

Unto Fulness #2 - the Vision of Fulness

by Stephen Kaung

The sermon emphasizes the importance of vision in our spiritual life and the fullness of God and Christ, which is something we can enter into and experience personally.

Duration: 1:19:48

Scripture: Ephesians 1:15, Ephesians 1:18-21, Colossians 1:15-17, Colossians 1:19

Topics: "Spiritual Discipline", "Christian Vision"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having a vision in our spiritual lives. He uses the analogy of a farmer using a goat to gently touch the leg of an ox to show that we need discipline and to recognize that we have a master. The speaker then relates this to the story of Paul on the road to Damascus, where he realized for the first time that he had a master in Jesus Christ. The speaker concludes by stating that vision is essential for direction, unity, and endurance in our spiritual journey.

Transcript

Let's turn to the letter to the Colossians. The letter to the Colossians chapter 1. We read from verse 15 through verse 19. Colossians chapter 1 verse 15.

Who is image of the invisible God, firstborn of all creation? Because by Him were created all things, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or lordships or principalities or authorities. All things have been created by Him and for Him, and He is before all, and all things subsist together by Him, and He is the head of the body, the church. Who is the beginning, firstborn from among the dead, that He might have the first place in all things? For in Him all the fullness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell.

Then the letter to the Ephesians chapter 1. We read from verse 15 through verse 23. Ephesians chapter 1 verse 15. Wherefore I also, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus that is in you, and the love which He hath towards all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, making mention of you at my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him, being enlightened in the eyes of your heart, so that ye should know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the surpassing greatness of His power towards us who believe, according to the working of the might of His strength, in which He wrought in the Christ, in raising Him from among the dead, and He set Him down at His right hand in the heavenlies, above every principality and authority and power and dominion, and

every name named, not only in this age, but also in that to come, and has put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Let us pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we do praise and thank Thee for Thy precious word, but we do pray that Thy word may not just be word to us, but through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, that Thy word may become living to us. Lord, we pray that Thou will grant us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of God.

We do acknowledge that unless Thou dost reveal Thyself to us, reveal Thy Son in us, Thou art beyond us. We are not able to know Thee, and to be filled with Thee. So our Father, our prayer tonight is that Thou will grant us the spirit of wisdom and revelation, that we may know Thee.

We ask in Thy precious name. Amen. The burden that God has put in my heart is this matter of unto-fullness.

Last night we began by saying that God has called us to fullness. Our God is a God of fullness. Therefore His calling cannot be anything less than fullness.

Anything that is less than fullness cannot represent our God. Therefore His calling is calling us unto His fullness. And we mentioned last night that the calling and election, the calling of God knows no repentance.

In other words, when God calls us, that's what He will have. He will not lower His calling. He will not try to lower His calling to suit our condition.

His calling knows no repentance. And that is to say, He calls us to know His fullness, and nothing less than His fullness. And because of this we find we have a tremendous responsibility before God.

As we find in 2 Peter 1, it says, we must make our calling and election sure. This is our responsibility. He has called us, and now He waits for us to respond to His calling.

Whether we will enter into the fullness that He is calling us, or we will rather just be contented with a little that we know of Him. Whether we will be like the children of Israel who enter into the promised land and possess their possession in fullness, or we will be like the two tribes, the tribe of Reuben and the tribe of Gad. They were contented to stay on the eastern side of the river Jordan.

They do not want to go over the Jordan to know the fullness. They would rather stay in the plain because it's good for their cattle. In other words, they love the blessing of God, and they do not want the blessing.

Or worse than that, we may be like the children of Israel who did come out of Egypt, but they fell in the wilderness. Because they live according to flesh. So dear brothers and sisters, the calling is out.

The calling is upon every one of us. And we need to be really before the Lord, asking the Lord to examine our hearts, to show us what is our heart attitude towards His calling. Now this evening we would like to continue on with the vision of fullness.

I believe brothers and sisters we are all very familiar with that verse in Proverbs. In Proverbs chapter 29 verse 18 it is said, where there is no vision the people perish. And you will find in other versions where there is no vision the people pass off, restrained.

Or maybe put in another way where there is no vision the people disintegrate. The people scatter. The people go to pieces.

Vision is most basic in things spiritual. Now we mentioned last night that our God is invisible. He is not infinite.

But we are finite beings. And because we are so limited, limited in our capacity, limited in our understanding, therefore it is very easy for us to limit our God. In a way God is really beyond us.

For a finite being to comprehend the infinite God, it is impossible. And that is the reason why you will find vision is so important. In other words, if it is left to us to know God, we will never be able to know Him.

You remember the Job chapter 11 verse 7 it is said, can anyone by searching know God? Can we know the Almighty to perfection? It is impossible. God is beyond us. And we are so limited.

And that is the reason why we need vision. We need revelation. When God reveals Himself then we got the vision.

You know sometimes we quote a verse in Isaiah chapter 45, it says, verse 15, that God is a God who hides Himself. Now if you read the context, you will find that this verse does not refer to God as a person. It refers only to the ways of God.

The workings of God. Now if this verse refers to God as a person, then God in His very character, in His very nature, He wants to hide Himself from us. Now if He shall hide Himself, now who will be ever to know Him? We will never be able to know Him.

But in reading the context, you will find what it really means is here. That the children of Israel, they do not know what God is doing for them. In other words, God is working salvation for them.

And yet they do not know it. And in that sense, it is as if God is one who hides Himself. Not that He hides Himself, but His way is unknown.

His working is unknown to the children of Israel. As a matter of fact, our God is a God who reveals. Why? The very name Jehovah means the self-existing One who reveals Himself.

That is in the very name of our Lord. It is the pleasure, it is the delight of our God to reveal Himself and to reveal His Son in us. And dear brothers and sisters, because this is so, therefore there is hope for us to know Him.

Our God is a God who reveals Himself. And Paul said, it please God to reveal His Son in me. We need vision.

By vision we do not mean something that you see with your naked eyes. Now it is true sometimes God does condescend Himself to our level, and sometimes does allow us to see something even with our naked eyes. But we must remember that vision, strictly speaking, is an unveiling of God's purpose.

Our dear brother Sparks, T. Austin Sparks, in a message called The Saving Power of Divine Vision, I do not know if you have read it, it is in that little book called The Ministry, Volume 1. And in that he said, what is vision? Vision means two, three things. Number one a vision is the revealing of God's purpose. That is a vision.

Number two, a vision is the revealing of the principles that govern God's purpose. And number three, a vision tells us why and how things have gone away from God's purpose. In other words, a vision should include these three things.

The Holy Spirit. He unveils the mind of God to us. And He reveals that in our spirit.

And in our spirit we begin to see God's eternal purpose. We begin to understand the principles that govern God's purpose. And we also begin to understand why and how things have gone astray.

Now when we see these in our spirit, we have seen. A vision. Vision is so basic to our spiritual life.

Without vision we perish. Without vision we go to pieces. Without vision we just disintegrate.

We cast off all restraint. Why? Because only vision gives us direction. Vision shows us the goal.

It shows us the way. It gives us the strength. It unites us together.

It enables us to endure. In that same message our brother says, vision is the dynamic of life. It is like a fire that burns within us.

And when cannot be quenched. Vision is the cohesion of life. It is only when we have one vision that we are able to be really one.

And when there is vision, it means the elimination of self. Now that is what vision is. When we come to this metal of fullness.

The fullness of God. Dear brothers and sisters, we need vision. If we do not have vision of the fullness of God, then we do not know what we are seeking.

And if we do not have that vision, we do not have that incentive within us. We will not have that inward force that drives us on. We will not have that fire that burns within us and will not be quenched.

And without vision, we will not be able to pay the cost that is always connected with vision. That is the reason why you find Apostle Paul. He prays.

When he is trying to share with the Ephesian believers and with the Colossian believers, you find that how he gave himself to prayer. And you find in Ephesians chapter one, his prayer is that God will give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of God. In other words, Paul knows very well that even if he tries his best to share with the believers that which God has revealed to him, to his spirit, by the Holy Spirit, but even if when he tries to share it with the believers, he knows that unless they too receive revelation, what is shared will just be words.

They will not be life. And that is the reason why he prays. He prays that God will grant them, give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of God.

And he not only prays once, but in the letter to the Ephesians you will find in the third chapter, he bows his knees again. In other words, after he has shared some of the visions, then he prays again that the vision may not just remain as vision, but it may become vocation. And again, this means the working of the spirit of God.

So dear brothers and sisters, may we before the Lord, as we are sharing this evening, that God will give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation. That we may catch a vision of God. That we may see the fullness that is in God.

Now in this matter of the fullness that God is calling us into, I think there are two aspects of that fullness that we must see. One is the fullness of Christ. And the other is the fullness of the Church.

In the letter to the Colossians, we find it is mentioned twice. Once in chapter 1 verse 19, in him the fullness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell. And again in chapter 2 verse 9 it says, the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him bodily, and ye are complete in him.

Now here we find a phrase, the fullness of the Godhead. The fullness of God. The fullness of deity.

Now can we fathom the depth of that fullness? Our God is a God of fullness. He is full. Ever full.

He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. In other words, there can be no improvement to our God. Why? Because he is always full.

Perfect. Complete. You cannot add anything to him.

He is the ultimate. The final. This is our God.

And the fullness of the Godhead. Think of his character, his attributes. Our God is eternal.

And his eternal is full. In other words, he has no beginning and no ending. Why? Because he is the beginning and he is the end.

He is the first and the last. The Alpha and the Omega. From eternity to eternity he is God.

There is no break in between. His eternity is not only a matter of time as we understand it. But his eternity is also a matter of quality.

In other words, he is eternally perfect. Ever fresh, ever green, ever living. There is no spot, no wrinkle.

No aging. That is the eternity of God. The fullness of eternity.

And then when you come to Psalm, say Psalm 139, David's Psalm, and there you will find David describe the omniscience, the omnipresence and the omnipotence of God. God knows everything. He knows you are sitting down, you are lying down, you are getting up.

He knows everything about you. And no matter where you go he is there. You cannot escape him.

He is ever present and he is all powerful. Oh how he create us, how he made us even in the womb of our mothers. His mighty power is working there.

The knowledge of God is full. Not partial. The presence of God is full.

Everywhere. The power of God is full. Almighty.

There is nothing he cannot do. You may think of the love of God. And his love, the agape love of God is full.

His love is not influenced, affected by external environment. His love just comes from himself. No matter how we are, what we are.

He loves and he loves to the uttermost. You can think of the holiness of God. And even the seraphim, they have to hide their face before God.

Because God is holy. Holy, holy, holy. God.

Almighty. You can think of the glory of God. When God appears, his glory appears.

And how glorious it is. Always full. So brothers and sisters, when we think of the fullness of the Godhead, it is really full.

And it is something that we just cannot comprehend. But the Bible says all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ and in him bodily. And we know the word dwells does not mean a visit sometimes.

It means make its home. The fullness of the Godhead takes up its permanent residence in Christ. And this is from eternity to eternity.

And this does not change when our Lord Jesus came in the flesh. Because all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him bodily. Now this is the fullness of Christ.

If we can know the fullness of the Godhead, then we know the fullness of Christ. Because the fullness of Christ is nothing less than the very fullness of the Godhead. He is God.

The Son of God's Son of God's. You know I have to quote him often now. Because when you come to this area of fullness, he is the one to quote.

And our brother often in his talk say now, you make Christ small. Christ is not small at all. But you make him small.

And isn't it very true? Our concept of Christ, our understanding of Christ, our receiving Christ is so small, so limited, and often times we think we have him all. We are deceived. He is infinite.

There is a fullness in him that is infinite. And it is to that fullness that we are called into. Now I think probably the best way to share on this matter of the fullness of Christ is to use experience of one person.

We do not want to make it too academic, theological, objective. But we will try to approach it more in a personal subjective way. So that we can see that this fullness of Christ is not something that we speculate.

But it is something that we really can enter into. And when we enter into that fullness, what a change it will be. And I believe you know whom I am trying to say.

The Apostle Paul. Before the Apostle Paul was converted, he is the great Pharisee Saul. And in those days, his view of Christ, Jesus, was bound by the tradition of the Jewish fathers.

Now we have to acknowledge that the tradition of the fathers, of the Jewish fathers, if you compare it with the traditions around the world, it is the best of traditions. But here you will find this great Pharisee Saul. He was brought up according to the tradition of his fathers.

And because of this you will find his view of Christ was so distorted. He considered Jesus as an imposter of Judaism. As an enemy of Judaism.

And he took upon himself to wipe out the name of Jesus. Thinking that by doing so he would do God a great service. And he did it with zeal.

That shows how the natural man can never know Christ. But we know that on the way to Damascus, a light shone upon him. And he fell under that light.

He heard a voice. Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? Don't you know it is hard for you to kick against the goat? And there he received a revelation. He saw a vision.

He realized that Jesus of Nazareth was the one whom he despised. He is actually the Lord of all. You cannot resist him.

Because the Lord said, why do you persecute me? Don't you know it is hard for you to kick against the goat? Now we know that in the old days, when a farmer is plowing the field, he will use an ox. The plow, the yoke will be upon the neck of the cow. And the ox will be on it and it will be connected with a yoke.

And the farmer's hand, one hand he will guide the yoke. And on the other hand he will have a sharp instrument called a goat. Then he will drive this ox to till the land.

But you know the ox has his own will. Stubborn ox. And sometimes you know the ox wants to go its own way.

And if it goes its own way, then you will find the plow will not be straight. So the farmer has to apply a little discipline. We are talking about discipline in the afternoon.

I am glad that many people came in the afternoon, but I hope more people will come. Because we need discipline. And here you will find the farmer will use the goat and touch the leg of the ox.

Now he has no intention to hurt the ox. So he will just touch it gently. To let the ox know that he has a master.

But the ox is so stubborn he kicks back. And in kicking back it hurts. And after being hurt a few times, he began to realize that he is not his own master.

But he has a master. And it is better for him to obey. So on that day on the road of Damascus, Paul saw for the first time, realized that he has a master.

You know he was such a strong person. He thought he was his own master. He was doing whatever he felt he should do.

And now he began to realize that he was not free. He was an ox in the hand of the farmer. He belongs to someone.

And someone has a purpose for his life. To do the work of his master. Not to do his own work.

But when he is doing his own work, going his own way, trying to be his own master, then he is being touched by that ghost. And the Lord said, don't kick. It is hard for you to kick against the ghost.

You better surrender. Capitulate. And be obedient.

So on the road of Damascus you find Paul, for the first time, by revelation, envisioning he saw the righteous one. He realized that Jesus of Nazareth is not someone you can despise and wipe out. He is the Lord of your life.

He is the Lord of all. And thank God you find this man immediately capitulated. He said, Lord, what do you want me to do? Now you are my Lord, my master.

I belong to you. But it is more than that. Because in Galatians chapter 1, Paul said, it pleased God to reveal his Son in me.

And he refers to his experience on the road to Damascus. In other words, you find that on the road to Damascus he not only realized that Jesus is Lord, Lord of his life, but he also get a revelation of the Son. This Jesus that is now made Lord of all, is God's beloved Son.

God's only begotten Son. The Son of God's love. The very center of God's heart.

The very meaning of everything. Not only God has revealed the Son to him, but he said God has revealed the Son in me. In me.

Not only who he is, but what he is. In me. Now dear brothers and sisters, this is a great revelation.

To know the Son of God. To know the Son in me. He is in me.

The Son is in me. And what does it mean? It can mean only one thing. And that is, the Son in me is to bring me into Sonship.

That one day, the Son, the Son of God, the Son of God will come. The firstborn. They bring many sons into glory.

Now, of course, we cannot say that Paul, at that moment, he saw everything, but it was the beginning. And here you find he began to see something of Christ. He began to see that Christ is the Son of God.

And he is the Lord of all. He went to Damascus. He was blinded by the light.

And on the third day, an anise came, laid his hand on him, and said, Brother Saul, God wants you to see. And his eyes were opened. And the Bible says in Acts chapter 9 verse 20, Saul, he immediately joined himself with the disciples in Damascus.

He went in and out with them, and he began to preach that Jesus is the Son of God. Now, dear brothers and sisters, you cannot testify to what you do not know. But what you have seen and heard, you testify.

So Paul, he has seen Jesus as the Son of God. All the purposes of God are centered upon that Son of God. And that Son has once come into this world to be a man, Jesus of Nazareth.

But God has exalted Him and made Him Lord of all. Paul began to preach Jesus as the Son. That is the beginning of his seeing the fullness.

But then we know he went to Arabia. He went to the desert. Instead of going to Jerusalem to see the apostles that were before him, he went off to Arabia, to the desert.

And he was there for about three years time. Now even though we do not know what he was doing there, but I think one thing we can be sure and that is this great Pharisee. Pharisee.

Who knew the Old Testament, the Bible, so well. But only in the light of the traditions of the Father. Now he was converted to Christ.

He has found Jesus. So he really needed the time to go away to beautiful God to re-read the Old Testament. In the new light that he has found.

In other words, he is reading the Old Testament in the light of Jesus. These times, hidden years in Arabia, must be very precious. He must have received much directly from God.

When he came back to Damascus, then you find in Acts chapter 9 verse 22. He began to reason with the Jews, and come to the land, founded them, proving to them that Jesus is the Christ. You know the difference here? When he first met the Lord on the road to Damascus, he began to preach that Jesus is the Son of God.

But when he came back from Arabia, he began to prove that Jesus is the Christ. Now how did he prove him? Of course, through the Old Testament. In other words, he proved through the prophets.

Through the five books of Moses, through the prophets, through the Psalms. He proved to the Jews that this Jesus, the Son of God, is the Christ of God. That Jesus is the Anointed.

He is the Messiah, the Saint One. He is the One who comes to fulfill a mission. Even the work of redemption.

Aiding Him is salvation. Ignore what else. So you find that his vision of Christ gets deeper.

That Christ is not only the Son of God, but He is also the Christ of God. Now brothers and sisters, do we know Jesus as the Son of God? We do. But to what degree? Do we know Jesus as the Christ of God? We do.

But how much? How much? If Paul, if Paul was converted in the year 33 to 36 A.D. Now we do not know for sure, but approximately Paul probably was converted in the year 33 to 36, around that year. And he went to Arabia for three years. He went to Jerusalem.

He was sent away because he was too hot. And he was sent away to Cilicia in Syria. And we do not know exactly how long it must be, a number of years, until he was found by Barnabas and brought back to Antioch.

That probably is in the year 44 A.D. And then you find, after they served the Lord there together in Antioch for some time, God called them out, Barnabas and Paul, out on the apostolic work that you find in Acts chapter 13. And when they first went out, it was probably in the year 47 to 48 A.D. That is when they first started out. And you find that they went out once, twice, three times, and approximately 11 years of apostolic work.

Then he was taken in Jerusalem. Probably around the year 58. And he was in prison more than four years.

Two years in Caesarea, and two years in Rome, but sometime in Jerusalem. So you find that another four or five years passed, he was released. And then he was retaken, again, probably in the year 67 or 68 A.D. So when you read the history of this man, from the day, from the time he was saved, you find that it covers approximately a period of 33 to 34 years.

Now it is very strange, you know. I should not use the word strange, but wonderful. Because our Lord Jesus, he was on earth for 33 years, and half probably.

And then if you read the book of Acts, you find the record of the book of Acts covered about 33 years. And here you find that man Paul, from the day of his conversion to his martyrdom, again it is about 33-34 years. But during those 33-34 years, you find that his vision of the fullness of Christ ever increases.

There is always an increasing in his vision of the fullness of Christ. Now brothers and sisters, that is what it should be. Because Christ is infinite.

The fullness of Christ is infinite. It is not something that we can just get it all at once. But it takes time.

It takes eternity. It takes revelation after revelation. Our vision needs to be deepened, to be widened, broadened.

Our horizon has to be broadened all the time. We need to know Christ, the fullness of Christ, again, again, again, and there is no end to it. Brothers and sisters, we can not stay put in this matter of knowing Christ.

And this is the passion in the heart of Paul. You know when he wrote Philippians, he showed us this is his one passion, to know Christ, to know Him. Even at this time, period of his life, you find he is still driving on with that fire, with that passion of knowing Christ.

And this is what we should have in us. You know if we read his letters, probably we can find some hints of his increasing vision of the fullness of Christ. We know Paul was used of God to write a number of letters in the New Testament.

And these letters, roughly, you can group them into four groups, chronologically speaking. The first group of his writings, of course we know are 1st and 2nd Thessalonians. Now these are written approximately in A.D. 52-53.

These are the two first letters he wrote. Now he wrote to a young church. And in these two letters, you find that at that period of time.

Now of course, it has something to do with the condition of the church in Thessalonians too. And it has something to do with the circumstances at the moment. But still you find the burden in Paul's heart.

Or that which really occupies Paul's heart. If you read these two letters, you find it is the second coming of the Lord. He mentioned again and again in these two letters, the coming of the Lord.

The presence of the Lord. It is a day that we look forward to. And how he longed and prayed that not only he may stand before Christ blameless, but how he prayed that he may present these Thessalonian believers to Christ in that way too.

It is a day of reward. When Christ shall return and reward his own. But it is also a day of judgment so far as the world is concerned.

So you know that during that time in the first missionary, in the early missionary trips, you find that which occupies his heart is this coming of the Lord. And dear brothers and sisters, surely we should be occupied with that. As our brother mentioned in the morning, it is our responsibility and privilege that we may not only wait for his coming, but actually to face his coming.

Then the second group of letters he wrote are the first and second Corinthians, Galatians and Romans. Now these were written probably in the year A.D. 57-58. And then you find in these letters Paul thought it is occupied with something.

In 1 Corinthians of course, you find he said I know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and him crucified. In other words, he sees the centrality of the cross. All the problems of the Corinthians are due to the fact they do not know Christ crucified.

Then in the second letter to the Corinthians, you find he mentioned Christ exalted. In 1 Corinthians it is the cross. In 2 Corinthians it is resurrection.

You know brothers and sisters, the cross is the foundation of our spiritual life. But the cross is not the end. The cross is the means to an end.

It is through the cross, through death and burial, that resurrection comes into being. We need to know the cross of Christ working in our lives. Because without the cross we have no foundation.

But we also need to know the resurrection of the Lord. Christ lives in us. Reigns in our lives.

That is what occupies Paul. And then of course in Galatians, he is telling us what the gospel is not. And in Romans he tells us what the gospel is.

The gospel is Christ. The Son of God. Christ.

He is the gospel. And there is none else. Now this is the second group of this letter.

So you will see that during that period, again we say there are external circumstances for these letters. But still you will find in the heart of Paul, he began to see more and more of the cross of Christ. He began to experience more and more of the power of his resurrection.

He began to see clearer and clearer of what the gospel is not and what the gospel really is. It is Christ. He is the gospel.

Then you come to the fourth group. Third group. And of course the third group are the prison letters.

These are Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon. And these four are prison letters. And they are written probably in the year 61 to 63 AD.

And here in a sense you find Paul, even though he was in prison and yet his spirit soared to the third heaven. In the letter to the Ephesians he shows us the fullness of Christ in the church. The church is the fullness.

And in the letter to the Colossians he shows us the fullness of the gospel dwells in Christ. In other words, here you will find Paul, in his own understanding and experience, he has entered deeper and deeper into the fullness that is in God. And that is something he tried to share with the Ephesians and the Colossians.

Now what about Philippians and Philemon? You know, if Colossians and Ephesians tell us more of the truth of the fullness, then Philippians and Philemon shows us more of the overflowing of the life, the fullness of life. Paul. He knew so much of the fullness that is in Christ, that you find that fullness just flows out from him towards the Philippian believers.

He was able to comfort them instead of needing to be comforted. Love just flowed from the prisoner, Paul, to the Philippian believers. And in Philemon, that little letter, you find that Paul reveals to us the love of God in Christ.

It is a beautiful, beautiful, the overflowing of the fullness of Christ in that man. Then finally, of course, he was released and for a few years before his martyrdom. And you will find the fourth group of his writings.

1 Timothy, Titus and 2 Timothy. And we may say that in these letters you will find it deals with the recovery of the testimony of Jesus. He shows us what the church is.

It is the instrument, the vessel of God's testimony. And how it should be maintained. But when there is declension, the testimony of Jesus continues on with those few who are faithful.

So dear brothers and sisters, as you read his letters, in a sense it does give you an understanding that this man, his vision of the fullness of Christ seems to get fuller and fuller and fuller. And this is what it ought to be with every one of us. Dear brothers and sisters, is our vision of Christ, is our vision of Christ, is up somewhere.

Or, by the grace of God, there is an ever advancing, increasing, progressing, broadening horizon of the fullness. And again we say there is no end to it. But then there is another aspect of the fullness that is in God that we need to catch a vision.

And it is the fullness of the church. You know in Ephesians chapter one it says, God has made him, Christ, head over all things to the church, which is his body. The fullness of him who fills all evil.

That is what the church is. You know the church is a mystery. It was hidden through the ages.

The prophets in the Old Testament, they did not know the church. They did not have this knowledge that there will be the church. God had not revealed to them.

And even though the children of Israel, the chosen people of God, in a sense, they serve as a type of the church, of the New Testament. But there is a great difference, because the nation of Israel is an earthly nation, people. While the church is an heavenly.

So in the Old Testament time, the church is hidden. It is hidden in God. God has not revealed it.

Even though you will find in types, like the tabernacle and so forth, and yet you will find it has not been revealed. It was unknown. And when our Lord Jesus was on the earth, strangely you will find only two times he mentioned the word church.

You know he came for that purpose. But throughout his life you will find he mentioned the church only twice. Once in Matthew chapter 16 he said, I will build my church upon this rock, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

You are Peter, a stone. I will build my church upon this rock, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And then in Matthew chapter 18 he said, if your brother sin against you, you go in love, and try to show him.

And if he does not listen to you, then you get one or two other brothers, and try to go and convince him. And if he does not listen to you, then you tell the church. Now these are the only two times.

In Matthew 16 the Lord said, I will build my church. The church is something that the Lord comes to build. I wonder if that very word build immediately strike a chord within us.

You know in Genesis God took out something from Adam, and with that something he built a woman. And he brought that woman to the man. And they were joined into one.

The Lord said, I will build my church. How does he build his church? Out of his tears and sighs. Comes forth blood.

Something that comes out of him. And with that he builds. But then in Matthew 18 he said, tell it to the church.

Can you just go to a physical building and tell it? And will that physical building act? Of course we know. It does not refer to a physical building. It refers to those who are called, gathered together unto the name of the Lord Jesus.

But these are the only two times our Lord mentioned about the church. But then you find in the book of Acts, on the day of Pentecost, we often say historically speaking, on the day of Pentecost the church was born. And to Peter, he looked upon the church as a building.

Now this is in a sense easy for him because with the Jewish people they have the tabernacle and the temple. So naturally when Peter, you find in 1 Peter 2 verse 5 he said, we are as living stones because he is one. And as we come to the Lord we are as living stones being built up together into a spiritual house.

But Peter understands that this temple, this tabernacle is not made of wood, is not made even of gold or of stone, but it is made of living stones. People like him. And it is a spiritual house.

It is not a physical house. It is a spiritual house. That's the understanding of Peter about the church.

And then to the Apostle John his understanding of the church is a household of God, the family of God. And that idea again is not foreign to a Jewish mind. Because God's people is a family.

But it is to the Apostle Paul. You find there is revelation given concerning the fullness of the church. On the road to Damascus he heard a voice, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute? It is a revelation.

If there is no revelation, how will you answer that question? The natural answer would be, I have never persecuted you. I didn't have a chance. I only persecuted your followers.

Now that is without revelation. But with revelation, when the Lord said, Peter, Paul, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? Immediately he saw in his spirit that these followers of Christ in Jerusalem, in the cities of Judea, and even in Damascus, these people, they are parts of Christ. It is as if when you touch a member of the body, the head complains.

So there on the road of Damascus, dear brothers and sisters, it is a tremendous revelation. He not only began to come to see the fullness of Christ, but he also began to see the fullness of the church. What is the church? The church is none other but a body of Christ.

A body that is joined to the head. And because the body is joined to the head, it is the fullness of the head. The head fills the body, all and equal.

He began to see the church as the body of Christ. He began to see there is not only a relationship between him and the head, but also a relationship between him and other members of the body. So immediately he joined himself with the disciples in Damascus.

You cannot be an independent Christian if you see what the church did. Often times we find we become rather independent in our Christian life. We often hear such term as my Lord and I. And that seems to be very spiritual.

I do not care about you. I do not need you. I have my Lord and I. And that is all I need.

If you see the church as the body of Christ, then you will find that you are not alone. But you are related. Not only to the Lord your head, but you are related to your brothers and sisters.

And there is only one body. And all those who are the Lord are in that body. You have no choice.

You cannot choose your brothers and sisters. You are born into that body, into that family. And therefore it is better that you begin to love one another.

If you see the body of Christ, you are delivered not only from independence, but also from sectarianism. Because Christ is not divided. The body is one.

But dear brothers and sisters, you find that to see the church as the body of Christ, that we are one body. We cannot be divided. We are together.

But that is not enough. You find when Paul begins to share his vision of the church as the body of Christ, he said this body needs to be built up together. Yes, here is the body.

But this body needs to be built up. And how is it to be built up? Brothers and sisters, unless we are committed to the Lord and to one another, there is no way to be built up. God has sovereignly put us together.

But our flesh rebels against Him. We want to choose with whom we will be built up together. Those of the same temperament, those that are like we are.

And that is the reason why you find God's people, when God has thrown them together as it were, they are just like a pile and not built up together. And sooner or later you will find that pile disintegrate, scatter. No commitment.

For us to be built up together we need to be committed. Committed to the Lord. And in Him we are committed to one another.

And then brothers and sisters, as you go on with the apostle, you will find that more and more the apostle began to see and began to share and said, well, what is this body? This body is made up of believers,

those who are called, gathered together unto the name of Christ. But it is more than that. Because what is it? He said, this is nothing but the Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 12, it says, the body is one, but there are many members. And the members are many, but the body is one. So also is the Christ.

You know, some people point out that in the original, you find sometimes Christ without an article, the before it. Sometimes there is the article before it in the original manuscript. And it makes a great difference.

When Christ is mentioned alone without an article, it points to Christ, the personal Christ. But when it has the the there, it points to Christ in His corporate expression. Corporateness.

So also is the Christ. What is the church? The church is the body. The body is the Christ.

In other words, the church is Christ in you, Christ in me, it is Christ and nothing else. It is the very extension of Christ. The problem with the building of the church, the greatest problem is me.

And in the Christ, Christ is all and in all. This I, this me, has to be eliminated by the Christ. So you find that as you begin to see the fullness of the church, it is nothing than the fullness of Christ.

Christ all and in all. Brothers and sisters, it really demands our very life. Our self-life has to go.

If you read 1 Corinthians the writings of the Apostle Paul, you find this is what God has revealed to him. And he is sent out on apostolic work. And what is this apostolic work? To build the church.

So brothers and sisters, may we catch a vision of the fullness. And also a vision of the fullness of the church. Because without that vision, we will not have that incentive within us.

In our spiritual pursuit, there is no direction. The one thing that touched me very deeply in my travel is, I find people acknowledge, they love the Lord, but they say we have no direction. We do not know where we are heading.

There is no vision. And the people perish. So let us ask the Lord to open our eyes, to reveal the fullness of Christ and of the church.

And when we see that fullness, brothers and sisters, we will be like Paul. We will forget what is behind us. And we will press on.

Dear Heavenly Father, we acknowledge that we are finite beings. Thou art infinite. Thy fullness is beyond our comprehension.

But we do praise and thank Thee because Thou art the God who reveals Thyself. And it does please me to reveal Thy Son in us. So Father, it is the prayer of our hearts tonight, that Thou will continue to reveal Him to us in the ever increasing, that we may know the fullness that is in Christ.

Oh that it may draw us on, draw us into Him. And we as Thy people, not only individually but corporately, may know the fullness. That we may truly be that fullness.

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