostle must be for the church. To be a prophet must be for the church. To be an evangelist must be for the church. To be a shepherd and teacher must be for the church. Whatever the Lord commits to us or burdens us to do must be for the church. The church is what God is after. The church is what God planned and desires to have.

THE BEGINNING AND THE END

There are two important verses spoken by the Lord in the New Testament regarding the church. One is at the beginning of the New Testament in the book of Matthew, and the other is at the end in the book of Revelation. The first time the word *church* is used is by the Lord

in Matthew 16:18. In this verse and its context (vv. 16-17, 19) we see three things that are related to one another: Christ, the church, and the kingdom. Whenever Christ is revealed to man, immediately the church must come into view. The church can be produced only by knowing Christ, and the church must be produced by the realization of Christ. After Peter came to know Christ, immediately the Lord Jesus said that He would build His church, against which the gates of Hades would not prevail.

Then following the church, the kingdom is mentioned. Christ produces the church, and the church brings in the kingdom. Where Christ is realized, the church is produced. Then the church will bring in the kingdom, the reign, and the authority of God on the earth. Therefore, the church is the key.

The Lord is the Alpha, and He is also the Omega. He speaks something about the church in the *first* book of the New Testament, and then in the *last* book, as a consummation of the whole Bible, He speaks to the churches about the church. The book of Revelation is not written to individuals but to the local churches. "I am the Alpha and the Omega" (1:8), and "What you see write in a scroll and send it to the seven churches" (v. 11).

If we are outside the local churches, we have no position or standing to take the book of Revelation, for it was not written to individual believers. It was written to the local churches, though the Lord called individual believers to listen to it. We must be in the local church; then we are qualified with the position and standing to accept this book and listen to what the Lord Spirit speaks to His churches.

The Lord Jesus never forgets what He begins. We may forget, but He never forgets. In the first book of the New Testament, He spoke about the building of the church, and what He began He will accomplish. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, to accomplish the building up of the church.

In the beginning He spoke about the universal church, but practically speaking, when He comes to the end, it is the local churches. The Lord begins with the church, and He ends with the churches. The church is universal, and the churches are local. The local churches are more practical to us than the universal church. The local churches are the accomplishment of the universal church. God needs the local churches to fulfill His eternal purpose of the universal church.

May our eyes be opened to see the economy of the mystery according to God's eternal purpose which He purposed before the beginning of creation. We must see the church according to the eternal plan which God planned in Christ in eternity. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1968*, vol. 1, "The Practical Expression of the Church," pp. 341-346)