

# **THE BODY OF CHRIST**

**By Titus Chu**

## **MESSAGE THREE: THE PRACTICALITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST IN THE LOCAL CHURCH LIFE**

In this message we will touch upon certain practical matters we must exercise if we are to have the Body life. The first has to do with putting on, the second has to do with honoring, and the third has to do with prophesying.

### **PUTTING ON THE NEW MAN**

According to the Bible, we are to “put on the new man, which was created according to God” (Eph. 4:24). Many of us may feel like we have heard this before, so we must ask the Lord to grant us a fresh realization, for this is necessary for the practical church life. The truth contained in the word should never become old to us; it should always be fresh. A parent never grows tired of looking at his or her children, even though they are around day in and day out. We are covering something that is related to our existence. We were regenerated and as members of the Body of Christ, we are now in the local church life. As those in the local church life, we must learn to put on the new man, which was created in Christ Jesus.

What is the new man? The Triune God is the essence, element, and substance of the new man, and Christ is the totality of the Triune God, so Christ is everything to the new man. Therefore, when we put on the new man, we are not putting on anything other than the Christ who is the person and life of the church as the new man. Thus, as we are living in the local expression of the Body of Christ, the church life, Christ must become our covering and reality through the many members. This is the significance of putting on the new man.

I may be a quick brother, and another brother may be slow. We could try to “put” one another “on,” but regardless how we make allowance for one another or try to accommodate one another, it will not work! In this new man, it is not we but Christ who “works”. Yet if the Christ we experience is confined to ourselves, we still have not put on the new man. What is it to put on the new man? Something of Christ that I have must become “fellowshippable” and even intertwined with the Christ of another saint. It is by means of the joint-experience of the Christ we share that we put one another on in the new man.

Apart from Christ, there is no such thing as putting on the new man. The church life is not a life in which we are colleagues. If the elders in a locality are together as colleagues, that can cause damage in the church life. Apart from this joining life, there are no natural reasons for us to be together. In the church life there is only fellowship, and through the fellowship of this joining life, there emerges an intertwined existence among us. In such an intertwining fellowship, it is possible for the saints to put one another on. The Christ in you works with the Christ in me, and the Christ in me works with the Christ in you. In this way, we two can become a blessing to the church, because we have learned to put on the new man.

**The Requirement:  
Being Renewed in the Spirit of the Mind**

The first obstacle to putting on one another in this way is our mind. Therefore, we need to be renewed in the spirit of our mind (Eph. 4:23). We may look at the others with us in the church, and just consider our situation hopeless! Perhaps the brother with me is much younger than I am, and not nearly as experienced in the Lord. I will look at him and think, “How could we put each other on? What a joke!” If we are not renewed in the spirit of our mind, we will find something to object to in every possible relationship. One brother will appear too sober, and another will appear too flippant. To us, one saint will be too American, and another will be too Chinese. Yet the Lord tells us, “You are all

one Body. I have placed you together so that you might put one another on!” We may feel as though we are entirely too different from one another, yet the Lord has placed each one of us in the Body even as He willed (1 Cor. 12:18). Every parent may wish to give birth to an Einstein, but just as this is not up to us, neither is it up to us who the Lord places us with in the Body. With the Body of Christ, God decides. He has produced you a certain way, and He has molded another one in another way. You may have never realized it, but the Lord has made you the way you are with some other saint in view, just as He formed and placed that saint to be with you!

Consider two sisters. One is a dreamer, and the other is very pragmatic. Do they realize that the Lord has placed them together? Where you live, He has placed someone for you to put on, and He has placed you there for that someone to put on. Don’t be bothered that you are so different. God is happy about it! We have no way to do this in our natural life, but it is possible when our mind is renewed. When the one sister looks at the other, she should not see a hopeless romantic, and when the other sister looks at her, she should not see a boring person with no imagination; both should see the other as someone who is in Jesus. Then they will be able to put one another on, through the renewing of the spirit of the mind.

No one will make you happy in the church life. Outside of Christ, no two people in the church life should appear satisfactory to each other! If we were able to agree with one another in everything, that would not be a healthy thing in the church life! Often we need those who don’t agree with us to cross us out and to cause us to be before the Lord. We all should reach such a stage, where we are not those who like one another according to our natural man, nor are we together according to our natural man. Then everyone will be forced to be renewed in the spirit of their mind. When you see a brother or sister, it must be as the Spirit sees that brother or sister! When we are renewed in the spirit of our mind, all the saints appear beautiful to us.

Once we are renewed in the spirit of our mind, we will have a genuine concern for the saints. We will not be bothered if they are not as much a blessing to the church as they could be. We will struggle for their growth and blessing. At the same time, you will realize that their portion is something wonderful and you will appreciate them, and you will thus be able to fully put them on. You will no longer be dissatisfied with who they are, only that they have not reached the full realization of their portion. You will no longer wish that the saints were different, only that they would grow.

We all need to be renewed in the spirit of our minds. When we look at the saints, we should not care whether they appear to be too wild or too sober; God has placed each of them in the Body for us to enjoy. I am able to put on other saints because I recognize they have their ministries to bless the Body of Christ. We can put on this brother with his ministry, because all the members with all their functions have their ministries to bless the Body of Christ. Isn't this marvelous? This is the church life. Everyone is your life-supply, and everyone becomes your blessing when you are renewed in the spirit of your mind.

### **Members One of Another**

Therefore, we need to practice being members one of another (Eph. 4:25). Siblings in a family can give us some insight into this. Much of the time it may not seem brothers or sisters have a lot of feeling for one another, but when the time comes, the bond makes itself manifest. When I was a young teen, my older brother and I were walking down a street, and we noticed a chauffeur polishing a big shiny car. I couldn't resist touching it, and when that man came after me and gave me a shove, my brother stood up to him, even though he wasn't much older than I was. Up until then, I had only considered my brother as someone who irritated me and bossed me around. Yet when push came to shove, he stood up for me, because we were family. Perhaps we do not show enough love for one another in the church life, or pray enough for one another, but when we really

need it, we know that there is something there. In the Body of Christ, we are members one of another.

### **Be Filled in Spirit**

How can we be genuine with one another in the church life? Paul noted that we should not be drunk with wine, but filled in spirit (Eph. 5:18)! If you want to know someone, there are two possibilities, and Paul ruled out the first one, which was becoming drunk! After someone has had too much alcohol, they lose their inhibitions, and speak out whatever is on their heart. In a sense, Paul is likening being filled in spirit to being drunk with wine. When we are not filled in spirit, we put on a cloak and act hypocritically, being careful to keep our mask in place all the time (unless we are drunk with wine!) When we are “drunk” with the Spirit, who we really are comes out. There is a true spiritual man within us, but if we are not drunk in spirit, we live a guarded life and are often just performing. It is not appropriate to become drunk with wine, but it is very necessary in the church life to be filled in spirit! Do you want to have the church life? Be filled in spirit!

When the disciples were filled by the Spirit on Pentecost and speaking in tongues, the people thought they were filled with new wine (Acts 2:13). When we are so “sober,” it is impossible to be released in spirit. Therefore we need to be filled in spirit, speaking to one another in hymns, songs, and spiritual songs. When we are filled in spirit, we will no longer lie to one another (Col. 3:9, 16). When we are not in spirit, we really do perform a falsehood when we try to live the church life. After we are filled in spirit, however, we will sing to the Lord and speak to one another in hymns, songs, and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19)! There will be no more “covering up” of our spiritual inner man. Instead, we will produce short songs of praise, longer songs of truth, or even deep hymns. We all need to experience such times of singing from our hearts to God.

When we are so “sober” in the church life, we look at all the brothers and feel they are too much to deal with. When we are “drunk” in spirit, however, all the saints appear very lovely! We should practice this in the church life. Whenever we come together, we should give ourselves to praise, declare, shout, and even groan until we are all saturated. If the entire church life is like this, it will make no difference what the Lord asks of you in the new man, for you will love all the saints to the uttermost. No saint will appear troublesome. Every saint will be seen as a blessing. When the saints seem to be a problem to us, that is a sign that our mind has not been renewed, and that we are not filled in spirit.

When you go back to your localities, remember one thing: The Spirit decides your church life. How the Spirit fills you and operates decides how excellent is the practice of your church life. Therefore in every meeting there should be a lot of prayer, praising, pray-reading, singing psalming, and a lot of mutual enjoyment.

### **Nourishing and Cherishing One Another**

As those putting on the new man, we also need to nourish and cherish all the members of the Body, just as Christ does (Eph. 5:29). Nourishing means feeding. Regardless how the saints are doing, they need to eat! No mother bases her family’s nourishment upon how well they behave! In the church life, however, it seems that more feeding is given to those who know how to behave, and nourishment is denied to those who misbehave! If the saints behave, nourish them, and if they don’t behave, still nourish them. The saints in the church life need to be nourished.

One of the biggest problems we have faced is that for some time now, the saints have not been receiving enough nourishment in their localities. We will speak on this later. In all the church gatherings there should be nourishing, and there should be cherishing. To cherish the church means to care for it tenderly.

Sometimes the Lord must speak a hard word to us in love. That is a form of cherishing, just as the encouraging and comforting words are after we experience a hard word. Too often we are a Mr. Moses, searching for something wrong. When the church life is short of nourishing, it will be short of strength, and when the church life is short of nourishing, it will not be warm. If we desire the church life to be full of warmth, we must practice cherishing one another. We all have problems. Some we are aware of, and some we are not, but rather than judging one another, we should learn to comfort one another. In the church life there should not be the exercise of the law.

### **Putting On the Whole Armor of God**

Eventually, as we put on one another, we also need to put on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:11). This indicates that the many virtues of many other saints become our protection in the church life.

### **Honoring One Another**

The second matter in the practical Body life we need to address is the matter of honoring how the Lord is in all the members. You may have some feeling about something, and I should learn to recognize and honor it. On the other hand, you should also recognize and honor my portion. Among us, there should be no rebelliousness, but rather an exercise of honoring one another.

Only a zealot claims that no one else has the real leading of the Lord besides himself. This is why religious zealots cannot honor anyone. They say, "I know the way. If you do not follow it, you do not belong here." What kind of church life would that be? We are an expression of the Body of Christ, not a military organization. We do not have law-givers, instead we honor one another. We often do not realize how much the Lord is doing in the saints. We must not assume there is nothing going on inwardly in a saint, and thus feel free to direct them without any concern for what the Lord may be speaking in them.

If we honor the saints, we will stand with them and help them to function and operate so that they may carry out whatever the Lord is committing to them. Every member needs to be honored. We should not look down on anyone, thinking we are superior. If a member seems “rough,” we should show more honor to it and care for it more. In the church life, honor all the brothers. Do not assume that only we have seen something, or that only we have found the Lord’s “flow”. Some among us honor only young people, saying they are the future. In spite of the fact that young people often don’t know where they are going, we still should honor them! No particular group is the future. The whole Body is the future. The Body of Christ the future of Christ, for it is organic, and it will have its organic continuation.

The Titus you see here today is not the same Titus that was present a number of years ago, because my body has replaced itself organically. Every cell that was seen then has been replaced by new life. So the Body continues. The Body of Christ is the future of Christ.

### **Having the Same Care One For Another**

In order to experience the Body life, we also need to have the same care one for another (1 Cor. 12:25). In spite of what some think, I also am a member who needs care! Our thought is often that we should mainly care for the new ones, for the younger ones, or for the weaker or needy ones. Yet every one of us in the Body life needs care! Perhaps you cannot minister a message to me, but you can still write me a letter or tell me you have been praying for me. That is care. We do need the mutual care. All the members should have the same care one to another, whether we are older or younger, gifted or not so gifted, desirous or cold...we all need the mutual care.



### **Suffering with Those Who Suffer, Rejoicing with Those who are Glorified**

As those learning to honor all the members, we have to know how to suffer with those who suffer, and rejoice with those who are glorified (1 Cor. 12:26). We should never have the thought that those who are suffering somehow deserve it. Even if a brother steals in the church life and gets put in jail, we should not feel glad to be rid of him. What should we do? On the one hand, we should tell him to steal no more, and to love the Lord, and on the other hand, we should suffer with him. This is the Body principle, to suffer with those who suffer. I have a skin problem which requires that I wear long sleeves, even in the heat of summer. I would never consider that I should have my skin removed, just so the rest of my body might have more comfort! When one part suffers, we all suffer with it. This is the expression and outflow of love.

If anyone is glorified, we also rejoice with that one. This is even more difficult than suffering with those who suffer, for it involves denying the self. In the church life, some members become manifested. When this happens, we should deny the self and rejoice.

### **We Cannot Elect to Leave the Body**

Even if a member insists he is no longer a member, such a declaration does not break the life relationship (1 Cor. 12:15-16). Therefore, whoever says someone is not in the Body has never seen the Body. In Paul's example the ear felt disappointed it was not an eye, which is something that seems more indispensable. Therefore the ear said, "I am not of the Body!" Paul said that such a statement does not make the ear any less a member than it was before. Isn't it then foolish to say someone is not of the Body? As long as a person is regenerated, he or she is a member of the Body. We must see the Body to the extent that we appreciate all the members. Regardless how they practice the church life, they are the Body of Christ.

### **Every Member Has Its Ministry**

Every member in the Body has a ministry. This was Watchman Nee's word. We must treasure all the ministries of all the members. Every member has a particular portion with which he serves the Body of Christ. Every part in the Body has its function, and every part has its portion, and none can fully replace another. We cannot ask one member to be like another; for each has its own characteristic; neither should any member try to emulate another. The eye serves the Body by seeing, the ear by hearing, and so on. Each has its responsibility. When any member does not function as it should, the entire body suffers. The church life will suffer if some ignore their responsibility. Your characteristic and capability constitute your place, your position, and your ministry. No one else possesses the same place, the same position, or the same ministry that you do. If all of us would rise up with this realization, how different the church life would be! Every member in the church life should be able to confidently say, "I have my ministry!"

We may not be able to say we have fully arrived in our ministry, but even as we are on the way to our full development, we can be a blessing to the Body. The ministry of every member is the supply it renders to the Body. It is not merely something for our own blessing; it is given to us for the sake of the Body. May every member of the Body who reads this fulfill their ministry!

### **PROPHESYING AND PROPHETS**

The final matter we will consider in this message is likewise very crucial. In the first verse of First Corinthians 14, Paul says that all the saints should earnestly desire to prophesy (see also verse 24). In chapter 14, however, he also speaks to a group of gifted ones who are prophets (vv. 29-33). When a person stands up to speak in the meeting, how then do we know whether he speaking as a person prophesying, or as a prophet - or perhaps as someone learning to be a prophet?

### **The Need for Prophets**

To prophesy as a prophet is not something everyone in the church is capable of. If you have not been trained and have not experienced Christ much, you will not be able to prophesy in a way that greatly blesses the church. This is why Paul said everyone should seek to prophesy, yet even this kind of exercise does not mean that you are necessarily a prophet.

In America, there are handymen, and there are master craftsmen. A handyman can do many things well. If something is broken, he can fix it. A craftsman, however, is experienced and trained to produce a certain quality of product. A handyman can buy a cabinet kit at Walmart and put it together, but the result is not the same as what a craftsman can produce. We can liken this to the prophesying of a member, and the prophesying of a prophet. According to Paul's writing to the Corinthians, there should be some in every local church who are able to "craft" what is needed by the church for its continual building up. This does not mean that all the members should not exercise to prophesy; they should! Every portion is precious. There are certain "gifts" called prophets, however, and they, according to Paul, should function by two's or perhaps three's in a meeting, as the others (meaning other prophets) sit by. The picture is of a group of prophets within a church who are learning and pursuing together for the sake of the building up of the entire assembly.

In the church life, everyone should seek to have the ability to prophesy, even if you are not a prophet. As to the prophets, however, two or three should speak, and the other prophets should discern. If something is revealed to one of the prophets sitting nearby, the first should be silent, for "all can prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged" (1 Cor. 14:31). According to the context, this "one by one" is not referring to all the "handymen" in the meeting, but to all the "craftsmen," or prophets. The ministering of the prophets must be with substance, life and riches. For the church life to be healthy, there must be a group of brothers who are functioning together as prophets.

## **Two or Three Speaking**

In a locality, it should be evident who these brothers are. This group of brothers should then come together to pray for the church and consider how to minister so that all the saints are nourished, equipped, encouraged, and comforted. They labor jointly. Paul noted that in Corinth everyone wanted to speak, so he first encouraged all the saints to seek to speak intelligibly (instead of in tongues). Yet still further, Paul said only two or three should speak. (In Chinese it says, “two or no more than three”. These prophets prepare together, and then as they speak, the others are also there, listening and discerning, having prepared together.

Therefore all of them are ready to speak if needed. If one suddenly loses his anointing as he is speaking, another sitting nearby is able to stand up and continue the speaking of the prophets. Or, perhaps one of them has seen something further based upon what has been shared and according to what they have been exercising over. They operate together according to the Lord’s leading and anointing.

Therefore, in a church meeting there should be two types of prophesying. The first is the saints sharing whatever they have experienced or received of the Lord. This is marvelous! Then, there should also be the prophesying of the prophets. If there are a sufficient number of saints meeting together, there should be a group of brothers who are prophets to meet the need of the church. Between them there must be a very good relatedness. They must share the same burden, commitment, and care.

All the churches today need the prophesying of the prophets. Otherwise, the churches will be undernourished. After our gatherings, there should be a sense that the Lord has spoken to us richly. Without the proper exercise of the prophets, this will be lacking. Let us go on for the building up of the churches today. May we all practice in such a healthy way that the Lord’s testimony may be borne up among us. Hallelujah for the church life!

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