

The Corporate Christ

by Watchman Nee

The following article on the corporate Christ is a consolidation of several chapters from The Mystery of Christ by Watchman Nee.

In Ephesians 3:4-6 Paul speaks of his understanding of the mystery of Christ. This mystery was not made known to the sons of men in other generations. The men of old did not know of the mystery that God spoke through Paul, which involves the Jews and Gentiles becoming one new man in Christ Jesus. This is the corporate Christ, which is the church. Verse 6 of chapter three is a precious verse. The words “fellow members” refer to the new man in Ephesians 2:15. The new man stands in contrast to the old man. There are many individual men in this world, but there is only one old man. In the same way, there are many Christians, but there is only one new man—the church.

One New Man

In order to understand what the new man is, we must first understand what the old man is. The old man is the God-created man who fell through sin. Every person in Adam is not only a sinner before God, but also an old man. When such a sinner, the old man, hears the gospel and believes in Christ and is saved, he becomes a new man. Not only has he become a new man individually; he is joined to all other Christians to become one corporate new man as well. Ephesians 1 speaks of the church as the Body of Christ; chapter two speaks of the church as the new man; chapter three speaks of the mystery of Christ; chapter four speaks of the way to build up the Body of Christ; chapter five speaks of the responsibility of the church; and chapter six speaks of the warfare of the church. The peak of God’s work is the church, which is the new man. God saves us so that we will become a new man in Christ.

A great lack among Christians today is that everyone wants to be an individual Christian. Everyone wants to be good and zealous; everyone wants to sit and listen to good sermons. In short, everyone wants to be a Christian in an individual way. But God does not just want us to be good on an individual basis. He is after a corporate vessel that will destroy Satan and accomplish His plan. God does not want to see Christians scattered like a pan of sand. He wants Christians to be joined together to become a corporate new man.

Ephesians 2 speaks of Christ creating one new man out of two groups of people, but it does not tell us what the new man is like. According to Colossians 3:10-12, the new man is renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him. In the new man there is no Greek or Jew, circumcision or uncircumcision, barbarian or Scythian, slave or free man, but Christ is all and in all. The new man is not a matter of having or not having distinctions; it is a matter of either being the new man or being nothing. The new man is not in the realm of being a Greek or a Jew. The new man is simply Christ. The nature of the new man is Christ. In the new man Christ is all and in all. We can even venture to say that Christ is the church and the church is Christ, because everything in the new man—the church—is simply Christ. The constitution of the new man is nothing less than Christ Himself.

The Church Being the Corporate Christ

Since the nature of the new man—the church—is Christ, we can say that the church is Christ. Let us read two passages. In Luke 12:50-52 the Lord said, “I have a baptism to be baptized with,...Do you think that I have come to give peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.” Why did the Lord say this? He said this because He had said that He would cast fire on the earth. This fire is

the fire of God's life. This means He would release His life on the earth to all those who would believe in Him so that they would be regenerated and receive God's life. This matter, however, could only be accomplished after His baptism, which refers to His crucifixion. John 12 reveals that the church is produced out of Christ's death and resurrection. He is the grain of wheat that fell into the earth, died, and brought forth many grains—the church—in resurrection. From these two passages we can see that the church is produced by the life of Christ. Through His death and resurrection, Christ released His life and dispensed it into the believers. These believers are then joined together to become the church.

In the New Testament there are two ways to look at Christ. On the one hand, He is Jesus Christ the Nazarene—this is the individual Christ. On the other hand, He is Christ plus the church—the corporate Christ. First Corinthians 12:12 refers to the second aspect when it says, “All the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ.” Anything apart from Christ is not the church. There is only one thing in a Christian that forms a part of the church—Christ. The church is the corporate Christ. In the church there is only Christ. During the bread-breaking meeting, the portion that we break off from the whole still signifies the Body of Christ, the church. The church is not what is added to Christ but what issues out from Christ.

Today there are divisions among God's children because there are differences in organizations, personal views, concepts, choices, preferences, and doctrines. But in God's eyes the church is inseparable. All these differences are merely outward differences; they are not differences in the intrinsic reality of the church. The church is the composition of all the believers with Christ. The church is the corporate Christ. When all the saints are joined together in Christ, we have the church. Since there is only one Christ, there can be only one church. Hence, it is indivisible and inseparable.

In the New Testament, Paul was the only apostle who used the expression *the Body of Christ* to denote the church. In other places in the New Testament, the church is called the temple of God, the household of God, etc. But Paul specifically said that the church is the Body of Christ. The subject here is not us becoming the sons of God or becoming Christians. We are talking about how the church becomes the Body of Christ. We can say that the church is Christ in a different form. Christ was the only begotten Son of God. Now He has become the Firstborn. Christ plus all the sons—the church—is the one Body. There are no individual persons in the church; there is only Christ in the church. Anything that issues from Christ is the church. The church comes fully out of Christ and is one with Christ. There is no need for a Christian to do anything or

change anything in order to be in Christ. As long as a man is regenerated, he is in Christ and becomes a part of the Body of Christ.

The Body of Christ Being a Matter of Life

The church as the Body of Christ is absolutely a matter of life. The church as the Body of Christ is not a doctrine; it is of life. A man cannot become a part of the Body of Christ just by understanding it. He becomes a part of the Body of Christ through regeneration. This is absolutely a matter of life; it has nothing to do with knowledge or doctrine. As Christians we need very much to see the Body of Christ. But the only way we can see the Body of Christ is by God's revelation. We cannot understand the Body of Christ with our mind. Even if we have all the knowledge there is about the Body of Christ, we still may not have seen the Body of Christ or touched the reality of the Body. Only those who have received revelation from God will see the Body of Christ, and only they will enter the reality of the Body.

Romans 12 tells us that the church is the Body of Christ, but it does not explain how the church becomes the Body of Christ. In order to understand how the church becomes the Body of Christ, we have to understand Romans 5 through 8. Chapter five tells us that all men are joined to Adam and that man derives his life from Adam. Through Adam's fall, all men have become sinners and have been joined to the old man. Chapter six tells us that the old man has to be dealt with; it has to be crucified with Christ. Through Christ's redemption, we have died and resurrected. Chapter seven says that a man should no longer live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Chapter eight goes on to explain how we live according to the Spirit.

The Body of Christ Being the Consummation of the Work of the Cross

The consummation of the work of the cross is the church. The work of the cross goes as far as the Body of Christ and consummates with the Body of Christ. Hence, the knowledge of the cross brings us to the knowledge of the Body of Christ. The cross brings a man to a state of weakness and inability, one in which he totally loses hope in the old creation. When he is brought to this point, he is delivered in a real way from the old creation and brought into the new creation. Everything in the old creation has been condemned and terminated by the cross. The Body of Christ is the new creation; it has nothing to do with the old creation. If we resort to human methods, tactics, and skills (which we have used in the past) to deal with the affairs of the church, the result will only be disastrous. God does not approve of anything that is from the old creation, and He will not allow anything from the old creation to remain in

the new creation. Everything of the old creation must pass through the cross and remain on the cross. The church has no use for anything that comes from the old man. The church only takes that which issues from Christ.

When man fell, he fell because of his own concepts, choices, and judgments. Therefore, God will not allow anything that issues from the old creation to gain the upper hand. The “backbone” of the natural man must be broken; the hollow of his thigh must be touched. Before he will submit to God, he must be crippled and fall flat on his face. This is what God is doing in the new creation. He is smashing everything of the old creation, and He is constituting us with everything that issues from Christ so that we can become the Body of Christ in practicality. I saw the evil of man’s flesh twelve years ago in Philippians 3, Romans 5, and John 5. For seven months I was hesitant to make any move at all, because I knew that everything that issued from the flesh would be rejected by God. God wants to remove everything in man that is from the flesh. God’s children must first deal with the natural life. If they deal with their natural life, they will be in the Body spontaneously, because the Body of Christ is composed of everything that issues from Christ. Nothing of the old man can remain in the Body. As soon as a man passes through the experience in Romans 5 through 8, he can enter into the experience of Romans 12.

Today the church is divided because Christians are living in the wrong realm and the wrong sphere. Christians are not living in the new creation or in the reality of the Body of Christ. They are living only in the superficiality of doctrines, which belongs to man’s natural life and is part of man’s oldness. If every Christian was willing to be dealt with and to leave the natural things and the old creation behind, and if every one of them was willing to live in the reality of the Body of Christ, there would be no more divisions. May the Lord be merciful to us to see what the Body of Christ is. May the work of the cross usher us into the Body of Christ.

The Body of Christ Being the Expression of Christ

The Body of Christ is the continuation of Christ’s life on earth. When He came to the earth and lived on earth, He expressed Himself through a body. Today He still requires a body to express Himself. Just as a man needs a body to express all that he is, Christ needs a body to express Himself. The function of the Body is to be the full expression of Christ. We cannot manifest our personality through any one member of our body—the ears, mouth, eyes, hands, or feet—alone. Similarly, Christ cannot manifest His personality through any one member of His Body. It takes His whole Body to manifest Him. We must see that everything of Christ is expressed through His Body. This is not all. The Body of Christ is the extension and continuation

of Christ on earth. He spent more than thirty years on earth to reveal Himself. He did this as the individual Christ. Today He is revealing Himself through the church. This is the corporate Christ. Formerly, Christ was expressed individually; now He is expressed corporately.

The Body of Christ Being the Corporate Vessel to Fulfill God’s Plan

God is after a corporate vessel, not individual vessels. He is not choosing a few zealous, consecrated ones to work for Him individually. Individual vessels cannot fulfill God’s goal and plan. God has chosen the church, and He is after the church. Only the church as the corporate Christ can fulfill God’s goal and plan.

Consider our human body. No member of our body can act independently. It is impossible for a body to depend on one hand or one leg. However, if the body loses a member, it will not be complete. The Body of Christ is composed of all the believers. Every believer is a member in the Body of Christ, and every believer is indispensable.

The Body of Christ is a reality. The church life is also a reality. The Word of God does not say the church is *like* the Body of Christ; it says the church *is* the Body of Christ. Nothing external can become part of our physical bodies. We may clothe our bodies, but the clothes do not become part of our bodies. Nothing that is of us can ever become part of the Body of Christ, because “Christ is all and in all” in the Body (Col. 3:11). Anything in us that is not a part of Christ frustrates our inward knowledge of the Body of Christ. Sin hinders us from seeing Christ, and the natural life hinders us from seeing the Body. We all must see our position in the Body of Christ. If we truly see our position in the Body, it will be as though we were saved a second time.

The Adamic life is individualistic and independent. Even though everyone in Adam shares the same life, there is no fellowship among them. We all commit sin, yet we each take our own way. Everyone in Adam lives as separate individuals. In Christ everything that is individualistic is ruled out. If we want to know the Body life, we need deliverance not only from our sinful life and our natural life, but also from our individualistic life. All individual elements must go because nothing that is individualistic can reach God’s goal.

The Difference Between Being a Member and Being a Christian

The New Testament shows us that there is a difference between being a member and being a Christian. Being a Christian is something individualistic, whereas being a member is something corporate. Being a Christian is something

one does for himself, whereas being a member is something for the Body. In the Bible there are many terms with opposite meanings, such as purity and uncleanness, holiness and commonness, victory and defeat, the Spirit and the flesh, Christ and Satan, the kingdom and the world, and glory and shame. All these are opposites. In the same way, the Body is in opposition to the individual. Just as the Father is versus the world, the Spirit is versus the flesh, and the Lord is versus the devil, so also is the Body versus the individual. Once a man sees the Body of Christ, he is free from individualism. He will no longer live for himself but for the Body. Once I am delivered from individualism, I am spontaneously in the Body.

The Body of Christ is not a doctrine; it is a realm. It is not a teaching, but a life. Many Christians seek to teach the truth of the Body, but few know the life of the Body. The Body of Christ is an experience in a totally different realm. A man can know the book of Romans without being justified. Similarly, a man can know the book of Ephesians without seeing the Body of Christ. We do not need knowledge; rather, we need revelation to know the reality of the Body of Christ and to enter the realm of the Body. Only a revelation from God will usher us into the realm of the

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Body, and only then will the Body of Christ become our experience.

In Acts 2 it seems as if Peter was preaching the gospel alone and that three thousand people were saved through him. But we must remember that the other eleven apostles were standing beside him. The Body of Christ was preaching the gospel; it was not the preaching of an individual. If we have the view of the Body, we will see that individualism will not bring us anywhere.

If we realize that a Christian is nothing more than a member, we will no longer be proud. Everything depends on our seeing. Those who see that they are members will surely treasure the Body and honor the other members. They will not see just their own virtues; they will readily see others as being better than themselves.

Every member has a function, and all the functions are for the Body. The function of one member is the function of the whole Body. When one member does something, the whole Body does it. When the mouth speaks, the whole body is speaking. When the hands work, the whole body is

working. When the legs walk, the whole body is walking. We cannot divide the members from the body. Therefore, the movement of the members of the Body must be focused around the Body. Everything that the members do should be for the Body. Ephesians 4 says that the Body is growing into a full-grown man. It does not say that individuals are growing into full-grown men. In chapter three the ability to know the love of Christ and to apprehend the Lord's breadth, length, height, and depth is with all the saints. No one can know or apprehend by himself. An individual does not have the time or the capacity to experience the love of Christ in that kind of way.

First Corinthians 12:14 through 36 speaks of two erroneous concepts that members may have: (1) "Because I am not...I am not of the body" (v. 15). This is to despise oneself and covet the work of others. (2) "I have no need of you" (v. 21). This is to be proud of oneself, thinking that one man can be all-inclusive, and despising others. Both concepts are harmful to the Body. We should not imitate other members or be covetous of other members. In this way we will not become discouraged and give up when we find that we cannot be like others. At the same time, we should not despise other members, thinking that we are better and more useful.

The Consciousness of the Body

In the church life, we should learn to have the consciousness of the Body. When we are at odds with the brothers and sisters, it means that we are surely at odds with God. Some Christians are like butterflies; they act independently. Others are like bees; they live and move together. The butterfly flies from flower to flower, going its own sweet way; but the bee works for the hive. The butterfly lives and works individually, but the bee has a body-consciousness. We should all be like bees, having the consciousness of the Body so that we can live together with other members in the Body of Christ. Wherever there is Body-revelation, there is Body-consciousness, and wherever there is Body-consciousness, individual thought and action are automatically ruled out. Seeing Christ results in deliverance from sin; seeing the Body results in deliverance from individualism. Seeing the Body and deliverance from individualism are not two things but one. As soon as we see the Body, our life and work as individuals cease. It is not a matter of changing our attitude or conduct; revelation does the work. We cannot enter the realm of the Body by anything other than seeing. A real inward seeing settles the whole problem.

The Need for the Supply of the Body

Every Christian should know that he is only a member. If he does not have the other members, he will not survive. In the Body all the members must be joined together

before they can become the Body. All the members in the Body are related to one another, and they cannot be separated from one another. Between the members there must be a mutual supply and a mutual relatedness. Only then can the members survive. If a Christian lives an independent life, sooner or later he will weaken and dry up. If I am an ear, I cannot see and neither should I expect to see by myself. The whole body is dependent upon the eyes for sight, and no amount of prayer will give sight to the other members. If I am an ear, what should I do if I want to see something? I should go to the eyes—a brother or sister who sees—and ask for help. In order to go on with the Lord, we must recognize His supply for us in the Body and avail ourselves of it. The whole Body is built up through the interdependence among the members.

In order for a member to live a normal life, he must receive the supply from the other members. If a man is not living in the Body of Christ, he will not receive the Body's supply. No member can say that he does not need the other members. No member may detach himself from other members to live alone.

Romans 12:3 says, "Not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think." We should not think too highly of ourselves, and we should not think that others are inferior. We should not despise and reject other members of the Body. Peter thought that the other members would fall and fail but that he would not. But when the test came, he failed just the same as everyone else. Those who think highly of themselves and despise other members will end up in trouble sooner or later. In the Body of Christ everyone is a member and nothing more than a member. Hence, no member can live without the other members, much less despise them.

The prayer of the Body renders the life supply to members in need. God dispenses the life supply to His members through many other members. If the finger wants the supply of the blood, it has to receive it through the shoulder and the arm. Similarly, as members in the Body, we receive our supply through the other members. Therefore, it is foolish to try to separate ourselves from the other members.

Living in the Body of Christ

What are the eyes, ears, hands, and feet? They are Christ Himself. The Head is Christ, and the Body is also Christ. Each member is a part of the life of Christ. If I refuse the help of my fellow-members, I am refusing the help of Christ. If I am not willing to acknowledge my need of them, I am not willing to acknowledge my need of Christ. Just as I cannot be independent from the Head, I cannot be independent from the Body. Individualism is hateful in the sight of God. What I do not know, another

member of the Body will know; what I cannot see, another member of the Body will see; what I cannot do, another member of the Body will do. Therefore, I must allow the other members of the Body to minister to my needs. We must avail ourselves constantly of the fellowship of the Body, for it is our very life.

In the Old Testament, being out of the fellowship was the most severe punishment that could be visited upon the children of Israel. They "shall be cut off from his people." This is very serious. If it were God's intention for us to live as individuals, we could progress perfectly well apart from one another. However, He has made us members of His Body; therefore, we cannot possibly grow apart from one another.

We have to see the reality of the supply in the Body of Christ, and we have to learn to live in the Body and to receive the supply in the Body. In the Old Testament the lampstand was placed in the sanctuary. In order for a man to see light, he had to enter the sanctuary. In the New Testament the sanctuary is the church. If a man wants to see light, he has to come to the church. In the church meetings and among the brothers and sisters, God's light

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is much stronger than in individuals. Today God's sanctuary is the church; God Himself dwells in the church. Hence, His light is in the church. A man can only see light if he comes to the church. Everything that Christ has is in His Body. He is a foolish man who claims that he can be a Christian alone. Sooner or later, all individual Christians will dry up. As long as we live in the Body, we will receive the supply of the Body, no matter what our condition is. Every member should learn to treasure the supply of the Body and to treasure every member. We must all learn to live in the Body, that is, we must all learn to live in the supply of the Body.

The Authority of the Body Resting in the Head

The Bible emphatically tells us that Christ is the Head. One day God will head up everything in the universe under Christ. Today the universe has not come under the headship of Christ yet, and everything is in a state of confusion. But one day God will head up everything under the headship of Christ. God ordained that Christ should exercise headship over all things, but today that headship must first be exercised in the church, and then through

the church the headship will be exercised over all things. Today Christ is the Head of the church. Eventually, He will be the Head over all things. The church is God's means of enlarging Christ, and this enlargement will go on until He fills the entire universe. The church is "the fullness of the One who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23). If the headship of Christ is not established in the church, it cannot be established in the universe.

What do Christ being the Head of the church and the church being the Body of Christ mean? They mean that all authority is in Him. All authority is in Him because all life is in Him. The whole Body is consummated in Him; He is the fountainhead of the life of the Body. The Body has no life of its own. "God gave to us eternal life and this life is in His Son" (1 John 5:11). Even after eternal life is given to us, it still rests in His Son. The Son does not part with it; He retains it in Himself. "He who has the Son has the life" (v. 12). This verse does not say, "He who has the life has the life." We do not possess life as life; only by possessing the Son do we have life. A Christian receives his life from the Lord. Yet this life can never be separated from the Lord. A believer is related not just to life. By being related to this life, a believer is related to the Son of God. This life makes us members of the Body of Christ. This life relationship rules out the possibility of being separated from the Head, because our life is derived from the Head. The flow of life in us continually depends upon our relationship to the Son. As soon as there is any obstruction in our fellowship with Him, the life in us is immediately blocked. He is the Head of the Body, and life can flow freely to us only when He is in full control.

The Members' Place Being to Submit to the Authority of the Head

The power of our existence is derived from Christ. This is why we cannot do anything independently. Only the Lord is our Head, and only He has the authority to direct the moves of the members of His Body. In this age of lawlessness, any suggestion of the need of authority is unwelcome; but if we are to understand and enter into the life of the Body, we must know the authority of the Head. My hand can do nothing without direction from the head. The head must command if the members are to move. Christ is the life of the Body, and Christ is also the authority in the Body. All the moves of the members of His Body must be under the direction of the Head. For Christ to be the Head means that He has the authority in the Body. We are not the head, and we do not have the authority. The only thing we should do is submit to the authority of the Lord. If we seek to know the life of the Body, a question will immediately arise: Do we bow to the absolute authority of the Lord? We will be challenged at the outset by the headship of Christ. We cannot say, "But..." We cannot say, "I think..." We can only bow to

His sovereignty. We need to realize that if we are going to be members of the Body, we cannot be the Head. We cannot dictate, choose, or even desire. The Bible says that we should follow the Lord. What does it mean to follow the Lord? Following means coming after. The Lord is the One who decides our pathway. We do not have any ground for our own choice. The Body's only duty toward the Head is obedience and submission without any opinion, idea, or proposal. In the Body of Christ, no individual's idea or proposal counts; all these have to be cast down. We should only submit to the authority of the Head. We should just listen to His command and do as He says.

An acceptance of Christ as Head involves a repudiation of all other heads. Christ alone is the Head of the Body; no one else can be the head. You cannot be the head, nor can anyone in the church be the head, because there can only be one Head in the Body; there cannot be two heads. Only Christ is the Head. Therefore, all of us have to obey Christ. Today we see many human methods and ordinances abounding in the church. How wrong this is! Human plans and human decisions are against the headship of Christ. If Christ is my Head, then I will not dare to please myself or others; I must seek to please Him alone. "God has made Him both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Note that God has not set up Christ as Savior but as Lord. Paul first saw Christ as Lord and then as Savior. When he was apprehended on the road to Damascus, his first question was, "Who are You, *Lord*?" (9:5). Only Christ is the Head in the church; there is no other head. If we desire to live in the Body of Christ, we have to learn to submit to the authority of our Lord Jesus. Anyone who cannot submit, who always expresses his opinions and proposals, and who insists on being the head has never seen the Body. Once a man realizes that he is a member in the Body, there will surely be a feeling of submission in him because submission is a law of the Body.

Holding the Head

Paul spoke of "holding the Head, out from whom all the Body, being richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews, grows with the growth of God" (Col. 2:19). Since Christ is the Head of the Body, we have to hold the Head. Holding the Head is acknowledging that only Christ is the Head; it is coming absolutely under His authority. We can be joined to the brothers and sisters only when we hold the Head. The members of the Body are fitted together and able to live the Body life through holding the Head. Our relationship to the Head determines our relationship to the other members. All the questions regarding our relationship with the brothers and sisters can only be solved when we come under the absolute authority of the Lord. Unless we recognize the headship of Christ in the Body,

we will never have a perfect fellowship with the other members, because it is our common relationship to Him that causes us to be related to one another. We may look different outwardly, but the Christ within us is the same. This is why we can fellowship with one another and be one with each other. Apart from Christ, we have no means of fellowship. When we do not hold the Head, our fellowship becomes invalid. The basis of our fellowship is our mutual holding of the Head. When we all hold the Head, we will hold to one another, and our relationship with the Body will be proper.

If we hold the Head, we cannot have a special relationship, feeling, or fellowship with any individual or group of individuals. There is no room for our own preferences in the Body. We have no direct communion one with another; it is all through the Head. For instance, when my left hand hurts, my right hand comes to its aid immediately. The right hand does this because both the left hand and the right hand are under the direction of the head. The mutual relationship of the members passes through the Head first. What does it mean to form parties? Forming parties means that a few Christians have a direct relationship with one another and are detached from the authority of the Head. They communicate with each other directly, but their communication has not passed through the Head. They have a special relationship with one another, but their relationship has not passed through the Head.

We must not move in relation to another member except under the direction of the Lord. If He asks us to do something for a fellow member and the fellow member does not appreciate it, we do not need to worry since all of our dealings are with the Head. If we hold the Head, getting all our direction from Him and doing all as unto Him, we do not need to worry about the consequences.

If we hold the Head, we cannot have different interpretations of Scripture. Differences arise when someone is not holding the Head, because He cannot possibly say one thing to one member and something else to another. If differences arise, we must not try to straighten them out by discussion; rather, we should just recognize Christ as the Head. In the church we all must hold the Head, whether it involves the understanding of the truth, the handling of business, or any other matter. Christ is the unique authority in the Body. The place of all the members is to hold the Head and to acknowledge Him as the unique and supreme authority in all things. If we let the cross deal with our natural life, we will find no difficulty in our relationship with the fellow members of the Body.

The Measure of Christ

The riches of Christ are too profound. He is the Lord

who fills all in all (Eph. 1:23). With Him are the unsearchable riches (3:8). God's intention is not for these riches to remain just in Christ but for these profound and infinite riches to become the riches of the church. His intention is that the church would become the fullness of the One who fills all in all (1:23). The church is a vessel to contain the life of Christ. All the riches of the Son of God are deposited in the church. The riches of Christ are the riches of the Body of Christ. No individual could ever contain those riches, nor could a multitude of individuals. It takes a corporate company to hold the riches of Christ. The individual pieces of a crashed tumbler may hold a few drops of water, but it takes the whole tumbler to hold a full glass of water.

The church is not a heap of stones, nor a mass of unrelated individuals, but a "building" in which the stones are "fitted together" so that they become "a dwelling place of God in spirit" (2:21-22). This temple is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (v. 20). In a lesser sense each individual believer is a temple of God, but only the corporate temple can contain all the riches of God.

Ephesians 3:10 tells us that the showing forth of the multifarious wisdom of God to the rulers and the authorities is given to the church, not to any individual. Verses 18 and 19 say that God will cause us to be "full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are and to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ." The love of Christ is so rich that it takes the church to measure it. Christ is not only in each member, but He is also in the Body. No one member of the Body of Christ can contain all the riches of Christ. The riches of Christ that we receive individually are two-dimensional at the most, but the riches of Christ that the church receives are three-dimensional. Only the Body of Christ has the capacity to express the riches of Christ. We need to be in the Body so that we can apprehend the riches which Christ has in His Body. It is not one believer, but "all" the believers together who "arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (4:13). In chapter six we are told to put on "the whole armor of God" that we may wage warfare against the hosts of darkness. However, the equipment for the fight is not given to one believer; it is given to the church. "The whole armor" can only be put on by the Body, not just by one member. Spiritual warfare is in this principle—one will chase a thousand and two will put ten thousand to flight (Deut. 32:30). The so-called church has not defeated the enemy's host, because Christians are living scattered lives instead of functioning in the Body.

Mathematically speaking, if one can chase a thousand,

two should only be able to chase two thousand. But in spiritual mathematics, one chases a thousand while two chase ten thousand. The strength of two persons put together is five times that of two who are considered separately. Two is the minimum corporate number. If two persons chase the enemy separately, they will not defeat ten thousand. This is a principle: The strength of the corporate Body is very great. God cares for the corporate Body. He does not care how much strength you have or how powerful you are as an individual. As long as you are an individual and not joined to others, you can only chase a thousand. But if you are joined to others, your strength will be increased fivefold. You have to see that you are only a member. You are limited and short. You need the other members.

“For there Jehovah commanded the blessing: Life forever” (Psa. 133:3). Where did God command the blessing? He commanded the blessing where brothers dwell in unity (v. 1). When the Body is under the anointing, life flows freely from the Head to all the members. Christ is not the Head of any mission or organization, He is only the Head of His church. The Head is only Head over the Body. Unless we are standing on the ground of the Body, we cannot claim the headship of Christ, and if we cannot claim the full authority of the Head, we cannot know the fullness of life that streams from the Head. The blessing that is commanded whenever brothers are united under the anointing is “life forever,” a full, free, unceasing stream of life.

The Local Church Being the Manifestation of the Body of Christ on Earth

When Paul wrote to a group of believers in Corinth, he said, “Now you are the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:27). The Body of Christ is not only universal; it is also local. Every local church is the manifestation of the Body of Christ in that locality. All of the riches of Christ are vested in the local church. The authority of the Head is vested in the local expression of the Body. Apostles and elders in the local church are representative members of the Body, but they are not the Body. The entire company of believers in a locality, not just a section of the believers, constitutes the church in that locality.

The church is not one member; it represents the whole Body in a locality. Hence, when we touch the local church, we touch the Body. Participating in the fellowship of the local church is participating in the fellowship of the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ is not something abstract or unfathomable; the Body of Christ is manifested in the local churches. Anyone who wants to live in the Body in a practical way has to be in the local churches. He should fellowship with the local saints, be edified in the local church, and be built up together in mutuality.

When Christ was on earth He referred to the church two times—in Matthew 16 and Matthew 18. In the first instance, He referred to the universal church, and in the second instance, He referred to the local church. In speaking of the authority of the local church, He said, “If he refuses to hear the church also, let him be to you just like the Gentile and the tax collector” (18:17). This verse shows us that the authority of the church is derived from its representation of Christ. Christ has given His authority to the church and authorized the church to execute His will on earth. The Bible shows us that there are three ways in which a person can receive guidance from God: (1) God’s Word—the Bible, (2) the indwelling Holy Spirit, and (3) the church in a locality. The third line is the most important line. The leading of the Bible and the Spirit are individual in nature, but the leading of the local church is corporate in nature. The local church, being the local expression of the Body of Christ, has the headship of Christ and, therefore, can know the mind of Christ, which is always communicated to His Body. The local church declares the headship of Christ. “Truly I say to you, Whatever you bind on the earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on the earth shall have been loosed in heaven” (v. 18). A person who sees the Body seeks fellowship and accepts the leading of the church. Often the decision of a church in a rural area is proven to be better than the decision of a church in the city. Such a decision does not originate from man’s ability or wisdom but from the corporate seeking in one accord. In order to know God’s will and His way, it is not enough for us to read the Bible or pray by ourselves. We have to be in the fellowship of the local church, live the Body life, and follow God’s leading in the Body.

In a local church, God has established the elders as representatives of His authority. But this does not mean that they are everything. The elders should not monopolize anything; they are merely the overseers in the church. They stand on the side to guide the saints on, to stop improper activities, and to encourage proper activities so that the whole Body can be activated. Acts 12:5 says, “So then Peter was kept in the prison; but prayer was being made fervently by the church to God concerning him.” Today the church should pray fervently for world events and the state of our nation. This kind of prayer involves the exercise of the authority that God has given the Body.

Much revelation has been lost to the church because believers have sought light individually instead of seeking light in the sanctuary. When a man does not see the Body, he loses many blessings. This is a great loss to the church. May the Lord show us what the Body is so that we can live in the Body and receive the riches of the Body. When we are in the Body, we know God’s will, have the authority of the Body, and experience the power of the Body. **AC**