

ND2-009: Becoming a New Creation: Knowing the Body of Christ

Outline:

A. Become a new creation in Christ

New creation" means that it had not existed before, but now it is new, and only in Christ. Before Christ, God was God, man was man, the two were separate. Only Christ, who is both the true God and the perfect man, integrates divinity and humanity in one. Therefore, Jesus Christ is the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45),

When we are born again in the Holy Spirit, Christ becomes our life (Col. 3:4), so that we can say, *"no longer I live, but Christ lives in me"* (Gal. 2:20). The Triune God dwells in us through the Holy Spirit, making us the "new creation." The old has passed away, not only old things and history, but our old lives, old temperaments, old ideas, old values, old hobbies...etc.. All has become new in Christ!

- *"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation"* (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- *"Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation."* (Gal. 6:15)

B. From New Creation to New Man

Although the term "new man" can also refer to individuals, it is mainly used to refer to a group, composed of "new creation" people. It is a "community of new life," that is, "the body of Christ," the "church." And the head of this "new man" is Christ. He is the head of the church. The church is *"His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."* (Ephesians 1:23).

- *"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit."* (1 Corinthians 12:13)
- *"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace,"* (Ephesians 2:13-15)

"The two" refers to Jews and Gentiles. The new man is essentially the "group" of new men. God has "broken down the middle wall of separation" in Christ and "abolishes enmity" for us.

- *“That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man ... and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph 4:22-24)*
- *“Since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.” (Col 3:8-11)*

The above two passages mention “you.” The new man in Christ, God’s children, no longer divide into different groups: race differences (Greek or Jew), religious background differences (circumcised or uncircumcised), cultural standing (barbarian, Scythian), or social class (slave or free).

- *"which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men.... that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.” (Ephesians 3:5-6)*

C. Live out the new creation in the new man

- 1. God cares about the victory and testimony of the "new man" more as a group than just the individual**

The fulfillment of God's will on earth, the coming of Christ and the emergence of the Holy City, New Jerusalem, are related to the state of the church. Today is the age of the Holy Spirit, it is also the age of the church. One of the most important missions of the coming of the Holy Spirit is to come and build up the body of Christ and prepare the bride of the Lamb, to welcome the Lord's coming.

- *"...Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish." (Ephesians 5:25-27)*
- *"...for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready" (Revelation 19:7)*
- Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, “Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

- 2. The "new man" must not only spread the gospel, but also "be a witness of Christ manifested in the flesh," live out a new creation, and glorify God.**

- *"to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever."* (Eph 3:21)
- *"church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory."* (1 Tim 3:15,16)

3. Equipping the "new man" to maturity is the most important mission and challenge for the church

Ephesians 4:11-16 provides us with a very clear blueprint, as well as the roadmap for implementation:

a) Through special vessels and various gifts from God, the "equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" is accomplished

- *"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."* (Ephesians 4:11-13)
- *"But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: 8 for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit...11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills (1 Cor 12:7,8,11)*
- ...since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel. (1 Cor 14:12)

b) By growing up in all things into Him who is the head, who is Christ

- *"that we should no longer be children... by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ"* (Ephesians 4:14-15).
- My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you (Galatian 4:19)

c) By growing up in all things into Him, every part does its share, causing growth of the body for the edification of itself in love.

- from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:16)

Meditation, Practice, Discussion

Content Review: Based on the theme verse and content of this lesson, what are some questions you may have?

1. Please share the definition of “new creation” and “new man.”

What’s the condition of becoming a “new creation?”

2. The roadmap of equipping the “new man” to maturity is accomplished by doing:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Further Reflection: The impact of this lesson on me, the revelation of the Holy Spirit, and additional thoughts

1. Please describe the importance of the “new man,” and what are the challenges and missions of the new man? How does this knowledge of the new man bring changes to your church life?

2. What is the spiritual meaning in “equipping the Saints?” What is the purpose? To you, what are the greatest challenges to be an “equipper” (to others) or to be “equipped” (by others)?

3. From Ephesians 4:11-16, what is the “blueprint and road map for implementing the equipping the body of Christ?” As a new man, list how you can be further committed in building the body of Christ. Please list what touched you or your plan for change. Please share with your group members, be accountable and support each other.

☐ The Path to Implementation:

Observe the relationship between the body of Christ and your daily life. For example: are you united with the body of Christ? Do you care for the health and condition of church, and pray for her? Do you attend church meetings and gatherings as a “new creation?” Do you serve faithfully in the body of Christ in “oneness?” Do you grow continuously in the gifts given by the Holy Spirit? ...etc

Record one or two things each day, examine your relation with the body of Christ. According to the move of the Holy Spirit, seek realignment and growth in Christ.

Week One

Day	Insights or practice
M	
T	
W	
Th	
F	

Week Two

Day	Insights or practice
M	
T	

W	
Th	
F	

Sermon (Pastor Yu's Message Transcript):

Brothers and sisters, peace to you!

It is a big challenge to condense the most important messages of "disciples of the Lord" from the whole Bible into twenty-five short teaching sessions! I hope all brothers and sisters will study seriously, truly comprehend and live out these spiritual principles. Whenever I prepare a message, I always spend lots of time praying. As Isaiah said: "*The Lord God has given me the tongue of the learned... He awakens My ear to hear as the learned.*" (Isaiah 50:4). Although Isaiah was called by God to proclaim His words, his own ears needed to be opened by God first. Therefore, before "speaking," we must first learn to "listen."

Today, we will talk about Lesson 9 - "From New Creation to New Man." "Becoming a new creation" is the first stage of the discipleship, there are a total of eight sessions. Today is the last stage of "becoming a new creation." Afterward, we will enter the next stage, the "new life." "From the new creation to the new man" can also be called: "Knowing the Body of Christ." Let's explore this subject from three different angles: become a new creation in Christ, from a new creation to a new man, and to live out the new creation in the new man.

A. Become a new creation in Christ

First, let's look at "becoming a new creation in Christ." In other words, let's solve a very critical fundamental issue first: What is a "new creation?" A "new creation" means that it had not existed before, but now it is new, and only in Christ. Before Christ, God was God, man was man, two were separate. Only Christ, who is both the true God and the perfect man, integrates divinity and humanity in one. Therefore, Jesus Christ is the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45), the head of the new creation. 1 Corinthians 15:45 says that "*The first man Adam became a living being.*" *The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.*" When talking about Adam, the focus is on the "generation." "The first Adam" is the first of that generation, and the "last Adam" indicates that there will be no other but this generation going forward. The first generation, because of the fall of Adam, was called the old creation. In God's eyes, the old generation was seen as only one

person, because all people, all sinners are descendants of Adam. However, when Christ came, He was the "last Adam." This is a completely different generation, and Christ is the head of this new generation.

When we are born again in the Holy Spirit, Christ becomes our life (Col. 3:4), so that we can say *"no longer I live, but Christ lives in me"* (Gal. 2:20). The Triune God dwells in us through the Holy Spirit, this is the "new creation." The old has passed, not only old things and history, but our old lives, old temperaments, old ideas, old values, old hobbies...etc, all has become new in Christ! This is not only a requirement, but also a promise! We can't get rid of old things on our own. However, our sins can be forgiven in Christ. All our pains can be comforted in Christ; all our bondages can also be released in Christ. Just like the 38-year-old paralytic in the Gospel of John, chapter 5, the "mat" has become the scope of his life, his bondage, his shackles, all of his life. However, in Christ he was *"made well, took up his bed, and walked."* (John 5:9). Similarly, in the past, *"in me ...nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find."* (Romans 7:18). We wished we could walk on the righteous path, the correct way, the way to life, but were unable. Thank the Lord, we are all liberated in Christ today! *"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation"* (2 Corinthians 5:17). The "new creation" not only talks about the essence of life, but it also speaks about a new realm and scope, which are only available in Christ. Therefore, today we are a new creation in Christ. This Triune God, magnificent God, gave us the Holy Spirit, because Jesus Christ had resurrected and ascended on high and now dwells in us through the Holy Spirit making Christ our life.

Brothers and sisters, we have become a new creation in Christ today. This is the most prominent and unique group of people, called the "new creation." What grace we found today, that the magnificent God actually lives in us, and Christ has become our life! Those great spiritual men in the Old Testament, no matter who they were, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, or Daniel, they all envy us. Because, for them, God is God, man is man, and they are separated from each other but today this great God is always with us. Christ lives in us and has become our life. This is really the greatest thing!

Paul not only told us in 2 Corinthians that the condition for "becoming a new creation" is: "in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:17) he also said in Galatians, *"neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation"* (Gal. 6:15). For us, "circumcision or not" really does not matter. However, for the Jews, this is of great importance, because it is not only a sign of God's covenant with Abraham, but also a sign of distinction of God's chosen people. Those who are not circumcised are to be cut off from the people; those who are not circumcised have no part in the promises and blessings of God. Therefore, for the Jews, "circumcision or uncircumcision" is definitely not a minor issue, but a vital matter! Paul used this verse to remind us: Many things that we consider important today are not at all important in God's eyes. If we are not in Christ, if we are not a new creation, no matter how accomplished we were, how much happiness and enjoyment, how rich we are it is irrelevant in God's eyes. So, what we should care about is: Am I a new creation in Christ? Moreover, we must not only care about the changes in the status and identity, but also care about whether we are living in the new creation every moment! Did you enter into the heavenly, broad and abundant realm of freedom in Christ? Will my boss lay me off tomorrow? Will my green card be approved? My health, my finances, where I live, those things are so important to us, but in God's eyes, nothing is more important than whether we are a new creation.

The Bible calls Adam the "first man," who was of earth and made of dust, so people who made of dust were earthly. Jesus Christ is called the "second man," the term "the last man" is not used in verse 47. For unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. These grains are all new creations and all in Christ. Therefore, God will not only be glorified in Christ, but also be glorified in the church. He will be glorified in you and me, by us living out Christ and living out as a new creation. Therefore, there is not only a second man, but also a third man, a fourth.... The words in the Bible are very particular. It says that Jesus Christ is the "last Adam" and the "second man." Today we are all new creations in Christ. All the old creation, because Adam sinned, "in Adam all die" (1 Corinthians 15:22). In the eyes of God, there is only one man - all sinners. *"He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."* (1 John 5:12) Today, there are more than seven billion people on earth. In God's eye, those who "have the Son of God" have life; those who "do not have the Son of God" are lifeless. In terms of God's love, God loves the world; in terms of God's justice, "Only Christ." We should all be very grateful for this status as a new creation, newly created life, newly created identity, and newly created realm! I hope that the participants of the "New man discipleship" class can know the truth of salvation clearly, be a new creation as disciples of Jesus, and become a new man.

B. From New Creation to New Man

Although "new man" can also refer to individuals, it is mainly used to refer to a group, composed of "new creation" people. It is a "community of new life," that is, "the body of Christ." — the "church." And the head of this "new man" is Christ. He is the head of the church. The church is *"His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."* (Ephesians 1:23). What we are talking about today "from the new creation to the new man" is for us to know "the body of Christ."

There are two very important passages. The first passage is in 1 Corinthians 12, *"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit"* (1 Corinthians 12:13). Today, no matter who we are, as long as we believe in the Lord and as long as we are in Christ, we are baptized with the Holy Spirit and become one body. The second passage is in Ephesians 2:13-15: *"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace."*

"The two" refers to Jewish and Gentiles. There was no racial opposition, or racial discrimination, as strong as the Jews and Gentiles in the Old Testament. The Jews were so proud and considered themselves as God's chosen people, that they saw Gentiles as pigs or dogs. If they come into contact with Gentiles, they must immediately wash their hands when they return home. Not to mention about marriage between their daughters and the Gentiles, that is absolutely forbidden. They strongly despised Gentiles, moreover they considered Gentiles simply unclean and unacceptable. However, today, in Christ, two ethnic groups: Jews and Gentiles are united into one, creating a "new man," a group of new men. Similarly, for all believers today, God has

"broken down the middle wall of separation" in Christ and "abolishes enmity" for us. Jesus Christ gave up His life to remove these "dividing walls" among us!

Today, in God's family, seemingly everything can be a division between God's children, such as elections, vaccinations, current events or issues. Many oppositions and divisions existed among people, this was happening in God's family as well. Jesus Christ shed His blood to "break down all walls of separation" for us, and sacrificed his own life to "abolish all enmity." However, some people have been building up walls, creating divisions and opposition between brothers and sisters. We really should ask the Lord for forgiveness and mercy!

The church should be sanctified. The church cannot allow sin to enter. This cannot be compromised. But now the children of God are fighting, not against the enemy for the absolute truth, not for the testimony for the Lord, but over minor issues. They opposed each other easily. Language, background and culture, even drinking coffee or tea can become reasons for opposition and separation. Brothers and sisters, these are the divisions that Jesus Christ has abolished for us through His body. Another English translation of "abolish" is to "put to death," which means "to kill" or some translations use "kill," some even use "slain." This is to emphasize that Jesus sacrificed His life to completely abolish all enmities for us. However, we are creating divisions easily. Anything seems to cause division in God's family. Brothers and sisters, this is the device of the enemy! Our enemies are definitely not brothers and sisters in Christ, nor even Gentiles or non-believers. There is only one enemy, and that is the devil. May God help us, because Jesus broke His body and shed His blood, "so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace," Jesus Christ is our peace, he puts the separated two into one new man.

"That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man ... and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph 4:22-24)

"Since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all." (Col 3:8-11)

The above two passages both say that we should put off the "old man" and put on the "new man", and both emphasize that one of the characteristics of the "new man" is "created according to God" (Ephesians 4:24), or "according to the image of Him" (Col. 3:10). Therefore, this "new man" has a characteristic, that is "like the Lord." "Put on the new man" means "put on Christ" or "wearing Christ." The "oneness" in the church today is not to find the similarities among the differences in the "old man" nor is it to resolve the conflicts in the "old man" so that they can be united. This is not the "oneness" in the Bible. The "oneness" in the Bible definitely does not rely on resolving conflicts or looking for uniformity, but in "receiving the new creation" and to "put on Christ." Certainly, if all is in Christ, that is the "oneness." Paul said in Ephesians, "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Because, in Christ, it should be "one," for He had abolished the dividing walls and enmity. All hostilities were abolished.

When people have different views on issues, we shouldn't just rely on human effort and communication skills to make everyone "one." At best, we can try to keep everyone from conflicts. Keeping everyone in harmony (still very valuable and important), however, is not the "oneness" God desires. God doesn't want the superficial "relationship without incident." On the other hand, "relationship without incident" does not mean the true "oneness" in the Holy Spirit. The true "oneness" comes out of the inner life, its essence is the one, positively undividable. We are not only a "new creation," but we must also see that we are placed in the "new man" by God, in a group of "new men." This "new man" is the body of Christ, and it is impossible to divide. Moreover, not only is there no division, it is so harmonious and full of blessings! This is indescribable in words.

From these two passages, in addition to emphasizing the characteristic of the new man, it also focused on "Christ," that is, "Christ-like." Paul went on to say: "*where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all*" (Col. 3:11). In this passage, Paul actually mentioned at least four great oppositions which are not supposed to exist in Christ:

1). Race differences

Are you a Greek or a Jew? The Jews at that time regarded the Greeks as a general term for all Gentiles. Here emphasizes on the difference of races.

2). Religious background differences

Even if you also believe in God, whether you have been circumcised or not, there are differences in your religious practices.

3). Culture level

Are you a gentile? That is, a barbarian, Scythian.

4). Status and social class differences

Are you a slave or free?

Paul said: "*you are all one in Christ Jesus*" (Gal. 3:28b), because only "*Christ is all and in all*" (Col 3:11). Ephesians 3:5, Paul also said that God has a mystery, "*which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men.... that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel*" (Ephesians 3:5-6).

This is about the church. The word "church" comes from the Greek word "*Ecclesia*," and its most basic definition refers to "a group of people called out." In other words, it refers to a group of people chosen by God and called out from the world, to inherit salvation and accomplish God's will. The church is the manifestation of the glory of God and the fullness of Christ. The life and composition of the church are of Christ, because the church came out of Christ, just as Eve came out of Adam, everything that is not of Christ is not to be called a church.

We cannot find a perfect church on earth; Not even to find a church that can live in peace, build up well in peace, grow in peace, and have no issues. How can the church become "holy and without blemish" as the Bible described, "a glorious church?"

In Session 13 of "Fundamental Theology," we talked about "knowing the church," especially what is called a "heavenly church," or a "universal church, and what is called a "local

church." For example, our "Silicon Valley Christian Assembly" is one of more than 300 Chinese churches in the Northern California Bay Area, and one of thousands of Christian churches in the world. God put us together, this is the "local church." On the other hand, we are all placed by God in a universal church, a heavenly and spiritual church. The church on earth has many blemishes, spots, and wrinkles; but the church in heaven has no wrinkles or blemishes. The church on earth has many disagreements and strives, and many are carnal and unspiritual; however, the church in heaven is completely "one" and "holy without blemish." It is a "glorious church!!"

Therefore, the "new man" is perfect in God's eyes. She is what God intended to have, is the body of Jesus Christ, and is the glorious church. One day when she grows in maturity and fullness, Jesus Christ will return. He will come to marry his bride, his church. Similarly, when Revelation talked about "the bride of the Lamb," John saw "*the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*" (Revelation 21:2). Here the "Lamb's Bride" emphasizes she is loved by Christ and is the "Holy City New Jerusalem." She is a testimony and expression of the glory of Christ. Speaking of the church, the Book of Ephesians gives us one of the best definitions: "*the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all*" (Ephesians 1:23). This means: the Son of God fills the church, the church becomes the body of Christ, the manifestation of his great heavenly life, and the church must become a holy without blemish, a glorious church.

When I read Ephesians 5:27 before, I would feel discouraged because it was impossible for us to see it. How can the church be holy and without blemish? How can she be a glorious church? However, now when God opens our eyes, we can see that in Christ, all the church has accomplished, and the fruits of the Holy Spirit today belong to this "heavenly church," and to this "holy city" the "New Jerusalem." There are all kinds of gems in the holy indicating that the glorious life of Christ has been fully manifested through the saints and through the churches in various places. This is really a glorious hope, and it's so joyful!

C. Live out the new creation in the new man

How can we live out a "new creation" together in the "new man?" How do we live out together the life and testimony that the "new creation" should have in the body of Christ Jesus? Here I would like to point out three important reminders about the "new man" and what they should know:

1. God cares about the victory and testimony of the "new man" more as a group than just the individual

The fulfillment of God's will on earth, the coming of Christ and the emergence of the Holy City, New Jerusalem, these are absolutely related to the state of the church. Today is the age of the Holy Spirit, and it is also the age of the church. One of the most important missions of the coming of the Holy Spirit is to come and build up the body of Christ and prepare the bride of the Lamb to welcome the Lord's coming.

Ephesians 5:25-27 said: "*...Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should*

be holy and without blemish." All those who are not cleansed cannot be part of the heavenly church. Only those who have been cleansed and renewed by the Lord, will no longer be stained or defiled; and only they would belong to the New Jerusalem, to the glorious "new man." The Revelation tells us: "*for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready*" (Revelation 19:7). Therefore, our situation before the Lord greatly affects the return of Christ. If we truly love the Lord, we should be ready to welcome Him.

Why doesn't Christ return today? When enduring suffering or facing disasters, many people often ask, "God, where are you?", "Lord, why haven't you returned?" Truth is, the Lord is eager to return soon, but we are not ready yet. Have you ever seen a bride in ragged clothes, shaggy hair, without washing face, waiting for the bridegroom to come and marry her? Will the groom come to marry such a bride? Similarly, we must prepare ourselves! Christ is coming to marry a glorious church, he is waiting for the church to be prepared by the Holy Spirit; he is waiting for the bride to come to maturity, to have the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Eph 4:13) At this time, Jesus Christ will come a second time to welcome His bride, and the Holy City, New Jerusalem, will also come down out of heaven. It is important to note here that although God cares about the victory of our individual life in the new creation, God cares more about the testimony of the entire group of "new man."

2. The "new man" must not only spread the gospel, but also "be a witness of Christ manifested in the flesh." live out a new creation, and glorify God.

Today, we not only became a person who found grace, but a church full of grace. The church has a more important mission on earth - to manifest Jesus Christ and live as a new creation. Therefore, the mission of the church is — "Whether individuals, families or churches, all must be witnesses of Christ in the flesh." We not only have the life of Jesus Christ, but also let His life to be manifested through our bodies and through the visible church. This is called "becoming a witness of Christ in the flesh."

The last verse of Ephesians chapter 3 is the culmination of the whole chapter, and it is also Paul's prayer: "*to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever*" (Eph 3:21). God has been glorified by Christ, so who is He still waiting for now? He is waiting for the church! However, looking at the situation of churches, churches everywhere are in weakness and desolation. We really should step up and pray. In the fullness of time, when the heavenly church matures, heaven will open again for us, and the glorious Lord will come, and He will come to welcome His church.

1 Timothy 3:15, "*...church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*" Some said that when Paul wrote about the church, he was filled with Holy Spirit, and sang the spiritual song, "*great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory*" (1 Tim 3:16).

Brothers and sisters, when Paul was praising, many commentators believed that he was not only praising the Christ who manifested in the flesh, but also praising the body of Christ, the glorious church. God appeared in Jesus of Nazareth; in the same way, God appeared in you and me, and in the church today. *God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit*, " at the end "*Received up in glory*" (1 Tim 3:16).

We need to know the importance of the status of the "new man!" We have a glorious mission on earth—to come to manifest Christ, to glorify God, and to live out a "new creation" together as the "new man." Some people say that the four gospels are the "acts of Jesus," and the book of "Acts of the Apostles" is the "acts of the Holy Spirit," or "the acts of the church." It records the work of the Holy Spirit through the church. The four gospels talk about the "personal Christ," and the "Acts" talks about the "corporate Christ." The four gospels talk about "a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies" and in "Acts" talks about "it produces many grains." That great and noble grain of wheat is in all the wheat and in the churches. His work, his blessings, and his will are still going forward. The Four Gospels talk about the "Christ in the flesh," and the Acts of the Apostles talked about the "Christ who died, rose, ascended, and indwelt in us," today Christ manifests His life through the church, in the same way, demonstrates his mighty deeds. Therefore, we should not look at the failure and desolation of the church only, or the frustrating and depressing situations, nor should we often think about the wounded and failed history. We should always turn our eyes to Christ, who has truly become the Hope of glory in our hearts!

Our mission:

— Regardless as individuals, families, or churches, all is to "become a witness of the Christ in the flesh"

1) In all circumstances

"...with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:20b-21a)

Paul told us that we should be mission-minded, not only during church gatherings, but in any circumstances. In other words, no matter what our situation, at any time or place, we must become witnesses of Christ in the flesh. We can't say, "Lord, someone offended me today, so I'm weak temporarily. Don't mind me for now, allow me to lose my temper a bit." Absolutely not! Our mission is not suspended at any time, because "...whether by life or by death, Christ will be magnified in me" (Philippians 1:20). This is also the theme of our church this year.

2) In every place

Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. (2 Corinthians 2:14)

We must triumph in the Lord everywhere. Don't just speak softly and spiritually when we are in church; even at home, or facing the one who offended us, (no matter who he/she was), we can still "*diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place*" (2 Corinthians 2:14), this is the fundamental characters, truly remarkable!

We all will fail, and we all will be weak sometimes, even have emotional outbursts. However, God reveals our weakness to heal us; God reveals us to woven the life of Christ in us. So, thank God for the occasional painful experiences, because God doesn't want us to stay in the old way when we see Him. We should thank God that we are still alive and have the opportunity to experience the changes and His work on us; we should even

thank God for the opponent who still bothers us, because without these disturbances and opponents, we are unable to charge and grow spiritually.

3) In the ordinary life

“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Cor 10:31)

"Word became flesh" is to live out Christ in me in any situation, any place, and even the most ordinary daily life. 1 Cor 10:31 said, “whether you eat or drink”, eat and drink are the most ordinary things, but Paul went on saying, “whatever you do”. In other words, whatever we face today, we should “do all to the glory of God.”

How can we turn the ordinary things into extraordinary, and turn the small things into great in God's eyes? Brother Spock said: "Regardless of things big or small, as long as you have a relationship with Christ, it's a big thing." As long as it is in Christ, nothing is trivial in God's eyes! No matter what our situation is, no matter where we are, or what hardship we are experiencing today, we can take all opportunities to live as a "new creation" and glorify God. This is the challenge for a "new creation."

3. Equipping the "new man" to maturity is the most important mission and challenge for the church

Ephesian 4:11-16 provides a very clear blueprint for building up the body of Christ. As mentioned earlier, local churches are often imperfect and have lots of issues; however, the heavenly and spiritual "new man," the body of Christ, is what God desires. This "new man" needs to be equipped, and grow to maturity. This is the most important mission and challenge of the church today.

In the bible, there are many names for the church, three of them are the most important ones:

- "The body of Christ," is the "oneness" in life;
- "The bride of Christ," is his favorite;
- "The Holy City of New Jerusalem," or in the Old Testament, the tabernacle of meeting or the temple, these indicate the dwelling place of God, a place where God magnifies His glory, a place to worship God.

These are three important essences of the church. We will only focus on the body of Christ today. The equipping and growing of this "new man" is a very important mission of the church. Ephesians 4:11-16 provides us with a very clear blueprint, as well as the roadmap for implementation. Don't underestimate these scriptures just because you are familiar with them. They are the revelation of God, telling us God's desires, telling us that the church on earth should be equipped and grew according to God's will. I will only mention three points, which are the essence of the essences. I hope that we can learn it carefully before the Lord.

1) Through special vessels and various gifts from God, to "equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ"

Through special vessels and various gifts from God, to "*equipping of the saints*", for the work of ministry, for the purpose of edifying the body of Christ." This is definitely not a matter just for a few people. God has given the church some special gifts, these special "vessels"—apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, pastors, they are all people with special ministries. However, the church does not rely solely on them to build, but through them to equip the saints, so that all the saints will work together to edify the body of Christ. Therefore, the equipping of the body of Christ is absolutely relevant to every saint, and is the responsibility of each member. Whether the church is healthy or not depends on each member in the body.

Everyone should know this principle, but in reality, we have seen that rarely the saints can truly participate and devote themselves to the responsibility of equipping the body of Christ. Many pastors told us that they use various methods to encourage, announce, and call people to come to serve, and the response rate is often less than 20%, or sometimes even lower. However, according to the Bible, "we are a royal priesthood," it should be 100%. One of the young men from our church went to a mega church when he was studying in San Diego. The senior pastor said, "If you are willing to come to our meeting, to worship God here, you are always welcome. However, if you refuse to serve or commit yourself here, you should not regard this as your home. Because, if it is your home, you should put yourself in!" I admire the pastor's boldness in saying this. When I say this today, many may leave, because they don't feel the love. But in fact, true love is to hope every member of the body would not wither or die. Just like my hand, if it doesn't move for ten years, it will wither and shrink. How can a limb not move function well? It definitely should move! Even when I'm preaching, many of my body parts are moving. This is a very natural and coordinated thing. Therefore, "equip the saints" is "for the work of the ministry", and ultimately to be able to "edify the body of Christ." Older generation talked about "equipping," mostly they mean in terms of "correcting." It is to say: you are wrong, so I will correct you. But the "equipping of the saints" really is to "change our lives, elevate our spiritual value, and expand the measure of our ministry and blessings." Its ultimate purpose is not for personal growth or to utilize spiritual gifts, but for "edifying the body of Christ." Therefore, what we are talking about here is not just correcting mistakes, but actually for the benefit of the perfecting, although the process may be through corrections.

Michelangelo's teacher knew he was very talented since he was a teenager, gifted with great creativity. Once Michelangelo carved an object and showed it to his teacher. his teacher smashed it on the spot, and said to him, "This kind of work by simply relying on your own has no value, you must throw your whole self in." Michelangelo was able to succeed later because of such a good teacher who guided him.

How then, can we change our lives, or increase our value through the help from these special "vessels" God gave to the church? I think the value of a thing not only is about its own quality, but also about who owns it or had owned it in the past. Once a violin was auctioned at an auction venue, asking for a few hundred dollars, waiting for bidding, but no one was interested. Suddenly, a prestigious master violinist came out, took the violin and played a piece on the spot. After he finished playing, the violin was immediately sold at a sky-high price. It was originally an old violin that no one wanted, but it was later bought at a high price because it was played by this master, and its value was never the same. So, do you still think that serving the Lord is a waste of your life? Do you still feel that it is a waste if your gifts can only be used in the church, not in the world? Is it a waste? This is how the king of the world lied to us. The book of Hebrews

says that these great men of faith used by God are people “*of whom the world was not worthy.*” (Hebrews 11:38). These instruments used by God are too noble, and the world does not deserve to have them! We really want to treasure what God is working on in church today, through various "vessels", to change our lives, upgrade our spiritual value, and expand our capacity to serve, so we can be used by God. This is called "equipping." Therefore, "equipping of the saints is for the work of ministry. This is priceless.

On the one hand, God gives us special "vessels"; on the other hand, the Holy Spirit gives various gifts to everyone.

1 Corinthians 12 said: "*But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another...* (1 Corinthians 12:7-10) After listing the various spiritual gifts, Paul went on to say: "*But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.*" (1 Corinthians 12:11). So, why is the Holy Spirit giving us these gifts? It is to enable us to be "*as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.* (1 Peter 4:10), and to enable us to grow, build, and bless God's family, to serve the Lord more effectively.

Paul reminds us again in 1 Corinthians 14: "*Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.*" (1 Corinthians 14:12). Therefore, the gift we should ask for should be the one that can truly edify the church, not for promoting yourself. This is different from the pursuit of postmodernism. Today, even in the church, most people emphasize what my gift is, if my gift has been used, whether my portion has been affirmed, have I been accepted by others...? Brothers and sisters, this is not the teaching of the Bible! The Holy Spirit gives us gifts to glorify God and to edify the church.

"Equipping the saints for the work of ministry" is full of challenges, not only for "the churches of this generation," but it is true for all generations. Every church faces the same challenge. Many church leaders shared the same feeling, that churches lack suitable vessels. Many churches can't find Sunday school teachers, worship leaders, or can't find people to preach the gospel. In many cases, it's not whether there is anyone to do the work, but whether anyone can do it in Christ, serve according to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, so as to edify the body of Christ to grow. The church earnestly needs such people!

This time the "new man discipleship" is specifically called: "new man discipleship for equipping the body of Christ." Therefore, we must cherish each member of our discipleship group, lead the group of people who serve with us, and for the purpose of edifying the body of Christ. Our purpose is not for personal enjoyment or the display of gifts, but for us as a person to be used by God and be able to bring blessings to the body of Christ. Therefore, the church needs both "the equipper" and "the equipped." Many people are fragile, look beautiful outside, only rejoice when they are exalted or appreciated. However, when being corrected, then we are like soap bubbles and burst easily with a light jab. This is why so many people today are unwilling to tell the truth and to perfect others, because they think confrontation is unappreciated. This generation is an era of high individualism, high on self-promotion and self-centeredness, and unapologetically displays self-pride. In this generation, it is really not easy to do the "equipping ministry," and even fewer people are willing to give themselves to be "equipped" by others. I remember when I was studying in the United States forty years ago, a few brothers in our "Brother's House" made a covenant: "We want to equip each other." Therefore, every night after

returning to the house, we would kneel together and pray, and then we would share and encourage each other; if anyone did something wrong, we would be perfecting each other, by openly sharing with sincere repentance. I really miss that time, daring to hand oneself over to each other. We are bold enough "to equip" people and "be equipped." Very few people are willing to do so now, but we really need such a spiritual companionship. "Equipping" is to change our lives, to increase or enhance our spiritual value, and to expand the measure of our serving and being used by God.

2) By growing up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ

Paul said in Ephesians: "*that we should no longer be children*" (Ephesians 4:14). The "children" mentioned here is to tell us not to be childish anymore. We should be simple, child-like which is necessary. However, turning back to being like children does not mean that we need to be superficial and naive. Paul advises us "*that we should no longer be children... by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ*" (Ephesians 4:14-15). Therefore, we must hold to the truth in love! In Acts 20:20, Paul said to the elders of the church in Ephesus: "*I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you.*" In verse 27, he said: "*For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.*" This is a true servant of God! To love the Lord, to love each member, and to love the body of Christ, he upholds the truth in love.

Ephesians 4:15b: "*grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ.*" This is telling us:

a. Growing up in all things: cherish every opportunity for growing and surpassing all factors that hinder growth

Every moment can be a growing opportunity. One should grow, and must grow into Christ. Therefore, learn to cherish every opportunity for growth. Similarly, Paul also advised us in Ephesians, to "*redeeming the time*" (Ephesians 5:16). In NIV, it is "Make the most of every opportunity." So many things happen every day, conservatively speaking, there are at least ten opportunities to grow each day. We definitely have more opportunities to grow daily, ten times more, right? Try to think about this: How many different situations do we have to deal with each day? Overcoming negative emotions or uncomfortable things, facing positive or negative things. For example: we come to group meetings, we read the Bible and pray, we learn how to speak, how to listen. We have so many things to learn! When it is time to say "I'm sorry," say "I'm sorry," when it's time to say "thank you", say "thank you." Even with these basic skills, we can improve.

b. Grow into Christ: not only pursuing Christ, but also growing into Christ

What is it meant by "grow into Christ"? It is the growth that is counted by God, and it can be attributed to the "body", to the "new man." "*...to forget what is behind, to work hard for what is in front of me, to drive towards the goal*" (Philippians 3:13-14) Paul cherishes every opportunity and uses them to "experience Christ", "to gain Christ", and to "live in Christ." How we respond to our daily situations would not only determine the results in this life, but has eternal value!

c. Grow into the body, grow into a "glorious church": grow with all the members in the body of Christ

Neither the individual nor the church can stop growing. We should pursue growth together, in order to bring out the continuous progress and growth of the entire church. We need to be all in, pursuing excellence, and dedicating our best to God. The attitude and quality of serving God tells the depth of our relationship with God, and the quality of our spiritual life.

Therefore, Paul not only advised us to "grow in all things", but also to grow into Christ and grow into the body! Ephesians 4:16: "*from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*" Here we are talking about growing up with all the saints and all the members in Christ. Not only must individuals grow, the team also needs to pursue growth together to bring continuous growth to the entire church. Just like the wooden bucket example: Although each wood panel has different heights, the water volume of the wooden bucket is determined by the shortest piece of wood. If we do not grow, it will definitely affect the blessing of the whole body of Christ; if we are not in place, it is like pulling out a piece of wood from the wooden barrel. Even if there is more water, water will eventually leak off. This also talks about the "oneness" of the body. Regardless of the individual or the church, one cannot stop growing. Individuals should grow; and it is to drive the growth of the body. Just like in the Tokyo Olympics, although it brings individual glory to win the gold medal, it also brings glory to the country. Today we are in Christ, and God does affirm, delight, and bless our personal growth, but our growth is also for the whole body to be accepted and be blessed before God.

Paul advised us again, "*My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you.*" (Ephesians 4:16) God puts us together, for us to serve well together, become each other's blessings, grow together, pursue excellency, and dedicate the best to God. The attitude and quality of serving God show our relationship with God and also show the quality of our spiritual life. Brother Watchman Nee once said: "True serving is the outpouring of life; it will be counted; it is always the Christ living out." He said it so well! The true service which is counted by God will always come from the life of Christ living out. Therefore, we must be humble before the Lord, accepting change, and let Christ take over, because true service not only allows us to gain Christ, but also reveals the life of Christ.

3) By growing up in all things into Him, every part does its share, causing growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

When Paul talked about edifying of the body in Ephesians 4:16, he said: "*the whole body, joined and knit together*", and must "grow into Christ the head." He is the head, and we need to rely on him to connect to each other in a proper way. If there was no "into the Christ who is the head," and if it were not for him to organize, then it would not be "every part does its share", but "every part does individually", which have completely opposite meanings. Today, many people in God's house are just doing as they please. If you are not "into Christ the head," everyone just picks whatever they want to do, then God's family will be in chaos. On the contrary, when all "grow into Christ the head" then everyone is in the right position, "*from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share.*" This is such a beautiful picture; we are longing for it! Therefore, let us

come together so that the heavenly church, the heavenly glory, and the fullness of the body of Christ can be truly manifested in the church on earth, and we must "*cause growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*" (Ephesians 4:16).

4. Live a normal church life in the "new creation"

This point talks about how we live a normal church life in the "new creation." For the full extent of this lesson, I will speak more in the 19th session "The Church Life", but this does not prevent us from starting to live the normal church life now.

Lastly, I want to emphasize again that God not only asks us to "edify the body of Christ," His goal is to make the entire church "*to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*"

- In life: "*grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—*"
- In serving God: "*equipping the saints for the work of ministry.*" , Joined and knitted together "*according to the effective working by which every part does its share*".
- In terms of mission: we must be able to pass on, the riches of God, the visions and the missions that God has given us; not only have to spread across different races, cultures, and languages horizontally, but also be able to pass on from generation to generation vertically, because this is what God has intended, because it will impact when the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

Therefore, we talk about "from the new creation to the new man" today. The "new creation" is the foundation of the church. Only in Christ, in the "new creation", the work of equipping can be truly carried out, and the work of edifying can bring life. Only then can the body grow toward the "glorious church" that is what Christ intended. Hope the testimony, the glory, and the blessings of the "new man" can be manifested among churches, and among us!

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we thank you again! There are so many important truths to be shared, Lord, the salvation is for your children, and in Christ, all has been given to us. Help your church, Lord; removed our focus from the disappointment, frustration, painfulness matters, let us be a new creation in Christ, the old has passed away; behold, all things have become new, for if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; a new life, all has been renewed. Lord, please implement the work of "new man" and the edifying of the body of Christ in every church. Hear our prayers, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen!