

The Church Is Christ

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Ministry Publications
Scottsdale, Arizona

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Library of Congress Catalog
Card Number: 93-79979

ISBN 0-914271-42-3

Ministry Publications
P.O. Box 12222
Scottsdale, Arizona 85267
(602) 948-4050

Printed in the United States of America

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Preface

The title of this book, *The Church Is Christ*, is based upon 1 Corinthians 12:12 and Colossians 3:11b. First Corinthians 12:12 says, “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.” This verse briefly unveils the precious New Testament truth of *the corporate Christ*. Colossians 3:11b, says, “Christ is all and in all.” This statement spoken by the apostle Paul also defines the inner nature of the church. Christ is all things to the church, and Christ is the indwelling reality of the church. Thus, *The Church Is Christ!*

The contents of this book were given in the form of spoken messages, and therefore reflect that form throughout. The messages came out of a burden to share with the saints that the reality of the church is just Christ Himself. They were given in Seattle, Washington and Scottsdale, Arizona during the months of February and March of 1993.

The Bible translation used in this book when quoting Scripture is the *New King James Version*, unless it

is otherwise noted. Where words and phrases could have been better translated according to the original Greek text we have included the more literal translation in brackets [] within the verse.

I also want to express my thanks to the Lord for the dear brothers and sisters co-working with me, who labored faithfully in Christ in many details in order that these messages might be available in print.

Our prayer is that the Lord will use this book to open our eyes to see what is the inner reality of the church, and that it might direct us away from so many distractions and complications to “the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3, ASV).

March 1993

— *Bill Freeman*
Scottsdale, Arizona

Scripture quotations are taken from the *New King James Version* unless otherwise noted.

1 ■ How the Church Is Christ

I. By the Statement in 1 Corinthians 12:12

We need to see the basic revelation of what the church is according to God's thought. In our religious background many of us have not properly seen what the church is. We have grown up in the history and practice of Christianity and have followed the traditions of men in regard to the church. But when we come to the pure Word of God, we discover something altogether different and fresh concerning the church — we see that the church is Christ! According to Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 12:12, in its highest definition and reality the church is Christ.

First Corinthians 12:12 says, "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ." Some Bible translations say, "so also is the Christ," because the definite article occurs before "Christ" in the original Greek text.

To reveal that the church is Christ, Paul uses our human body as an illustration. The human body is one unit, yet it is composed of many members. For example,

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I am not many persons standing in front of you; I am just one. My body is one. Yet, if you take me apart, I am composed of many members. But these many members are not many bodies; rather, the many members are one body. The many members form one unit and together make up one body.

In 1 Corinthians 12:12, Paul first speaks about the body from the angle of its oneness: the body is one. Then he describes this one body from another angle: the one body is in reality made up of many members. Then from the angle of the many members he comes back again to the angle of the one body. He is emphasizing two different points that are equally true. Looking at the body, you see only one body, and yet you also see many members. Then, looking at the many members, although you can recognize many members, yet you see only one body. Look at the hands, the arms, the feet, the ears — many members, yet one body. Look at the body in its oneness — one body, yet there are many members.

Paul specifically applies this one body/many members illustration to the church in the most elevated way by saying, “so *also* is the Christ.” The word “also” links what he is about to say with what he just said in the first part of the verse. In other words, in the same way that our body has a oneness and a plurality, so Christ has a oneness and a plurality — Christ is one and Christ is many. According to our thought, we would have concluded, “so

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also is *the church*.” Although the church is the one Body of Christ, and as such has many members, Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:12 does not identify oneness and plurality with the church or the Body; instead, he identifies this oneness and plurality with Christ! This elevates our realization of what the church is according to its inner reality — the church is Christ. Thus, according to the divine view, Christ is not merely a single Person, but a corporate Person.

Perhaps some may ask, what do you mean by saying that the church is Christ? I am aware that to say that the church is Christ is to risk being accused of teaching heresy, or teaching a kind of pantheism similar to the New Age movement. Of course, I do not mean anything like that. However, we all must admit that to say that the church is Christ is not to *interpret* Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 12:12, but simply to *quote* them. Therefore, let us see how the church is Christ according to other scriptural statements.

II. By Other Scriptural Statements

A. *Matthew 25:34-40 and 1 Corinthians 8:12*

Understanding that the church is Christ is not a minor truth presented by the apostles to clarify certain New Testament situations; rather, it is an underlying

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supposition of the whole New Testament. It runs through the apostles' writings from Matthew to Revelation. On many occasions the writers simply speak from the premise that the church is Christ. For example, the Lord's words about how we are to treat His "brethren" are recorded in Matthew, planting a seed in the Gospels that the church is Christ. In Matthew 25:34-40 we read, ³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? ³⁸ When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? ³⁹ Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' ⁴⁰ And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, *inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.*'"

In 1 Corinthians 8:12 Paul presents another example of how the church is Christ. He is addressing a practical situation where insensitive brothers are offending weak brothers. Perhaps the Corinthians were somewhat shocked when they read Paul's words to them. They probably didn't have Paul's understanding of the church being

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Christ, so they were thinking that this was just an issue between brothers. But listen to Paul's interpretation of their behavior in 1 Corinthians 8:12: "But when you thus sin against *the brethren*, and wound their weak conscience, *you sin against Christ*." The brothers — Christ! What an application to your family life! How this affects your relationships — taking care not to wound the weak conscience of your spouse, or of your children, or any of the saints. If our mind is not renewed, we just see one another according to our natural thought. We look at one another according to the flesh, and we may think we can *own* each other. We may think we can manipulate each other and control each other. But, brothers and sisters, if you wound the saints, you wound Christ.

Again, the Lord said, "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matt. 25:40), and "Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me" (Matt. 25:45). He is fully identifying Himself with His members. His members are parts of Him. When you see the church this way, it makes all the difference in how you experience the church — how you forgive, how you handle others, even how you live your life not to consciously offend or to wound others. Obviously, due to our weaknesses, our blind spots, our untransformed natures, oftentimes we offend, even unwittingly. Thus, it is Christ that we need to experience together that we might see something of the

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reality of what the church is.

B. 1 Corinthians 12:26-27

Another passage illustrating how the church is Christ is 1 Corinthians 12:26-27: ²⁶“And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.” The traditional understanding of verse 27 is, “you are the body of Christ.” No doubt, all the translations put in the definite article, because the sentence does not seem to make sense otherwise. But, “the” is not in the original Greek text. Thus, the verse could be properly translated “you are a body of Christ,” or, “you are body of Christ.”

If Paul is saying to the local church in Corinth, “you are the body of Christ,” this means that as the local church, meeting there in that city, the believers could be identified as the body of Christ. Although this fact may be true in other passages, there’s something special here that Paul was actually pointing out. Grammatically, in the Greek language, the absence of a definite article means that the writer is emphasizing the nature of something. Paul, then, is describing the nature of the church in Corinth as “body of Christ.”

Let us look at other passages in the Word that illustrate this grammatical point. John 4:24 says, “God is

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Spirit.” It doesn’t say, “God is the Spirit,” referring to the third Person in the Godhead. Here, the writer is purposely leaving out the definite article to emphasize the nature of God. God is Spirit. Although He is the triune God — the Father, the Son, and the Spirit — yet John 4 emphasizes His nature. Because in nature God is Spirit, to worship Him you have to be in spirit, in the realm of the spirit. To touch God’s nature, you have to touch God in the realm of the spirit.

This principle of emphasizing the *nature* of something is also seen in John 1:5, where we read, “God is light.” And in 1 John 4:16 the writer again leaves out the definite article to describe God’s nature — “God is love.” Thus, when 1 Corinthians 12:27 says, “You are body of Christ,” or, “you are a body of Christ,” it’s touching the nature of what we are. Some Bible versions have translated it this way: “You are a body to Christ,” touching the nature of what you are. If you read 1 Corinthians 12:12 and then continue on in the chapter, you will notice that Paul returns to the same thought in verse 27: “you are in nature a body to Christ.” Paul wanted to impress us as believers with the nature of what we are. We are a body to Christ; we are members to Him. As the body is one and has many members, and yet the many are not just many, but are one, so also is Christ. Christ is many. You are a body to Christ.

These scriptural statements from the Word of God

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help us to understand the dimension of the *nature* of the church. If you don't see the church in this way, you don't see the full, deep content and reality of what the church is. Once we see that the church is Christ, our every view, every opinion, every division, is shattered. Nothing of this kind can remain intact when we see that the church in the divine thought is just Christ — Christ Himself living, occupying, and supplying Himself into every member. And this issues in an expression of Him. The flavor of the church is Christ. It tastes like Christ. It gives you the sense of Christ. You're touching Christ, because the church is Christ.

C. Ephesians 5:28 and 1 Corinthians 1:13

In Ephesians 5:28 Paul gives us a remarkable example of how the church is Christ: “So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.” In saying, “He who loves his own wife loves *himself*,” Paul is identifying the wife as part of the husband. The husband and the wife are one. They are one flesh. Paul brings out this emphasis, this precise speaking, to convey precise revelation into us about the church. Then, notice Ephesians 5:29: “For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.” Paul speaks again in a very intimate way to show us that we are members of Christ's

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Body.

We nourish and cherish our flesh, just as Christ does the church. This shows how the church is related to Him. It's Himself. How can you damage Him? How can you negatively affect Him in any way? When Paul deals with division in 1 Corinthians 1:13, he declares, "Is Christ divided?" He doesn't say, "Is the church divided?" He says, "Is Christ divided?" That's why, when I recently heard about the problems concerning one of the churches in this area, that brothers were taking brothers to court, I just felt grieved. Is Christ divided?

In the church we are not like unbelievers, behaving ourselves in the realm of right and wrong. The world may ask, Who is right? or Who is wrong? But we as believers ask, Where is Christ? We're not in issues. We're dealing with a living Person — Christ. Where is Christ between the brothers? I personally talked to both sides. I said, "Brothers, I'm grieved over the situation. Could we not come together and fellowship?" Some may be wondering about why I would speak. But I am a member of the Body, seeking to fellowship with the brothers to see that the peace of Christ arbitrates between them. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:5, "I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?"

The real test of genuineness is in how we relate to Christ, not in seeking to know who is right and who is

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wrong. In 1 Kings 3:16-27, Solomon was testing genuineness in a situation where two women claimed to be the mother of the same child. In his wisdom, Solomon proposed to have the child cut in half, knowing that the real mother would object to such a solution. The real mother quickly gave up her rights to the child rather than see the child killed. In doing this she established her true relationship to the child. Thus Solomon was able to restore the child to the real mother.

The same principle applies in the church situation. Rather than see the church divided, will we not let the peace of Christ arbitrate? Where the peace of Christ arbitrates, where Christ is not divided, that is the reality of the church. Otherwise you have something that is not an expression of the fullness of Christ.

We need to see clearly from the Word of God how the church is Christ. By searching the Scriptures diligently like the Bereans (Acts 17:11), we will be more than convinced of this basic truth revealed in the New Testament. By continuing through the next chapters of this book, we will see that the church is Christ to such an extent that we could never be the same. This will be a solid foundation for our entire Christian life and church life.

III. By the Enlargement of Christ

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We need to see the church according to divine revelation, otherwise our vision and practice of the church will lack something. Surely the church is not a physical building; neither is the church a human organization; nor is the church merely a group of people who subscribe to a particular doctrinal statement. Rather, the church is Christ Himself dispensed into all His members. His one life is dispensed into the “many members.” It is His life, filling and functioning through every member, that makes the church the Christ in reality. Such a definition of the church points us to the proper source of the church — Christ Himself! All His members make up His fullness. We are organically joined to Him as the Head. As the Head, He is not merely the controlling center, but He is also the life supply that flows in every member. By His life He lives in us, fills us, and flows out from us, and we become His expression. Thus, the church is the enlargement of Christ. For example, I am one person with both a head and a body. My head is connected to my body, and because they are organically joined together as one unit, there is an enlargement and a fullness. If I had only a head and no body, there would be no enlargement or proper expression.

The Holy Spirit reveals this same truth in 1 Corinthians 6:15: “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly

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not!" Then verse 17 says, "But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him." Our bodies are the members of Christ, and our spirit is one spirit with the Lord. These truths reveal the extraordinary oneness existing between Christ and the church. This is a revelation of the church at the deepest level. We are not just believers or followers of Christ in an outward way. Nor are we limited to being members of His Body, with a concept that His Body is something separate and detached from Christ Himself. All the saints are one spirit and life with the Lord Himself, and their bodies are not only temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19), but also are "members of Christ."

In the fourth century, Augustine saw the biblical revelation that the church is Christ, and he coined the phrase "the Whole Christ." The following are his utterances:

What is the Church? She is the body of Christ. Join to it the Head, and you have one man: the head and the body make up one man. Who is the Head? He who was born of the virgin Mary And what is the body? It is His Spouse, that is, the Church The Father willed that these two, the God Christ and the Church, should be one man.

All men are one man in Christ, and the unity of Christians constitutes but one man.

Let us rejoice and give thanks. Not only are

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we become Christians, but we are become Christ. My brothers, do you understand the grace of God that is given us? Wonder, rejoice, for we are Christ! If He is the Head, and we are the members, then together He and we are *the whole man*.

When the Head and the members are despised, then the *Whole Christ* is despised, for the *Whole Christ*, Head and body, is that just man against whom deceitful lips speak.¹

John Calvin, living during the time of the Reformation, also gave utterance to this marvelous revelation in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:12:

So also is Christ. The name of Christ is used here instead of the Church, because the similitude was intended to apply — not to God's only-begotten Son, but to us. It is a passage that is full of choice consolation, inasmuch as he calls the Church *Christ*; for Christ confers upon this honor — that he is willing to be esteemed and recognized, not in himself merely, but also in his members. Hence, the same Apostle says elsewhere (Eph. 1:23), that the Church is his completion, as though he would, if separated from his mem-

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bers, be incomplete.²

Both Augustine and Calvin saw that the reality of the church is Christ. If the church is Christ, then we are members of Christ and parts of Christ. We are not parts of a denomination. We are not merely parts of a group of disciples or believers, as true as that may be. We are, at the deepest level, the very parts of Christ. Christ lives in us. The church does not have any other source or reality. The church is a Person, living and expressing Himself through His many members. If we see the church in this way, it will make all the difference in our experience, in our practice, in our understanding, and in our relationships with one another. For example, in our relationships we will realize that we are not just dealing with another person — we are dealing with parts of Christ. We are dealing with the members of Christ. We are handling Christ. We are handling His members. We are touching those that have been made part of Him. We are touching the redeemed, those purchased by blood and organically joined to Him, the living Head. We are members of one another because we are members of Christ.

In the diagram on page 15, we can visualize how the whole person — Head and Body — is the Christ. This is the church. This is what the church is by revelation. According to the New Testament, you do not join a church by signing up to become a member. There is not

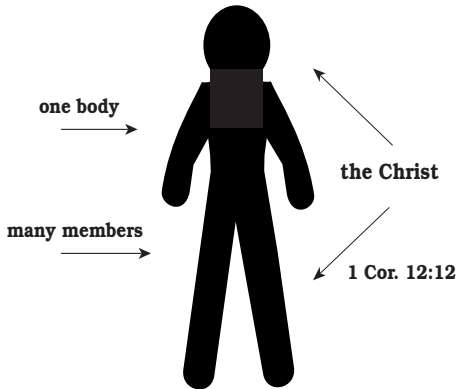
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such a practice in the New Testament. In the book of Acts, as the church was growing, people were “*added to the Lord.*” In Acts 5:14 we read, “And believers were increasingly *added to the Lord*, multitudes of both men and women.” Then also Acts 11:24b says, “And a great many people were *added to the Lord.*”

When you and I receive Christ and are genuinely born of God, at that moment we are added to the Lord as an attached member of His Body. This is the membership that is in the New Testament. It is not membership on a roll. It is not signing a doctrinal agreement. It is not joining a denomination. It is not becoming affiliated with any group. No! We have been befuddled by the teachings and practices of

church membership in traditional Christianity. Oh, brothers and sisters, *church membership* is simply becoming a *living member of Christ!* When I become a regenerated man, and the life of Christ, the Head,

The entire entity – Head and members – is the Christ!



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enters into me, at that time I am added to Him as one of His members! Hallelujah! We are members of Christ! As members of Christ, we belong to one another as parts of Christ. Marvelous! This is the church.

Some have asked us over the years, “Don’t you have a membership? Isn’t it uncertain and shaky not to have a membership? Don’t you have some way to keep your members?” My response inwardly has been, “Keep my members?” The church is not a community club. No, we are members of Christ! We are members of one another by being organically joined to the life of our one Head. Brothers and sisters, we don’t join the church — we see the church. We enjoy the reality of being added together to Christ (Acts 2:41, 47). Nothing is more solid. The gates of Hades cannot stand against this kind of membership. This is an organic membership. This is members joined to the Head. Thus, the church is the enlargement of Christ with all His members filled with Him and expressing Him as His fullness. This is the basic vision that we need to see to understand how the church is Christ.

IV. By the New Testament Revelation of Christ

A. Through Paul’s Experience

To describe how the church is Christ, we need to have the New Testament revelation of Christ. The

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revelation of Christ according to the teaching of the original apostles will bring us into another realm concerning our apprehension of the church. Through the apostle Paul's experience, we see the most outstanding example of how the church is Christ. In Acts 8:1 we read, "Now Saul was consenting to his [Stephen's] death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was [in] Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." Please note the phrase, "the church which was [in] Jerusalem." This is an example of the original identification given to the church in the New Testament. From this we observe how the church was identified simply as "the church." Also, the church was identified according to geography, that is, "in Jerusalem."

Based upon the revelation of the church as Christ, to say, "the church which was in Jerusalem," would be equivalent to saying, "the Christ which was in Jerusalem." In other words, we should not identify the church by anything else. We should not add anything to Christ or the church. We should not make the church someone's group or personal following. It should not be Paul's church, Peter's church, or Luther's church. Let the church just be the church! Let Christ just be Christ through His members gathered and meeting in any given place.

The centrality of Christ in Jerusalem is captured and

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preserved by calling the saints in Jerusalem, “the church which was in Jerusalem.” To talk about the church is to talk about Christ in His exalted state. Christ was in Jerusalem. His continuation was expressed in the church — His enlarged form.

In the Gospels, Christ was in Jerusalem in the flesh. This was only the beginning of what He was “to do and teach.” In Acts 1:1, Luke says, “The former account [the Gospel of Luke] I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus *began* both to do and teach.” By using the word “began,” Luke indicates that Acts is the *continuation* of Christ — now in His enlarged form as the church.

Through His incarnation He was present in the flesh for 33 ½ years and began to do and teach many things. But now through His resurrection, as a life-giving Spirit, He continues to do and teach many things through His members. He has imparted His life into His members and continues to be expressed in His “other form” — the church! The glorified Christ has now streamed into thousands that have been *added to Him*. In Acts, we see an enlarged Christ. That is, we see the church, because the church is Christ!

The record of Saul’s experience of persecuting the church and the Lord’s subsequent appearing to him clearly reveals how the church is Christ. In Acts 8:3 we read, “As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, commit-

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ting them to prison.” This verse tells us that the persecution was aimed specifically at *the church*. Also, Acts 8:1 indicates that Saul specifically approved of Stephen’s killing. Then again in Acts 9:1 we read, “Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest.” Once again, it was against the *disciples* of the Lord that the severe persecution was directed.

Saul’s encounter with the Lord in Acts 9:2-5 reveals the Lord’s interpretation of his actions against the believers: ² “And [Saul] asked letters from him [the high priest] to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ And as he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. ⁴ Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ ⁵ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ ” Apparently, Saul was persecuting the church; but according to the Lord’s own words in verses 4 and 5, he was persecuting Jesus.

Through this experience on the Damascus road, Saul saw Christ in a corporate way. He saw the whole Christ. He saw that the church was joined to Christ, the living Head. He saw that to touch the smallest member of

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the church was to touch Jesus. This experience and revelation became the controlling heavenly vision of Paul's life and work (Acts 26:19). No doubt his utterance in 1 Corinthians 12:12 about the Christ being made up of many members was related to his Damascus road experience. It was there that he saw the vision of the Head organically joined to His members.

To say that the church is Christ does not mean that the church is deity, or that the church is part of the Godhead in a heretical sense. No! It means just what the Bible says, that we are one spirit with the Lord, and we are joined to Him as His very members (1 Cor. 6:15, 17). Every part of me, including my eyes, my ears, my hands, my feet, my soul, my heart, my mind, is a specific member of my body. So now every part of me is a member of Christ. My eyes are members of Christ! My ears are members of Christ! My eyes and my ears are not mine anymore; they belong to Christ. My body in its parts and as a whole is a member of Christ. Each individual saint is a member of Christ! Thus, the church is identified by Paul as the Christ.

B. Through Paul's Understanding

We see not only through Paul's *experience* that the church is Christ, but we also see it through Paul's *understanding*. In Ephesians chapter 3, we see how Paul

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wanted us to enter into his understanding of what he calls “the mystery of Christ.” In Ephesians 3:1-4 he says, ¹ “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles — ² if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, ³ how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I wrote before in a few words, ⁴ by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ).” In other words, he wants the believers to enter into his understanding of the mystery of Christ.

We need to understand the mystery of Christ as being one of the two basic mysteries in the Bible. Of the several mysteries mentioned in the Bible (Matt. 13:11; Rom. 11:25; 1 Cor. 4:1; 2 Thess. 2:7; Rev. 1:20; 10:7; 17:5,7), two are basic. The first is the mystery of God, mentioned in Colossians 2:2. Here Paul says, “That their [the believers’] hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, [unto] the [full] knowledge of the mystery of God, [Christ].” The phrase, “the mystery of God, Christ” is, in Greek, an appositional statement. That is, the mystery of God is Christ. Christ and the mystery of God refer to the same thing. Christ is the unveiling of God! If we want to *know* God, if we want to *see* God, if we want to *touch* God, if we want to *understand* the mystery of God in this universe, then we

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must see that it is all in Christ. To look at Christ is to look at God! To know Christ is to know God! The first basic mystery in the Bible is the mystery of God, which is Christ.

The second basic mystery in the Bible is the mystery of Christ, mentioned by Paul in Ephesians 3. After Paul speaks concerning some of the details related to the mystery in Ephesians 3:3-5, he then unveils what the mystery is in verse 6: “That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same Body and partakers of His promise in Christ [Jesus] through the gospel.” Thus, the mystery is the one Body of Christ, made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Paul continues to refer to the mystery of Christ in Ephesians 3:9 by saying, “And to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery . . .” (NASV). Then he specifies in verse 10 that the administration, or the economy, of the mystery is being worked out through the church. Thus, the mystery of Christ is the church!

If we want to know Christ, if we want to touch Christ, if we want to hear Christ, if we want to see Christ, then we must realize that Christ is revealed in the church. The mystery of Christ is His Body, the church, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (Eph. 1:22-23). The church is the expression of Christ — even Christ Himself lived out in a corporate way through His members. It is this revelation of the corporate Christ that was the unique revelation of Paul’s ministry. Indeed, he says that his

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understanding of the mystery of Christ was given to him that we might perceive and enter into his understanding. In other words, there is not going to be another revelation for us to enter into. No! All believers are required to enter into Paul's revelation and understanding, and that understanding is to see that the church is Christ — Christ revealed and unveiled through His one Body!

C. Through Paul's Prayer

The New Testament revelation of the church being the whole Christ comes uniquely through Paul's experience, through Paul's understanding, and also through Paul's prayer uttered in Ephesians 1:15-23. His prayer is that we would all have a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of God; that is, that as believers we would have a deeper and a higher vision of the full knowledge of God. This full knowledge in verses 19-23 includes knowing what is the exceeding greatness of God's power toward us who believe. We must see that the power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him on the throne, far above all rule and authority, is the same power that made Him the Head over all things to the church, which is His Body. The full knowledge also includes seeing that the church as His Body is, in reality, "the fullness of [the One] who fills all in all." Hallelujah!

Through Paul's prayer we see *how* the church is

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Christ! The church is Christ because the church is just Himself filling every member with His life. Ephesians 1:23 says, “The fullness of [the One] who fills all in all.” Here the verb “fills” is in the present tense and can be translated, “the One who is continuously filling all in all.” The Lord, having been glorified through His resurrection and ascension, has now become a life-giving Spirit. Now, He can stream into all the spirits of all the members! Every member who is presently being filled is incorporated into His organic expression! In this way, a large, full Christ is expressed on this earth. There is not just one hand, in Palestine, laid on a leper to heal him. There are thousands of members of His Body expanding the love of God to humanity. The ministry of Christ now flows through each individual member! Thus, in Paul’s prayer we see that the church is an enlargement of this glorified One who lives in us and who is now filling us. Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! What a revelation — a revelation of Christ being the church!

D. Through John’s Vision and Revelation

When we come to the end of the Bible, we come to the consummation of all things, expressed in the New Jerusalem, the holy city. The apostle John had a vision and a revelation of this city, and he describes what he saw — a city that was a full expression of God with man. For

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example, Revelation 21:3 says, “And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, *the tabernacle of God is with men*, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and *God Himself will be with them* and be their God.’ ” Then in verse 22 John says, “*But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.*” Then again in verse 23 he says, “And the city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for *the glory of God illuminated it and the Lamb is its [lamp].*” It is clear from these Scriptures that the tabernacle, the temple, and the glory and lamp of the city are just God Himself and the Lamb. When John was in spirit, he saw that the city was identified as “*the bride, the Lamb’s wife*” in verses 9 and 10. In other words, from one angle the city is an expression of God Himself, but from another angle the city is composed of all the chosen and redeemed people of God as the bride of Christ. Thus, we must ask, is the city God? Or, is the city the people of God? The answer is both! The city is a composition of God mingled with man.

When Revelation 21:22 reveals that God Himself is the temple, it does not mean that God is the temple by Himself. Rather, it means that God is so thoroughly and completely embodied in His people that *they* have become *an enlargement of Him* as a temple (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16). They are His dwelling place to such an extent that they perfectly express Him and have His glory (Rev.

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21:9b-11). God's building at the end of the Bible is composed of God Himself built into every saint — transformed and conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29)! When you look at the holy city depicted in Revelation 21 and 22, you are impressed with the fact that the whole city is God! God is the temple! The Lamb is the lamp! He is the light that illumines the entire city! The river of the water of life is flowing to every part of the city, supplying it with God Himself (Rev. 22:1-2, 17).

What we behold in the holy city is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This triune God is the inner content and reality of His finished work, His dwelling place for eternity! Hallelujah! The city has the glory of God! It is not existing for itself or building up itself with a name, like Babylon (Rev. 17:1-5). It is just God Himself enlarged in the Body of His Son (Col. 1:18-19), supplying everything directly as the Spirit (Rev. 22:1), flowing as a river for all to freely drink (Rev. 22:17)! What oneness and solidarity between God, the Lamb, and the city!

The holy city is not only the consummation of all God's work throughout the ages, but it is also the present goal toward which we should pursue (Heb. 13:14). Thus, the proper church life today should be a miniature of the holy city. The church should simply express Christ, having God's glory shining through it (2 Cor. 4:6-7). When people touch the church, they should be able to

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touch Christ in all the members. What people should be impressed with is simply Christ living and flowing from all the saints. The church is not an organization, it is not a program, it is not entertainment, it is not a special personality. The church is Christ! The church should be in the enjoyment of a Person, so that what people are impressed with is a living Christ expressed in His living Body! Praise the Lord! “Unto Him be glory in the church” because Christ is life to His members (Eph. 3:21)! That is all the church is — just Christ!

V. By Organic Oneness with Christ

A. *An Organic, Life Oneness*

To understand *how* the church is Christ according to the definition in 1 Corinthians 12:12, it is necessary to see how the church is organically one with Christ. This organic oneness is clearly revealed in the Lord’s prayer in John 17. In verse 21 He prayed, “That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.” Here the Lord is praying for the oneness of all the disciples who would believe on Him through the apostles’ word (John 17:20). In His prayer to the Father He specifies the nature of the believers’ oneness — “That they also may be *one in Us*,” or “That they also may be *in*

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Us.” (The latter translation is according to some of the oldest Greek manuscripts.)

In verse 22 the Lord continues praying, “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, *that they may be one just as We are one.*” This part of the prayer again specifies the nature of the believers’ oneness — it is a oneness that is directly related to the oneness between the Father and the Son.

Furthermore, in verse 23 He utters exactly *how* we are one: “I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect [into] one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.” In other words, to be “one just as We are one” means in reality, “I in them, and You in Me.” This is how we are one — one in the oneness of the Father and the Son! This oneness is the Son Himself indwelling us (“I in them”), and thereby bringing in His oneness with the Father (“You in Me”). This is an organic, life oneness. It is this oneness entering into us as the gift of eternal life (John 17:2-3) that causes us to be made perfect into one. According to the Greek text, the word “perfect” in John 17:23 is a perfect passive participle and may be translated more literally, “that they may be in a state of perfection.” Indeed, in his *Expanded Translation* of the New Testament, Kenneth Wuest translates John 17:23 as, “I in them and you in me, in order that they, having been brought to

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the state of completeness with respect to oneness, may persist in that state of completeness.” In other words, when eternal life enters into us in the Person of the Son of God, a perfect state of oneness enters into us. It is simply the “I in them, and You in Me” that creates and establishes the oneness of believers with Christ, the Head, and all the members of His Body. It is being grafted into an organic oneness (John 15:4-5). In this way the church is Christ—by an organic life-union with the Head, who is supplying every part of Himself with His life (Eph. 5:28-30).

Brothers and sisters, our oneness is His oneness! The church is Christ! It is not a made-up oneness. We are not excited over a movement for oneness that says, let us all be one! Nor are we believers attempting to create oneness through conferences and revivals. This is not the oneness in the New Testament. Oneness is not the cooperation of denominations; nor is it interdenominationalism. Oneness is the corporate Christ made up of all His redeemed. We are already one! We are one because He dwells in us!

We have the oneness of the Father and the Son installed into our spirit, and the best that we could do is wake up one morning and *see* it and say, “O God, O God, I’m one with the brothers, I’m one with all the saints, I’m one with my wife.” All we can do is see the oneness. We can’t create it. We can’t produce it. We can’t arrange it.

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The Lord prayed that we would be one, and we must ask, how could this be? By negotiation? By doctrinal investigation? “What doctrine do you believe? In which way do you believe in the Lord’s second coming? Do you speak in tongues?” Should we try to be one this way? No! The Lord says, “That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us.”

When we see all the verses in John 17 together, it is as though the Son was saying, “What I am going to do, Father, is bring them into Us. I am shepherding them from eternity past in the eternal covenant. I have marked them out. They are the objects of My grace from eternity past. I will pick them up out of the mud, redeem them, get inside of them, and make them members of Me. Now I am going to bring them with Me as My members into Us.” Amen! Hallelujah! Oh, brothers and sisters, we’re in Him — He has made us part of Himself in an organic union.

We are now enjoying the same flow of love that circulates between the Father and the Son and the Son and the Father (John 17:23, 26). We were put right into that flow of liquid love — He’s not loving me separately from the Son. I’m an organic part of His Son. I’m the object of the same love that the Son is receiving from the Father. The love of God is poured out in our

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hearts (Rom. 5:5). It's not worked-up love. It's not manufactured love. It's love that is released from our spirit. It's love that is dug out from the well within (John 4:14). Our part is to enjoy and drink deeply at this fountain. We are in the Son. We are members of Christ. This shows us the organic nature of our oneness. It's an organic, life oneness that constitutes the church as Christ.

B. The Oneness of the Spirit

“The unity [oneness] of the Spirit” that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 4:3 is still another way of describing how the church is Christ. The experiential reality of the Lord is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17-18; John 14:16-18). In order for the Lord to be the organic Head of His Body, the church, He became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b). The Lord is not a detached Head, nor a figurehead; neither is He merely an order-giving Head. He is a life-giving Head, supplying life, as the Spirit, to all His members. Indeed, 1 Corinthians 6:17 says, “But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.” To be one spirit with the Lord is to merge with the oneness of the Spirit, thereby causing His life to become our life (Col. 3:3-4). When His life is our life, then the church can be nothing else but Christ Himself lived out and expressed.

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Christ as the inner reality of the church is just the oneness of the Father and the Son flowing into us and shared between us. Thus, *our oneness* is not a oneness that is distinct or separate from *Their oneness*. *Our oneness* is *Their oneness*. The oneness of the Triune God has entered into us and is now settled in us. Our part is simply to recognize this oneness and keep it between us. We are sharing and participating in Their oneness! That is why Paul can only say to the believers in Ephesians 4:3, “Endeavoring [being diligent] to *keep* the unity [oneness] of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Just keep it! To keep it means that we already have it resident within us.

Brothers and sisters, have you recognized the oneness of the Spirit in your relationships? Have you seen that *Their* (the Father and Son’s) oneness is *your* oneness in your marriage life? Are your children being raised in an atmosphere where the oneness of the Spirit is recognized in day-to-day living? What about our relationships as brothers and sisters in the church life? Do we see that our relationships are not in the natural realm? Have we seen that our relationships are in a transcendent realm? When we see that the church is Christ embodying the oneness of the Spirit, then between us the governing principle in all of our interactions and dealings is “the peace of Christ” ruling and arbitrating in our hearts (Col. 3:15, NASV).

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For example, when I am tempted to remain in my disagreeable disposition with my wife, I now have a new kind of realization: I am not merely having a disagreement with her; I am interacting with God Himself between us. Are you going to be mad at your spouse for a few hours? Do you realize that you are touching a member of Christ? *Apparently*, the disagreement is over some problem that has arisen, but *actually* the real issue is the oneness of the Spirit being worked out between us.

Thus, the most important thing is not to solve a problem, but to “keep the oneness of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Let the peace of Christ arbitrate and make the decision in your heart. Taking care of the peace is the practical way to keep the oneness of the Spirit. Indeed, the oneness of the Spirit is found in the peace. When the peace of Christ controls our relationships, Christ is practically the Head over all things to the church. The church is Christ when the peace of Christ rules. And this peace is simply the oneness of the Spirit expressed in the Body of Christ as we are filled with the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

2 The Secret of Christ Being Everything to Us

To understand how the church could be Christ, it is important to see that *Christ is our relationship with everything*. When the apostle Paul said in Galatians 2:20, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me,” he opened up a profound revelation concerning our life — Christ is now our relationship with all things. If Christ now lives in me, with the “I” crucified and no longer in the picture, then I do not have a separate, independent relationship with God. My relationship with God is Christ! In fact, one of the most refreshing things to my spirit is for me to declare that I do not have a relationship with God. “Bill Freeman does not have a relationship with God. My relationship with God is *Jesus Christ!*”

God has established one unique relationship with Himself, and that relationship is with His *only* begotten Son (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18). First John 4:9 says, “In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent *His only* begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.” To identify the Son as the *only*

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begotten means that God has only one relationship with one Person. Then to directly relate the only begotten Son to us by saying, “that we might live *through* Him,” reveals that *His relationship* with the Father as the only begotten Son has now become *our relationship*.

Jesus is both the Son of God and the Son of Man. As the Son of God, He is the One who has the relationship with God. As the Son of Man, He is the One who has the relationship with man. He is *the* representative man. Indeed, only one Man has a proper and approved relationship with God and man, and that is Jesus Christ. He represents the meaning of man. For example, in Hebrews 2:6 the question is asked, “What is man?” The answer comes in verse 9, “We see Jesus.” Thus, Jesus Christ is the one Man that has the one unique relationship with God.

God established a relationship with His Son, and then He took that relationship and put it into our heart. Hallelujah! Now, Christ is *my relationship* with the Father. This is the meaning of John 14:6 where Jesus revealed that He is the way, the truth, and the life, and that *no one* can come to the Father except through Him. In other words, He is the One who exclusively has a relationship with the Father. Christ being *my relationship* with the Father is also the meaning of Galatians 4:6 where the Spirit of *His Son* is sent forth into *our hearts*, crying, “Abba Father!”

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Based upon these facts, we need to reevaluate the source of our relationship with God. Is Christ the source of our relationship with God? Or, are we the source? Instead of considering how *our* relationship with God is and how well *we* are doing, we need to consider how His relationship with God is, and how well He is doing. To look at *our* feelings, *our* condition, *our* day, *our* history, or *our* prospects for the future is to be in the wrong realm. As long as we remain in the realm of *our self* and *our relationship* with God, we will invariably fall into the pit of discouragement and condemnation. Our relationship with God is not in the realm of ourselves. Our relationship with God is Jesus Christ. Praise the Lord!

A. The Address of Christ in Us

Many Christians may know objectively the truth concerning identification with Christ, but they may not know subjectively His location within their being. To experience Christ as our relationship with everything, one of the most crucial things to know is that He lives in our spirit. Man's regenerated spirit is the address of Jesus Christ. In 2 Timothy 4:22 the apostle Paul says, "The Lord Jesus Christ be with *your spirit*." This identifies the place where Christ actually lives in us.

We need to understand that our spirit is as much a part of our constitution as our other faculties are. For

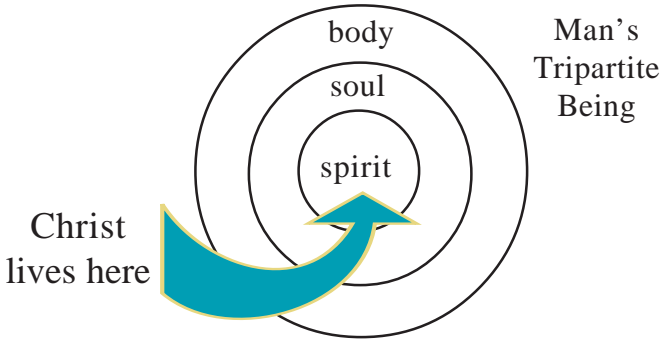
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example, our mouth is *our* mouth, and our eyes are *our* eyes, and our hands are *our* hands. I can close my mouth and I can open my mouth. I can close my eyes and I can open my eyes. I can squeeze my hands and I can open my hands. I can do all these things with my mouth, eyes, and hands because they are *my* members. In other words, we have the ability to do whatever we desire with our own faculties. In the same way, we have control over our own spirit that God has formed in us (1 Cor. 14:32; Zech. 12:1).

Have you ever observed how many personal pronouns there are in the New Testament related to the human spirit? “The Spirit Himself bears witness with *our* spirit” (Rom. 8:16). “For they refreshed *my* spirit and *yours*” (1 Cor. 16:18). “And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because *his* spirit has been refreshed by you all” (2 Cor. 7:13). “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with *your* spirit” (Gal. 6:18). All these verses refer to the deepest part of our being that is joined to the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17). It is this part that is the source of Christ being our relationship with everything. Without living and walking according to spirit, it is impossible for Christ to be everything to us (Rom. 8:3-4).

The diagram at the top of page 39 illustrates that man is a tripartite (three-part) being, possessing a spirit, a soul, and a body (1 Thess. 5:23). Man’s spirit is the address or dwelling place of Christ (2 Tim. 4:22).

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When Christ comes into us, He comes as the Spirit (John 14:17-18; 2 Cor. 3:17) into a specific place in our being called spirit. John 3:6 says, “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” This means that what is born of the big Spirit is little spirit. The capital-letter Spirit begets the small-letter spirit. The divine Spirit begets the human spirit. The Holy Spirit begets the spirit of man. The following diagram illustrates the joining and mingling of the two spirits (1 Cor. 6:17):

The
Mingled
Spirit

Spirit of God
pirit of man

The secret of Christ becoming everything to us is found in this *mingled spirit*, where the two spirits have

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become one (1 Cor. 6:17). Though they are one, the integrity and distinction between the Spirit of God and the spirit of man is still preserved (Rom. 8:16). Our wonderful Christ, who is our relationship with everything, is dwelling in our spirit. Thus, when we realize that exercising our spirit is as simple as squeezing our hand, it will revolutionize our daily life. Our spirit is a part of us, and like the other parts of us, it is subject to us. Because our spirit is subject to us, we can enjoy Christ anytime, in any place, and under any condition. Hallelujah!

When we know the address of Christ in us and learn to abide with Him in that place (John 15:4-5), we can consistently experience the unsearchable riches of Christ in our daily life. There is no need to wait for a “mountain-top” experience. Years ago when I went to retreats, I would always *feel* close to God in the atmosphere of the mountains and big trees. Then a few days later, after returning home, I wondered what happened to those feelings. I tried to imagine how I might recapture that mountain-top atmosphere in order to be close to the Lord. But one day I discovered the address of Christ in me. I saw from the Word that Christ was dwelling in my spirit; and from that time forth, I began to experience Christ in a way that I had never known was possible. Praise the Lord!

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B. The Church Is Christ in the Two Spirits

After discovering that Christ as the Spirit is joined to our spirit, let us see how the church is Christ in relation to our experience of these two spirits. In the New Testament there are two sister verses that show us this. In Romans 8:15 we see “*a spirit of sonship*” (lit.), and in Galatians 4:6 we see “*the Spirit of His Son.*” To understand these two spirits, we need to carefully consider both verses. Romans 8:15 says, “For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of [sonship] by which *we cry out*, “Abba, Father.” And Galatians 4:6 says, “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of *His Son* into your hearts, *crying out*, Abba, Father!” When we compare these two verses we have to ask, who is doing the crying? In the Galatians verse *the Son* is crying, but in the Romans verse *we* are doing the crying. The reason for the apparent contradiction is simply that the two spirits are mingled into one. From one angle it is the Son crying; from another angle it is our crying. These are not two separate cryings. It is only one crying due to the mingling and oneness of the two spirits. The Son’s crying is mingled with our crying, and His crying does not happen apart from our crying.

When we ask how the church is Christ, the answer is — the mingled spirit! Christ lives in us and moves

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through us as we give Him the track of our spirit. For example, our praying is His praying (Rom. 8:26-27, 34), our preaching is His preaching (2 Cor. 5:20), our witnessing is His witnessing (Matt. 10:19-20), our love is His love (1 John 4:12), our experiences are His experiences (2 Cor. 4:10-11). Christ is all and in all! Amen! This is the church. It is Christ!

In Romans 8:16 we see the dynamic that takes place in the mingled spirit. When in verse 15 we cry with *our* spirit of sonship, “Abba, Father,” then in verse 16, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” Let me ask a simple question that will help to make this clear. According to Romans 8:15-16, what did our spirit *do* in verse 15 that causes the Spirit Himself to witness with our spirit in verse 16? In other words, what is the factor that causes the Spirit of God to respond? The answer is revealed in verse 15 — it is our crying, “Abba, Father,” that causes the Spirit of God to respond and testify in us.

In our religious mentality, we usually read Romans 8:15-16 the opposite way. Our thought is that the Holy Spirit takes the initiative and does the crying, and then our spirit bears witness with His Spirit. In other words, our spirit witnesses with His Spirit. But according to the verse, it is just the opposite — the Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit. To cry “Abba, Father,” is to take the initiative to exercise Christ within us.

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Based upon this principle of the mingling of the two spirits, the church is Christ. For example, when we come to the meetings of the church, we come exercising our spirit with Christ. When we do this, the meetings are brought into the realm of the reality of Christ. We don't wait for an inspiration or for someone to make the meeting happen. The meeting is not a spectator event like entertainment or sports. Nor is the meeting an impersonal program being carried out. No. The meeting is the mingling of the two spirits crying, "Abba, Father." This mingling, through the exercise of our spirit, releases the meeting to be Christ. When we pray, fellowship, speak, sing, and open up to each other as members of the Body of Christ, the Spirit Himself witnesses within us and is full of joy and happiness. The church is truly Christ in the mingling of the two spirits.

C. The Church Is Christ as We Are Filled in Spirit

Since Christ Himself dwells in our spirit, the secret of experiencing Him is to use our spirit. Thus, the apostle Paul exhorts the saints to be filled in spirit in order that they would experience the shining of Christ on them. In Ephesians 5:14 he says, "For this reason it says, 'Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you'" (NASV). Then in Ephesians 5:18 Paul reveals *how* Christ will shine on them: "And do not get drunk with

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wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled [in spirit]” (NASV). The verb “filled” is in the present tense in Greek, stressing a continuous kind of experience. It is also in the passive voice, indicating that something is causing the filling. And finally, it is in the imperative mood, which means it is a command. However, the command Paul gives here seems to be outside the reach of our experience. According to our thought, to be “filled in spirit” requires inspiration, a special feeling, or excited emotions. But Paul does not mention these things as the means to be filled in spirit. What then is the means or cause of the filling?

To find the cause of being filled in spirit, we do not need to look far. There are at least five participles in the succeeding verses that are grammatically connected to this verb. The word “participle” itself reveals its function in a sentence — it *participates* in the action of the verb. Thus, when Paul said, “Be filled in spirit,” his thought was linked to the five participles that followed in verses 19 to 21. The first participle is *speaking*, the second is *singing*, the third is *psalming* or *making melody*, the fourth is *giving thanks*, and the fifth is *submitting* to one another. All five of these participles participate in the action of the verb, “be filled.” They express simultaneous action with the verb. They also are the means for being a person continuously filled in spirit and shining with Christ. To experience Christ shining upon us so that He

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is everything to us, we need to be filled in spirit by speaking, singing, psalming, giving thanks, and submitting to one another.

Brothers and sisters, our spirit is joined to the Lord. This means His life, His love, His praise, His overcoming, and His victory are all resident within us. We all have the same Christ. No one is excluded. None belong to a special class of people. We all have the same potential. If you have Christ and I have Christ, we can all shout, “Hallelujah!” We can experience Him as our relationship with everything as we simply allow Him to fill us up by speaking, singing, psalming, giving thanks, and being subject to one another. This is how we are filled in spirit and this is how Christ shines upon us.

When we take the initiative with our spirit *to speak* His name and testify of our experience of Him, to sing His praises, *to psalm* by plucking the guitar or playing the piano to the Lord, *to give thanks* in all things, and *to submit* to each other, we cooperate with the Christ who is already installed in us. We do not need a re-installation of Christ in us. For example, this building has been installed with an electrical system. At one point there was a once-and-for-all installation in the building. Now there is no need to go through the procedure of installation again. What is needed is simply to turn on the switch. Just turn the switch on and the light shines. In the same way, we switch on Christ in our lives by our speaking and

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singing. Our exercised spirit and our speaking mouth is the key to letting Christ shine upon us and become everything to us.

D. Our Spirit and Our Mouth

The apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:13 shows us the importance of our spirit and mouth in experiencing Christ in the midst of our environments. He says, “But since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed, and therefore I spoke,’ we also believe and therefore speak.” This verse is Paul’s quotation of David in Psalm 116:10. In Psalm 116 David describes his afflictions and trials, and then speaks of how he called upon the name of the Lord in the midst of them. When Paul says, “We have *the same* spirit of faith,” he is identifying himself with David — both with David’s trials, as well as with how he handled his trials. David’s way and Paul’s way of passing through trials was to release their spirit of faith by speaking.

To understand the spiritual law of opening our mouth to draw from our spirit of faith is the key to experiencing Christ in a practical way. It is in this way that Christ can become our relationship to everything. It is also in this way that the church is Christ in its expression. For example, in the middle of my feelings of bitterness and hurt — when I can feel them wanting to

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take me over, when the feelings are turning into anger, when my reasonings begin to fuel my feelings and I am about to give vent to them in words and deeds — at that moment I can exercise my spirit by opening my mouth and saying, “Lord Jesus!” When I call His name, He operates within my spirit to change me. Thus, He becomes my relationship with others. And this is how the church is Christ.

When you say, “Lord Jesus,” from your spirit, at that point you are walking in the Spirit and not carrying out the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:15-16). For example, the desires of the flesh in the form of vengeance start to well up within you. These desires of the flesh want to be angry or lustful, or to turn inward with morbid introspection. The flesh has many facets to it. It can be angry one minute, lustful the next, and then turn into a deep depression. Although we may have these feelings of the flesh, we can interrupt them by walking in the Spirit and not carrying them out.

For many years I didn’t know how to practically interrupt my flesh and walk in the Spirit. I just didn’t know how to apply Christ at the times I needed Him the most. For example, I used to have problems with my mind in relation to things in the past. The thoughts were so awful that they would plague and torment me. The only thing I knew to do in my early Christian life to handle those thoughts was drive down the freeway for miles. I

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would just drive my car, hoping to shake the thoughts out of my head. I didn't realize at that time the secret of exercising my spirit by using my mouth — that this was the way to walk in the Spirit and let Christ be my relationship with my thoughts.

However, one day on an old dirty, dusty road in an avocado orchard, I discovered my spirit by using my mouth. I was going through a hard time, and I just started walking back and forth, calling on the name of the Lord. Even though I knew the teaching and theology of the human spirit — I knew about it all — I didn't know how to make it real in my experience. But that day I just started thanking God out loud for my regenerated, born-again spirit. I started actually opening my mouth, thanking the Lord, exercising my spirit, calling on His name. By doing this, I was in my spirit enjoying Christ. I really discovered the Lord, not by mere knowledge about Him, but by actually contacting Him. Praise the Lord!

We not only see that God's Son is in us and that He is now our relationship with the Father, but we also have discovered the secret of allowing Christ to be everything to us. By exercising our mingled spirit we can be filled up with His life. Knowing that His address is our spirit makes it possible for us to experience Him at all times. Could anything be more encouraging? It is by living out this secret that the church is in the reality of expressing Christ.

3 Christ —

Our Relationship with Everything

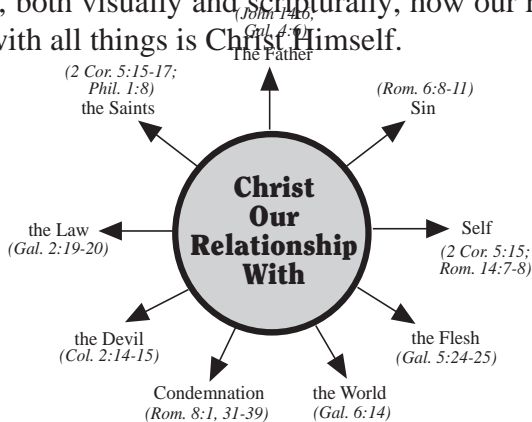
Apart from Christ we cannot do anything, and neither o
we have a relationship with anything (John 15:5). For the church to be Christ in reality this must be our controlling vision. According to John 14:6, it is *through* Christ that we come to the Father. We are not coming to the Father on our own, merely using the name of Christ in a formal way. Galatians 4:6 describes John 14:6 more precisely by showing that God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying, “Abba, Father.” We are coming with the Son Himself in our hearts crying, “Abba, Father.” Our crying, “Abba, Father” *is* Christ in us crying, “Abba.” He says, “Abba” in our “Abba” (cf. Gal. 4:6 and Rom. 8:15). In other words, we are actually participating in His relationship with the Father.

As *my* relationship with the Father, Christ is my righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). Thus, I am not shrinking back in coming to God; neither am I a condemned person. Far be it! There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). I am coming to the Father *in* Him, *through* Him, and *with* Him. If Christ can be condemned, then I can. But

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since He is outside the reach of condemnation, so am I. Hallelujah!

The illustration has been given of a soldier keeping himself in a tank and not lifting the lid to stick his head out. It is dangerous for him to raise his head out of the tank to look around. To do so is to risk becoming a target of the enemy. It is safer to keep the lid shut and remain in the tank. In the same way we need to stay in Christ, abide in Christ, and let Him be our relationship with God, not lifting ourselves up to look around at our condition. If you lift your head up and look at yourself with your subjective feelings and thoughts, you will become the target of the darts of Satan. Brothers and sisters, we just need to rest and remain in Christ. There is no need to defend our relationship with God when our relationship with God is Christ (Rom. 8:31-39). The diagram below will help us to see, both visually and scripturally, how our relationship with all things is Christ Himself.



Christ — Our Relationship with Everything

Christ is our relationship with *all* things — both positive and negative. As we have seen, on the positive side, Christ is our relationship with the Father. He is also our relationship with all the saints, the members of His Body. On the negative side, Christ is our relationship with sin, the self, the flesh, the world, condemnation, the devil, and the law. Praise the Lord! Thus, we must ask ourselves, how are we related to sin? How are we related to our flesh? How are we related to the world? Oftentimes, we have tried to live the Christian life with ourselves as the source. But we must see that we have no life in ourselves apart from Christ (John 6:53). Our life is wholly wrapped up with Him. Our true life has been hidden with Christ in God. “Christ who is our life” in Colossians 3:4 means that we died to sin *in Him*. We died to the flesh *in Him*. We died to the world *in Him*. We defeated the devil *in Him*. And we died to the law *in Him*. Praise the Lord!

Our relationship with all these realms is Christ. Even in our encounters with sins, we need to be a person who reacts exclusively with the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10:17-19). Concerning sin, we need to interact with what happened on the cross. Christ died to sin, and in Him we reckon ourselves to be dead indeed to sin. We are alive to God *in Him* (Rom. 6:8-11). When we are oriented to

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these facts, our partaking of Christ and our participation in Him become so rich and full. He supplies to us the victory. The victory over sin and death is just Himself. We do not strive to win the victory. We receive and participate in His victory! Hallelujah!

Brothers and sisters, we are all on the same level, so we can all echo the familiar song, “Just as I am, without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me . . . O Lamb of God, I come, I come.” This is exactly how we should relate to the Lord, always coming to Him *where we are*. If you are thinking that you have to do it, or that you have to repair yourself, or that you have to reach a point where you are stronger in yourself to be accepted by God, then you have it all wrong. There is nothing in ourselves that can stand before God (Rom. 7:18). In fact, if we would seek to clean ourselves up on our own, and come to Him with some merit in ourselves, His analysis would be that all our righteousnesses are nothing but filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). God only accepts one Person — His *only begotten Son*. Amen!

When Christ is revealed in me (Gal. 1:15), I have a new relationship with everything. I no longer come from the source of myself. I am no longer the savior of my life. Christ Himself is my Savior. I no longer interact with matters and things apart from Him, as though I am on my own. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 that as a man in Christ, I am in the realm of the new creation, where “*all*

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things are [out] of God.” The new creation means Christ is the center and spring of my life, and because of this I now have a new relationship with all things.

A. Christ — Our Relationship with the Father

To understand our relationship with the Father, we must understand the relationship that exists between the Father and the Son. In Matthew 11:27, the Lord Jesus unveiled that relationship by saying, “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” From this verse we see two crucial things about the relationship between the Father and the Son. First, the Father and Son’s relationship is mutually exclusive. That means no one in this universe knows Their relationship except the Father and the Son. Second, the Father and Son’s relationship can be revealed to us. That is, Their relationship can be known as the Son makes it known to whomever He wills. Thus, God has only one relationship — the relationship with His Son. The Father has no other relationship in this universe.

What is important to see in understanding our relationship with God is that we do not have a separate relationship apart from the Father and Son’s own relationship. God is not establishing new relationships with others. He has established one relationship with His Son,

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and then He gives that relationship away as a gift. This is the meaning of the gift of eternal life in the New Testament. Eternal life is receiving the Son of God into us and participating in His relationship with the Father. John 17:3 says, “And this is eternal life, *that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*” Also, 1 John 5:20 says, “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, *that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.*”

When we receive eternal life we receive the Father and Son’s very own relationship. Hallelujah! Now Christ Himself is my relationship with the Father. You and I do not have a different relationship with God besides the one Christ has with the Father. This is why after the Lord revealed the one unique relationship in the universe between Himself and the Father in Matthew 11:27, He immediately said in verse 28, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” This means there is no longer any need to labor and struggle in our souls, trying to establish our own relationship with God (Rom. 10:3-4). We only need to come to Jesus and learn from Him. When we do, we become one with Him and discover that *our* relationship with the Father is actually *His* relationship. We are merging with His relationship with the Father, and this brings rest to our

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souls (Matt. 11:28-30).

Based upon redemption, God can now give away His relationship with His Son. Galatians 4:4-6 says, ⁴ “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ *to redeem* those who were under the law, *that we might receive the [sonship]*. ⁶ *And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!”* To receive the sonship is to receive the rights, privileges, and relationships of the Son of God. Oh, brothers and sisters, our God took His relationship with His Son and put it right into our hearts! Amen! Now we do not have a separate fellowship with the Father. Indeed, we have been called *into* the one unique fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor. 1:9). “*Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ*” (1 John 1:3b).

This relationship and fellowship means that we are not standing with our own righteousness, but with His alone (1 Cor. 1:30). Neither are we dependent upon our condition or status as the basis of our relationship with God. We are not trusting in anything related to ourselves (Phil. 3:7-9). We are nothing and have nothing. When we wake up in the morning we need not inspect “*our relationship with God*”; rather we say, “Lord Jesus, how are You doing today? How is Your relationship with the Father?” Never again do we need to doubt our relationship with

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God, since our relationship with God is Christ (Rom. 8:38-39).

The uniqueness of the Lord's relationship with the Father is emphasized in John 14:6: "Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes ["is coming" – present tense] to the Father except through Me." When He says, "no one," it means categorically *no one* (Rom. 3:10-12). No one is coming to the Father except through Him. When He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," He was, in effect, saying, "I am your constant relationship with the Father." How could we ever sink to puny, morbid introspection again? This kind of inner subjective activity is useless! It is wasted time and energy. My relationship with the Father is Jesus Christ my Lord. He doesn't change. Every morning I can wake up and open myself to God with a released spirit, knowing that my joy, my love, my relationship with the Father is absolutely wonderful. Hallelujah! Oh, what a Christ I have!

B. Christ — Our Relationship with Sin

To speak of Christ as our relationship with sin does not sound so positive, yet the New Testament reveals that Christ's relationship with sin has become my relationship. *Christ* is my relationship with sin. God dealt with sin in Christ. Then He put us in Christ, so that now our

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relationship with sin is to be found in Christ. Romans 6:8-11 clearly shows us *how* Christ is our relationship with sin: ⁸ “Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Verse 11 says that we are “alive to God in Christ Jesus.” This is a most astounding fact. I can declare with boldness by the Word of God that I am alive and living to God in Christ Jesus. This truth renews my mind regarding *how* I am alive to God! This is truth that sets us free!

On the positive side, we are alive to God in Christ Jesus; on the negative side, we are dead to sin. Since Christ died to sin once for all, His death to sin has now become my relationship to sin. There is no way to have a victorious relationship toward sin apart from Christ’s relationship with it. Sin is a powerful force dwelling in our flesh (Rom. 7:14-24). To attempt in ourselves to overcome this indwelling sin is to end up in the same condition the apostle Paul experienced at the end of Romans chapter 7 — defeated and wretched.

In Christ’s crucifixion, He died to sin once for all. Now in resurrection He lives to God in another realm. In the same way, we died to sin in His death (Rom. 6:6), and

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now, in Him we also live to God in another realm. Our history, our life, and our existence are all bound up with Him. Thus, our relationship to sin is the same as His relationship to sin; that is, it is in the realm of life. He is living to God and we also are living to God in Him.

To be dead to sin implies that we are living in another realm. Just like a dead person is dead in the physical realm but alive in the after-life (Luke 16:19-31), so we also are dead to the realm of sin because we are alive in the realm of the Spirit and life. According to Romans 8:2, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.” One realm frees us from another realm. Thus, being dead to sin has nothing to do with our impotent efforts and struggles; rather it is a question of what realm we are in.

When we see Christ as all in all, He then becomes not only our relationship with all things, but He also becomes the new realm we live in. Indeed, the way we experience death to sin is not by trying to be dead to it in ourselves. It is by staying in the realm of resurrection. The realm of resurrection is the realm of the Spirit and life (1 Cor. 15:45b). In this realm we are automatically freed from sin. That is, the power of sin is broken in our lives by what one servant of the Lord has called “the expulsive power of a new affection.” This new affection is in the realm of the Spirit. It is the love of God poured out in my heart by the Holy Spirit that enables me to put to death the

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practices of my body (Rom. 5:5; 8:13).

Dealing with sin is not to be achieved in a process of trying to overcome it. Rather, it is drawing from the life-power of Christ in the realm of resurrection. Instead of interacting with sin as though it were my responsibility to overcome it in myself, I interact with Christ — *my relationship with sin*. In *that* relationship, sin is a dead thing to me. Because I can exercise my spirit *where* I am alive to God in Christ, I come under the expulsive power of a new affection for God and the things of God (Rom. 8:5-6). It is that affection that immobilizes the force of sin in my life. In the realm of the spirit, indwelling sin forever remains a dead thing to me, because I died and my *new me* is now hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3-4).

In Romans 6:11 Paul says to *reckon* ourselves to be “dead indeed to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” The Greek term for “reckon” — *logizomai* is a mathematical term and simply means $2 + 2 = 4$. This equation is reliable and can be counted on every time we use our calculator to do some addition. Paul wanted to convey that Christ as our relationship with sin is just as reliable. He meant that we could rely upon Christ as our relationship with sin just as we rely upon the facts of mathematics. For example, when you wake up in the morning and it’s stormy weather outside and the electrical power has gone out, it does not change the fact that $2 + 2 = 4$. Whether it is good weather or bad weather — any kind of weather — two plus two

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will always equal four.

In the realm of the Spirit, to reckon means to trust and rely upon what exists in that realm. What exists there? Victory over sin in Christ Jesus! No wonder Paul broke forth in Romans 7:25 and declared, “Thanks be to God *through* Jesus Christ our Lord!” (NASV). At that moment he saw Christ as his relationship with sin. Sin could no longer intimidate him. He was freed from the torment of sin, because he saw his new relationship with sin in the Person of Christ. Instead of being in the mode of being miserable and wretched, he started operating in the mode of thanksgiving. When we experience Christ in this way — as our relationship to sin — the church will become increasingly a life-giving expression of Him.

C. Christ — Our Relationship with the Flesh

In John 3:6 the Lord Jesus said, “That which is *born* of the flesh is flesh, and that which is *born* of the Spirit is spirit.” By using the Greek perfect tense (a present/permanent state) for the word “born,” He conveyed two important principles: first, the realm of the flesh never changes; second, the realm of the spirit never changes. These two realms are separate from each other, are mutually exclusive, and, in fact, oppose each other (Gal. 5:17).

When we receive Jesus Christ into our lives, we

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need to realize that our flesh does not change at that time. Neither will it change in the future. It is our spirit that is born again. Our dead spirit is begotten of the divine Spirit and comes alive (Eph. 2:1; Rom. 8:10). Indeed, our newly-born, mingled spirit becomes the source from which we live as believers. It is into our regenerated spirit that Christ comes to dwell. From this place He Himself becomes our relationship with the flesh. Thus, our relationship with the flesh is Jesus Christ *as He* lives in our spirit and *as we* walk according to spirit (Rom. 8:3-4).

There are many aspects to the flesh — the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:16), the will of the flesh (John 1:13), the mind of the flesh (Rom. 8:6-7), and the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19), to name a few. The flesh has feelings and reactions, as well as deeds; and many times we are subject to these things. Thus, we bear a close relationship with the flesh.

Concerning his own flesh, Paul had to admit, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells” (Rom. 7:18). Then, in Colossians he warns the believers that if they relate to the evil flesh with a religious flesh they will encounter certain defeat (Col. 2:18-23). How then can we be related to our flesh, if flesh cannot overcome flesh? The answer to that question is found in Galatians 5:24-25: ²⁴ “And those who are [of Christ Jesus] have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the

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Spirit.” The phrase uttered by Paul, “those *who are of Christ Jesus*,” tells us *how* we are to be related to the flesh. It is those who simply belong to Christ Jesus, who are one with Him in spirit, that have crucified the flesh. Are you one who is of Christ Jesus? This means you do not have a separate life from Him. You are wholly identified with Him. You do not have a separate relationship with the flesh in your flesh. You are *of Christ Jesus*, and as such, you *own* His relationship with the flesh. Hallelujah! His relationship with the flesh is not a long, drawn-out battle with it; rather it is a one-time crucifixion to it. The word “crucified” in Galatians 5:24 is in the aorist tense in Greek, indicating a blow was dealt to the flesh in the past that is decisive, complete, and final. That blow was dealt to the flesh on the cross of Calvary two thousand years ago.

How we are related to the flesh is wrapped up in the answer to one question — *Are we of Christ Jesus?* That is all we need to answer. We don’t need to examine whether or not we have any potential. Neither do we need a record or string of victories that we can boast in. Nor do we need to look at our condition to see whether or not we feel like a crucified person. We just need to answer one question — *Are we of Christ Jesus?* If so, then we have crucified the flesh. Paul says it — If we are of Christ Jesus then *we have* crucified the flesh. This means that Christ is our relationship with the flesh.

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In Galatians 5:24, the relationship with the flesh is established as a fact in Christ Jesus. Then in verse 25, the application and experience of this fact is revealed by Paul: “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” To “live in the Spirit” in this verse is equivalent to being “of Christ Jesus” in the preceding verse. Thus, *Christ in the realm of the Spirit* is our relationship with the flesh. But for this fact to become our experience over and over again in our daily life, we need to walk in the Spirit.

The Greek word in Galatians 5:25 for “walk” is a specific military word, rather than the more general word for walk used in other places in the New Testament. It has the sense of “keeping in step with the Spirit.” This could be likened to a group of soldiers marching down the street, keeping in step with the cadence of the drummer. Their steps are very deliberate and specific. It is the same when we walk in the spirit; Christ is in us, in our mingled spirit. He has already dealt a blow to the flesh. Now we must keep in step with Him whenever our flesh rises up to be fulfilled. This means we take a deliberate and specific step in spirit at the moment our flesh manifests itself. When we keep in step with the Spirit, the Lord Himself is our relationship with the reacting flesh. We just say, “Amen, Lord, I love You!” Or, call out His name, “Lord Jesus!” This is how we keep in step with the Spirit, and execute the crucifixion over our flesh.

The main point in dealing with the flesh is not to

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interact with it. We do not dare to handle it on our own. There is only One who is qualified to handle it, and He was incarnated to do so. He became flesh (John 1:14) and lived a victorious life in the flesh (Rom. 8:3). Now in resurrection He has become a life-giving Spirit in our spirit to supply to us His triumphant relationship with the flesh. Now all we need to do is keep in step with the Spirit. Pray a little bit, call a little bit, shout to God a little bit, sing a little bit. Just keep in step with the Spirit. For example, you come to a meeting with the feelings and mood of the flesh. Then during the meeting you start to walk in spirit. You are just keeping in step with the Spirit, and automatically in the realm of the Spirit you experience the crucifixion of the flesh. Hallelujah! This is our experience.

If, as an excuse, you say to me, “I can’t overcome my flesh. I have already tried over and over again and failed.” I will respond by saying, “That’s right! Of course you can’t!” If you and I have a relationship with the flesh based upon ourselves, we are through. Oh, brothers and sisters, let us come back to Christ — to see Him as our relationship with the flesh and then just keep in step with the Spirit. This is how the church is Christ. It is by a group of people enjoying Christ as their relationship with everything, including the flesh. When you, as a member of the Body, experience Christ as your relationship to sin and the flesh, and I experience Christ in my daily life in the same way, then when we all come together to meet — the

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church is Christ!

D. Christ — Our Relationship with the World

The church is also Christ is in its relationship with the world. When we as believers allow Christ to be our relationship with the world, we will find ourselves living a church life in the realm of the “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15). The church life is described with similar terms in Colossians 3:10-11 as “the new man” where “Christ is all and in all.” These phrases, “new creation,” “new man,” and “Christ is all and in all,” depict the church life. To have a practical church life in this realm requires a decisive dealing with the world — both with the evil world and with the religious world. The world and the present evil age are always opposing God’s perfect will to have the church life as a pure expression of Christ (Gal. 1:4; Rom. 12:2; 1 John 2:15-17).

The apostle Paul speaks concerning his relationship with the world in Galatians 6:14-15: ¹⁴ “But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.” Paul lived in the realm of the new creation, and experienced the crucified Christ as his relationship with the world. The cross of Christ was the point of reference for

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Paul whereby the world was crucified to him and he to it. According to Paul in these two verses, “the world” is something opposite from the “new creation.”

When our relationship to the world is Christ, we are crucified to it and it to us. That means we are released to live in the new creation — where we live in a different realm with different goals and different values. In this realm, the system of the world under Satan’s dominion is nullified. Our priorities are not the same. We love Christ and the church. Our time and energy is for God’s will and purpose, rather than being usurped by this age with its worldly preoccupations.

Christ being our relationship with the world issues in the church life as the new creation. When I’m out of the world, I’m in the church. The church is the *ἐκκλησία* — the called-out ones. That is the nature of the church — being assembled as the called-out ones. The fact that we could meet as the church, standing together in the cities where we live, means we are out of the world. We are out of the world, because Christ is out of the world (John 17:15-16). The cross is our once-and-for-all dealing with the world. We are not trying to deal with the world in ourselves. It has been dealt with in Him through His cross. Now we glory and boast in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, because by it the world has been crucified to us and we have been crucified to it. It is a dead thing to us and we are a dead thing to it. We no longer live in the

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realm of its values. Rather, we value the new creation where Christ is all and in all.

E. Christ — Our Relationship with Condemnation

Christ has also become our relationship with condemnation. Has it ever occurred to you what your relationship with condemnation is? Many times we live under a stream of condemning thoughts from the enemy in our mind. We relate to these thoughts by coping with them in some form or another. Sometimes we try beating them away in a fly-swatter fashion. Or, we attempt to replace them with new resolutions and promises to God that we won't fail again. Or, we just sink into depression. We live always feeling condemned.

God's answer to this spiritual disease is found in Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." In other words, not being condemned has nothing to do with your past record or your present performance. Nor is it dependent on your ability to cope with your thoughts. It is strictly a matter of *where* you are. Where are you? Are you *in yourself* or are you *in Christ Jesus*? If you are in Christ Jesus, then you can shout "Hallelujah!" You can tell condemnation that you are now related to it in Christ. If Christ can be condemned, then you can be condemned. But since you are included and hidden in Him (1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 3:3), all

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the arrows of condemnation have to come to Him. Of course, that is unthinkable.

When our religious flesh is alive, trying to be justified by the works of the law, we unwittingly set ourselves up for a condemnation situation. But if our flesh is terminated, and the law-keeping “I” is crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:19-20), then there is not even a possibility of receiving any condemnation. We don’t even have a chance to be condemned anymore. We died with Christ, and it is “no longer I who live.” Thus, Christ is now my relationship with condemnation.

Paul is so clear about being a person in Christ who cannot be condemned that he begins to boldly challenge everyone in the universe. It’s as if he were saying, “Are you (whoever you may be) going to condemn me? Are you going to bring a charge against me? Come and listen to me!” Then in Romans 8:31 through verse 34, he declares, ³¹ “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.” Hallelujah!

Paul totally ignores the possibility of being charge-

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able, or of whether or not the condemnation is perhaps legitimate. He does not give any ground for anyone to say anything against him. He does not answer the charges with himself, his record, or even his victorious Christian life. He only answers with Christ Jesus. It is Christ who died! It is Christ who is risen! It is Christ who is at the right hand of God making intercession for us! It is Christ who is our relationship with condemnation!

Our problem is that we have been in a relationship with condemnation for such a long time that we live with our conscience deflated, and our spirit down. We can't enjoy God because we are flooded with condemning thoughts. At those points we have to boldly declare, "Condemnation, I don't have a relationship with you anymore. My relationship with you is now my Christ."

We all need to learn this lesson from an older brother in the Lord in Washington State. He is about 90 years old and he is ready to meet the Lord at any time. I heard him give the following testimony: "You know what I do when the devil comes and starts to condemn me? I say, 'JESUS! HE'S HERE AGAIN!' " Oh, brothers and sisters, that is what we need to declare when those condemning thoughts come streaming in — "JESUS, HE'S HERE AGAIN! The thoughts are here again!" We don't handle condemnation with ourselves. We handle it with Christ, because He is now our relationship with it.

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F. Christ — Our Relationship with the Devil

One of the most crucial areas in which we need to know Christ is in our relationship with the devil. In Jude 9 we read, “Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’ ” Michael’s relationship with the devil in this verse is brief and to the point — “The Lord rebuke you!” That says it all. The Lord Himself is our relationship with the devil.

At every stage of the Lord’s history, He defeated the devil. *In His human life*, in the wilderness and in His ministry He defeated him (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 11:20-23). *In His death on the cross*, Christ decisively destroyed the devil and triumphed over him (John 12:31-33; Heb. 2:14; Col. 2:14-15). *In His resurrection*, Christ broke the devil’s power (1 Pet. 3:18-22; Rev. 1:18). *In His ascension and enthronement*, He subdued the devil (Eph. 1:19-22). *In His building of the church*, He crushed Satan under our feet so that he cannot prevail (Rom. 16:20; Matt. 16:18-19). *In His indwelling* in the believer, Christ is greater than the devil (1 John 4:4). *In His battle to bring in the kingdom*, all believers overcome the devil because of the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:9-11). *In His millennial kingdom*, the devil is bound in the abyss for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1-3). *In His eternal victory*, the

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devil is cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10). Hallelujah!

At any point in our daily life we can resist the devil by simply resting in the Object of our faith — our victorious Christ (1 Pet. 5:8-9). By submitting to God with Christ our life, the devil has to flee (James 4:7). By being totally focused on Christ and remaining pure and simple toward Him, we keep ourselves preserved from the deceiving serpent so that he cannot touch us (2 Cor. 11:2-3; 1 John 5:18). What a victory! Christ is our relationship with the devil.

G. Christ — Our Relationship with the Law

God desires that the church be the enlargement of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). For this to happen God made Christ our wisdom and our relationship to everything (1 Cor. 1:30). Thus, the more we experience Christ as our relationship in all things, the more the church is Christ being fully expressed through His members. This includes the believers' relationship with the law. Christ is also our relationship with the law.

In Galatians 2:19-21, the apostle Paul shows how our relationship with the law is just Christ: ¹⁹ “For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by [the] faith [of] the Son of God, who

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loved me and gave Himself for me. ²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.” In verse 19 we see how God dealt with us in our relationship to the law — we died to the law in the death of Christ on the cross. When Christ died on the cross we also died (2 Cor. 5:14). Indeed, Paul makes it clear in Romans 7:3-4, that when the body of Christ was hanging on the cross, we not only died with Him but we died *to the law* with Him. The law demanded that the sinner die for his sin (Ezek. 18:4). Thus, in our co-crucifixion with Him, we legally and judicially died. We were all judged on the cross in His death. The law effectively put us to death in Him and dealt a final blow to our law-breaking flesh. This is the meaning of Paul’s statement, “I through the law died to the law.”

Now that we have died to the law in the death of Christ, we no longer have a relationship with it in ourselves. Our relationship to the law is now Jesus Christ Himself. He is not only the end of the law for righteousness to us (Rom. 10:4), but He is the fulfiller of the righteous requirement of the law in us as we walk according to spirit (Matt. 5:17-18; Rom. 8:3-4). We are no longer occupied with living to an impersonal law and demand that has no life in it. We are living to God in a Person who is life and who gives life! Christ being my relationship with the law means that it is no longer the law-keeping “I” that lives, but Christ who lives in me.

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This means I am forever delivered from slavery, bondage, legality, impotence, and fear. I am now living to God in the Person of Christ.

The way we live to God is not from ourselves or our efforts. We live to God in our relationship and fellowship with His Son. In the Son we have received the “sonship” (Gal. 4:4-5). The “sonship” in the New Testament means to have an existence continually living before God as an object of His love (Eph. 1:4-6). We are being constantly supplied with grace because we are in the One who is continually being loved — the Beloved One! This is “sonship.”

I live to God in the very relationship that Christ has with the Father (Eph. 2:18). Even though I am still in the flesh and can feel its tendencies and weaknesses, my relationship with God is never disturbed. This is because of a constant infusion of faith that comes from being so flooded with the personal love of my Christ for me. Paul says it well in Galatians 2:20: “the life which I now live in the flesh I live by [the] faith [of] the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Thus, “the faith of the Son of God” was coming to Paul because of his love relationship with the Lord (Gal. 5:6). That is the way faith operates — it is simply by abiding in His love.

Despite the presence of the flesh and even the rumblings of the flesh, we are not under the law to

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interact with it or have any kind of relationship with it. The only thing we do now is keep ourselves in the love of God. By this we allow faith to keep infusing us to be completely occupied with Christ. It is in this way that the church is Christ — by saints being freed from the tyranny of the law, having only one relationship in their lives — Christ!

H. Christ — Our Relationship to Ourselves

1. Concerning 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

One of the most wonderful things to discover is that once we have received Christ, He then becomes our relationship to ourselves. Paul makes this clear in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, ¹⁴ “For the love of Christ constrains us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; ¹⁵ and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer [to] themselves, but [to] Him who died for them and rose again.” In verse 14, when Paul says that “One died for all,” according to our understanding, we probably would have continued the sentence by saying, “then all are forgiven.” Of course, it is true in other passages of Scripture that when Christ died for all, He died to forgive all. However, in verse 14, Paul is stressing another aspect of Christ’s death. The statement, “if One died for all, then all died” reveals a crucial fact about our relationship to

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ourselves. Furthermore, as we consider verse 15, Paul opens up what the issue should be of our having died in His death — “that those who live should live no longer [to] themselves, but [to] Him.” In other words, a relationship to ourselves with ourselves has ceased — Christ is now our true relationship to ourselves. We do not live to ourselves any longer. We live to Him.

The death of Christ is not only for our forgiveness; it is also for our termination. The terminating of the self is very positive, for it has one goal in view — the release of Christ living in us. When we no longer live to ourselves, we are no longer our point of reference in relation to our daily life and affairs. Our point of reference is no longer the self, but Christ. Thus, we begin learning how to live *to* Him. Who do we live to? Our orientation in our fallen nature is to live to ourselves — to our own reasoning mind, to our feelings, to our reactions, to our own analysis of ourselves. In the past “the self” has been our point of reference.

When the self is our point of reference, we really do not know ourselves as we should in God’s light. In fact, according to the Scripture, apart from Him we are prone to being deceived about ourselves. The self cannot accurately know the self. So, no one really knows himself without God’s light. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who

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can know it?” Who can know their own heart properly? We may think we are fine, when we are totally off. Or, we may think we are off, when we are fine. Brothers and sisters, we are unable to know our hearts. God says our hearts are desperately wicked, whether we agree with His diagnosis or not. It is God who asks the question, “Who can know the heart?”

In Jeremiah 17:10, the Lord answers His own question, “I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.” It is the Lord who knows and searches our hearts. Even the Lord is identified by a compound title in Greek — “the Heart-Knower” (Acts 1:24; 15:8). Thus, to know ourselves we must first come to know God. We may think we know ourselves by introspection, or by analyzing our own heart. We may imagine that we know ourselves rightly, but apart from being in fellowship with the Heart-Knower, we are prone to deception.

Actually, James says it in a good way: “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” And immediately after that, he adds, “Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (4:8). Now, the religious way of understanding those verses is that *first* you cleanse your hands and try to purify your heart. You try to make it seem right, according to your thought. *Then* you draw near to God — as though you are the savior and

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the one who cleans yourself up, as though you are the one qualified to know the duplicity in your heart and to know when your heart is divided, as though you can do the work yourself. You think that after you've done what you could, then you can draw near to God. But James doesn't say it that way. He says to come as you are and draw near to God. Come just the way you are, without one plea, but that His blood was shed for you. Blood has been shed. You can come the way you are, and God will draw near to you. And then you get in the light. "In Your light, we see light" (Psa. 36:9). In God's light your hands are dirty. "O God, look at the filth on me." And yet, when you're looking at your hands, you're not looking at them with yourself as the point of reference. You're looking at yourself from *His* light, and in His light, the blood is cleansing. And you can weep and you can repent and you can shed tears; and all the time you're weeping and repenting and shedding tears, it's not at all ascetic or religious. You are actually participating in the grace of God.

Repentance is a gift (Acts 11:17-18). You don't work up repentance. Repentance is given to us as a gift (Ezek. 36:25-31). The fact that I could weep and repent and confess — that is a gift of God. Hallelujah! It's not of us. The whole thing is Him, from beginning to end. So we see that first, you draw near to God and He'll draw near to you, and then you see your dirty hands and you see

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your heart — your motivation and how you manipulate people. You see the duplicity in your heart. You see how thoroughly corrupt you are. And all the time you see that, you say, “Lord, I still love You.” And when you’re saying that, He’s just diffusing His life into your heart. He’s going to change you. “I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh” (Ezek. 36:26). It’s as though He’s saying, “You can’t do it. I’ll take it away. I’ll give you a new heart. I’ll give you a heart of flesh. And you will walk in My statutes. You will do it, because I’m going to do it in you.”

In one of our home meetings, there was a new sister among us. She was worn out as a believer, and was ready to give up the Christian life. She had no where else to go. She sat in that meeting, just forlorn, disappointed. Raised in a Christian home, she’d had all the Christian upbringing, but didn’t know which way to turn. I said to her, I’m going to show you something. I opened to Ezekiel 36. She sat there, her face sad because she realized the condition of her heart, but had no way to handle it. I said, Look at what it says here, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.” Her tears were just starting to come down. I said, Look — “I will take away the stony heart.” — He’s going to do it! She had never seen it before, that He would actually take away the stony heart. She began to weep for joy to see that it was God’s work — God was going to do it.

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“Draw near to God.” You draw near, not after you adjust yourself, but before you even try. Because the blood has been shed, we can enter into God — the real Savior. He’s the real Repairer. He’s the real Healer. He’s the One who cleans up our heart. He’s the real Cleaner-upper. He’s the real Restorer. He does it, and He does it while we’re in contact with Him.

Being oriented to Christ in your experience means you’re in contact with Him — no longer living to yourself but to Him. My point of reference is no longer me. My point of reference is Christ. For example, if I’m broken down, and I need some repair, then I need to go to the Repairman. Jesus is my Repairman. I don’t know how to fix anything. I’m just simple to come to Jesus. This is what I appreciate about my wife. She has her weaknesses, but amazingly, even in her frailty, weaknesses, and feelings of failure, she still has that boldness to just keep coming to God. Sometimes I wondered how she could be testifying in a meeting so boldly, when she’s feeling so weak. But, you know, this is the right way — “Just as I am, without one plea . . . Fightings within and fears without, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.” Amen. Just like that. And He does the work in us.

2. Concerning Romans 14:7-8

God wants us to keep coming forward and enjoy this

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grace that's ours. So, our point of reference is not ourselves, it's Him. Romans 14:7-8 tells us, "For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." Then verse 9 continues, "For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living." It says, "that He might be Lord" — the Boss — "both of the dead and the living." So, live to the Boss. Live to the Lord. He died and rose again, not merely to become a ticket in our pocket for us to go to heaven when we die. He died and rose again to be Lord. This means we live now to Christ. He's our point of reference. We no longer live to ourself. We never refer back to ourself. Our whole source has changed, from ourself to Him. He's bringing us back to what He intended with the tree of life in the garden of Eden — that He would be our source.

Our relationship with ourself is Christ. This kind of understanding will come progressively in our experience. As our mind is renewed by the Spirit and by the Word, a consciousness of life will begin to invade every area of our living. We will start linking this word with our experiences. For example, you have a love of money in your heart, and you're not allowing the Lord to be the Lord with your finances. You're struggling over this matter. Then you begin to make the link with the Word — Christ is your point of reference. So now, you begin

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to touch Him, “Lord, Amen. You’re my relationship with money. Jesus, thank You, You’re the giving One in me. You’re the life in me.” You begin to drink and to eat Him in this way, and you begin to experience Him. You’ll discover that your greedy, closed hands will begin opening up and you’ll start giving, even hilariously, because Christ becomes your life.

This consciousness of Christ being our point of reference will continue to spread in our daily life. For example, you will find it in your speaking. You say something, but in your saying it, you feel like you put on a suit of clothes that doesn’t fit, that doesn’t feel right. As you’re criticizing and gossiping, you’re going to feel like, “O Lord, this language doesn’t fit. Amen, Lord, You’re my talk. You’re my speaking. I used to speak so freely. But Lord, Amen.” By contacting Him and experiencing Him in this way, you begin to feel the restraint in your words. Christ is becoming your talking (2 Cor. 13:3).

Little by little, the Holy Spirit will begin to make Christ real in your speaking. You may fail, but you experience Christ in your failure. You touch the living One, because your point of reference has changed. You can no longer rearrange your thoughts, thinking “I shouldn’t talk that way anymore.” Nor can you replace bad thoughts with good thoughts. That doesn’t work! You have to interact with God. You have to touch the Spirit. And when you touch the Spirit, you draw from Him and He changes you. Then, you come to the meeting

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and you just make the meeting Christ — because you've handled Him. You've handled Christ as your portion in your speaking. Amen!

I. Christ — Our Relationship to One Another

When Christ is our relationship to ourselves, and we know ourselves in God's light, the result of this knowing is that Christ becomes our relationship to one another. The apostle Paul follows this sequence in 2 Corinthians 5:14-17, ¹⁴“For the love of Christ constrains us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; ¹⁵ and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer [to] themselves, but [to] Him who died for them and rose again. ¹⁶ Therefore, from now on, we [know] no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” In verses 14 and 15 of this passage, Paul stresses that we no longer live to ourselves, based upon the fact that we all died in Christ. Then in verse 16 Paul goes directly into our relationship with one another. In other words, when we live to Christ rather than to ourselves, we know each other and are related to each other, not according to the flesh, in the realm of the old creation, but in the spirit, in the realm of the new creation.

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The deep significance of 2 Corinthians 5:16-17 that Paul opens up is a new kind of knowing of Christ in contrast to his old knowing of Christ. What is this new kind of knowing of Christ? The obvious answer is in verse 17, where Christ is presented in an enlarged way by Paul. He no longer considers Christ merely alone by Himself. He says, “*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. . .*” Christ here is not just an individual man, but a corporate man where other persons are “in Him.” Thus, the new knowing of Christ is knowing Him as the church (Eph. 5:29-30). It is the knowing of Him according to 1 Corinthians 12:12, where both the one body and the many members form one whole Christ! It is also the same knowing of Him found in Paul’s prayer for the believers in Ephesians 1:17-23. Here, the full knowledge of God is to know Christ as Head of His Body, the church, which is described as being “the fullness of [the One] who fills all in all.”

It is the church as Christ that is the new kind of knowing of Christ in 2 Corinthians 5:16. The church described as “the new man” in Colossians 3:10-11 is also the new kind of knowing of Christ. The church as the new man of the new creation is the realm where Christ is all and in all. It is also the realm where old things have passed away and all things have become new! In this realm we know each other as members of Christ. We no longer regard or know each other according to the differences

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and distinctions of the old creation (Gal. 3:27-28).

According to the context of 2 Corinthians chapter 5, to say, “old things have passed away” and “all things have become new” means that old relationships have passed away and all things in our relationships with each other have become new. We all have together been newly created in Christ as one new man, and have all been reconciled to God in one body by the cross (Eph. 2:15-16).

Christ as our relationship with each other is what the church is. In other words, the church is just Christ between us. If Christ is not our mutual fellowship, then the reality of the church is lost. So, brothers and sisters, to know the church is to know Christ as our relationship with each other. It is not a matter of knowing each other in a natural way according to race or background. Neither is it formally joining a church to become a member. No. We are joined to the Lord in one Body, and His relationship with all His members becomes our relationship with every member. So we freely receive one another the way Christ received us (Rom. 15:7). This is what the church is. Praise the Lord!

The depths and intimacy of Christ as our relationship with one another comes out in Paul’s relationship with the Philippians. In Philippians 1:8 we read, “For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the [inward parts] of Jesus Christ.” Here Paul so identifies his feelings with the Lord’s that he is not merely saying,

“I am burdened for you,” or “I am thinking of you.” The Lord Himself with His inward parts became the relationship with the Philippians. Paul was a man who embodied the Lord’s own feelings and intimate care for the saints. This demonstrates to what extent Christ becomes our relationship with one another. My relationship with you and your relationship with me is Christ. How precious this is. The more there is an increase of Christ in us, the more there will be an increase of Christ in our relationships. Amen.

4 Christ Formed in Us

I. The Meaning of Galatians 4:19

A. *Progressive or Instant?*

Knowing and experiencing Christ as our relationship with everything is directly related to Christ being formed in us. The apostle Paul speaks of this in Galatians 4:19. To know the precise meaning of Galatians 4:19, we need to examine the verse and then seek to apprehend what it is saying. The verse says, “My little children, for whom I labor [travail] in birth again until Christ is formed in you.” There are two ways to understand this verse. One way is that Christ is formed in us progressively; the other is that Christ is formed in us in an instant.

The understanding of Christ being formed in us in a progressive way has been illustrated with a hand and a glove. A glove is shaped according to a hand. Now, I start slipping my hand into the glove in a progressive way. First, I put my index finger into the glove, then my thumb, and then all my fingers, one by one. Eventually my whole hand is formed into the glove. This illustration has been

applied to our experiencing the Lord a little bit at a time over a long period until Christ is formed in us. Experiencing the Lord progressively in our daily living is a reality that we enjoy. Such an experience is scriptural, yet it should not be applied to this portion of the Word. The question then is, what did Paul mean in Galatians 4:19 when he spoke of travailing again for the believers until Christ would be formed in them?

The second way to understand Christ being formed in us is that it happens in an instant. That is, Christ comes into us and immediately is formed in our heart as our relationship with everything. Thus, Christ formed in us does not refer to our arriving at a final stage of maturity in the growth of life. Rather, it refers to the constant state of every child of God from the day of his new birth until he reaches full maturity.

If Christ being formed in us referred to a gradual growth process, then Paul would not be travailing for it to happen again. Surely, Paul is not expecting them to be born again a second time. There is no such teaching in the New Testament. They were already born again; nevertheless, something had happened in their experience to remove them from Christ (Gal. 1:6). Thus, He was not formed in their hearts as their point of reference for them to grow in the Lord in a proper way.

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1. Christ Is the Way We Operate

Since Christ is my relationship with God, then He is my point of reference to make everything in my Christian life work. Let me illustrate this principle using the Macintosh computer. This computer has what is called “the system folder.” Without this system folder, the Macintosh will not work. You might have the best word processing program with an exhaustive number of capabilities, but if you don’t have a system folder your word processing program will not work. If the system folder breaks down, everything else on the computer breaks down. In the same way, Christ being formed in us, is like having the system folder in operating order. If that is operating, then everything else is going to work.

If Christ is not formed in me, if He is not my point of reference to relate to all things, then nothing “works” in my Christian life. Christ’s work in me — His living and operating — comes to a halt. There is no growth, no sanctification, no conformation to the image of His Son, and no way to proceed in the Christian life. If I am not interacting with Christ, then I am interacting with the law, or what is formed in my mind. I am interacting with my feelings of discouragement or the reasonings of my mind. My point of reference when I go through things is not Christ, but it is something else. It is my feelings, the

outward circumstances, the situation, the law, what I'm supposed to be, or even what I'm not — all these mental gyrations that go on within us. The principle is that whatever is formed in me is what I interact with. If Christ is formed in me, crying, "Abba, Father," I interact with Him. If something else is formed in me, I interact with that.

Christ formed in me doesn't mean I'm perfect, that I'm a finished product. Christ formed in me means that my point of reference is always and ever Christ — that He would have the first place in everything. So I don't know how to handle myself. I don't know how to handle sin. I don't know how to handle my reactions to my environment. But Christ has already handled all these things. So by taking Him as my point of reference in all these things, I remain in fellowship with Him.

When Paul speaks of Christ being "formed" in you, he uses the Greek aorist tense, indicating that it happens at a point in time. This bothered me for years, because most Bible teachers have interpreted the word "formed" as though it was a present tense, giving the impression that it means a *process* happening over a period of time. However, the aorist tense for the word "formed" implies that Christ needed to be "once again" formed in their experience. This did not mean they lost their salvation. They were still born of God, but due to their being focused upon the law instead of Christ, they fell out of being

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supplied by the realm of grace. Christ no longer profited them. They were, as Paul says in Galatians 5:4, “discharged” from Christ living and operating in them, because they went to something else. Instead of Christ being formed in them, Moses was formed in them, circumcision was formed.

Maybe due to your religious background, what is formed in your mind right now are your own thoughts about the way you’re supposed to be. You feel like you can’t get to the Lord until you fulfill some requirement. You have so many things formed in you. Paul says, “I travail again . . . until Christ is formed in you,” until He again becomes your present enjoyment and fellowship. Out of that you will grow. Out of that He will live in you. Out of that He will operate in you. Out of that you will grow with the growth of God. The principle of this verse is identical to Colossians 2:19, where Paul speaks of “holding fast the Head,” or “seizing the Head.” Your point of reference is the Head. Seize the Head. Don’t seize ordinances or regulations, such as, “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle” (Col. 2:20-21). Seize the Head and you will grow with the growth of God.

What an encouragement that right now all of us can have Christ as our point of reference — our relationship with the Father, our relationship with one another, our relationship to everything in our life. When He is formed within our heart, we are fellow-

shipping with Him, partaking of Him, drinking and eating Him, and living from Him. Amen. Isn't this wonderful? And when there is a group of people on this earth enjoying this reality, then it doesn't matter what problems or what weaknesses they have, or how many battles and bruises they have. Brothers and sisters, all these things are for Christ to become all in all to you. When He is all in all to you, when He is all in all to me, when He becomes rich in every member — the church is Christ.

B. The Background of Galatians

To understand Galatians 4:19, you must understand the entire background of the book of Galatians. These believers had begun in the Spirit, and were loving the Lord and experiencing Christ. But then they were invaded with Judaistic concepts and being compelled to be circumcised. As a result they were distracted from Christ as their center. He was no longer their point of reference; rather, with their flesh they were living to the law, to that impersonal demand. Thus, Christ had no way to grow in them, to spread gradually into their whole being, because they were focused upon the law.

The Galatian believers were crippled by legality, and it was evident in their experience. They were angry, they were ready to bite and devour. They did not know

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how to handle their flesh, because they had lost Christ as their handling center. They were relating to themselves. Thus, it is with this kind of background that Paul spoke the word in Galatians 4:19, “My little children, for whom I labor [travail] in birth again until Christ is formed in you.”

C. “Again” and “Until”

To accurately understand the exact sense of Galatians 4:19, it is important to realize that the background of this verse is that the Galatian believers had fallen into a state of legality. Paul is speaking to that kind of situation when he says, “I labor [travail] in birth *again until* Christ is formed in you.” These words “again” and “until” tell us something. At one point in the believers’ experience, Christ had already been formed in them. Then they lost Christ as the One who was everything in their hearts. Now, Paul is *travailing again until* Christ is formed in them. This further substantiates the truth that Christ being formed in us is not a process; otherwise, they would be waiting indefinitely for this to take place. Rather, Christ “formed” is Christ restored instantly in our hearts as our center, our focus, our point of reference for relating to all things. Paul was *travailing again until* this would happen in the believers.

D. Punctiliar Action

To know the meaning of Galatians 4:19 it is important to understand the significance of the verb, “formed” as it was used by Paul. As children in elementary school, we all learned that *verbs are action words*. In our English language, verbs emphasize the time in which action takes place, whether past, present, or future. Thus, in English *the time of the action* is what is important. However, in the Greek language the emphasis with the verb is on *the kind of action* that is taking place, rather than *the time of the action*. The kind of action related to Greek verbs is seen as taking place either in an instantaneous way or in a progressive way. Instantaneous action is called *punctiliar* action, and progressive action is called *linear* action. These two kinds of action may be illustrated in the following way:

Punctiliar Action



The kind of action that is seen as happening instantaneously at a point in time.

Linear Action



The kind of action that is seen as happening progressively and continuously.

The dot illustrates point, or *punctiliar*, kind of action; and the line shows continuous, or *linear*, kind of action. To fully appreciate Paul’s expectancy of Christ

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once again being formed in the Galatians, it is vital to know that Paul used an aorist tense in Greek. The aorist tense emphasizes punctiliar action, not linear action. Thus, when Paul said, “I [travail] again until Christ is formed in you,” he meant that *the way* Christ would be formed in them would be *instantaneous*, that is, something occurring in a moment of time. This is in contrast to a gradual, progressive kind of formation.

For Christ to be formed in us means that Christ is instantly poured out into our hearts so that He becomes our relationship with everything from that moment on. He is now our continuous point of reference. He is the source from which we live. He is the way we handle everything in our lives. He is the way we relate to ourselves. He is the One in whom we constantly abide. He is the Christian life living His life in us. In short, He is our life. Hallelujah! Oh, brothers and sisters, Christ formed in us means He is formed within our hearts as our all in all! It is in this way we will grow with the growth of God.

1. The Passive Voice

It is also encouraging to see the means God uses in order to accomplish the formation of Christ in us. This is brought out by observing that the verb “formed” is in the passive voice, rather than the active. The active voice would imply that we are somehow responsible for Christ

to be formed in us, but the passive voice tells us that something outside ourselves is the means for Christ to be formed in us. In other words, God uses a means or agent to form Christ in us. The agent He uses is the Word of God. Thus, as we come under the hearing of the Word, it becomes the agent that forms Christ in us. This Word brings us under the hearing of faith, and Christ is formed in our heart. He is formed in me because someone spoke Him into me by means of the Word. For example, Christ was formed in the Corinthians by means of Paul's speaking the gospel. He implies this in 1 Corinthians 4:15: "For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; *for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.*"

In Romans 10:8 Paul says, "The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart,' that is, the word of faith which we preach." How is the Word in our mouth and in our heart? By being formed there, as we sit, relax, and hear the Word. This is called "the hearing of faith" (Gal. 3:2, 5). Hear the wonderful words of life. Hear that He loves you, hear that He died for you, hear that He was raised for you, hear that He will do everything in you. Just hear it. And the moment you say, "Lord Jesus," He is in your heart. He is formed there. How was He formed? He was formed by the spoken Word. So the way Christ is formed in us is not by works of law, but by the hearing of faith.

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So, what was Paul doing in his epistle to the Galatians? He was speaking again and again in order that the saints could come under the hearing of faith. He knew that this was how they had received the Spirit initially, and he also knew that this was how Christ would be formed in them again. What a marvelous thing — that Christ is formed in us by means of the Word! This shows us that the Christian life is entirely a matter of grace from beginning to end.

E. Defining Christ Formed in Us

Part of the context of Galatians 4:19 is Galatians 4:5-6. Let us see how these two verses define the formation of Christ in us: ⁵ “To redeem those who are under the law, that we might receive the [sonship]. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” According to these verses, when we are redeemed, we receive the sonship. Receiving the sonship simply means receiving the Son with all that He is and all that He has accomplished. We were redeemed to receive the sonship as a gift given by grace. The sonship is not something we work for or grow into. To receive the sonship is instantaneous when we receive Christ and are born again. It is not something we receive after a long process of being dealt with by God or something we receive as a reward for

work done.

What is the sonship? Galatians 4:6 tells us: “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” Hallelujah! In other words, the sonship is the formation of Christ in us. He has been *sent into my heart* — not just into my spirit — but into my heart. Here in Galatians 4:6 it is not a matter of Him growing into my heart. Nor is it Him taking over my heart little by little. He has been *sent* (aorist tense / punctiliar action) into my heart. He has been instantly formed in me through regeneration.

The moment the Lord is formed in me through regeneration, I immediately begin crying, “Abba, Father.” And my crying, “Abba,” is synchronized with His crying, “Abba,” and vice versa (Gal. 4:6 and Rom. 8:15). This crying is my direct participation in the sonship, which includes the Son’s very own relationship with the Father. My orientation is the Son with the life of the Son (1 John 5:20). Now, when I’m weak, when I’m “out of it,” when I can’t make it, my focus is no longer on myself. I am now inwardly aligned with Christ. Christ has been formed in my heart as the object of my love and attention. This is what it means to handle everything with Christ. You’re one with Him. You’re loving Him. He’s formed in your heart.

“God *sent forth* the Spirit of His Son.” The verb “sent forth” is in the aorist tense, meaning that it hap-

Christ Formed @ Heart

pened in a moment of time. Then Paul tells us where the Spirit of God's Son was sent — “into our hearts.” God wants our hearts to be occupied with Him! Now, this doesn't mean that we're all “finished products.” But this is *how* you become a finished product. This is the way — by handling everything with Christ.

Christ was no longer formed in the hearts of the Galatians. What was formed in them was Moses and the law. And when something is formed in you, that's where your mind goes. That's where your thoughts go. It's like a mold in there, and you think and reason according to that mold. In their relationship with God, the Galatians were oriented to laws and rules, so that is what was formed in them, that is what had molded their thinking. That was their point of reference.

When your thinking is molded by the law, the law is like a mirror looking right back at you — at your law-breaking flesh, your failing self, your unfinished, untransformed, unformed state. You see all the blemishes, and it's terrifying. That's what happens when you're related to the law, because you're related to God's goal as *a demand* that *we* must attain instead of *a result* of interacting with Christ. The final goal of conformation to Christ takes care of itself when our spirit and our heart simply stay engaged with loving Christ.

II. Christ — Our Point of Reference

In Galatians 5:1-2 Paul exhorts the believers, ¹ “Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. ² Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.” Christ would profit them nothing if what was formed in them was circumcision. If they held to that, Christ would profit them nothing. That means He would no longer be their point of reference. Do you want Christ to profit you? For Christ to be a profit to you, you simply need to interact with Him and love Him, just the way you are. Look to Him, believe in Him, trust in Him, and draw your supply from Him. That’s what He loves. He loves to take unfinished people who will just keep focusing upon Him, and conform them to His image. While we’re looking at Him, His glory comes from His eyes, and the transfusion comes in. We get transformed by beholding Him (2 Cor. 3:18). Transformation doesn’t happen by our own efforts. It happens by beholding the glory of the Lord. To behold the Lord is the same as to have Christ formed in us. Christ formed in us means that He’s there in such a way that we can only behold Him. And then He can profit us. Then He is our point of reference.

In Galatians 5:3 Paul continues to emphasize this point: “And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.” In

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other words, if you make one mistake, if you break one law, you are guilty of breaking the whole law (James 2:10). Then in verse 4 he says, “You have become [discharged] from Christ.” You are not discharged from Christ in the sense that you lose salvation, or that you lose His indwelling in your spirit. But you have temporarily been separated from the benefit of having a direct supply of grace from Him to change you. You have been separated because of what you are looking at and what you are oriented to. You’re about to be discharged from Christ if you’re looking at that law, expecting it to change you and to perfect you before God.

The Christian life is not about changing and perfecting yourself. It’s about coming to the Son the way you are, under the new covenant, by the blood. This gives Him the opportunity to come in as the Spirit to write on your heart and mind. By the blood of the covenant you keep coming to Him in a direct way, just as you are.

Then Paul says in Galatians 5:4, “You who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” You have fallen out of the supply that comes from the enjoyment of Christ. Then in verse 5 Paul reminds them of the proper way to relate to the law: “For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.” It’s as if he’s saying, “Do you want to know how we do it?” “For we through the Spirit,” we stay in the waiting room. This can be likened to the fathers staying in the waiting

room at a hospital, waiting for the baby to be delivered. The waiting room is a place where you remain until the baby is brought forth.

In the same way, Paul says, “For we through the Spirit *eagerly wait* for the hope of righteousness by faith.” This means, we stay in the Spirit. For example, you may know that your disposition is an irritable one; nevertheless, you are not going to live under a heavy cloud about your irritable disposition. You are just going to keep drinking the Spirit. And you’re waiting in that waiting room of the Spirit, enjoying God, while God is working in you day by day. Amen. In this way, you’re experiencing Christ, and that’s how the church becomes Christ. It is a group of people who are in the process and have one thing formed within their heart — Christ. God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. He is in our hearts. He is our constant point of reference as we interact with all these things in our daily lives. Just keep loving Him. Just keep relating to this Person, and He does the rest. And we grow with the growth of God (Col. 2:19).

III. Christ Making Home in Our Heart

We have seen that Christ “formed” in us refers to the normal state of our heart as we are growing in the Lord, and that He is our point of reference in relating to all things. Now let us look at another passage from the Word

Christ Home in Us

to further clarify the state in which He is in our hearts, that is, *how* He is in us. Ephesians 3:16-17b says, “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might, through His Spirit, [into] the inner man, that Christ may [make His home] in your hearts through faith.” Now, we know that to be strengthened into our inner man is to be strengthened into our spirit (2 Cor. 4:16). But, when you touch your spirit and experience the strengthening, the purpose of this is that Christ would move in — that He would move into your heart. And He doesn’t take several months to move in. He immediately moves in and occupies every “room” of your heart. So, when you’re strengthened into your spirit, you begin to handle Christ as the One who has made His home in your heart. As you are in spirit, He is in your whole heart as the “Head of the household.” As the Head, He says, “This is My house. Everything about you belongs to Me. I give the orders here. I’m doing the talking. I’m going to supply. I’m going to provide. I’m going to do everything here.” Let Him make home in your heart. Amen.

Here in Ephesians 3:17 His making home in our hearts is not a gradual process. Paul uses the aorist tense for the infinitive “make home” or “dwell.” Again, this means it’s an instantaneous action. He just comes in and takes up His residence in every part of your heart as the Head of the household. He’s doing everything. You refer

everything to Him. He lives in your house. You don't make the decisions there. He's made His home. He's going to tell you what to do now. That means Christ being formed (Gal. 4:19), Christ making home (Eph. 3:16-17), and our holding Him as the Head (Col. 2:19) is the way we should live every moment of every day, because now He has replaced us to become *our life*. Then we're rooted and grounded in love (His very own love). Then we are able to apprehend with all the saints the vast dimensions of the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ.

These truths were real to John and Charles Wesley and to George Whitefield. That is why the Spirit worked so dynamically in their day. Those brothers saw that at the moment they were regenerated, instantly Christ was formed in their hearts. That is why we have so many inspiring songs by Charles Wesley.

George Whitefield was saved by reading a little booklet that Charles Wesley gave to him. It was entitled *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, by Henry Scougal. Before reading this booklet, Whitefield was struggling with all kinds of religious duties. And yet he couldn't find peace. Then he began to read the little book, which begins by saying that religion is not to be found in mere orthodox beliefs, or in external religious duties such as prayers and fasting. Whitefield tells us in his journal that when he read the things the author listed, he said to himself, "Alas!

thought I, if this be not true religion, what is?" He was doing all of these things. And then he continued to read:

But certainly religion is quite another thing, and they who are acquainted with it will entertain far different thoughts, and disdain all those shadows and false imitations of it. They know by experience that true religion is a union of the soul with God, a real participation of the divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul, or, in the apostle's phrase, it is 'Christ formed within us.' Briefly, I know not how the nature of religion can be more fully expressed, than by calling it a *divine life*.¹

Whitefield saw that Christ was formed within. In his journal, he continued to say, "God soon showed me; for in reading a few lines further, that 'religion was union of the soul with God, and Christ formed within us,' a ray of Divine light was instantaneously darted in upon my soul, and from that moment, but not till then, did I know that I must be a new creature." From this experience, both the Wesleys and Whitefield went on to make a big spiritual impact on England.

Oh, brothers and sisters, Christ is formed in us. Christ making home in our hearts causes something to happen! Everything we hold on to, everything we self-

ishly cling to, everything we struggle with — all of this we let go of, we loosen our grip, we don't handle anymore. He has come in and He has *made home*. In the Greek, it's in the aorist tense, "that Christ may *make* His home," right now, in your heart, through faith. "Through faith" shows us the means by which Christ makes His home in your heart. When you touch the spirit, you're loving the Lord; and when you're loving Him and calling on Him and contacting Him, something happens — faith operates through love (Gal. 5:6). So, here you are — you can't believe so much, you can't trust so much. But, that's okay. Just love. Sing some more songs. Just touch the spirit, and you love Him. And when you're loving the Lord and you're saying, "Abba," you're just holding Him, you're just clinging to Him; then faith operates through that interchange of love. Christ makes home in your hearts through faith. There's just a believing, a sense that, "Lord, You've made home here. You're the One doing everything in me. I refer everything to You as the Head of the household. Hallelujah! I just live here. I'm here following You, Lord." And this is how I grow with the growth of God. Brothers and sisters, this is how, with many experiences of Christ, we become the reality of the church as the Christ. Amen.

IV. Holding the Head and Growing with the Growth of God

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Another experience of Christ that makes the church the reality of Christ is seen in Colossians 2:18-19. In these verses we can see what robbed the Colossian believers of a genuine experience of Christ and the genuine growth of God. In verse 18 Paul describes how the energy of the flesh is being exercised: “Let no one defraud you by judging you unworthy of your prize.” Do you know what your prize is? Your prize and my prize is Christ. Don’t let anybody judge you or defraud you of your prize. It’s not just that Christ will be my prize one day when I die. My prize right now is my present possession of Christ as my life. In verses 18 and 19 Paul exposes the things that were defrauding the Colossian believers. “Let no one defraud you of your [prize], taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head.” When Paul says, “And not holding the Head” (KJV), he is telling us that there’s a way to grow and a way not to grow. The way not to grow is to be focused on yourself, having a relationship with yourself, or your flesh, or your own energy, or the law, or man-made religion. That is the way not to grow. Growing comes from holding the Head. “Holding the Head” is in the present tense, which means that you’re continuously holding Christ as your Head.

When you hold something, you handle it. The Colossian believers didn't hold the Head. They weren't handling Christ.

Then in verse 19 Paul continues, "from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the [growth of] God." This verse uniquely shows us why the church meetings are so rich and precious. It's because there's a supply coming from every part, every joint, every connection, every supplying member. We're just coming to the meeting holding the Head. Hallelujah! We are just holding Christ.

It is while the Body is being supplied that it is "knit together with the joints and ligaments" and "*grows with the growth of God.*" When Paul says "grows with the growth of God," he is specifying what kind of growth takes place when we're holding the Head.

The way to grow with the growth of God is to have Christ formed in you. That means He's there within your breast, crying "Abba." That's the formation of Christ in your heart. And that happens in an instant. He's formed in me. That means He's my center, He's my focus. And now I'm just holding the Head. I'm handling Christ. And while I'm handling Christ, in my unfinished state, I grow with the kind of growth called "the growth of God."

It's not self-improvement, it's not outward change. It's not the self-esteem programs advocated in parts of Christianity today. It's not a matter of replacing bad

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thoughts with good thoughts, or of being a very positive-thinking man. I once heard a well-known preacher speak along these lines. He said, "When I get up in the morning, I look into the mirror and I tell myself, 'You're a wonderful person today. You're going to have a wonderful day.'" Brothers and sisters, you may be "wonderful," but where's Christ? How much is there of Christ? Today there is a lot of self-improvement philosophy in the Christian world. It's in the seminaries, it's in the evangelical world; and it's a big substitute for Christ. There are "how to" books on marriage, on the family, and on all kinds of things. Much of this is simply human psychology and philosophy. It's cheating people from the reality of Christ Himself.

God, on this earth, wants Christ — nothing but Christ Himself. The church is Christ. But *how* is the church Christ? The church is Christ by all the members holding Him. A person who feels weak, crippled, and lame, but who knows how to hold Christ, can build the church with Christ. This weak person only knows how to fall on Christ with his whole being. A doctor once complained to me that all Christians seem to need a crutch. He was disparaging our dependence on God. I said to him, "No doctor, you're wrong. I don't need a crutch, I need a wheelchair." What I was saying is that Christ is everything to me. He's my life. This is really the way it is. Christ is our life. So, we can see that by holding the Head, we grow with the growth of God. Oh, hallelujah!

5 Understanding the Church as Christ

I. Revelation and Understanding

A. *The Need for Understanding*

When Paul deals with the matter of the reality of the church he emphasizes the importance of having an adequate understanding. To gain this understanding requires a settling down of our being before the Word. We need to read it, dig into it, feed on it, internalize it, see it for ourselves (2 Tim. 2:15). The result of being in the Word in this way is that we receive revelation that is solidly based upon the understanding of the Word. It is this understanding that will preserve us, change us, and transform our living.

In Colossians 2:2 Paul says, “That their [the saints’] hearts may be [comforted], being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, [unto] the [full] knowledge of the mystery of God, [Christ].” In this verse Paul gets right to the root of the problem in Colosse — the saints were being robbed of

Christ because of the deficiency in their understanding about Christ. They were open to winds of teaching and other influences about the law, about asceticism, and about all kinds of mystical things. They were carried off by many different things. Because of this, they were disappointed and their hearts needed comforting. They needed to be restored, touched, and healed.

Let us look further into what Paul identifies as their condition. He knew that somehow in their understanding they did not have the riches of the full assurance. This deficiency kept them from having the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ. “Full knowledge” does not mean merely objective knowledge about something. The word in Greek for that kind of knowledge is *gnosis*. The Greek word for “full knowledge” is *epignosis* and means experientially apprehending or laying hold of something. Paul is saying that believers need the riches of the full assurance of understanding. We need revelation that enters into our mind, causing a renewal and giving clear vision. Then Satan cannot invade our understanding to distract us in any way. The riches of the full assurance of understanding is “unto” a rich, full experience of Christ. Without adequate understanding, our experience will be deficient and there will be open doors for the enemy to come in because we lack the full assurance of understanding.

Now, after passing through a church trial where it seemed like everything was turned upside down, we can

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testify that it was the full assurance of understanding that fully preserved us. The Lord's deposit in us of the riches in our understanding of the Word led us and gave us clear direction to pursue Him and the church life. According to our realization, we didn't miss a step in our following Him, because through the years we allowed *the Word of God itself* to be etched into our minds. Regardless of who, what, or when — any kind of storm that would come in the church life — our understanding has been solidly based upon the Word of God. Thus, our thinking was automatically pointed in the one direction of Christ and the church. This, we believe, has been due to the riches of the full assurance of understanding. These riches issue into a full knowledge, that is, into a deeper and richer experience and apprehension of the mystery of God, Christ.

The Colossian believers were hurt, they were damaged, they were under a negative influence. They didn't have the full assurance of understanding, and as a result they were distracted by such things as angels, visions, restrictive practices in eating and drinking (asceticism), and philosophy. They were getting robbed of Christ, their prize. They thought they needed Christ, but they thought they also needed a lot of other things. They thought that the fullness really wasn't in Him. To their understanding, you could have Christ, but the fullness was not in Him. That is why Paul responds, "in Him dwells [all] the

fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). Saints, you think you need something more. But, let me tell you, in Him dwells all the fullness.

There is no other book like the book of Colossians that opens up the details of the riches of what Christ is in this universe. For example, Colossians 1:16 says, “For [in] *Him* all things were created . . . all things were created through *Him* and [unto] *Him*.” Also, Colossians 2:3 tells us that in *Him* “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” It’s the “word of *Christ*” in Colossians 3:16 that dwells in you. And in Colossians 3:15 it’s the “peace of [*Christ*]” that makes the saints so happy. Throughout the book of Colossians, it’s Christ, Christ, and more Christ.

In the Colossian believers’ understanding Christ’s sufficiency was being undermined. They lacked the full assurance in their apprehension of Christ so they were vulnerable to being cheated by the enemy. The subtlety of intruding influences caused some of the believers to look elsewhere, other than to Christ. So Paul says in Colossians 2:2-3, “That their hearts may be [comforted], being knit together in love, and attaining [unto] all [the] riches of the full assurance of understanding, [unto] the [full] knowledge of the mystery of God, [*Christ*], in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” Amen.

We need to know more and more about what Christ is. We need the portrayal of Him from Genesis to

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Revelation fixed in our understanding. Our minds need to be renewed to the extent that He is all-inclusive to us. Christ is our moon! Christ is our day! Christ is our peace! Christ is our rest! Christ is our everything! Book after book, verse after verse, word after word, gives me the full assurance of understanding. It is by this that I enter into a rich enjoyment and apprehension of Christ in my daily life. For example, when I'm denied something, Christ at that moment is my portion. I don't need anything else, and I don't want anything else, but Christ.

Paul declares in Colossians 2:9-10, ⁹ "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; ¹⁰ and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power." If God's estimate of things is centered in His Son so that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him, then who am I to challenge God about what is important in my life? I surely do not want to go after something else other than Him. It is God who said that the fullness dwells in Him. Are we going to challenge God's interpretation of our life? Do we think we need something more than Christ? A better husband? A better wife? A better job? A better environment? Better security? We think we need something more than Christ. Don't challenge God. God says, "In Him dwells all the fullness" and not only so, "you [have been made full] in Him." What contentment! What satisfaction! I might be deprived in my outward circumstances. I might even be tried to the limit, but I

have a Christ in me who is rich and all-sufficient. He is my fullness and my satisfaction.

Because Paul knew Christ as his fullness and his satisfaction, he could be in prison and talk about “always” rejoicing (Phil. 4:4). He could pray, sing, and praise the Lord in the midst of suffering because his understanding was so full and rich with Christ (Acts 16:24-25). The “full assurance of understanding” and “the excellence of the knowledge of Christ” were constantly ushering Paul into more and more experiences of Christ in his daily life (Phil. 3:7-8). Thus, we can see that a proper understanding of Christ is crucial. The book of Colossians reveals that the way our understanding of the unsearchable riches of Christ can increase is by letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly (Col. 3:16).

We also need to be enlarged and expanded in our understanding concerning the mystery of Christ, the church. In Ephesians 3:3-4 Paul says, “How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I wrote before in a few words, ⁴ by which, when you read, you may [perceive my understanding] in the mystery of Christ).” Paul wants us to perceive his understanding in the mystery of Christ. Again he uses the word “mystery,” which refers to something that cannot be known apart from divine revelation. A mystery in the Bible is not something we cannot know. It is simply something we cannot know by our natural thought. It cannot be known

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apart from divine revelation in our spirit. That is why the church in the Bible is not in the category of our thought. The church is in the category of God's thought. No one knows the church, no one can create the church, no one can explain the church or understand the church. The church is one hundred percent in the realm of mystery. That means no one knows the church until God reveals it (Matt. 16:16-18). This is what we have enjoyed through the years. The church to us is not in the realm of man's choice — my choice, your choice, his choice, their choice. It is simply not in that realm.

Salvation is not in the realm of our choice. For example, there is no salvation in Buddha, there is no salvation in Confucius, and there is no salvation in the New Age movement. We know, it's not our choice. There's only one name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12). This means that concerning salvation, it is altogether a matter of God's choice. And the church is no different. It is also in the realm of God's choice. The choice has been made. We simply see it.

This seeing involves an understanding. In Ephesians 3:3 Paul says, "by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I wrote before in a few words)." No doubt he is referring back to chapters one and two. And then in Ephesians 3:4 he says, "(by which, when you read, you may [perceive my understanding] in the mystery of

Christ).” We need to enter into Paul’s understanding. Paul was given understanding for all believers, as he says in Ephesians 3:2, “If indeed you have heard of the [administration] of the grace of God which was given to me for you.” Paul wants the believers to enter into his understanding of the mystery of Christ. When we read about his understanding in Ephesians chapter 2, we see that when Christ died on the cross He made the Jew and the Gentile one. He broke down the middle wall of partition, creating the two peoples in Himself into one new man, and reconciled both in One Body to God. Paul shows us that the mystery of Christ is the church, His Body. And he wants us all to enter into his understanding. So we need to understand Christ is everything, and we need to understand that the church is simply the expression and testimony of a Christ who is everything.

B. The Proper Meaning of Understanding

It is so wonderful to have such a thorough understanding of the church as the Christ, and to see that this understanding comes by the Word of God. We have seen the need for the full assurance of understanding. It isn’t enough to merely hear these things, but we need to actually understand them as well. And the understanding, in the divine concept, is something related to Christ Himself.

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All proper human understanding is understanding with Christ as the focus and centrality (Col. 1:16-17); otherwise, the word understanding is only a borrowed term. According to God's creation and His Word, the only genuine, proper understanding is to understand everything in Christ, from Christ, through Christ, and unto Christ. Without this, you have no understanding. You don't understand your life. You don't understand anything properly. Unless you see Christ, you only have the husk of an understanding. He's the kernel of all understanding. Understanding from God's point of view is to enter into His thoughts about everything — about creation and His purpose. So, for any of us as human beings, the proper understanding is that we see Christ as all and in all. That's understanding. This comes from having our minds renewed.

Let us see how the Lord used the Scriptures to show that He is the focal point of all understanding. In Luke 24, as the Lord was with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, He was talking with them, yet concealing Himself. And then He unveiled Himself. He said to them,²⁵ "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Ought not *the Christ* to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory? ²⁷ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He [explained] to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning *Himself*." Notice that He explained the things concerning *Himself*.

There's only one way to study the Scriptures, and that is to come to the Scriptures to see Christ. If you come to the Scriptures to study the Bible, to simply get Bible knowledge, like I did in Bible college and seminary, you don't see and you don't understand the Scriptures. You may have Bible knowledge, but what links everything together? The Lord opened the Word from Genesis through Malachi, clearly showing the disciples the things concerning Himself — that He was the focus of all the Scriptures.

In Luke 24:32, after the disciples' eyes were opened, they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" A burning heart comes when we can take the Bible and talk about Christ and apply Christ. It is the understanding of the Bible with Christ as the focus that causes our heart to burn.

Again in Luke 24:44-45 we read, "Then He said to them, 'These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.' And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures." Their understanding was opened when the Scriptures were opened with the focus on Christ. It was not just Bible study, not just completing a lesson, but opening the Word to unveil Christ and to see Christ (John 5:39-40).

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Not only was the Lord focused with His handling of the Scriptures to reveal Himself from Genesis to Malachi, but also the apostle Paul was very focused in his ministry. In Ephesians 3:8-11, Paul summarizes his ministry with two things: preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ and making all men see the church as the administration of the mystery of Christ. In other words, Paul, in his ministry, was focused on Christ and the church. His focus was taken right out of the heart of God. It was hidden there. Paul makes this clear in Ephesians 3:9, which says, “And to make all people see what is the [administration] of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ.”

God had something hidden in Himself that He didn't make known for a long time. This may be considered as God's suppressed desire for the universe (Rom. 16:25-26). This desire is wholly focused in Christ. Paul understood this focus, and thus his ministry never deviated from making known the unsearchable riches of Christ through the church (Eph. 3:20-21).

When we see the focus of Christ in this universe according to the Lord's use of Scripture and the apostles' ministry, it is quite clear that the church is just Christ! What else could the church be? If “Christ is all and in all,” as Colossians 3:11 says He is, then the church, even logically, must be Christ. Understanding the church as

Christ is very simple when we see that Christ is the centrality of the church, the content of the church, the reality of the church, and the expression of the church.

When we understand the church as Christ, this understanding will issue in a focused daily life with many experiences of Christ. This is the meaning of Paul's word in Colossians 2:2 related to having the full assurance of understanding *unto* an experiential knowledge of Christ. This experiential knowledge of Christ is knowing Christ increasingly as our relationship with everything.

C. Being Unsettled by the Wind of Teaching

Without the proper and adequate understanding of the church as Christ we will be subject to being blown about by the wind of teaching. When Paul speaks of the wind of teaching in Ephesians 4:14, he puts it between two verses that direct us solely to Christ. He says,¹³ "Till we all come to the [oneness] of the faith and [of] the [full] knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of [teaching], by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive,¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ." In these three verses the stress is upon the believers being progres-

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sively reduced to Christ (v. 13) and growing up into Him in all things (v. 15).

Believers today are very much tossed about with various winds of teaching. When we don't have or understand the proper focus of Christ, we are always subject to distracting and even heretical things. These winds and distractions are very unsettling to our souls. For example, Acts 15:24 says, "Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, 'You must be circumcised and keep the law' — to whom we gave no such commandment." Legalistic teachings and tones are not focused on Christ and are always unsettling to our souls. This is due to a wind of teaching. Only being rooted and grounded in Christ Himself can save us from these kinds of things. We need to have the same value system that the triune God has in this universe — Christ.

It is Christ that must be our emphasis and our atmosphere. If something else comes in and replaces Christ, regardless of how good it may be, it is a wind of teaching. It may be a good teaching from the Bible, it may be a particular practice, it may be a gift of the Spirit, it may be an emphasis upon a gifted person — whatever it may be — it will have the effect of unsettling your soul. Anything that brings us down to a level lower than Christ is not the church. The church is always Christ in its emphasis and focus.

With the full assurance of understanding that Christ is all and in all, we are solid, just like a rock. Nothing can change or influence us. We are not left to blow in the wind, wondering what direction we should take. Our course is set and our way is clear, because we are under revelation. It is not a matter of speculation, negotiation, or experimentation. Christ and the church is a matter of revelation. Revelation motivates us! Revelation is our leading! Revelation is our mandate! Once we see the revelation of the church as Christ, that very revelation becomes a mandate to practice the church life on this earth (Eph. 1:9-10). We have no choice. Indeed, the revelation is referred to by Paul as “the [command] of the [eternal] God” (Rom. 16:25-26). The command is made known for the obedience of faith. This is the ultimate issue of understanding the church as Christ — that we rise up to gather together with the saints to experience a rich Christ for the church life.

II. Revelation and Practice

A. The Real Nature of Division

Now we need to understand the reality of the church in relation to our practice of the church. The practice of the church should be based upon the revelation that the church is Christ; otherwise the result will be division.

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Paul knew that the division in the church in Corinth was due to the believers' lack of revelation. Thus, when he dealt with their divided situation, he did so in a way that revealed that the church is Christ. In 1 Corinthians 1:10-13 we read, ¹⁰ "Now I plead with you, brethren, [through] the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. ¹¹ For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. ¹² Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.' ¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized [into] the name of Paul?" Paul's question to the Corinthians, "Is Christ divided?" exposes the real nature of division — division is not merely to divide an organization or a group of people. Division is to divide Christ.

Usually when the problem of division is spoken of among believers, it is identified as "church division." In fact, as we read the above passage in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, we would logically conclude that Paul would have said, "Is the church divided?" But Paul deals with "church division" as "Christ division." Even while he is dealing with a problem, he imparts a high vision of what the reality of the church is. For Paul to ask, "Is Christ divided?" reveals the real nature of division, on the

negative side; and it reveals that Christ is the inner reality and content of the church, on the positive side.

When we gather together as believers, we need to be mindful of the real nature of our standing and meeting. We should not stand on the ground of division. What is the ground of division? Anything that replaces Christ Himself. Even to meet around the apostle Paul is to meet in a divisive way. The church is Christ and Christ alone. There should not be any name or denomination appended to Christ. We need to be watchful as we come together as Christians. When we see that the church is Christ, we could never stand as a denomination or meet according to our preferences. Our standing and meeting as the church must be pure and simple — a standing where Christ is all and in all (Col. 3:11).

As believers, are we coming together as Christ? Or, are we coming together as *our own group*? It makes a big difference how we gather together. Paul told the believers in 1 Corinthians 11:17, “Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since *you come together not for the better but for the worse.*” The context of this verse reveals that they were not coming together simply as Christ, but with parties and factions and divisions among them. According to Paul’s analysis of the situation in 1 Corinthians 11:20, he had to say, “Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper.” In other words, Paul was exposing that

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they had nullified the reality of the Lord's supper by their improper way of meeting and practicing the church. This shows us that it is not a small matter to gather as the church. We must stand and meet according to the revelation of the Word of God. We meet not just *for* Christ or *under the banner of* Christ, but *as* Christ!

Paul's interaction with the saints in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:10-13; 3:3-9, 21-23; 4:6) indicates that as good as Paul, Peter, and Apollos were, they were never to be the factors around which to create a church. To meet as the church in any way other than around Christ is to meet without revelation and in ignorance. This gives ground to the flesh and the proud, undealt-with self. Of course, we should realize that the self is so subtle that even the name of Christ can be used in a fleshly and proud way. Paul condemned not only the ones who said they were *of Paul*, or *of Peter*, or *of Apollos*, but also the ones who said they were *of Christ*. It seems like a paradox, but when believers gather together in an impure way, even their so-called gathering around Christ can be very divisive.

Paul's way of dealing with the problems of the church in Corinth brought forth revelation and clarity about how believers should meet together. Paul's utterance and statement, "Is Christ divided?" at once reveals the inner nature and reality of the church. Like the statement in 1 Corinthians 12:12, we see that Christ is composed not merely of Himself, alone in the heavens,

but also of all His members meeting on earth. Such a statement identifying the church with Christ teaches us that the church does not belong to a worker, a pastor, a pope, a group of elders, or even the most legitimate of apostles, such as Paul and Peter. The church is God's building in Corinth (1 Cor. 3:9). This means the church is God's own property (1 Cor. 1:2; Acts 20:28), and the only thing that He will own is Christ (Col. 3:11; Gal. 3:27-28)!

The truth that the church is Christ is the reason why, in the New Testament, the singular term "church" is used along with the city's name where the church meets. For example, to say "the church in Jerusalem" is like saying "the Christ in Jerusalem." The church is Christ enlarged and expressed in Jerusalem. The church in Philadelphia is Christ expressed in that city, or the churches of Galatia are Christ expressed in that region. In Romans 16:16 Paul says, "The churches of [the] Christ greet you." Of course, Paul is not referring to a denomination called "the church of Christ." He is referring to the reality of all the churches in plurality being an enlargement of Christ. It means the churches are just Him in their identification and expression.

That is why over the years I have said many times, it is not left up to us to name the church. God did not give us that prerogative. No! We do not name the church, we see the church. To see the church is like seeing salvation.

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We do not make it up, create it, or invent it. Salvation is one hundred percent a matter of revelation from the Word of God. Our part is to respond by faith and say, “Amen! I believe!” By this we are saved. It is the same way with the church. The church is one hundred percent a matter of revelation from the Word of God (Matt. 16:17-18; Rom. 16:25-26). To be the church and meet as the church is a matter of faith. We simply believe the Word of God, which reveals to us that the church is Christ. Christ is in you, and you are one of His members. Christ is in me, and I am also one of His members. When we come together we just need to see this and say, “Amen! I believe.” Hallelujah! We are all in Christ together and we see it!

The apostle Peter saw the church in this way. The Jews had received the Holy Spirit, the church was established in Jerusalem, and Peter was practicing the church as he knew it. But the Gentiles had not yet been included in the church with God’s salvation. Then in Acts 10 we read of the account of Peter’s divine guidance to preach the gospel to the Gentiles in Cornelius’ household. As he stood before them to preach the gospel, the first word out of his mouth was, “In truth I perceive that God [is not a respecter of persons]” (Acts 10:34). As Peter continued to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and his household and interrupted his message. Peter reported this experience later in Acts 15:7-8 during a council in Jerusalem: ⁷ “Men and brethren, you know that a good

while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸ So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as He did to us.” It was God who chose. In other words, Peter didn’t choose, James didn’t choose, John didn’t choose. It was God who made the choice. Peter saw God’s choice before his eyes and all he could do was recognize it. This is the principle of standing and meeting together as the church. We simply recognize Christ in one another and gather according to God’s choice.

Brothers and sisters, when we see that the church is Christ, it is for keeps. We are not trying something out to see if we like it or not. We are not gathering in an experimental way. We are here for God’s building — the building that the gates of Hades cannot prevail against. The church as Christ is for keeps. It is for keeps now in time and for eternity. Amen! Hallelujah! What a vision! What a revelation of what the church is! We stand and meet together *in* Christ, *with* Christ, and *as* Christ!

6 ■ The Sense in Which the Church Is Christ

I. Inclusion in Christ

We have seen the need that we all have for revelation and understanding that the church is Christ. We have also seen several of the scriptural passages where Paul states so clearly that the church is Christ. However, in what sense is the church Christ? What does Paul mean when he says the church is Christ? The following seven points will help us understand in more detail how it is that the church is Christ.

First, we must see our inclusion in Christ. Brothers and sisters, we have all been included in Him. We were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). When the Father looks at me, He sees me in His Son. He does not consider me in any other way. “But of Him are you in Christ Jesus who became [to] us wisdom from God: [both] righteousness and sanctification and re-

demption” (1 Cor. 1:30). It is of God that I have been put into Christ. Now, the Father sees me in Christ. He has included me in Christ. This is why the phrase “in Christ” is used so frequently throughout the New Testament.

And it is in Christ that the Father graces us. Paul says, “He has [graced] us in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6). The word “Beloved” in this verse is not a noun. We would think “Beloved” would be a noun. It is rather a verb in the perfect tense, which in Greek denotes a present state or condition. The sense of this verb and the whole verse is that He has graced us in the One who is right now in a present state of constantly being loved by the Father. He is in the process of receiving the flow of love from the Father and He’s flowing love back to the Father. So we are being graced in the One who is getting “hit” with all the Father’s love. All the Father’s love is hitting the Son. The Son is receiving all the love from the Father and He has graced us in the One who is being loved. Hallelujah!

When we see this we will quickly lose all our inferiority complexes. So often we get down on ourselves. We feel nobody loves us. But, brothers and sisters, we are the objects of the divine love. The same love that is directed to the Son is the love that is coming to me. I am not apart from the Son. I am in the Son. And He has graced me *in* the One who is now being loved.

So when we sing or pray a little and just exercise our spirit, we discover that there is liquid love flowing there.

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That liquid love is just the Father and the Son loving one another right within our spirit. When we sing or pray, we are merging into their love. We are taking the “on-ramp” into the “freeway-flow” of the Father and the Son. They are loving one another and enjoying one another and we have an on-ramp in our spirit to merge into their love. Hallelujah, there is only one love in this universe. It’s that love that is flowing between the Father and the Son. There is no other love that God has separately for us. There is only one love. It is the love of the Father for the Son. And that love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5).

John 17:26 says, “And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.” In this passage, the Lord prays that the love with which the Father loved Him would be in us! The same love that is between the Father and the Son is now in us. How is it in us? The Lord said, “and I in them.” When He gets into us then the same love is flowing in us.

So, brothers and sisters, we are in Christ. We are included in this beloved One. You ask, does God love me? Actually, you need to change your question to, does God love Christ? You are in Christ. If you are in Christ, you cannot help but be loved because we know that God loves Christ. You are in the object of the

Father's love. Regardless of our condition, we are eternally the objects of divine love and divine grace.

II. Incorporation into Christ

We also can understand the sense in which the church is Christ by our incorporation into Christ. The New Testament tells us that we have been baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27-28; Rom. 6:3-4). We have been "plunged" into Christ. To be baptized into Jesus Christ simply means that we have been incorporated right into Him.

The New Testament also tells us that we have been added to the Lord (Acts 5:14; 11:24-26). This is real church membership. Today people join churches, sign doctrinal statements, and are added to the church membership roll. But there was no such thing in the New Testament. The book of Acts says that when people got saved, they were just added to the Lord. So membership in the Bible is like becoming an arm, a hand, a member of Christ. We become parts of Him organically. We are joined to Him in our spirit. He is the Head and we become His very Body. So we are members of Christ. This is the real membership. So we can see that we are incorporated into Christ by being baptized into Him and by being added to Him. It is in this sense of incorporation into Him that the church is Christ.

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III. Identification with Christ

Another way we can understand the sense in which the church is Christ is by our identification with Christ. Believers in the Bible are called Christians. That was not just a nickname given to them by outsiders. Acts 11:26 says that the disciples were first revealed Christians in Antioch. The word “revealed” is often translated “called.” However, the Greek word is best translated “revealed.” This means that in the church life in Antioch, as Paul and others were speaking the Word, they received the revelation that they were “Christians,” “Christ ones.” “Christ” means anointed one. He is the anointed One. And we have been joined to the Lord. We have been attached to Him and thus we are Christ ones. The anointing that is on the Head is also on His Body. He is anointed and we are also anointed (1 John 2:20, 27; 2 Cor. 1:21). Hence, we are identified with Christ by the anointing.

We are also identified with Christ in His death, resurrection, and ascension (Eph. 2:5-6; Col. 3:1-4; Rom. 6:1-11; 7:4; Gal. 2:19-20; 2 Cor. 5:14-17). We died with Christ. We were raised with Christ. We were made alive together with Christ. We are seated with Christ. The Bible identifies us so absolutely with the Lord. This is the sense in which the church is Christ.

Then, the apostle Paul says that our bodies are

members of Christ. “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot?” (1 Cor. 6:15). Paul actually deals with the problem of fornication in the church by elevating the vision of the saints to see what their bodies actually are — they are members of Christ. Shall I take my eyes or my ears, which are members of Christ, and let them see or hear things that are incompatible with the Lord? Shall I let my feet go places or my hands do things that are displeasing to Him? My body is a member of Christ. My body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). And so we can see how our bodies and our spirits being joined to the Lord are identified with Him. This is the sense in which the church is Christ.

We can also see our identification with Christ in our relating to the saints. We are familiar with Saul’s experience on the Damascus road and how it says in the book of Acts that he was persecuting the church. He was dragging off the disciples of the Lord and delivering them to prison (Acts 8:3). And then when he was on the Damascus road he heard the voice, “ ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting’ ” (Acts 9:1-5). Just a few verses before it says Saul was persecuting the disciples. But then the Lord told Saul, you are persecuting *Me*. By this account we can see

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such an identification of the church with Christ. When you persecute a member of Christ, you are persecuting Christ!

First Corinthians 8:12 says, “But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.” If this realization was really in our consciousness — that to sin against a brother is to sin against Christ — how differently we would treat one another. Brothers and sisters, we are members of Christ. So we need to keep the precious oneness of the Spirit between us. God is between us. We are not making up or manufacturing a oneness. We are sharing in the oneness of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Their oneness is in us! We don’t have another kind of oneness.

That is why we have a burden for the brothers here in the Northwest. My burden is for neither side. I have no burden to take sides, one against the other. But, brothers, could we not see that there is a oneness of the Spirit? Could we somehow keep the oneness of the Spirit? God is between us as the bond of peace. And the way you keep the oneness of the Spirit is to keep checking the monitor of peace. Is there peace? In taking the steps that you are taking, is there peace? Don’t interfere with the peace. The peace between us is so sweet. The kingdom is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). Where there are no other factors between us, and no legalities being imposed on us, so that

only Christ Himself is between us — there is peace! It's called the peace of Christ. And that peace is not just a good little feeling between us. That peace is a Person! He made peace. He Himself is that peace (Eph. 2:14). And keeping peace is keeping Him, keeping Him between one another (Col. 3:15). That's what the church is. The church is Christ dispensing His peace between us. This is the sense in which we understand that the church is Christ.

IV. Cohesion in Christ

A further way that we can understand the sense in which the church is Christ is by our cohesion in Christ. Colossians 1:17 says, "And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist." Or, you could say, all things are held together in Him. This is a very deep verse because it tells us that the Lord Himself is the cohesive factor that causes us to be held together. Whenever we are experiencing Christ with one another, there is such a sense of being glued together. Cohesiveness means that there's something sticky. We stick together. There's a fellowship, there's a knitting, there's a bonding. And the bonding is not just because we agree mentally on certain things. It's because the Christ within us automatically coheres and bonds us together. We *feel* that fellowship, that joy, that oneness. We are not just detached units by

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ourselves. We are not divided or separated. But there's a sense of togetherness. There's a sense of flow. What is this? It's Christ! It's not just a good feeling. It is Christ who is the cohesive factor. He holds everything together.

Hence, we need to experience Him and know Him. As we do, He Himself becomes the holding factor. Notice how Paul continues from verse 17 into verse 18. After saying that in Him all things consist, he then says that Christ "is the Head of the Body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have [the first place]." This verse shows us the practical way that we can enjoy the experience of this cohesiveness. It is by all of us allowing Christ to have the first place in all things, to be everything to us, and to be the center of our being, so that our relationship with one another is Him. He is before everything. He has the priority. I don't handle my flesh. I don't handle my reactions. I don't handle my resentment. I don't handle my hurt. I don't handle my problems. I don't handle myself. I'm not qualified. I simply handle Christ. I handle Him first. I give Him first place. I'm not qualified to be my savior. He's my Savior. He's my life. He's my relationship with myself. He's my relationship with the Father. He's my relationship with sin. He's my relationship with the flesh. He's my relationship with the world. He's my relationship with the devil. He's my relationship with the law. He's my relationship with all the saints.

Christ is my life.

So, what is the church? The church is Christ. How is the church Christ? The church is Christ when the members, in their daily living, in their relationships with one another, allow Him to have first place. You're not qualified to talk back to your husband. You're not qualified to say those words to your wife. You walk in spirit. You experience Christ with your husband and your wife. You are not even qualified to deal with your failures. You are not qualified to deal with your sinking feelings of condemnation. Instead, you sink yourself into Christ. You call, "Jesus." Paul said, "O wretched man that I am!" (Rom. 7:24). When he said this, he was at the bottom. He was in the pit. He had failed over and over again. What he wanted to do he didn't do, and what he hated he did. He was a wretched man. Finally, he asked, "Who will deliver me?" He then replied, "I thank God — through Jesus Christ." Paul just thanked God through Jesus Christ. It was *through* Jesus Christ. He was the means by which Paul handled his own wretchedness. This shows us that the church is not just a group of perfect people. Rather, it is a group of failures who handle Christ. I'm not condoning sin or condoning failure. But we can handle our failures and condition through Christ. When we experience Christ in this way, the church is full of the cohesion of Christ, full of the glue that holds us together.

We can also see our cohesion in Christ by the

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cohesion of the branches. The Lord told us that He is the vine and we are the branches (John 15:4-5). We are all attached together in Him in an organic way. And then we can see our cohesion in Christ by the fact that we are God's building (Eph. 2:19-22). Christ Jesus Himself is the cornerstone of God's building. In other words, He is the cornerstone that holds the building together. We are all stones in God's building, but He is the cohesive factor between all of the stones. He's the holding factor. Nothing else can hold us. The church is not an organization where we all agree on a certain method. That is not our cohesion. But it is Christ and our experience of Him.

We have recently purchased a Perfect Bind machine that perfect binds our books. The first time I used the Perfect Bind machine, I inserted all the collated pages into the clamp. The machine milled the pages, glue was applied to the spine, the book cover was attached, and out came the book. But when I began to examine the book, the cover fell off and the pages fell apart.

Immediately I called the technical support people. They told me that I had not used enough glue. I simply needed to apply more glue. So I adjusted the knob that controls the amount of glue, put through another book, and the cover and pages stuck together. It was perfect bound. Why? Because there was enough glue! Brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ is the glue of the church. We simply need more glue, more of Christ! When all of the

members experience Christ, there is lots of glue and we become “perfect bound.” Isn’t that marvelous? He is the holding factor that binds us together.

V. Participation

Thus far we have seen four points which help us to understand the sense in which the church is Christ — it is by inclusion in Christ, incorporation into Christ, identification with Christ, and cohesion in Christ. The fifth point is participation in Christ. This point is crucial because our participation in Christ is what makes all the other points a reality in our experience. It is how the church is Christ in reality.

Paul told the Corinthians that they had been called into the fellowship, or participation, of God’s Son, Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:9). God had called them to participate in Christ. How do we participate in Christ? It is by calling His name, Jesus. When we say, “Jesus,” we participate in Jesus. His name is the practical handle for us to participate in Him. And when we participate in Him, we must realize that we are participating in all the phases of His existence. The Lord Jesus passed through incarnation, human life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. These are the phases of His existence. And today all these phases are in the Spirit, who has been poured out like a flowing river for us to drink. So when we call, “Lord

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Jesus,” we drink the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3, 13-14). And as we drink the Spirit, we are participating in the phases of His existence. We participate in His incarnation, His human life, His death, His burial, His resurrection, and His ascension. We participate in His life and become living members of Him. It is by such a participation that the church is Christ.

In Romans 6:4-5 Paul says, “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have [grown together with Him] in the likeness of His death, indeed, we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection.” Years ago I studied this phrase, “grown together with Him.” I was deeply impressed by Frederick Godet’s remarks in his commentary on Romans. He states that this phrase “denotes the organic union in virtue of which one being shares the life, growth, and phases of existence belonging to another; so it is that the existence, prosperity, and decay of the branch are bound up with the state of the stem. Hence we have ventured to translate it: to be made one and the same plant with Him.” So, we have become ones joined to Him and growing together with Him.

Now, all that He has passed through and all the phases of His existence are for our participation. We can participate in Him by eating Him (John 6:48-63). And

when you eat Jesus, you eat His humanity, the glorified humanity made available as living bread. The manhood that He lived out was not lost 2,000 years ago. That manhood has now been put into the Spirit to ever be a constant supply of bread for us to eat (1 Cor. 15:45). Now we can eat the thinking of Jesus and the reactions of Jesus and the choices of Jesus. We can eat His mind, His emotion, His will. It flows in the Spirit. We all need another disposition to live the church life. We need the divine disposition. How do we obtain such a disposition? It's by feeding on Him in the Word, by calling on His name, and by drinking of the Spirit.

For instance, I had a wonderful dinner today. I enjoyed lasagna, tortellini, and for dessert, chocolate mousse. I participated in all those delicious foods. It was a real enjoyment and so tonight I am really satisfied. But not only am I satisfied, I am also supplied. When we eat, we are receiving all the nourishment that is needed to run the body. In the same sense, the way the church is Christ is by being a group of people who eat and drink Him, who participate in Him, who enjoy Him, and are thus supplied to live by Him.

VI. Transmission

The sixth point that helps us to understand the sense in which the church is Christ is the transmission of Christ.

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Ephesians 1:22 tells us, “He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church.” The phrase “to the church” indicates a transmission through the organic union of the Head and the Body. He is transmitting His life to His Body, the church. He is the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), and all of us have regenerated spirits. Did you realize that there is a heavenly transmission going on? He is transmitting Himself as the Spirit into all of our spirits. He has been installed in each of us. It is just like this room. This room has been installed with electrical wiring. Somewhere nearby is a power plant that is transmitting electricity to the wiring that is installed in this room. Now, to turn on the lights and enjoy the “good” of the electricity, we only have to flip the switch. You just turn the switch on, and you enjoy the benefits of transmitted electricity into this room.

All of us, brothers and sisters, have been installed with God. There is a transmission of the divine life into our spirits. So, our part is just to turn the switch on. And the switch is our mouth. You just open your mouth. The Bible tells us to be filled in spirit by speaking, singing, and giving thanks (Eph. 5:18-20). As we speak, sing, and give thanks, there is a transmission, and the church is filled up with Him. This is how the church is Christ.

Then, there is the transmission of love in the Triune God (John 17:21-26). We have already seen that there is a current of love between the Father and the Son. And that

flow of love between the Father and the Son is the same love that is being transmitted to us! It is wonderful to know that in this universe there is only one love. We don't have any love for God. We might think we have love for God, but in ourselves, none of us have any love for God (Rom. 3:10-11). Every bit of love in us toward God is God. Perhaps you feel you don't have that much love for the Lord. You find your heart loving the things of the world. But let me tell you, if there is even a little bit of love within you, a little bit of desire for the Lord, that *is* the Lord. Take that little bit of love, baby it, nourish it, and let it grow. Just tell the Lord, "Thank You for this little bit of love. It's You, Lord. The love in me for You, even if it's so small, is You. It is God." There is one love.

And that one love has been poured out into our heart (Rom. 5:5). That's why we don't work up love. We cannot be loving in ourselves. We need to get into another kingdom, another realm, where the divine love is flowing. We need to be born again. When we are born again, we see the kingdom and we enter into the kingdom. We enter into the realm of the divine love. Our spirit becomes joined to the Lord so that we are joined to the transmission of divine love between the Father and the Son. So right inside of you is the love of God (John 17:26). It's in you. To experience this transmission of divine love, just go home, get on your knees, and start thanking Him for *everything* in your life. Thank Him for every problem.

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Thank Him for every impossibility. Thank Him that all things are working together for good to those that love God (Rom. 8:28). Just start loving Him and start thanking Him. After a short time, the tears will come down, and you will begin to merge with the divine life and love that is within your being. That life is so thankful. It's so thankful to the Father. That life knows how to suffer. It knows how to pass through difficulties. That's why the Bible talks about entering into the fellowship of His sufferings (Phil. 3:10). It's not gritting our teeth and hoping for a better day. It's participating in the satisfaction and the contentment of His life (Phil. 4:11-13). Nothing outwardly changes, but inwardly, you are joyful in God. And God is enough. You say, "Thank You," to the Lord, and there is a wonderful transmission of life and love. That's how the church is Christ.

VII. Continuation

The final point that helps us understand the sense in which the church is Christ is the continuation of Christ. Acts 1:1 says, "The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach." You have to notice the word "began." Luke wrote both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. When Luke wrote the book of Acts, he started out by referring to the "former account." This "former account" is the Gospel of Luke.

Then Luke says that he wrote an account in his Gospel of all that Jesus *began* to do and teach. This means that the Gospel only records what Jesus *began* to do. The book of Acts records what Jesus *continued* to do. However, He continued not as an individual Christ, but as an enlarged Christ, as the corporate Body of Christ. The Lord Jesus enlarged Himself with many members. And in the book of Acts all can see Him preaching the gospel and going to the Gentiles. It's the enlargement and continuation of Christ (Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 2:17).

We can also see the church as the continuation of Christ in Colossians 3:10-11. It says, "and have put on the new man who is [being] renewed [unto] full knowledge, according to the image of Him who created him, where there [cannot be] Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all and in all." This new man is simply the continuation of Christ. When we are persons who are out of the old creation, and are not related by nationality, by social standings, by religious backgrounds, but are related by Christ who is all and in all, then there is the new man. And the new man is the continuation of Christ.

How do we put on the new man as the continuation of Christ in a practical way? Paul tells us in the following verses: "Therefore, as [God's chosen ones], holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, [lowliness], meekness, longsuffering; [bearing one another], and for-

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giving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as [the Lord] forgave you, so you also [forgive]. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (Col. 3:12-14).

To have the bond of perfection, to have a perfect relationship, does not mean that you and I are perfect. Perfection in the Bible refers to one thing — the perfect love of God. That’s perfection. Of course, we know that in our marriages, and in the church life, we’re all imperfect people. We make mistakes, we offend one another, we oftentimes neglect one another unwittingly. We do things without even knowing what we’ve done. Sometimes we even hurt people intentionally. So, how can you have a perfect church? What is a perfect church? A perfect church is simply where there are fallen sinners, who have weaknesses and failures, but who at the same time enjoy the perfect love of Calvary flowing among them. The bond of perfection is the love of God flowing between us. So, in the church life, eventually there will be things that you will be unhappy about. You will be disappointed over things that did not go the way you expected them to. Perhaps you might say, “This is not what I thought it was going to be.” That’s right. What you need now is to touch the source of the perfect love of God (1 John 4:11-12, 16-17). You start calling and enjoying God. There’s His forgiveness, there’s His kindness, there’s His forbearance. And when the flow of the love

of God is between us, that's the building. That's Christ. We're being built up in love with one another.

Paul's word in Ephesians 4:15 tells us that we should speak, or hold, the truth in love. We should not use the truth like a hammer over each other. Sometimes there are imperfect situations in the church life, but there's a factor between us, and that factor is the perfect love of God. With the love there is the peace. Immediately following the exhortation to "put on love" as the bond of perfection in Colossians 3:14, Paul goes on to say in verse 15, "And let the peace of [Christ arbitrate] in your hearts." This means, let that peace rule. Let that peace make decisions. Don't overstep the peace. So often, we want to put somebody in their place. We have a complaint, and our complaint is right. But, Paul does not add, If anybody has a complaint, go to someone and see who is right and who is wrong on this point. He says that if you have a complaint, forgive, grace one another. Because so many times, even if we are right, our flesh is so involved. Our vindictive nature, which likes to put people in their places, is being expressed. But just sink yourself again into the liquid flow of love between the Father and the Son. When all the members do this, the church life is perfect. Because there's a perfect love. Love one another the way Christ loves you. That's the church, and that's how the church is Christ. Oh, may He show us the church is Christ in all these rich ways!

7 The Reality of the Church as Christ

Once we see the sense in which the church is Christ, we need to see the reality of the church as Christ. Many verses in the New Testament confirm the objective truth that the church is Christ. However, the Greek word *aletheia*, translated “truth,” includes not only the thought of objective truth, but the subjective reality of that truth. Thus, in this chapter we need to consider the factors that reveal the reality of the church as Christ.

I. The Centrality of Christ

A. *Christ Having the First Place*

For the church to be the reality of Christ expressed on this earth, the saints need to know Christ as the centrality of all things. Colossians 1:15-18 unveils the truth concerning the centrality of Christ: ¹⁵ “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn [of] all creation.

¹⁶ For [in] Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and [unto] Him. ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. ¹⁸ And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the [first place].” These verses clearly point to the centrality of Christ in the universe. In verse 15 and 16a, His centrality is related to all of creation. In verse 16, His centrality is related to the means through which the universe came into being, and to the purpose of the universe, since all things were created “unto” Him. In verse 17, His centrality is related to His having priority in time over all things, as well as to His present intrinsic presence that holds the universe together. In verse 18, His centrality is related to His being the Head of His Body, the church. All of these points unveil to us just how *central* Christ is in this entire universe.

Experiencing the centrality of Christ in our lives is essential for Him to be the reality of the church. Practically, this centrality is worked out by our giving Him the first place in all things. This means that we do not initiate things and matters in our lives. Our mind, emotion, and will are not the initiators in our living. We do not think on our own, feel on our own, decide on our own, choose on our own, go on our own, stay on our own. In

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everything He has the first place! I'm not qualified to initiate anything. I'm not qualified to speak; neither am I qualified to issue a rebuke! In everything He must have the first place! This is how His centrality is worked out.

I must give a word of personal testimony about my speaking here in Seattle concerning Christ being the church. Inwardly, I have the full assurance that He has the first place in my speaking. He is the centrality. My firm conviction is that Christ is all and in all. Because of this, I come here to ask one question, where is Christ? Where is Christ in dealing with the problems among the saints? I have become aware of some of the problems here. I am burdened to fellowship with all of you that the church is Christ. We must give Him the first place in all things. Christ must be the centrality of solving our problems.

For the church to be Christ we must hold fast to the Head in the midst of trials and problems. It is in this kind of environment that we need to learn to touch Him and be oriented to Him. He must be our point of reference in relating to all things. When we give Him the first place by holding Him firmly in our spirit, He grows in us, and we grow up into Him. As we are all growing up into Him in this way, the church is just Christ.

Christ is the centrality of all things by our actually giving Him the first place. To do so is to stand on the same ground as the Father. It is the Father that recognizes Christ as the centrality of all things. Don't dispute with

the Father. We don't dare to think differently from the Father. The Father has already made the decision about Who is the centrality in this universe. The Father made Christ to be everything by making Him the firstborn of all creation. The Father has caused the fullness of the Godhead to dwell in Christ bodily. The Father said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). Oh, brothers and sisters, we must see that the Father has put His stamp of approval on His Son. He wants His Son to be the source of all things. Don't reason and dispute in your small, feeble thinking, that you are going to have the first place in your life or in the church. No! Christ has the first place. We must let Him be our relationship with all of our affairs by calling on His name and submitting to His inner authority. As we let Him transmit Himself into us, He infuses us with His life and virtues. In this way, He is the centrality and He has the first place. This is how the church is Christ.

B. Christ in the Realm of Resurrection

Another crucial matter is that the reality of the church as Christ is in the realm of resurrection. To see this, we must read John 2:14-17: ¹⁴ "And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. ¹⁵ When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with

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the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. ¹⁶ And He said to those who sold doves, 'Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!' ¹⁷ Then His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.' "

Just consider the Lord here with His reaction to all the false things in the Father's house. He made a whip of cords and then He overthrew the false things. Why? Because He was eaten up with zeal for the Father's house. The false things were deceiving all the people about what the Father's house was. So, the Lord Himself went through the temple to upset the whole situation. Now, if you and I were there, what would you say about the Lord? Was He a bad man? Was He mean? Was He doing something out of Himself? Of course, none of us would charge the Lord this way. But, here was the Lord. Why? Because He was in the realm of resurrection, eaten up with the zeal for *the reality* of the Father's house.

Immediately following the Lord's purging of the temple, verse 18 says, "So the Jews answered and said to Him, 'What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?'" The Jews were always asking political kinds of questions. Their questions and talk were filled with ulterior motives. They were not pure in their asking for a sign. When we do something in the realm of resurrection, we are often confronted by religious people with

their political talk and impure motives. I told some of the brothers here that I am not in the realm of politics, discussion, or debate in regard to why they went to court against their brothers. Neither am I on the level of taking sides. I'm not in that realm and will not come down to that level. I only want to remain in the realm of resurrection where there is fellowship in the Spirit, where Christ is all and *in all*. Let us talk in a way in which we can find Christ in all the saints! There's no place for politics in the church life. I'll only talk to you about your heart, about your spirit, about your attitude, about whether you're presently ready to forgive seventy times seven. I'll only talk to you about whether you will allow Christ to be your relationship with your brothers and drop your court orders and injunction against them. I told the brothers to drop it. I was not asking them to drop it, or negotiating with them about dropping it. I was exhorting them to drop it. This is Christ. This is not politics.

When the Jews asked for a sign, Jesus answered them in verse 19 by saying, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." In other words, the Lord's answer to political questions was not to come down to that level, but to remain in the realm of death and resurrection. They asked for a sign, and the sign the Lord gave them was a word about destroying Him through crucifixion so that He would be the raw material for resurrection life to come forth. Hallelujah!

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Again, I must testify that the enjoyment and the sense of flow and anointing that I'm enjoying in these days here in the Seattle area in resurrection life is due to our having been destroyed for seven years. In coming back here, I didn't have an opinion or thought about doing anything in this area. In fact, for the last seven years we have stayed away from divisive speaking that would undermine a servant of the Lord's ministry. The whole church in Scottsdale, with all the saints, is very positive. Neither do we allow zealous brothers from other localities to come and impose one man's ministry in an improper way (1 Cor. 4:6). If some compel others to follow "the ministry" in a more absolute way, this is to act in the flesh, apart from Christ (1 Cor. 3:3-5) and to bring a Judaizing atmosphere into the church. However, if they would drop their imposing attitude and behavior, preserving the atmosphere of freedom, then the Spirit would be between us, and we could have fellowship in Christ.

Brothers who are here in the meeting, who have come with any other motive than just to enjoy Christ, are like the spies in Galatians. In the book of Galatians they were called spies. They came to spy out the freedom that the saints had in Christ Jesus (Gal. 2:4). Brothers and sisters, there's a freedom here! There's an enjoyment of the Spirit! The reality of the church is here with this Christ who raises us up in resurrection. John 2:20 says, "Then the Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build

this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?’ ” Again we see how the Jews were always in the realm of their reasoning mind trying to figure out another realm they knew nothing about. The Lord was speaking in one realm and the Jews were reacting in another realm. Verses 21 and 22 say, ²¹ “But He was speaking of the temple of His body. ²² Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.” For the Lord to raise the temple of His body in three days, refers to His physical body. But we also realize that He has a spiritual body, which we are. We are the members of His Body, the church; and in resurrection, we have all been raised together with Him. So, when we speak about the church being Christ, we are speaking of the realm of resurrection. This realm is a realm of life out of death. It is life that has gone into death, passed through death, and come out of death victoriously. It is this resurrection life that is the reality of the church today. This reality is Christ Himself.

So, whatever we have passed through where something apparently was destroyed — that’s part of the process for the Lord to perfect the church, and bring it into the realm of resurrection. There must be some destroying. There must be some sad things that happen. There must be some with sad faces, like those leaving Jerusalem in Luke 24 walking on the road to Emmaus. These

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disciples had thought that the Lord was going to redeem Israel. They were disillusioned, disappointed, wondering, Why did all this happen? Let me say, that's as it should be. In verse 15 the Lord comes alongside them. He's right there. And in verse 17 he asks them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?" And then they related to Him all the things that had happened in Jerusalem concerning Jesus, and how they had thought He was going to be the Redeemer. Then, in verses 25 and 26 He says, ²⁵ "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" In other words, don't you know that there is a suffering part, and it is the suffering part that leads to the glory of resurrection? The destroying part is for the raising-up part!

Many of you, a few years ago, were disappointed. You thought this was the church. But some things happened in such a legalistic way that it virtually destroyed the church life we had experienced in Seattle. Many could not take the Judaizing element that invaded the local churches. From the Judaizers' point of view, among the saints there was not an absolute oneness with "the ministry." Everything not "one with the ministry" was considered by them as divisive. Actually, prior to this there was no division among us; but this sinister Judaizing attack created the problem of division. And

then the same Judaizing attackers turned around and blamed the division on co-workers, elders, and saints who just wanted Christ and the church with a supply from the ministry in a normal way. This was the situation in 1986, and it is still the existing situation that God has allowed to become a destroying factor for many. But, brothers and sisters, if we are rooted in God's economy, then we all have to admit that this had to happen. We are "always" bearing about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus. We are "always" handed over into death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus would be made manifest in our mortal bodies (2 Cor. 4:10-11). "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter" (Rom. 8:36).

The way that the church is in the reality of Christ is in the realm of resurrection. And the way that we experience death should be in the realm of resurrection life (Phil. 3:9-10). In that life we are in the fellowship of His sufferings — not the burden or bitterness of His sufferings, but the fellowship of His sufferings. Then the church is sweetened with Christ, not living with hurt, bitterness, and anger. We must all throw "the tree" of the cross into our bitter waters (Exo. 15:23-25). When we do, those bitter waters become so sweet. There is nothing sweeter than the taste of the realm of resurrection. The church is Christ in this realm.

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II. The Lord Building “Upon This Rock”

The reality of the church as Christ is where the centrality of Christ is, and where the Lord Himself is building the church “upon this rock.” The Lord opens up the significance of building “upon this rock” in Matthew 16:13-18: ¹³ “When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’ ¹⁴ So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ ¹⁵ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ ¹⁶ And Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ ¹⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I also say to you that you are Peter, and [upon] this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.’ ”

Peter’s confession, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” is a confession that is both definite and singular: He is uniquely *the* Son, and He is the *only* Son, distinct and particular. The Lord responded to Peter’s confession by saying that what he saw was revealed to him by the Father, and that he did not receive this revelation by flesh and blood. Although these verses and utterances are familiar to us, we may have overlooked the

real impact of them on our Christian lives. To make a confession based upon revelation that Jesus, the Son of Man, is the Christ, the Son of the living God is to be a person who is reduced, focused, and centered upon one Person. It is a confession that Christ is the unique anointed One — He is the One appointed to live out the Father’s life, do the Father’s will, and accomplish all things in God’s economy. To confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God is to acknowledge Him as the One who has the approved relationship with the Father, as well as the proper relationship with all things, both negative and positive. This confession is an all-inclusive utterance concerning the Christian life. It is a confession that recognizes that Christ is all and in all.

Immediately following Peter’s revelation and confession, Jesus said, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and [upon] this rock I will build My church.” Peter’s name in Greek is *petros*, which means “rock.” And the Greek word for rock in the phrase, “upon this rock,” is *petra*. Both words are derived from the same root word for rock.

Among Bible teachers there are various interpretations of what the “rock” means. First, the Roman Catholic church says that “this rock” refers directly to Peter. They do have a ground to say this, because etymologically the Greek words *petros* and *petra* belong to the same root word. Some dictionaries attempt to differentiate between

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the words by saying that *petra* (rock) means a massive rock or boulder, and *petros* (Peter) refers to a small piece of rock that is broken off of the massive rock or boulder. Although there is some ground to make this distinction, the evidence is not conclusive.

The Roman Catholic Church has taken their interpretation and falsely applied it to Peter, designating him as the first pope, the head of a hierarchy of cardinals and bishops who oversee an international religious institution. In other words, *Peter* is the rock, the pope, upon which the church is ostensibly built. They say that to have historical continuity with Peter, you need to be part of the Roman Catholic Church, because Peter is the rock upon which the church is built, and he was the first pope of Rome.

Second, the Protestants interpret this verse to mean that “this rock” refers to *the confession of Peter*. Thus, it is Peter’s confession of Christ that becomes the rock upon which the church is built. Of course, this interpretation has the biblical context as support and should be part of our understanding of the proper meaning. The Protestant interpretation has crystallized in the phrase “the confession of faith.” This phrase is often used to refer to the significance of the “rock” upon which the church is built.

Other good Bible teachers have brought out a third point in connection with the meaning of the phrase, “upon this rock.” They say that it is *the revelation of Peter* that

constitutes the rock upon which the church is built. In other words, Peter's confession was based upon a revelation from the Father, as Jesus said in the immediate context. This interpretation must also be included in the proper understanding of what the rock is, because verse 17 mentions that what Peter confessed was a revelation.

Finally, a fourth point concerning the meaning of the "rock" is presented by many teachers of the Word. This point simply emphasizes that the rock is *Christ Himself*. It is based upon sister verses like 1 Corinthians 10:4, which says that the "Rock was Christ" and 1 Peter 2:8, which refers to Christ as "a stone of stumbling and a rock (*petra*) of offense." Obviously, this interpretation is accurate according to these confirming verses.

Thus, we can conclude that all four of the above interpretations are right, from the angle in which they approach the passage. In other words, we should receive the light that all four understandings shed upon the significance of "this rock." First, to say that *Peter himself* is the rock reveals that the building of the church is with the saints themselves as "living stones" (1 Pet. 2:5). The Lord is not building a house made of material things. The Lord's building is a spiritual house made up of the saints (Heb. 3:6). This is not a "mansion" in the sky. We all are the materials of the building (1 Cor. 3:9). Second, surely the church is built upon our *confession* of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. It is this confession and

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declaration that opens the way for the Lord Himself to do the building of the church. Confessing and declaring Christ is the rock upon which He builds. Thirdly, this confession is not something originating from flesh and blood, but comes from the *revelation* of the Father (Matt. 11:27). Fourthly, *Christ Himself* is the Rock upon which the church is built. “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it (Psa. 127:1).

What constitutes the full meaning of “this rock” is the saints making a confession of Christ Himself as everything out from the realm of revelation. This “revelation/declaration of Christ,” to coin a phrase, is the factor for the church to be Christ in reality. Such a declaration of Christ as “this rock” proceeds from our spirit of revelation, which sees Him as everything. It is unique, simple, and available for all of us to utter — “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” When we declare this in our daily life we are saying, “You are the qualified One! You are my all in all! You are the One who has the relationship with the Father! You are the One who has the relationship with the saints. You are the One who has a relationship with the law, the flesh, the self, the devil, condemnation, and sin. Lord, You are the Christ, the appointed One to become my relationship with all things.”

In the presence of this kind of revelation and declaration, the Lord seized the opportunity to say to Peter, “upon this rock, I will build My church.” In other words,

it was as though, in that brief declaration — “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” — Peter summarized every forthcoming truth in the entire New Testament about the all-sufficiency of the indwelling Christ. Thus, to confess “You are the Christ” means, “You’re revealed in me. You’re everything to me. You’re living Your life in me. You’re my relationship with all things — with the Father, sin, the self, the flesh, the world, the devil, the law, and all the saints.” To declare, “You are the Christ,” is saying, “I’m no longer living to myself. I’m no longer my point of reference. Lord, You are! You are! You are!” This becomes our constant confession in our daily lives, and this is the “rock” upon which the church is built.

With this confession we drop our self as the source of our living. We drop *our* decision, *our* choice, *our* view, *our* way, and we take Christ as our all in all. Then the Lord has the “rock” upon which to build the church. When we are persons constituted with this revelation and confession in our daily living, we bring in the reality of “this rock” upon which the Lord will build His church that the gates of Hades will not prevail against. The Greek word for “prevail” implies a struggle; nevertheless, even with the struggle, the gates of Hades is not going to be strong enough to overpower the building of the church. Why? Because, in your weakness and in your frailty you do not refer your *self* to yourself anymore! But with your mouth you declare, “Jesus, You are the Christ!” With your

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thoughts, with your feelings, with your reactions, with your considerations, you inwardly experience this One by saying, “You are the Son of the living God!” That’s saying, “Lord, You know how to live. I don’t know how to live. I’m just a branch in You as the Vine. Without You I can do nothing!” That’s the significance of saying, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!” And this kind of declaration coming from this kind of revelation is the rock upon which Christ builds His church in reality.

I would like to say to all the brothers in this area who have taken their brothers to court — drop everything. Tell the Lord that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Let Him be your relationship with one another. Consider how Paul handles relationship problems between the saints. In 2 Corinthians 2:7-11 he says, ⁷ “So that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. ⁸ Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him. ⁹ For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. ¹⁰ Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the [Person] of Christ, ¹¹ lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.” In these verses dealing with a sinful brother, Paul forgives in the Person of Christ. It’s not a matter of personal feeling. It’s a matter that Christ is my forgive-

ness toward the brothers! You have to tell your feelings, “Come on feelings, you have to catch up with my Person, because my Person is Christ. Feelings, you may still have some lingering hurts and resentments about the past; but sorry feelings, you have to follow my Person.”

I talked to one of the leading brothers in Seattle concerning their initiating a lawsuit against their brothers. I told him that I wanted to share with the saints that Christ is our relationship with one another, but he kept bringing up the past. He kept bringing up that there was not such a good feeling among the brothers about certain events that happened in the past. I said to him that he needed to help the brothers to drop the past and forgive. I told him definitely that if he knew how to shepherd the church, he would bring the saints out of the realm of their reasoning mind to Christ and forgiveness. Let the peace of Christ arbitrate. Then I said, “If you do that, then Christ is between us. Christ is our relationship with each other. Christ is the church.” I said to him that it’s not a matter of negotiating, or discussing who is right or who is wrong. It’s a matter of the government of the kingdom. I told him, “I refuse to negotiate.” Brothers and sisters, we’re Christians! We’re not politicians. I’m just here with Christ, not political maneuverings. Our Christ must be our relationship with the brothers, and that means total forgiveness and forgetting of the past.

To say, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living

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God,” is not a mere doctrinal confession. It is to say, You are the Christ forgiving the saints. It’s saying, You are the Christ that died to sin. It’s saying, You are the Christ that died to the flesh. It’s saying, You are the Christ that loves the saints. It’s saying, You are the Christ where there is no condemnation. I’m not a condemned person anymore because I’m not qualified to take any condemnation! God didn’t leave me in myself. He put me in Christ Jesus! Now there is no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus! You are the Son of the living God, so You are my relationship with the Father! I’m in His love. I’m in His joy. I’m not imitating His love. I’m not imitating His joy. I have the actual joy of Jesus in me! It is revelation that causes me to make these declarations about Christ, and it is “upon *this* rock” that the Lord builds His church.

III. Getting Satan out of Our System

The reality of the church as Christ is altogether where the centrality of Christ is and where there is revelation and declaration concerning Christ as the Rock. Now we must ask, how can this happen in our own being and among us? Let me tell you how. We have to get Satan out of our system. Apart from Christ occupying us, Satan is in our system! That means Satan is in our mind. Satan is in our soul. For Christ to be the reality of the church, we need to eject the Enemy out of our system. The

Enemy, not any person, is the attacker of the church. Our battle is not against flesh and blood; it is against the realm of the Enemy. And he is in the system of individuals who have not allowed Christ to be their relationship with all things.

We see Satan in Peter's system as we continue to read in Matthew chapter 16. Verses 21-25 say, ²¹ "From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. ²² Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!' ²³ But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not [setting your mind on] the things of God, but [on] the things of men.' ²⁴ Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ²⁵ For whoever desires to save his [soul] life will lose it, and whoever loses his [soul] life for My sake will find it.' "

To follow the Lord, according to verse 24, is to follow Him for the building of His church. He wants us to follow Him in the reality of the church life. For this we need to deny ourself and take up our cross and follow Him. We also need to lose our soul-life for His sake. To lose our soul means losing our soul as the initiator! Lose setting your mind on the things of men. Lose it! Take Me!

The Reality of the Church Christ

You'll find your soul when you take Me as your relationship with all things. Your relationship to yourself is Me! Lose yourself; don't find yourself. When you lose yourself to find Me, then you will really find yourself in a proper way.

For the church to be in the reality of Christ, we need many experiences where we start to do something out of ourselves and then we stop ourselves by calling on the name of the Lord. By this we bring our being back to Christ. We sink back into our mingled spirit. We stop ourselves from initiating, thinking, acting, deliberating, and bring ourselves back to Christ as our source. At that point, we lose our soul-life. The more we lose our soul, the more Satan comes out of our system, the more Satan cannot destroy the church through our undealt-with mind and opinion. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" . . . "upon this rock I will build." That means, you must take Christ as everything.

When Peter took the initiative to rebuke the Lord concerning His going to the cross, the Lord looked at him and said, "Get behind Me, Satan." That means Satan was in Peter's system. He was occupying Peter's soul. This is where the problems and division in the church really are — in our undealt-with soul.

Satan will be ejected out of our system if day by day and hour by hour we do not initiate anything, but lose our soul-life to find it in Him. When the self initiates things,

Satan is unrestrained in his attack on the church. We must all learn not to initiate! Don't live! Don't reason! Don't even introspect yourself! Just say, "You are the Christ! The Son of the living God!" Then, like Peter, we will learn to eject Satan out of our system, and our independent, undealt-with self will not be Satan's door into the church.

The reality of the church is Christ. We all must learn to experience Him in a genuine way so that He is our centrality and our Builder. I offer this fellowship to the brothers here from Bellevue and Seattle. I say it to all of us. I love all the brothers, and I have no personal feelings against anyone. I mean it. But I feel like the Lord has charged me to speak frankly to you that the church is Christ. I have not had any plan or strategy to do anything in this area, but once I heard that the brothers in the church in Seattle were taking their brothers to court, then I became fully burdened to come here and plead for harmony and oneness. If the brothers refuse to hear this word, then we have no choice but to identify their practice as sectarian and unworthy of the kingdom of God. I trust the Lord's mercy and grace to be over us all. I told the brothers, let us not repeat history. Church history has already done these kinds of things. Let us experience Christ together through all our problems; then the church will be the reality of Christ. Anyway, I'm so happy that our Christ is here to stay. Amen! The church is here to

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stay! There will be building among us more and more, and we trust it will spread. The Lord will do something to shame His enemy and glorify Himself. He loves harmony and oneness in the peace of Christ. Amen.

8 ■ Handling Everything with Christ

I. How the Father Handles the Universe

It is a wonderful thing to realize that the Lord builds the church with brothers and sisters that handle everything in their daily life with Christ. Christ is our relationship with every item in our lives, whether inward or outward. But God's intention that everything would be handled with Christ does not just extend to us. Have you ever realized that even the *Father Himself* handles the entire universe with Christ? Even the Father does not touch the universe apart from Christ. Let us see this marvelous fact from the Word.

A. In His Eternal Plan with His Good Pleasure

It is so enlightening to see that the Father handled His eternal purpose, His plan, and the good pleasure of His will with His Son. It was by His Son and with His Son that He handled His eternal plan. Ephesians 1:3-4 says, ³“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him

before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without [blemish] before Him in love.” The Father, in eternity past, chose us to be before Him in love. He put us in His Son, His Beloved, in order that we could be before Him without blemish in love. This is how the Father in eternity past began to handle the universe. Before the universe was created, the Father was at the “drawing board” considering all those that would be in His family and that would be part of His eternal habitation for eternity. And what came out was an eternal plan that had everything to do with His Son. God did not come forth with a plan that was apart from His Son. The Father’s plan was in Christ. And the Father chose us in Christ.

Verse 5 continues, “having predestined us to [sonship through] Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.” It was the Father’s good pleasure to handle His eternal plan with Christ. God’s good pleasure is to have many sons. He has predestinated us for this. But God has done it all through Jesus Christ and through His redemption. It is by His one unique Son that God gets His many sons.

B. In Creation

The Father also handled the creation of the universe with Christ. Colossians 1:15-16 says, ¹⁵ “He is the image

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of the invisible God, the Firstborn [of] all creation. ¹⁶ For [in] Him all things were created.” Christ is the Firstborn of all creation, and in Him all things were created. When the Father handles and touches the universe, He does it in and through Christ. He doesn’t touch one thing in this universe apart from Christ. He created everything in Christ and through Christ. Verses 16-18 continue, ¹⁶ “For [in] Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and [unto] Him. ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things [cohere]. ¹⁸ And He is the Head of the Body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” Praise the Lord!

Brothers and sisters, do you see it? The Father handled creation, He handled the universe, with Christ. He didn’t touch anything apart from Christ. The hymn written by Augustine, “All Creatures of Our God and King,” expresses it so well. The first two lines of the hymn say, “All creatures of our God and King, lift up your voice and with us sing.” All of creation has to praise the Lord. Let the sun, let the stars, let the moon, let the grass, let the trees, let everything cry out, “Praise the Lord,” because all of creation has the stamp of Christ upon it. Of course, I do not mean this in a pantheistic sense. I do not mean that the trees are God, or the rocks are God, as it is

taught in pantheism and in the New Age movement. But the entire creation has the stamp of Christ on it because it came through Him and it is unto Him.

Oh, brothers and sisters, do you see how the Father feels about His Son? Even the Father would not handle the universe apart from Christ. This indicates how deeply the Father feels about His Son. When Peter said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” the Lord responded, “flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”

In other words, Peter received the revelation of how the Father feels about the Son. He is the Christ, the Son of the living God! Get out of your well. Get out of your problems. Get out of your own thinking, and come over to the Father’s side. Come on over, and let’s stand and look from the Father’s point of view. Let’s look and see how He feels about His Son. If you would just say from your spirit, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” God’s Spirit will witness with your spirit. You will be taking the Father’s testimony, the Father’s viewpoint, about His Son. The Father’s value of His Son is so high that He would not handle creation apart from His Son.

John 1:3 says, “All things [came into being] through Him, and [apart from] Him [not one thing came into being which has come into being].” Just consider this statement: “and [apart from] Him [not one thing came into being which has come into being].” Not one thing! The

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Father did not do one thing apart from Christ! Should we be any different from the Father? The Father handles everything with Christ.

C. The Father's Feeling about His Son

A brother once wondered if the Father was feeling bad because we were talking so much about Christ. But, let me tell you how the Father really feels. What the Father is saying to us is, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). The Father’s testimony about His Son just points us to His Son. And if the Father is handling everything, touching everything, doing everything *with* Christ, *through* Christ, *by* Christ, and *unto* Christ, what right do I have to handle one thought, one depressed feeling, one anxiety, one reaction, one fleshly desire, or one thing in my life apart from Christ? Oh, brothers and sisters, if all of us would rise up in our daily life and agree with the Father’s testimony and just say, “You’re the Christ,” what a difference it would make! As we touch Him, handle Him, and apply the Spirit, then it’s upon “this rock” — this confession, this declaration, this revelation — that He builds His church. It is no longer a synagogue, but a church, an assembly, a group of called-out ones becoming the testimony of Jesus.

Oh, it is so marvelous to see the Father’s feeling

about His Son. The Father revealed His own feeling about His Son to Peter. Peter got into the Father's viewpoint and saw the Father's estimate and value of Christ. He is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Hebrews 1:1-2 says, ¹ "God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² has in these last days spoken to us [in the] Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the [universe]." Some versions translate the word "universe" as "the ages," which is also acceptable. He made all the universe and all the ages through Christ. Then verse 3 says, "who being the [effulgence] of His glory and the [impress] of His [substance], and upholding all things by the word of His power. . . ." Here we see how the Father made everything and upholds everything in the universe through Him. I just reduce all these words to one thing: the Father handles everything with Christ.

D. The Father's Testimony Concerning His Son

Then in Matthew 11:27 we can see the Father's testimony about His Son. He says, "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one [fully] knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone [fully] know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." So here is a clear statement — no one

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knows the Son but the Father, and no one knows the Father but the Son. This means that we cannot know the Son apart from the revelation of the Father. We cannot know the Father apart from the Son revealing Him. In other words, this is a close-knit relationship. And this is the only relationship in the universe. And it is this relationship that has become a gift of eternal life to all of us. So when I receive Christ, the Spirit of God's Son comes into my heart crying, "Abba, Father." I begin to know the Father the way Jesus knows the Father. I begin to know how to be an object of love and grace and mercy. I begin to know how to receive the love of God again and again and again. I'm in the beloved One. I have been graced in the beloved One. I'm getting showered with the love of God because I'm in the Son of God. Hallelujah!

Do you have any personal problems? Do you have any inferiority complexes? Just come and let us talk about you in Christ and Christ in you. Just keep saying, "You are." In every problem and every situation, just say "You are." The Lord Jesus told the Jews that He was the "I AM" (John 8:58). Whatever we need, He is. Hence, we can say to Him in our daily life, "Lord, You are. You are peace. You are patience. You are endurance. You are power. You are faith." Just keep saying, "You are."

Now let us consider 1 John 5:9. It says, "If we receive the [testimony] of men, the [testimony] of God is greater; for this is the [testimony] of God which He has

testified of His Son.” In the church meetings, we always give testimonies about Christ. A brother or sister will stand up and give a testimony. Well, God stood up one day and gave a testimony. The Father’s testimony was about His Son! It says in this verse, “this is the [testimony] of God that He has testified concerning His Son.” Then verse 10 says, “He who believes [into] the Son of God has the [testimony] in himself.” When we believe in Christ, we receive in our spirit the testimony of the Father about the Son. The Father not only spoke from the heavens when Jesus was baptized in water (Matt. 3:17); He not only spoke when Jesus was transfigured (Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35); He not only spoke when Jesus was on the cross through that centurion who said, “Truly this was the Son of God!” (Matt. 27:54); but the Father also has a testimony about His Son that is currently preserved and flowing in the Spirit. And when we are reduced to Christ and say, “Jesus,” believing into Him, we then have the Father’s testimony in ourselves. When we simply cry, “Abba, Father,” His Spirit is testifying and witnessing with our spirit that we too are a child of God, an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ! (Rom. 8:15-17). We get the Father’s testimony in ourselves. We get the “Yes” of the Father. We get the “Amen” of the Father (2 Cor. 1:20). And so, brothers and sisters, just reduce your life to saying, “You are.” Every time we say, “You are,” we are agreeing with the Father, and we are enjoying

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the Father's testimony.

Notice that John says, "He who *believes* [into] the Son of God has the [testimony] in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son" (1 John 5:10). This means that we really believe He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. We really believe He is everything. It means that we embrace Him as our relationship with everything, and we get the testimony in ourselves. We may not have our problems solved outwardly, but we have the joy of the Holy Spirit flowing within our being. We're so happy. We are like Madame Guyon, who was imprisoned for many years in the Bastille in France. She said that God had placed her like a little bird in a cage for her to sit and sing to Him every day. She said all the stones in the Bastille were like rubies to her because she was enjoying Christ as her everything. We can enjoy God in the same way, experiencing Christ as our everything. But if we do not believe God's testimony that Christ is everything to us, that He is the Son of the living God, and we think that we must do something ourself, then we make God a liar, because we have not believed in the testimony which God has testified concerning His Son.

Verse 11 continues, "And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life." He gave to us eternal life. Eternal life is not some substance or some commodity.

Eternal life is the person of God Himself. “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3). What is eternal life? It is not some ticket we are holding. Eternal life is our relationship with the Father and the Son. It is that current of life between the Father and the Son in the flow of the Spirit. Eternal life is that current which has been flowing for eternity between the Three in the Godhead. And He has given to us Their relationship. He has given to us Their flow. He has put within us Their reciprocal relationship One with Another. He has included us in that flow, because we are the Body of the Second in the Godhead. We are the Body of Christ. He is the Head, and we are the members. He is the Anointed, and we are the anointed ones. He is the Christ, and we are the Christians. We are one with Him in our union with Him. Then 1 John 5:11-12 says, ¹¹ “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹² He who has the Son has [the] life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have [the] life.” Do you have the Son? Hallelujah! Then we have the life, the eternal life.

And then John says in verse 13, “These things I have written to you who believe [into] the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.” We can know we have eternal life. How? Because the Father’s testimony concerning His Son was not just a

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historical event 2,000 years ago when the Father spoke out of the heavens at the river Jordan (Matt. 3:13-17). It is so wonderful that the Father's testimony about His Son is now in the Spirit, and when I say, "You are. You are the Christ. You're the One living for me now, Lord. Live in me. I refuse to handle this, Lord. I refuse to live apart from You. Without You I can do nothing. I'm just a branch drawing and absorbing from You," His Spirit will be constantly bearing witness within me and testifying, "Yes, yes, that's right." Because this is how the Father handles everything. He handles it all with His Son. And now we too can live handling everything the way the Father does — in Christ, through Christ, and unto Christ.

I trust that this kind of fellowship will ignite a different daily life for all of us! I trust it will change our lives, change our schedules, change our priorities, change our giving, change our loving, change our time in the Word, change everything! Instead of living in our habits, in our tradition, in our preferences, in our flesh, and by the current of the age, let us live in this Person and just keep saying, "You are, Lord. You are my living today. You are my schedule today. I'm going to prioritize my life according to You."

II. Handling the Church with Christ

A. Handling the Mysteries of God

We have seen thus far how the Father handles the universe with Christ. We now want to see how the church is to be handled. According to the clear revelation of the Word, we are to handle the church with Christ. The apostle Paul said, “Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor. 4:1). We know that the two great mysteries that Paul handled were the mystery of God, which is Christ (Col. 2:2), and the mystery of Christ, which is the church (Eph. 3:3-10; 5:32). And we must also see that Paul did not handle these mysteries in a loose or common way. He did not handle the church in just any way that he pleased. Paul was a servant. He was a steward. This means that he was in complete subjection to His master, the Lord Jesus. He could not touch the church in a natural way. He was under a vision that he had to handle the church in Christ and according to Christ.

B. Handling Our State of Perfection

We also must see that to handle the church, we must be handling a state of perfection. In our relationships with one another, we are handling a state of perfection. You might ask, “What do you mean? We are not perfect. We have a long way to go.” However,

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we must see from the divine point of view that we are in a state of perfection. Let us consider John 17:21. The Lord Jesus said, “That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You.”

The kind of oneness that the Lord is speaking of here is not an organizational or negotiated oneness. It is the very oneness between the Father and the Son. Then the Lord continues in verse 21, “that they also may be one in Us.” It is like the Lord is saying “Once they’re in Us, Father, everything will be solved. If they can just be brought into Us, Father, they will then participate in Our oneness. We have no problems, do We, Father?” “No, We have no problems,” the Father replies. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are absolutely one. Their oneness is a continual flow of liquid love. The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father in the current of the Spirit. Now the Lord’s prayer is that we would be brought into Their oneness, Their love. There is only one love in this universe. It is not a matter of our love. Even as Christians, we have no love within ourselves. No, there is only one love. It’s the love of the Triune God that has been deposited right within us. We just need to recognize it. The love of God is in me for you. The love of God is in you for me. We have been brought into the Triune God, and Their relationship has been brought into us.

Then verses 22 and 23 say, ²² “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just

as We are one: ²³ I in them, and You in Me; that they may be [perfected into] one.” This word “perfected” in verse 23 could unsettle us. It seems as though this verse is saying that we must labor and struggle to arrive at a state of perfected oneness. But, actually, this is not the case at all. The tense of the word “perfected” in the original Greek text is crucial in understanding the proper meaning of this passage. In fact, it is the tense in Greek that brings to us an astounding revelation about what the Lord is saying here. “That they may be perfected” is in the perfect tense in Greek. It could also be translated “that they may be brought into a state of perfection.” Kenneth Wuest’s translation of the New Testament emphasizes the tenses of the verbs. It is an excellent translation and captures the meaning of the perfect tense in John 17:23. His translation says, ^{22b} “I have given them, in order that they might be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and You in Me, in order that they, having been brought to the state of completeness with respect to oneness, may persist in that state of completeness, to the end that the world might be understanding.” We have been brought into a state of perfection, of completeness. The oneness that we have been brought into is the perfect oneness between the Father and the Son. When He says, “I in them and You in Me” — that is the perfection right there. That is the state of perfection. We have been brought into Them to participate in this perfect state of oneness.

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This is why Paul says, “Keep the [oneness] of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). To keep the oneness of the Spirit is to keep the oneness of the Triune God. It is a serious thing to cut off a brother or to reject a saint, especially over such matters as eating meat or not eating meat (Rom. 14:1-17), or emphasizing and exalting one brother above another brother in the ministry of the Word (1 Cor. 1:12). To draw lines and to demarcate the saints based on these kinds of matters is a very sober and serious thing. You are touching the oneness of the Father and the Son. You are touching the state of perfection that we are all in! It is so serious! If we could feel how the heavens feel, we would realize that to touch the oneness among the saints is to touch God.

Brothers and sisters, we have been brought into a state of completeness. We have been brought into a state of oneness. Do not tell me to get into the oneness. I am already in the state! This is a state of perfection. Now, we can persist in this state of perfection by keeping the oneness.

C. Handling Christ as the One Continuously Being Laid

Finally, let us look at 1 Corinthians 3:10-11: ¹⁰ “According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he

builds on it. ¹¹ For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Again, we need to study the original language to understand the tense of the verb in verse 11. The phrase, “that which is laid,” should literally be translated “that which is being laid [present tense].” This foundation, which is Jesus Christ, is presently and continuously being laid. This tells us that the Lord Jesus Himself is the living foundation of the building of the church. The foundation is not merely the doctrines of Christ. In the past, our understanding of the foundation of the church may have been more in a doctrinal mold. Even to say that the church was founded here many years ago, and that Christ was laid as the foundation, is still deficient. When Paul touched this matter he did not use a past tense. He did not say: “I *laid* Christ as the foundation in that locality many years ago. I presented all the apostolic teaching about Christ. Therefore, the foundation was laid.” We must see that Christ as the foundation of the church is not merely a doctrinal matter. Do not substitute mere doctrine, or even the apostles’ teaching, for the Person of Christ Himself. When Paul says, “No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is being laid,” it means that presently, in the experiences of all the saints, the foundation of the church is the ever-living Christ who is continuously being laid. If we do not experience Him as our foundation rock, if we lose the experience of Christ, then where is the

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foundation of the church? If we relate to one another in ourselves and in politics, then there is no foundation. In fact, you cannot have the ground of the church if you have no foundation. The ground of the church is automatically nullified if you do not have the One who is “being laid.” So I ask, this week has Christ in our experience been the rock to us? Is He being laid? He is the ever-living, up-to-date, present foundation of the church. He Himself is the chief cornerstone. Do not substitute doctrine, teaching, or past experiences for Him. He must be our portion today, and then the church is Christ.

When we refuse to handle our depression, our failure, or our condition by ourselves, and instead tell Him, “You are the Christ. You know how to get people out of holes. You know how to pull me out, Lord. You know how to take me on, Lord,” then the Lord is there! You just keep interacting with Him. You handle everything with Christ. He responds to that. He loves that. Then He is with us, and the church is Christ.

9 ▸ Nullifying Christ

In the New Testament there are many words that reveal to us that the church is Christ, but there are also many words and examples that show us that we can nullify Christ and the reality of the church. If we are persons who do not handle Christ and experience Him, then we will nullify the reality of what we say we believe. When Christ Himself is replaced by anything, then the church no longer expresses Him. Church history is filled with examples of seeking saints and of movements that began with a fresh revelation and experience of the Lord, but then fell into substitutes and replacements for Christ. Many of the denominations today come under this category.

Reality in the spiritual realm is present when *Christ Himself* is living and present among us, for He is reality. Reality simply does not exist apart from Him (John 14:6; 15:5). In this chapter we need to review the kinds of things revealed in the New Testament that not only nullify Christ, but nullify the reality and practice of the church.

I. Losing the Atmosphere of Freedom

One of the chief things utilized by Satan to nullify

Christ is an atmosphere of legality. This kind of atmosphere can subtly creep into the church. This was one of the primary problems that invaded the church life in the New Testament. The Gospels are filled with accounts of the scribes and Pharisees who nullified the Word of God by their tradition and detailed legalities (Mark 7:6-9). The book of Acts does not cover up the fact that the church in Jerusalem was replete with “believers” who were zealous for keeping the law (Acts 21:20). Many of the Epistles were written due to the battle with Judaizers, who were going about to spy out the believers’ freedom in Christ (Gal. 2:4). From the New Testament days until this hour, Christ is nullified when the church loses the atmosphere of freedom.

The apostle Paul addresses this problem in Galatians 5:1-5. The New American Standard Version has the better translation for verse 1: “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” In other words, Paul is saying that it is for the express purpose of an atmosphere of “freedom” that Christ died on the cross to set us free. Freedom in this verse is a state or atmosphere that believers are to live in. Indeed, Paul exhorts the saints to “keep standing firm” in this blood-bought freedom. To lose this freedom is to be brought again into a yoke of slavery. Paul continues in verses 2-5, ² “Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will

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profit you nothing. ³ And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. ⁴ You have become [discharged] from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. ⁵ For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.”

For Christ to no longer “profit” us and to be “discharged” from Christ means to nullify Christ. By speaking in this way Paul brings out the serious consequences of losing the atmosphere of freedom. An atmosphere where saints are being *compelled* to conform to a spoken or unspoken standard or practice is what constitutes the loss of freedom (Gal. 2:3; 6:12). The saints had lost that precious freedom that preserves the atmosphere where the love of God can freely flow — from God to man, from man to God, and from man to man. In order for this flow to be preserved in all its sweetness, we must preserve the atmosphere in which it can happen.

This means in the church life there always must be an atmosphere of freedom where the love of God is able to flow among us. Love cannot and does not flow where there is no freedom. When love doesn’t flow, Christ has been nullified (cf. Gal. 5:2, 4 with verse 6). Where there is law, where there is obligation, where there is a legal mind-set, it not only chokes the flow of love, it makes it impossible for love to happen. For example, if I tell my wife, “You *must* love me. I am your husband. I am your

head, and therefore you *must* love me.” The more I talk to my wife in this way, the more I make it impossible for her to love, even if she wanted to. How could she *freely* give love when I am over her demanding it? Love needs the atmosphere of freedom in order for it to exist. If freedom is not the atmosphere in our relationships, Christ and love are nullified. To love God and to love one another requires the atmosphere of freedom.

This is why it is so serious for the law to come into the church in any form. It kills the ability of the Spirit to be released and the ability of the divine love to flow. This happened among the Galatians. When the saints were put under a yoke of slavery, they discovered that they not only lost the love between themselves (Gal. 5:14-15), but they were also biting and devouring one another. They were “consuming” one another because the freedom was lost.

By observing Paul’s interaction with the saints in the New Testament letters, we can see that he was always careful to speak in such a way that the liberty of the saints was preserved (Philem. 12-14; Rom. 1:11-12; 2 Cor. 8:7-8). Study the fine points in Paul’s dealing with the churches, and you will see a relationship between an apostle and the saints where freedom was maintained.

Brothers and sisters, for freedom Christ set us free! We are all here willingly, not because we *have* to be here. No! There is no forcing or compelling here. There are no

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unspoken or hidden agendas. There's not an "expected way" to meet or practice the church. Whether this way or that way, as long as Christ is not nullified, we are all happy to be in the reality of the kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). We are not here with "formed ideas" and "concepts," even about the scriptural way to practice the church. It's not that anything is wrong with the scriptural way concerning the gathering of believers. But what is more important is *the way* these kinds of things are handled, because it determines whether the atmosphere of freedom is preserved or lost. If freedom is lost, then Christ is nullified, and the Spirit cannot operate. Spiritually speaking, everything comes to a halt, even though, outwardly speaking, the meetings and activity of the church life continue.

The apostle Paul was very much aware of the implications of practicing anything that would put people under the law. This is why he had to rebuke Peter publicly for withdrawing from fellowship with Gentiles at Antioch. Peter's withdrawing was due to his fear of "those who were of the circumcision" (Gal. 2:11-21). Apparently, Peter was just under a little pressure to conform to some racial and cultural differences as a Jew. But actually his way of behaving was building up a legal system all over again under the guise of the gospel (Gal. 2:18). It needed Paul to draw out the serious and far-reaching consequences of Peter's practice. The

foundational principles of the gospel — freedom, justification by faith, being co-crucified with Christ, dying to the law, Christ living in us — all were being threatened. And the resultant atmosphere of freedom based on these foundational principles was at stake. In other words, Christ was nullified. In fact, Paul brings out the ultimate result of Peter’s legal practice — the grace of God is set aside and Christ died in vain (Gal. 2:21). Thus, we can see that when the atmosphere of the law (in whatever form it may appear) replaces the atmosphere of freedom, Christ Himself is nullified and the church is no longer Christ in reality.

II. Christ Not Profiting Us

In Galatians 5:2 Paul knows he is making a crucial statement about the secret of experiencing Christ, so he draws attention to it in a special way. He starts out by saying, “[*Behold*] I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.” With the word, “Behold,” we get the impression that Paul knew how important the atmosphere of freedom was to genuinely experience a living Christ. To be circumcised or not to be circumcised does not determine whether Christ is in you. Paul does not deny the fact that the Galatians were Christians. This was not his point. His burden was that Christ would profit the believers in the realm of their

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experience. The *way* the practice of circumcision was brought in among them was the focus of Paul's concern. The way was a "compelling" and a "forcing" of a practice, which caused the atmosphere of freedom to be destroyed. Christ cannot profit us if we are under a religious system that compels and forces us.

Actually, Paul's concern was not even over the practice of circumcision. His concern was over the *way* circumcision was being handled by the Judaizers. For example, at one point in his ministry, Paul took Timothy with him as a co-worker and had him circumcised for the sake of not offending the Jews (Acts 16:3). That was an occasion of not abusing freedom for the sake of love and not becoming a stumbling block to any (Gal. 5:13-14). Of course, it was perfectly acceptable to be circumcised under those circumstances. However, on another occasion Paul refused to have Titus circumcised because it involved the practice of circumcision *in a way* that destroyed the freedom of the gospel (Gal. 2:3-5). Why did Paul act differently toward circumcision on those occasions? It was not because he was opposed to circumcision as such, but because he was opposed to *the way* circumcision was being handled by the Judaizers. Paul's use of the word "compel" in Galatians makes this clear. The way circumcision was promoted and handled brought with it an atmosphere of fear and intimidation (Acts 15:1, 24). It is *that* atmosphere that nullifies Christ.

If Christ can be nullified in experience, surely the church life can also be nullified. In 1986 we passed through a church experience similar to what happened to the Galatians. Brothers began to talk about a new move or turn that the Lord was taking among us. Some of the points they brought up were good, and even scriptural. But *the way* it was applied and enforced so destroyed the atmosphere of freedom among us that some brothers and sisters could no longer go into the meeting place. The reality of the Spirit was replaced with zealotry for a new way. Paul refers to this kind of zealotry in Galatians 4:17 and 6:13: ^{4:17} “*They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them. . . .*” ^{6:13} “*For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh.*”

When the proper atmosphere of freedom is replaced with a forcing and compelling atmosphere, Christ no longer profits us. This means Christ is of no use to us. He is of no supply to us. There is no practical advantage of having Christ. This is what happens when He is replaced by the law. When this happened in our experience, we didn't know how to act or behave. We didn't know what to do with ourselves in the meeting. The new turn or way was very much centered on how to have a proper meeting. The way things were handled put many into a straight jacket. Personally, I did not know how to operate in that

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kind of forced realm. It was like somebody tried to put Saul's armor on me, and I just didn't know how to manage it. But later, when we were removed from that atmosphere, I, so to speak, put my track shoes back on. I do know how to run with my track shoes. In other words, give me back my spirit and a living touch with the Lord, and I can function again and share Christ with all the saints. Amen.

III. Shutting Christ Down

Paul's word in Galatians 5:4 is very strong concerning how we can shut Christ down in our lives. He says, "You have become [discharged] from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace." To be discharged means "brought to nought from Christ," "be separated from Christ," or become "idle in relation to Christ." Again, this does not mean we lose our salvation. But it does mean, according to the Greek word, *katargeo*, to nullify and put out of operation.

In my Macintosh computer I have what is known as "the system folder." This folder is the key to the operation of all my Mac-related programs. If the system folder is up and running, then everything else runs fine; but if something goes wrong with the system folder, everything on my computer shuts down. Even though I have many good programs that can do a lot of things, if the system folder

is damaged in any way, then nothing works for me. In the same way, if you and I come under the law in any form and are brought again under a yoke of slavery, we are discharged from Christ and He is nullified in our experience and practice.

This word from Paul in Galatians is helpful to all of us. It perhaps helps to explain our experiences in the past, when under certain situations, we felt like the Lord was virtually absent from a place. The atmosphere of freedom was lost. Christ was nullified. This word will also preserve us as we go on together in the church life in the coming years. May we always maintain the blood-bought atmosphere of freedom for the full enjoyment of Christ, that the church would be in the reality of Christ.

10 **Escorted to Christ**

I. The Need to Be Measured and Escorted to Christ

The highest revelation of the church is to see that the church is Christ! This is how the Father sees the church. This is how the apostles saw the church, and this is how we should see the church. The vision of the church as Christ is truly a heavenly vision. This vision reduces us to Christ and becomes the governing factor controlling our daily life. Thus, we will be escorted to Christ over and over again.

In order to be a person escorted to Christ, we need to see in the Bible the divine principle of measurement that governs God's relationship with man. God works with fallen man on the basis of this principle. First, He measures man according to His standard. Then, this divine measurement becomes a demand upon man. This demand, in turn, reveals man's shortness and failure. Finally, man's realization of his failure is intended by God to escort him to Christ. In other words, the measurement and the subsequent demand of God is for one thing — to lead us to Christ to experience Another life.

God desires to be man's life-supply. The way He fulfills this desire is by first measuring man to expose his shortness; second, by this measuring He escorts man out of his own resources into God Himself as his boundless supply.

Thus, in God's economy the measuring Word of God is always intended to produce a standard beyond man's ability and capacity. Indeed, God's Word with its divine measurement and high demand, which far exceeds man's natural capacity, is the same Word that escorts man to God Himself over and over again. It is this principle that we see governing God's relationship with fallen man, both in the Old Testament under the law and in the New Testament under the higher demand of the law revealed in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5—7). Thus, we can say that *man's extremity* becomes *God's opportunity*.

A. *The Demand of the Law*

The demand of the law pushes man beyond his capacity. It exhausts him of his resources. When the law makes its demand upon the flesh, the flesh cannot do it. This failure results in a sense of discouragement within fallen man. He is discouraged because of his inability to measure up to the law of God. Of course, according to the principle of measurement, this is precisely what God intends to produce in man. Indeed, that weak feeling of

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inability and our discouragement over it become God's way of escorting us to Another life!

This principle of measurement is addressed by the apostle Paul in Galatians 3:21-24: ²¹ "Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. ²² But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise [out of] faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. ²³ But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. ²⁴ Therefore the law was our tutor [Greek: escort, or guide] to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified [out of] faith." We can see from these verses that the law has become our escort unto Christ. The law could not *give* life, but it did *lead* and *escort* us to life.

The apostle Paul is a prime example of a person in whom this principle of measurement was operating in Romans 7. He was struggling with the demand of the law expressed in the tenth commandment, "You shall not covet." Unlike the other nine commandments that are related to actions, this particular commandment is a commandment on reactions. Basically, the Ten Commandments are commandments on actions, for example, "You shall not kill," "You shall not commit adultery," and "You shall not steal." These are commandments against certain actions. But God so designed the Ten

Commandments that they would also include a commandment on reactions. In other words, no one escapes coming up short when measured by the high demand of God's Word.

The tenth commandment is "You shall not covet," or "You shall not feel that way," or "You shall not react the way you are reacting." It is a commandment on reactions. The tenth commandment shows how deep sin is in our being. Sin is not just in our actions; it is in our reactions. God's law exposes sin to the core of our nature, not merely on the surface of our being. Our very reactions are wrong and come short of the divine measurement. We are void of the divine love in our reactions. Thus, our fleshly reactions show us that we are sinful at a deeper level than outward actions.

With the apostle Paul in Romans 7, the tenth commandment was a demand upon his inner being. What he did not want to do, even what he hated, is what he found himself doing. This chapter reveals the frustration of a man trying to be right, but continuously falling back into the sinful habits and patterns that he was in bondage to. The law as the divine standard and measurement did its work upon Paul — it exposed his inability and weakness.

When we come to the end of Romans 7, we find a man who has been defeated again and again. He is defeated to the point of utter frustration, discouragement, and wretchedness. He cries out in Romans 7:24, "O wretched man

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that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” Thus, the law did a perfect work over Paul — it escorted him to Another life. It guided him out of himself to Christ. It so measured him that he no longer was looking at himself or expecting anything from himself. He was absolutely turned to Another source — Another life. In Romans 7:25 Paul breaks out and says, “I thank God — through Jesus Christ our Lord!” This is an expression of a man who has been escorted to Christ. Amen!

However, many times when believers are being measured by the Lord, instead of being escorted to Christ, they are left in discouragement and depression. They are left with hopeless feelings, feelings of not making it and wanting to give up. Thus, it is imperative to see that the demand of the law is the principle that governs God’s dealings with man. This demand is designed by God to produce a certain effect in man — feelings of failure and frustration. It is these very feelings that serve to escort us to Christ. God uses our frustration to lead us to Another source and life that we might learn to become a partaker of Christ, our life.

B. The Demand of the Lord’s Sayings

The Lord not only measures us by the law, but even more, He measures us by what He taught in Matthew 5—7. The Lord’s sayings in this section of the Word reveal a higher demand than the Old Testament law. In Matthew

5:17-20 the Lord says, ¹⁷ “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. ¹⁹ Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

When the Lord speaks of having a surpassing righteousness for entering into the kingdom, He is applying a finer measurement with a much higher demand than the law. The standard of the law could be compared to measuring in “inches,” but the Lord’s sayings in Matthew 5—7 could be compared to measuring in “picas,” which are a fraction of an inch. This means the measurement is much finer and more detailed.

The Lord’s word in Matthew 5—7 measures our emotions, our attitudes, our reactions, our exaggerations, our comments about others — He measures it all! He measures our heart, He measures what we think, He measures the fantasies in our mind, He measures how we look at others, He measures lust, He measures anxiety. He measures how we react in situations that touch our

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selfishness and personal convenience; for example, going two miles instead of one, or giving our outward coat as well as our inner garment. Nothing escapes being measured.

If we were discouraged by the law of Moses, we are even more discouraged by Matthew 5—7. Indeed, in Matthew 5:48 the Lord reaches the point of saying, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” Perfection in this verse is the demand to love exactly as the Father loves. It is not merely putting up with our enemies, but praying for them and blessing them. Such a measuring of our love finds us all short, but at the same time escorts us to Christ as our life and life-supply. When we are escorted to Christ, we become *partakers* of His love. This is why the Lord begins Matthew 5—7 with “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). When we are poor in spirit we realize, for example, that in ourselves we do not have the divine love toward our enemies; we realize we are nothing and can do nothing. It is this sense of nothingness that escorts us to Christ. The Lord’s high standard is intended to cause disappointment over ourselves, in order that we would be drawn away from our own energy and strength to the energy and strength of Another life.

In Matthew 5:17 when the Lord said, “I did not come to destroy [the law or the prophets] but to fulfill,” He

meant that *He Himself* would be the fulfillment of all that He taught and commanded. In other words, it was as though He was saying, “I am living the perfect life. I am overcoming sin, the flesh, the world, and the devil. I am bearing the penalty for sin. I am going to be raised from the dead, and I will become a life-giving Spirit to enter into you and fulfill in you all that I have spoken. Everything is now embodied in Me! Now just learn how to draw from Me, drink of Me, feed upon Me, depend upon Me, and abide in Me. Let your need and sense of nothingness, which comes from being measured by the divine standard, escort you into all that I am!” Amen!

C. The Demand of Our Environment

Being measured and confronted by the divine demands is always for the purpose of escorting us to Christ. God uses not only the law and the Sermon on the Mount to measure us, but He also uses our environment. Our environment makes demands upon us that cause us to sense our frailty and weakness. How we meet our environments, face them, and interact with them is used by God to escort us to Christ. Environments include your husband, your wife, your children, your money, your job — all persons, matters, and things in your daily life that affect you. In fact, environment, according to the biblical understanding, is simply *that which affects us*. A stormy

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relationship can affect us, money problems can affect us, taking a thought about a past mistake can affect us. Whatever may affect us — this is environment. Environment is like the law making a demand upon us that is beyond our capacity to handle. Just as the law escorts us to Christ, God intends that our environmental trials would also escort us to Christ. This means that we accept the “all things” of Romans 8:28 as being under God’s sovereignty. Categorically, all things are working together for good, because under the mighty hand of God they escort us to Christ.

Environment, which is measured out by God, is always pushing us a little bit too far. We have environments that we cannot cope with in ourselves. We get discouraged. We get depressed. We turn inward upon ourselves and sigh, “How can I go on?” or “I can’t make it.” Oh! brothers and sisters, that’s right! That’s exactly right! God intends that our environments push us beyond our limits.

This experience of being pushed beyond what we’re able to do becomes our guide to escort us to Christ. This was Paul’s experience in 2 Corinthians 1:8-10: ⁸ “For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. ⁹ Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the

dead, ¹⁰ who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us.” Here Paul allowed his “despair of life” to escort him to the God who raises the dead, knowing that He would deliver him. Thus, again and again, every kind of demand in our environment is actually a divine escort in disguise to lead us to Christ.

A further example of the Lord’s speaking concerning what He intends to accomplish through environmental dealings is found in Deuteronomy 8:2-3: ² “And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. ³ So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.”

When the Lord said, “to humble you and test you,” He meant “to measure you.” When He said, “to know what was in your heart,” He meant that in their hearts, the children of Israel would discover murmuring and rebellion manifesting itself, and they would find themselves coming short of God’s standard. In other words, all their negative reactions to their environment were allowed by God to escort them to live by every word that proceeds out

of the mouth of God.

The fact that the Lord allowed them to hunger and then fed them with manna signifies that they were pushed beyond their capacity in order that they would be escorted to eat divine food. Not to “live by bread alone” meant not to live by the natural life, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord. God was seeking to escort them in the wilderness to learn to live by Him as their source and supply.

In the same way, God humbles us through environments that we just can’t cope with. It’s at those junctures that we need to quickly recognize our escort! The feelings of not being able to cope *are* the escort. Our escorts leading us to Christ come in the form of frustration, desperate feelings, and failure. We need to recognize these escorts and allow them to guide us to live by manna! That is, we allow them to guide us to live by Christ as our bread!

The law is beyond our capacity. The Lord’s sayings in Matthew 5—7 are beyond our capacity! Our environments also push us beyond our capacity! All of these things are absolutely God’s favor to us, because He is not leaving us to ourselves. He exhausts us. He allows us to be defeated and feel discouraged. But the problem is this — we do not see discouragement as our escort to Christ! May the Lord open our eyes to see what is happening to us in the midst of our reactions, that we might seize our

discouragement and let it escort us to Christ.

Have you had any escorts lately? Praise the Lord! There is great hope in our escorts. They turn defeat into hope. The most defeated can use their very defeat as an escort to Christ. Whatever the Lord may expose in our lives — our reasoning mind, our divided heart, our motives — causes us to feel undone, naked, and defeated before Him. We need to realize at that time that the Lord is simply escorting us to Himself. Paul indicates this in Hebrews 4:13: “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.” Following this verse in which we are exposed to the core of our being, Paul says in Hebrews 4:16, “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” This speaks of being escorted to Christ *at the very time* of being naked and laid bare. Thus, all the demands and all the defeats are our personal escorts to Christ.

The demand of the law, the demand of the Sermon on the Mount, and the demands of our environment are all arranged by God to lead us out of our own limited capacity and ability. God’s intention is to bring us into Another life. He wants us to touch the life that has already made it into glory! Touch the life who is the victory! Touch the life that now dwells in our spirit!

Now we need to know how to turn to Christ in the

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midst of our problems and defeats. That is, we need to know how to touch the spirit and how to partake of the One that we are being escorted to. Without this turn to Christ we will still languish in ourselves. But brothers and sisters, there's an installation in us! It is the installation of the Triune God. The Father is in the Son, the Son flows as the Spirit, and the Spirit is joined to our spirit (John 14:20; 7:37-39; 1 Cor. 6:17). When we open our mouths and contact such a God, we open ourselves to all the riches of the Godhead as our supply. Amen!

There is nothing that is too hard for Christ. He has already been perfected for us and become the source of our salvation (Heb. 5:9). So what should we do with our defeatedness, our sense of discouragement, our reactions that say "I can't do that! I can't be that way! I can't love that way!?" Simply allow all these to become escorts to lead us to Christ.

D. The Demand of the Church Life

The demand of the church life is another kind of experience that God uses to escort us to a richer and deeper Christ. This demand comes with the revelation of the church that is according to the New Testament apostles. Once we see the church by revelation, we see how short we are in our ability to live such a life. The most basic point related to the demand of the church life is to love

like Christ loves. The church life requires loving one another, not only *with* Christ's love, but *in* His love — loving as Christ loves, loving all the saints for the building up of His unique one body. This requires the divine love, the kind of love that is beyond our capacity, the kind of love that we don't have in ourselves.

The kind of church life described in the New Testament requires a higher and deeper love than we have in our natural life. We are called to love sinners. We are called to love those who are unfinished, who are still in the process of being transformed. We are called to love weak, and oftentimes failing, saints. Divine love is Calvary love — the love demonstrated on the cross. It is love that flows out to despicable kinds of people — ugly people, hateful people, dirty people, rebellious people, deceived people. The love of God in Christ is all-embracing and full of forbearance and longsuffering.

To have the church life that is unveiled in the pages of the New Testament demands this kind of divine love. It is a church life that is beyond the reach of our natural man. In ourselves we do not have the capacity to love one another the way Christ loves us. But that's okay! When we see the demand of the church life with its measurement, it should produce a sinking feeling in our self-life. But that sinking feeling, if properly understood, is really an escort to guide us to Christ. While we are sinking in a feeling of despair over ourselves, we begin to confess

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our inability and emptiness by saying, “Lord, there is nothing in me that could live the church life with the disposition of the divine love toward all the saints. But I thank You, Lord, for Your life in my spirit that can strengthen me. By Your strengthening, You can make home in my heart to love through me with Your love.” This kind of sinking, yet confessing, prayer is an escort to Christ. When we are overwhelmed with the demand of the church life, we are put more and more into contact with Another life that can supply us with divine love. Thus, the demand escorts us to Christ. Amen!

In the book of Ezekiel we see this principle of measurement at work. The last chapters of this book, describing the details of the temple, are in typology a portrayal of the church life in the New Testament. For example, in Ezekiel 43:10-12 we read, ¹⁰ “Son of man, describe the temple to the house of Israel that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the pattern. ¹¹ And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the temple and its arrangement, its exits and its entrances, its entire design and all its ordinances, all its forms and all its laws. Write it down in their sight, so that they may keep its whole design and all its ordinances, and perform them. ¹² This is the law of the temple: The whole area surrounding the mountaintop shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the temple.” When Ezekiel had the vision of the temple, he was to

measure the pattern. This means that everything related to the temple was measured according to the divine plan with its divine dimensions. That measurement exposed the state of the children of Israel. If they would allow the measurement to produce shame for their iniquities, then that kind of response would escort them to God and deeper into the details of His building for His satisfaction.

The measuring process is opened up to us in Ezekiel 47:1, 3-5: ¹ “Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar. . . . ³ Then, when the man went out to the east with the line in his hand, he measured one thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the water came up to my ankles. ⁴ Again he measured one thousand and brought me through the waters; the water came up to my knees. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through; the water came up to my waist. ⁵ Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross; for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed.” Thus, Ezekiel had a wonderful, marvelous escort that brought him through the measuring process.

We are all being measured. Our mind is measured under certain environments. For example, when we consider the matter of giving to the Lord, we are being

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measured. Our reasoning comes in, “I can’t give.” This environment is for the purpose of being escorted through the waters and brought into another level of life. In other words, this escort is an escort into life-supply. This supply will take us into a deeper Christ — a Christ beyond what we can ask or think. Here in Ezekiel there is a measurement over the house, and the measurement is according to the divine standard. Ezekiel is measured and escorted through the waters into more life-supply for a purpose — that water could flow out of the temple, God’s house.

In the New Testament we are measured by the demand of the church life revealed by the apostles. It is not the kind of church life found in present-day Christianity with its shallowness and outwardness. The kind of church life in the New Testament is not denominational. It has nothing to do with being a Baptist, a Methodist, a member of a Free Church, or a charismatic. The church life revealed in the Bible is without division. All genuine believers are members one of another. All are organically related to each other by Christ, and Christ alone! And all are being built up with one another in love, experiencing the cross with one another and practically meeting together in the oneness of the Spirit.

In contrast, in today’s divided church, the self-life is not touched that deeply. In fact, you can remain in many places in the professing Christian world and never really

be measured by the Lord. It is not a church life that demands everything in your life. It does not push you beyond the limit of yourself. It is only a convenient, so-called church life that totally centers on meeting your need, rather than creating a need in you to be escorted to Another life.

The church that is according to man's thought does not escort you to Christ. But the revelation of the church in the divine thought pushes you beyond your capacity, with the goal of escorting you to Christ. For example, the measurement of the church in the book of Ephesians goes far beyond our limited concept of the church. To have such a church life requires a deeper and higher experience of Christ. That is why Paul prays two specific prayers for the believers in Ephesians. We need to see the church by revelation, and we need to feel the church by our hearts being filled with Christ and His knowledge-surpassing love. Then we experience forgiving one another, enduring, suffering long, keeping the oneness of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and not being blown by the wind of teaching. We find ourselves going beyond what we could ask or think in relation to living a more committed church life. The seeming impossibility of the kind of church life described in Ephesians is itself an escort to Christ. The church according to God's thought goes beyond

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the ability of our natural self and demands that we be escorted to Christ as our life.

When we talk about the church and giving our whole being to the church life, we may feel we can't make it. We just don't have the disposition for it. Our coming up short produces a kind of discouragement. Again, we have to say, according to the divine principle of measurement, God uses this discouragement to escort us to Christ.

The church, in God's thought, requires Another disposition that we do not have in ourselves. That is why we are escorted to Christ. Paul prays this way — that we would be strengthened into our inner man, that Christ would come in and possess us, and even make home and settle down in our heart. It is by our being escorted to Christ that we will have the capacity for the church life.

Oftentimes, we've been left with our flat, demoralized feelings. The demand of the law was there, the demand of the Lord's sayings was present, the demand of our environment was upon us, and the demand of the church life was ever before us. All these things were like high demands, yet we did not realize the demands were our escorts to lead us to "the rock that is higher than I." Hear what the Psalmist declares to the Lord: "From the end of the earth I will cry to You, when my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher

than I” (Psa. 61:2). This illustrates the proper understanding of being measured and escorted to Christ.

E. The Demand of the Kingdom

The divine principle of demand and measurement, which governs God’s relationship with man, extends to the realm of the kingdom. The demand of the kingdom life is indeed beyond man’s ability, as we see from the Lord’s conversation with the rich young ruler in the Gospels. In Matthew 19:16-17 we read,¹⁶ “Now behold, one came and said to Him, ‘Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?’¹⁷ So He said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.’ ” Then the Lord graciously presented the various commandments. To this, the young man replied, “All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?” (v. 20). In answer to this question the Lord applied the tenth commandment to the young man’s life: “Jesus said to him, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me’ ” (v. 21). The young man’s response to this word should have escorted him to Another life. Instead, verse 22 says, “But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”

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The young man's reaction to the demand of the kingdom to sell all was typical of fallen man — he was covetous and he was not willing to sell his possessions. In other words, he failed the test. The Lord measured him by the tenth commandment and he was found wanting. The Lord then said to His disciples in verses 23-24, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” By these words the Lord revealed the high demand of the kingdom life in relationship to man's lust and desires. Then in verse 25 we read how the disciples responded: “When His disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, ‘Who then can be saved?’ ” Again, the Lord had pushed the demand of the kingdom to the utter limits. Who is willing to give up all their possessions for the sake of the kingdom? This demand produced a reaction of astonishment in the disciples. They imagined that it was impossible then for anyone to be saved. Thus, the demand of the kingdom is stringent and absolute, altogether unachievable to the natural man. As we have seen, when God presents this kind of demand, it is His way of escorting man to Himself.

To the disciples' question, “Who can be saved?” the Lord replied, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (v. 26). This word indicates that

the sorrowing feelings of the young man over his lack of willingness should not have led him away from the Lord; rather they should have escorted him to the Lord. By being escorted to the Lord, he could draw from Him all the possibilities in His life. The young man had the right reaction to the demand of the kingdom — he felt sorrowful over his greediness and recognized that in himself he could not let go of his possessions. At that juncture he should have allowed his inadequate feelings to escort him to the God who makes all things possible.

To properly understand the Christian life we need to apprehend this divine principle that governs God's relationship with man: wherever there is demand from God, there is always supply waiting to meet that demand. We need only to be escorted to the source of the supply. Whether it is the demand of the law, the Sermon on the Mount, our environmental dealings, the church life, or the kingdom — all are to lead us to Christ to interact and fellowship with Him that we might partake of His victorious life.

May this word govern us the rest of our lives, that we would realize again and again that our weaknesses are our escorts out of ourselves into Another life. So, today when our flesh reacts to the Lord's measurement, instead of staying in the reaction, or fueling the reaction, we need to allow the reaction to bring us to Christ in a specific way. Various kinds of reactions — discouragements, defeats,

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and temptations — are all our escorts to experience more of Christ.

Brothers, yes, your flesh is lustful. Your lustful feelings affect you in a negative way. But walk in the Spirit and you will turn those feelings into paths to Christ. None of us can change our flesh (John 3:6). It is irreparable and unchangeable. However, while we are still in these mortal bodies as redeemed children of God, God uses the flesh to lead us to Christ over and over again! Therefore, when we allow our greatest weakness to escort us to Christ, it will become the factor of our greatest supply of life.

This was the apostle Paul's experience in 2 Corinthians chapter 12. He had a "thorn in the flesh." It was a chronic problem that caused him to feel weak. He asked the Lord three times to remove it, but the Lord did not remove it according to his prayer. The Lord answered him instead with "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). When Paul realized that God was using an environment to put a demand upon his flesh that was beyond his natural strength, he completely changed his attitude toward his thorn in the flesh. In 2 Corinthians 12:9b-10 he says, ^{9b} "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may [tabernacle over] me. ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake.

For when I am weak, then I am strong.” In other words, Paul was saying, “When I am weak, I allow my weakness to escort me to Christ! It is in my weakness that He tabernacles over me and I draw from Him. Instead of my weakness becoming a frustration to my experience of the Lord, it has become a path to lead me to the One who supplies me continuously with His grace.”

Paul learned this through his experience of the demands in his environment. So none of us should allow any environments to embitter us. Instead they should sweeten us, because they bring us so much God. In all the demands, God is teaching us one lesson — “I don’t want you to live by your own life anymore. I’m simply driving you out of yourself into Myself that I can be your All in all!” Oh, brothers and sisters, there are hundreds of hallelujahs within us as we appreciate the fact that all the demands in our lives are one escort after another, lined up, to lead us continuously to the all-sufficient Christ! Amen!

F. The Demand of the New Jerusalem

The final measurement in the Bible revealing all that God is and all that He wants is found in Revelation 21—22. This is the most thorough measurement with the most exacting demand. The measurement comes in the form of a vision of the holy city, New Jerusalem. In Revelation 21:15-17 we read, ¹⁵ “And he who talked with me had a

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gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. ¹⁶ And the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. ¹⁷ Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel.”

According to Matthew 22:30 man becomes like the angels in the realm of resurrection. Therefore, the measure of a man being that of an angel simply refers to a measurement in resurrection. This means that the entire city of the New Jerusalem is measured according to the standard and demand of resurrection life. It is measured with a golden reed, signifying the divine nature in resurrection. The measurement of the city reveals the Triune God with all His chosen and redeemed people for eternity. The city is composed of God’s people fully transformed and supplied with God in the Lamb flowing as the river of the water of life.

The New Jerusalem is the consummation of all God’s measuring and escorting throughout all the ages. The revelation of the city unveils what God requires: it is golden; it has the glory of God; it is holy; it is separate; it is the bride, the Lamb’s wife; it is constituted with God through and through. Looking at the holy city in spirit will cause us to realize that we all have come short of the glory of God. It will also serve to escort us to Him who is our eternal supply as the tree of life and the water of life

(Rev. 22:1-2).

Eventually, with whatever measuring we experience — related to the law, the Sermon on the Mount, our environment, the church life, the kingdom, or the New Jerusalem — the demand should always lead us to a higher and richer experience of Christ. God does not want to bring us down to the level of ministry which pleases man and makes man feel comfortable, without any exposure or conviction. No! He wants His demands to remain beyond the reach of our natural life so that we would be driven out of ourselves into Him. The New Testament ministry of the Word should always maintain the divine principle of God's measurements and demands. When this is a reality among God's people, we will be escorted to Christ to abide in Him for His rich supply (John 15:5). May we seize every opportunity in our daily lives with the "all things" of Romans 8:28 to be escorted to Christ with an open heart and an open mouth to call upon His Name. By this we will find ourselves drawing from the inexhaustible supply of the Triune God (2 Cor. 13:14). Amen!

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Endnotes

Chapter 1 — Notes to pages 12-13

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2. John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, Vol. 11, Romans–Galatians, Associated Publishers and Authors, Wilmington, Delaware, n.d., p. 1684.

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1. Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, Inter-Varsity Fellowship, London, 1962, p.16.

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