

Message Three

The Church is the Expression of Christ

Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:15-16; John 14:9; Eph. 1:22-23; 2:15-16; Gen. 11:1-9

I. The church, as the Body of Christ, is the expression of Christ—Eph. 1:22-23:

- A. Christ is not only God, but He is God embodied, God defined, God explained, and God expressed; therefore, Christ is God made visible—John 1:1, 14; 14:9.
- B. Although Christ is mysterious, the church is the manifestation of Christ—1 Tim. 3:16:
 - 1. The church, as the Body of Christ, is the expression of Christ—Eph. 4:15-16.
 - 2. When we see the church, we see Christ; when we come into the church, we come into Christ; when we contact the church, we contact Christ—1:23; cf. Acts 9:4.
 - 3. The church is the corporate Body, which is Christ Himself, the totality of all the saints with Christ added together—1 Cor. 12:12.
- C. The church, as the Body of Christ, is the enlargement of Christ, who is the mingling of God and man—Luke 1:31-35; Col. 2:19:
 - 1. The nature of the church is God mingled with man and man mingled with God; we need to understand the Body of Christ from the perspective of the mingling of divinity and humanity—Eph. 3:14—4:6; cf. Lev. 2:4.
 - 2. The church, as the Body of Christ, is a group of redeemed and regenerated people who allow God to be mingled with them—Eph. 3:16-17a; 4:4-6:
 - a. The Body of Christ is the issue of the believers being mingled with God and constituted with Christ.
 - b. The crucial matter is whether God is mingled with us; whenever we have this mingling within us, we have some amount of the reality of the Body of Christ—3:16-17a; 4:16.

II. The church life, as the Body life, is the real communal life and corporate life—Acts 2:44-47:

- A. In our natural makeup and natural life, there is a kind of desire to have a community where we may live together with others:
 - 1. The desire to have a communal life was something created in the human nature by God—Gen. 1:26.
 - 2. God created a corporate man—one man with all men—but due to the fall this communal life was spoiled and damaged at the time of Babel—Gen. 11:1-9.
- B. In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus accomplished redemption to bring people back to God's original purpose, a corporate man mingled with God and living the life of a God-man—Col. 3:10-11:
 - 1. Christ on the cross abolished all the ordinances and slew the enmity among people for the purpose of creating one new man—Eph. 2:15-16.
 - 2. What was divided and scattered in the old man is recovered in the new man—Gen. 11:5-9; Acts 2:5-12; Col. 3:10-11.
 - 3. To put off the old man is to put off the divided and scattered man; to put on the new man is to put on the gathered and one new man—Eph. 4:22-24.

4. The church life, as the Body life, is the real communal life; this corporate living of the new man fulfills God's intention to have a corporate man expressing and representing Him—Gen. 1:26; Eph. 2:15; 4:24.

Focus: The church is the expression of Christ today, and the church life is the real communal life that expresses and represents God.

Ministry Excerpts

THE CHURCH BEING CHRIST

When we say that the church is Christ, this Christ is not an individual Christ, but a corporate Christ. This corporate Christ, who is the church, is the expression of the individual Christ. In the four Gospels there is the individual Christ. But in Acts and the Epistles, there is the corporate Christ, the church.

What does it mean to say that the corporate Christ is the church? Let me illustrate. We all are members of the Body of Christ. Suppose we all come together to have a meeting. You come with yourself, another brother comes with himself, and I come with myself. We all come here with ourselves. Thus, we are just a group of “selves” coming together. But if you come with Christ, I come with Christ, and he comes with Christ, we are Christ—not the individual Christ but the corporate Christ. We have people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation gathered together (Rev. 5:9) as the church. If they live by Christ, then when they come together, they are the church.

We all have to see what the church is. The church is the corporate Body, which is Christ Himself. The church is the totality of all the saints with Christ added together. The church is not a church building. Christ with His church has been confined by the church building for many centuries. But He is being released from the confinement of the church's building.

Furthermore, the church is not an organization of many so-called Christians. The church is Christ Himself. In order to have the church in reality, we need to live by Christ. In chapter three we saw that we have to take Christ not only as our life but also as our person. If each one of us takes Christ as his person, not living by himself but by Christ, then each one is Christ. So whenever we come together, we come not with ourselves, but with Christ. You come with Christ and I come with Christ. We all come with Christ. Therefore, the church is Christ. (*The Life for the Preaching of the High Gospel*, ch. 5)

THE CHURCH BEING THE ENLARGEMENT OF THE MINGLING OF GOD WITH MAN AND MAN WITH GOD

What is the church? The church is the enlargement of Christ, the God-man, the One who is God mingled with man. When the church is in a normal condition, we can see God and man mingled together. On the day of Pentecost, those in the church were uneducated, insignificant men, but we can see that they were mingled with the almighty God. When Peter and the eleven apostles stood up to speak, although it was Peter's voice, God was speaking. God was not merely among them; even more, He was mingled with them. They were inseparable from God. This is the church, the enlargement of Christ, the enlargement of the mingling of God with man and man with God.

Formerly, this mingling could be seen in only one person, but now it can be seen in millions of people. Formerly, this mingling involved only the Head, but now it has been enlarged to become the Body. With respect to time, this enlargement is extending; with respect to space, this enlargement is spreading. For two thousand years this enlargement has been ongoing throughout the earth; it keeps extending and spreading over the whole earth. This is glorious. This enlargement is the church. A genuine church not only preserves its nature and keeps its ground, but it has God within. The nature of the church is God mingled with man and man mingled with God.

THE HOLY CITY

Man was created by God with the desire for a communal life. Our human nature longs for a community life. In order to fulfill this desire, people attend nightclubs and parties. However, nightclubs and parties cannot meet this need. Although people hunger and thirst for a proper communal life, they are poisoned by the clubs and parties of the world. Instead of receiving the proper drink to quench their thirst, they are poisoned. There is only one kind of party that is pure, happy, nourishing, enlightening, satisfying, and edifying, and that is the church. Day after day, we in the church life are attending a heavenly party. This party is holy, divine, and spiritual. It is the party of God mingled with man. What an enjoyment it is to attend this party!

Through my experience in the church life of nearly fifty years, I have come to know the disposition of the young people. Young people are sharp and quite demanding, and they can pierce into the hearts of their parents or of the elders in the church. All the elders are targets for the arrows of the young people. Often I have said to some of these sharp young people, "If the church and the elders are not pleasant in your eyes, why don't you go off somewhere, to the mountains, perhaps, and live by yourselves? Then you will no longer be troubled by the church or the elders." They replied that because they enjoy the fellowship in the church life, they would never leave the church.

Our desire for a communal life cannot be fully satisfied even by our married life or family life. You may have many brothers, sisters, cousins, nieces, nephews, and other relatives, but they cannot satisfy your inward desire for a community life. This desire, a desire for the church life and a desire created by God, can be satisfied only in the church.

We Christians are like sheep flocking together. Years ago I observed some flocks of sheep in Scotland. I noticed that the sheep enjoyed flocking together. They traveled together, ate together, and lay down together. They were always together as a flock. We Christians also have such a desire, the desire for the church life.

How we enjoy God in the church life! Some may say, "God is omnipresent, and I can enjoy Him anywhere. I can enjoy Him at home or on the street. I don't need the church life to enjoy God." We can testify that there is no comparison between the enjoyment of God in the church and the enjoyment of God apart from the church. Yes, you may enjoy God anywhere, but not in the way we enjoy Him in the church. In the church life we are beside ourselves with the enjoyment of the Lord. The church life is a life of God mingled with man. In this wonderful mingled life, we daily enjoy God in all the dear saints, and we enjoy the dear saints in God. (*Life-study of Revelation*, msg. 66)

References: *The Life for the Preaching of the High Gospel*, chs. 5—6; *The Church as the Body of Christ*, ch. 3; *Life-study of Revelation*, msg. 66

