

### **CHAPTER THREE**

## **THE BODY OF CHRIST AND THE BRIDE OF CHRIST**

We have already seen how Eve typifies the church in God's plan. In God's plan all that is of the church is completely out of Christ. It contains nothing of man and has no relationship with sin. Our God is determined to have such a church. Anything less than this can never satisfy His heart. He not only planned this kind of church, but He is going to obtain it. Hallelujah! It is a fact! We must realize that our God can never be hindered or frustrated. When He purposes something, even though Hades and all of creation's forces would rise to oppose Him, He cannot be resisted. Even though we are fallen and full of failure, even though we are fleshly and soulish, departing far from God and disobeying Him, God will still attain His purpose. No matter what man does, he cannot ruin God's plan; the most he can do is delay it. Therefore, we must not only realize God's purpose, but also be clear that God will fully attain what He has purposed. From eternity God purposed to obtain a church completely out of Christ, a church containing no impurity of man, no element of earth, nor any savor of sin. Every part of her is something out of Christ, and Christ is her very life.

Beginning with Genesis 3, however, man fell. Now we not only have the fact of God's purpose in creation, but also the fact of man's fall. Therefore, let us see the way that God devised to amend the situation.

Ephesians 5:25-30 says, "Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her that He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word, that He might present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she would be holy and without blemish. In the same way the husbands also ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his own wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ also the church, because we are members of His Body."

These six verses of Scripture may be divided into two sections: verses 25-27 tell us the first reason husbands should love their wives; verses 28-30 tell us the second reason husbands should love their wives. In these two sections we see two commands to love the wife and we see two reasons. But there is a difference between these two sections. The first section says that Christ "loved" the church and "gave" Himself up for her—these verbs are in the past tense. Beginning with verse 28, the verbs are in the present tense, such as "nourishes" and "cherishes." These two portions of Scripture, therefore, involve different elements of time—one section refers to something in the past and the other to the present.

The subjects of these two sections are also different. The first section refers to the church as the bride of Christ; the second section speaks of the church as the Body of Christ. In the first section, the past tense is used when the church is referred to as the bride of Christ. This is because the whole purpose of Christ, as revealed to us, is to have

a bride. Even His death was for the purpose of obtaining a bride. Although He will obtain His bride in the future, the work was finished in the past. Concerning the present, the church is the Body of Christ, and the Lord is presently nourishing and cherishing His church.

## **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BODY AND THE BRIDE**

In the Lord's eyes, the church has two positions: as to her life, the church is the Body of Christ, but regarding her future, she is the bride of Christ. As to the union of Christ with the church, the church is His Body; regarding the intimate relationship of Christ with the church, the church is His bride.

Whenever God's Word speaks of the oneness between Christ and the church, we see Christ as the Head and the church as His Body. Whenever the Word shows the distinction between Christ and the church, we see the church as the bride to Christ. Adam and Eve were spoken of as two becoming "one flesh," but they were still two persons; God still counted them as two. Adam was Adam, and Eve was Eve. They were united to be one. This is the relationship between the church and Christ. From one they became two, and from two they became one. When God first created man, He made male and female. Eve came out from Adam; thus, she and Adam were one. Even so, the church comes out from Christ; therefore, the church and Christ are also one. However, since Adam and Eve both existed at the same time, there was a distinction between them. Likewise, since the church and Christ coexist, there is also a distinction between them. Regarding oneness, they are one, but as to the matter of distinction, they differ from each other.

These two positions have to do with a difference in time. Today the church is the Body of Christ, but in the future the church will be the bride of Christ. Today the church is the Body of Christ for the purpose of manifesting the life of Christ. One day, when the church is mature in life, God will bring the church to Christ; in that day she will become the bride of Christ. Some people think that the church is the bride of Christ today, but this is wrong. There is no such thing. Since the Lord Jesus is not yet the Bridegroom, how could the church already be His bride? God will not bring the church to Christ as His bride until the work of the church as the Body of Christ has been accomplished.

If we look at the type in Genesis 2, we can also see the relationship between the Body and the bride. Eve was made out of Adam's rib, so she was the body of Adam. Since a portion of Adam's body was used to make Eve, her position was the body of Adam. But after Eve was made, God brought her to Adam, and she became the bride of Adam. This is the relationship between the Body and the bride. When reference is made to Eve coming out of Adam, it means that she is the body of Adam; but when Eve was brought to Adam and became his help meet; she became Adam's bride. That which was out of Adam was the body of Adam, and that which was brought to Adam was his bride.

Only that which came out of Adam could become the help meet of Adam. Whatever was not out of Adam could never be his help meet. Thus, when all the birds of the air were brought to him, Adam did not take any of them as his help meet, for they were not out of him. When all the cattle were brought to him, Adam did not take any of them, because they also were not out of him. It was the same with all the beasts. Their origin was not right. Since they were not out of Adam, they could not be his help meet. Who then could be the help meet of Adam? Eve could! Eve was brought to Adam just as the birds of the air, the cattle of the field, and the beasts were brought. However, there was a basic difference between Eve and them; they were not out of Adam. Since Eve was the only one who came out from Adam, she alone was qualified to be his bride. Coming out from him, she was brought back to him. Whatever comes out from him is his body; whatever is brought back to him is his bride.

Only that which comes out of Christ can return to Christ. That which does not come out from Christ can never return to Him. Only that which comes from heaven can return to heaven. If we have not come down from heaven, we will not be able to return to heaven. Home is the place of our origin. When we say that we are going home, we mean that we are returning to the place from which we have come. Only that which is from heaven can return to heaven. Only that which was from Adam could return to Adam. Adam could receive only that which was out of himself. This was a type—showing that Christ will receive only that which is out of Himself. Only those who come out from Christ can return to Him. Only those who receive life from Him can be received by Him.

There are many people who feel that they should offer all that they are and all that they have for the Lord's use. But God cannot accept anything which is offered from a human source. God cannot take or use anything which comes out from man himself. Among all Christians, especially among those who are quite zealous, a serious mistake is often made. They think that everything will be fine as long as they offer themselves, their abilities, their talents, and all they have to the Lord. But we must remember that Christ will accept only that which comes out of Himself; He will not accept anything which comes out of man.

You may say, "Among the apostles, was there not a Paul? Was he not well educated? Was he not a man of great intelligence?" But we must remember the words that Paul spoke about himself. "For I did not determine to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and this One crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling; and my speech and my proclamation were not in persuasive words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor. 2:2-4). We thank God that intelligent and eloquent men can come into the church, but their natural, original intelligence and their natural, original eloquence are of no spiritual use in the church. In the church only one thing is recognized—that which comes out of Christ. Only that which is out of Christ can return to Christ. The material for the building of such a bride is Christ Himself.

The matter we need to attend to is this: only that which is out of Christ can be of any value and spiritual use in the church. God never uses the old creation to construct the new creation. Neither does God use that which is of man to construct that which is of God. He can never, never use fleshly things to produce something spiritual. The Lord Jesus said, "That which is born of the

Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6b). Would it be possible for that which is born of the flesh to become spirit? No! "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." All problems issue from the matter of source. If we want to know whether the result will be spiritual, we need only ask whether the source is spiritual. The Lord Jesus said, "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." We cannot use anything of the flesh to produce something of the spirit. A message which issues from thoughts only produces thoughts. Work done by stirring up the emotion only produces emotional stimulation. Only work from the spirit produces the spirit. The question is not whether the goal or the purpose is right, but what the process is. Man considers that as long as the goal is right, everything else is right. But God not only asks if the goal is right, He also asks how we do it. Someone may say, "I am for the Lord, and the work I am doing is for the church—the work of saving souls, spiritual work, the work of extending the heavenly kingdom. I have given all my ability and intelligence to it. Isn't this good?" In spite of this, man's natural ability and intelligence—that which has not been dealt with by the cross—are of no spiritual use. The Lord said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (v. 6a).

Thus, it is not only necessary to have a spiritual purpose, but the process must also be of the spirit. The method must be of the spirit, and the man himself must be one who is of the spirit. Only that which is from the Holy Spirit can be spiritual. Only that which was out of Adam could return to Adam. First it must be Adam's body, and then it could be Adam's bride. First we must be the Body of Christ, and then we can be brought back to be the Bride of Christ. We hope that we may touch some spiritual reality in this matter. We need to see what God is really after. He requires that everything be out of Christ, that everyone be born of the Spirit.

Every Christian, therefore, must pursue the life of the Body. If we do not seek the life of the Body, we cannot seek the life of the Bride. We should never think that it does not matter much whether we experience the life of the Body. We must realize that if we have the life of the Body today, we will have the life of the Bride in the future. If we live vaguely and aimlessly today, we will never know the life of the bride. Every Christian must know the Body of Christ. In the sight of God, we must seek after this. We cannot just live as individuals; we must walk together with other children of God. A Christian must see that he is a member of the whole Body. He is not simply one Christian among many, but he is also a member. He must live as a member with many other Christians, having a mutual, Body-relatedness with them. If we really know the life of the Body, we will see that a Christian cannot live one day without the Lord Jesus, and neither can he live one day without other Christians. Without the Lord Jesus he cannot exist, and without other Christians he cannot exist. God is after a Body, not many single, isolated Christians. God desires a whole Eve, not a hand here and a foot there. He must obtain Eve as a whole being; then she will be of use to Him. He does not want one who is disabled. He wants a new man, a corporate man.

For this reason all division and individualism must be eliminated. The matter of division is not merely something outward—it is a problem of our heart. Martin Luther said that the greatest pope does not live in Rome but right in our hearts. We must realize that the

greatest hindrance to God's will is not outward divisions but ourselves, as individual persons, who do not know the life of the Body. At this point we need two different revelations: first, to see that the Body is one, and second, to see that we are part of it, that we are members of this Body. When we see that the Body is one, we will never dare to be divisive. When we see that as members we are but a portion of the whole Body, we will never dare to justify ourselves, or consider that, as single members, we could be a whole unit. Only the whole Body together can be a unit. We ourselves as members are too small, too insufficient. Oh, may God deliver us from being individualists. Then we may become those who are useful to Him.

## **CHRIST LOVES THE CHURCH**

Now let us read Ephesians 5:28-29. "In the same way the husbands also ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his own wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ also the church." Husbands should love their wives, because loving their wives is loving their own bodies. Men always nourish and cherish their own bodies, and Christ also nourishes and cherishes the church. In the eyes of Christ, the church is His own Body, bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh. These verses show us that the church is the Body of Christ, and that His work toward the church today is to nourish and cherish it, because the church is Himself. He certainly will nourish and cherish us, because we all have come out of Christ. We know how well we nourish and cherish ourselves. In the same way, Christ will nourish and cherish us. It is a fact that "no one ever hated his own flesh." If a normal person hurts his hand, he carefully cherishes his hand; if his foot is injured, he tenderly cares for it. Men always nourish and cherish themselves. Similarly, Christ loves the church, because the church is His very self.

Let us read Ephesians 5:25-27. "Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her that He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word, that He might present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she would be holy and without blemish." These three verses speak of the church as the Bride of Christ. "That He might present the church to Himself" presents a scene of God bringing Eve to Adam. In like manner Christ will bring the church and present it to Himself. This presenting, however, is in the future. The church today has not yet attained to this place. Christ is working step by step in the church until that day when He presents her to Himself. In other words, Ephesians 5:25-27 speaks of the path from redemption to the kingdom. Step by step the church is now being prepared so that Christ may present it to Himself in that day.

Why does it say here that the church must be "cleansed"? It is because this is Ephesians 5, not Genesis 2. God's highest revelation of the church is seen in the book of Ephesians. The outstanding feature of this book is that it does not start with sinners being saved but with our having been chosen in eternity. Romans 1 speaks first of sin—how we sinned and then were saved. But Ephesians 1 starts from eternity and our being chosen before the foundation of the world. The problem of sin is not mentioned until chapter two. The book of Ephesians reveals two lines: one is from eternity to eternity, and the other is from man's fall to his redemption. In Ephesians something transcendent is revealed to us. We see how the church comes out from Christ, how it was chosen before the foundation of the world, and how it will forever manifest

the glory of Christ in eternity. At the same time, it shows us that man's fall is a fact, that man's committing of sin is a fact, and that the existence of our natural life is also a fact. Therefore, chapter five says that Christ will cleanse us by the washing of water in the word until we are sanctified. He wants to restore us to the point that we completely match God's eternal will.

On the one hand, we need the vision to see that the church has never failed, sinned, or fallen. The church has never touched sin; from eternity to eternity she has been on a straight line. On the other hand, we need to see that we are just a group of sinners saved by grace; therefore, we need the washing of the water in the word. We need His life, by means of His word, to sanctify us and restore us to the highest point. May God grant us grace so that we may reach that point.

## **THE CLEANSING OF THE CHURCH BY THE WASHING OF THE WATER IN THE WORD**

We must notice this phrase "by the washing of the water in the word." In the New Testament two Greek words are used to denote word. One is *logos*, referring to the word in a general sense; the other is *rhema*, which although translated as word in Scripture, means something quite different from *logos*. *Logos* refers both to things which have been eternally determined and to things used in an objective way. This is word, as we generally use it, and word, as it is generally known in Christianity. But *rhema* refers to words which are spoken. This is more subjective than *logos*. Let us look at several passages in the New Testament where *rhema* is used.

In Matthew 4:4 Jesus said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out through the mouth of God.'" In this verse "word" is *rhema*, not *logos*. When we say that the Bible is the Word of God, the "word" is *logos*, not *rhema*. Can we say that man shall not live by bread alone, but by the Word of God recorded in the Bible? No. We are not saying that the written Word of God is of no use, but that *logos*—the Word of God recorded in the Bible—is of no use to us by itself. One day a messenger came to tell a mother that her son had been run over by a car and was at the point of death. The mother immediately opened the Bible and happened to turn to John 11:4: "This sickness is not unto death..." Because of this verse she felt peaceful and even began to rejoice, but when she arrived at the scene of the accident, she found that her son had already died. Did this mean that what is recorded in the Gospel of John is not the Word of God? It is the Word of God, but it is *logos*, not *rhema*. The word she grasped was not the word which God spoke to her at that specific instance. Both *logos* and *rhema* are the Word of God, but the former is God's Word objectively recorded in the Bible, while the latter is the word of God spoken to us at a specific occasion.

Romans 10:17 says, "So faith comes out of hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." In this verse *rhema*, not *logos*, is again used. This means that we can believe when Christ first speaks within us.

John 3:16 is a verse many of us can quote from memory. Perhaps we have known it for ten or twenty years. Is this verse the Word of God? Certainly it is the Word of God, but it is *logos*. There comes a day, however, when we read this verse and it is entirely different to us than it ever was before. "For God so loved the world..." Now, God does not just love the world, He loves me. "...that He gave His only begotten Son..." God did not give His Son just to the world, but to me.

"...that every one who believes into Him..." It is not that someone believes into Him, but that I believe into Him. "...would not perish, but would have eternal life." It is I who will not perish, and it is I who even now have eternal life. This word is now rhema. God speaks the word to us, and at the same moment, we have faith. Therefore, we must ask God, "O God, if You would be gracious to me, I pray that You would always give me rhema." This does not mean that logos is of no use. Logos has its definite use, for without logos, we could never have rhema. All the rhema of God is based upon logos. We cannot deny that John 3:16 is the Word of God. But when the logos of God becomes the rhema spoken by God to us, we have faith and the whole matter is settled.

John 6:63 says, "The words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." Did the Jews not have the logos of God? Yes, they did. They were very familiar with it and could recite the Old Testament commandments very well, but it was of no use to them. Only the words which the Lord spoke to them were spirit and life. Only rhema is spirit and life.

Mark 14:72 says, "And immediately a rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered the word, how Jesus had said to him, Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times. And thinking upon it, he wept." Peter recalled the rhema that Jesus had spoken to him. The rhema was that which was brought to his remembrance. While Peter was telling a lie, suddenly rhema came. The very sentence of the Lord came to him. Rhema is the word which the Lord has spoken, and now He speaks it again.

In Luke 1:38 Mary said, "Behold, the slave of the Lord. May it happen to me according to your word. And the angel departed from her." In this verse rhema is used. This was not just a word of prophecy in Isaiah 7:14, "Behold, the virgin will conceive and will bear a son," but a word that was spoken specifically to Mary by the angel, "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son" (Luke 1:31). Because Mary heard this, she received strength and it was accomplished.

In Luke 2:29 Simeon said, "Now You release Your slave, Master, according to Your word, in peace." "Word" in this verse is rhema. Before the Lord Jesus came, God spoke His word to Simeon that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ. But on the day he saw the Lord Jesus, Simeon said, "Now You release Your slave, Master, according to Your word, in peace." Simeon had rhema from the Lord. It was not according to a certain chapter or a certain verse in the Bible, but it was according to the word spoken to him on that day by the Lord. Merely having the word from a certain chapter and verse in the Bible is not sufficient. Only the word which the Lord speaks to us is of any use. The rhema reveals something to us personally and directly; it shows us what we need to deal with and what we need to be cleansed from. We must specifically seek after this very matter, because our Christian life is based on this rhema. What word has God really spoken to us, and how has He spoken to us? We must remember that today's Christianity is still the Christianity of personal revelation. If the Lord does not speak within man, it is not Christianity, nor is it the New Testament.

Luke 3:2 says, "During the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zachariah in the wilderness." "Word" in this verse is also rhema.

Luke 5:5 says, "Simon answered and said, Master, through the whole night we toiled and caught nothing; but based on Your word I will let down the nets." The "word" in this verse was something spoken by the Lord for that occasion. It was the Lord speaking personally to Simon. This is rhema. The Lord did not speak in a certain chapter and verse of the Scripture that Simon should let down the net. If someone attempted to walk on the sea because of Matthew 14:29, he would certainly sink. This is not the word which the Lord is speaking today, though He did speak it on that day. It is true that the word spoken by God in the past and the word He speaks today carry the same authority; they have never changed. But the important thing is this: Is God speaking that very word to us today?

Luke 24:8 says, "They remembered His words (rhema)." In short what is rhema? Rhema is something the Lord has spoken previously which He is now speaking again. In other words, rhema is the word which the Lord speaks the second time. This is something living.

In Acts 11:16 Peter said, "And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, John baptized in water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit." While Peter was preaching to the household of Cornelius, the Spirit of the Lord fell upon them, and the word of the Lord came to Peter. It was not that Peter tried to recall the word from his memory, but it was the Lord who spoke to him, "John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit."

We will always treasure the fact that the Lord still speaks today. He not only spoke in the Scriptures, He not only spoke to Paul and John, He is also speaking to us today. The word of the Lord has never ceased. Whenever someone who is working for the Lord stands up to speak for Him, he must expect the rhema. If the Lord does not speak to us today, we are really failures. How many times have we preached, yet the Lord did not speak a word? It is not that there was something wrong with the message, but it was all the general word of the Lord; there was no rhema in it. The problem with the church today is that it lacks the living word of the Lord; instead there are only dead doctrines. There is a real shortage of direct communication from God. There is only a passing on of man's preaching. It is pitiful that so many people have died under good doctrines! May God have mercy upon us and give us rhema. May He speak personally and directly to us today. Only when we have rhema can we move ahead and have the living water to supply to others. What we need is rhema.

In the eternal plan of God the church is without sin. The church has no history of sin; it is entirely spiritual and wholly out of Christ. But what about the actual history of the church? We know that she has not been completely out of Christ, and much of her element has been of the earth. In what way will Christ bring the church into perfection? He will do it by cleansing her with the washing of the water in the word—the rhema. We have mentioned previously that water refers to life. It typifies the life that was released through the non-redemptive aspect<sup>1</sup> of the death of Christ. Christ is using His life in His word, His rhema, to cleanse us.

What is the meaning of Christ cleansing us by His life through His word? First, we must see the church's problem from God's viewpoint. Her defect is not that the Christ whom she has received is too little, but that she has too many things other than Christ. The church in God's will comes entirely out of Christ, without any sin, without any flesh, and containing no natural life. But what about our actual condition? Every one of us who truly belongs to Christ has a certain portion



which is solely and wholly Christ. We thank God for this portion. In addition to this portion, we still have many things which are not of Christ. We need to be cleansed because of all these other things. What is the meaning of cleansing? It means to subtract, not to add. If cleansing meant an addition to us, then it would be a dyeing. Eve in Genesis 2 did not need to be cleansed, because she typified the church in God's eternal plan. But if we consider that we do not need to be cleansed today, we are deceiving ourselves. God plans to bring us to the place where cleansing is not necessary, but today we still need to be cleansed.

How does God cleanse us? He does it with His life through His own word. Many times we do not know in which aspect we need to be cleansed. But one day the life within us will not let us go. Before long His rhema comes into us, indicating what must be dealt with. On the one hand, it is the life that touches us, and on the other hand, it is the word that tells us. Sometimes we are engaged in something which seems quite good according to doctrine, and our reason for doing it is also quite right, but within there is something which keeps touching us and will not let us go. Eventually, the Lord speaks to us; rhema comes, the mighty word of the Lord. It tells us that a certain matter must be dealt with and cleansed. On the one hand, this is the life, and on the other hand, it is the word of the Lord. By this we are cleansed. Sometimes the order is changed. At the beginning we do not feel anything while we are engaged in a certain matter; in fact, we feel that everything is fine. But when rhema comes, the word of the Lord speaks to us first, telling us that this particular matter is wrong, and then the life within us demands that we deal with it. This is our daily life. Either the life of the Lord does not allow us to do something, and the word comes; or first the word comes, and then the life follows, demanding that we deal with it. But it is always the cleansing of the water in the word to sanctify us.

Therefore, the whole matter of our growth and progress depends upon our attitude towards life and rhema. If we have any inner feeling in life, we should never let it go. We must pray, "Lord, please give the rhema that I might know how to deal with this situation." If the Lord first gives us rhema, speaking to us first, then we still need to ask Him to supply us with life to deal with the matter. If we pay attention to these matters and do not take them lightly, the Lord will cleanse us by the washing of the water in the word that we may be sanctified.

Before the Lord, the meaning of the church being cleansed by the washing of water is that the life of Christ deals with every part that is not out of Christ. The natural life and all that is not out of Christ must be purged away. Sanctification can only come after cleansing, and the basis of cleansing is the Lord's word, the rhema. If we do not know the Lord's word, there is no way for us to be cleansed and sanctified. Since the day we became Christians, from where has our knowledge come? Has it come from an outward source or from an inward one? Do we understand the will of God from within, or is His will still something outside of us? Many difficulties have their root in this very matter—the lack of God's word. The reason the Body of Christ cannot be built is because we merely have something outward, not something inward. The whole basis of the Christian faith depends upon the Lord's speaking. The growth of the church also depends upon the word which the Lord speaks. Therefore, the central point of our prayers should be our longing for the Lord's speaking. Oh, may the Lord speak to us! The Lord's word being spoken to us will enable us to attain the eternal purpose of God. The church today is not like Eve in Genesis 2, because the church has fallen. So the Lord must cleanse us by the washing of the water in the word.

The church according to God's will and the church in experience are two entirely different things. The church in God's plan is completely without sin; it has never known sin, nor had any history of sin. It is transcendent far above sin, without even a trace of sin. It is altogether spiritual and wholly out of Christ. However, the church in history has failed and is fallen. Today the Lord is working among fallen men to bring them back to the church of His original will. The Lord desires to work among people who are fallen, corrupted, and desolate, full of sin and filthiness, so that He may obtain a church from among them. He intends to restore and recover them to what He purposed in eternity past, so that He might have that which fulfills His desire in eternity future. In His magnificent work, the Lord is using the words He speaks as the instrument to bring the church back to God's original purpose. Oh, may we not lightly esteem the words of the Lord.

We must remember that knowledge is one thing and spiritual stature is quite another. All doctrine, teaching, theology, and knowledge are of little use if they just flow from one person to another. True growth depends upon our receiving the word directly from God. God is using His rhema to do His work, and He desires to speak to us. Therefore, if our purpose in reading the Scriptures is solely for knowledge, it is indeed pitiful. If this is so, we are finished. The real value of the Scriptures is that God can speak to man through them. If we desire to be useful in the Lord's hands, we must be spoken to by the Lord. Whether or not our building is spiritual depends upon whether the Lord has spoken to us. Knowledge and doctrine are of no spiritual use. Only the Lord's speaking in us is of spiritual value.

How can we ever be satisfied with knowledge and doctrines while the church is in a fallen state, when she has failed God and is blind to His will? May God have mercy upon us and be gracious to us! Oh, may we have such a prayer: "Lord, we pray that You would speak to us." All the words that are from without, all the words that are passed on to us by others, though they have been spoken a thousand or ten thousand times, are of no use. Only rhema is of any value. If we do something just because others tell us to do it, we are keeping the law; we are not in the New Testament. A person with a clear mind can divide the book of Romans into sections, such as "Salvation," "Justification," etc. But within him there is a great deficiency—God has not spoken to him. A man may have knowledge and yet be without God's word. Many people think that knowledge of the Scriptures and understanding of the doctrines are spirituality. There is no such thing! Bible knowledge can never be a substitute for spirituality. Only God's speaking to us, personally and directly, is of any real value. When God speaks to us through His word, we are enlightened; through His word we are sanctified; and through His word we are made to grow. We need to know what is dead and what is living, what is mere knowledge and what is spiritual. Whatever is not living has no spiritual value. If we have rhema, the living word of God, we can be cleansed and sanctified.

### **"THE CHURCH...GLORIOUS"**

What is Christ's purpose in His cleansing and sanctifying work? It is that one day "He might present the church to Himself glorious" (Eph. 5:27). Christ is waiting for the church to be prepared and presented to Himself. "The church...glorious" in the original language means that the church is brought into glory. In other words, the church will put on glory or be clothed in glory. Ephesians 4 says that the church will arrive at the oneness of the faith and the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (v. 13). Then chapter five says that the church will be clothed

with glory to be presented to Christ. God intends to bring the entire church to this state. This is indeed a great matter! When we look at the condition of the church today, we say, "How can it be?" We may even doubt God's intention, but the Lord is working. One day the church will arrive at the oneness of the faith; she will arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; she will be clothed with glory and presented to Christ. This is what the Lord desires and will obtain. This is also what we desire and will obtain.

This glorious church will not have spot or wrinkle or any such things, but she will be holy and without blemish (5:27). The Lord will cleanse us to such a degree that it will seem as if the church has never had any spot or defilement. It will seem as if the church has never committed sin; nor will any trace of sin be found in her.

Not only is it without spot, but it is also without any wrinkle. We all know that children and young people have no wrinkles. Whenever wrinkles appear on a person, it means that he is getting old. The Lord wants to bring the church to the stage where there is nothing old, where there is nothing of the past. He wants everything in the church to be new. When the church stands before the Lord, it will seem as if she has never sinned, as if she has never had any history of sin. She will be without spot or wrinkle. In the future she will be the church according to God's purpose at creation.

The church will not only be without spot or wrinkle, but she will not have "any such things." In the translation from the Greek, it can be read, "This or that kind of defect." She will not only be without spot and wrinkle, but she will not have any defect whatsoever; all the defects will have been excluded. The day is coming when God's work upon the church will be brought to such a stage that she will be completely glorious.

Moreover, she will be "holy and without blemish." According to the meaning in Greek, this can be read, "That it should be holy and blameless." God will bring the church to the place where nothing can be said against her in any respect. The world will have nothing to say; Satan will have nothing to say; everyone and everything will have nothing to say; even God Himself will have nothing to say. In that day, when the church is so glorious, she will become the Bride of Christ.

We must see these two matters very clearly. First, today we are Christ's own Body. As His Body, Christ is purging and preparing us so that we may become the church which God intended from eternity. Second, when the time arrives, Christ will come, and we will be brought into His presence to be presented to Him as a glorious church, His bride. Therefore, first we have the history of the Body of Christ on earth, and then in glory the history of the bride. Now we are in the process of being cleansed. Now is the time that we need the rhema. Christians who have never received direct revelation are delaying God. If we have never heard the Lord speaking to us, we are hindering the Lord from pouring forth His grace. May God be merciful to us that we may not be those who hinder Him. Rather, may we be those who hearken to Him and go forward so that the church may be brought to the stage of being the Bride of Christ.

## **THE WORK AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHURCH BEFORE GOD**

The book of Ephesians reveals the church which God has purposed in eternity. Chapter five tells how the church will be a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle or any such things, holy and without blemish. Then chapter six speaks of the practical work of the church, the spiritual warfare.

When we read Ephesians 6:10-12, we realize that the work and responsibility of the church is spiritual warfare. The opponents in this warfare are not flesh and blood, but spiritual beings whose dwelling is in the air. Let us read verses 13 and 14. "Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore." Here we are told that we should stand, not that we should attack. The spiritual warfare is defensive, not offensive, because the Lord Jesus has already fought the battle and won the victory. The work of the church on the earth is simply to maintain the Lord's victory. The Lord has already won the battle, and the church is here to maintain His victory. The church's work is not to overcome the devil, but to resist him who has already been overcome by the Lord. Her work is not to bind the strong man—the strong man has already been bound. Her work is not to let him be loosed. There is no need to attack; simply guarding is sufficient. The starting point of spiritual warfare is standing upon the victory of Christ; it is seeing that Christ has already overcome. It is not dealing with Satan, but trusting in the Lord. It is not hoping that we will win the victory, because the victory has already been won. The devil can do nothing.

The church's work and responsibility is spiritual warfare. It is a matter of the conflict between God's authority and Satan's power. We come now to see the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God.

Some people think that the kingdom of God simply concerns the matter of rewards. This is too low of an estimate of the kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus once explained what the kingdom of God is. He said, "But if I, by the Spirit of God, cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28). What is the kingdom of God? It is the overthrowing of the power of Satan by the power of God. When the devil is unable to stand in a certain place, the kingdom has come to that place. Wherever the devil has been cast out, wherever the work of the enemy has been displaced by God's power, His kingdom is there.

Revelation 12:9-10 says, "And the great dragon was cast down, the ancient serpent, he who is called the Devil and Satan, he who deceives the whole inhabited earth; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, Now has come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ, for the accuser of our brothers has been cast down, who accuses them before our God day and night." We must pay attention to this word "for" in verse 10. The kingdom of God could come, "for" Satan had been cast down. Satan lost his place and could no longer stand there. At that time there was a loud voice in heaven saying, "Now has come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the

authority of His Christ." Whenever Satan leaves a place, it is because the kingdom of God is there. Wherever the kingdom of God is, Satan cannot be there. This shows us clearly that in the Scriptures, the first, essential meaning of the kingdom of God is in regard to dealing with Satan.

When the Pharisees asked when the kingdom of God would come, the Lord Jesus answered, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, Behold, here it is! or, There! For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17:20-21). What did the Lord mean when He said that "the kingdom of God is in the midst of you"? He meant, "I am standing here." Of course, we all know that the kingdom of God could not be within the Pharisees. On that day the kingdom of God was in their midst because the Lord Jesus stood in their midst. When He was there, Satan could not be there. The Lord Jesus said, "The ruler of the world is coming, and in Me he has nothing" (John 14:30). Wherever the Lord Jesus is, Satan must depart. In Luke 4 there was a man possessed by a demon. How did the demon react when he saw the Lord? Before the Lord said anything to cast him out, the demon cried out, "Ah! What do we have to do with You, Jesus, Nazarene? Have You come to destroy us?" (v. 34). Where the Lord is, the demons cannot be there. The very presence of the Lord Jesus represents the kingdom of God, and He is the kingdom of God. Where He is, the kingdom of God is also.

What does this have to do with us? Revelation 1:5-6 says, "To Him who loves us and has released us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be the glory and the might forever and ever. Amen." Notice the word "kingdom" in verse 6. This shows us that not only where the Lord Jesus is, but also where the church is, the kingdom of God is. Not only does the Lord Jesus Himself represent the kingdom of God, the church also represents the kingdom of God. The important point here is not a matter of future reward or position in the kingdom, whether large or small, high or low. The concern is not with these things. The vital matter is that God wants the church to represent His kingdom.

The work of the church on earth is to bring in the kingdom of God. All the work of the church is governed by the principle of the kingdom of God. The saving of souls is under this principle, and so is the casting out of demons and all other works as well. Everything should be under the principle of God's kingdom. Why should we win souls? For the sake of the kingdom of God—not just because man needs salvation. We must stand on the position of the kingdom of God whenever we work, and we must apply the kingdom of God to deal with the power of Satan.

The Lord wants us to pray, "Our Father who is in the heavens, Your name be sanctified; Your kingdom come; Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth" (Matt. 6:9-10). If the coming of the kingdom of God was automatic, the Lord would never have taught us to pray in this way. But since the Lord asked us to pray in this way, He simply showed us that this is the work of the church. Yes, the church should preach the gospel, but much more, the church should pray to bring in the kingdom of God. Some people think that whether or not we pray, the kingdom of God will come automatically. But if we know God, we will never say this. The principle of God's work is to wait for His people to move. Then He will move.

God told Abraham that the people of Israel would come out from the nation which afflicted them. However, this was not accomplished until four hundred thirty years later. When the Israelites cried unto God, He heard their cry and came to deliver them. Never presume that whether or not we cry things will happen in their own way. God needs man to cooperate with Him in His work. When God's people move, He will also move. When God's people saw that they should leave Egypt (though not all the Israelites realized this, yet some did), they cried to God, and He moved to deliver them.

Even the birth of the Lord Jesus was the result of the cooperation of some of God's people with Him. In Jerusalem there were some who were continually looking for the consolation of Israel. This is why the Lord was born. Although the purpose of God is to bring in His kingdom, His part alone is not sufficient. He needs the church to work with Him. Through prayer, the church must release the power of the kingdom of God upon the earth. When the Lord comes, the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Rev. 11:15).

Since the work of the church is to stand for God and not give any ground to Satan, what manner of living should we have to accomplish this task? All our sins and unrighteousness must be dealt with, our consecration to God must be thorough, our soul-life must be put to death, and our natural man must be abandoned. The ability of the flesh is absolutely useless in spiritual warfare. "I" cannot resist Satan. "I" must go! Whenever "I" goes out, the Lord Jesus will come in. Whenever "I" enters, there is failure. Whenever the Lord comes in, there is victory. Satan recognizes only one person—the Lord Jesus. We cannot resist Satan. The fiery darts of Satan can penetrate our flesh, but, praise God, we can put on Christ who has won the victory.

We believe that Christ is going to come again. But do not think that the Lord Jesus will automatically come if we sit and passively wait. No, there is a work which the church must do. As the Body of Christ, we must learn to work together with God. We should never think that it is enough just to be saved. It is not. We must be concerned with God's need. There are two consequences of man's fall: one is the problem of man's moral responsibility, and the other is Satan's usurping of authority over the earth. On the one hand, man suffered loss, but on the other hand, God also suffered loss. Redemption solves the problem of man's moral responsibility and man's loss, but the loss which God suffered has not been solved. God's loss cannot be restored through redemption; it can only be restored by the kingdom. Man's moral responsibility has been dealt with by the cross, but the problem of Satan's authority must be dealt with by the kingdom. The direct purpose of redemption is for man, while the direct purpose of the kingdom is to deal with Satan. Redemption gained what man lost; the kingdom will destroy what Satan gained.

Man was originally given the responsibility to overthrow the authority of Satan, but instead man fell, leaving the authority to Satan. Man himself even became subject to him. Satan became the strong man, and man became his goods (Matt. 12:29). This situation demands the kingdom to deal with it. If there is no kingdom, then due to man's fall the work of Satan cannot be overthrown.

The new heaven and the new earth did not appear immediately after redemption was accomplished because the problem of Satan had not yet been dealt with. Before the new heaven and new earth come, there must first be the kingdom. Revelation 11:15 says, "The kingdom of

the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever." Once the kingdom comes, eternity is ushered in. The kingdom connects with eternity. We may say that the kingdom is the introduction to the new heaven and the new earth. Revelation 21 and 22 show us that the new heaven and new earth appear after the kingdom. Isaiah 65 even describes the kingdom as the new heaven and new earth. This means that Isaiah viewed the kingdom as the introduction to the new heaven and the new earth. Thus, when the kingdom begins, the new heaven and the new earth begin also.

May God open our eyes so that we may not consider ourselves as the center. Why were we saved? Was it just so we should not go to hell? No. This is not the center. Why then did Christ want to save us? We can answer this question from two different viewpoints—from man's viewpoint and from God's viewpoint. When we view the same thing from two angles, it is seen in a different light. We should not just consider this matter from man's viewpoint. We must see it from God's viewpoint. In fact, the recovery of man's loss is for the recovery of God's loss. God's loss must be recovered through the kingdom. Today God has caused us to share the victory of the Lord Jesus. Wherever the victory of the Lord Jesus is displayed, there Satan must leave. We must simply stand steadfast, because the Lord Jesus has already won the victory. In His redemptive work, the Lord Jesus destroyed all the legal ground of the devil. All of Satan's legal rule has been terminated through redemption. Redemption was the sentence by which Satan was deprived of his legal position. Now the responsibility of executing this sentence is upon the church. When God sees that the church has sufficiently fulfilled this task, the kingdom will come, and the new heaven and the new earth will follow. The new heaven and new earth in the book of Isaiah will lead to the new heaven and new earth in Revelation.

Today we are standing midway between redemption and the kingdom. As we look backward, we see redemption; when we look forward, we see the kingdom. Our responsibility is twofold. On the one hand, we must lead the people of the world to be saved, and on the other hand, we must stand fast for the kingdom. Oh, may we have this vision so that we see the responsibility committed to the church by the Lord.

Let us review what the kingdom of God is. The kingdom of God is the realm where God exercises His authority. We must have such a kingdom among us. While we allow God to exercise His authority in the heavens, we must also allow Him to exercise His authority over us. God must have His authority, His power, and His glory among us. Not only must we seek to live before God according to Ephesians 5, but we must also pursue the responsibility revealed to us in Ephesians 6. Then we will not only be a church which is glorious, holy, and without blemish, but we will also be those who have cooperated with God to bring in His kingdom and caused Satan to suffer loss on this earth.