

2024 NORTHEAST SUMMER SCHOOL OF TRUTH

THE CHURCH--THE VISION AND BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH

Outline One

The Vision Concerning the Church and God's Purpose for the Church

Scripture Reading: Eph. 3:9-11; 1:22-23; 1 John 1:2; 5:1; Eph. 2:6; Rev. 21:9-10; Col. 3:1-3; Eph. 2:20; 5:25-27; Eph. 1:4-5, 9-11; 1 Pet. 1:2-4; 2:2; 1 Cor. 3:6; 2 Cor. 3:16-18; 4:16-18; 1 Thes. 5:16-18, John 2:19

I. God's eternal purpose is to dispense Himself as life into His chosen people to produce a corporate man for His expression and His representation—Gen. 1:26-27; Eph. 3:10-11, 16-19:

- A. Man was created after God's kind in the image of God inwardly, and with the likeness of God outwardly, to bear His image and express Him—Gen. 1:26a, 27; Col. 1:14; 2 Cor. 3:18.
- B. Man was created to exercise God's dominion so that God could deal with His enemy, recover the earth, and exercise His authority—Gen. 1:26-28.
- C. God's eternal purpose is fulfilled by the way of life—Gen. 1:2-27:
 - 1. God is triune so that He can dispense Himself into man and be man's life, life supply and everything—Matt. 28:19; John 10:10b; Col. 3:4; 2 Cor. 13:14.
 - 2. Man is created with three parts—spirit, soul and body—so that man can use his human spirit to receive, experience, enjoy and express God—1 Thes. 5:23; John 4:24.
 - 3. Only God's divine life can express God.
 - 4. The way of life that fulfills God's purpose is called God's economy in the Bible—Eph. 3:9.

II. God's eternal purpose is fulfilled by a corporate man, the church—Gen. 1:26-27; Eph. 3:9-11:

- A. The Lord wants to build up His church to be the corporate man for His corporate expression—Matt. 16:18; Eph. 3:8-11.
- B. The church, as the Body of Christ, is being built up by the functioning of all the members—Eph. 4:16.
- C. Satan wants to frustrate the building of the church and destroy the church.

III. The vision concerning the church:

- A. God's eternal purpose is not just to create man, to rescue him from his fallen condition, and to bring him to heaven; God's purpose is not simply to have us be holy, spiritual, and victorious; God's eternal purpose is to have the church—Eph. 3:9-11, 1:22-23:
 - 1. The word purpose in the Scriptures is equivalent to the word plan; God's eternal purpose is God's eternal plan—3:11.
 - 2. God planned to have a corporate Body, a corporate vessel, with which He could mingle Himself and all that He is; this vessel is called the church—1:22-23.
- B. The church is a building, but the church is not a physical building; the building materials are the chosen, redeemed, regenerated, and transformed people of God—cf. 1 Cor. 3:9.

- C. We need to see that the church as the Body of Christ is altogether organic, absolutely of life, with nothing organizational; the Body of Christ is the organism of the Triune God—cf. Eph. 4:4-6.
- D. The divine life, God's life, the eternal life, the uncreated life, the indestructible life, is the very essence of the church, and this divine life generates the church—1 John 1:2; 5:1.
- E. Since the source of the church is the Triune God, the nature of the church is of heaven and not of earth—Eph. 2:6; Rev. 21:9-10; Col. 3:1-3.
- F. The church's foundation is Christ, revealed and ministered through the apostles and prophets—Eph. 2:20; cf. 1 Cor. 3:10-11.
- G. God desires a church of glory; glory is the expression of God and it is altogether different from human morality and behavior—Eph. 5:27:
 1. The only way God can have a glorious church is through Christ's sanctifying, cleansing, nourishing, and cherishing—Eph. 5:25-27.
 2. As we experience these things in a personal and practical way, the church becomes glorious.

IV. God's purpose for the church:

- A. God's purpose for the church is that the church might have the sonship, and that God might be expressed through this sonship—Eph. 1:4-5; cf. Heb. 12:15-17.
- B. The second item of the purpose of God for the church is to deal with His enemy—Eph.3:9-11:
 1. The church is composed of those who once were ruined, corrupted, and damaged; before we were saved, we were dead in trespasses and sins, and were scattered and divided, utterly unable to be one.
 2. Nevertheless, God in His wisdom is able to make us the church; now we are not only redeemed, saved, cleansed, freed, liberated, and regenerated—we are also united.
- C. The third main aspect of the church in God's economy is the heading up of all things in Christ—1:9-11:
 1. God's purpose with the church is to work Himself into us as life that we may be full of light; when we are controlled by this light, then we have oneness and harmony, which will be the real building.
 2. Without the building up of the church, God could never head up all things in Christ; it is by being life to the church, and the church being built up by this life, that the light of God shines out as the controlling factor.
 3. This will release all creation from confusion and bring it into a liberty under the shining of the sons of God; then Christ will be the Head of all things through the church—v. 10.

FOCUS:

We need to see God's desire for the church, God's purpose for the church, and the role of the church in fulfilling God's purpose. Let us ask the Lord to give us a vision of the church and let us pray to give ourselves for the building up of the church for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose.

REFERENCES:

1. The Vision and Building Up of the Church, Chapters 1-2.
2. Life Study of Ephesians (Lee/LSM), pp. 565, 495, 270.
3. The Practical Expression of the Church (Lee/LSM), p. 7.
4. The Organic Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ (Lee/LSM), p. 10-11.
5. The Organism of the Triune God in the Organic Union of the Divine Trinity (Lee/LSM), p.7.
6. God's Purpose for the Church (Lee/LSM), pp. 3-20.
7. Basic Revelation in the Holy Scriptures (Lee/LSM), pp. 59, 83, 142, 144-146.

QUESTIONS:

1. Use several verses to describe how God's eternal purpose is the church.
2. Use different portions from the Bible to prove that the church is a building of people and is not physical.
3. What is the difference between an organism and an organization?
4. What does the term "glorious church" mean?
5. What is "sonship"? What does it include?
6. How does the church make known God's wisdom to His enemy?
7. What does it mean "to head up all things in Christ"?
8. Write a prophecy of about 200 words concerning God's purpose for the church. Make sure that you include the three key points with verses to back up your prophecy.

Outline Two
The Status of the Church

(1)

The Assembly, the House of God, the Kingdom of God, and the Body of Christ

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:2; Matt. 18:20; Gen. 28:12, 16-17; John 1:51; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 3:6; 1 Pet. 4:17; Eph. 2:22, 19; Rom. 14:17; Eph. 4:4; 1:22-23; 5:23; 1 Cor. 12:12-13, 15, 21; Eph. 3:8, 19; Col. 3:11; John 6:48, 57, 63

I. The assembly of the called out ones—ekklesia—Matt. 18:17:

- A. The basic concept of the church as the assembly is that the church is a gathering of the called out ones—1 Cor. 1:2; Matt. 18:20.
- B. The first status of the church is that of the assembly of those who have been called out of the world by God to Himself for the fulfillment of His purpose—Gen. 1:26; Matt. 18:20.
- C. Because the church has the status of the assembly, the ekklesia, we need to gather together; we must assemble and meet in order to have a congregation for God to work and move among us.

II. The house of God—1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 3:6; 1 Pet. 4:17:

- A. As God's dwelling place, the church is both God's house and His household, His family; in the New Testament the dwelling place and the family are one; according to God's New Testament economy, God's house is His family—1 Tim. 3:15.
- B. In Old Testament times, the house of God was the house of Israel; today the house of God is the church; God is the Father and the church is His house—Heb. 3:6.
- C. God's house, or household, is the church composed of the believers; from this house, as His own house, God begins His governmental administration by His disciplinary judgment over His own children—1 Pet. 4:17:
- D. This is so that He may have strong ground to judge, in His universal kingdom, those who are disobedient to His gospel and rebellious to His government—v. 17.
- E. In speaking of the church as the house of God, Paul specifically refers to God as the living God; the living God who lives in the church must be subjective to the church and not merely objective—1 Tim. 3:15.

III. The dwelling place of God—Eph. 2:22:

- A. The church, the dwelling place of God on earth, is the place in which God can have His rest and put His trust; in this dwelling place God lives and moves to accomplish His will and satisfy the desire of His heart.
- B. Because the church is God's dwelling place, the church is where God expresses Himself; a house is always the best place for a person to express himself.

IV. The kingdom of God—to live in the kingdom of God is a matter of bearing responsibility and of being regulated—Eph. 2:19:

- A. The kingdom of God is the living of the Church; the kingdom life is the reality of the Body life—Rom. 14:17:

1. As the believers live the kingdom life in the church, they will live righteously toward themselves; this means that we must be strict with ourselves and make no excuses for ourselves—v. 17.
 2. To live the kingdom life in the church also means that we live peacefully toward others; our relationships with others must be characterized by peace.
 3. Living the kingdom life in the church also requires that we live joyfully to God in the Holy Spirit.
- B.** The believers who develop and grow in the life of God in the church life shall be richly and bountifully supplied with the entrance into the kingdom of God—cf. 1 Pet. 1:3-11.

V. The Body of Christ—the organism of the Triune God is the Body—Eph. 4:4:

- A.** A. Christ is the Head of the Body; being the Savior is a matter of love, whereas the Head is a matter of authority; we must be subject to Him as our Head—v. 23.
- B.** The members of the Body of Christ are the God-chosen, Christ-redeemed, and Spirit-regenerated people.
- C.** The Body receiving from the Head—The phrase “to the church” implies a continuous transmission from Christ the Head to the church His Body; all that He is, all that He has, all that He has accomplished, and all that He has obtained and attained is being transmitted into all the members all the time—Eph. 1:22.
- D.** The church as the Body of Christ is the fullness of Him who fills all in all; through the enjoyment of Christ’s riches, we become His fullness to express Him—Eph. 1:23; 3:8.
- E.** We are filled unto all the fullness of God; we are filled, resulting in an expression of God; fullness means expression:
1. Paul prayed that the Father would strengthen us with power through His Spirit into the inner man that Christ might make His home in our hearts, and that we might know Christ’s dimensions—the breadth, length, height, and depth—that we might be filled unto, resulting in, the fullness of God, the expression of God—Eph. 3:14-19.
 2. The church today should be such an expression, issuing out of the rich enjoyment of the unsearchable riches of Christ—v. 19.

FOCUS:

All the statuses of the church are applicable to us today: as the assembly for our meeting life; the house of God for the family life of the church; the kingdom of God with its rights and responsibilities; and as the Body of Christ with the Head and all the members. By seeing and appreciating these statuses, we can be brought into the experience and enjoyment of church life.

REFEERENCES:

1. The Vision and Building Up of the Church, Chapters 3-4.
2. Conclusion of the New Testament (Lee/LSM), pp. 2215-2218, 2225-2229, 2235-2241, 2243-2244, 2265, 2270.
3. The One New Man (Lee/LSM), pp. 7-9.
4. The Organism of the Triune God in the Organic Union of the Divine Trinity (Lee/LSM), p. 8.
5. Basic Revelation in the Holy Scriptures (Lee/LSM), pp. 57-59, 61-62, 75, 83, 87, 93, 94, 127.
6. Body of Christ (Lee/LSM), pp. 23, 24, 30.
7. A Brief Definition of the Kingdom of the Heavens (Lee/LSM), pp. 9-16.

8. Completing Ministry of Paul (Lee/LSM), pp. 35, 42-45, 47, 49, 77.
9. Experiencing Christ as the Offerings for the Church Meetings (Lee/LSM), pp. 7, 22, 30, 134-135
10. Life Study of Ephesians (Lee/LSM), pp. 156, 231, 624-625.

QUESTIONS:

1. How does the first status of the church show that the church is not a physical building, but the built-up believers?
2. In this age the church is the reality of the kingdom. What is God's requirement for us to be in this kingdom today?
3. What is required of us in this age to enter into the manifestation of the kingdom in the next age?
4. What is the significance of Christ being the Head of the Body?
5. We have seen that the Body of Christ is composed of organic members. Could you hire or fire anyone for a particular function in the Body? Why?
6. How do we as members of the Body of Christ become His fullness?
7. Write a prophesy (100 words) listing each status of the church. Write a brief explanation of each status.

Outline Three

The Status of the Church

(2)

God's Masterpiece, the New Man, the Counterpart of Christ, and the Golden Lampstands

Scripture Reading: Eph. 2:10; 2:15; 4:22-24; Col. 3:10-11; Gen. 1:26-27; Eph. 6:12; 5:22-33; Gen. 2:21-24; John 3:29-30; 2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:7-8; 21:2, 7-9; 22:17; Exo. 25:31-40; Zech. 3:9; 4:2-10; Rev. 1:11-12, 20b; 4:5; 5:6; Col. 2:9; 1:15; 1 John 5:11-12; Rev. 21:18b, 23; 22:1, 5

- I. We, the church, the masterpiece of God's work, are the highest poetry, expressing God's infinite wisdom and divine design—Eph. 2:10; 1 Cor. 3:10.**
- II. The church as God's masterpiece is the corporate and universal new man—Eph. 2:15; 4:22-24; Col. 3:10:**
 - A. Christ created the one new man in Himself on the cross through His all-inclusive death—Eph. 2:15; 2 Cor. 5:17.
 - B. The new man in the new creation fulfills God's intention that man would bear His image for His expression—Gen. 1:26.
 - C. The new man is now fulfilling God's purpose to express God and to fight against God's enemy for God's dominion, God's kingdom—Eph. 6:10-17.
- III. The church as Christ's counterpart comes out of Christ, has the same life and nature as Christ, and is one with Christ—5:31-32; Col. 2:2; Gen. 2:21-23:**
 - A. The church is the corporate bride, the wife, of Christ, who is the Bridegroom, the Husband—Eph. 5:32; John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2.
 - B. God's economy in the New Testament is to obtain for Christ a bride, the church, through His redemption and divine life; Christ and his counterpart, His bride, will be married at His coming back—Rev. 19:7-8; Eph. 5:24-25, 31-32.
 - C. The consummation of the church as the counterpart of Christ will be the New Jerusalem in the new heavens and the new earth for eternity—Rev. 21:2.
 - D. The consummation of the processed Triune God and the consummation of God's chosen, redeemed, regenerated, and transformed people will become one in a universal marriage and will be a couple in eternity—22:17.
- IV. The final aspect of the status of the church—the church as the golden lampstands—Rev. 1:12, 20b:**
 - A. The lampstand in Exodus 25 typifies Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God; God is in Him, and apart from Him no one can find God:
 1. Gold signifies the divine nature, the nature of God, in which is the essence of the divine Being; by this we see God the Father, the One whose nature is the substance of the lampstand—v. 31.
 2. The form of the lampstand signifies the Son as the embodiment of the Godhead in His humanity—Col. 2:9.
 3. The seven lamps signify God the Spirit being the seven Spirits of God for His expression—Exo. 25:37; Rev. 4:5; 5:6.

- B. The golden lampstand signifies Israel as God's testimony in the Old Testament and in the millennium—Zech. 4:2:
 - 1. The seven lamps of the lampstand are the seven eyes of Jehovah (Zech. 4:10) and the seven Spirits of God (Rev. 4:5); therefore, the lampstand in Zechariah 4 shines through the seven eyes, the seven Spirits, of Jehovah.
 - 2. The seven eyes, the seven Spirits, of Jehovah are the seven eyes of Christ, who is the Stone-Savior for God's Building—Zech. 3:9.
- C. The seven golden lampstands signify the seven local churches as God's testimony in the New Testament—Rev. 1:11-12, 20b:
 - 1. As golden lampstands, the churches shine in the darkness and bear the testimony of Jesus; the function of the church is to shine out the glory of God in the dark night of this age—21:23; 1:2, 9; 20:4:
 - a. The substance, the material, of the lampstand is gold, which signifies the Father's divine essence; all the local churches are divine in nature; they are constituted with the divine essence.
 - b. The form, the shape, of the lampstand signifies the Son's human form; the church should have not only the Father's divine essence but also the Son's human form.
 - c. The golden lampstands as the testimony of Jesus have the Spirit's expression; the seven lamps of the lampstand shine for God's expression.
 - 2. The New Jerusalem, the aggregate of all the lampstands, the totality of today's lampstands, is a consummate, universal golden lampstand to shine forth God's glory in the new heaven and new earth for eternity.
 - 3. As the consummation of the golden lampstands, the New Jerusalem will be the triune expression of the processed Triune God in eternity—the expression of the Father as the source, the Son as the embodiment, and the Spirit as the realization and transmission.

FOCUS:

All the statuses of the church are applicable to us today: as God's masterpiece in His work on us; the new man for us to take Christ as our person; as the counterpart of Christ for us to love the Lord supremely and prepare to meet Him; and as the golden lampstands to shine as the testimony of Jesus in this dark age.

REFERENCES:

1. The Vision and Building Up of the Church, Chapters 5-6.
2. Completing Ministry of Paul (Lee/LSM), p. 37-39.
3. Life Study of Ephesians (Lee/LSM), pp. 186, 210-212, 223, 624-625, 722, 798, 814, 816-817.
4. Conclusion of the New Testament (Lee/LSM), pp. 2301-2303, 2321, 2327-2328, 2337, 2275.
5. The Basic Revelation in the Holy Scriptures (Lee/LSM), pp. 64-66, 68, 110, 113-114, 117-118.
6. Body of Christ (Lee/LSM), pp. 21, 24, 55.
7. Completing Ministry of Paul (Lee/LSM), pp. 9, 34, 38-40, 46-47, 74-75, 91.
8. Conclusion of the New Testament (Lee/LSM), pp. 2045-2100, 2293, 2305-2306, 2308-2321, 2329-2347, 2395-2396, 2399-2300.
9. The Glorious Church (Nee/LSM), pp. 46-71

10. Life Study of Ephesians (Lee/LSM), pp. 210-212, 223, 612, 624-625, 722, 798, 814, 816-817.

QUESTIONS:

1. What does the term “masterpiece” imply when referring to the church?
2. What is the difference between the old man and new man?
3. How did Christ’s death on the cross create the new man?
4. List as many parallels as you can between Eve as the bride of Adam, and the church as the bride of Christ.
5. Write a short essay about how the symbol of the lampstand reveals the Triune God.
6. Why is the lampstand an appropriate symbol for the church?
7. Explain in detail the final stage of the church as the lampstand.

Outline Four

The Two Aspects of the Church—Universal and Local

Scripture Reading: Matt. 16:16-18; Eph. 1:22-23; Matt. 18:17; Eph. 2:22; 4:4; Titus 1:5; Acts 4:23; 13:1; Rev. 1:4a, 11; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 10:16-17

- I. The church Christ is building is the universal church, the unique Body of Christ; the church in its universal aspect is uniquely one—Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 10:32; 12:12-13.**
- II. The one universal church expressed in many places on earth becomes the many local churches; the expression of the church in a locality is the local church in that particular locality—Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 1:2; 11:16.**
- III. The nature and principle of the universal church are the nature and principle of the local church; every local church is a representative of the universal church, representing the universal church in its locality by living out the proper life of the Body of Christ and thus expressing Christ:**
 - A. The universal church is heavenly (Eph. 2:6; Rev. 21:9-10); the local churches are also heavenly (Col. 3:1-3).
 - B. The universal church is the house of God (Eph. 2:20-22); the local churches are also the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15).
 - C. The universal church is the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:23); the local churches are also the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-5).
 - D. The universal church is the expression of God (Rev. 4:2-3; 21:11); the local churches are also the expression of God (1 Cor. 14:24-25).
- IV. God accomplishes His eternal purpose by coming into time, especially in the New Testament age, and by going to various localities through His Spirit to raise up groups of people who believe in His Son and to build these people into local churches—Rev. 1—3, 21—22.**
- V. The local church is the universal church in practicality because the local church is the reality of the universal church; the universal church is abstract; the local church is real and tangible:**
 - A. The Lord's building of the universal church is gained through His building of the local church; if the Lord did not build the local church, He would have no place to start His building of the universal church—Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 3:6, 9.
 - B. Matters related to administration and government or matters related to edification or leading must all be done locally; there must be a local church so that it is possible for the universal church to carry out its administration—Matt. 18:15-17.
 - C. The believers' corporate life and service in coordination are realized in the local churches—1 Tim. 3:15.
- VI. In the proper church life, the administration of the church is local, but the fellowship of the church is universal—Matt. 18:17; 16:18:**
 - A. The administration of each local church is separate from the administrations of all other local churches; furthermore, the administrations of all the local churches are on an equal level.

- B. The fellowship of the church is one universally, this universal fellowship is the fellowship of the Body of Christ, it is the fellowship passed on to us by the apostles— Acts 2:42; 1 Tim. 1:3-4.

FOCUS:

The Body of Christ is universal, but its expression is local; therefore, there is a universal aspect and a local aspect of the church. The local aspect of the church is the practical church life on earth in a locality, as the procedure to reach the goal of God's eternal purpose.

REFERENCES:

1. The Vision and Building Up of the Church, Chapter 7.
2. Vital Factors for the Recovery of the Church Life (Lee/LSM), p. 45.
3. Conclusion of the New Testament (Lee/LSM), p. 2139-2140, 2149.
4. Vital Factors for the Recovery of the Church Life (Lee/LSM), pp. 47-57.
5. The Testimony and the Ground of the Church (Lee/LSM), p. 144, 172-178.
6. Basic Revelation in the Holy Scriptures (Lee/LSM), pp. 66-67.
7. Further Talks on the Church Life (Nee/LSM), pp. 11, 19-20, 22, 25, 123, 132-133.
8. Normal Christian Church Life (Nee/LSM), pp. 96-97, 105, 162.
9. The Organic Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ (Lee/LSM), pp. 16, 18, 50, 64.
10. The Practical Expression of the Church (Lee/LSM), pp. 24, 26.

QUESTIONS:

1. How do you know that the church mentioned in Matt. 16:18 is the universal church?
2. How do you know that the church mentioned in Matt. 18:17 is the local church?
3. Write a prophecy (approx. 150 words) on how the words "fellowship" and "administration" show both the universal and local aspects of the church.

Outline Five

The Original Condition of the Church, the Failures in the Churches, and the Degradation and Recovery of the Church

Scripture Reading: Matt. 20:25-28; Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; John 17:14-17; Acts 17:11; Rev.1:11; 1 Cor. 16: 1, 3; Acts 13:1-2, 15: 28; Col. 3:11; Acts 2:46-47; Acts 5:1-11; 6:1; 15:1-2; Col. 2:8,16, 20-22; 2 Tim. 1:15; Ezra 1:3-11; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; John 5:17

I. The original condition of the church:

- A. All believers were equal and were brothers—there was no position, class or rank in the church—Matt. 20:25-28; 23:8-11; Rev. 1:9.
- B. All believers functioned in the church:
 - 1. All the believers were members of the Body and functioned in coordination—Rom.12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:16; Acts 2:46.
 - 2. All believers were priests—1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev, 1:5, 6; 5:9, 10.
- C. The church was separated from the world and forsook the idols—John 17:14-17; Acts 15:29; 19:19.
- D. The church treasured God's Word—listened to the speaking of the Holy Spirit—Acts 17:11; 15:15-16.
- E. All the churches stood on the ground of oneness—one city, one church—Acts 8:1, 13:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; Rev. 1:11; Acts 9:31; 15:41.
- F. All the churches had fellowship with one another—1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 16:1, 3.
- G. The church was under the headship of Christ and the authority of the Holy Spirit—Col.1:18; Eph. 4:15; Acts 13:2; 15:28.
- H. The church had no distinction between race, nationality, or social classes—Col. 3:11; cf. Acts 13:1.

II. Because their condition was according to the truth and the nature of the church, they therefore received much blessing from the Lord—Acts 2:46-47; 6:7; 12:24.

III. The failures of the church—there are no failures in the universal church; however, there are failures in the local churches:

- A. The first failure in the churches was that of hypocrisy seen in the case of Ananias and Sapphira; hypocrisy is a matter of pretending to be somebody in order to get a name that we may have vainglory—Acts 5:1-11.
- B. The second failure in the churches was related to culture and languages; at the very beginning of the practice of the church life, trouble was caused by language differences; proper care was taken to solve this—Acts 6:1-6.
- C. Another failure was that of bringing in the legal practices of the Old Testament; this type of teaching annulled the faith in God's New Testament economy, and was a real heresy; this failure annulled the believers' freedom in Christ—Acts 15:1-2.
- D. A very serious failure in the churches was the compromise with Judaism led by the apostle James; this failure brought in the mixture of Judaism to contaminate God's pure grace and spoiled the purity of the church life—Acts 21:20-26.
- E. God's intention in recording these failures in the holy Word is to give us a warning concerning the possibility of such failures recurring in the church life.

IV. There is a difference between the failures in the churches and the degradation of the church; the failures are not serious in a basic way while the degradation of the church is more than basic, for it cuts the root of the life, living, and growth of the church.

- A. The degradation as described during the time of the New Testament:
 - 1. The first aspect of the degradation of the church was the church being taken over by the Gnostic philosophy and the elements of the world—Col. 2:8, 16, 20-22; Titus 1:14-15.
 - 2. Another aspect of the degradation of the church was the teaching of things different from the economy of God taught by the apostle, resulting in turning away from the apostle's teaching—Acts 2:42; 1 Tim. 1:4.
 - 3. The desire for material gain is another reason certain ones teach differently from the economy of God; because of pride and the desire for profit for riches, some are teaching differently—1 Tim. 6:5.
 - 4. In the degradation of the church, many turned away from Paul's ministry; those who turned away from Paul's ministry deviated from God's complete revelation—2 Tim. 1:15; Col. 1:25, 27.
- B. The church further degraded after the completion of the New Testament; Satan tried his best to destroy the church because he knew that the builded church would destroy him— Matt. 16:18:
 - 1. He used the Roman Empire to persecute the church in an attempt to terminate her; but persecution did not terminate the Christians; it rather helped them.
 - 2. Then Satan changed his strategy; under the rule of Constantine the Great the Roman Empire made Christianity legal, and Christians had the full freedom of worship.
 - 3. This ruin progressed from the fourth to the sixth centuries, by which time the papal system was fully established; with this the Roman Catholic Church reached its full development.

V. Because the church has become degraded through history, it needs to be restored according to God's original intention; the recovery of the church means that there is the need to bring the church back to its original state:

- A. The recovery of the church is typified by the return of the children of Israel from their captivity—Ezra 1:3-11.
- B. The recovery of the church is fully revealed in the New Testament even though the word recovery is not used; this recovery is revealed mainly in the later Epistles of the New Testament.
- C. We need to be recovered from the divisive and apostate ground with its deviation from the truth concerning the person of the Triune God and the person and work of Christ.
- D. We need to be recovered from every kind of division back to the unique and pure ground of the oneness of the Body of Christ with its truths concerning:
 - 1. The New Testament faith and God's economy—1 Tim. 1:3-4.
 - 2. The person and work of Christ.
 - 3. The person and the dispensing of the Triune God—2 Cor. 13:14.
 - 4. The church, the Body of Christ, the Corporate Christ—Eph. 1:22-23; 1 Cor. 12:12.
 - 5. The universal and local aspects of the church—Matt. 16:18; 18:17.

- E. In the recovery of the church, we are building the Body of Christ, the temple of God, the house of God—Eph. 4:12-17.
- F. The recovery of the church involves the establishing of the kingdom life—Rom. 14:17.

FOCUS:

The original condition of the church did not last long. The failures and the degradation of the church reveal the Lord's need for a recovery. The recovery of the church brings it back to God's original intention for the church. May we give ourselves for the recovery of the truth and of the proper church life to fulfill God's eternal purpose and economy.

REFERENCES:

1. Conclusion of the New Testament (Lee/LSM), pp. 2349-2397.
2. The World Situation and God's Move (Lee/LSM), p. 12.
3. Conclusion of the New Testament (Lee/LSM), pp. 2447-2496.
4. The Economy of God and the Building Up of the Body of Christ (Lee/LSM), p. 50.
5. The Glorious Church (Nee/LSM), p. 61.
6. The One New Man (Lee/LSM), pp. 7-8.
7. The Specialty, Generality, and Practicality of the Church Life (Lee/LSM), pp. 15-16.

QUESTIONS:

1. Explain the difference between the failures of the church and the degradation of the church.
2. What are the items of degradation of the church revealed in the New Testament? Make a list and use verse references.
3. What are the major items we need to be recovered from and recovered to?

Outline Six

The Holy, Royal, and Gospel Priesthood for the Building up of the Church

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rom. 15:16; Heb. 9:14; 1 John 1:9; John 1:29; Eph. 2:14; 5:26; Col. 2:9; Heb. 4:16; Rom. 10:17; Psa. 119:147-148

I. A priest must contact God, be filled with God, and be possessed by God completely that he may be built up with others in the flow of the life of God; then the priesthood will be His living corporate expression—1 Pet. 2:5, 9:

- A. The main function of a priest is not to work, but to spend time in the presence of the Lord until he is one with Him in the spirit.
- B. The priesthood that God plans to have is a corporate man who is saturated and permeated with Himself.

II. The holy priesthood is typified by the priesthood according to the order of Aaron; to be holy is to be separated from the common things, the worldly things, unto the holy God—1 Pet. 2:5:

- A. We need to be separated positionally so that we may be filled with the holy God dispositionally.
- B. The tabernacle and its furniture is a picture of our experience of coming to God as a holy priest:
 1. The altar signifies the cross where Christ died as our sacrifice; when we come to God, we first need to offer Christ as our spiritual sacrifice—Heb. 9:14; 1 Cor. 15:3; John 1:29.
 2. The laver, the show bread table and the lampstand signify three experiences in the Word; when we use our spirit to read the Word, the Spirit will wash us, feed us, and enlighten us—Eph. 5:26; Matt. 4:4; John 8:12.
 3. The incense altar signifies our prayer; as we use the Word to pray, we enter into the holy of holies—Rev. 5:8.
 4. The ark typifies Christ as the embodiment of God; this is where we fellowship with God, and where God fills us with Himself to transform us—Col. 2:9.

III. The royal priesthood is typified by the priesthood according to the order of Melchisedec—Gen. 14:18-20; 1 Pet. 2:9:

- A. Melchisedec came from God to bless Abraham with bread and wine; he came from God to bless man with the Lord's table.
- B. We need to go to God's people to bless them with God as the bread and wine; the Lord's table signifies Christ's death and resurrection for man's salvation and enjoyment; this is the gospel, the good news, for fallen, sinful man and what we share in the church meetings to build up the church—v. 9.

IV. The gospel priesthood is to preach the gospel to save sinners, so that they may be offered to God as acceptable sacrifices; the gospel priesthood includes the holy and royal priesthoods—Rom. 15:16; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9:

- A. As a gospel priest we need to come forward to God to be saturated with Him first; then the Lord burdens us to pray for a certain friend, we bring God to that friend as a royal priest.

- B. We are built up as we perform our priestly duties; as we are being built up, more priests become saved and are added to the priesthood to be built up together with us; this is God’s way to build up the church.

V. How to practice the priesthood—Rom. 15:16:

- A. In the Old Testament, the priests start to offer sacrifices to God in the morning; therefore, we also must enjoy the Lord in the Word every day early in the morning to have a new start each day; by having morning revival every morning, you will be filled up with God to perform your priestly duty—Psa. 119:147-148.
- B. Pray unceasingly to fellowship with the Lord and to pray specifically for your friends’ salvation; praying refreshes us, strengthens us, and directs us in our priestly function— Rom. 1:9; John 15:16.
- C. Praying and going are two aspects of our co-laboring with God, go to visit people as God visited us, go and speak the Word to convert them to the Lord; this the God-ordained way to function as a gospel priest.
- D. After ones receive the Lord, you must continue to pray for them and shepherd them into life, so that they may be established in the faith; help them to pray, to read the Word, and to live by the spirit.
- E. In Matthew 28:20 the Lord said that after we have baptized people, we should teach them “to observe all things, whatever I commanded you”; the best way to teach the truth is in small groups, when you have a small group of saints meeting together, there are more riches of Christ.
- F. In the meetings, we practice as royal priests to speak for God and to speak God into all the saints; whatever you currently know and have enjoyed is your portion to build up the church.

VI. We should endeavor to be the holy, royal, and gospel priests in the one priesthood; if we are faithful, the life and number in the church will increase and the Lord will build His church through us.

FOCUS:

May we enter into the experiential and practical working out of the universal priesthood of bringing man to God (Holy) and God to man (Royal). The result of this priesthood is the New Testament priesthood of the gospel. We should faithfully endeavor to be holy, royal, and gospel priests in the one priesthood so that the life and number in the church will increase and the Lord will build His church through us.

REFERENCES:

1. The Vision and Building Up of the Church, Lesson Book 5, pp. 239-249.
2. Speaking Christ for the Building Up of the Body of Christ (Lee/LSM), pp. 36-37.
3. The New Testament Priest of the Gospel (Lee/LSM), pp. 75-79; 95-110.

QUESTIONS:

1. With the teacher and the other students in your class, draw a picture of the tabernacle including all the furniture. Discuss the significance of the tabernacle and its furniture.
2. Discuss the function, similarities and differences of each aspect of the priesthood (holy, royal, and gospel).
3. In detail, describe the type of living needed to be a proper priest.

Outline Seven

Our Entrance into the Church and Our Attitude in the Church Life

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:3-5, 7; Rom. 4:25; 1 Pet. 1:3; Eph. 2:5-6; Acts 2:4; 10:44-45; 1 Cor. 12:13; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 26:19; 2 Cor. 4:1; Phil. 3:13; Rom. 12:3-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; 1 John 3:14; Heb. 13:17

I. Our entrance into the church—we are in the church by life and because of life; we are in the church because of the work of the Triune God, we can never leave the church, we were destined to be in the church—Eph. 1:3-5, 7:

- A. The Father's choosing and predestinating of us to be sons is for the church; because the church is made up of the many sons of the Father, we who were chosen and predestinated are the constituents of the church—Eph. 1:3-5.
- B. God must redeem us, forgive us, and cleanse us from our sins to prepare us to be building material for the church; He accomplished redemption, as a man, on the cross for all mankind, once and for all—v. 7.
- C. We were regenerated unto a living hope through Christ's resurrection; as a result, the eternal life of God came into us to make us divinely human, qualifying us to be the constituents of the church; furthermore, we were raised together and seated in the heavenlies with Christ Jesus and have the authority to carry out God's desire—to build up the church—Rom. 4:25; 1 Pet. 1:3; Eph. 2:5-6.
- D. The Triune God's final accomplishment was the outpouring of the Spirit to form the one Body—1 Cor. 12:13:
 - 1. The Spirit was first poured out on the day of Pentecost for the Jewish believers—Acts 2.
 - 2. The Spirit was then poured out in the house of Cornelius for the Gentile believers—Acts 10.
- E. Our entrance into the church is by believing and being baptized after hearing the word of the truth, the gospel of our salvation; by believing, we receive the Spirit of reality, who brings us all the divine realities; by being baptized, we are put into the Spirit once and for all to remain in the Body—1 Cor. 12:13.
- F. Our entrance into the church is eternal; it is according to the divine and uncreated life of God; there is no going out, whether by our choice, by somebody else's choice, or by God's choice.
- G. If you see the vision of the church and the building up of the church, your spontaneous reaction will be to give yourselves up absolutely to Christ for the building up of the church; you will realize that there is nothing else to do in the universe but to build up the church:
 - 1. We need to pray for the Lord's mercy to keep us obedient to the heavenly vision so that we will continue to be absolutely consecrated until the end—Acts 26:19.
 - 2. We should not lose heart because we have the New Testament ministry to encourage and supply us for the building up of the church—2 Cor. 4:1.
 - 3. We must focus our attention on the goal—Christ and the church; therefore, young brothers and sisters, set your whole heart, whole mind, and whole soul to love the Lord Jesus for the building up of His church—Phil. 3:13; 1 Cor. 11:1.

II. Our attitude in the church—having the proper attitude helps to build up the church—Eph. 4:12-16:

- A. Being conscious of the Body—we were saved as members of the Body of Christ; therefore, we must be conscious of the Body.
- B. Loving the brothers and sisters—all of us who were born of God and have been baptized into the one Body of Christ cannot help but love one another; we must take care of one another's feelings by living in the spirit—1 John 3:14.
- C. Having no division—one who has seen the Body of Christ and who thus possesses the consciousness of the Body feels unbearable inside when he does anything which may cause division or separate God's children; this consciousness of life can deliver all of us from any taint of division—1 Cor. 12:25.
- D. Being delivered from independence—if we have Body consciousness we will comprehend immediately that the Body is one; the instant God's children see that the Body is one, they are delivered from their individual endeavor—Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12.
- E. Staying in fellowship—fellowship means realizing the total inadequacy of my own self; in fellowship I acknowledge my insufficiency and incompetency, and I also acknowledge my need of the Body—1 John 1:3; 1 Cor. 12:14-22.
- F. Learning to be a member—because we are members of the Body of Christ and members each in its part, we must seek how to help the Body in gaining life and strength—Rom. 12:5.
- G. Submitting to authority—whoever knows the life of the Body of Christ and is conscious of being a Body member will invariably sense the authority of the Head, who is Christ Jesus the Lord, and will recognize those whom God has set in the Body to represent the Head—Eph. 4:15; Col. 1:18; 2:19.
- H. Having no ambition—ambition is the source of all the problems in the church life, the source of ambition is Satan; the Lord humbled and emptied Himself to be a slave unto death; the mind of Christ should be in us so we will always serve as a slave in the church life to build up the church—Phil. 2:5.

FOCUS:

Our entrance into the church is eternal—we are in the church because of the work of the Triune God. We must never leave the church. The more we see the church and the more we see God's purpose for the church, the more we will give up ourselves absolutely to Christ for the building up of the church. Let us pray to have the proper attitude concerning the church and seek to excel for the building up of the church. Let us focus on the goal—Christ and the church!

REFERENCES:

1. The Body of Christ (Lee/LSM), pp. 19-24.
2. The One New Man (Lee/LSM), pp. 47-61.
3. The Organism of the Triune God in the Organic Union of the Divine Trinity (Lee/LSM), pp. 39-45.
4. Life Study of Romans (Lee/LSM), pp. 295, 303-305, 320-325.

QUESTIONS:

1. Use the Bible to write a prophecy regarding our entrance into the church.

2. We have seen in this lesson that it is possible to be disobedient to the heavenly vision, but is it possible to leave the church? Explain.
3. What role did the Triune God, the Father, the Son and the Spirit, have in our entrance into the Church?
4. How does the “consciousness of life” deliver us from division?
5. When you visit with the brothers and sisters can you discern the difference between fellowship and chit-chat? What is the difference? Can you quote from memory a verse from the Bible referring to fellowship? If so, recite it to the other students in the class.
6. What is the difference between “power struggle” and authority? What is the source of each?

Outline Eight

Our Need to Serve for the Building Up of the Church

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:46-47; 9:31; 20:20; Heb. 10:24-25; Eph. 5:18-20;
1 Cor. 14:24, 26, 31

- I. In Matthew 16:18 the Lord spoke the greatest prophecy in the Bible: “I will build My church.”**
- II. We can participate in the building up of the church in a practical way by:**
 - A. Attending and functioning in the church meetings – Heb. 10:24-25; 1 Cor. 14:3, 12.
 - B. Participating in the practical services in the church life – Rom. 12:1, 4-8, 11.
 - C. Attending the small group meetings – Matt. 18:20; 2 Tim. 2:22; Acts 2:46; 20:20.
- III. We should learn to function in the meetings of the church; the young people should begin to bear some responsibility in their spiritual family:**
 - A. The young people should attend the regular meetings of the church; at a minimum, they should not miss the bread-breaking meeting and the fellowship meeting of the church, and attend the young people's meeting—Heb. 10:24-25.
 - B. In the meetings of the church, they should not act as if they are guests or spectators; they should not wait for the older saints to function out of deference for their age.
 - C. When they are in a meeting, they should try their best to release their spirit; in the church they are adults, and they must bear responsibility:
 1. The young saints must bear this responsibility; when they come to a meeting, they should open their mouth and release their spirit; they should give testimonies, sing hymns, and give praises—Eph. 5:18-20.
 2. There is a rich source, a living and fresh supply, within all the young people; they should not rely on listening to messages but rather exercise to function more in spirit—1 Cor. 14:24, 26, 31.
- IV. The young people should endeavor to enter into the practice of the church life through the children’s work and the practical service in the church—Rom. 12:1, 4-8, 11; 14:18; cf. Acts 20:19:**
 - A. The young people should also bear responsibility in the children's meeting in every local church; the children's work is not less important than the young people's work:
 1. If children are added each year, they will become gospel seeds when they graduate from elementary school and enter into junior high school—Matt. 13:37-38.
 2. When this happens, the church will begin to gain young ones through them; when these young saints graduate from junior high, they will be gospel seeds when they enter into high school.
 3. When they finish high school, they will be gospel seeds in college; as this cycle is repeated, many people will be gained.
 - B. If all the local churches labor well in the young people's work and in the children's work, the future of the churches will be unlimited:
 1. The young people and even the children will influence their parents, and this influence will be both deep and widespread.

2. Hence, the young people should bear this double responsibility at this time; on the one hand, they should preach the gospel to their classmates, and on the other hand, they should help with the care of the children in the church.
- C. As energy and time allow, the young people should also take part in other miscellaneous services of the church:
1. For example, they can serve in ushering, in the business office, or in cleaning; we rejoice to see that many services in the church are being borne by the young saints.
 2. In these services the young saints are spontaneously blended into the church life through the practical coordination and fellowship with saints of all ages, including their peers.
 3. This will help them greatly to grow in life and to manifest their function.

V. We should endeavor to enter into the practice of the church life through the homes; the small group becomes our practical church life:

- A. At the very beginning the way created by the Holy Spirit and ordained by God was to meet in two ways, in the congregational way and in the home way—Acts 20:20.
- B. Actually, the church life will be carried out practically in the group meeting; it is important to have our own group meeting which can be considered as our own assembly—Heb. 10:25.

FOCUS:

We can participate in the building up of the church in a practical way by learning to function in the meetings of the church, bearing responsibility in the meetings (for example, the children's meetings) and in the services of the church, and entering into the practice of the church life in the homes. In these ways, the church life becomes our practical church life.

REFERENCES:

1. The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1968, vol. 2 (Lee/LSM), pp. 67-73.
2. The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1989, vol. 4 (Lee/LSM), pp. 252-255.

QUESTIONS:

1. Three ways to participate practically in the building up of the church were mentioned in this message. What are they?
2. What does it mean that "young people should begin to bear some responsibility in their spiritual family"? How have you begun to bear some responsibility in your spiritual family?
3. Why should we endeavor to enter into the children's work? If you have served with the children, please share your experience of service.
4. Do you regularly join the small group meetings, the meetings in the homes? If so, share your experiences and enjoyment from those meetings.