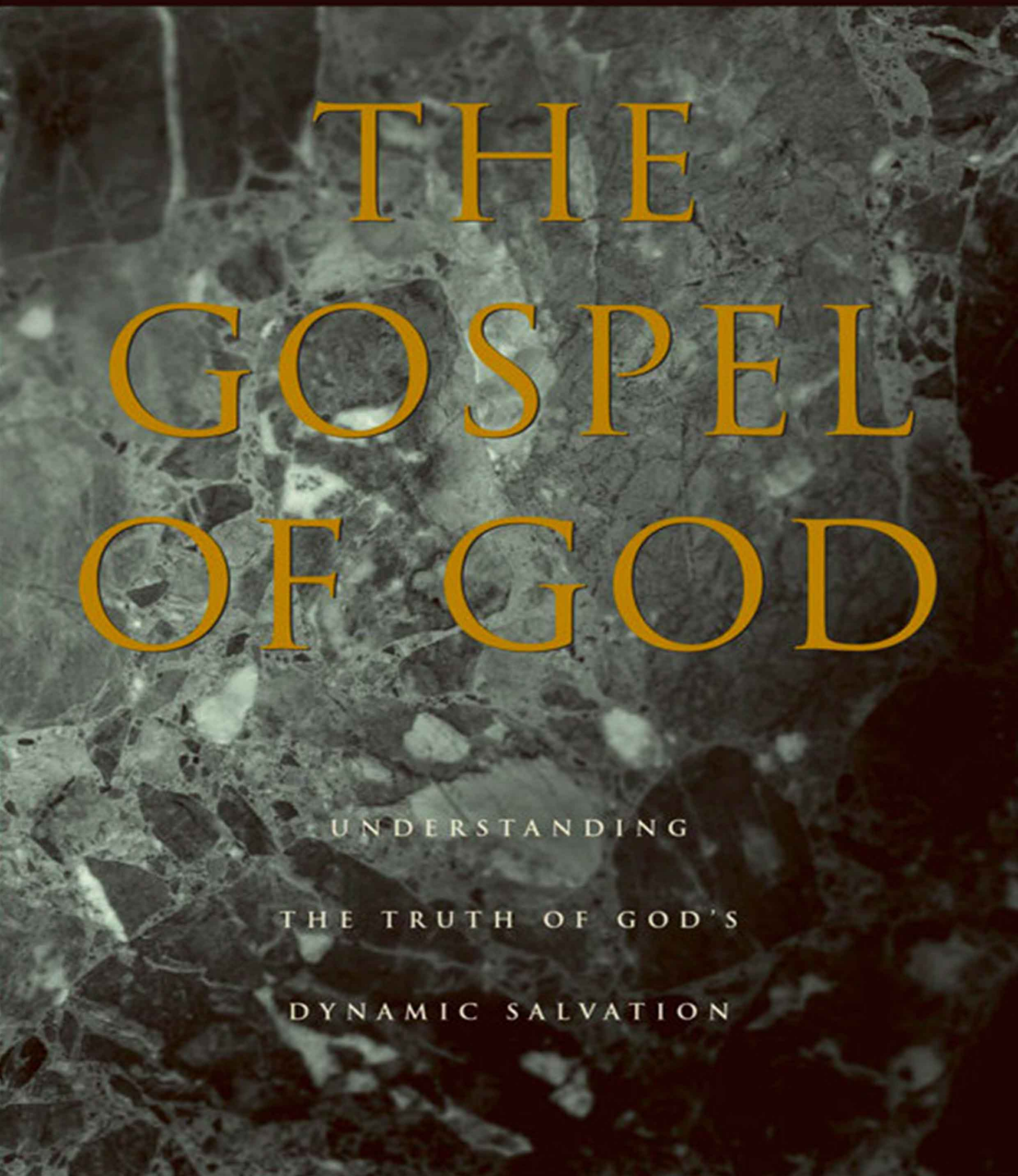


WATCHMAN NEE

THE GOSPEL OF GOD

by Watchman Nee

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PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

As has become manifest to Christian readers throughout the earth, Brother Watchman Nee was especially entrusted by the Lord with the burden to help the believers in the truth of God's full salvation. In the spring of 1937 Watchman Nee delivered a series of twenty-six messages on the basic truths of the gospel of God to the church in Shanghai, China. These messages compose the contents of this two-volume set. The matters covered are comprehensive, ranging from man's sinful condition before salvation to his destiny in the coming age. In the first volume, Watchman Nee presents the particulars of God's salvation, that is, man's sins; God's love, grace, and mercy; the nature of grace; the function of the law and God's righteousness; the work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit in God's salvation; and faith as the way of salvation. In the second volume, he covers in detail the issues of eternal security of salvation and God's way of dealing with the believer's sins both in this age and in the age to come. For both issues Watchman Nee presents persuasive response from the Scriptures to various understandings current among Christians.

The messages in this series were spoken by Watchman Nee in Chinese and were transcribed by hand as they were being given. The handwritten notes have been translated into English and edited as necessary. As much as possible, the spoken nature of the messages has been preserved. Many of the illustrations Brother Nee used were drawn from his life in China at the time.

These messages demonstrate the Lord's commission to our brother and His equipping of him with the revelation in His Word. May the Lord richly bless all who read and see these truths released by the Lord through our brother.

The Editor

CHAPTER ONE

SIN, SINS, AND THE SINNER

THE NATURE OF THIS MEETING—THE TEACHING OF THE GOSPEL

Tonight we begin a series of Bible-study meetings. But before we begin, I would like to first say a few words concerning the nature of these meetings. I do not know if there are some here who are with us for the first time. Some who come for the first time find it very hard to locate our address. Many have complained that the street we are on is difficult to locate. Some have even said that though they were actually sitting here, they did not know how to leave from here after the meeting. They did not know which way to turn to get to that auto shop they saw as they came here, and they did not know how to walk from there to the tram stop or to the bus stop. Even though they were here, they were not sure of and could hardly remember the way they came. This is the case with many Christians in their Christian life. If you ask them if they have believed in the Lord, they will say yes. But if you ask them how they have believed, they will say that they are not sure. They are not clear at all about the way they were saved.

The meetings that we are having now are not revival or gospel meetings. And while the subject of these meetings is the gospel, they are not gospel meetings. We are not preaching the gospel this time; instead, we are teaching the gospel. Why do we need to teach the gospel? Many have been saved and have become Christians, but they still do not know how they have become Christians. What we are doing today is telling people how they have become Christians. In other words, we are telling them that they turned south from Aiwenyi Road and walked straight ahead to that auto shop they saw, that they turned from there to Wen-teh Lane where we are now, took a few steps from there to the window of our meeting hall, turned at the entrance of our hall and walked to a trash can by the door of the meeting hall, and then entered into the meeting hall. This time we are not persuading people to come in; rather, we are telling them how to come in.

If there are some sitting here who have not believed in the Lord, they may be disappointed. What we are doing this time is showing those who have believed how they have believed. Some brothers and sisters may be very clear about the gospel; they may already know what we are speaking about. But I hope that the Lord would bless us and grant us new light. You must be clear that these meetings are Bible-study meetings and are meant for those who have believed but do not know how they have believed. This time I am not trying to encourage you or revive you. I am merely pointing out the direction to you. In other words, in these meetings I am nothing more than a tour guide.

SIN, SINS, AND THE SINNER

I will begin with a very basic foundation concerning the gospel. Yet I hope that in every meeting we will advance a little. In this first meeting, our subject is one which most people do not like to hear about, but one which is unavoidable. Our subject in this meeting is sin, sins, and sinners.

The Bible pays much attention to the matter of sin. Only when we are clear about sin can we understand salvation. If we want to know about the gospel of God and the salvation of God, we must first know what sin is. We must firstly see how sin has affected us and how we have become sinners. Only then will we be clear about what God's salvation is. We will first consider the ABCs. We need to see what sin is, what sins are, and who is a sinner.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SIN AND SINS

We can easily tell the difference between sin and sins: sin is singular, and sins are plural. However, we need to distinguish between sin and sins. If you cannot differentiate between the two, it will be impossible for you to be clear about your salvation. If someone is not clear about the difference between sin and sins, even if he is saved, his salvation is probably an unclear one. What is sin according to the Bible? What are sins? Let me give a brief definition first. Sin refers to that power within us that motivates us to commit sinful acts. Sins, on the other hand, refer to the particular individual sinful acts that we commit outwardly.

What is sin? I do not like to use terms such as "original sin," "the root of sin," "the source of sin," or the like. These are terms created by theologians

and are unnecessary for us now. We will remain simple and consider this matter from our experience. We know that there is something within us that motivates and forces us to have certain spontaneous inclinations; it compels us toward the way of lust and passion. According to the Bible this something is sin (Rom. 7:8, 16-17). But not only is there this sin within us that forces and compels us, there are also the individual sinful acts, the sins, which are committed outwardly. In the Bible sins are related to our conduct, while sin is related to our natural life. Sins are that which are committed by the hands, the feet, the heart, and even the whole body. Paul refers to this when he speaks of the practices of the body (Rom. 8:13). But what is sin? Sin is a law that controls our members (Rom. 7:23). There is something within us that compels us to sin, to commit evil, and this something is sin.

If we want to differentiate clearly between sin and sins, there is one portion of the Scriptures which we must consider. It is the first eight chapters of the book of Romans. These eight chapters show us the full significance of sin. In these eight chapters we find one outstanding feature: from chapter one through 5:11, only the word sins is mentioned; sin is never mentioned. But from 5:12 until the end of chapter eight, what we find is sin, not sins. From chapter one through 5:11, Romans shows us that man has committed sins before God. From 5:12 on, Romans shows us what kind of person man is before God: he is a sinner before God. Sin refers to the life that we have. Prior to Romans 5:12, there is no mention of the dead being made alive, for the problem there is not that one needs to be made alive, but that the individual sins that one has committed need to be forgiven. From 5:12 on, we have the second section. Here we see something strong and powerful within us as a law in our members, which is sin, that compels and drags us to commit sinful acts, that is, sins. For this, there is the need of being freed.

Sins have to do with our conduct. Hence, the Bible shows us that for our sins we need forgiveness (Matt. 26:28; Acts 2:38; 10:43). But sin is that which entices and compels us to commit sinful acts. Hence, the Bible shows us that we need to be freed from sin (Rom. 6:18, 22). Once I met a missionary who talked about "the forgiveness of sin." Right away I stood up and grasped his hand and asked, "Where in the Bible does it say ‘the forgiveness of sin’?" He contended that there are many such cases. When I asked if he could find one for me, he said, "What do you mean? Can you not find even one place that says this?" I told him that nowhere in the entire Bible are the words the forgiveness of sin mentioned; instead, the Bible always speaks of "the

forgiveness of sins." It is the sins that are forgiven, not sin. He did not believe my words, so he went to look this up in his Bible. Eventually he told me, "Mr. Nee, it is so strange. Every time this phrase is used, a little s is added in." I believe that you can see that it is the sins that are forgiven, not sin.

Sins are outside of us. That is why they need to be forgiven. But something else is inside of us, something strong and powerful that compels us to commit sins. For this we do not need forgiveness; for this our one need is to be freed. As soon as we are no longer under its power and have nothing to do with it, we will be at peace. The solution to sins comes from forgiveness. The solution to sin, however, comes when we are no longer under its power and have nothing to do with it. Sins are a matter of our actions and are committed one by one. That is why they need to be forgiven. But sin is within us, and we need to be freed from it.

Therefore, the Bible never says "forgiveness of sin" but "forgiveness of sins." Neither does the Bible speak about being "freed from sins." I can assure you that the Bible never says this. Instead the Bible says that we are "freed from sin," rather than from sins. The only thing that we need to escape and be freed from is that which entices us and compels us to commit sins. This distinction is clearly made in the Bible.

I can compare the two in this way:

> Sin, according to the Scriptures, is said to be in the flesh; whereas sins are in our conduct.
> Sin is a principle in us; it is a principle of the life we have. Sins are acts committed by us; they are acts in our living.
> Sin is a law in the members. Sins are transgressions that we commit; they are activities and real acts.
> Sin is related to our being; sins are related to our doing.
> Sin is what we are; sins are what we do.
> Sin is in the realm of our life; sins are in the realm of the conscience.
> Sin is related to the power of the life we possess; sins are related to the power of the conscience. A person is governed by the sin in his natural life, but he is condemned in his conscience by the sins committed outwardly.
> Sin is something considered as a whole; sins are something considered case by case.

Sin is inside man; sins are before God.
Sin requires our being made free; sins require our being forgiven.
Sin is related to sanctification; sins are related to justification.
Sin is a matter of overcoming; sins are a matter of having peace in one's heart.
Sin is in man's nature; sins are in man's ways.
Figuratively speaking, sin is like a tree, and sins are like the fruit of the tree.

We can make this matter clear with a simple illustration. In preaching the gospel, we often compare the sinner to a debtor. We all realize that to be a debtor is not a pleasant matter. But we must remember that it is one thing for a man to have debts; it is another thing for a man to have a disposition for incurring debts. A person who borrows again and again is not that concerned about using others' money. The Bible says that Christians should not be debtors (Rom. 13:8); they should not borrow from others. A person with a borrowing disposition may borrow two or three hundred dollars from someone today, then two or three thousand dollars from someone else tomorrow. Even if he is unable to pay back his debts, and his relatives or friends have to pay back the money for him, after a few days he will begin to consider borrowing again. This shows that to borrow is one thing, but to have a borrowing disposition is another. The sins that the Bible describes are like the outward debts, while sin is like the inward habit and disposition; it is like the mind that is inclined to borrow easily. A person with such a mind will not stop borrowing just because someone else has paid his debts. On the contrary, he may borrow even more because others are now paying his debts.

This is why God is dealing not just with the record of sins, but also with the inclination toward sin. We can see that it is important to deal with the sins, but it is equally important to deal with sin. Only when we see both of these aspects can our understanding of our salvation be complete.

WHO IS A SINNER?

Now we need to ask the question: Who is a sinner? I know that some of the brothers and sisters here have been believers for over twenty years. Some have even worked for the Lord for over fifteen years. My question can be considered as one of the ABCs of the Bible. Who is a sinner? I believe that many would answer that a sinner is someone who sins. If you check Webster's

dictionary, I am afraid that you would get the answer that a sinner is one who sins. But once you read the Bible, you will have to reject this definition, because it is not that the ones who sin are sinners, but that the sinners are the ones who commit sins. What does this mean? Many among us have read the book of Romans. I have heard many say that Paul, in proving that everyone in the world is a sinner, mentioned in chapter three that all have sinned and have come short of the glory of God (v. 23). God seeks the righteous and finds none; He seeks those who understand and who seek after Him and finds none; all have lied and have turned aside (vv. 10-13). Hence, it seems that Paul is saying that everyone in the world is a sinner. But be careful. Do not be too quick to say this. Does Romans 3 mention the sinner at all? If anyone can find the word sinner in Romans 3, I will thank him for it. Where is the sinner mentioned in this chapter? Please note that the sinner is never mentioned here. Some have said that because Romans 3 talks about man sinning, it proves that man is a sinner. But Romans 3 does not mention the sinner. It is Romans 5 that talks about the sinner. Therefore, we must make the distinction: Romans 3 is on the problem of sins, and Romans 5 is on the problem of the sinner. All that Romans 3 tells us is that all have sinned. It is only in Romans 5 that we are told who the sinners are.

Everyone who was born in Adam is a sinner. This is what Romans 5:19 tells us. If you open up J.N. Darby's New Translation, you will find that he used the words have been constituted sinners. We are all sinners by constitution. When you write a resume, there are two things that you must put in. One is your birthplace, and the other is your profession. According to God, we are sinners by birth, and we are those who sin by profession. Because we are sinners by birth, we are always sinners, whether we sin or not.

Once I was conducting a Bible study with the brothers in Canton. I told them that there are two kinds of sinners in the world—the sinning sinners and the moral sinners. But whether you are a sinning sinner or a moral sinner, you are still a sinner. God says that all who are born in Adam are sinners. It does not matter what kind of person you are; as long as you are born in Adam, you are a sinner. If you sin, you are a sinning sinner. And if you have not sinned, or to be more accurate, if you have sinned less, you are a moral sinner, or a sinner who sins little. If you are a noble person, you are a noble sinner. If you consider yourself holy, you are a holy sinner. In any case, you are still a sinner. Today the biggest mistake among men is to consider a man a sinner only because he has sinned; if he has not sinned, he is not considered a sinner.

But there is no such thing. Whether you sin or not, as long as you are a man, you are a sinner. As long as you are born in Adam, you are a sinner. A man does not become a sinner because he sins; rather, he sins because he is a sinner.

Therefore, my friends, remember God's Word. We are sinners; we do not become sinners. We do not need to become sinners. Once I was talking to a brother. There was a thermal flask in front of him, and he said, "Here is a thermal flask. If it prays, 'I want to be a thermal flask,' what will happen?" I said, "It already is one. It does not have to be one." Likewise with us, once we are something, we do not have to become it.

Though our sins are forgiven, we remain sinners. We can call ourselves the forgiven sinners. But many believe that they are no longer sinners. They think that if we talk about being sinners, it means that we do not know the gospel that well. But this may not be all that true. Paul did not say that his sins were not forgiven. But he did say that he was a sinner (1 Tim. 1:15). Have you seen the difference here? If you were to ask Paul if his sins were forgiven, he could not be so humble as to say no. But Paul could humbly say that he is a sinner. He could not deny the work of God in him. But neither could he deny his position in Adam. Although we have received fresh grace in Christ, God has not fully removed the problem of sin; we are still sinners. The problem of sin will not be fully solved until the new heaven and new earth appear. However, this does not mean that we have not received a complete salvation. Please do not misunderstand me. In a few days we will come to this point.

The thing that we must see clearly and accurately is that everyone in the world is a sinner. Whether you have sinned or not, as long as you are a man, you are a sinner. When some listen to the gospel, they spend the whole time reasoning about how many or how few sins they have committed. But before God there is only one issue: Are you in Christ or in Adam? All who are in Adam are sinners, and as long as you are a sinner, nothing more needs to be said.

Why then did Paul have to tell us in Romans 1—3 about all the sins that man commits? These few chapters show us that sinners sin. The first three chapters of Romans prove that a sinner is known by the sins that he commits. But Romans 5 tells us what kind of person a sinner actually is. Once I went to Jian in Kiangsi and one evening met a brother who is a security guard. He did

not believe that I was a preacher and a worker for the Lord. Here was a problem. I am a worker for the Lord and a servant of Christ, but he would not believe it. Therefore, I had to prove to him that I was one. I gave him many proofs. In the end he did believe. In the same way, we are sinners already. But this has not been proven to us. The first three chapters of Romans prove that we are sinners. They give us the evidence. By showing us that we have sinned in such ways, these chapters prove to us that we are sinners. Chapter five says that we are sinners, but the first three chapters prove that we are sinners.

Let me relate another story. In Fukien, there were some robbers and kidnappers who had previously been nominal Christians. Though they were robbers and kidnappers, their consciences were still somewhat exercised; therefore, if they realized that they had kidnapped a pastor or a preacher they would release him without ransom. By and by, when some were kidnapped, they said that they were pastors or preachers of such and such a denomination. What could the robbers do? After some time, they came up with a way. Every time someone said that he was a pastor, the robbers would ask him to recite the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Beatitudes. Those who could recite them had to be pastors, and so they were let go. I heard this story recently and thought that it was very interesting. If you were a pastor, you had to prove it. The robbers required that these people prove to them that they were pastors. In the same way, God wants to prove to us that we are sinners. Without proving this to us, we may forget about our true self. This is why Romans 1—3 enumerate all those sins. It is to show us that we are sinners. After so many facts are presented there, we are proven to be sinners.

Therefore, one should never think that it is the many sins that makes us sinners. We have been sinners for a long time already. We do not become sinners after these sins are committed. We must lay this foundation clearly. Today you can walk out to the street and meet anyone, and take him by the hand and tell him that he is a sinner. If he says that he could not be a sinner because he has not murdered anyone or set fire to anyone's house, you can tell him that he is a sinner who has never murdered anyone or set fire to anyone's house. If someone tells you that he never robs or commits fornication, you can tell him that he is a sinner who never robs or commits fornication. But no matter whom you meet, you can say that he is a sinner.

In the whole New Testament, only Romans 5:19 tells us who a sinner is. All the other places in the New Testament tell us what the sinner does. Only this one place tells us who the sinner is. A sinner can do a million things, but these do not constitute him a sinner. As long as he is born in Adam, he is a sinner.

THE GREATEST SIN

We have seen the matters of sin, sins, and the sinner. By birth, we are sinners, and our walk matches our birth. Because we are sinners, our conduct matches our title sinner. There are many "gentlemen" in this world who cover up their sins and will not admit that they are sinners. But this does not mean that they are not sinners. It only means that they have disguised themselves as ones without sins. We are sinners by birth, and our profession and walk is to commit sins. Let me repeat that it is not because we have sinned that we have become sinners; rather, it is because we are sinners that we have sinned. The fact that we are sinners causes us to sin. Those who can sin prove that they are sinners.

Tonight we have a few Western friends here with us. Perhaps they all speak the Shanghai dialect. The Shanghainese can of course speak the Shanghai dialect. But we cannot say that everyone who can speak the Shanghai dialect is Shanghainese. Many have put a lot of effort into learning the Shanghai dialect, but they are not Shanghainese. There also may be some Shanghainese who do not speak the Shanghai dialect. We cannot say that because they do not speak the Shanghai dialect, they are not Shanghainese. They are still Shanghainese, but they are Shanghainese who cannot speak the Shanghai dialect. However, there are very few Shanghainese who do not speak the Shanghai dialect. Generally speaking, all Shanghainese speak the Shanghai dialect. It is a natural thing for them to speak the Shanghai dialect. In the same way, it is all but unavoidable for those with a sinner's life to live a sinner's living.

Concerning the sins that sinners commit, I prefer not to list them in detail, as many have done. I would just like to briefly prove man's sin. Both in the New Testament, as well as in the Old, there are a few sins that are especially prominent. In the Old Testament, one sin which is particularly striking is the failure to love God. In the New Testament, there is also one sin that is particularly striking, the refusal to believe in the Lord. When the Bible says that man is condemned and has become a sinner in the eyes of God, it does

not mean that he has committed a multitude of sins that incur God's wrath, such as murder, arson, fornication, pride, debauchery, prostitution, gambling, or other kinds of filthy and secret sins. This is not what the Bible emphasizes. What the Bible considers serious is the problem that has arisen between man and God. The end of the law is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength (Matt. 22:36-37; Mark 12:30). Hence, at issue is not whether one has stolen from others, or whether one has murdered or plotted arson. At issue are not personal lusts or thoughts or words. Rather, at issue is the problem of one's relationship with God.

Among all the sins, there is one which tops the list. This one sin brings in all sins. By this one sin, all other sins follow. The Bible says that sin entered into the world through one man (Rom. 5:12). I want to ask you, What sin did that one man commit? Was it fornication, theft, murder, arson? There were no such things in Eden. All the evil, filthy, and terrible things that happen in the world today come from one incident involving Adam. But what did Adam do? Adam did not murder; he did not commit fornication; he did not commit any of the evil and filthy sins in the world today. The sin that Adam committed was simple and pure. Adam thought that God was holding one thing back from him. He thought that if he were to eat of the fruit of that tree, he would be like God. The sin that Adam committed was actually a problem that developed between him and God. God expected Adam to be standing on his proper ground. But Adam did not believe that what God had given him was profitable for him. He began to doubt the love of God. A problem developed concerning the love of God.

Adam did not commit that many sins in this incident. He did not gamble; he did not set his eyes on evil things in the streets; he did not read evil books. Adam's sin was a problem that arose between him and God. Following that, many sins came. Once Adam sinned in this way, all kinds of sins followed. Sins are after their kind, and they all come one after another. However, the first sin was not the sin that we would have thought. The first sin was the unique sin in the Old Testament, the sin of not loving God. After a problem developed between man and God, problems among men began to develop. In the garden of Eden, a problem developed in man; then, outside the garden of Eden, the older brother murdered the younger, and all kinds of sins followed. Hence, we see that sins did not begin in a serious and filthy way, as we might imagine. The Bible shows us that sins began with something very simple. But

actually the first sin was the most serious one—a problem between man and God.

When we look into the New Testament, we see the Lord Jesus saying many times that he who believes has eternal life (John 3:15-16, 36; 5:24; 6:40, 47; 11:25). There are probably fifty or more times that the Lord indicates that he who believes has eternal life. Who then are those who will perish? Is it the murderers who will go to hell? Is it the fornicators who will perish? Is it those who have filthy thoughts and improper behavior who will go into perdition? Not necessarily. The Gospel of John tells us again and again that it is those who do not believe who are condemned (John 3:16, 18). Those who do not believe have the wrath of God upon them always (John 3:36). The Lord Jesus said that the Holy Spirit came that the world would be convicted concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). Why concerning sin? Is it because you have gone to the movies lately? Is it because you have gambled lately? Is it because you have murdered someone or have committed arson? No. "Concerning sin, because they do not believe into Me" (John 16:9).

The greatest difficulty we have today is that we consider filthiness sin, but we do not pay much attention to the Lord's word to see what God considers sin. The Lord said that he who does not believe has been condemned. The reason man commits all his sins is that he does not have a proper relationship with the Lord Jesus. In the Old Testament, it was when man lost his proper relationship with God that all kinds of sins were committed. In the New Testament, it is when man loses the proper relationship with the Lord Jesus that all kinds of sins are committed. Here lie all the problems. While you are sitting here tonight, you may think that even though I have proven that you are a sinner, you really have not committed very many sins. But no one in the whole world can say that he has not committed the sin of not loving God. Neither is there anyone in the whole world who can say that he has not committed the sin of not believing in the Lord. For this reason, no one can say that he is not a sinner.

Do you remember Luke 15? There you have a prodigal son and his father. The prodigal son left his father and squandered his estate. But when did the prodigal son become prodigal? Was he a prodigal son when he had a lot of money in his pocket and was living lavishly in a distant country? Or did he become a prodigal only after he had spent all that he had and was hungry while he fed the hogs? Actually, he was a prodigal the day he left his father's

house. Before he even spent a dime, he was already a prodigal. He did not become a prodigal only after he had spent all that he had and was feeding the hogs and eating the carob pods and while his garments were torn and his stomach was empty. He became a prodigal when he left his father's house. Let me ask you a question. Suppose the younger son had not spent any money when he was in the distant country. Suppose instead that he had earned a lot of money, that he had gone into business, made a fortune, and became even richer than his father. Would he still have been a prodigal? Indeed he would have. In the eyes of his father, he would have still been a prodigal.

Today there is a very wrong concept that must be rooted out of our mind. We think that because a man has failed to do good, he becomes a sinner. This is absolutely wrong. As long as a man has departed from God, he is a sinner. Even if he is ten times more moral than others, as long as he is away from God, he is a sinner. You must remember therefore that as Christians, we may perform all the outward services that there are to perform, and we may fulfill all the outward duties that there are to fulfill; we may pray as we always have, and we may read the Bible and attend church meetings as we always have; we may do everything as we always have, and may even do them more. Yet if there is a problem between us and God, we have sinned. When the first love is gone, there is a problem. Who is a prodigal? It is not simply one who has squandered his father's estate, but rather one who has just left his father's house. The moment that a person leaves his father's house he becomes a prodigal. Even if he makes a fortune while he is away, he is still a prodigal. Of course, there will never be a prodigal who makes a fortune in the world. A prodigal will never prosper. A prodigal will always squander away all the money he has. God allows the "money" to be squandered, so that man will know that it is not a good thing to depart from God and will realize that he is a sinner after all.

We now see how we have received the qualification of a sinner and how we have become sinners. We become sinners by developing a relationship with sin, and we commit sins by developing a relationship with sins. There is a difference between the two. Since I was born in Adam and am under sin's dominion, sin has become the principle of my life and my living, and I have become a sinner. In the same way, the many individual sins outside of me have made me one who commits sins. Committing sins has to do with sins, and being a sinner has to do with sin.

THE OTHER SINS

This does not mean that the other sins are unimportant. All sins carry punishment with them. In the Old Testament, those who did not love God committed many other sins spontaneously. In the New Testament, those who do not believe in the Lord also commit many sins spontaneously. The failure to love God and the refusal to believe in the Lord are the two main sins. From these many other sins are produced, such as unrighteous acts, evil deeds, expressions of greed, wickedness, jealousy, murder, strife, deceit, displays of hatred, slander, backbiting, blasphemy, insolence, pride, arrogance, false accusations, disobedience to parents, unfaithfulness, a lack of natural affection and mercy, self-love, the love of money, ingratitude, unholiness, ferociousness, the despising of good, betraying others, recklessness, loving pleasure rather than God, giving the appearance of godliness without having its reality, and so on. But none of these are the most serious sin that man has ever committed, even though they are sins before God. Unfortunately, man does not realize that these sins are produced through one main sin. Both the sinners in the world and the believers in the church try to deal only with these sins. It seems as if the removal of all these sins would rid us of the problem of sin altogether. But man has not realized that these sins occupy only a secondary place in the Bible.

Though impossible, what if someone had received enough grace to deal with all the other sins? If he had been a person in the Old Testament age, he would have realized that there was still the sin of not loving God. Although he would no longer have the other sins, his conscience would still bother him. If he were a person in the New Testament age, he would realize that there is still the sin of not believing in the Lord. Although he would no longer be condemned by the other sins, he would not feel satisfied in the deepest part of his heart, because the Spirit of God would convict him of his sin of unbelief.

Man perishes because of his unbelief. Unbelief causes the punishment for all the other sins to fall upon an unbelieving one. The immediate reason for man's perdition is his many sins. The ultimate reason is man's sin of unbelief. Because of this, we have to be concerned with the sin of unbelief. Of course, we cannot overlook the other sins either.

THE RESULT OF SIN AND SINS

Once a man succumbs to the power of sin, he commits a variety of sins. Once a man commits these many sins, he brings upon himself the guilt or condemnation for sins, the verdict or judgment for sins. As soon as we have sinned, there is the problem of guiltiness. Being guilty is not used merely to imply one's act of transgression. It is like a verdict in court that pronounces one either guilty or not guilty. It is a description of whether or not one is legally sinful. According to the Bible, it is not our sin that we are responsible for, but our sins. Our sin does not bring in the problem of guiltiness before God. Rather, the sins we have committed bring in this problem. The Bible says that if we say that we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves (1 John 1:8). Yet at the same time, it does not require us to bear the guilt for our sin. If we confess our sins, God will forgive us of our sins (1 John 1:9). This shows us that we do have to bear the responsibility for our sins.

Because there are the sins, there is guilt. Once a person is guilty, there is the problem of punishment. Because there is punishment, there is unrest in the conscience and the consciousness of being apart from God. Sins make us condemned persons before God. They leave us waiting for God's wrath to appear. Only after one is forgiven is his conscience at peace; only then will he have the boldness to come to God. But even if the many sins are forgiven, as long as the problem of sin remains, the many sins will continue to come, and the problem of guilt will recur. This is why after God has forgiven our sins, He must go on to free us from sin.

MAN'S UNDERSTANDING OF SIN AND SINS

Before we were saved, we did not feel the evil of sin. Before we became Christians, all that we felt was the evil of the many sins. Even after we became Christians, what saddened us were our many sins, not sin itself. The many sins made us feel terrible, not sin itself. Even though we are saved now, we may still lie or lose our temper, and we may be jealous and proud, or be inadvertently loose with others' possessions. Hence, these individual sins bother us. What do we do? We go before God and ask for forgiveness for each of these items. We may say, "O God, I have been bad today. I have sinned again. Please forgive me." If you did twelve wrong things yesterday, you felt sorry inside. But if you have done only two wrong things today, you feel happy within. You feel that you have committed far fewer sins today, that there are fewer sins in you now. But let me remind you that this is only the initial stage

of a Christian life. During this period of time, we feel sorry only for the many sins that we commit.

After we have been Christians for many years, we realize that what saddens and bothers us are not the many sins, but sin itself. In the end, we find out that it is not the things that we do that are wrong, but our person that is wrong. It is not the things that we do that are evil; it is our person itself that is evil. One comes to realize that all the things that he has done are but outward matters and that the real evil thing is his person. There is a natural principle inside us that causes us to sin. The outward things can be of many categories. We can call them pride, jealousy, filthiness, or any other names. There can be all kinds of sins outside of us. But within us there is only one principle, and it is something that craves sins. There is an inclination within us toward sins. There is something in our being that craves these outward things. This is why the Bible makes these outward sins plural in number; they are realized item by item. Pride is one, lying is another, and fornication is yet another. Pride is different from murder, and lying is different from fornication. But there is only one thing which inclines us to sin, which controls and entices us. The reason that we sin is that there is a law within us. It constantly directs us toward the outward sins. This sin is singular in the Bible. It does not denote our conduct; rather, it denotes our nature. This sin is in our nature, and we need to be freed from it.

Since God's salvation for man is complete, He must deliver us from the many sins and He must also deliver us from sin itself. If God only delivers us from the many sins, without delivering us from sin, then God's salvation cannot be said to be complete. Since there are two things with us, the sins and the sin, we need a twofold salvation. On the one hand, we need to be delivered from the many sins. On the other hand, we need to be delivered from sin. In the following pages we will see how in accomplishing His complete salvation through the redemption of Christ, God delivers us both from sins and from sin.

I can clarify my point with an illustration. The many sins are like the fruit of a tree. They exist individually, and a tree can bear one or two hundred of them. This is how sins are. Sin, on the other hand, is like the tree itself. What we the sinners see with our eyes is the fruit. We realize that the fruits are bad, but we do not see that the tree is just as bad. The fruits are bad because the tree is bad. This is how God teaches us to understand the problem of sin. At the

beginning He shows us the individual sins. In the end, He shows us ourselves. At the beginning we need forgiveness because we have committed sins. But after a while we realize that we need to be freed because we are sinners.

THE THREE ASPECTS OF SIN

The Bible shows us that there are three aspects of sin. To put it another way, sin is in three places. First, sin is before God. Second, sin is in the conscience. Third, sin is in the flesh. The Bible always shows us sin according to these three lines. It is like one river that is fed by three tributaries. If we want to know sin in a thorough way, we must be clear about these three lines. We must know that our sin is before God, in the conscience, and in the flesh. If we are not clear about these three lines and are not able to distinguish between them, we will not be clear concerning the problem of sin. If we confuse the three lines, we will not realize God's view concerning sin, and we will not comprehend the thoroughness of God's work in dealing with sin. Only when we understand the need will we acknowledge the treatment. If we do not know the need, we will assume that the treatment is unnecessary. Hence, we must know sin first, and then we can know the thoroughness of God's salvation.

God is a righteous God. In the administration of the universe He is the highest authority. He is the Ruler of the universe. He has definite laws and ordinances concerning sins. He rewards man according to what man has done, and He recompenses according to how man has acted. God deals with the world in His position as the sovereign Ruler. At the time of Adam, though there was no such term for it, there was the Adamic law. After Noah, again though there was no such term for it, there was the Noachian law. At the time of Moses, the term law specifically began to be used. It was not until then that the law was specifically placed before man. Whether we are talking about the explicit law after the time of Moses or about the implicit law before the time of Moses, God's verdict is that those who sin must die. He demands that those who transgress against the law will be punished with eternal death. While man is alive, though his flesh is living, his spirit is dying. In the end, his flesh will also die. In eternity, his spirit, soul, and body will all die. If man does not sin, God will not execute the punishment. But if man does sin, God will surely execute the punishment. God has enacted ordinances and laws concerning man's sins.

When sins occur in our life, there is first the record of sins before God. Let me illustrate with an example. Recently people were forbidden to park their cars anywhere they pleased. Two months ago you could park your car anywhere. You could even park your car on the wrong side of the street, and you were free to park your car in any direction. But two months ago the traffic department ruled out this practice. Now as you drive, you see all the cars parked in the same direction. There is a new law that says that all cars should be parked in the same direction as the flow of traffic. If you do not do this, you violate the law. If a brother comes to the meeting today by car and parks in the wrong direction, an officer from the police department may see this and record a violation against him at the police department. The violation is recorded not in the street where he parked, but in the police department, even though the brother may not be aware of the fact. The violation may have happened on Ha-tung Road, but the place where the violation is recorded is the Tsin-an-tsu district police department.

The incidents of sin occur in man. But as soon as man sins, there is the record of it before God. God is the sovereign Ruler of the world. He is in control of everything. If in the course of our lives we have transgressed the law, there is a record of our sin before God. This is why the Old Testament frequently speaks of sinning against Jehovah. The reason an act of sin is evil and terrifying is that once a sin is committed, there is the record of sin before God. Since God says that he who sins must die, He has to execute His judgment on sins. There is no way for us to escape, for the record of sin is there already.

Second, there is the knowledge of the sin in our conscience. Though there is a record of the sin before God, until you know about it, you may still be able to smile and rejoice in your seat, and you may be able to act as if nothing has happened. But once you have the knowledge of a sin, the sin that is before God has come into your conscience. Originally, this sin was only before God; now it is identified in your conscience. What is the conscience? It is a "window." God's light shines into you through the window of your conscience. Whenever God's light shines into you, you feel uncomfortable and you know that you have done something wrong.

There may be someone here tonight who has parked his car in the wrong direction. Perhaps he was not aware of his mistake and may have been quite unconcerned. But since I have mentioned it, he will now feel uneasy within.

My words have moved the record of his sin from the police department into him. Hence, the conscience is turned by knowledge. Without knowledge, you are ignorant of your sins; and since your conscience does not bother you, you will feel peaceful. But as soon as you have the knowledge and begin to realize God's view and the view of the law concerning you, your conscience will not let you go.

Is it true that everyone has a conscience? Surely everyone has a conscience. But some consciences are closed up and light cannot get in. Some consciences are like a kitchen window that has a thick layer of grime on it. Through it you may be able to see the shadow of a man moving, but you cannot see the man clearly. If a person's conscience cannot take in God's light, he will be unconcerned and happy. But the moment he hears the gospel and sees his own sins, his place before God, and the record of his sins before God, his conscience has a problem. It will be bothered. It will not be at peace, but will condemn him. He will ask what he should do to be able to stand before the righteous God, and how he can become justified before such a righteous God.

The amazing thing about the conscience is that it may at worst go to sleep, but it will never die. Never think that the conscience has died. It will never die, but it will go to sleep. However, when the consciences of many wake up, they find that it is too late, that they do not have the opportunity anymore to believe or to be saved. Do not think that our conscience will let us go. One day it will catch up with us. One day it will speak. I have seen many who thought this way, who did much evil and thought that they would get by. But when their conscience finally woke up, they were caught by it.

What do people do when their conscience wakes up and they realize that they have sinned? As soon as their conscience catches up with them, they try to do good by performing good works. What is the purpose of man's trying to do good works? The purpose is to bribe the conscience. The conscience shows man that he has sinned. So now he performs more charitable acts and does more good deeds to tell his conscience that although he has done so much wrong, he has also done all these good things. What does it mean to do good works? To do good works means to bribe the conscience when it starts accusing, in order to quell its condemnation. This is a way of salvation invented by man.

But please remember that this is basically the wrong way. Where is the basic error? The error lies in our assumption that sin exists only in our conscience. We forget that sin also exists before God. If sin were only in our conscience, then we would need to perform at most ten good works to more than compensate for our one mistake. But the problem now is not with our conscience. The problem now is what is before God. I cannot be absolved from judgment for one violation of illegal parking just because I park the car legally a hundred times. Sin is something before God. It is not merely something in our conscience. Not only do we have to deal with the sin in our conscience; we also have to deal with our sin before God. Only when we have dealt with the record of sin before God can the sin in our conscience be dealt with. We cannot deal with the problem in the conscience first, for the conscience can be pacified by self-deception. But remember that the conscience will never die.

Perhaps you have not seen the conscience at work yet. I have often seen people who are troubled in their conscience. When the light of God comes, the conscience is ill at ease. A person in such a condition would crawl into a hole in the floor if there were one. He would do anything to pacify his conscience. He would even forsake his life to redeem himself from sin. Why did Judas hang himself? It was because his conscience would not let him go. He had betrayed Jesus, and his conscience would not let him go.

Why is there no need for God to send many angels to throw men into the lake of fire as though they were throwing stones? Why is there no need for God to have many angels guarding the lake of fire? Is not God afraid of a revolt in hell? I am sure that for a man who has sinned hell is a blessing rather than a curse. When the conscience rises up to condemn a man, it demands that the man be punished. Punishment is not just a demand of God, it is also a demand of man. Before you see what sin is, you are afraid of punishment. But after you see what sin is, you will take punishment as a blessing. Have you ever seen murderers or assassinators at the time of their execution? Before a man sees his sin, he may rejoice in murder. But after he sees his sin, he will rejoice in his own execution. Hence, hell is not only a place of punishment. It is also a place of escape. It is the ultimate place of escape. Sin in the conscience causes pain today and cries out for punishment in the coming age. Hence, for God to save us, He must deal with our sins before Him, and He must also deal with our sins in our conscience.

There is a third aspect to sin. Sin is not only before God and in man's conscience; sin is also in man's flesh. This is what Romans 7 and 8 tell us. What is the sin in the flesh? We have seen that, on the one hand, there is the record of sins before God and that, on the other hand, there is the condemnation of sins in man's conscience. Now we see the third aspect: the power of sin and the activities of sin in man's flesh. Sin has its place. Sin is presiding. Sin is in man's flesh as the chairman. Please remember that sin is the chairman presiding in the flesh.

What do I mean by this? Sins before God and in man's own conscience are objective. For me the record of sins before God and the condemnation of sins in my conscience are matters of my feeling with respect to sin. But sin in the flesh is subjective. This means that the sin that is dwelling in me has the power to force me to sin; it has the power to incite and arouse me to sin. This is what the Bible calls the sin in the flesh.

For example, there may be a brother who earns a hundred dollars a month, but spends a hundred and fifty dollars a month. He likes to borrow money. It is his disposition. If he does not borrow, his hands will itch; even his head and his body will itch. After using up all of his salary, he must borrow some and spend it before he can feel comfortable. In him we can see the three aspects. First, he has many creditors, who have the records of his debts. Second, unless he has no knowledge of the consequences of borrowing, in which case he may still go on borrowing peacefully, he realizes that he is in danger and thus is burdened not only with the record of debt before his creditors, but also with the exposing by his conscience. Yet in addition, there is the sin in his flesh. He knows that it is wrong to borrow, yet he feels restless unless he continues to borrow. Something is prompting him and arousing him, telling him that he has not borrowed for months and that he should do it one more time. What is this? This is the sin in his flesh. On the one hand, sin is a fact with him; it results in a record of sin before God and sin in his conscience. On the other hand, sin is a power in his flesh; it incites and compels him, even drags and pulls him, to sin.

If you have never resisted sin, you have not felt its power. But if you try to resist sin, you will sense its power. When water is flowing, you do not feel its power if you flow along with it. But if you try to go against the flow, you will feel its power. Most rivers in China flow from the west to the east; so if you try to travel from the east to the west, you will feel how powerful China's rivers

are. Those who know the power of sin the most are those who are the holiest, for they are the ones who try to oppose and to stand against sin. If you are joined to sin and are going along with it, surely you will not know its power. The sin in your flesh is all the time arousing and compelling you to sin, but only when you wake up to deal with sin will you realize that you are a lost and perishing sinner. Only then will you know that you are helpless and that you have no way to solve the problem of sin in your flesh, not to mention the presence of sins in your conscience and the record of sins before God.

Therefore, we have to see that when God saves us, He deals with all three aspects. The inward sin is dealt with by the cross and the crucifixion of the old man. We have mentioned this many times before, so we will not repeat it now. Our Bible study this time covers God's way of dealing with our sins before Him and the condemnation of sins in our conscience. Earlier I mentioned the problem of sin and sins. Sins refer to the sinful acts before God and in our conscience. Every time the Bible mentions sins, it is referring to the sinful acts before God and in our conscience. But every time the Bible mentions the sin in the flesh, it uses the word sin, not sins. If you remember this, you will have no trouble later on.

We thank God that His salvation is complete. He has dealt with our sins before Him. He has also judged our sins in the person of the Lord Jesus. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit has applied Christ's work to us, so that we could receive the Lord Jesus and have peace in our conscience. Once the conscience is cleansed, there is no more consciousness of sin. Many times I have heard Christians say that the blood of the Lord Jesus washes away their sins. When I ask if they feel peaceful and happy, they say that at times they still feel the presence of their sins. This is inconceivable. I am happy because when the conscience is cleansed, there is no more consciousness of sins. Our conscience has the consciousness of sins because there is the record of sins before God. But if the sins are gone before God, how can we still have the consciousness of them? Since the sins before God have been dealt with, the sins in our conscience should be dealt with as well. Hence, we should not have the consciousness of our sins any longer.

CHAPTER TWO

GOD'S LOVE, GRACE, AND MERCY

Tonight we will consider God's love and grace, and we will also touch the subject of God's mercy.

Many times the Old Testament says that salvation is of Jehovah. This indicates that salvation does not originate with us. Since sin is committed by man we would naturally think that salvation also originates in man. But even the thought of our salvation did not originate with us; rather, it originated with God. Although man has sinned and is destined for perdition, it is not his intention to seek salvation. Though he has sinned and ought to perish, it was God who took up the thought of saving him. Hence, the Old Testament mentions again and again that salvation is of Jehovah. The reason for this is that it is God who wants to save us. Man has never wanted to save himself.

Why is salvation of Jehovah? Why is God interested in man? In a general way, we can say that it is because God is love. But more specifically, it is because God loves man. If God did not love man, He would not need to save him. Salvation is accomplished because, on the one hand, man has sinned and, on the other hand, God has loved. If man had not sinned, there would be no place and no way for the love of God to be manifested. And if man had sinned but God had not loved, nothing would have been achieved either. Salvation is accomplished and the gospel is preached because on the one hand God has loved and on the other hand man has sinned.

Man's sin shows us man's need. God's love shows us God's provision. If there is only the need without the provision, nothing can be done. But if there is the provision without the need, the provision will be wasted. Salvation is accomplished and the gospel is preached due to the two greatest facts in the universe. The first is that man has sinned and the second is that God loves man. These are two immutable facts. They are two facts that the Bible emphasizes. If you drop either of these two ends, salvation will be lost. You do not need to drop both ends. As long as one end is gone, there will be no possibility for salvation to be accomplished. God has love and man has sin. Because of these two facts, there is salvation and there is the gospel.

GOD'S LOVE

The Bible never fails to point out the love of God. In our Bible study this time, we will cover the truth of the gospel only in a sketchy way. We will mention a lot of things, but will not consider them in detail. Tonight I cannot cover every aspect concerning the love of God found in the Bible. I can mention this matter only briefly. We must consider three aspects of the love of God. First, God is love. Second, God loves man. And third, the expression of God's love is in the death of Christ.

God Is Love

Let us come to the first point: God is love. This is recorded in 1 John 4:16. Here it does not say that God loves. Nor does it say that God may love, or that God can love, or that God has loved or will love. Rather, it says that God is love. What does it mean to say that God is love? It means that God Himself, His nature and His being, is love. If we can say that God has a substance, then God's substance is love.

The greatest revelation of the Bible is that God is love. This revelation is what man needs the most. Man has many conjectures and theories about God. We ponder all the time about what kind of God our God is, what kind of heart our God has, what intentions God has toward man, what God Himself is like. You can ask anyone about his idea of God, and he will give you his concept. He will think that God is this kind of God or that kind of God. All the idols in the world and all the images made by man are products of man's imagination. Man thinks that God is a fierce God or a severe God. He pictures God this way and that way. Man is always trying to reason and to explore what God is like. In order to correct the different conjectures man has concerning God, He manifests Himself in the light of the gospel and shows man that He is not an unapproachable or unfathomable God.

What is God then? God is love. This statement will not be clear to you unless I give an illustration. Suppose that there is a patient person. He has patience no matter what he encounters and no matter how difficult or bad the conditions are. For such a person, we cannot say that he has acted patiently. The adverb patiently cannot be used to describe him. Nor can we say that he is patient, using an adjective. We must say that he is patience itself. Perhaps we would not refer to him by his name. Instead, behind his back we would say

that Patience has come or that Patience has spoken. When we say that God is love, we mean that love is the nature of God. He is love from inside to outside. Therefore, we would not say that God is loving, using an adjective, or that God loves, using a verb. Rather, we would say that God is love, applying the noun to Him.

In our friend Patience we cannot find rashness. The man is patience itself; he is not simply patient. He is just a lump of patience. Would you think that with such a person there could be rashness? Could he lose his temper? Could he exchange sharp words with others? It is impossible for him to do such things because there is no element in his nature to do such things. There is no such thing as temper in his nature. There is no such thing as rashness in his nature. He is simply patience.

The same is true with God, who is love. God as love is the greatest revelation in the Bible. For every Christian, the greatest thing to know in the Bible is that God is love. It is impossible for God to hate. If God hates, He will not only have a conflict with whomever He hates, but will also have a conflict with Himself. If God hated any one of us here today, He would not have a problem with that one alone; He would have a problem with Himself. God must develop a problem with Himself before He can hate or do anything in a way that is not in love. God is love. Although these three words are most simple, they give us the greatest revelation. The nature of God, the life-essence of God, is just love. He cannot do anything otherwise. He loves, and at the same time, He is love.

If you are a sinner today, you may wonder what you must do before God will love you. Many people do not know God's mind toward them. They do not know what God is thinking or what intentions God has. Many think that they should do something or that they should suffer or should be very conscientious before they can please God. However, only those who are in darkness and do not know God will think this way. If there were no gospel today, you would be able to think this way. But now that the gospel is here, you cannot think this way anymore, for the gospel tells us that God is love.

We human beings are nothing but hatred. For us to love is extremely difficult. Likewise, it is equally difficult for God to hate. You may think that it is difficult to love and that you do not know how to love others. But it is impossible for God to hate. You have no way to love, and God has no way to

hate. God is love, and for Him to hate is for Him to act contrary to His nature, which is impossible for Him to do.

God So Loved the World

This is not all. God Himself is love, but when this love is applied to us, we find that "God so loved the world" (John 3:16). "God is love" speaks of His nature, and "God so loved the world" speaks of His action. God Himself is love; hence, that which issues out from Him must be love. Where there is love, there must also be the object of that love. After showing us that He is love, God immediately shows us that He loves the world. God has not only loved us, but has also sent forth His love. God could not help but send forth His love. He could not help but love the world. Hallelujah!

The greatest problem the world has is that it thinks that God always harbors evil intentions for man. Man thinks that God makes severe demands, and that He is strict and mean. Since man has doubts about the love of God, he also doubts that God loves the world. But as long as God is love, He loves the world. If love is His nature, He can conduct Himself toward man in no other way except in love. It would make Him uncomfortable if He did not love. Hallelujah! This is a fact! God is love. He cannot help but love. God is love, and what spontaneously follows is that God loves the world.

We can blame ourselves for our sins, for being susceptible to Satan's temptation, for being entangled by sin. But we cannot doubt God Himself. You can blame yourself for committing a sin, for having failed, for succumbing to temptation. But if you doubt God's heart toward you, you are not acting like a Christian, for to doubt God's heart toward you is to contradict the revelation in the gospel.

I cannot say that you will never fail again. Nor can I say that you will never sin again. Perhaps you will fail and you will sin again. But please remember that for you to fail or sin is one thing, but God's heart towards you is another. You must never doubt God's feeling toward you simply because you have failed or sinned. Although you may sin and fail, God does not change His attitude toward you, for God is love and He loves the world. This is an unchangeable fact in the Bible.

On our side, we change and turn. But on the side of the love of God, there is no change or turn. Many times your love can change or become cold. But this does not mean that God's love is affected. If God is love, no matter how you test Him, what comes forth from Him is always love. If there is a piece of wood here, no matter how you hit it, you will always get the sound of wood. If you hit it with a book, it will give you the sound of wood. If you hit it with your palm, it will still give you the sound of wood. If you hit it with another piece of wood, it will again give you the sound of wood. If God is love, no matter how you "hit" Him—if you reject Him, deny Him, or cast Him aside—He is still love. One thing is sure: God cannot deny Himself; He cannot contradict Himself. Since we are just hatred itself, it is altogether natural for us to hate. Since God is love, it is altogether natural for God to love. God cannot change His own nature. Since God's nature cannot be changed, His attitude toward you cannot be changed. So we see that God loves the world.

God's Expression of Love

Does the whole matter stop with God loving the world? "God is love" speaks of God's nature; it speaks of God Himself. "God so loved the world" speaks of God's action. But God's love toward us has an expression. What is this expression of His love? Romans 5:8 says, "But God commends His own love to us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." God's love has an expression. If I love a person and merely tell him that I love him, that love has not yet been consummated. Unless love is expressed, it is not consummated. There is no love in the world that is without an expression. If there is love, it must be expressed. If a love is not expressed, such a love cannot be considered love. Love is most practical. It is not vain and is not merely a verbal matter. Love is expressed through actions. If you put a ball on a surface that is not level, you can be sure that something will happen; it will end up rolling down. The same is true with love. You can be sure that it will have an expression.

Since God loves the world, He has to be concerned about man's need. Hence, He must do something for man. We are sinners. We have no other choice but to go to hell, and no other place to be except in the place of perdition. But God loves us, and He will not be satisfied until He has saved us. When God says, "I love you," His love will step up to bear all our burdens and remove all our problems. Since God loves us, He must provide a solution to the problem of sins; He must provide the salvation that we sinners need. For this reason, the Bible has shown us this one great fact: the love of God is

manifested in the death of Christ. Since we are sinners and are unable to save ourselves, Christ came to die in order to solve the problem of sin for us. His love has accomplished something substantial, and this has been put before us. Now we can see His love in a substantial way. His love is no longer merely a feeling. It has become a thoroughly manifested act.

In this great matter of God's love, we must take note of three things: the nature of God's love, the action of God's love, and the expression of God's love. Thank and praise God! His love is not only a feeling within Him. It is also an action, and even an expression and manifestation. His love made Him do what we cannot do by ourselves. Since He is love and since He has loved the world, salvation has been produced. Since man has sin and since God is love, a lot of things follow. If you are not poor, you will have no need of me. But if I do not love you, even if you are extremely poor, I will not be concerned at all. The situation today is that man has sinned and God has loved; therefore, things begin to happen. Hallelujah, a lot is happening because man has sinned and God has loved. When you put the two things together, the gospel comes into being.

GOD'S GRACE

But, brothers and sisters, God's love does not stop here. Since God is love, the matter of grace comes up. It is true that love is precious, but love must have its expression. When love is expressed, it becomes grace. Grace is love expressed. Love is something in God. But when this love comes to you, it becomes grace. If God is only love, He is very abstract. But thank the Lord that although love is something abstract, with God it is immediately turned into something substantial. The inward love is abstract, but the outward grace has given it substance.

For example, you may have pity on a pauper, and you may love him and have sympathy for him. But if you would not give him food and clothing, the most you could say is that you love him. You could not say that you are grace to him. When can you say that you have grace toward him? When you give him a bowl of rice or a piece of clothing or some money, and when the food, clothing, or money reach him, your love becomes grace. The difference between love and grace lies in the fact that love is within and grace is without. Love is primarily an inward feeling, while grace is an outward act. When love is turned into action, it becomes grace. When grace is traced back to its feeling,

it is love. Without love, grace cannot come into being. Grace exists because love exists.

The definition of grace is not just the act of love. We must add something else to this. Grace is the act of love upon the destitute. God loves His only begotten Son. But there is no element of grace in this love. One cannot say that God deals with His Son in grace. God also loves the angels, but that cannot be considered as grace either. Why is not the Father's love toward the Son and God's love toward the angels grace? The reason is that there is no destitution and deprivation involved. There is only love; there is no thought of grace. Only when there is deprivation and destitution, when there is no way for one to solve his problems on his own, is love realized as grace. Since we are sinners, we are those with problems; and we have no way to solve our problems. But God is love, and His love is manifested to us as grace.

Hence, when love flows on the same level, it is simply love. But when it flows down, it is grace. Therefore, those who have never been on the low end can never receive grace. Love can also flow up. But when it does, it is not grace. Love can also flow between equal heights. When it does, it is not grace either. Only when love flows downward is it grace. If you want to be above God, or if you want to be equal with God, you will never see the day of grace. Only those who are below God can see the day of grace. This is what the Bible shows us about the difference between love and grace.

Although the Bible mentions the love of the Lord Jesus, it pays more attention to the grace of the Lord Jesus. The Bible also speaks of the grace of God, but it pays more attention to the love of God. I am not saying that there is no mention of the love of the Lord Jesus and the grace of God in the Bible. But the emphasis in the Bible is on the love of God and the grace of the Lord Jesus. How did Paul greet the church in Corinth? "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14). You cannot change the sentence to read, "the grace of God and the love of the Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." You cannot do this, because the emphasis of the Bible is on the love of God and the grace of the Lord Jesus. Why is this so? Because it was the Lord Jesus who accomplished salvation. It was He who substantiated love and accomplished grace. The love of God became grace through the work of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, the Bible tells us that the law was given through Moses, but grace came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17).

GOD'S MERCY

Thank the Lord that in the love of God, there is not only grace, but another great item as well, God's mercy. The Bible puts much emphasis on mercy also. But we have to admit that mercy is more particularly an Old Testament word, in the same way that grace is more particularly a New Testament word. This does not mean that you will not find mercy in the New Testament. But if you have a cross-reference Bible or a concordance, you will find mercy in the Old Testament far more frequently. Mercy is something of the Old Testament, in the same way that grace is something of the New Testament.

The outlet of love is either grace or mercy. Mercy is negative, and grace is positive. Mercy is related to the present condition, and grace is related to the future condition. Mercy speaks of the poverty of your present condition, and grace speaks of the bright condition that you will be saved into in the future. The feeling that God has toward us when we are sinners is mercy. The work that God does upon us to make us the children of God is grace. Mercy arises from our existing condition; grace arises from the work that we will receive.

I do not know if you are clear about this or not. Suppose there is a destitute person here with us. You love him and have pity upon him. You feel sorry for his difficult situation. If you did not love him, you would not suffer and grieve for him. But by doing so, you are having mercy on him. But such mercy is negative. Your mercy on him is in sympathy for his present condition. But when is grace accomplished? It is accomplished when this person is rescued today out of his poor condition to a new position, to a new realm and a new environment. Only then does your love to him become grace. This is why I say that mercy is negative and for today, while grace is positive and for the future. The future I am talking about is the future in this age, rather than the future in the coming age. I do not mean that the Old Testament speaks only about mercy. The Old Testament speaks about grace, too. It is not true that we no longer need mercy. No, we still need mercy. God was merciful in the time of the Old Testament, because His work was not yet completed. Therefore, the Old Testament was full of mercy. God showed mercy for four thousand years. But today, in the New Testament age, we have grace because the Lord Jesus has accomplished His work. He has come to bear our sins. Hence, what we have received today is not mercy, but grace. Hallelujah! Today is not a day of mercy, but a day of grace.

If there were only mercy, we could only have hope. In the Old Testament, there was only hope; hence, the Old Testament speaks of mercy. But thank the Lord, today we have obtained what was hoped for. There is no need to hope for it anymore.

Mercy comes from love and issues in grace. If mercy has not come from love, it will not issue in grace. Since it originates in love, it arrives at grace. In the Gospels there is the account of a blind man receiving his sight (Mark 10:46-52). When he met the Lord, he did not say, "Lord, love me!" or "Lord, be gracious to me!" Rather, he said, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (v. 48). He asked for mercy because of his present condition, his present difficulty, and his present pain. He knew that if the Lord Jesus were to sympathize with him, He would not stop at showing mercy to him; He would surely do something.

In the New Testament there are also a few places where mercy is mentioned. In most cases, mercy is mentioned in reference to the situation at the time. Some may ask, "Since the love of God is so precious, why must there be mercy? Love is very good as the source, and grace is also very good as the result. Why then is there the need for mercy?" It is because man is destitute. We have no courage to go to God and ask for His love. We are of the flesh and do not know God well enough. Although God has revealed Himself to us in the light, we still do not dare come close to Him. We feel that it is impossible for us to go to God and ask for love. At the same time, we do not have the adequate faith to go to Him and ask for grace, telling Him that we need such and such a blessing. We have no way to ask for God's love, and we do not have enough faith to ask for God's grace.

But thank the Lord. Not only do we have love and grace; we also have mercy. Love is manifested in this mercy. Because God is merciful, if you hear the gospel and are still unable to believe, you can cry, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" You may be afraid to ask about other things, but you need not be afraid to ask this one thing. I dare not ask the Lord to be gracious to me. I dare not ask Him to love me. But I can ask Him to be merciful to me. For other things we dare not ask. But we can be bold to ask for mercy. God is pleased with this. God has placed His love among us so that we would have the right to come to Him. But if there were only love, we would still be afraid to come to God. Since God is also merciful, we are able to come to Him. I dare

not ask God to love me, nor do I dare ask Him to show grace. But I can ask God for mercy. I can at least ask for that.

Last year I met a man who was very old and was suffering from a serious illness. When he saw me he cried. He told me that he was not bitter toward God, but that he was indeed in much pain. I told him that he should ask God to love him and be gracious to him. He said that he could not do this. When I asked him why not, he answered that for sixty years he had been living for himself and not for God. Now that he was dying, he would be ashamed to ask God to love him and be gracious to him. Had he not been so far away from God, had he drawn closer to God during the past few decades, had he developed some affection for God, it would have been easier for him to ask for love and grace. But such as he was, away from God his whole life, how could he ask God to love him as he lay on his deathbed? In spite of my persuasion, he would not believe my words. I told him that God could grant grace to him, that He could be gracious to him and could love him. But he simply could not believe it. I went to see him many times, but I could not get through. Then I prayed, "O God, here is a man who will not believe in You. Nor will he believe in Your love. I have no way to help him. Please open up a way for him in his last hour." Later I felt that I should not speak to him about grace, nor about love, but only about mercy. I went to him again rejoicingly. I said to him, "You should forget about everything now. Forget about the love of God or the grace of God. You should go to God and say to Him, 'God! I am suffering. I have no way to go on. Have mercy on me.'" Immediately he agreed. And as soon as he agreed, his faith came and he prayed, "God, I thank You that You are a merciful God. I am weak and suffering. Have mercy on me." Here you see a person being brought to the presence of the Lord. He realized his destitute situation and asked for mercy. In his present condition, he asked God to be merciful to him.

Now let us look at a few verses. Ephesians 2:4-5 says, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in offenses." Paul said that God was rich in mercy because of something. That something is His great love with which He loved us. Without love, there would be no mercy. In what situation was He merciful to us? He was merciful to us when we were dead in offenses. His mercy had to do with our present distressing situation. Because we were dead in sins, He had mercy on us. He had mercy on us based on His love toward us. What happens after mercy? Verse 8 goes on to tell us that He saved us by grace. Hence, mercy was

shown to us because we were in a situation of being dead in offenses; then, grace was given to us for our salvation, indicating that we received a new position and entered a new realm. Thank God that there is not only love and grace, but great mercy as well.

In 1 Timothy 1:13 Paul says, "Who formerly was a blasphemer and a persecutor and an insulting person; but I was shown mercy because, being ignorant, I acted in unbelief." Paul explains here how he obtained mercy. His obtaining mercy had to do with his life history. It had to do with his being a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insulting person. Before he was saved, he was in a condition of being a blasphemer, a persecutor, an insulting person, and an ignorant and unbelieving person. While he was in such a condition, God had mercy on him. So you can see that mercy is negative and has to do with the hard and difficult situations of our past. Grace, on the other hand, has to do with the positive aspects related to us. The two must be distinguished and should not be considered the same.

Titus 3:5 says, "Not out of works in righteousness which we did but according to His mercy He saved us..." There is no righteousness in ourselves. While we were without righteousness and were in a suffering and helpless situation, God had mercy on us. Thank the Lord that there is mercy! We saw earlier that mercy originates in love and terminates in grace. When mercy extends itself, we are saved. He had mercy upon us in the condition that we were in, and as a result we were saved.

Romans 11:32 says, "For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all." Why did God shut up all in disobedience? It was so that He might show mercy to all. God allowed all to become disobedient and has shut up all in disobedience, not for the purpose of making them disobedient, but for the purpose of showing mercy to all. After He has shown mercy, His next action is to save them. Therefore, mercy has to do with your condition, not the condition after you became a Christian, but the condition before you were saved. But thank God that He did not stop with mercy. With Him there is also grace.

There is one place in the Bible that shows us clearly that our regeneration is of mercy. First Peter 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has regenerated us unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." All of

God's work in grace was planned according to His mercy in love. His grace is directed by His mercy, and His mercy is directed by His love. It was according to His great mercy that God regenerated us unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Hence, both regeneration and the living hope are related to mercy. Because there is mercy, there is grace.

Jude 21 says, "Keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." This verse shows us that today we should keep ourselves in the love of God. Until the Lord comes again, that is, until He appears to us, we should await His mercy unto eternal life. Before we are raptured, we should await His mercy. Today while living on this earth, we receive not only mercy, but also grace. Thank the Lord that we have been saved and belong to God, but there is still one problem. Our bodies are not yet redeemed. Although we are no longer of the world, we are still in the world. It is good not to belong to the world, but this is not enough. Sooner or later the Israelites had to leave Egypt. Sooner or later Noah had to leave the ark to enter into the new age. Sooner or later Lot had to leave Sodom. And the day must come when the Christians must leave the world. While I am being attacked in this world, I await the mercy of the Lord Jesus. While I am being entangled by sin in this world, I await the mercy of the Lord Jesus. While I am being buffeted by Satan in this world, I await the Lord's salvation. Hence, while we are living on earth and keeping ourselves in the love of God, we await the day when the Lord will show mercy to us. Therefore, it is still necessary for His mercy to be upon us. We have to await His mercy until the day that we are raptured.

The Bible shows us one thing more concerning mercy and grace. Both in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament, the word mercy is always preceded by either show or have. Mercy is something that is shown, and those who are shown mercy are said to have received mercy. Why does the Bible say "to show mercy" instead of "to give mercy"? It is because mercy does not require our doing. Grace, on the other hand, requires some doing. When we obtain grace we obtain something definite. But when we receive mercy, it is only a receiving; all that we have to do is to receive.

Hebrews 4:16 exhorts us to come often to the Lord to pray. When we come to pray before the Lord, we will receive mercy and find grace for timely help. Some versions use the expression obtain mercy. But actually, in the original language, the word is not obtain. Obtain is something too active. The word is

more passive in Greek. It should be translated "receive." We are to receive mercy and to find grace. What is to receive? To receive means that everything is here; it is always ready for use anytime. What is grace? Grace is something that you have to "find," because it is something that God will do. Grace is something positive; it is something to be worked out. That is why it says to "receive" mercy and to "find" grace. The Bible is very clear about mercy and grace. There is no confusion between the two.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NATURE OF GRACE

On the first evening we discussed the problem of sin. Last night we spoke about God's grace. However, we did not finish these matters. Therefore, we will continue the two previous messages and cover the matters of grace and sin further.

First, we have to see what is the nature of grace. What characteristics does grace have? We treasure the love of God, for without God's love as the source, there would not be the flow of salvation. The flow of salvation issues from the love of God. At the same time, without God's mercy there would be no possibility of salvation. Because God has shown mercy on us, He has given us His salvation. God's salvation is the concrete expression of God's love. Hence, we treasure love, and we also treasure mercy. But the most precious of all that reaches us is grace. Love is indeed good, but it does not give any concrete benefit to us. Mercy is also very good, but it also does not bring us any direct benefit; however with grace there is a direct benefit. Hence, grace is more precious. The New Testament is filled, not with the love of God, nor with the mercy of God, but with the grace of God. Grace is God's love coming forth to accomplish something for the fallen, lost, and perishing sinner. Now we not only have an abstract love and a sentimental mercy, but we have grace to meet our needs in a concrete way.

We may think that it is wonderful enough if God is merciful to us. A fleshly or fleshy person will think that mercy is good enough. The Old Testament is filled with words of mercy. There are not many words on grace. When man is in the flesh, he thinks that mercy is enough, that there is no need for grace. He thinks this way because he does not consider sin to be something serious. If man were without food or clothing or housing, mercy would not be adequate; there would also be the need of grace. But the problem with sin is not a lack of food, clothing, or housing. The problem with sin is unrest in man's conscience and judgment before God. For this, man thinks that if only God would be merciful to us and be a bit more lenient, everything would be fine. If God would overlook our sins, it would be good enough for us. In our hearts we hope that God would be merciful to us and let us go. Man's concept is to let go

and to overlook. But God cannot mercifully overlook our sins. He cannot let us get by loosely. He must deal thoroughly with our sins.

Not only does God have to show mercy on us; He has to give us grace as well. What issues out from God's love is grace. God is not satisfied with mercy alone. We think that if there were mercy and that if God would let us go and not reckon with us, everything would be fine. But God did not say that since He has pity on us He would let us go. This is not the way God works. When God works, He must do so in harmony with Himself. Therefore, God's love cannot stop with mercy. His love must extend into grace. He must deal thoroughly with the problem of our sins. If the problem of sins were something that could be overlooked, God's mercy would be sufficient. But to Him, letting us go and overlooking our sins are not sufficient. Thus to have mercy alone is not sufficient. He must settle the matter of sins thoroughly. Here we see the grace of God. This is why the New Testament, though not void of mercy, is full of grace. In it we see how the Son of God, Jesus Christ, has come to the world to show forth grace and to become grace so that we might receive grace.

What is grace? Grace is nothing other than God's great work accomplished freely in His unconditional and boundless love for helpless, unworthy, and sinful man. God's grace is just God working for man. How does this contrast with the law? The law is God requiring man to work for Him, while grace is God working for man. What is the law? The law is God's demand for man to do something for Him. What is work? Work is man's effort to do something for God. What is grace? Grace is neither God requiring something nor God receiving man's work, but grace is God doing His own work. When God comes forth to do something for and on behalf of man, that is grace.

The emphasis in the New Testament is not on the principle of the law. In fact, the New Testament opposes the principle of the law because law and grace can never mix. Is it God who is working or is it man who is working? Is God giving something to man or is He asking for something from man? If God is asking for something from man, we are still in the age of the law. But if God is giving something to man, we are in the age of grace. You would not go to someone's home to give him money while you are there to collect money. Likewise, law and grace are opposite principles; they cannot be put together. If man is to receive grace, he must put the law aside. On the other hand, if he follows the law, he will fall from grace.

If man is to follow the law, he must have God accept his works. If there is the principle of the law and of works and if man is to give something to God, he must give God what He demands. The Bible indicates that man's works should be a response to God's law. God's law demands that I do something. When I do it, I am responding to God's law. This is what the Bible calls works. But when grace is here, the principle of law and of works is set aside. Here we see that it is God working for man instead of man working for God.

Grace, which is God working for helpless, poor, and troubled man, has three characteristics or natures. Everyone who wants to understand God's grace must remember these three characteristics or natures. If we forget these three characteristics, we as sinners will not be saved, and we as Christians will fail and fall. If we see the characteristics and nature of God's grace, we will receive more grace from God for timely help. Let us consider briefly these three characteristics from the Bible.

What are man's works? Generally speaking, there are three things to man's work: (1) his wrongdoings, (2) his achievements, and (3) his responsibilities. The works of man that are evil are his wrongdoings, those that are good are his achievements, and those that he is willing to bear are his responsibilities. Here we have three things: of the things that man does, those that are not done well become his wrongdoings, those that are done well become his achievements, and those that he promises to do for God are his responsibilities. In terms of time, wrongdoings and achievements are things of the past, and responsibilities are things of the future; they are things that a man is responsible for. If God's grace is God working for sinful, weak, ungodly, and helpless man, right away we see that God's grace and man's wrongdoing cannot be joined together. Neither can God's grace be joined with man's achievements and responsibilities. Where the question of wrongdoing comes into play, grace does not exist. Where the question of achievement comes into play, grace also does not exist. Likewise, where responsibility is, grace does not exist. If God's grace is indeed grace, wrongdoings, achievements, and responsibilities cannot be mixed in. Whenever wrongdoings, achievements, and responsibilities are mixed in, God's grace loses its characteristics.

GOD'S GRACE NOT RELATED TO MAN'S WRONGDOINGS

The first characteristic of God's grace is that it is not related to man's wrongdoings. God's grace is given to sinful man, to helpless, low, weak, and ungodly sinners. If the question of wrongdoing comes up and if it is stipulated that those with sin shall not have grace, then grace is basically annulled. God's grace can never be held back just because man has sinned. God's grace cannot even be reduced when man's sins increase. There can never be such a thing.

Man's mind, being fully of the flesh, is filled with the thought of the law. We may think that the ones who have achieved may receive grace but we, the sinners, as those without achievements, are unqualified to receive grace. In man's thought, wrongdoing and grace are at opposite poles. In man's thought, grace only comes where there is no wrongdoing. If you told anyone who has some consideration about God that God loved him and has given him grace, he would immediately wonder how this could be since he has committed so many sins. Man's thought is that grace can be received only when there is no wrongdoing. He fails to realize that this is absolutely wrong. Why? Because wrongdoing provides the best opportunity for grace to operate. Without wrongdoing, grace has no opportunity to manifest itself. Not only is wrongdoing unable to stop grace; it is the necessary condition for grace to be manifested.

In the same way, our poverty before the Lord is not a deterrent to grace. On the contrary, our poverty is a condition for receiving grace. Without being so poor, we would not be willing to receive grace. Every Lord's Day morning there are eight or nine beggars here in our meeting hall. They come every Lord's Day morning, and they are very punctual. When they come to you and you give them a coin or two, they smile and take it. But what would happen if you offered a coin to any brother or sister among us who is well groomed and who has a good upbringing, saying, "Here, take this. Find yourself two more coins and you will be able to buy some fritters on the street"? Surely he or she would not accept it. He or she would not only refuse it, but would consider it an insult. Therefore, being poor is a condition for receiving grace; in fact, it is the most necessary condition.

Man is very illogical. He says that he cannot receive grace because his sins are too numerous. No statement is more contradictory than this. No statement is more senseless. Because the sick are sick, they need a doctor; because the poor are poor, they need relief; and likewise, because man is a sinner, he needs grace. Hence, sin is not a deterrent. On the contrary, it is an

opportunity. Our problem today is that we always think that we have to be in a condition that is different from where we are today. We think that we must be holier and better people today than yesterday if we are to receive grace.

My friends, if you want to be a magistrate, there is the matter of qualifications. If you want to enter a school, there is the matter of standards. If you want to be a doctor in a hospital, there is the matter of capability. If you want to do business, there is the matter of skill. Qualifications, standards, capabilities, and skills are indeed useful in certain things. But if man wishes to come to God, qualifications, standards, capabilities, and skills are out of the question. Only when I am a helpless sinner, standing on the lowest ground, can I receive grace. Man misses grace not because he is too sinful, but because he is not low enough. He is too proud and too moral. This is precisely where the greatest problem lies. We are great in all kinds of sins. At the same time, we are very great in the sin of pride. On the one hand, we have an absolute need; on the other hand, the ground we stand on is one on which we cannot receive the grace we need. This is due to nothing other than our pride.

Romans 5:20 tells us that "Where sin abounded, grace has super-abounded." The Word of God shows us that where sin is, grace is also. Where sin abounds—not that it has really abounded, for all men sin alike, but that sin has manifested itself more abundantly—the grace of God abounds even more. The word abound in the original language has to do with the idea of overflowing. I do not know if you have ever been to the seashore or riverside. When high tide comes, a water line is left on the shore or bank. But if a flood comes, it overflows the water line. When the water is at the water line, we say that there is only a normal rise of the tide, but if the water rises above the line, there is a flood. This is what abound means here. Sin is so high, but grace is higher and even covers sin. Hallelujah! Sin is high, but grace is even higher and has covered sin. This is God's grace. Man has the strange thought that to receive grace, he must be without sin or wrongdoing. But there is no such thing. Although our wrongdoings are quite serious and can rise quite high, God's grace rises even higher. Since the grace of God is here to deal with the problem of wrongdoings, they are no longer a problem.

What is the nature of God's grace? God's grace is just God coming in the sinner's position to take upon Himself the consequence of his sins. Please remember the definition that we gave earlier, that grace is God working for man. If we do not have any wrongdoings, we do not need God to do anything

for us, and as a result, we do not need God's grace. But because we have sinned and because we have problems, He has to come and solve our problems. Hence, we need grace. If I say, "Since I have sinned, I cannot receive grace," it is like saying, "Because I am too sick, I am too shy to see the doctor. I will see the doctor when my temperature is down a little." Since there is no such patient in the world, there should be no such sinner in the world either. Thus our wrongdoings are the condition for us to receive God's grace.

Since the problem of sin is taken care of by God and since He takes the responsibility to deal with our wrongdoings, any sin we have, whether great or small, is no problem before God. Both great sins and small sins pose no problem, for both can be solved by God's work and by God's work alone. The great sin is taken care of by God's work. The small sin likewise requires God's work. If it were up to us to deal with our sins, we would distinguish between great sins and small sins. But if our sins are taken care of by God, they will be taken care of regardless of whether they are great or small. Since they are taken care of by God, it makes no difference at all to us. All that we are doing is receiving grace.

Earlier we saw why man cannot receive grace. Recall Peter's words in 1 Peter 5:5: "In like manner, younger men, be subject to elders; and all of you gird yourselves with humility toward one another, because God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble." God gives grace to the humble. If you humbly confess that you are a sinner, your wrongdoings will not deter you from receiving God's grace; rather, they will cause you to receive His grace. As long as you humble yourself before God, God's grace will flow to you. Thank God that the grace of God flows down to us; it is not pumped up to us. No one can ever pump God's grace up to himself. Therefore, all those who are high have to come down.

Who are the sinners and who can receive grace? The Bible shows us clearly in Romans 3:23-24 that "all have sinned," but the all who have sinned are "justified freely by His grace." The Bible shows us that once man sins, spontaneously he can receive grace. Without being a sinner, he cannot receive grace. Man thinks that those who have sinned cannot receive grace. But God says that because man sins, he can receive grace. It is so obvious: since man has sinned grace comes. Never think that when sin comes, grace goes away.

Sin is one of man's great mistakes, but to think that sin blocks man from receiving grace is a greater mistake.

Therefore, the first thing we must see is that man's wrongdoings cannot stand in the way of God's grace. With God's grace, there is no problem because of wrongdoings. On the contrary, God's grace is there to deal with man's wrongdoings. God is giving grace because man has sinned.

GOD'S GRACE NOT RELATED TO MAN'S ACHIEVEMENTS

Now the second issue arises. Not everything that man does is sin. In God's eyes, all of man's acts are sins, but in man's eyes, many things he does are achievements. Some consider that since they are such extreme sinners, they cannot receive grace. Others think that because they sin, they have to improve themselves before they can receive grace. Please notice that there is a difference here. The first group says that they have sinned and are therefore unqualified to receive grace. This group is absolutely in the negative realm. The second group is a little more positive. They say that they are sinners and will only receive grace if they act better. They think that they have to attain a certain standard of conduct and certain achievements before they can receive grace. In the mind of the first group, the problem is hindrance from grace. In the mind of the second group, the problem is how to obtain grace. Some think that wrongdoings will hinder us from receiving God's grace. Others think that achievements will enable us to obtain God's grace.

Friend, do you know what grace is? Grace is unconditional. It is free, and it is not given based on any reason. It is God's work of love which He bestows on us, the sinners. If God's grace were related to man's achievements, the nature of grace would immediately be lost. As long as a trace of achievement is allowed to remain in us, God must reward us according to our achievement. God is righteous. And since He is righteous, He is just. He has to reward and recompense man according to his achievements. But if God's giving is a recompense or reward, it is not grace. As soon as achievements come in, recompense must also come in and grace is out. If a man gives you a month's labor and you give him a month's wages, the payment cannot be considered a gift; it is a recompense. He has done something for you; it is his achievement. If it is an achievement, the payment is not grace, but recompense. Once recompense comes in, grace goes out.

Romans 4:4 makes the matter very clear: "Now to the one who works, his wages are not accounted according to grace, but according to what is due." Wrongdoings do not stop us from receiving grace; on the contrary, they afford us the opportunity to receive God's grace. Achievements do not help us to receive God's grace; on the contrary, they annul the nature of God's grace. Unless it is free, it is not grace. Unless it is given without reason and cause and unless it is a gift, it is not grace. If there is some reason or some cause involved, if there is a price involved, or if there is some work involved, the matter of recompense immediately comes in because God is righteous. Once recompense comes in, the nature of grace is lost.

If you are standing on a position that is above God, or even one that is equal with God, you cannot receive grace. That is why Romans 4 says clearly that no one can come before God and say that he has done this or that and, therefore, unashamedly ask for grace. If a person says that he is not like others who have extorted money or who are so unrighteous, that he fasts at least twice a week, that even though he may not have tithed, he at least offered up one-twentieth of what he has, he cannot receive God's grace. What is grace? Let me say this in an emphatic way—grace is receiving without having a reason to receive. Once there is a reason, it becomes recompense. If you have any achievements, the matter of recompense comes in and grace is out. We must pay much attention to this matter.

There is still another sentence in Romans which is very clear on this point: "But if by grace, it is no longer out of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace" (11:6). Someone in my family once said that we should give a gift to a certain doctor at the end of the year. When I asked why, I was told that two months earlier my two younger brothers were sick, and they were cared for by that doctor. Because the doctor was a friend, he would not accept any money for his services. Therefore, we were to buy him something. "In that case," I said, "we are not giving him something, but returning something." Why? Because there was a work and a debt. Strictly speaking, our giving was a returning of what we owed.

My friends, if we had any achievements before God, whether these achievements were great or small, God's salvation to us would become a payment of debt and would no longer be grace. Thank God that there is no one who can claim any achievements before God. Thank the Lord that we are saved by grace. If I, Watchman Nee, were saved by my achievements, I would

never say, "God, I thank You for giving me grace." Instead I would say, "God, I am saved because You have paid back Your debt." I could proudly claim that I am saved by achievements. Why is it that no one can save himself by achievements? It is because God wants to remove all pride from man, that man may do nothing other than thank and praise Him. Once the matter of achievements arises, grace is no longer grace.

Please remember that God cannot withhold grace from man because of his wrongdoings. Nor can He reduce His grace to man because of his wrongdoings. He has to give, and He cannot reduce His giving. Grace is not related to wrongdoings. What about achievements? In grace there is no possibility of mixture with anything, even in the nature of achievements. Grace is not God's payment of debt to us. It is not that God owed us and that now He is paying us back. Some may say, "Mr. Nee, we are not so extreme. Even though we dare not say that we come to God only by our achievements, you have to believe that we need some achievements before God. It is impossible to have nothing at all. We should do a little work, and then God can make up our lack. We will do our best, and God will make up the rest." My friends, we cannot say this. Grace is not God's payment of a debt. In the same way, neither is grace God's overpayment of a debt, as if God owed you five dollars, but is now returning ten to you. Grace is like someone giving you a new garment. It is not like someone patching up your torn garment. If grace is a patching up, it has lost its standing, and its nature is annulled.

Let me repeat again, grace has nothing to do with achievements. Man naturally sees that some people are better and others are worse. Therefore, he thinks that the better ones require less of God's grace and the worse ones require more of God's grace—a bigger patch for a bigger hole and a smaller patch for a smaller hole. But such a concept does not exist in the Bible.

Who has sinned? I believe all of us know the phrase by heart: "For all have sinned." Why is it that all have sinned? It is because they "fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). If the Bible were to say that all have sinned because all have broken the Ten Commandments, there would be a difference between great sinners and small sinners, for some may have transgressed nine commandments, while others may have transgressed only one. If the Bible were to say that all have sinned because all have fallen short of society's customs or the law of the land, there would still be some who are good and some who are not so good. But strangely enough, the Bible says that all have

sinned because all have fallen short of the glory of God. What then is the glory of God? If you want to understand what the glory of God is, you have to understand Romans 1 through 8. God's grace is linked to God's glory. Grace seeks out man on the lowest level, and glory brings man to the highest level. Romans 1 through 3 tells us how man has sinned. Then after giving the way of salvation by the Lord Jesus in chapters three through five, the crucifixion with Christ in chapters six and seven, and the work of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of chapter eight, Romans tells us the following at the end of chapter eight, "Whom He foreknew, He also predestinated...whom He predestinated, these He also called; and those whom He called, these He also justified; and those whom He justified, these He also glorified" (vv. 29-30). Salvation is God pulling a sinner from the mud of sin and taking him all the way to glory. Although we are justified, we know that justification is not enough. Justification is not the goal of God's salvation for us. God will not stop until we are in glory. Hence, Romans 1 through 8 begins with sins and ends with glory.

What does it mean to fall short of the glory of God? It means that one cannot enter into glory. All have sinned because they cannot enter into glory. If all have sinned because they have not honored their parents, you could find some "great" dishonoring ones, some "mild" dishonoring ones, and some "little" dishonoring ones. Perhaps for the 400 million Chinese, there are 400 million classes of dishonoring ones. But in falling short of the glory of God, that is, in failing to enter into glory, you and I are exactly the same. You may be a moralist, and I may be a criminal. As a criminal I cannot enter into glory, but neither can you as a moralist. Hence, before God all have fallen short of His glory, and no one is qualified to enter in.

You can go to the street and tell anyone that he has sinned. If he says that he has not sinned, you can ask if he thinks he can enter into glory. Of course, he will not know what glory is. If we are in God's light, and if we have a little knowledge of the Scripture, we will know that we are not qualified to enter in. None of us can enter in.

Two months ago, while I was in Hong Kong, the world tennis championship was there. The tennis pavilion where the match was held could hold only five to six hundred spectators. Another eight hundred people could not get in and had to stand outside. The problem was not whether they had money or not, whether they were male or female, or whether they were masters or slaves.

None of them could go in. Whether one was rich or poor, educated or illiterate, male or female, made no difference. The difference between them and those inside did not lie in their being rich or poor, male or female, educated or illiterate. The problem was that they could not get in.

In the same way, whether or not you are moral or whether or not you are gentle is not the question. The question is whether or not you can enter into glory. All those who cannot enter into glory are sinners and are disqualified before God. God has leveled everyone before Him. We have a plot of land in Jen-ru. Recently we needed to put some grass on it. To do that I had to hire some workers to level the ground. The question today is whether or not we can enter in. Regardless of whether or not you are moral, you cannot enter into glory. God has leveled everyone. Why has God leveled everyone? Galatians 3:22 tells us that "the Scripture has shut up all under sin in order that the promise out of faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." God has shut up all under sin. Everyone has become a sinner, so that all who believe in Jesus Christ may receive the grace of God. God has leveled everyone so that He might bestow grace on everyone.

Romans 11:32 says, "For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all." God has shut up all in disobedience. He has leveled them all. For what goal? The goal is that He might show mercy to all. Hence, before God achievements can have no place at all. Everyone stands on the same ground.

Romans 3:9 says, "What then? Are we better? Not at all! For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin." God's verdict is that both the Jews and the Gentiles are all under sin. There is absolutely no chance for achievements to have a place. In the portions of the Scriptures that we have just read, we see that all have been shut up in sin and disobedience in order that we may go to God to receive grace and mercy. What is God's grace? God's grace is His giving to man not according to what he deserves. God's grace does not give to man more than what he deserves or better than what he deserves. Grace is simply God giving to man what he should not have and does not deserve.

GOD'S GRACE NOT RELATED TO MAN'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Now we come to the third matter, man's responsibilities. God's grace can never be tied to man's responsibilities. What are man's responsibilities? Suppose I give a brother ten thousand dollars to send to a certain place, but because I am afraid that he will lose the money, I charge him, saying, "You are responsible for this money." What do I mean? I mean that if he loses the money, he has to pay it back. This is the meaning of responsibility. Wrongdoings are matters of the past. Achievements are also matters of the past. But responsibilities are matters of the future. If God is to give us grace, it cannot be tied to responsibility. When I ask a brother to take ten thousand dollars to the bank, that money is not his, so I tell him that he is responsible for the money. But if this money is a free gift to him, can I say, "You are responsible for it"? Surely not. Once I give the money away to him, the money is his. What he does with the money is up to him even if he throws it into a river or a trash can.

Some have said that prior to our salvation we did not have good works and were unable to save ourselves. There was no other way to be saved except to have God's grace save us. But now that we are saved, they say, we should do good works, for if we do not do good works now, we are again doomed to perish. Many think that salvation is of grace, but that maintaining salvation is of our merit and work. This is what I mean by responsibility. Many think that if we behave properly after we are saved, our salvation will be preserved, and if we do not behave properly, God will take back His salvation. If salvation can be taken back, is it grace anymore? If it is grace, there is no question of past merit, present work, or future responsibility. If we bring in future responsibility, then again it is no longer grace.

Once a preacher came to talk to me who did not believe that once a person is saved, he is forever saved. I asked him why he thought so. He said that he believed that man is saved by grace, but if man does not behave properly after salvation, he will perish. "Is this then grace?" I asked. Then I gave him an illustration. Suppose we go to a bookstore together and each of us pick out the same book to buy. When you ask the salesman the price, he tells you that it costs sixty cents. You give him sixty cents and take the book home. But I dig into my pockets and realize that I do not have any money. I want the same book also, so I tell the salesman that I have not brought any money with me, and ask if I can take the book now and send him the money later. He says that it is fine to do so because we know each other well. Thus, I take the same book home also. You have paid cash, but I have postponed the payment. Let me ask

you, was the cash transaction grace? Surely it was not, because the book was paid for with sixty cents. For man to be saved through good works is like a cash transaction. If you have done good works, you can go to God and He will say, "Fine, you can be saved." If a man is saved this way, his salvation is not through grace. Thank the Lord that no one is saved this way. How about my case of postponing the payment? This is like God advancing salvation to man. If man would not do good after salvation, his salvation will be claimed back from him. One would have to do good in order to keep his salvation. But this is not grace either. Grace is not a cash transaction nor is it like a postponed payment. In a cash transaction one pays now; with a postponed payment one pays later. But both have to pay. We do not purchase our salvation on credit. I told the preacher that if salvation is of grace, there is no need for good works. Then he asked, "Does this mean that we do not need good works anymore?" I said, "No. Christians need to do good works. But the good works that I am talking about have nothing to do with salvation. The good works that I am talking about have to do with the kingdom, with the reward and the crown. Salvation is not bought, nor is it purchased on credit. Salvation is given freely."

What does it mean to give freely? The Lord Jesus said, "And I give to them eternal life" (John 10:28). Eternal life is given to us by God. Once I went to buy something at a friend's shop. He and I know each other very well, so he would not take money from me. He said that he would give me the item I wanted. I could not persuade him to take the money, yet he insisted that I take the item. In the same way, God says that He will give us eternal life. He did not say it only to come back and check on it. He did not say that it would be ours if we do good and that He would take it back if we do not do good. I do not mean that Christians should not have good works. I hate loose living, but this has nothing to do with my salvation. Hallelujah! Salvation is given to us; it is not bought by us. However, we should not despise good works. Good works are related to the kingdom reward, to the crown or punishment, but they have nothing to do with salvation. If salvation is of grace, the question of the future is out.

Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." What is a free gift? A free gift is a present. I cannot send a present to your house, and then later send you a bill for it. If it is a present, it is given absolutely free and cannot be changed.

Therefore, grace is not related to your past wrongdoings, your present achievements, or your future responsibility. If it is related to your future responsibility, it is not grace; it is a purchase on credit instead. Thank God that eternal life is not a purchase on credit. It is a gift. Thank the Lord that eternal life is God's gift in His Son Jesus Christ.

Since salvation is given to us by God, we must remember one thing after we are saved: salvation is obtained strictly through believing, and it is preserved apart from our faithfulness. Therefore, the condition for preserving our salvation is the same as the condition for obtaining salvation. Since salvation is obtained freely it is also preserved freely. Thank God that because the obtaining of salvation is free the preserving of salvation is likewise eternally free.

At the end of the book of Revelation, after the new heaven, the new earth, the kingdom, the lake of fire, Satan's end, and the great white throne have all been covered, the Bible says, "Let him who wills take the water of life freely" (22:17b). Thank the Lord that He has purposely put taking freely of the water of life at the end of chapter twenty-two. After we have seen the lake of fire, the second death, Satan's end, the kingdom, the new heaven and the new earth, we may fear that God would harden His heart again; but after all these things, God purposely stated that the water of life is free. There is no charge for it. Thank the Lord that we have grace through Jesus Christ, and that this grace is free. It is not related to our responsibility.

I have heard many times that we have to do good and repay God's grace. These are common sayings in the church today. But I have to ask where in the Bible is there a verse that says that we have to repay God's grace? This word is too contradictory. If there is repayment, there is no grace. And if there is grace, there is no need of repayment. Thank the Lord that in the whole New Testament we are never told to repay anything. It is true that we Christians ought to have good works. But why should we have good works? Why do we have to suffer for the Lord? Why do we have to bear the shame? Why do we serve the Lord? As the Lord has dealt with us in love, so we deal with the Lord in love; but there is no thought of a trade here. It is not that God gives me so much and I give back so much in return. Because He has loved me, I cannot help but love Him; because He loved me, He was crucified for me; and because I love Him, for Him I bear the cross willingly. What He has given me has been given freely, and what I am giving Him is also given freely. The

difficulty lies in man's legal mind. In everything he has the thought of bargain and law. Even the matter of salvation is seen from a bargaining perspective. Today if we work, serve the Lord, suffer reproach, or bear the cross, it is not because we want to pay back His grace—it is because we love Him. The love with which He has loved us has taken hold of us, captured our hearts, and constrained us to serve Him.

If you speak of repayment, you are ignorant of the value of the grace you have received. If you borrow ten dollars from a friend today, you will want to repay him. If you borrow a hundred dollars, you will want to repay him as well. If you borrow a thousand dollars, or even ten thousand dollars, you might still want to repay him. But if you borrow a million dollars, you may not have the thought of repaying him. And if you borrow ten million dollars or a hundred million dollars from him, you cannot imagine repaying him. If you are going to borrow a trillion dollars from him, you do not even know how to think about repayment anymore, for repayment has become impossible. If you want to repay God today, it simply means that you do not know how much God has given you. You do not know the depth, length, height, and breadth of God's grace to you. If you realized just a little of the length, breadth, height, and depth of the grace that you have received, you would quiet down and give up the idea of repayment. You would owe the Lord willingly, saying, "I am a willing debtor forever." The grace that He has given us is too great. Even if we want to repay, there is no possibility to do so.

My friends, if you owe someone a hundred million dollars, would you have the audacity to buy him a ten-cent cookie and call it your "little token of appreciation"? Can this be even a "little token"? Our God has done so much for us. Dare we say that we are giving Him "a little token" as repayment? No! We can only say that God has freely given us so much. I am happy to be an eternal debtor. God has loved us with an eternal love. There is no limit to the length, breadth, height, and depth of His love to us. Are we going to repay God with a "ten-cent cookie"? We can only say that we accept His love willingly. I hate to hear men talk about repaying! I hate the thought of the law! I only wish that God's children would see that as God is grace to us, we may be grace to Him. As God has dealt with us generously, let us deal with God generously.

Hallelujah! There is no question of wrongdoings, achievements, or responsibilities. Salvation is nothing other than God for me. It is not I for God.

Grace is what God has done for me. It is not what I have done for God. Please remember the peace and joy of a sinner and the peace and joy of a Christian do not lie in how much they love the Lord, but in how much the Lord loves them. Our peace and joy do not lie in how much we have done for the Lord, but in how much the Lord has done for us. We are not resting daily on what we have, but on what God is. We must be delivered from ourselves. We must see God in the light of the gospel. We have to see that we are resting on what God is and what He has. We are resting on the grace and mercy of God. If we see this, we will not fail or be sorrowful. If we rest on ourselves, considering that we are quite good and that we love the Lord quite much, we will be like drifting sand; we will not be able to build a house on it. We cannot find any peace and joy in ourselves. We can only find them in the Lord, in God.

It is wonderful to realize that while we live on this earth, God is for us. Do you remember the words of Romans 8:31? "If God is for us, who can be against us?" I do not believe there is a better word for us than this. When I come to break bread on the Lord's Day, I do not ask myself whether or not I have behaved properly for the last few days. Rather, I ask if the Lord has loved me the last few days. Perhaps your condition for the last few days has been very poor. Perhaps you have been very cold in your emotions for the last few days. But you only need to ask if the Lord still loves you. If the Lord does not love you anymore, you can withhold your praise. But if the Lord still loves you, you have to praise Him. Have you noticed how the disciples were with the Lord for three and a half years and yet were so foolish in the end as to argue about who was greater among them? Yet the Bible says that the Lord, having loved His own, loved them to the uttermost (John 13:1). Thank the Lord that everything depends on Him. If it were up to your love, if you had to trust in yourself, it would be like putting a candle in a boat, launching the boat to sea, and sailing it in stormy weather. You can imagine how shaky that would be. Thank God that everything is grace. Everything depends on Him. May God grant us to truly know the characteristics of the grace of the Lord Jesus.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FUNCTION OF THE LAW

We realize that man's position before God is that of a sinner. Now, let us consider why God set up the law. Once we understand the law, we will be able to understand God's work.

God has always known man's condition, but does man know his own condition? Since sin has been manifested before God, it should also be felt in man's conscience. But is man's conscience aware of sin? Unfortunately, it is not. Because man is unaware of sin, we need the functioning of the law. Tonight we will study this matter.

What is the law? The law is nothing other than God's demand on man that man work for God. In Romans, Ephesians, and Galatians, the apostle Paul shows repeatedly that man is saved by grace, not by the law. In other words, man is saved because God works for man, not because man works for God. It is not a matter of being something before God or doing something for God, but a matter of God Himself coming into our midst to become something and do something for us. This is why the apostle, under the revelation of the Holy Spirit, constantly emphasized that, both for the Gentile and the Jew, salvation is absolutely of grace and not of the law. We want to spend some time to see that it is impossible for man to be saved by the law. I am not using the term law in reference to the law mentioned in the Old Testament. Law, as I use it here, refers to a principle, that is, the principle of man working for God. We will see whether or not our salvation is due to our working for God.

The way I use the word law is not without a biblical basis. The apostle Paul used words in a very precise and meaningful way. In the Bible the word Christ is often used. In the original language, sometimes there is no definite article before the word Christ. At other times there is a definite article, and thus we should understand it as the Christ. Unfortunately, not many versions translate this accurately. Another word that is often used is faith. Sometimes there is a definite article; in these places it is the faith. Similarly, there are places in the Bible where the word law has a definite article, and we should read the law.

The meanings of these words with the definite article is quite different from their meanings without the definite article. For example, when Christ is mentioned, it refers to the Lord Jesus Christ; but when the Christ is mentioned, you and I are also included. When the Bible speaks of the individual Christ, there is no definite article; but when it speaks of the Christ who includes us, we find the Christ. When the Bible speaks of our individual believing, it uses faith, without the article. But when it speaks of what we believe in, that is, our faith, it uses the faith. Bible translators all know that whenever the Bible mentions the faith, it is not referring to our individual believing, but to that which we believe in. What then is the law? In the Bible, the law always refers to the Mosaic law, the law in the Old Testament. But if there is no definite article before law, it refers to the requirement God places upon man.

Therefore, let us keep in mind that law in the Bible does not merely refer to the law given to us by God through Moses. In many places in the Bible, law refers to the principle God applies toward us, or the principle of God's requirement of us. The law does not only mean the Mosaic law, the law given on Mount Sinai, or the Old Testament law. It also means the condition for fellowship between God and man. The condition for fellowship between God and man is God's requirement upon man, what God wants man to do for Him, to accomplish for Him.

Is man saved by the works of the law? Does God save man because man has done things for God? The whole world says we must do good before God will save us. If we put this in biblical terms, it means that we must have the works of the law in order to be saved. Those who talk this way have made two great mistakes. The first is that they do not know who man is. The second is that they do not know what God's intention was when He gave man the law. If we know what we are, surely we will not say that man needs to have works of the law in order to be saved. If we know the purpose of God's giving the law, neither will we say that man can be saved through the works of the law. Because man has made these two great mistakes, he bears the wrong concept and says wrong things.

THE FIRST GREAT MISTAKE—
NOT KNOWING WHAT MAN IS

Why would man say that he can be saved by the works of the law when he does not even know what he is? It is because man does not know how evil he is; he does not know that he is fleshly. Since man has become fleshly, there are three things in him that are unchangeable: his conduct, his lust, and his will. Because man is fleshly, whatever he does is sin and evil. At the same time, his lust within is actively tempting him, provoking him to sin all the time. In addition, man's will and desire reject God. Since man's conduct is against God, his lust is provoking him to sin, and his will is rebellious against God, there is no possibility for him to have the works of the law and be obedient to God. Therefore, it is impossible for man to satisfy God's requirement by the righteousness of the law. Not only do we have our outward conduct, but we also have the lust in our body. Not only do we have the lust in our body, but we also have the will in our soul. You may be able to deal with your conduct, but the lust stirring within you, even if it is not successful in precipitating sinful, outward conduct, exists and provokes you all the time. And even if you hate your lust and do your best to deal with it, your will is altogether not compatible with God. Deep in his heart, man is rebellious against God and wants to crucify the Lord Jesus. On the one hand, the cross signifies God's love; but on the other hand, it signifies man's sin. The cross signifies the great love God has in dealing with man; but it also signifies the tremendous hatred man has toward God. The Lord Jesus was crucified on the cross not only by the Jews, but also by the Gentiles. Man's will toward God has never changed. Man's will is totally at enmity with God.

Romans 8:7-8 says, "Because the mind set on the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, for neither can it be. And those who are in the flesh cannot please God." The mind set on the flesh is enmity against God. Those who are in the flesh are not subject to the law of God, neither can they be. We do not understand man enough. We think that man is still curable and useful. Hence, we say that the works of the law can still save man. But man can never be subject to the law of God; it is just not in our nature. In our conduct there is not the power to be subject to the law, and our nature cannot be. Not only are we unable to be subject to the law, we simply are not willing to be. Being unable to be in subjection is a matter of our nature and our lust; being unwilling to be in subjection is a matter of our will. Basically, man is not subject to God in his will.

Therefore, the law will manifest nothing except man's weakness, uncleanness, and sinfulness. It will not manifest man's righteousness. If one

says that a person can have life and be justified by the works of the law, he really does not know man. If man were not fleshly or sinful, the law could perhaps give him life. This is why Galatians 3:12 says, "He who does them [the works of the law] shall live because of them." Unfortunately, human beings are all sinners. They are fleshly and powerless in being subject to God, and they have no heart to be subject to God. Man does not have power to do the works of the law, nor does he have the heart to do the works of the law. The law is good but the person who does the works of the law is not. We all must admit this.

THE SECOND GREAT MISTAKE—
NOT KNOWING GOD'S INTENTION IN GIVING THE LAW

Man thinks that he can be saved by the works of the law because he has never read the Bible or seen the light or the heavenly revelation. He has never understood God's desire and intention. He has never understood the way of salvation. If you want to know whether or not you can be saved by the works of the law, you need to first ask why God gave the law. Only after you find out God's purpose in giving the law will you know whether or not you can be saved by the works of the law.

Before me is a podium. If I ask you what this is, some may answer that it is a high chair. A small girl may answer that it is a bed short of two legs. Another may say that this is a dresser because there are drawers in it. If I were to ask a brother, he may say that this is a bookshelf, because one can put books on it. If I were to ask ten people, I might get ten different answers. A bookseller, for instance, may tell me that it is a perfect sales counter. Every person would have an answer according to his own experience and concept. But if you want to know what it really is, you need to ask the one who made it in the first place. If he tells you that this is a dresser, then it is a dresser. If he tells you that this is a bookshelf, then it is a bookshelf. If he tells you that this is a podium, then it is a podium. In the same manner, if you ask me or anyone else what the function of the law is, you are asking the wrong person. The law was given by God, so we have to ask God about its function. Once God tells us His intention in giving the law, we will know whether man can be saved by the works of the law or not. Therefore, we must spend some time to look into the Bible concerning this matter. We must see how the law came in, step by step. We

have to see historically from the record of the Bible why God gave man the law.

THE LAW NOT BEING GOD'S ORIGINAL THOUGHT

The first thing we must see is that the law was not at all in God's original thought. The law was added in afterwards; it was brought in to meet certain urgent needs. It was produced to take care of certain things that came in along the way. The law was not in God's original thought; grace was in God's original thought. Second Timothy 1:9-10 says, "Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the times of the ages but now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who nullified death and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel." Here the apostle Paul tells us that God had a thought, and this thought began before the times of the ages, before the creation of the world. This was God's original thought. And what kind of thought was it? Paul says that this grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the times of the ages. Before man ever sinned, and even before the creation of the world, God had already made the decision to give us His grace through Christ Jesus. Therefore, grace was God's original thought. It was something that God planned from the very beginning.

Why did God want to give us grace? Paul says that God "has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace." God's will is to dispense His grace, and this grace saves us. He saved us and called us with a holy calling so that we may enjoy His glory. This is what God's grace is doing. He desired to save us and to call us with a holy calling according to His purpose, according to what He plans to do. Here Paul was very careful; he added a phrase to show us whether the law is according to God's purpose. He says, "Not according to our works." God's salvation is not according to how much we can do for God; it is not according to how much responsibility we can bear before Him. Rather, it is God coming to accomplish something for us, and it is God giving us His grace. This grace was always related to His plan. So let us remember that before the times of the ages, God's thought was grace, not works or the law.

Paul continues, "Which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the times of the ages but now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior

Christ Jesus." This grace has not been manifested until now. Hence, you see that though this grace was planned long ago, it was not until the Lord Jesus came that we knew what grace really was. What does this grace do for us? Let us read on: "Who nullified death and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel." When the Lord Jesus was manifested, He abolished works as well as the result of works. The result of evil works is death. Even if you have done the worst works, the most that the law can do is require your death. After you die, the law cannot do anything else.

You may ask, "What happens if my works have not violated the law? Do I still need to die?" Yes. But the Lord has also nullified death. The Lord has done away with works, and He has done away with death. This is our gospel, which was planned before the times of the ages, even though it was not manifested until the appearing of the Lord Jesus. Hence, the basic thought with God was grace.

After man was created, both Adam and Eve sinned and rebelled. Sin entered into the world through one man. But God did not give man the law at that time. For a period of about 1600 years after man sinned, God did not give man the law. God had no demands on man during that period of time. God allowed history to take its natural course. Then one day, four hundred and thirty years before Moses instituted the law, God spoke to Abraham, the father of faith, and chose him to be the one through whom Christ would come into the world. God chose Abraham and gave him the great promise that all the nations would be blessed through his seed (Gen. 12:3; 22:18). Notice that the seed is singular, not plural; it is one seed, not many seeds. Paul explained in the book of Galatians that this seed refers to the Lord Jesus (Gal. 3:16). When God spoke to Abraham, it was the first time God revealed His purpose that had been planned before the times of the ages. God told him that His purpose, from before the times of the ages, was that through his seed, Jesus Christ, the nations would be blessed. Abraham was an idol worshipper, yet God chose him and gave him a promise. He was the first one to be without works; he was a person of faith. Hence, God unfolded His purpose before him.

You have to pay attention to one particular point here. God's word to Abraham is unconditional. God simply said, "I will save and bless the world through your seed." He gave no conditions. God did not say that Abraham's descendants had to be this or that, or that the kingdom to come forth from him in the future had to be this or that before he would have a seed and the

world would be blessed. No. God simply said that he would have a seed who would save the world. It did not matter if Abraham was good or bad; it did not matter if his descendants were good or bad; and it did not matter if his kingdom was good or bad. There was no condition attached. This is the way He wanted it done. He would cause the seed to bring blessing to the people in the world.

After this word was spoken, Christ the Son of God did not immediately come to the world. Abraham begot Isaac, but Isaac did not come to save the world. Isaac was not the Son of God. Four hundred and thirty years later, Moses and Aaron came. And though they were very good people, they were not the Christ of God. Through God's revelation, Paul pointed out to us that the seed of Abraham does not refer to many seeds, but to one seed, who did not come until two thousand years later. There is a great reason why the seed did not come sooner. It is true that God wants to do things for man, that God wants to give man grace. However, will man allow God to do things for him? God sees that we are not doing well, and He wants to help us; but we may still think that we are quite capable. We are evil, but we may still consider ourselves to be good. We are filthy, but we may still consider ourselves to be clean. We are weak, but we may still consider ourselves to be strong in everything. We are useless, but we may still consider ourselves to be useful. We human beings are sinful and completely incapable, but we may still consider ourselves to be good and useful. God's purpose from before the times of the ages was to give grace, and in time He told Abraham that He would indeed give grace to man. But because man was ignorant, weak, useless, sinful, and deserving to die and perish, God had no choice but to give man the law four hundred and thirty years after He gave Abraham the promise. After God gave man the law, man found out that he was sinful. God put the law there to let man find out if he is right or not and if he is able or not. God put the burden of the law there to let man see if he could lift it or not. Let us remember that God's giving of the law was not His original intention. I must emphasize that the law was something added in for meeting a temporary need. It was not something in God's original intention.

Let us take a look at Galatians 3:15-22. We must consider these verses carefully because they are very important. Verse 15 says, "Brothers, I speak according to man, though it is a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one nullifies it or makes additions to it." Let us lay aside man's covenant with God for a moment and consider the covenants men make among

themselves. Suppose someone is selling a house, and a contract has been agreed upon and signed. Can the seller come later and ask for two hundred dollars more? Can he, after signing the contract, go and consider a little more and then tear the contract up? No. Even with contracts between men, once they are signed, it is impossible to add conditions to them or to subtract conditions from them. If a contract between men is like this, how much more a covenant between God and man!

How did God make His covenant with man? The next verse says, "But to Abraham were the promises spoken and to his seed" (v. 16). God covenanted with Abraham through promises because it concerned the future. What is already accomplished is grace; what is not yet accomplished can only be a promise. Because the Lord Jesus had not yet come, we cannot say that God's covenant with Abraham was grace. Its nature was indeed grace, but because it had not been manifested, it was still a promise. This promise was given to Abraham and to his seed. Paul says, "He does not say, ‘And to the seeds,’ as concerning many, but as concerning one: ‘And to your seed,’ who is Christ" (v. 16). The seed is singular, not plural; it is one, Christ. God promised Abraham that he would bring forth Christ and that through Christ the nations would be blessed. Verse 14 says, "In order that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." This is the covenant God made with Abraham.

Since God wants to bless the nations through Christ Jesus, why did He give man the law four hundred and thirty years later? Since the covenant God made with Abraham could not be annulled or supplemented, why would not the Lord Jesus just come to give us grace? Why did the problem of the law intervene? You have to see the argument Paul was making here. Paul was explaining why after four hundred and thirty years the law came in. Verse 17 says, "And I say this: A covenant previously ratified by God, the law, having come four hundred and thirty years after, does not annul so as to make the promise of none effect." Although God gave the law to man, the covenant He made four hundred and thirty years before could not be made of none effect. God could not cancel the covenant formerly made after some further thought four hundred and thirty years later. The law is something absolutely contradictory to promise and grace. What is a promise? It is something given to someone freely. Although he may not have it yet, he will definitely have it later. But what is the law? The law implies that one has to do this or that in order to get something. You can see that these two things are completely

opposite. The promise implies that God will do something for man; the law implies that man will do something for God.

Verse 18 says, "For if the inheritance is of law, it is no longer of promise." If what was to be given is according to the principle of the law, it cannot be according to the principle of promise. These two things are completely opposite.

Verse 19 says, "Why then the law?" Now the problem arises; here we have the problem. This is a most difficult problem to solve. The law and the promise are basically contradictory in their natures. If you have the law, you cannot have the promise; if you have the promise, you cannot have the law. These two matters cannot stand together. But now there is the law, and there is also the promise. God gave the promise, and then four hundred and thirty years later He gave the law. What should you do? If the covenant made by God could not be changed, either by subtracting from it or by adding to it, why then was the law given? Since a covenant cannot be changed, a promise will always be a promise, and grace will always be grace. Why then is there the need for the law?

In verse 19 Paul gives us the reason: "It was added because of the transgressions." What does it mean to add something? Recently I went to a certain place to work. During my stay there, I went with a few brothers to a restaurant for dinner one night. Because we do not have a home there, we went to a restaurant and ordered a meal of five dishes. These dishes were eaten very quickly, and so we asked the waiter to add one more dish. The addition of another dish was not our original intention; it was added to meet the immediate need. In a similar way, Paul said that the law was added. Actually, God does not have to give us the law, and neither did He need to give it to the Jews. God gave the law to the Jews because He wanted to show the world through the Jews that He gave the law because of transgressions.

Why was the law added because of transgressions? Let us look now at the last part of Romans 4:15: "But where there is no law, neither is there transgression." And let us also look at Romans 5:20: "And the law entered in alongside that the offense might abound." The purpose of the law is to cause the offense to abound. What does this mean? Sin entered the world through man, and therefore, sin is in the world. Death came from sin and began to reign. From the time of Adam to the time of Moses, sin was in the world. But

how can we prove this? It is evidenced by death being in the world. If there were no sin from Adam until Moses, man would not have died. The fact that from Adam until Moses all died proves that sin was there. Although there was sin during that time, there was no law. Hence, there was only sin but no transgression. What is transgression? Sin was real and present in the world, but man did not know that sin was here until the law of God came. Through the law God showed us that we have sinned. Actually, there was sin already within us. We were corrupted already, but we did not know about it until the law came, at which time the sin within was manifested as transgressions.

The law is like a thermometer. A person may be sick with a fever. But if you say to him, "Friend, your complexion does not look very good; you have a temperature," he may not believe you. All you would have to do is get a thermometer and put it in his mouth. After two minutes you could show him definitely that he has a temperature. We were already sinful; we already had a "temperature"; but we did not know about it. So God gave us a standard. Although the law may not be a perfect standard, it is a sufficiently high standard. God uses the law to measure us. By it we see that we have transgressed. Once we see that we have transgressed the law, we know that we have sinned. Sin was within man already; but without transgressions, he would never have confessed that he had sin. It was only after he transgressed that he would confess that he really had sin.

When I read the Bible, I marvel at the words the apostle used. In these verses he did not use the word sin; rather, he used the word transgression three times. Sin is always within man, but until it is carried out, sin does not become transgression. There must be something to transgress before there can be the possibility of transgression. Let me illustrate. Suppose there is a little child who always gets his clothes dirty. He always uses his sleeves to wipe his nose, and his clothes get dirty quickly. In his temperament, habit, thought, and conscience, he never considers that to dirty his clothes is a sin. His father does not consider it a sin either. The fact of sin is there even though there is no disobedience. The child's clothes are very dirty, but he does not mind it at all. His conscience feels fine, because his father has never said that this is wrong. He can be unconcerned about it. Even when his clothes are very dirty, he can still eat with his father, sit with his father, and walk with his father. Everything is fine as far as he is concerned. In other words, he has not transgressed. But one day his father tells him that he cannot get his clothes dirty anymore, and that if he does it again, he will spank him. If the child has

been doing this habitually, his father's speaking will manifest his sins. Originally there was sin only, no disobedience. But once the child disobeys, there is transgression. In the same way, only when there is the law will there be the transgression. When the law tells you to do this or that, transgression will be manifested. Originally this child could come before his father uprightly and without fear. But now if he behaves according to his habit and does this again, he will have no peace within and his conscience will speak.

All the Bible readers and all those who understand God's will know that God did not give us the law with the intention that we keep it. The law was not meant for us to keep, but for us to break. God gave us the law so that we would transgress against it. This may be the first time for many of you to hear such a word, and you may feel that it is strange. God has known all along that you have sin. God knows this; but you yourself do not know this. Therefore God has given you the law to transgress so that you will know about yourself. God knows that you are no good, but you think that you are fine. Therefore, God has given the law. After you transgress against it once, twice, and a number of times, you will say that you have sin. Salvation will not come to you until then. Only when you admit that you do not have a way, that it is impossible for you to go on conducting yourself in such a way, will you be willing to receive the Lord Jesus as your Savior. Only then will you be willing to receive God's grace.

We have already seen that in order to receive grace one needs to humble himself. We are sinners, and we have committed sins. What causes us to humble ourselves? It is the law. Human beings are proud. All human beings think that they are strong and consider themselves to be good. But God gave us the law, and once we look at the law, we have to humble ourselves and confess that we are really not good at all. This is what Paul was talking about when he said that before he had read from the law that we should not covet, he did not know what it was to covet. However, once he saw the law, he realized that there was coveting within him (Rom. 7:7-8). This does not mean that before Paul saw the law there was no coveting in him. There was coveting within him long before. He had always coveted, but he did not realize that it was coveting. It was not until the law told him so that he realized it. Therefore, the law does not cause us to do anything that we have not done before; the law merely exposes what is in us already. That is why I say that God gave man the law not to keep it, but to break it. Nor does the law afford man an

opportunity to transgress; rather, the law shows man that he will transgress. The law allows man to see what God has already seen.

Romans 7 explains this matter very clearly. Let us look at this chapter, beginning with verses 7 and 8, "What then shall we say? Is the law sin? Absolutely not! But I did not know sin except through the law; for neither did I know coveting, except the law had said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, seizing the opportunity through the commandment, worked out in me coveting of every kind; for without the law sin is dead." Without the law, I do not feel that coveting is sin, even though there is coveting within me. Hence, coveting within me is dead; that is, I am not conscious of it. However, after the law comes, I resolve not to covet anymore. But I still covet, and the sin is made alive. Verse 9 says, "And I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died."

Friends, remember that God gave you the law for one reason only: to show you that you have always been full of sin. Because you did not see your own sin, you acted proudly. The law came to try you out. You may say that you do not covet. However if you just try not to covet, what will be the eventual result? The more you try, the weaker you become and the more covetous you will be. You purpose not to covet, but the moment you purpose this way, you find yourself coveting everything. You covet today, and you will covet tomorrow; you covet everywhere you turn. Now sin is alive, the law is alive, and you are dead. Originally sin was dead and you were fine, but now that the law has come you cannot avoid coveting. The more you try not to covet, the more covetous you become. The problem is that man's being is fleshly, and because man is fleshly, his will is weak, his conduct is rebellious, and his desires are filthy.

Verse 10 says, "And the commandment, which was unto life, this very commandment was found to me to be unto death." If man can truly keep the law, he will live. But I cannot keep it; hence, I die.

Verse 11 says, "For sin, seizing the opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me." If the law had not told me that I should not do this or that, sin would go easy on me and would not be that active in me. But ever since the law came and told me that I should not covet, sin through the commandment has tempted me and put this matter of

coveting in my mind. The law tells me that I should not covet, and I purpose not to covet; but instead of not coveting, I covet even more.

For a period of time I felt that I had been lying. I did not lie deliberately, but I would sometimes unintentionally say too much about something or too little about something else. When I realized this, I resolved that from then on with me yes would be yes and no would be no. Regardless of whom I spoke to, I resolved to speak accurately. Before I resolved this, I really did not lie that much, but after I made the decision, it became so easy for me to lie. I was actually getting worse. The following Sunday I sent a note saying that I would not give a message that day. When I was asked for a reason, I said, "I have found out that my speaking is full of lies. This is quite serious. I am afraid that even my message will be all lies." When I did not pay attention to lying, lying seemed dead. Of course, that does not mean that I did not lie. However, it was not until I started paying attention to lying, not until I was enlightened by the law to deal with my lies, that I felt that all my words were lies. It seems that lies were standing right next to me. Therefore, I have found that originally the lies were dead, but now the lies have been made alive. Everywhere I turn, the lies are there. Sin has killed me through the law and I become helpless.

Verse 12 continues, "So then the law is holy, and the commandment holy and righteous and good." We should never consider the law evil. The law is always holy, righteous, and good. "Did then that which is good become death to me? Absolutely not! But sin did" (v. 13a). At the beginning, sin was dead and I was not conscious of it; but when the law came to check me out, I became dead. "Did then that which is good become death to me? Absolutely not! But sin did, that it might be shown to be sin by working out death in me through that which is good, that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful" (v. 13). Initially, we did not sense that sin is that sinful. But when the law came and we tried to keep it, we realized where our sins are and how sinful and thoroughly evil they are.

You can see the function of God's law here. The law is like a thermometer. A thermometer will not give you a fever. but if you have a fever, the thermometer will surely make it manifest. The law will not cause you to sin, but if you have sins, God's law will immediately show you that you are a sinner. Originally, you did not know that you are a sinner, but now you do.

The law came to judge man's sin. The law was established because man has sin. You never see God keeping the law because there is simply no possibility for God to transgress the law. Hence, no law is put upon Him. God never told the Lord Jesus to love the Lord His God with all His heart, with all His soul, with all His strength, and with all His will, and to love His neighbor as Himself. The Lord Jesus simply did not need it. He spontaneously loves the Lord His God with all His heart, with all His soul, with all His strength, and with all His will; He spontaneously loves His neighbor as Himself, even beyond Himself. Therefore, the law is useless to Him. And God did not tell Adam not to covet and not to steal. Why would Adam need to covet? Why would Adam need to steal? God had already given everything on the earth to him. The Ten Commandments were not given to Adam because Adam had no need of them. Rather, the law was specifically given to the Israelites because it showed fleshly man his inward condition and his sin within. If no Chinese had ever stolen, there would be no need for a clause in Chinese law concerning stealing. Because man steals, there is a clause in the law which says that one should not steal. Hence, the law exists because of sin. When man sinned, the law came in.

Now let us come back to Galatians 3 and continue with verse 19: "Why then the law? It was added because of the transgressions." Now we are clear. God purposed before the times of the ages to give grace to man. Later He gave Abraham a promise. In eternity it was merely His purpose. With Abraham, it was something spoken: He would deal with man in grace. Why then did God give man the law four hundred and thirty years after that? It was added because of the transgressions. In order for man's sins to become transgressions, the law was given to man. In this way, man realized that he had sin and would wait "until the seed should come to whom the promise was made" (v. 19). It was not until the whole world saw that they were sinners and that they were really hopeless that they were willing to receive the Lord Jesus Christ whom God had promised. Even if God had given man His salvation earlier, man would not have taken it. Man does not want God's grace, but because man has transgressions and is hopeless, he will possibly receive God's grace.

Verse 19 ends in this way: "It being ordained through angels in the hand of a mediator." The "it" here refers to the law mentioned above. The law was not only added because of transgressions, but was also ordained by a mediator. There are these two features to the law: it was added because of

transgressions, and it was ordained through angels in the hand of a mediator. Why was the law ordained through the hand of a mediator? Verse 20 explains: "But a mediator is not a mediator for one." Have you ever been an intermediary or a go-between? An intermediary acts on behalf of two parties. Why does the law have a mediator? It is because with the law there is the side of God and the side of man. Man has to do certain things for God before God will do certain things for man. When parties A and B draft a contract, the contract states what A must do and what B will do in return and vice versa. A mediator will then serve as a witness between the two parties. The law states what God's responsibility to man is and what man's responsibility to God is. If either side fails, the whole matter falls through.

Hallelujah! What follows in verse 20 is wonderful: "But God is one." But God is one! The law implies two sides. If either side has problems, the whole matter falls through. In giving the law, God said that we should do this and that we should do that. If we fail to do them, the whole matter will fall through. But in making the promise, "God is one," regardless of how we are. In promise and in grace, there is no mention of our side, only of God's side. As long as there is no problem on God's side, there will be no problem at all. The question today is whether God can save Abraham and whether He can preserve him. The question is not how we are. In the promise, there is nothing that involves us, nothing that depends on how we are.

The principle of the law can be compared to buying books from our gospel bookroom. If I spend $1.60, I can purchase one copy of The Spiritual Man. If I give the brothers there the money, they will give me the book. If they have the book but I do not have the money, the transaction will not be made. Nor will the transaction be made if I have the money but they do not have the book. If one side has a problem, the deal falls through. Therefore, the law is of two sides. If one side fails, the whole matter falls through. But what about the promise? The promise is like our magazine The Christian; one does not have to pay for it because it is free. The law is: if you do something for me, I will do something for you in return. If you do certain things, you will get something back; if you cannot do them, you will not get anything. Hence, the law is of two sides. By making a promise, God gives us the grace regardless of whether we do well or not. It has nothing to do with us; how we are is not a problem at all. Thank God that promise is of one side only. All that is needed is one side.

Verse 21 says, "Is then the law against the promises of God? Absolutely not!" Those with little knowledge may say that the law contradicts grace. It is right to say that law and promise are two completely different things, but there is no contradiction at all; the law is merely the servant of the promise. It is something used by God and something inserted by God. Law and promise may appear contradictory in nature, but in God's hand they are not contradictory at all. The law was used by God to fulfill His purpose. Without the law, God's promise would not have been fulfilled. Please remember that God uses the law to fulfill this goal. Hence, law and promise do not contradict each other at all.

Paul concludes in this way: "For if a law had been given which was able to give life, righteousness would have indeed been of law" (v. 21). If a man could obtain righteousness by the law, he could have life through the law. However man cannot do this. Therefore, "the Scripture has shut up all under sin" (v. 22a). What did God use to shut us all up? He used the law. Whoever is shut up by the law has to admit that he is a sinner. God shuts up all under sin "in order that the promise out of faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe" (v. 22b). Hallelujah! The law of God is something God uses to save us. It is not something God uses to condemn us. The law is absolutely something used by God. Tonight every one of us here has been shut up. Every one of us is a sinner. God has used the law to show us that we are sinners so that He may save us.

CHAPTER FIVE

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

In the previous meetings we have seen that man has sinned and that God's salvation is based on the fact that man has sinned. If man had not sinned, there would be no need for salvation. Since man has sinned, God has given the law to show man that he has sinned. God's law came to the world to cause man's transgressions to abound. Originally, man had only sin; he did not have transgressions. But when the law came, man had not only sin, but transgressions as well. After man transgresses, he realizes that he is a sinner. Thank the Lord that though we have sin and though we have transgressed, God, who is love, purposed to give us grace and mercy. He purposed to do something for us to solve the problems that we cannot solve ourselves.

In this meeting, however, we must see something else. Although God loves us and shows mercy on us and although He fully intends to grant us grace, there is one thing that makes it very difficult for God to do this. God cannot bestow grace upon us immediately; He cannot give us eternal life directly. There is a dilemma which God must solve before He can grant grace to us. The problem, which the Bible mentions frequently, is God's own righteousness.

The phrase God's righteousness has confused many theologians for centuries. If we read the Bible without prejudice and preconceived notions, God will show us what His righteousness is. We can see this matter clearly without much difficulty. Tonight we hope to see, by the grace of God, what God's righteousness is. In other words, we hope to see the difficulty God encounters when He saves us.

HIS SALVATION MATCHING HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS

If God is to save us, He must save us to a condition that matches, or measures up to Himself. If God is to give us salvation, He cannot give it in a manner that conflicts with His nature, His method, and His way. We are sinners full of transgressions and, therefore, have no thought of righteousness at all. If we wanted to be saved, we would probably use any means possible, whether straight or crooked, good or bad. We would try to be saved by any of

a thousand and one ways. As long as we can be saved in some way, it is good enough for us. We do not care if the procedure is proper or if the method is right. As long as we are saved, we are satisfied. We could not care less from where the salvation comes, and whether or not it is right. In this sense, we are like thieves. All that a thief cares about is getting the money. He does not care where the money comes from. As long as he gets the money, he is satisfied. He has no concept of right and wrong; he has no concept of righteousness and unrighteousness. But we must realize that salvation is not just a matter of us getting saved, but of God saving us. Although we would be satisfied no matter how we are saved, God cannot say that all there is to salvation is getting us saved, without caring about whether the way we are saved is right or wrong. God undoubtedly desires to give us grace and to save us. Without doubt, He wants to give us His life. God is full of love, and He is more than willing for us to be saved. But if God is to save us, He has to save us in an excelling way. Therefore, God's saving us is a big problem. God desires to save men. But what method can He use so that man can be saved in a most righteous way? What method is most reasonable? What method will match His own dignity? It is easy to be saved, but it is difficult to be saved righteously. This is why the Bible speaks so much about God's righteousness. It tells us again and again that God saves man in a way that matches His own righteousness.

What is God's righteousness? God's righteousness is God's way of doing things. Love is God's nature, holiness is God's disposition, and glory is God's own being. Righteousness, however, is God's procedure, His way, and His method. Since God is righteous, He cannot love man merely according to His own love. He cannot grant man grace merely according to what He wants. He cannot save man merely according to His heart's desire. It is true that God saves man because He loves man. But He must do so in a way that is in agreement with His own righteousness, His own procedure, His own moral standard, His own way, His own method, His own dignity, and His own majesty.

We know that it is easy for God to save man. But it is not easy for God to save man in a righteous way. Just imagine how easy it would be for God to save us if the matter of righteousness were not a problem. There would be no difficulty at all. If God had not loved us, nothing could be done for us and everything would be hopeless. But God has loved us and has had mercy on us. Furthermore, He intends to give us grace. If the issue of righteousness had not come in, God could say, "Have you sinned? All right, just do not commit

the mistake again." God could then overlook our sins. He could let us go and send us away. If God forgives carelessly not judging the sinner's sin and dealing with his sins according to the law, where is His righteousness? Here is where the difficulty lies.

Some time ago, a brother got caught up in a complicated matter and was put in jail by the government. I knew that though he was not completely without fault, the mistake was really with other people. Because of this, I was willing to help him out. I went to Nanking and talked to a few of the people who were involved in the matter. I told them about the situation and asked if they could help out a little. There were nine of us there, and all of us were busy people. We held nine meetings together over a period of eleven days, trying to come up with a way to help this man. Eventually, all these people admitted that they had the way and the authority to release the man, but that they could not release him without incriminating themselves. Hence, we had to find a way to release the man that, at the same time, would be legal.

Undoubtedly, God is full of love for us. God wants to save us. But He must do so legally. If He does not save us legally, He cannot save us at all. God's love is limited by His righteousness. God cannot act contrary to Himself and irresponsibly declare that our sins are written off, that everything is fine, and that we can get off free. If God were to forgive us irresponsibly, what law, what righteousness, and what truth would be left in the universe? All of these would be through.

God wants to save us, and we need to be saved. The question is whether or not there will be unrighteousness in our being saved. There are many today who accept bribes from others and are partial because of private relationships. They often help others out, and others often receive benefits from them; but we all agree that these people are not proper. They are not righteous but corrupt. They may have much love, but what they do is not righteous. God cannot save us at the expense of involving Himself in unrighteousness. God must save us while preserving His righteousness. It is important for God to save us, but He must do so according to His righteousness. God could save us immediately with His love. But He must also save us very righteously.

How can this be done? It is not an easy matter for God to save us without violating His righteousness. How can God justify sinners without getting into unrighteousness? How can God save sinners without involving Himself in

unrighteousness? How can God forgive sins in a righteous way? God is willing to save us, but He wants us to be able to say, at the time we receive His life and are saved, that He has justified us in a most righteous way.

GOD'S SALVATION FOR THE DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

There is one book in the Bible, the book of Romans, that tells us how God deals specifically with this one problem. Let us read Romans 3:25-26, beginning with the second part of verse 25: "For the demonstrating of His righteousness, in that in His forbearance God passed over the sins that had previously occurred, with a view to the demonstrating of His righteousness in the present time, so that He might be righteous and the One who justifies him who is of the faith of Jesus." Here I must add a word. Some versions make a mistake in translating verse 25. They translate: "To declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." But the word "for" should not be used in this verse. Instead it should read: "For the demonstrating of His righteousness, in that in His forbearance God passed over the sins that had previously occurred." Further, in verse 26 the word "and" should be understood as linking two things that occur at the same time. Hence, this clause should be understood in this way: "that He might be righteous and the One who justifies him who is of the faith of Jesus." While God justifies those who believe in Jesus, He is shown to be righteous, and man is to acknowledge Him as being righteous.

Verse 25 deals with the problems in the past, and verse 26 deals with the problems in the present. The problems in the past relate to the people of the Old Testament times. The problems in the present relate to the people of the New Testament times. Verse 25 deals with an Old Testament issue. Verse 26 deals with a New Testament issue. Those in the Old Testament times transgressed the law for four thousand years. They were full of sins and transgressions. But God did not send them into perdition or destruction immediately. During those four thousand years, day by day God forbore and passed over the sins previously committed. We do not see the lake of fire immediately after the garden of Eden. Although God told man that in the day that he ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he would surely die (Gen. 2:17), when Adam did eat of the fruit, he did not go immediately into the lake of fire. Why not? Because God passed over the sins

of the Old Testament times; He exercised His forbearance over them. God exercised forbearance and passed over the sins committed by man in the past. But a question arises immediately. Was God righteous in exercising forbearance and passing over man's sins in the Old Testament? What was God's purpose in doing this? Actually, in passing over man's sins and in exercising forbearance, God was declaring His righteousness.

God does not want us to think that after we are saved our salvation is an illegal one. God would not have man harbor such criticisms. God wants to show us that there is nothing illegal or unrighteous in His ways. Concerning the sins of the Old Testament times, He says that His forbearance and His passing over were for the demonstrating of His righteousness. Concerning the sins of the present time, He says that what is done is also for the demonstrating of His righteousness. He desires that in justifying those who believe in Jesus He would be known as the righteous One.

God's salvation is not some "backdoor merchandise." God wants our salvation to be one that comes from the "front door." Our salvation has to be right and proper. He will not allow anyone to say that our salvation is improper. He does not offer a fraudulent salvation. A fraudulent salvation is rejected by God. God's intention is to save us, but He will do so in a way that is related to His nature, His moral standard, His dignity, His law, and His righteousness. God cannot save us lawlessly.

Here we have a problem. If God were willing to use whatever means possible to save us and if He were to ignore the matter of righteousness altogether, He could say to anyone, "Go; you are free." There are men who are foolishly good. If God were to say this, He would be a foolishly good God. God would never be like this. If God did not love you, it would be easy—He would just let you die and perish when you sin. But He cannot allow this to happen because He loves you. The problem is that the sin of man and the love of God are together. When the righteousness of God is added to these two, salvation becomes the most difficult thing on earth. If man had not sinned, everything would be fine; and if God had not loved, there would be no problem either. If someone commits a crime and must die, it has nothing to do with me if I do not love him. Today many are taken from prisons to be executed. The matter concerns me little if I do not love them. It is difficult only if I love them and if I want to rescue them. If they have not sinned, the matter would be easy to deal with. And if I do not love them, the matter is also easy to handle. Further,

if they have sinned and I love them but have no righteousness, the matter can still be taken care of easily; I can handle the matter irresponsibly through bribery. But if I am a righteous person, I cannot resort to such fraudulent and improper methods. I would not let them go illegally. If I am to rescue them, I have to rescue them righteously. To carry out such a salvation becomes the most difficult task on the whole earth. These three matters—love, sin, and righteousness—cannot easily coexist. Love is a fact; sin is also a fact; and righteousness is a necessity. Because these three are together, God must come up with a way to save us and to satisfy His heart of love, while at the same time preserving His righteousness. Accomplishing such a work would be a masterpiece indeed. Hallelujah! The salvation which God has prepared for us in His Son Jesus is such a masterpiece. He is able to save us from our sins and demonstrate His love, and He is able to do so in a most righteous way. This He does through the work of redemption by the Lord Jesus.

THE COMING OF CHRIST BEING GOD'S REQUIREMENT IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth was God's requirement in righteousness; it was not God's requirement in grace. This is a very serious word. If there had been love without righteousness, the Lord Jesus would not have needed to come to the earth, and the cross would have been unnecessary. Because of the problem of righteousness the Lord Jesus had to come. Without righteousness, God could save us any way He wants to. He could overlook our sins, or He could forgive them lightly. He could take a permissive attitude toward our sins, or He could be completely unconcerned about them. If God said, "Since all have sinned, I will let you go this time; just do not sin again," there would be no need for a Jesus of Nazareth in the first place. Apart from the requirement of righteousness, there was no need for Jesus of Nazareth to come. The coming of Jesus of Nazareth was a requirement of righteousness.

When sin entered the world, God's government was damaged. His prescribed order in the universe was broken; His glory was trodden under; His holiness was profaned; His authority was rejected; and His truth was misunderstood. When sin entered the world, Satan laughed and the angels testified that man had failed and had fallen. If God were to judge sin mercilessly, He would be without love. But if He were to let man's sins go without judging them, He would be without righteousness. Because God loves

the world and, at the same time, He is righteous, He had to send the Lord Jesus to us. Because He is righteous, He had to judge sin. Because He is love, He had to bear man's sins for him. I must emphasize these two statements: God must judge because He is righteous. And God bears man's judgment and punishment because He is love. Without judgment, we see no righteousness; with judgment, we see no love. However, what He did was to bear the judgment on our behalf. In this way, He manifests both His love and His righteousness in Jesus Christ.

THE CROSS MANIFESTING GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS AND LOVE

Hence, the cross is where God's righteousness is manifested. The cross shows us how much God hates sin. He is determined to judge sin. He was willing to pay such a great price as to have His Son nailed on the cross. God was not willing to give up His righteousness. If God were willing to give up His righteousness, the cross would have been unnecessary. Because God was not willing to give up His righteousness, He preferred to have His Son die rather than give up His righteousness.

The cross is also the place where God's love is manifested. The burden for our sins should be on us. If we do not bear it, it is unrighteous. But to bear such a burden is too much for us. For this reason, He came and bore it for us. That God was willing to bear the burden shows His love. That God actually did bear the burden shows His righteousness. For God to have us bear the punishment is righteousness without love. For God to have us not bear the punishment is love without righteousness. Because He takes away the punishment and bears it for us, there is both righteousness and love. Hallelujah! The cross meets the requirement of righteousness and the requirement of love. Our salvation today is not "backdoor merchandise"; we have not received it fraudulently or improperly. We have not been saved illegally. We have been saved in a clear and definite way through judgment.

For us forgiveness is free, but for God there is no such thing as free forgiveness. For Him, forgiveness comes only after the redemption from sins. For example, if you break the law and the court requires you to pay a thousand dollar fine, you must pay the fine before your case will be dismissed. In the same way, we are saved only after being judged on the cross. Our salvation comes after we suffer the judgment for sin in Christ. It is a salvation

that comes only through judgment. Hallelujah! We are judged; then afterwards we are saved. God's love is here, and God's righteousness is also here.

Let me give an illustration. Suppose that there is a brother who is a millionaire, and suppose that I am one of his debtors. Let us say that I owe him a big sum of money, an amount as large as the ten thousand talents mentioned in the book of Matthew (18:24). When I borrowed the money from him, I signed a promissory note. On the note the amount that I owe him and the date and month that the amount must be repaid in full was listed, together with the terms and conditions of penalty. Suppose that now I go to him and say, "I spent all the money that I borrowed from you, and it is impossible for me to earn this money back and repay you at such a time as this, when the economy is slumping. I even have a problem taking care of my food and living. Please have mercy on me and let me go. Let me have the promissory note back." If I implore him this way, can he return the note to me? The promissory note clearly records the amount that I borrowed from him and the period of time in which I must repay him. This is a contract not only for me to keep, but one that he has to abide by as well. As the debtor, I have the responsibility to repay him the money within the set time. As the creditor, he also has a responsibility to fulfill, which is to return the promissory note to me only upon receipt of the money. If he returns the note to me before receiving the money, even though he does this out of his love and concern for me, he is not being righteous. Because we human beings are simply unrighteous and are used to unrighteous acts, it seldom occurs to us that free forgiveness is a form of unrighteousness. But God cannot do something unrighteous. If God forgave us freely, He would be unrighteous. Furthermore, going back to the illustration, let us suppose that this brother returns the note to me without receiving the money. This will affect me in a negative way. The next time I have money I will be indiscreet in using it. I have found that I can use others' money easily and loosely. Hence, this brother's free forgiveness is unrighteousness with him and a bad influence on me.

Now suppose that this brother is righteous, but does not want me to repay. What can he do? Let me tell you what I once did in a similar situation. Someone once came to my home to borrow money. He was a nominal Christian, so I told him that according to the Bible Christians should not borrow money. But he begged me to loan him the money all the same. Originally I considered simply giving him the money. But I knew that he was

irresponsible with other's money because some brothers had come to me beforehand and told me that this person borrowed often from the brothers, and warned me not to loan him anything. So on second thought I decided that I would not simply give the money to him, but would loan it instead. When I handed him the amount he asked for, I asked him when he would return it to me. I pressed him for a payment date, even though I knew that I would never be paid back. Borrowing was his habit; it was his life. But I could not tell him that I did not expect to be paid back, for that would have invited more borrowing. Therefore, I made him set a payment date. When the date arrived, I purposely wrote a letter to him, reminding him that the due date had come. After he received my letter, he came to see me. But before he was able to say very much, I interrupted him and told him to go home and see his wife, for she had something to tell him. So off to his home he went. Actually, prior to his coming to see me, I had taken the exact amount of money he owed to his home and had given it to his wife. I told her that when her husband came home she should tell him that I had sent him this sum of money for the payment of his debt. When the husband reached home, the wife told him what I had said. Then he opened the package and found the exact amount of his debt. He understood what to do next. He came back to my home and returned the money to me. In this act, you can see love and you can see righteousness. If this man had been forced to pay, there would have been no love. But if I had allowed him not to pay, I would have been unrighteous, for I had said specifically that the money was given as a loan. Not only would I have been unrighteous in myself, but I also would have exerted a bad influence on him. The next time he would have been more irresponsible. Thus, I did what I did.

We owe God "ten thousand talents of silver," but we have no way to repay. Now God is doing the same thing for us. Because He loves us, He cannot ask us to pay Him back. But because He is righteous, He will not tell us that we have no need to repay at all. For us to pay Him back is impossible. Yet for God to release us from our obligation is unrighteous. Thank and praise Him that He has come to give us the "money," that we can pay back what we owe Him. The collector is God, and the payer is also God. Without collecting, there is no righteousness; but if we are made to pay, there is no love. Now God Himself is the collector; hence, righteousness is maintained. And God Himself is also the payer; hence, love is maintained. Hallelujah! The collector is the payer. This is the biblical meaning of redemption from sins.

Therefore, Jesus the Nazarene came and bore our sins in His body onto the cross. God Himself came to bear our sins. Our sins were judged by God in the person of Jesus Christ. The blood of the Lord Jesus shed on the cross is proof of this judgment. We come to God by this blood. Through the Lord Jesus we tell God that we have been judged. Now we are turning over to Him what the Lord Jesus has paid for us. It is true that we have sinned. But we are not irresponsible; there has been the judgment. It is true that we had a debt. But we are not avoiding it; the debt has already been paid. We have the blood, which signifies the accomplished salvation of the Lord Jesus, as the receipt proving that God has paid our debt back to Himself. This is why the blood in the Old Testament was sprinkled seven times within the veil. This is why it had to be brought to the propitiation cover on the ark. God has to forgive every sinner who comes to Him through the blood of the Lord Jesus. There is no way for Him not to forgive us.

Let us return to the previous illustration. Suppose I borrowed ten thousand talents of silver from a brother and I have no money to pay him back. One day he comes to my home and says, "You owe me ten thousand talents of silver. Now you must pay me back. I am not an irresponsible or loose person. Whatever I do, I do seriously. You have to pay me back. Now here are ten thousand talents of silver. Bring this to my house tomorrow and pay back your debt. Then you can take back your promissory note." I would expect that when I go to his house with the money the next day I will be able to redeem the promissory note. But suppose that after I hand him the money, he says that because the money was given to me by him the day before, he will not return the promissory note to me. Can he do such a thing? When I hand him the money, does he have the right not to hand me back the promissory note? No. He had the right not to give me the money the day before. If he did not give me the money the day before, at most I can say that he does not love me. I cannot say a word more. But if he has given me the money and I pay him back, he is unrighteous if he still keeps my note; it is not simply a matter of him not loving me. If he is righteous, he has to hand me the note when I hand him the money.

GOD BEING BOUND TO FORGIVE US BECAUSE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Therefore, before the Lord Jesus came to the earth and was crucified on the cross, it would have been fine for God to refuse to save us. God could have left us unsaved. Had God not given us His Son, all that we could have said was that God did not love us. We could not say anything more. But because God has indeed given us His Son and put our sins upon Him that we might be redeemed from our sins, God can do nothing else but forgive our sins when we come to Him through the blood of the Lord Jesus and through His work. Hallelujah! God has to forgive our sins! Do you realize that God is bound to forgive our sins? If you come to God through Jesus Christ, God is bound to forgive your sins. It was love that brought His Son to the cross, but it was righteousness that caused God to forgive our sins.

John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." Out of love God gave us His only begotten Son. But 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The work of the cross was accomplished for us through the love of God. But today when we come to God through the accomplished work of Jesus Christ, God has to forgive us based on His faithfulness and righteousness.

Hence, if the Lord Jesus had not come, God would be free not to save us. But now that the Lord Jesus has died, even if God were unhappy about saving us, strictly speaking He still has to do it. If He received the money could He refuse to return the note? God cannot be unrighteous, because if He is unrighteous, He Himself becomes a sinner. Therefore, God is bound to forgive all those who come to Him through the blood of the Lord Jesus. Hallelujah! God cannot refuse to forgive them. I want to shout that this is the gospel. Since God has given us His Son, He is bound. Do you think that we can pay God back now? Today through the Lord Jesus, not only can we pay God back, but we have more than we need to pay Him back. We have an overflow. For where sin abounds, there grace much more abounds. Sin is abundant. But the grace in God's Son is more abundant, even superabundant. For this reason, it is through the Lord Jesus alone that one can be saved.

Everyone has to admit that there is nothing unrighteous with God when we come to Him by the Lord Jesus and when He gives us life and forgives our sins. Our heart can never say that God, in forgiving our sins, saved us lawlessly when He passed over our sins, exercised forbearance toward us, and justified us who believe in Jesus. We can never say that God has dealt

irresponsibly with our sins. On the contrary, we must say that God has saved us in the most righteous way. Our salvation is a proper and upright salvation. Our sins have been judged; hence, we are saved. No one can say that God has saved us by using unrighteous procedures. Rather, we must say that God has saved us by the most righteous procedures.

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS MANIFESTED APART FROM THE LAW

Now let us come back to Romans 3. Verses 19 to 26 are quite a difficult passage in the Bible. But after what we have seen concerning God's righteousness and the righteousness that the Lord Jesus has accomplished, Romans 3:19-26 is wonderful. Verse 19 says, "Now we know that whatever things the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may fall under the judgment of God." Why did God give man the law? It was given so that man would have nothing to say before God, so that every mouth may be stopped. God wants to show man that everyone is a sinner and that everyone has sinned. There is not one who has done good. Verse 20 says, "Because out of the works of the law no flesh shall be justified before Him; for through the law is the clear knowledge of sin." The ultimate purpose of the law of God was to show man that he is a sinner. The purpose of the law was not for man to be saved through it. The tone of the law is completely condemnatory. The law says that man should be condemned, that he should die, and that he should perish.

If the matter stopped here, there would be no gospel and everything would be over. But the matter does not stop here. Man cannot live by the law, but God has other ways. If you cannot pay back the money, God has other ways to pay it back for you. The first two words in verse 21 are marvelous; they mark a big turn in this matter. "But now." Thank the Lord that there is a turn! "But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been manifested." God's righteousness was originally manifested in the law. But if that were the case now, we would be doomed. What does it mean to say that God's righteousness was manifested in the law? It means that whatever you owed God you had to pay back. If you sinned, you had to perish. If you transgressed, you had to go into perdition. Thus, the law would manifest God's righteousness. To punish sinners would be the most righteous thing for God to do. But thank the Lord, God's righteousness is no longer manifested in the

law. If His righteousness were manifested within the law, God would have to judge sinners. But the righteousness of God is manifested apart from the law, in which case, judgment falls on God Himself. The end of verse 21 says, "Witness being borne to it by the Law and the Prophets." Even the prophets in the Old Testament, including David and all the other prophets, testified to the same thing.

How is God's righteousness manifested? Verse 22 says, "Even the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ to all those who believe, for there is no distinction." Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (v. 23), how can we obtain God's grace? Verses 24 and 25 say that we are "justified freely...through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God set forth as a propitiation place." God has sent Jesus to redeem us from our sins and has set Him forth as a propitiation place. I believe we all know what the propitiation place is. The propitiation place is the covering of the ark in the Old Testament tabernacle; it was the place where God bestowed grace upon man. Every place on earth is defiled by sin. But this place, and only this place, is without sin. Now Jesus has become the propitiation place. How has He become such a place? By His blood being the surety. God has set forth Jesus as the propitiation place, and now through the blood of Jesus I can come by faith to God. God cannot do anything else but bestow grace upon me. Only after God has done this can we say that His forbearance and His passing over of sins in the Old Testament was righteous; and only after God has done this can we say that His justifying those who believe in Jesus in the New Testament is also righteous. We are saved today not because God glossed over our sins but because God has dealt with our sins. Before God we are not forgiven debtors, but paid up debtors who are forgiven.

This is something most precious in the Bible. This is the only way that Christians can have boldness before God. Have you ever realized that inasmuch as love is precious, it is never that reliable? You cannot bring a person to court just because he has not loved you for a few days. There is no such thing as love in a law court. But if unrighteousness occurs or if sin arises, the law will speak. God likes to give us a handle, something for us to hold on to. Through such a handle, our faith can be strengthened and the promises of God can be fulfilled in us. This handle is the Lord Jesus Christ. God knows that we may doubt, so He works faith into us through His Son. We can say to Him, "God, since You have given me Your Son and have allowed Him to die, You must forgive my sins."

Sometimes we hear people praying, "O God, I want to be saved. Please save me! I have sinned, but I am determined to be saved. Please be merciful to me and have the Lord Jesus die for me." When such ones pray, they may cry bitterly. They act as if God's heart is very hard and believe that before God would forgive them or turn His heart toward them they have to cry much. Those who pray this way do not know what the gospel is. If the Son of God had not come to the earth, their crying and imploring before God might work. But the Son of God has come, and the problem of sin has been solved. The redemptive work on the cross has been accomplished. When people come to God, there is no need for poor begging anymore. Since God has given us His Son, He can forgive sins through His Son. He is faithful to do so; He is not being a liar by doing so. And He is righteous to do so; there is nothing unrighteous in it. When righteousness is involved, faithfulness is also involved.

Most people today are ignorant first of God's righteousness and then of the fact that the Lord Jesus has accomplished God's righteousness. People do not know that God's righteousness is manifested apart from the law. They still try to work up righteousness before God. They are like the man who owes ten thousand talents of silver. There is absolutely no way to repay the debt. But the man still tries to save six cents by getting off at an earlier stop, hoping to save to repay his debt. He is still calculating, hoping to save a little here or there, to do this or that, to generate a little money for the repayment of the debt. He still wants to say to his creditor that though he owes ten thousand talents, he does have a few pennies with him. He does not realize that the full sum has already been sent to his home.

Man has no idea what God has done in His Son. Because of this, the apostle Paul tells us what attitude man should have. Concerning God's righteousness, we need to look at two passages in the Bible. The first passage is in Romans 10. Verses 3 and 4 say, "For because they were ignorant of God's righteousness and sought to establish their own righteousness, they were not subject to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law unto righteousness to everyone who believes." I love these two verses. When we read these verses in relation to the gospel, our hearts must be warmed up. These verses say that the Jews did not know that God's righteousness had been established; they were still seeking to establish their own righteousness. They tried their best to be good, to exchange their work for their salvation, and to exchange their righteousness for life and all that God has given to them. But Paul said that all

those seeking to establish their own righteousness are not subject to the righteousness of God. Not to be subject to the righteousness of God is not to be subject to the work that God has accomplished in His Son Jesus. God's righteousness is accomplished in His Son Jesus. The cross of Jesus is both a manifestation of God's love and an accomplishment of God's righteousness. On the cross of Jesus, God's righteousness was accomplished. If any man wants to establish his own righteousness today, he is denying the sufficiency of the Lord's work on the cross. Never think that we can add something to the work that the Lord Jesus has finished. Never think that we can help it or patch it up a little. All those who seek to establish their own righteousness are not subject to God's righteousness at all. If someone sends a sum of money to my home to pay back a loan he has made to me and I still try to save a few pennies to repay him, I am in reality despising what he has given me. All those who seek to establish their own righteousness are blaspheming God.

Why is "Christ...the end of the law"? Christ as "the end of the law" means that Christ includes everything that the law has. In other words, God has not just given you ten thousand talents of silver; all the money in the world has been given you. How can you save a few more pennies? The end of the law is Christ. How are you going to find any more righteousness? If a man is very big, and he occupies the whole chair, can you squeeze yourself into the same chair? The end of the law is Christ. How are you going to establish your own righteousness? Thank and praise God that what He has given us is the best! I would say a strong word in a most reverent way: God has "exhausted" His omnipotence in His Son Jesus. The end of the law is Christ. All those who believe in Him must receive righteousness. Those believing in Jesus are bound to receive. There is no possibility for them not to receive. I like this thought. It is impossible for us not to be saved. God has given us His Son, who does not only possess the little that you need, but even everything. God can never forsake those who have believed into His Son. God has no way to reject us. All those who come to God through the Son must receive righteousness. There will be no hassle; the guarantee is sure.

The other passage of Scripture is 2 Corinthians 5:21. We have been saved, but we still live as humans. It is true that we are now saved, and that our sins are forgiven, but what do we do while living on this earth? We are all Christians today, and are all the children of the Lord. Regarding His children, God declares something most amazing here: "Him who did not know sin He made sin on our behalf." God has made the Lord Jesus sin. Originally the

Lord Jesus was without sin at all; He had nothing to do with sin. Now God has judged Him as though judging sin itself. God judged Him this way "that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Today in the Lord Jesus Christ, you and I are the showpiece of God's righteousness. When people see us, they see God's righteousness. We, the sinners, through the Lord Jesus becoming sin for us and through His bearing of our sins to forgive us, have now become the righteousness of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are the living righteousness of God walking on earth. In Christ we are the representatives of God's righteousness.

If you do not know what God's righteousness is, all you need to do is find a saved person and take a good look at him. You will then know what God's righteousness is. If you want to know what God's righteousness is, just find a Christian and you will know that God has not dealt with our sins irresponsibly. He has made sin Him who knew no sin. Because the Lord Jesus has died, the work of redemption is accomplished. For us to be in the Lord Jesus today is an expression of the righteousness of God. When a person sees someone who believes in the Lord Jesus, he sees God's righteousness. If someone wants to know what God's righteousness is, I can stand up and tell him, "Just look at me. God loves me so much. He loves us to the uttermost. He is not loose concerning sin at all. This is why He caused the Lord Jesus to die on the cross. Look at me, a saved sinner today. I am the showpiece of God's righteousness in Christ."

Today we declare two great messages to the world. Both of them are what the world desperately needs. The first is that God loves man. This is a most wonderful fact. But that is not all. The other great message is that God in His righteousness has forgiven man's sins. Now man can come to God with all boldness and full faith, reminding Him that He has forgiven his sins.

At the end I would like to ask you a question. Why is the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15? It seems that there is something lacking in this parable of the prodigal. After the prodigal squandered his estate and came home, the father should indeed love him, but he should have said at least a few words of reprimand to the son, perhaps something like this: "You have taken all your estate and have spent everything; even your stomach is empty now." But the father did not say a word like this. No wonder the older son had to say something. Even we have to say something. Is it not unrighteousness when there is sin and it is not dealt with? If Luke 15 had only the parable of

the prodigal, we would have to conclude that God is not righteous, that God has not judged sin, but has glossed over it. In the parable of the prodigal son there is not so much as one word of rebuke. But thank and praise the Lord that there are three parables in Luke 15. The first is the parable of the shepherd saving the sheep. The second is the parable of the woman seeking the lost coin. The third is the parable of the father receiving the prodigal son. Immediately in the first parable we have the good shepherd forsaking his life for the sheep. The Lord Jesus has already come and died. The sin of the prodigal was already judged in the first parable. Because of what happened in the first parable, there is the second parable, in which a woman lights a lamp to seek for the lost coin. Since the Lord Jesus has accomplished salvation, the Holy Spirit can come to enlighten with His light. After this the Father does not see the problem of sin anymore. The problem of sin has been cleared up in the parable of the shepherd giving his life for the sheep. In addition, the inward feeling has been enlightened in the parable of the woman lighting the lamp. The wrongs have been realized already. By the time the Father comes, all He needs to do is to welcome the prodigal. The Lord Jesus has forgiven our sins. The Holy Spirit has enlightened us and has caused us to be convicted concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. Hence, by the time the Father comes, the matter of sin need not be mentioned anymore; He only has to do the work of welcoming us. In the previous two parables, God's righteousness as well as His love were already manifested.

Suppose a person has not yet come to God, but he sees that he is a sinner and realizes that the Lord Jesus has judged his sins. The Good Shepherd has borne his sins away and the Holy Spirit has enlightened him concerning his sins. When such a one returns home, he has to realize that the matter of sin is forever gone; it has been dealt with on the cross. Remember that the Father's house is not the place to talk about sin. It is not the place to talk about our squandering. The cross is the place to talk about sin; it is the place to talk about our squandering. If you are at home, God can most righteously choose not to talk about your sins. We can eat and drink to our heart's delight. We can live, wear the costly garments, rest, and make merry to our heart's delight. God has said that once we were lost, but now we have been found, that once we were dead, but now we have come to life. There is no problem here any longer. Hallelujah! God's grace is sufficient for us. In this way, we realize that God's grace is a faithful and righteous grace.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF SALVATION

One thing we have to know is that before the Lord Jesus died, it was unrighteous for God to forgive our sins, but after the Lord Jesus died, it would be equally unrighteous for God not to forgive our sins. Without the Lord Jesus' death, God's forgiveness would be unrighteous on His part; He could never do this. With the Lord Jesus' death, He would be held equally unrighteous if God would not forgive. Please remember, a redemption without blood is unrighteous. On the other hand, when one has the blood and is denied salvation, this is also unrighteous.

Once I went with a brother to Kiukiang. While we were on the boat travelling and sharing the Word with others, I began to speak to a person about our faith. At the same time our brother spoke to another person, who was Moslem. During the conversation, our brother asked the man if he had any sin. The man tried to tell him how good Mohammedanism is and how great Mohammed was. But our brother said, "I am not asking you about these things. My question is this: Do you have any sin?" He confessed that he did. Our brother then asked him, "What then are you going to do about it? Is there any way that you can be forgiven?" The man answered that if he wanted to be forgiven, he had to feel remorseful at heart and do good, and do this and that and many other things. After the man had listed all the things that should be done, our brother said, "This is precisely the point of controversy. You have said that when one sins, remorse can bring in forgiveness. But I say that when one sins, there must be punishment. Without punishment, there can be no forgiveness. You think that a sense of remorse will earn someone forgiveness. But I say that forgiveness only comes through judgment. If I have sinned in this city and I escape to a far away country, I can be remorseful over there, and I can perform many charities. I can be a nice man there. But none of these will revoke my sin. Your God is a God who forgives without judgment. But my God is a God who forgives only after judgment." The Moslem then asked, "How can you be forgiven then?" "This is why," said our brother, "You need to believe in Jesus. Only by believing in Jesus will you be forgiven. Your sins have been judged in the Lord Jesus, and when you believe in Him, you will be forgiven." Here is the righteousness of God. Today men consider whether or not God is love. They do not realize that God is not only love, but He is also righteous. It is not that God only wants to forgive man's sins. He has to forgive them in a way that will not conflict with His nature and His righteousness. This is what men fail to see.

THE APPLICATIONS OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

We should now ask, how is God's righteousness applied to us? God's righteousness is applied to us in two ways. God's righteousness can first be applied in its giving us peace in our heart. Feelings are unreliable; therefore, we may not trust God's feelings. Love is likewise unreliable. If someone's love changes, no one can penalize him or her for it. But we can lay hold of righteousness and make claims based on righteousness. If God only loves us, He may spare us from the judgment of sins or may let us off easily, if that is something that He can do. But what if one day God is not happy with us anymore and does not want to go easy on us anymore? If God does not love us anymore and if He becomes angry and unhappy with us, we would suffer. Under such circumstances, we could not have any assurance about God, and our hearts would never be at peace. But now that God has given us His righteousness, we are at peace, for we know that our sins have been judged in the person of Christ. Hence, we can have a bold conscience and definite assurance when we come to God, and our heart can have peace. Peace cannot be obtained through love; peace can only be obtained through righteousness. Although in reality God's love is reliable, from man's point of view it is not as reliable as God's righteousness. When a person first begins to trust in God, he should learn to trust more in His righteousness than in His love. Later, as he progresses, he should learn to trust more in God's love than in His righteousness. Such a trust belongs to an advanced stage of the Christian life. This is the life of people like Madame Guyon. But at the beginning, we should take righteousness as the basis of our faith. Without righteousness, faith has no basis. Thank God that our sins have been forgiven. Thank Him that He will never judge us anymore. As the hymn says:

God would not have His claim on two,
First on His Son, my Surety true,
And then upon me laid.

Our hearts are at rest, for our sins have been judged.

God's righteousness has another application: It causes us to realize the loathsome nature of sin. In order to preserve His righteousness, God was willing even to crucify His Son on the cross. God would rather sacrifice His Son than sacrifice His righteousness, His truth, and His law. God would not do one thing that is contrary to His nature. Therefore, we can see how

loathsome sin is. If God cannot be careless about sin and would rather judge His Son in order to deal with sin, we also cannot be careless toward sin. In God's view, His Son can be sacrificed, but sin cannot be left undealt with. Every believer in the Lord Jesus must see then that no sin can be glossed over. God's attitude toward sin is very strict.

Now all our sins are forgiven. The Lord Jesus has died, we are forgiven, and everything is taken care of. Here I would like to give you one more illustration. One day I was at Hsiao-feng Park reading my Bible. Suddenly, the sky blackened and thunder began to roll. It looked as if it was going to rain immediately. I closed my Bible quickly and ran to a little house behind the park. But after a while the rain had not yet come, so I walked home hurriedly. On the way home the sky was still quite dark; thunder was rolling, and the clouds were very thick. Yet the rain did not come—not one drop fell on me the entire way home. On another occasion some time later, I went to the same park to read again. This time also the sky blackened like the previous time. Thunder started to roll again, and the clouds were overcast and thick. I counted on my experience from the last time, so I was quite at ease and moved slowly. But unfortunately this time the rain came, and I got wet. I had no choice but to run to that little house again. By the time I reached the house, the rain was pouring down. I did not know how heavy the rain was. But, eventually, the sky cleared, the clouds dispersed, the thunder ceased, and I walked home again. This time, like the previous time, there was not a drop of rain while I was on my way home. But let me ask you a question: On which occasion did my heart have more peace? On both occasions no rain fell on me as I walked home. But which time did I have more peace? Was it the first time, or was it the second time? Although the first time there was no rain on the way home, I did not know when the rain would come; as a result, my heart was held in suspense. On the second occasion there was also no rain on the way home, but my heart was at peace because the rain had already passed and the sky was clear. Many people hope that God's grace would gloss over their sins. They are like I was on my first trip home. Although there is no rain, darkness still hangs overhead; thunder still rolls and the clouds still cover. Their hearts are still held in suspense. They do not know what will happen to them. But praise and thank the Lord, the salvation we have received is one that has already "passed through the rain." It is a salvation that has "passed through thunder." Our "rain" has already been poured out on Calvary, and our "thunder" has already rolled on Calvary. Now everything is over. We

rejoice not only because our sins have been forgiven, but because they have been forgiven after being dealt with. They were not glossed over. God has dealt with the problem of our sins. His Son's resurrection has become the evidence of this work.

Today is the day of grace. But we must remember that grace reigns through righteousness (Rom. 5:21). Grace cannot come directly; it must come through righteousness. God's grace does not come to us directly. It comes to us through Calvary. Today some say that if God loves us, He can forgive us without judgment. That would be grace reigning without righteousness. But grace is reigning through righteousness. Grace needs the righteousness of Calvary before it can reign. Today our receiving of grace is based solely upon God's righteousness. Our sins are forgiven after they are dealt with. When we see the cross, it is right to say that this is God's righteousness. It is also right to say that this is God's grace. The cross signifies God's righteousness, and it also signifies God's grace. To God, the cross is righteousness; to us, it is grace. When we behold the cross today, our heart is fully at rest because we know that the grace that we have received was obtained through God's righteous way. We know that our salvation is clear, complete, proper, and upright. Our salvation does not come through smuggling and fraud. Rather, it comes through judgment on sin. Thank and praise the Lord! The cross has solved the problem of sin, and the resurrection has confirmed that the solution is indeed true.

CHAPTER SIX

THE WORK OF CHRIST—REDEMPTION

By the grace of God, we have seen in the past few evenings what God's salvation is. Tonight is the sixth evening. I hope to give a quick review of what we have covered in the previous five meetings. Then we will continue. We have seen sin, the law, God's love, His grace, and His righteousness. We have seen how man became a sinner and how the law came in to expose man's sins. We have also seen that though man is proved to be a sinner, God still loves him. Not only has God loved us, but He has also shown us mercy and grace. We have also seen how God's grace has been manifested, what the nature of this grace is, how it came about, and that it can never be mixed with human effort. Last night we saw that, in spite of God's love and His desire to give us grace, there was one hindrance to grace's coming to us. If one thing had been left unsettled, God's grace could not have come to us. Though grace is now here to reign, it reigns only through righteousness (Rom. 5:21). Grace cannot reign by itself. Hence, the Lord showed us how righteousness was manifested. His righteousness has dealt with our sins. At the same time, it enables us to receive grace from God. We have covered these during the last five evenings. Now, we will go on with the gospel of God and His salvation.

The salvation accomplished by God through the Lord Jesus has manifested God's grace. At the same time, it satisfies God's righteous requirements. At this time we will cover the work of the Lord Jesus. This is an excellent and sweet subject. It deals with the way the Lord Jesus accomplished God's salvation. We have to see how the Lord Jesus satisfied God's demand and how He has manifested God's grace. At the same time, we have to see how the Lord Jesus satisfies the heart of the Christian so that we would be satisfied with His work also. A song which we sing says, "God's heart is satisfied with the work of the Lord Jesus, and our hearts are also at rest with His work." God is satisfied, and we are satisfied. If time permits, I hope that we can cover both of these aspects.

THE LORD JESUS BEING BOTH GOD AND MAN FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF REDEMPTION

The first thing we have to see is that the Lord Jesus is God. We may say that only God can bear man's sin. Never consider the Lord Jesus as a third person coming to die a substitutionary death. Do not think that God is one party, we are another party, and the Lord Jesus is a third party. The Bible never considers the Lord Jesus as a third party. On the contrary, it considers Him as the first party. You may have been told that the gospel is like a debtor, a lender, and the lender's son. The debtor has no money to pay back his debt. The lender, being very severe, insists on the payment. But the lender's son steps forth to pay the debt on behalf of the debtor, and the debtor becomes free.

This is the gospel that man preaches today. But this is not the real gospel. If this were the case, at least two points would not be fair and would be contrary to the Bible. First, this kind of understanding makes God the mean One and the Lord Jesus the gracious One. In such an illustration, we do not see God loving the world. Rather, we see only His righteous demand and the demand of the law. We see a severe God, One who is without grace and One whose words to man are always harsh. We see that the Lord Jesus loves us and gives grace to us. This is a wrong gospel. However, although this is a wrong gospel, God still uses it. Actually, I was saved through this kind of illustration. But although I was saved, during the first three years I could never praise God. I always felt that the Lord Jesus was good, that I should thank and praise Him, that without Him everything was hopeless, and that it was fortunate that He came. But I felt that God was very harsh, severe, and mean. He was not at all lovable. It seemed that everything good was with the Lord Jesus and everything bad was with God, that God is terrible and the Lord Jesus is lovable.

But this is not the Bible. The Bible says that God so loved the world that He gave His Son to us (John 3:16). God sent His Son to us because He loved us. This is why we were brought back to God after the Lord Jesus accomplished His work on the cross. If God had not loved us and had not sent us the Lord Jesus, the most that the Lord Jesus could have done would have been to bring people back to Himself; He could not have brought people back to God. Thank the Lord that the One who loved us is God. Thank Him that He Himself sent His Son to us. It was the Father who was moved with compassion. It was the Father who loved us. It was the Father who planned out salvation. It was the Father who had a will in eternity past. First, the Father purposed everything, and then the Son came. Hence, it is wrong for

man to think that there are three parties. There are only two parties, God and man. The Lord Jesus is God's gift to man. However, this gift is something living and with a will, rather than lifeless and without a will. Thank God that salvation is something between God and man. The Lord Jesus is a gift. Today the One we have to face is God. We come to God through the Lord Jesus. This is the first thing we have to realize.

Second, if there were three parties, the Lord Jesus would not have been qualified to die for us. It is true that when the Lord Jesus died for us, God's righteousness was met and man's sins were forgiven. But is this righteous to the Lord Jesus? Suppose there are two brothers. One brother has committed a capital crime and has been sentenced to death. The other brother is very willing to die for him and is therefore executed on his behalf. He is innocent, and also a third party. He dies instead of the other. The Bible does not show us that the Lord Jesus died for us this way. It does not show us that God had a demand, that His law had to be satisfied, and that in order for man to meet the law's demand, the Lord Jesus came to fulfill God's law. There is no such thing. What position did the Lord Jesus take when He came to accomplish redemption? We have to consider this matter carefully and accurately from the Bible.

I would like you to be aware of one thing. The world thinks that there is only one way to deal with the problem of sin. Preachers who preach wrong teachings say that there are three ways to deal with sin. But for God, there are only two ways to deal with sin. Some explanation is needed here. Before one reads the Word of God, he may think that any of three ways can solve the problem: man can solve it, God can solve it, or a third party can also solve it by substitution. The unsaved ones who do not know God consider that there is only one solution, which is for man to solve it by himself. But God's righteousness shows us that there are only two ways to solve the problem. One is by God Himself and the other is by man himself. What do I mean by this? Let us first consider what man thinks. He thinks that he is a sinner and should therefore bear the judgment of sin and the wrath of God. He thinks that he should perish and go into perdition. The only way is for him to solve the problem by going to hell. He will take responsibility for what he has done. If one sins, he goes to hell and bears his own judgment of sin. This is one way to solve the problem. When one owes money, he sells all that he has. He may even have to sell his wife, children, house, and land, if that is what it takes to solve the problem. This is righteous. Then there is the other wrong concept.

For those who have heard the gospel, they consider that the Lord Jesus is a third party coming to take our place and solve the problem of our sin. Man has sinned and has incurred the judgment of sin. Now all the judgment is laid on the Lord Jesus; He bears all the judgment. Such a teaching seems right. But you will see shortly that this is not accurate.

For the sake of those with unclear concepts, I will say a word first. In the Bible, there are two important doctrines, which are the bearing of sins and the ransom for sins. Please do not think that I do not believe in substitution. But the substitution that some talk about is not the substitution in the Bible, because their kind of substitution involves unrighteousness. If the sinless Jesus is to be a substitute for sinful men, it is, of course, a bargain for us. But is it righteous to treat the Lord Jesus this way? He did not sin. Why should He be killed? This is not the kind of substitution that the Bible speaks of. If the Lord Jesus is to die on behalf of all the sinners in the world, then those who believe in Jesus as well as those who do not believe in Him will likewise be saved. The Lord has died for them both, whether or not they have believed. One cannot turn the wheel backward and reverse the Lord's death just because some do not believe. One can turn back the wheel on other things. But this is not something reversible. Why does the Bible say that those who do not believe have been judged and shall perish? (John 3:16, 18). The reason is that the Son of God only died a substitutional death for us who believe. He is not a substitute for those who do not believe.

What then is the way to solve the problem of sin according to the Bible? There are only two righteous ways to solve the problem. One is to deal with the one who has sinned, and the other is to deal with the one who has been sinned against. There are only two parties in the world that are qualified to deal with this problem. There are only two persons in the world who have the right to deal with the problem of sin. One is the one who has sinned against another. The other is the one who has been sinned against. When a person sues another in court, no third party has the right to speak anything. In a court proceeding, only the one who has sinned against someone and the one who has been sinned against have the right to speak. Concerning the sinner's salvation, if the sinner does not take care of it himself, then God has to take care of it for him. The sinner is the sinning party, and God is the party being sinned against. Either party can deal with the problem of sin in a most righteous way. On the sinner's side, it is righteous for him to suffer judgment and punishment, perish, and go into perdition. But there is another way

which is equally righteous. The party that has been sinned against can assume the punishment. This may be quite inconceivable to us, but it is a fact. It is the party being sinned against that bears the sins. It is not a third party that bears our sins. A third party has no authority or right to step in. If a third party comes in, it is unrighteousness. Only when the party that is being sinned against is willing to suffer the loss can the problem be solved. Since God has love and also has righteousness, He would not allow a sinner to bear his sins, for that would mean that God was righteous without love. The only alternative is for the party being sinned against to step in. Only by God bearing our sins will righteousness be maintained.

Do you know what forgiveness means? In the world, we have forgiveness. Between individuals, there is forgiveness. Between a government and its people, there is also forgiveness. Even between nations, there is forgiveness. With God and man, there is also forgiveness. Forgiveness is something universally recognized as a fact. No one can say that forgiveness is something unrighteous. It is something one does cheerfully to another. But the question is: who has the right to forgive? If a brother has stolen ten dollars from me, and I forgive him, it means that I have taken up the consequence of his sin. I have taken up the loss of these ten dollars. As another example, let us say that you have hit me in the face. The blow was so severe that I bled. If I say that I forgive you, it means that you have committed the sin of hitting, and I have suffered the consequence of hitting. The sin was committed by you, but I suffered the consequence of it. This is forgiveness. To forgive means that one party sins, and another suffers the consequence of that sin. Forgiveness is the taking up of the responsibility of the sinning party by the party sinned against. A third party has no right to come in to forgive. He cannot come in to recompense. If a third party comes in to forgive and recompense, it is unrighteousness. If the Lord Jesus comes in as a third party to substitute for the sinner, it may be fine for the sinner, and God may also have no problem with it, but there is a problem with the Lord Jesus. He has no sin. Why did He have to suffer judgment? Only the sinning one can bear the consequence of sin; he has the right to bear his own responsibility and suffer judgment for his own sin. And there is only one who can take up his sins—the one whom he has sinned against. Only the one sinned against can take up the sin of the sinning one. This is righteousness. This is the principle of forgiveness. Both God's law and man's law recognize that this is righteous. Man has the right to suffer loss.

Inasmuch as man has a free will, God also has a free will. A person with a free will does have the right to choose to suffer loss.

What then is Christ's redemption? The redemptive work of Christ is God Himself coming to bear man's sin against Him. This word is more lovely to the ear than all the music in the world. What is the redemptive work of Christ? It is God bearing that with which man has sinned against Him. In other words, if Jesus of Nazareth was not God, He would not be qualified to bear our sins righteously. Jesus of Nazareth was God. He is the very God whom we sinned against. Our God has come down to earth personally and borne our sins. Today, it is God rather than man who has borne our sins. This is why it was a righteous bearing. We cannot bear it ourselves. If we were to bear it, we would be finished. Thank God that He Himself has come to the world to bear our sins. This is the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross.

Why then did God have to become a man? It is good enough for God to love the world. Why did He have to give His only begotten Son? One has to realize that man has sinned against God. If God requires man to bear his sin, how can he do it? The wages of sin is death. When sin motivates and acts within, it ends in death. Death is the rightful penalty of sin (Rom. 5:12). When man sins against God, he has to bear the consequence of sin, which is death. Hence, God is the other party. If He is to come and take up our responsibility and bear the consequence of our sin, He has to die. But 1 Timothy 6:16 tells us that God is immortal; He cannot die. Although God is willing to come into the world and bear our sins, and although He is willing to die and go into perdition, it is impossible for Him to do this. Death has simply no effect on God. There is no possibility for God to die. Hence, for God to bear the judgment of man's sin against Him, He has to take on the body of a man. This is why Hebrews 10:5 tells us that when Christ came into the world, He said, "A body You have prepared for Me." God has prepared a body for Christ so that Christ could offer Himself up as a burnt offering and sin offering. The Lord says, "In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You did not delight" (v. 6). Now He is offering up His own body to deal with man's sin. Hence, the Lord Jesus became a man and came into the world to be crucified on the cross.

The Lord Jesus is not a third party; He is the first party. Because He is God, He is qualified to be crucified on the cross. Because He is man, He can die on the cross on our behalf. We must distinguish between these two statements clearly. He is qualified to be crucified because He is God, and He is able to be

crucified because He is man. He is the opposite party; He has stepped over to man's side to suffer punishment. God has become a man. He has come among man, joined Himself to man, taken up man's burden, and borne all his sins. If redemption is to be righteous, Jesus of Nazareth must be God. If Jesus of Nazareth is not God, redemption is not righteous. Every time I look at the cross, I say within myself, "This is God." If He is not God, His death becomes unrighteous and it cannot save us, for He is but a third party. But thank and praise the Lord, He is the party opposite us. That is why I made the statement that only two parties are able to deal with our sins. One is we ourselves, in which case we have to die ourselves. The other party is the God whom we have sinned against, in which case He dies for us. Other than these two parties, no third party has the right or authority to deal with our sins.

THE MAN JESUS HAVING THE RIGHTEOUSNESS ACCORDING TO THE LAW AND BEING QUALIFIED TO REDEEM MAN

Jesus of Nazareth has come into the world. While He was on the earth, His works demonstrated that God loves us. But at the same time, He fulfilled the law. He was truly submissive to God. He was a holy man and a submissive man. In Him we see a perfect man. Jesus of Nazareth was full of righteousness. He was a righteous man. Throughout history there was only one man who could be saved by the law. This was Jesus of Nazareth. He did not need to keep the law, yet He kept the law. The Bible says that only those who keep the law can inherit the righteousness that is of the law. With righteousness, there is life. The law says that he who keeps it will live. To keep it is to abide by the law. All who have the righteousness of the law have life. The only purpose for God to say this to the whole world is to condemn man and prove to him that he is a sinner. God gave us the law to prove to us that we are sinners. Thank and praise the Lord. There is only One who has life by the law. This One is Jesus of Nazareth.

Let us for the moment set aside the fact that He is God and consider Him as a man, a very ordinary man. He kept the law and lived. He lived on earth for over thirty-three years. Not only did He not sin, He did not even know sin. He was tempted in all things. But He was not tempted by sin. Note this: the Lord Jesus was not tempted by sin. When many read the book of Hebrews, they receive a wrong understanding based on a wrong translation. The Greek text

shows us clearly that although the Lord Jesus was tempted in all things, He was never tempted by sin. He was in the flesh and therefore had weaknesses. But He knew no sin. He was never tempted by sin. If you consult an accurate translation, you will see this clearly.

Are the Lord Jesus' righteous acts of any benefit to us? Indeed they are. The righteous acts of the Lord Jesus prove that He is God. Because of these righteous acts, the Lord Jesus did not have to die for Himself. The righteous acts of the Lord qualify Him to die on the cross on behalf of our sins. If the Lord Jesus had any sin, His death would have been for Himself; He would not have been able to die for us. Since the Lord did not have any sin at all, He was qualified to be offered up as a sacrifice for our sins. Christian theology says that God has made the righteousness of the Lord Jesus ours. God has transferred the Lord's righteousness to us in the same way that banks transfer money from one account to another. The Lord kept the law for us. We have disobeyed the law. But the obedience of the Lord Jesus has earned us God's satisfaction. But let me ask emphatically: Has the Bible ever mentioned the "righteousness of the Lord Jesus"? Who can find a place in the New Testament that speaks of "the righteousness of the Lord Jesus"? If you read the entire New Testament, including the Greek text, you will discover that the New Testament never mentions the words the righteousness of Christ. One place seems to say this, but it does not refer to Christ's own personal righteousness. Men do not like to read God's Word today. They like to study theology. Theology, however, is created by man. It does not come from God's Word. Theology tells us that God has imputed Christ's righteousness to us. The Bible does not have this concept. On the contrary, the Bible is opposed to this concept. The righteousness of Jesus of Nazareth is His own righteousness. It is indeed righteousness, but it is the righteousness of Jesus of Nazareth. This righteousness qualifies Him to die for us and be our Savior, but God has no intention to transfer the righteousness of Jesus to us.

John 12:24 is a precious verse in the Bible. It says that unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone. A man like the Lord Jesus was just one grain before God. Only after He has died is there many grains. Salvation begins with the cross. Although we must have Bethlehem before we can have Golgotha, we are saved through Golgotha, not Bethlehem. The Son of God is absolutely righteous. He was the one righteous grain. But His righteousness cannot save us. It cannot be imputed to us. God does mention the righteousness of Christ in the Bible. But He never says that

Christ's righteousness is to be ours. The Bible says that Christ is our righteousness. It never says that Christ's righteousness is our righteousness. I would like to bring this out, for this will exalt the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible says that Christ is our righteousness. Christ Himself is our righteousness. We go to God in Christ. Christ is our righteousness.

Once I asked a Western sister what she wears when she goes before God. She said that she puts on the righteousness of Christ to go to God. She took the righteousness of Christ as her garment to go to God. I asked her where this is found in the Bible. It is not the righteousness of Christ that has become our righteousness. Christ has never transferred His righteousness to us. Rather, it is Christ Himself who has become our righteousness. We are saved by the righteousness of God, not by the righteousness of Christ.

We have seen what God's righteousness is. God's righteousness brings us forgiveness and saves us from judgment. It is not the righteousness of Christ that does this. The righteousness of Christ is only the qualification for Him to be our Savior. Christ has never transferred His righteousness to us. If the righteousness of the Lord Jesus were transferable to us, He could have done this while He was living on earth. He did not have to go to the cross, and we could have been saved then. If that is the case, His life would have become a ransoming life. But there is no such doctrine as a ransoming life. There is only the doctrine of a ransoming death. Only the death of the Lord Jesus will save us. His life is our example. We cannot be saved by His life. His righteousness condemns us. The more righteous He is, the more we are in trouble. There is absolutely no way for His righteousness to be imputed to us. If God were to put us side by side with the righteousness of the Lord, we could only go to hell. But thank God that He has died and become our righteousness. This is why we are saved. Salvation comes from the cross. It does not come from the manger. Salvation comes from Golgotha; it does not come from Bethlehem. If the righteousness of the Lord Jesus could save us, He would not have had to die. Therefore, when we read the Bible, we should not be affected by theology. We will be much clearer if we are taught by the Bible rather than by theology. Man's word can help, but it can also damage. We would rather put man's word aside.

Let us go on step by step. We first saw that it must be God who comes to bear our sins. Then we saw that Jesus of Nazareth came to bear our sins. But His righteousness on earth was more of a condemnation to us. When were we

saved through the Lord Jesus? Let us consider a type in the Bible. Between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle, there was a veil. God was within the veil in the Holy of Holies. Outside the veil was the world. The Bible tells us that this veil signifies the flesh of the Lord Jesus (Heb. 10:20). In other words, the Holy of Holies can only be seen by the Lord Jesus as a man on earth and those who live a life like the life of the Lord Jesus. Not all can see God. Only the Lord Jesus can see God. No one in the entire world can see the Holy of Holies. It has been veiled. Man was able to see the Holy of Holies when God removed the veil from heaven and combined the Holy of Holies, the Holy Place, and the outer court into one. This was accomplished at the time the Son of God was crucified on the cross. At that time, the way to the Holy of Holies was opened. This is why Hebrews 10:19-20 says that we have boldness to enter the Holy of Holies by the blood of Jesus through the veil. This torn veil is the flesh of the Lord Jesus. Now we have boldness and the full assurance of faith to come to God. The righteousness of the Lord Jesus on earth has no direct relationship with us. Thank the Lord that He did not stay on earth forever. If He were to remain on earth forever, He would still be the one grain. Thank God that He has died and produced us, the many grains. Thank the Lord for the cross.

THE TWO ASPECTS OF THE LORD'S CROSS

Here is a question. The Lord died on the cross, but what is the significance of His death? Who sent Him to the cross? Everyone who reads the Gospels knows that the Jews sent Him to the Gentiles, and the Gentiles crucified Him on the cross. If I remember correctly, Pilate was a Spaniard. How can we say that the Lord Jesus died to bear our sins? He was clearly crucified by man. In Acts 2:23 Peter told the Jews that they had nailed Jesus to the cross through the hand of lawless men. Here it says that it was the Jews who nailed the Lord Jesus to the cross. But what did the Lord Jesus do on the cross? Before He went to the cross, He was praying in the garden of Gethsemane. Was His prayer, accompanied with sweat like drops of blood, caused by man's persecution and opposition? Was it because Judas was bringing men to arrest Him? Or was it because He had to go to the cross to redeem us from sin? Was it not because God made the sinless One to become sin for us and laid the sins of the whole world upon Him, so that He would bear our sins upon the tree? There He prayed, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me" (Luke 22:42).

If the cross was something out of man's hand, if it was just the tool for some evil men to kill Him, and if there was only the human aspect to the Lord Jesus, then I would not like to listen to this prayer of the Lord. I would not like to hear Jesus of Nazareth kneeling there praying to the Father to remove the cup from Him if possible. For the past two thousand years, many martyrs and disciples of the Lord had a much stronger voice than He did when they were about to die. Many martyrs, when locked inside cells and dungeons, prayed that the Father would glorify them, that they would rather die for the Son, and that they would rather testify to the Lord's Word with their blood. If it had not been God who had commenced to place the burden of sins on the Lord at Gethsemane, and if it had not been God who had laid the burden of bearing our sins on the Lord Jesus, we would have to say that the Lord Jesus did not even have as much courage as those who believed in Him. Hence, the problem is that the cross has the aspect of man and the aspect of God. Man crucified the Lord Jesus on the cross. But the Lord said that no man takes His life away; He gave it up by Himself (John 10:17-18). Man could crucify the Lord a thousand times or ten thousand times, but unless He Himself gave His life away, nothing could have been done to Him. Man considers that He was crucified by man. We consider Him to be crucified by God to redeem sins on our behalf.

We have to find out from the Bible what God did on the cross. First, let us read Isaiah 53:5-10: "But He was pierced because of our transgressions; / He was crushed because of our iniquities; / The chastening for our peace was upon Him, / And by His stripes we have been healed. / We all like sheep have gone astray; / Each of us has turned to his own way, / And Jehovah has caused the iniquity of us all / To fall on Him. / He was oppressed, and it was He who was afflicted, / Yet He did not open His mouth; / Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter / And like a sheep that is dumb before its shearers, / So He did not open His mouth. / By oppression and by judgment He was taken away; / And as for His generation, who among them had the thought / That He was cut off out of the land of the living / For the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due? / And they assigned His grave with the wicked, / But with a rich man in His death, / Although He had done no violence, / Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. / But Jehovah was pleased to crush Him, to afflict Him with grief. / If You make His soul a trespass offering, / He will see a seed, He will extend His days, / And the pleasure of Jehovah will prosper in His hand." The apostles quote Isaiah 53 many times

in the New Testament. The One spoken of in this passage of the Scriptures is the Lord Jesus. What did the prophet say when he wrote this portion of the Scripture? The last sentence in verse 4 says, "We ourselves esteemed Him stricken, / Smitten of God and afflicted." At the beginning, the prophet thought that He was smitten and stricken by God, that He was punished for His own sins and smitten by God for His transgressions. But in verse 5, there is a turn. God showed him a revelation by means of the word but. We think that He was merely suffering from punishment and smiting. But He was not suffering from punishment and smiting. "But He was pierced because of our transgressions; / He was crushed because of our iniquities; / The chastening for our peace was upon Him, / And by His stripes we have been healed. / We all like sheep have gone astray; / Each of us has turned to his own way" (vv. 5-6). The next sentence is very precious, "And Jehovah has caused the iniquity of us all / To fall on Him" (v. 6). This is what the Lord has done. We can see that there is the aspect of man to the cross and there is the aspect of God. Although it was the hands of man that nailed the Lord Jesus up, manifesting man's hatred for God, it was also God who had laid all of our sins upon Him and crucified Him. The cross was God's doing; it was something that Jehovah accomplished.

What happened at the cross? "He was oppressed, and it was He who was afflicted, / Yet He did not open His mouth; / Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter / And like a sheep that is dumb before its shearers, / So He did not open His mouth. / By oppression and by judgment He was taken away; / And as for His generation, who among them had the thought / That He was cut off out of the land of the living/For the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due?" (vv. 7-8). To be cut off out of the land of the living is to die. Those who stood by the cross at the time the Lord was crucified marveled and wondered why this man was being crucified. They did not know the reason why such a thing happened. The prophet said that "He did not open His mouth," and that He is brought "like a lamb that is led to the slaughter /And like a sheep that is dumb before its shearers." Who knew that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the sin of the people? Who knew that it was God working on Him to accomplish the work of redemption? The cross was the way that the Lord accomplished redemption through His death. Verse 9 says, "And they assigned His grave with the wicked,/But with a rich man in His death,/ Although He had done no violence,/Nor was there any deceit in His mouth." Verse 10 is very precious: "But Jehovah was pleased to crush

Him, to afflict Him with grief./If You make His soul a trespass offering." The cross is a work that God did. It was God Himself who bore our sins on the cross. He solved our problem of sin. Never give any credit to Judas for delivering the Lord Jesus to the Jews. Never think that without Judas the Lord would not have been able to be the Savior. Even if there had been a thousand or ten thousand Judases, it would still be useless. It was the Lord Jesus Himself who bore our sins.

When the Lord Jesus was praying in the garden of Gethsemane, He may have seemed like the weakest of all men, without any courage. He prayed for the Father to take the cup away from Him (Luke 22:42). But when He came out from the garden and met many evil men, He said, "I am," and "they drew back and fell to the ground" (John 18:6). Please remember that He did not fall while being confronted with man's evil. On the contrary, He caused them to fall. While He was at Gethsemane, considering the suffering involved in bearing man's sins, how the sinless One would be made sin, and how He was to take upon Himself the judgment of sin, He prayed for the cup to be removed from Him if possible. Had it not been for the question of redemption, the Lord Jesus would not have even matched a martyr. How brave were the many Christian martyrs when they marched to the lions' den. But the Lord Jesus pleaded to have the cup removed from Him if possible. Physically speaking, the Lord Jesus was vastly different from all the martyrs. But for redemption, for solving the problem of sin, for God to come to man and bear man's sin, even He had to ask for the removing of the cup if possible. The Bible says that it was Jehovah that made Him an offering for sin. It was Jehovah who laid on Him the iniquity of us all. It was something Jehovah did. The cross was the work of God; it was not the work of man. The cross is God Himself coming to earth to bear man's sins. The cross is not the crucifixion of the Son of God by man.

Do you remember what the Bible says about the sixth to ninth hours? The sun's light failed (Luke 23:44-45). The Jews could mock Him, and the Gentiles could chastise and shame Him, but the sun was beyond the Jews' control. The Gentiles did not have the authority to manipulate the sun. Man could clamor and trumpet, but the earthquake was not something that Pilate could summon. Why was the sky darkened? These phenomena happened because God Himself had come to bear our sins. This was not something done by man. If it had been done by man, would God have added to His Son's pain when He was hanging on the cross? Would God not have sent twelve

companies of angels to come and rescue Him? Such would indeed have happened had it not been for the redemption for sins. We thank and praise God that His Son came to redeem us from sins. This was why He said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46). No believer throughout the past two thousand years has ever said these terrible words when they died. For two thousand years, whether the believers died in peace or in woe, they were more bold than He was. Why was the Son of God rejected there by God? If it had merely been man's hand and man's crucifixion, that would have been the time He needed God's presence even more. When man plotted to persecute and kill Him, God should have manifested His presence more. That was the most crucial moment. God should have been with Him. Why did God leave Him instead? It was solely because the Son of God had become sin and had borne the judgment. That was the reason He cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" God had forsaken Him. We who have believed in the work of redemption know that the work of the cross was for Him to be judged by sin. The cross of the Lord shows us how evil sin is and how much of a price God has paid for the work of redemption.

Besides Isaiah 53, another clear testimony of the Scripture can be found. In Romans 3:25, God set forth Christ "as a propitiation place." This also shows clearly that the work was done by God. Deuteronomy 21:23 tells us that he who is hanged on a tree is accursed of God. When the Lord was hanging on the cross, He was not accursed of man. Rather, He was accursed of God. That is why He can deliver us from the curse. First John 4:10 says that God loved us and sent His Son as a propitiation concerning our sins. It was God who sent His Son to be a propitiation. It was not man who crucified Him. Second Corinthians 5:21 also says, "Him who did not know sin He made sin on our behalf." This was something that God did. The cross is the work of God. It was God who sent the Lord Jesus to pass through the cross. Acts 2:23 mentions both the aspect of God and the aspect of man. "This man, delivered up by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you, through the hand of lawless men, nailed to a cross and killed." The Lord Jesus was killed by the Jews through the hand of lawless men. However, such a death was according to the determined counsel of God. This shows us that everything was done by God. We have sin, and sin can only be taken care of by God Himself. For this reason, God came to the world to be a man. While He was a man, He was indeed righteous. But this righteousness was not imputed to us. It was the death of the Lord Jesus that delivered us from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13).

He did not deliver us from sin while He was living, but when He died. On the cross, it was God who crucified Him, rather than man. Man's hand is useless. It was God who took the opportunity to make manifest man's sin.

REDEMPTION AND SUBSTITUTION

Now we have to ask one question. Since the Lord Jesus died on the cross and since God made Him the propitiation place, how can we be saved? What is the difference between redemption and substitution? Are they similar in any way? We have to realize that the work of the Lord Jesus is a work of redemption. But the result of this redemptive work is substitution. Redemption is the cause, and substitution is the result. The scope of redemption is very large. But the scope of substitution is not quite as large. It is quite interesting that the Bible never says that the Lord Jesus died on behalf of the sins of all. It only says that the Lord Jesus died on behalf of all (2 Cor. 5:14). His redemptive work was to satisfy the righteous requirements of God. When the Lord accomplished redemption on the cross, this work of redemption had absolutely nothing to do with man. I want to impress you strongly with this word. Redemption is absolutely not related to us. The work of redemption is between God and sin. What is the work of redemption? It is God Himself coming to the world to solve the problem of sin. Once the problem of sin is solved, the work of redemption is done.

The blood of the Passover lamb was sprinkled on the side posts and upper posts of the doors (Exo. 12:7). God said that when He saw the blood, He would pass over the house (v. 13). The blood was for God to see. It was not for the firstborn to see. The firstborn did not need to see the blood; they stayed in the houses. The blood was to meet God's righteous requirements; it was not to meet the requirements of the firstborn. With the firstborn, there was no such thing as redemption. If we read the Old Testament, we will discover that the blood for the atonement (i.e., redemption) of sin was brought into the Holy of Holies. It was sprinkled on the veil seven times (Lev. 16:14-15). On the day of Atonement, the high priest had to take the blood and sprinkle it on the mercy seat of the ark. The blood was offered to God. It is true that the blood had to be smeared on the thumb, the ear, and the toe of a leper. But that was done with respect to consecration. It was a matter of consecration to God. Man had no such requirement. Redemption has to do with God; it is God coming in to

solve what man cannot solve by himself. This is why the Bible says, "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Redemption includes the whole world. In such a redemption, everyone, even those that have not been saved, are included.

God has come and dealt with our sins. The Lord Jesus has satisfied God's righteous requirements so that we can receive the substitution of the Lord Jesus. His redemption is an abstract preparation. By believing in Him, this redemption becomes a substitution to us. Before God, it was not a substitution, but a redemption. It is important to know this. If we are not clear about this matter, we will be confused about many other doctrines. Redemption is before God, and substitution is for us. Redemption is to satisfy God's requirements, and substitution is for us to receive the benefit. What He accomplished was redemption; what we have received is substitution. I do not mean that there is no such teaching as substitution in the Bible. There is indeed such a teaching. But all the teachings in the Bible concerning substitution are written for Christians. They are not written for unbelievers. To the Gentiles we say that Jesus has died for them and accomplished redemption. To the Christians we say that the Lord Jesus has substituted them in bearing their sins.

In the passage that we have read from Isaiah 53, notice that it says, "But He was pierced because of our transgressions; / He was crushed because of our iniquities; / The chastening for our peace was upon Him, / And by His stripes we have been healed" (v. 5). Please observe that it says "our" instead of "your." He bore the suffering for our sins. Hence, our sins are forgiven. It is for us and not for the whole world. When Peter quoted Isaiah 53, he said, "Who Himself bore up our sins in His body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24). It was always "our" and not "your." Hence, we have to be careful when we preach the gospel. It is better that we adhere more to the Bible. The Bible never says to sinners that Jesus died for their sins. The Bible says that Jesus died for them (Rom. 5:8). There is such a thing as Jesus dying for them. But there is no such thing as Jesus dying for their sins. For Jesus to die for them is a fact. But the problem of sin is not solved yet. It is true that all the problems of sin are solved before God already. But if one has not participated in this work, his sins are not yet solved, and he has no part in the substitution of Jesus. When one receives the Lord Jesus, his problem of sin is taken care of. This is substitution. Without this, there is no substitution. In other words,

redemption has been accomplished, but salvation has not yet been accomplished. If I were to ask you when you were redeemed, you should reply that it transpired two thousand years ago. But if I were to ask you when you were saved, you should say that it happened in a certain year on a certain day and month. Redemption is something that happened long ago. Salvation is something present. Redemption was accomplished by Christ. Salvation is realized in us. We were redeemed two thousand years ago. But we may have been saved for only a few years. I do not know how to say it more clearly. This is very clear to me. God's work of redemption is a matter regarding Himself; it is to satisfy Himself and has nothing to do with us. It is something absolutely before God. God Himself was the One who did the work. When we come and see what God has accomplished, and believe and accept it, we will receive this substitution.

Let us use another illustration. There is a crossing that joins the east and west bank of the Whampoa river. It is free of charge. The name of the place is called The Free Crossing. Suppose I were a robber who had robbed and stolen many times there. However, now I am different. What should I do if I want to have a thorough dealing concerning my past theft and robbery? Even if I want to repay, where should I go? Those from whom I stole are now nowhere to be found. What should I do? For the sake of righteousness and in order to repay, I may start a free service to ferry people across the river. Anyone can come for the ride, and no money is charged. I may do this to repay the money that I stole from people in this area. I offer this kind of free service as a solution to the problem of my unrighteousness. This free service is to me a solution to unrighteousness. But to others, it is a substitution; I am paying the fare on others' behalf. This is the way that the Lord Jesus deals with the problem of punishment. God sent the Lord Jesus to accomplish redemption in order that the problem of sin, as well as His own holiness and righteousness, might be taken care of. When one believes, he will enter into this work, and the Lord Jesus will take away his sins.

Hence, the New Testament says, "Christ also has suffered once for sins, the Righteous on behalf of the unrighteous" (1 Pet. 3:18). He "Himself bore up our sins in His body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24). All of these were done for us. On the night the Lord was betrayed, He took the cup and blessed it, and gave it to the disciples, saying, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is being poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins," (Matt. 26:28). It was for many, not for all. In the future, we will see innumerable ones, with palm

branches in their hands, who are washed by the blood (Rev. 7:9, 14). Thank the Lord. He accomplished redemption for His own sake, so that we can be substituted. We can say nothing but to thank and praise Him.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE WORK OF CHRIST—RESURRECTION

BECAUSE OF OUR JUSTIFICATION

We have already mentioned that the Lord Jesus died for us and for our sins (Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 15:3). We have also seen how the Lord accomplished God's righteousness and, at the same time, manifested God's grace. Now we have to ask a question. How do we know that the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ has been accomplished? How do we know that such a work was accepted by God? Although we say that the Lord Jesus has fulfilled God's righteous requirements, what does God have to say about this? How can God show us that His Son has indeed accomplished the work of redemption and indeed met His requirements? It is true that the Lord Jesus died for us and for our sins and that His work was accomplished. On the cross before He died He clearly said, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). It is true that He finished the work of redemption He set out to do on earth. He was able to say that it was finished. Every one of us who has looked forward to His salvation can also say that it is finished. But how do we know that the Lord's work of redemption is acceptable to God when it is presented before Him? How do we know that the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus was approved by God? It is all right for us to say that the Lord's work has passed the test. But what does God have to say? We can say that Jesus died on the cross and accomplished the work of redemption. But how do we know that our God is fully satisfied with such a work? We know that the Lord's work of redemption is most reasonable to us. But how do we know that the same is true to God? We say that the work of redemption is fully righteous, but would God say that it is righteous also? When we look at the cross, we say that all things are settled. But when God looks at the cross, is everything settled in His eyes? We have to realize that there is no way to know whether or not God is satisfied based on the cross of the Lord Jesus alone; there is no way to find out whether or not God considers it final. If there were only the cross, if we only had the Lord's death, if the cross alone were to remain with us until today, and if the Lord's tomb

had never been emptied, we would not know what the work of the Lord's death has accomplished for us. Regarding the redemptive work of the Lord, there is not only the aspect of the cross but the aspect of resurrection as well.

THE LORD'S RESURRECTION IS THE PROOF OF GOD'S ACCEPTANCE OF HIS REDEMPTION

Tonight we are not going to speak about everything related to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, just as we did not share about everything related to His death the last time. Earlier we spoke only about the objective aspect of His death. Tonight we will also consider only the objective aspect of the Lord's resurrection. Objectively, the Lord died a substitutionary death for us; He died on behalf of all (1 Pet. 3:18; 2 Cor. 5:14). At the same time, He died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3). This is what the Lord's death accomplished. What then is the purpose of His resurrection? God raised up the Lord Jesus from the dead as a proof that the work of redemption has been accomplished. God has justified and approved it. Now He is satisfied.

Many of us have had experience working in business. Suppose you have a secretary who has proposed a plan to you. After you look at the plan you may write "OK" on it. This means that the work is approved; it is all right. Now it can be carried out. The Lord has died for us and the work has been accomplished. The resurrection of the Lord is God's signing of an "OK" on the work and death of the Lord Jesus. This means that this death is now approved. Man's problem of sin is now solved. Since the Lord has resurrected, the problem of our sins is fully solved. If the Lord had not resurrected, though the redemption would have been accomplished, our hearts would be held in suspense. There would still be a certain uneasiness within us, for though we would know that redemption had been accomplished, we would not know whether it had been accepted. We realize that we are fully redeemed from our sins when we see that the Lord Jesus has resurrected. Resurrection is the proof. It shows us that the cross was right and the redemption was approved. Resurrection is the proof that the work of the cross has been accepted and received by God.

Let us consider an illustration. Suppose I owe a certain person a sum of money. I may owe him so much that there is no way for me to repay my debt. This, of course, is not a very good illustration. But we will use it here for the sake of clarifying one aspect of the truth. It should not be applied to all

aspects of the truth. Let us say that I go to a brother and say to him, "You know that person to whom I owe the money very well. You two are good friends. Please plead for me a little. I have no way to pay back what I owe, even if I pawn everything at a pawn shop. I have a problem even in taking care of my own living today. Please do me this favor by all means." My creditor does not live here in Shanghai; he lives in Soochow. At my request, the brother makes a special trip to Soochow and tells the man, "Mr. Nee is really poor. He cannot even take care of his own living. This little sum of money is nothing to you. Why don't you let it go and write off his debt?" Suppose my creditor is very generous. He says, "Since you come to plead for Mr. Nee's debt, I will forget about it. He does not have to return it to me anymore. Take this promissory note back to him." Then he goes on and says to this brother, "We have not met each other for years. Since we are good friends and since you are here in Soochow, you should take a trip to Tiger Hill and the Winter Mountain Shrine. Why don't you stay here for a few days." He invites him to stay in Soochow and lavishly hosts him. Suppose this brother left on May 10 and settled the business on that day. However, by May 20 he is still not back in Shanghai. While he is feasting in Soochow, I am worrying in Shanghai. I do not know whether or not this brother has finished the business. Perhaps he has not come back because of some difficulty. He did not come back on the night train on May 10. Perhaps the business has not yet been settled. He did not come back on May 11. Neither did he come back on May 19 or 20. As long as he has not come back to Shanghai, my heart cannot have peace because I do not know if the business has been settled. The business was settled on May 10, but I have not yet received news on May 20. As long as he has not come back, my business is not finished. I still consider myself a debtor, and my heart is still ill at ease. When will the business be transacted? Only when he returns to Shanghai will I know that the matter is cleared up. Friends, this illustrates the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. When He died for us, He solved the problem of sin. As soon as He died, the fact of sin was taken care of. But if He had not resurrected from the dead, and if He had not come back, then our hearts would have been held in suspense; we would not know what had happened. The Lord Jesus went through death for us. He went through the punishment of the law and the wrath of God for us (Gal. 3:13). But if the Lord Jesus had not come back, we would not know if the work was finished. We would not know if God had accepted the work of the Lord. For this reason, the Lord Jesus must come back. He must resurrect. Then we will know that the work is settled. Praise the Lord. The work is settled. If the work had not been

settled, the Lord would not have come out and resurrected. His resurrection proves that our sins have fully been cleared up.

Romans 4:25 says, "Who was delivered for our offenses and was raised for our justification." Why was the Lord Jesus delivered? It was because of our offenses. If we had had no offenses, the Lord would never have had to be delivered. It was because of the offenses that the Lord was delivered to man. In the same way, His resurrection was because of our justification. In Greek the two clauses have the same structure. Jesus was delivered because of our offenses and was resurrected because of our justification. Some Bible translators have misinterpreted Paul's meaning. They thought that resurrection is for the purpose that man may be justified. They thought that it is first the resurrection of the Lord, then our justification. But Paul was saying and the Holy Spirit was saying that He was resurrected because we have been justified. To put it simply, it is because we have been justified that the Lord was resurrected. Some versions say that resurrection comes first, then justification. But the Holy Spirit says that justification comes first, then resurrection. First there is the matter of our offenses. Then there is the death of the Lord. In the same way, first there is our justification, then there is His resurrection. He was delivered because of our offenses, and He was resurrected because of our justification. This means that the resurrection of the Lord Jesus is our proof of justification. Because we have been justified, God raised up the Lord Jesus. Since the Lord has satisfied God's righteous requirement, God resurrected Him.

My friends, tonight I have to announce to you some very good news. Although some have believed in the Lord, they are still in fear and trembling. They feel like they are walking on the edge of a precipitous cliff or on thin ice. They think that they have committed their souls, their lives, and their eternal future to the Lord's cross. They do not know whether this trust in the Lord will be safe or not. If they find out at a later date that this trust does not result in salvation, then they are in trouble. I may believe in the cross of Jesus for the redemption of my sins today. But if it fails me on that day, then I am in trouble. Today I may say that it is not a matter of doing good or of keeping the law and that all I have to do is rely on the cross of Jesus. But what happens if God says in that day that this is not all right? What shall I do? How do I know today that the cross of the Lord is sufficient? My friends, you should not look at the cross; you should not worry about whether the cross is sensible or not and whether it is right or wrong. All you need to look at is the Lord's

resurrection. If the work of the Lord's cross was not proper or right, God would not have resurrected Him. Hence, He resurrected because we were justified. Because we are justified when we trust in the blood of Jesus, the Lord Jesus was resurrected.

RESURRECTION BECAUSE OF OUR JUSTIFICATION

It is wonderful that Romans 3 tells us that we are justified freely through the blood of the Lord Jesus and that Romans 4 follows by telling us that because we are justified, the Lord Jesus was resurrected (v. 25). His death is the basis of our justification, while His resurrection is the proof of our justification. Since He died, we are justified; since we are justified, He resurrected. We are justified before God because of His death, and He was resurrected because of our justification. His resurrection is God's proof to us that His blood is able to justify us. Suppose someone were to ask if His blood is effective or not. There is no way to see the blood. We cannot see the blood at all because the blood was put on the side posts and the upper post of the door (Exo. 12:7). It was brought into the Holy of Holies and put in the place of atonement for sin (Lev. 16:14-15). It was only for God to see. We only know about the redemption of the Lord Jesus. We do not know how the blood of the Lord Jesus has satisfied God's demand. No matter how much we know, we will never be clear about this matter. In the whole universe, only One knows the full value of the Lord's blood, and this One is God. God knows in full the value of the Lord Jesus' blood. We only know it in part. We will never know it by our mind, our prayer, or our wisdom. We do not know why the blood of the Lord Jesus washes away all our sins. We can only say that He has died for us and for our sins. We still do not know the value of the Lord's work on the cross. However, God knows this value. How does God show that the work of His Son is of great value? How does God show that the propitiation sacrifice of His Son has indeed propitiated us? He shows it by giving us the resurrection as a proof. Resurrection proves that He is satisfied with the cross. In resurrection, God is saying that He has approved the cross and that the cross has passed the test. Now God is presenting resurrection as an evidence. We are justified. Therefore, the Lord Jesus resurrected. Because God saw that the work of the Lord had fulfilled all the righteous requirements of God, everyone who comes to God is now justified. Since God is satisfied, the Lord Jesus resurrected.

The illustration that we have given may not be very good. Let me give you a more accurate illustration. Let us not say that I owe money. Let us say instead that I have sinned. In this case a brother is not going to plead for me. Instead he will bear my punishment, if there is such a thing in law as bearing others' punishment. I have sinned and should be put in jail for three months or confined to manual labor for two or three months. But I have brain disease, heart disease, a lung problem, a kidney disorder, and all kinds of other sicknesses. However, this brother is very healthy and is willing to be my substitute. When will I know that my case is over? I should be the one to go to jail. But he has gone in my place. Although I have not spent one day in jail and although I am staying peacefully at home and can conduct my business as usual, as long as he is in jail, my heart is still not at ease. I am worried that one day the judge may say that he cannot be my substitute and that I have to come myself. It is not until the day that he is released and walking on the street that I know that my case is over. If my case was not yet over, he would not have been released. The Lord Jesus has died for us. But we do not know what God has to say about this. I know that the Lord has come to redeem us from sin. But how do I know that God will acknowledge this way of redemption as proper? I do not know if the Lord's redemption is adequate or proper. I do not know if the redemptive work of the Lord has been fully settled. But since the Lord came out from death, I realize that everything has been taken care of.

Last year when we were buying a piece of land, a few times I took the money to the bank myself. Some of the money was in notes. The other money was in coins. I wrapped them up in a big bundle and wrote on a bank slip the amount of cash included. Then I handed in the package. I thought that if any of the notes or coins were counterfeit, I would have to rewrite the slip. While I was standing by the counter, I kept worrying. How do I know that the amount was correct? How do I know that all the notes were genuine? How do I know that all the coins were genuine coins? The teller would at times take a note and examine it under the light. After he had counted all the money, he put his signature on the slip and passed it to another senior officer, who also signed the slip. The slip was then passed to another man sitting opposite to him who signed the slip again. Finally, the slip was handed to me. By then I knew that the transaction was completed, and I took the slip home. I did not have to worry anymore about whether the notes were genuine or whether the coins were real. As long as the three signatures were genuine, everything was all

right. If after I returned home, I still worried that one of the notes might be counterfeit and could not eat or sleep because of this, there had to be something wrong with my mind. The question was no longer whether the notes had the right color, the right print, or the right paper texture. As long as the bank took the money and put its signature on the slip, the money was genuine, and all the problems were over. In the same way, as long as we see the Lord resurrected, everything is all right. The resurrection of the Lord tells us that we are justified. What does it mean for us to be justified? It means that God has acknowledged the redemption of Jesus His Son. After this, He justified us and then resurrected His Son. Resurrection testifies that His death is proper. Hence, if you still do not have peace and still do not know God's view concerning your salvation and whether you can be saved before God through the Lord Jesus, all you need to ask is whether the Lord has resurrected. His death takes care of redemption. His resurrection takes care of justification. Without justification, He could not have resurrected. This is why I have often said that resurrection is the receipt that God issued for the sacrifice that the Lord Jesus offered. Resurrection is God's receipt to us. It acknowledges the payment as adequate.

If you have faith in a certain person and you know that he has good credit, you would not necessarily need a note of receipt from him if you loan him a hundred, a thousand, or even ten thousand dollars. You know that he would not cheat you. But if it is a person that you do not know, one whom you have never been acquainted with and whose credit you know nothing about, you would definitely want a note of receipt from him. You do not know what he would do with your money. Thank the Lord. He knows that we are of little faith. He knows that we would doubt Him and that we would not believe in Him immediately. Although He has given us His Son and caused His Son to suffer judgment and accomplish redemption, and has even declared that whosoever receives His Son would be justified, He knew that man would still not believe in Him. Therefore, He has resurrected His Son from the dead to be a proof of our justification. His Son is the proof of our justification before Him.

My friends, you have a receipt in your pocket now. Suppose I am now saved, but after a few years God were to say, "Now you have to go to hell. You have to go into eternal perdition." Of course, this is something that will never happen. I would ask, "Why?" Suppose He says, "Because you have sinned. You are not good." I would say, "Has not the Lord Jesus accomplished redemption?"

Suppose He would say, "The redemption of Jesus is not enough. You must go to hell." I would then say, "Why is the Lord's redemption not enough?" God might say, "Don't you think that I know everything. When I say that it is not enough, it means it is not enough." What should I say then? I say that I have indeed done wrong, but I am trusting in the Lord's redemption. But God says that though the Lord's redemption has been accomplished, it is not completed. I would then say to Him, "If the work of the redemption of the Lord Jesus was not thorough enough, You should not have resurrected Him. If You resurrected Him, You were telling us through this resurrection that everything was all right. How can You say that it is not enough now?" If I were to say this to God, even He would have to acknowledge that I am right. Hallelujah! The purpose of His resurrection is to show us that His works are proper.

If there is no resurrection among us, then how do we know what happened on the cross? How do we know what the Lord negotiated with God on the cross? We heard these words on the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46). Another word that we heard was, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). One word tells us that God forsook Him. Another tells us that it was finished. If the Lord Jesus had died only, then the whole world could only have hope in Him; it could not have assurance in Him. Man could hope to receive eternal life in Him. He could hope to be justified and forgiven in Him. But he could never have the assurance to say that he is saved or has received eternal life, or that his sins have been forgiven, or that God has justified him. The reason I have the assurance that my sins are forgiven and that I am saved through faith is that I have seen the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. His resurrection shows us that the cross has satisfied God's heart.

THE BIBLE CAUSES US TO BELIEVE IN RESURRECTION

I am one who preaches the cross. Among us, many co-workers also preach the cross. Today we are all those who believe in the cross. We all believe that His death has saved us. He did not die for Himself. Rather, He died to redeem us. But let me ask you a question. Can you find one place in the entire Bible that says that we should believe that the Lord Jesus has died for us? Where in the entire New Testament does it say that we should believe in the Lord's death for us? There is no such place. This is most peculiar. There is not a single verse in the entire New Testament that tells us that we should believe in the Lord's death for us. Do not misunderstand and think that I despise the

work of the cross. I am very much for the work of the cross. But one must pay attention to the word of the Bible. There is not a single place in the New Testament that says that we should believe in the Lord Jesus' dying for us. There are countless places in the Bible that tell us that Jesus died for us and for our sins. But there is not one place that tells us to take His death as the object of our faith. The Gospel of John tells us that we have to believe (3:15-16, 18, 36). But it does not speak about believing in the cross. It only speaks of believing in the Lord.

There is another thing that is equally peculiar. The New Testament tells us to believe that God has raised Jesus from the dead. The Bible does not say that the cross or the death of the Lord Jesus is the object of our faith. Rather, it says that resurrection is the object of our faith. I believe we all know the verse in Romans 10:9, "That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Why does the Bible not ask us to believe in the cross of the Lord, but asks us to believe in His resurrection? Why does the Bible never ask us to believe in the cross of the Lord Jesus, but ask us to believe that God has raised Him from the dead? Brothers, we must consider this a little. This is very crucial. If it were up to our reading of the Bible, we would think that the cross is the most important thing, and that there should be at least one word that says that we should believe in the Lord's death on the cross. But there is not a single word about this. Why is this the case? One brother may answer that if Christ has not resurrected, our faith is in vain. It is true that twice in 1 Corinthians 15 it says that if Christ has not been raised, then our faith is vain (vv. 14, 17). But this word does not help us to solve the problem. On the contrary, it makes our problem all the more difficult. If there is no resurrection, our faith is in vain. Hence, resurrection is something that we should believe in. We know that redemption is a matter between God and the Lord Jesus. It is not God's demand on man. Redemption is not something that the Lord has done to satisfy man's heart. It is the Lord Jesus' satisfaction of God's demand of holiness, righteousness, and glory. The Lord's death and the redemptive work that He accomplished are transactions that went on between God and the Lord Jesus. It is not something that is sounded out as the object of our faith. The basis of our faith is God's raising of Jesus from among the dead.

Hence, today our faith is not in the blood of the Lord Jesus' redeeming us from sin. We can never fully understand this matter. Even a man as spiritual

as Andrew Murray, who knew God so well, said that he did not know how much value there is to the blood of the Lord Jesus. Even he said that when he went before God, he could only pray, "God, I do not know how much worth is the blood of Your Son before You. But I ask that all the worth of Your Son's blood be realized in me." The Lord's blood is of such worth that if I would only say so much, I will not be able to receive all that He has done, and His work would be limited by my speaking.

We do not know the worth of the blood. But we do know the worth of resurrection. The blood of the Lord satisfied God's demand, and we do not know how great that demand is. But we do know how great the satisfaction is. I do not know how much I owed. Perhaps it was ten talents or perhaps ten million talents. But I know that the death of the Lord is sufficient to save me. How do I know this? It is because He has resurrected. I am not trusting in the money I put into the bank to be enough or not enough. This is not what I am trusting in. I do not even have to trust that all the money that I have put in was genuine. What I am trusting in is that God would not give me a counterfeit receipt. Even if the redemption of the Lord were wrong, whatever mistakes there could be, God would never issue a wrong receipt. Hence, though I do not know how much the blood has met God's demand, I do know that it has satisfied God's demand. If the Lord had not satisfied God, God would not have resurrected Him. Therefore, you can believe in a most ignorant way. You do not have to ask whether the blood of the Lord is sufficient, or whether the Lord's work of redemption is approved. You only have to ask if God has resurrected the Lord. Since the Lord Jesus has resurrected, all you have to do is believe. We believe in resurrection. This is why the Bible only requires us to believe in resurrection; it does not require us to believe in the cross. The work of the cross is only conveyed to us to let us know what the Lord has done before God. What we preach and believe is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. It includes His death and His life. Once I see the receipt, immediately I know that the amount is adequate and that every bank note is genuine.

Tonight I can sleep well because the Lord Jesus has resurrected. If the Lord had not resurrected, even though He has died and redeemed us, we still could not sleep in peace. How do I know that His blood is sufficient? How do I know that the problem of sin is solved? Hallelujah! There is the resurrection. Because we are justified, He has resurrected. Hence, we believe in His resurrection. I do not know how many are sitting here who are still worried

about their salvation, who are still doubting and are not sure. When you ask yourself whether you have trusted in Jesus, you may say yes. When you ask yourself whether you believe that Jesus has died for you, you may also say yes. But in you there is still a question. You may think that to believe in Jesus is not sufficient to be forgiven of your sins, that you may still have to do some good works. You may still think this and that. But you only need to know one thing. Why did God resurrect the Lord Jesus? Why did God issue a receipt? The fact that God is willing to issue you the receipt proves that the amount that you have put in was right. When God raised His Son from the dead, it proved that the redemption that His Son accomplished was a righteous one. God cannot do anything unrighteous. Resurrection proves that the work of the Lord Jesus is effective before God. This is why the New Testament emphasizes so much our believing that God has raised His Son from the dead.

The two verses that we mentioned earlier in 1 Corinthians 15 are very precious. Verse 14 says, "And if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is vain; your faith is vain also." Verse 17 then says, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile." If Christ has not resurrected, one will not know what has become of the things that he has believed in. Another wonderful thing is seen in 1 Corinthians 15:3 which says, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." But in verse 17 it says, "If Christ has not been raised...you are still in your sins." Do not these two verses contradict each other? Verse 3 says that He has died for our sins. That means He has solved the problem of our sins. Why does verse 17 say that if Christ has not been raised, we are still in our sins? This verse is quite peculiar. Perhaps you would have changed that to, "If Christ has not died for you, you are still in your sins." If we changed the words been raised to died, we would readily be able to understand it. Since Christ has died for us, we are no longer in sin. But verse 3 says that Christ has died for our sins already. Now verse 17 says that without Christ's resurrection, we are still in our sins. What does this mean?

My friends, the matter is actually very clear. On the one hand, Christ has died for our sins. But when do we know that we are no longer in sin, and when do we know that we have been freed from sin? It is when the Lord Jesus was resurrected. It is when the Lord was resurrected that we realized that we were redeemed from our sins. We have to distinguish between these two. The redemption and deliverance from sin before God is due to the Lord's death; it is not due to His resurrection. But for us, it is the Lord's resurrection, rather than His death, that we realize. For my creditor, the time a debt is settled is

when he sees the money. But for me, it is settled when I see the receipt. My creditor only looks at the money, and I only look at the receipt. God's eyes only see the death of the Lord Jesus, and our eyes only see His resurrection. God does not need the resurrection of the Lord as His proof. He knows very well that the Lord's death is adequate for redemption. The problem is that we do not know. A receipt is not written for the one who receives money. It is written for one who pays the money. No receipt is prepared for the creditor. All receipts are made out for the debtors. They are written to give the debtors peace of mind. Hence, before God the Lord's death is sufficient for our sins. As long as He dies, God is satisfied. Resurrection tells us that He is satisfied, that the death of the Lord has redeemed us from sins. But if the Lord has not resurrected, even though we have been redeemed from our sins, we still would not know it. With the death of the Lord, the problem of sin is forever dealt with before God. Without resurrection, we would not have the confidence that our sins are indeed dealt with. The fact of forgiveness lies in His death. The assurance of forgiveness lies in His resurrection. The Lord's death redeems us from sins, and the Lord's resurrection allows us to know that we have been redeemed from our sins.

THE LORD'S DEATH BEING FOR GOD AND HIS RESURRECTION BEING FOR US

Hence, there are these two sides in the Bible. Without the death of the Lord Jesus for us, we would not have been redeemed from our sins. The Bible says that Jesus has died for our sins. But we see that we are still in sins. Although God has finished His side of the work, matters are still unsettled on our side. That is why the Lord Jesus must resurrect before we know that our sins have been forgiven. Death is for God, and resurrection is for us. Death is God's demand, and resurrection is the sinners' demand. Death is the solution of sin before God, and resurrection is the removal of doubt in man's heart. With death, the record of sin is done away with. With resurrection, we realize the proof of forgiveness and a not guilty verdict. Thank the Lord that there is resurrection. What happens when one comes to God and wonders if he is saved or not? Such a one may indeed have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. But he may still wonder if he is really saved. Now before God, the receipt has been issued already. If such a one still wants to doubt, it is because he chooses to doubt. If the Lord Jesus has resurrected, then our problems are solved.

Please make a point to remember these three passages—Romans 4:25, 10:9, and 1 Corinthians 15:17. These three places show us what resurrection has accomplished for us objectively. Up until now, we have seen quite a few things. We have covered sin, the law, grace, God's righteousness, the work accomplished by the death of the Lord Jesus, and the work accomplished by His resurrection.

A brother has asked the question: What does 1 John 2:2 mean? I would answer in this way. The words "the sins of" in the phrase "the sins of the whole world" in some versions are not in the original text. The Chinese Union Version reads, "And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." If such is indeed the case, then the whole world would have been saved already, for the Lord Jesus has become a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. But in Greek it should read, "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the whole world."

For a reader of the New Testament to understand the Lord's redemption and His substitution, he first has to know the distinction between ourselves and our sins, that is, between the sinner and the sins of the sinner. Second, he has to know the difference between all and many. Third, he must know the difference between sin and sins. There are differences between the three pairs of things: ourselves and our sins, the all and the many, and sin and sins.

The Bible says many times that the Lord Jesus died for all. But not once does it say that the Lord Jesus died for the sins of all. Second Corinthians 5:14 says that, "One died for all, therefore all died." Paul could not say that since One died for the sins of all, therefore all died. The Lord Jesus died for all. But He did not die for the sins of all. If the Lord Jesus had died for the sins of all, then whether or not one believes, he can be saved, for all the problems of sins are solved. But the Lord Jesus died for all. If we go to Him, we will receive Him as our substitute and receive His redemption.

The Bible does say that the Lord Jesus died for sins. But in such cases, it says that He died for the sins of many, and not for the sins of all. The night before last, a brother tested me with a verse. He asked why the book of Hebrews says that the Lord Jesus was offered up for our sins? Hebrews 9:28 says, "So Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time to those who eagerly await Him, apart from sin, unto

salvation." You can see that when it talks about Christ's bearing of sins, it says "to bear the sins of many," and not "to bear the sins of all." Following this, it gives an explanation, "to those who eagerly await Him." This means all those who are purchased by the blood. It is the innumerable multitude in Revelation 7:9-17. It is the many. That is why it can say that He was offered up for their sins. But it cannot say that He was offered up for the sins of all. The wording of the Bible is never loose. If Christ bore the sins of all, if He bore all the sins of everyone in the world, then we would not have to preach the gospel anymore. But this is not the case. What we have is the many.

Hence, Matthew 26:28 records that when the Lord Jesus took the cup, He said, "For this is My blood of the covenant, which is being poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Again we have "many," and not "all." If it were "all," then everyone's sins are forgiven. The Bible only says that the Lord Jesus died for all. This word merely shows us that the Lord's death is an open one and that everyone can receive the benefit of His death. If there is anyone here who is not saved tonight, I would say that Christ has died for you. But as for me, the Lord Jesus died for my sins. As long as you ask for it, the effectiveness of the Lord's death will be upon you, and you will have a share in it. But you must come to Him before the effectiveness of the Lord's death can be yours and can work on you. The Lord Jesus died for all, and He died for the sins of many. There is a distinction between the two. We have to take note of this.

Let us read two more passages. Romans 5:18-19 says, "So then as it was through one offense unto condemnation to all men, so also it was through one righteous act unto justification of life to all men. For just as through the disobedience of one man the many were constituted sinners, so also through the obedience of the One the many will be constituted righteous." If we want to understand these two verses, we must give them some thought and pay attention to them. Readers of the Bible agree that these two verses are some of the most difficult verses in the New Testament. We have to pay attention to the wording of them. First, in verse 18, it says, "all men," but in verse 19, it says, "the many." Second, in verse 18 there is the Greek word *eis*, which is equivalent to the English word to or toward. One version translated this as "by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." This is not a very accurate translation. The verse can be translated here as "through one offense unto condemnation to all men, so also it was

through one righteous act unto justification of life to all men." Now we have to pay a little closer attention to this matter. Verse 18 speaks about one offense, and verse 19 speaks about one man. The one offense denotes the sin of Adam (Rom. 5:14). The one-time sin of Adam was unto the condemnation of all men. This means that the one offense was for the condemnation of all men. Have you seen that just once was enough? It is like saying that once a person makes a fortune, he is prepared to buy many things. The one offense was for the condemnation of all men. In the same way, the one righteous act of Christ was for the justification unto life to all men. It is not correct to translate the verse as the previously mentioned version does, for it would mean that through the one righteous act of Christ, all would have been justified and received life. What is the meaning of *eis*, translated "unto" in this verse? It means a preparation. It is like the government's printing of many bank notes in the central bank. It is a preparation to be used later for exchange. Even if everyone comes to exchange the notes, the government is prepared. Verse 18 says all men. This means that everyone can receive life. There is no problem here at all. But verse 19 is different. Here it says, "For just as through the disobedience of one man the many were constituted sinners, so also through the obedience of the One the many will be constituted righteous." Here we have the many. Through the disobedience of one man, who is Adam, the many were constituted sinners. Here it does not say that all men were constituted sinners. Why is this so? Let me give you an honest testimony. It may seem as if I am joking. But six years ago, when I first read about the difference between the many and the all, I was a little concerned for the apostle Paul. While I was looking up the original text, I thought if Paul were to use words the way our translators did, it would be a disaster. I was almost praying there, "Don't let such a word be all but be many." Eventually I found out that it is indeed many. What does it mean if we say that through the disobedience of one all men were condemned? This would mean that everyone who is in Adam is a sinner. There would not be one righteous one. This would not be too serious. But the next sentence would be more serious: Through one righteous act all men are justified. This would mean that the gospel need not be preached anymore, for everyone is saved and is justified. There is no mention here of the matter of believing or not and receiving or not. Through the obedience of the One all are saved. Even the unbelieving ones are saved. But this is, of course, not the case. What it says here is, "Through the obedience of the One the many will be constituted righteous." Therefore, what

the work of the Lord Jesus has gained is for the many. One must differentiate between all and the many.

At the same time, we must also differentiate between ourselves and our sins. Romans 5:8 says, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." But 1 Corinthians 15:3 says that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." To be "for us" is a preparation. But to be "for our sins" is a kind of realization. Even if a person is not yet saved, he can still preach the gospel. But he can only say that God sent His Son to die for us. This is absolutely right. But only those who have been saved can say that God sent His Son to die for our sins. This is because our relationship with the Lord Jesus is in the matter of sins. Hence, we can say that the Lord Jesus died for our sins. First Peter 2:24 says, "Who Himself bore up our sins in His body on the tree." There is a distinction here. To a sinner, we can only say that the Lord Jesus died for him. We cannot say that the Lord Jesus died for his sins.

It will help you to understand if I illustrate this by a simple example. Suppose I have borrowed some money, but have no way to repay. A brother knows that my account number in the Shanghai Bank is No. 51. Suppose he deposits a sum of money into account No. 51. Then he writes a letter to me telling me that he has deposited a sum of money in the bank for me and that I can now repay my debt. He has paid the money and has sacrificed himself to prepare the money for me. But let me ask, Has my debt been cleared yet? I can pay back the debt. The money is in the bank. But the debt is not paid yet. It is only when I go personally to the bank and withdraw the money and pay back the debt that I can say that this brother has paid the debt for me. In the same way, the Lord Jesus has died for us. This death was prepared for us. But it is only when we receive the Lord Jesus that we can say that He died for our sins. Hence, brother, when you quote 1 John 2:2, you must be careful about the wording. Jesus Christ has become a propitiation for our sins, and not for us only, but also for the whole world. You can see how accurate the Holy Spirit is in choosing the words through His apostle. The Lord Jesus died for our sins. But the death of the Lord Jesus was not only for us, but for the whole world, so that the whole world may receive this death. One has to be careful here. Do not add the words the sins of to "the whole world." It is unfortunate that many have not seen this. We cannot add anything to the word of God, nor can we subtract anything from it (Rev. 22:18-19).

Finally, there is still one thing that we have to take note of. It is the difference between sin and sins. We cannot say that the Lord Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, for sins means all the wrongdoings and all the punishment that we need to bear. If the Lord Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, then all the wrongdoings of all the world were removed. Whether a man believes or not, he is saved. But the Bible is very careful in the use of words. It only says the sin of the world. It does not say the sins of the world. John 1:29 says, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" The word "sin" is singular. The problem of sin is brought into the world through one man and brought out of the world through one man. What is mentioned here is the "abstract" dealing of the problem of sin by the Son of God. Objectively speaking, sin entered the world in an "abstract" way through Adam. Today the Lord Jesus is taking away and dealing with the problem of sin in an "abstract" way. This does not mean that He has borne the guilt of each individual sin. If He has borne the guilt of each individual wrongdoing, then the whole world would have been saved already. Thank and praise the Lord that the Word of God does not have any loophole. It never makes a mistake.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT— ENLIGHTENING AND FELLOWSHIP

In the past few evenings we have seen how God manifested His grace and accomplished His righteousness. We have also seen how God through His Son Jesus died for us and for our sins, thus accomplishing the work of redemption (Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 15:3). His work of redemption justifies us before God through faith in His blood (Rom. 3:24-25). His resurrection from the dead becomes the assurance of our faith. Through this resurrection we know that God has accepted the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. The work of the Lord Jesus has satisfied God's requirements. His resurrection is a proof to us of this fact. All who believe in the blood of His Son and who come to Him through His redemption are now justified.

Tonight I will not cover the other aspect of the Lord's work, which is His ascension. Since many brothers and sisters already know about this, I will just mention it in brief. The ascension of the Lord Jesus is His appearing before God on our behalf, that we might be accepted in Christ. What is ascension? In the Bible ascension means only one thing objectively, which is for one to be accepted before God. Today the Lord Jesus has appeared before God (Heb. 9:24). We also appear before God in Him. In this way God accepts us in the same way that He has accepted Christ.

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT— ENLIGHTENING TO SEEK OUT SINNERS

Tonight we must mention another matter. The gospel is inadequate if it mentions only the work of the Father and the Son without mentioning the work of the Holy Spirit. There must be the mention of the Holy Spirit also. The work of the gospel is of three aspects. Luke 15 shows us three parables. On the one hand, we see the loving Father waiting to receive the sinners. On the other hand, we see the good Shepherd coming to the world to seek for the lost sheep. One sees the Father waiting at home for the repentant and saved sinner, and one also sees the Son coming to the world to save sinners. But after the Lord's work was completed and before the sinner reaches home,

there was another parable, which is the woman patiently and carefully seeking the lost coin with a lighted lamp.

First, one sees the Lord Jesus coming to earth to seek for the sinners. Second, one sees the woman lighting the lamp to enlighten, sweep, and seek for the lost coin. Hence, the Holy Spirit is working together with the Father and the Son to seek out the sinner for the accomplishing of the gospel work. The Son came to die for the sinner; the Father receives the sinner home; and the Holy Spirit works to enlighten man's heart and to show man his real position.

If a person does not have the light of the Holy Spirit, it is possible that he can be like Judas, who saw his sin, was suffering and had no peace within, but would not see his own position before God. Without the light, he would not see his position of perdition. Man's feeling concerning sin goes only so far as to realize that he has done wrong. He does not realize that he is a lost one before God. We are willing to admit that we are sinful. But without the enlightening of the Holy Spirit, we will not admit that as a result of sin, we became lost persons before God. In the eyes of God, we are lost persons.

There is the possibility of a fleshly counterfeit even in the matter of sin-consciousness. The flesh can replace the work of the Holy Spirit. Many tears in revival meetings are but results of man's flesh. They are not produced through the work of the Holy Spirit in man. It is one thing for man to know that he has sinned. It is another thing for man to know that his relationship with God is wrong. The Holy Spirit patiently and carefully enlightens man and shows him that he is lost. What the Holy Spirit does is to show man that his position is wrong. Hence, the first feeling of everyone who has experienced the work of the Holy Spirit of God is not something related to sin, but the feeling that he is away from home. His relationship with God is cut off. He has developed a problem with God. He is a lost man.

Our problem before God does not lie merely in how much we have wasted ourselves in eating, drinking, fornication, or gambling. It is a problem of being away in a distant country. When the Holy Spirit enlightens man, the first thing He does is show man that he is in a distant country. When one reads the last parable in Luke 15, he has to take note of what the prodigal said to the father. He did not say that he had squandered all his father's estate with harlots. The first thing he realized when he came to himself was that in his

father's house there was an abundance of bread. Why then was he living with the hogs in a distant country and not able even to satisfy his hunger with the carob pods which were for the hogs? When the Holy Spirit enlightens a person, he will realize that he has a problem with God, that he has left his Father's house, and that he is away from his Father. My friends, when a person in the world has come to the end of himself in his sinful condition, he may, like Judas, become aware of his sins. But without the light of the Holy Spirit, he will not feel that he has left the Father's house and is in a distant country. I am not saying that sins are not serious. Sins are sins. But the Bible shows us that man's chief sin lies in the fact that he is lost. He is standing on an improper ground. He may not be in an improper condition. Of course, all those who are in an improper condition must stand on improper ground. When the Holy Spirit enlightens us, first He shows us that we are on an improper ground. Then He shows us our improper condition. This is the enlightening of the Holy Spirit.

Hence, although there is the love of the Father and the work of the Lord, there is still the need for the Holy Spirit to prepare man's heart. He still has to work in man's heart so that man will receive all that the Lord Jesus has done. One can say that the Lord Jesus is our objective Savior from God and that the Holy Spirit is our subjective Savior from God. The Lord Jesus is the Savior who accomplished redemption for us outwardly, and the Holy Spirit is the Savior who accomplishes salvation for us inwardly. All of us sitting here have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit. We all know that we are the lost sheep, that we have all turned to our own ways (Isa. 53:6). We all like sheep were lost. Our problem was not sickness or lameness, but taking a wrong path. The path that one takes is very important. In John 16:8-9, the Lord Jesus told us that when the Holy Spirit comes, "He will convict the world concerning sin and concerning righteousness and concerning judgment." What does it mean to be convicted concerning sin? We are convicted concerning sin "because they do not believe into Me." We have developed a problem with Him, and we have come into conflict with Him. We are convicted of sin because we have not seen His blood and His authority, because we have not met His demands, and because we now have a problem with Him. The greatest sin of man is the refusal to believe in the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit comes to show us that we have developed a problem with the Lord Jesus and with God. Our position is wrong.

But let me ask a question. Is it possible that a person in a distant country can be a good son? Is it possible that he can be frugal and thrifty? Is it possible that he can be a diligent worker? Is it possible that he can be discreet in making friends? We know that this is impossible. If a person has wandered to a distant country and is wrong in his relationship with his father, he must be wrong in all other relationships. That is why the prodigal began to live dissolutely. When the Holy Spirit enlightens a person, not only will He show him that he is in a lost position, but He will also show him that his past conduct has been wrong. The Holy Spirit does not overlook past sins. He pays attention to all sins. However, He turns one's attention to all the sins only after He has shown such a one his perishing position. The Holy Spirit first shows you how dangerous a position you are in, then He shows you how many sins you have. The light of the Holy Spirit enlightens and exposes all the areas in which you have transgressed against others. It exposes all unrighteousness and all the hidden sins in our words and thoughts.

God's chastisement is for His healing. The Holy Spirit's rebuking is for His comforting. God is not pleased to chastise and punish His children without reason. The only reason God punishes is that man would obtain peace. The reason the Holy Spirit shines on man and shows man his shortcomings and his waywardness is that man would accept all the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. Without the enlightening of the Holy Spirit, we are not able to see even one of our sins.

GOD POURING OUT THE HOLY SPIRIT UPON MAN FOR HIS SALVATION

What should we do now that the Holy Spirit has enlightened and we have seen our position? There is one thing we continually neglect in our preaching of the gospel, which the Bible pays attention to all the time. We have to realize that the work of the Lord Jesus for the sinners is indeed precious and crucial. But likewise the work of the Holy Spirit for the sinners is equally precious and crucial. The Bible shows us that not only does the Holy Spirit come to enlighten us and to show us our sins, our lost position, and our unrighteousness before God and men, but this Spirit is also sent from God and is poured forth upon all flesh for the purpose that man everywhere could be saved through His work (Acts 2:17-18, 21).

Some who know a little more than others concerning the truth of the Bible think that it is easy to receive forgiveness and to accept the Lord Jesus as Savior. All he has to do is to kneel down and pray and accept Him from his heart. Perhaps he does not even have to kneel down; he only has to accept in his heart. But many people do not have this knowledge. They may be weak or from inaccessible lands and may not have had the chance to listen to the truth. They may think that it is a very difficult thing to be saved. They may think that they have to pray for a long time, and they have no assurance whether God would listen to their prayers. If I were to ask you today if you are saved, you can answer quickly that you are saved. But such a statement would sound strange to one from an inaccessible land. They would wonder how you could be saved. To them it is a most difficult thing to be saved. They would say that they have prayed for many years and are still not sure if they are saved. They hope to be saved, and they try their best to be saved. But they still do not know if they are saved. It seems as if they are not yet saved. To them, salvation is something very difficult to achieve. But my friends, just as the work of the Lord Jesus is complete, the work of the Holy Spirit in causing us to appropriate the Lord's work is also complete. The Bible shows us clearly that God sent the Holy Spirit for the purpose that we, the sinners, would receive the Holy Spirit's work and be saved. The Son of God came for the sake of the whole world. In the same way, the coming of the Holy Spirit is also for all flesh. As long as we are a man in the flesh, we can obtain the Lord's work for us.

WHOEVER CALLS UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED

Let us read Romans 10:13: "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." The subject of Romans 10 is on God causing the Lord Jesus to die and resurrect for us. In the few verses prior to this verse, God asks if there is anyone who can bring Christ down from heaven to die for us and if there is anyone who can bring Christ up from the abyss to resurrect for us (vv. 6-7). There is no such person. Such a work can only be done by God alone. It is God Himself who has caused Christ to die for us. It is also God Himself who caused Him to resurrect for us. Hence, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord today is saved.

I do not know if you realize that it is a most wonderful thing to be saved just by calling on the name of the Lord. In the original language, the word call means that we only need to say His name. Today in order to contact a brother, all I have to do is to go to his door and knock twice with the door handle. This is to call upon him. I do not have to beg him to listen. I do not have to implore him. I only need to go to him and inform him with a word. This is the meaning of calling. The Chinese version translates this word as implore. This is incorrect. Although one cannot say that the Greek word carries no sense of imploring, it does mean more of an invoking. Since God has caused the Lord Jesus to die and resurrect for us, all who desire to be saved need only to go to God and tell Him. They will then be saved. As long as you would go to the Lord Jesus and call His name once, you will be saved. All you need to do is to open your mouth once. You do not need to do anything else because He has already completed all the work. All the work has been completed. That is why we say that we are justified by faith, and not by works (Gal. 2:16). If you think that even to call once is a work, then God says just believe a little in your heart and it will be enough. Verse 8 says, "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart." Since the Lord has done the work of death and resurrection, we have nothing to do. As long as we open our mouth once, everything is done. Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

You may ask why it transpires so quickly. It is true that the work of Christ has been accomplished. But why will I be saved just by calling? How can the Lord's work in death, resurrection, and ascension be applied to me so quickly? Acts 2 is an added explanation to this. Verse 17 says, "And it shall be in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh." We have to remember that in the last days God will pour out of His Spirit upon all flesh. What is the result of this? Verse 21 says, "And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Verse 17 is linked to verse 21. God says that He will pour out of His Spirit upon all flesh. Then He says that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved because God has poured out His Spirit upon all flesh. The Holy Spirit is working now on all flesh. If there is anyone today whose sins have not been forgiven and who still does not know how to be saved and receive eternal life, who does not know that the Lord Jesus is his Savior, he must remember that God has poured out the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is upon you already; He is waiting for you. Once you call, you will be saved.

God says that He would pour out of His Spirit upon all flesh. Why is there Pentecost? God gave us Pentecost because He wanted to pour out the Holy Spirit upon all flesh. Now one only needs to open his mouth and say, "O Lord!" and the Holy Spirit will come into him. The Holy Spirit is like the light. As long as there is a crack, light will come in. You may not realize how well light goes through cracks. If you do not believe this, just go next door. If you drill a hole in the wall, as soon as the drill is taken out, the light enters. You do not have to look for it because it comes in immediately. As long as there is a crack, the light will come in. Today God has poured out the Holy Spirit upon all flesh. As long as you are alive, the Holy Spirit is upon you. Whenever you say, "O Lord!" the Holy Spirit begins working. This is the meaning of calling on the name of the Lord. The ancient Chinese say that one must appeal to heaven, to earth, and to his parents. Now we only need to appeal to the Lord once. When one mentions prayer, he always thinks of supplication more than invocation. Actually, all we need to do is invoke Him. Once we open our mouth, the Holy Spirit comes in. When the Holy Spirit comes in, the accomplished work of the Lord Jesus is brought to us.

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT—FELLOWSHIP

The work of the Holy Spirit is fellowship. The characteristic of God is His love. The characteristic of the Lord Jesus is His grace, and the characteristic of the Holy Spirit is His fellowship. Second Corinthians 13:14 says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." God is love, and His characteristic is love. The Lord Jesus is grace, and His characteristic is grace. Lastly, the characteristic of the Holy Spirit is fellowship. The Holy Spirit has nothing in Himself. He brings the love of God and the grace of the Lord Jesus into you by the way of fellowship. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has not accomplished a work of love. He has not accomplished a work of grace. The Holy Spirit conveys to you what God and the Lord Jesus have accomplished. Hence, the work of the Holy Spirit is fellowship. The Holy Spirit after the Lord's ascension is just filled with the work of the Lord Jesus. He is like the light. As long as there is a crack, He will come in. When He comes in, He will bring the grace of the Lord Jesus and the love of God into you. This salvation is surely complete.

Some time ago, a very famous servant of the Lord in England died. Of course, his death was under God's sovereignty. None of us can say anything

about that. But humanly speaking, we can say something about his death. He was very weak and had been sick for years. The doctors had prescribed a kind of medicine for him. Whenever he inhaled that medicine, he became strong again. He put this medicine by his chest of drawers. Many times, when he suffered much and felt like dying, he would breathe in the medicine and become well. Although the medicine did not smell good, it was very effective. The night that he died he felt uncomfortable again. He tried to reach for the medicine but was too weak to open the drawer. The next morning others found him in his bed with his hand stretching for the medicine. He died there with half of his body outside his bed. It was not a matter of the lack of the best and most effective medicine. He had lived by that medicine for eight or nine years already. Every time he was about to die, he inhaled the medicine and became well again. Why did he die this time? It was not because there was no medicine, and it was not because he did not want the medicine. It was because the medicine did not get into his hand. In the same way, we are those who are about to perish. The Lord Jesus has accomplished the work. God's medicine has been prepared. As long as we take it, we will be healed. But who will give this medicine to us? There is the doctor to prescribe the medicine. There must also be someone to apply the medicine. The work of the Holy Spirit is to convey the work of the Lord Jesus to us. The love of God is in the grace of the Lord Jesus, and the grace of the Lord Jesus is in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Hence, all those who have received the fellowship of the Holy Spirit receive the grace of the Lord Jesus, and all those who have received the grace of the Lord Jesus have a taste of the love of God.

When the Holy Spirit comes, He gives you the light and shows you your failures and degradation. He shows you that you are lost. God has worked to such an extent that once you open your mouth and say a word and once your heart has a place for the Lord and would invoke Him, you will be saved. You do not have to go to a great cathedral to be saved. You do not have to pray to be saved. You do not have to step forward to the altar to be saved. The Holy Spirit is poured out upon all flesh already. Wherever you are, the Holy Spirit is there. Hallelujah! This is a fact! Today the Holy Spirit has already been poured out upon all flesh. You do not need to look for Him. He is looking for you. You can call on the street or in a house. You can receive God's salvation in the sweetest place or the most unpleasant place. You can have it in the most crowded place or the most quiet place. The Holy Spirit has been poured

out upon all flesh. No matter where you are, as long as you call on the name of the Savior, you will be saved.

Romans 10 talks about the fact, and Acts 2 talks about the reason. Romans 10 only tells us that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. It does not tell us the reason. Acts 2 tells us that the Holy Spirit is upon all men. Hence, as long as one opens his mouth, he shall be saved. The Holy Spirit has already entered in. When man calls on His name, he shall be saved.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE WORD OF GOD

There is another thing that the Holy Spirit does and this concerns the Word of God. Many people do not see the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Hence, they do not treasure the words of the Bible that much. How can man receive the work of the Lord's cross? Many are bewildered about this. Many sinners even pray, "Lord Jesus, be merciful to me and die for me." They do not know what redemption is at all. Here we see the preciousness of God's Word. After God has accomplished His work through His Son, He declares it to us and shows us through the words of the Bible. In other words, God has placed the grace that the Lord accomplished for us in His own Word and has sent this Word to us.

If we subtracted the work of the Lord Jesus from the Word of God, what would we have? If we took away the work of the Lord Jesus from the Word of God, God's Word would become zero; nothing would be left. The reason that God's Word is God's Word is that in it there is the fact of the Lord's work. What is a word? A word is a recorded fact. Without facts, words become lies. With the facts, the words become real. If the Lord's work for us is not real, the Word of God is not trustworthy. But if the work of the Lord Jesus is a fact, if God has accomplished His righteousness through the Lord Jesus, and if God has accepted us in the Lord Jesus, God's Word must be trustworthy. Hence, we have to remember that the work of the Lord Jesus is contained in the Word of God. Here we see the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

The Holy Spirit is the doorkeeper of God's Word. I like my English name, Watchman. It means one that guards and keeps watch. God has put the accomplished work of the Lord in the Holy Spirit. Today the Holy Spirit is

carefully watching. He is like a doorkeeper. As soon as a person receives the Lord, immediately He opens up the matters in God's Word to him.

A few days ago a brother sent me a box of candy. The box was very big and had flowers printed on it. It was wrapped in peach-colored paper with a letter attached, saying that the candy was a gift for me. I can say that what I received was a paper box. I did not receive the candy itself. I did not even taste the candy. What was in my hand was a paper box. But what I had actually received was the candy because the candy was in the box. What I took home was the box. But at the same time, I took the candy that came with the box. What we receive today is the Word of God. But what we receive into us is the work of the Lord Jesus. When we receive the Word of God, we get the work of the Lord, for the Lord's work is in God's Word. When one believes today, he is not believing that the Lord has done something for him. He is believing in the Word of God. But when one believes in the Word of God, the Lord's work is automatically applied to him. Hence, if you say that you are not very smart and that you cannot understand the work of the Lord, I will say to you that God does not require you to believe in the work of the Lord. He only requires you to believe in God's Word. When you believe in God's Word, you will obtain His work in the Word. Apparently, what I took home was the paper box. How do I know that it contained candy? When I went home, I removed the colored paper and opened the box and took out the candy. Thank the Lord. This is how the Holy Spirit works. We receive God's Word by faith, and the Holy Spirit opens up the work of the Lord that is contained in God's Word. Therefore, we must realize that the work of the Holy Spirit is fellowship. The Holy Spirit conveys the work of the Lord contained in God's Word to us. Without the Holy Spirit's conveying, God's Word remains only the Word. But when the Holy Spirit comes, the Word is opened up. Hence, God has prepared the Lord Jesus. He has also prepared the Holy Spirit for this work of fellowship.

THE HOLY SPIRIT CONVEYING THE LORD'S WORK AND THE LORD HIMSELF TO US

Now we must see how the Holy Spirit conveys the work of the Lord to us. The Lord's work includes all that He has done on the cross, in His resurrection, in His ascension, in His second coming, and in everything that He bestows upon us. We cannot go into detail concerning all these items.

There is too much to say about them. To speak of them, we would have to mention the work of the Holy Spirit in the entire New Testament. Tonight we can only mention it in brief. The coming of the Holy Spirit is not merely for conveying the Lord's work to us. It is also for conveying the Lord Himself to us. The purpose of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is to convey the Lord Jesus and His work to us. If a man has not received the work of the Lord, the Holy Spirit conveys this work to him. If a man has not received the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit conveys the Lord Himself to man. At the time we were saved, the work of the Holy Spirit was to convey the work of the Lord to us. Later His work is to convey the Lord Himself to us. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to manifest the Lord Jesus.

A week ago, two sisters came to me asking me how to translate the English phrase to minister with Christ into Chinese. This is a difficult phrase to translate. It means to serve others with Christ, like serving someone with a cup of tea or a bowl of rice. The work of the Holy Spirit is to serve the Lord Jesus to us. When we received the Lord, the Holy Spirit transferred the Lord's work to us. Hence, all the work that the Lord has accomplished, such as the gift of repentance, forgiveness, cleansing, justification, sanctification, and joy, are accomplished by the Holy Spirit in us. Matters such as regeneration or the receiving of eternal life are accomplished in us through the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is to convey the life of the Lord Jesus to us. It is similar to a wire conveying electricity from the power plant at Willow Tree Creek to us. Through the Holy Spirit, we receive a new life, a new heart, and a new spirit (cf. Ezek. 36:26). When we receive a new spirit and a new heart, the Lord Jesus is able to abide in us through the Holy Spirit. Hence, regeneration is the Holy Spirit preparing a new temple for the Lord.

Since we are of the flesh, the Lord Jesus cannot dwell in us. We are like the world under judgment at the time of Noah. After the water subsided, Noah released a dove from the ark (Gen. 8:8-9). But the dove found no place of rest; it could not abide anywhere. In the same way, we are full of sin. The Lord Jesus can find no place to abide in us. That being the case, God gave to us the Holy Spirit. The Lord accomplished everything objectively. Now the Holy Spirit gave us a new spirit subjectively, so that the Son of God can abide in our spirit. The Holy Spirit came first to prepare a dwelling for the Lord Jesus. Then the Lord came to live in us.

On the one hand, the Holy Spirit gave us a new life within. On the other hand, day by day He conveys God's truth and purpose into us. This is why the Lord says that when the Spirit of reality comes, He will guide us into all reality (John 16:13). Furthermore, there is another item of the work of the Holy Spirit, which is to communicate to us the gifts, such as prophecy, tongues, healings, miracles, revelations, words of wisdom and words of knowledge, faith, and all kinds of other gifts.

THE HOLY SPIRIT PRESERVING THE ETERNAL FRESHNESS OF THE LORD'S WORK

I do not want to enumerate in detail all the items of the Holy Spirit's work of fellowship. I will only stress one thing: all of the work of the Lord Jesus is conveyed to us today through the Holy Spirit. Even the Lord Jesus Himself is conveyed to us through the work of the Holy Spirit. This is God's salvation. Many people do not understand the Holy Spirit's work of fellowship. They ask me how the Lord's work that was accomplished nineteen hundred years ago could be applied to us today. Actually, if there were not the work of the Holy Spirit, their question would be fully justified. How can a work accomplished nineteen hundred years ago be applied to us today? What the Lord accomplished nineteen hundred years ago was not left to "dry in the wind and the sun." God has preserved and nurtured this work in the Holy Spirit. That is why this work remains so fresh. Today we can receive the work of the Lord Jesus. This work can be the same as it was before.

Once I went to a shop and the shopkeeper gave me a can of imported vegetable soup. The can looked old and ugly outside. It was covered with dust. The shopkeeper recommended it very much and was willing to sell it to me at a discount. I bought it and took it home. When I examined the date afterwards, I found out that the date was older than my age. Later, when I opened it and cooked it, I found out that the soup was still quite palatable. If the Lord Jesus' work were not preserved in the Holy Spirit, the question of time and space would come in. How could the Savior who died on Calvary nineteen hundred years ago come into me? But with the Holy Spirit, there is no question of time and space. God has preserved the work of the Lord in the Holy Spirit. Now the work of the Lord is living. This is why the Holy Spirit is able to convey the work of the Lord into us.

I have a brother who studies biochemistry. He conducts experiments all the time. In order to cultivate a certain bacteria, he has to use a certain kind of chemical. As long as he maintains a certain temperature, the bacteria will live. If the temperature becomes too high or too low, or if other elements are added into the culture, the bacteria will die. The best environment to preserve the work of the Lord is the Holy Spirit. Once the work of the Lord leaves the Holy Spirit, it will not be able to live and will die. The same is true with the Christian life. A Christian life can never be separated from the Holy Spirit. If the truths understood by the Lord's children are separated from the Holy Spirit, they will gradually dry out and die. Hence, all spiritual matters have to be in the Holy Spirit. Apart from the Holy Spirit, everything will die. Nothing will survive. We have to see that the Holy Spirit is the source of life. In Him is life. Apart from Him, everything is dead.

Through the Holy Spirit, God conveys everything of Himself and the work of the Lord into us. God has prepared everything related to our salvation. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit has come and is ready to convey everything that God has prepared. If there is anyone who is not saved yet, he cannot say that God has not loved him, or that the Lord Jesus has not accomplished redemption for him. He cannot say that the word is too far from him and is unreachable.

My friends, do you have a mouth? Some people may argue that they are dumb and that they do not have a mouth. But they have a heart. They can be without a mouth. But they cannot be without a heart. Romans 10:8-9 says, "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart...that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Why is this? Because God has said that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Perhaps you wonder how it can be so simple and how it is that one can be saved just by calling. This is because the Holy Spirit has come. He will save you as soon as you call. How does one call? If he has a mouth, he can use his mouth. If he does not have a mouth, he can call with his heart. This word is not far from us. It is in our mouth and even in our heart. This word is the word of justification by faith that we have been speaking of in the past few days.

CHAPTER NINE

THE WAY OF SALVATION—
FAITH VERSUS LAW AND WORK

During the past few days, we have seen that all that man has is sin. We have also seen that God accomplishes everything. He has loved us. He has given us grace. God has accomplished righteousness, has caused the Lord Jesus to die and resurrect for us. God has even sent the Holy Spirit to convict and enlighten us and to give us the strength to accept the work of God. Let me ask a very natural question. What must man do to be saved, now that God has finished all His work? God has done everything on His part. Today He has laid this finished work before man. What then is the condition for us to be saved? God has accomplished the work of redemption. How can man now receive salvation? How can redemption become salvation? How can propitiation become substitution? How can God's gift to us in His Son be communicated to us in the Holy Spirit? We are talking about the condition for salvation. What should we do on our side before what is on God's side can be communicated to us?

THE CONDITION FOR SALVATION—FAITH

All those who read the Bible know that the condition for salvation is faith. There is no other condition except faith. Because man has fallen and is corrupted, because his thoughts are crooked, and because man's flesh is of the law, he thinks that he must do something before he can be saved. But the Bible shows us that the only condition for our salvation is faith. Besides faith there is no other condition. The New Testament tells us clearly at least one hundred and fifteen times that when man believes, he is saved, he has eternal life and is justified. When man believes, he has all these things. In addition to these one hundred and fifteen times, the Bible says that man is justified by faith, or becomes righteous through faith, another thirty-five times. In the first instance, we have the verb to believe. In the second instance, we have the noun faith. The verb to believe is used one hundred and fifteen times. Once a man believes, he is saved (Acts 16:31). Once a man believes, he has eternal life (John 3:36). Once a man believes, he is justified. In addition to these verses, there are thirty-five times in which the noun faith is used. Man is saved

through faith. He receives eternal life through faith, and he is justified by faith. Hence, in the entire New Testament, at least one hundred and fifty times it says that man is saved, justified, and has eternal life through faith only. It is not a matter of who one is, what one does, or what one can do. Everything depends on believing. Everything depends on faith.

Another thing that deserves special attention is that in all these one hundred and fifty occurrences of faith and believing, no other condition is added. These verses do not say that man must believe and then do something to receive eternal life. They do not say that man must believe and do something before he can be justified. Neither do they say that man must believe and do something before he can be saved. The Lord's Word mentions faith in a clear and definite way. Nothing else is mixed in or attached to the condition of faith. Hence, the Bible shows us clearly from God's point of view that there is no other condition to salvation than to believe.

One of the most well-read and treasured books in the New Testament is the Gospel of John. If one reads it carefully, he will see that John wrote this book with no other purpose than to tell us how man can receive life and be saved and how he can be delivered from condemnation. The Gospel of John mentions eighty-six times that man receives life, is justified, and does not come into condemnation by faith alone and nothing else. Hence, the Bible shows us clearly, adequately, and simply that salvation is not based on who man is, what he has, and what he has done. The Bible shows us that when man believes, he receives (John 1:12). He receives by believing.

We have said that salvation and redemption are accomplished by God. Even the way and plan to accomplish them are laid out by God. We have also seen that grace is accomplished by God through the Lord Jesus. We have to remember that if it is grace on God's side, then it must be faith on our side. If I stretch out my hands to give a brother a cup of tea, he cannot receive it by stretching out his feet. Whatever way others use to give things to you, you have to use the same way to receive them. The way to receive must be the same as the way to give. If others call you on the telephone, then you have to answer by picking up the telephone. If others write a letter to you, you have to receive the letter. The way something is received must be the same as the way it was sent.

According to the Bible, God has given us grace through Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:4). For Him to do so is in the principle of grace. Since giving is in the principle of grace on God's side, then receiving is in the principle of faith on our side. Faith and grace are two inseparable principles. Grace is God giving something to us, and faith is our receiving something from God. Faith is nothing other than receiving what God has given us in spirit. This is absolutely independent from work. Only by this way can man receive God's grace. If we resort to any other means, we will not be able to receive God's grace.

Although the Bible shows us that through faith one receives God's grace, many doctrines have emerged as a result of man's misunderstanding. Man comes up with theories that are based on his own thoughts and darkened mind, involving what he should do before he can be saved. Just as man has made idols with his crooked heart and has considered them gods, he has specified conditions for salvation with his crooked heart and darkened thoughts. For this reason, I must point out the different conditions that man has set forth for salvation and consider if these ways of salvation are trustworthy or not. If man does not see God's truth and does not understand His Word, he will not realize that the condition for salvation is faith. But if a man sees God's light and understands God's truth, he will not be able to overturn the New Testament fact that salvation is through faith. The problem today is that after man realizes faith as the condition of salvation, he adds something else to faith. The point of dispute between God and man is not that of believing or not believing, but whether it is believing with repentance, believing with the works of law, believing with baptism, or believing with testifying, as a prerequisite to salvation. The Word of God tells us that once we believe, we are saved. But man today adds a word with. According to his darkened mind, he claims that man is saved by faith with something. What we will consider is not if one can be saved by faith. That matter is settled already. The question today is whether or not faith is enough. Do we need to add with to faith before we can be saved?

SALVATION NOT BEING FAITH WITH THE WORKS OF LAW

The first question is whether man is saved through faith with the keeping of the law. Man's way for salvation is faith plus the keeping of the law. We have

spoken concerning the question of the law already, but we will repeat it again. The Bible devotes much time to deal with this question. Preachers, therefore, must also devote much time to deal with this question. Because man pays so much attention to the law, the Bible devotes two books to deal with this problem. We have to know for what purpose God has given the law. God gave the Israelites the law, not for them to keep, but for exposing their sins. Originally, the Israelites had sins, but they had not become transgressions. From Adam to Moses, man had sins (Rom. 5:14), but he did not have any transgressions. God gave the law in order to turn man's sins into transgressions (Rom 5:13, 20a).

How were man's sins turned into transgressions? Suppose there is a person who has the disposition and temperament of walking back and forth outside the meeting hall every day. It is something that he likes to do. He has to do this every day, every week, every month, and every year. No one can explain why he does this. But in his temperament, disposition, and life, there is something that compels him to walk back and forth outside the meeting hall. Although he has such a habit, we cannot say that he has any transgression. You may not like what he does, and you may think that it is wrong, but he has no realization that this is wrong. When will he realize that it is wrong? Suppose you take two bright red ribbons and tie one to each end of the lane. When he comes the next day, he will see the two ribbons and will realize that he should not walk through them. His habit has always been to walk there because something in him compels him to walk there. Suppose he takes a look at the two ribbons and considers the bright color, the silk texture, the nice knots, and then tears them apart and walks right through. In that case, his walking is different from his previous walking. His previous walking was sin without transgression. Now it is the same walking, but he walks in transgression.

God says that the law is perfect. It is good, righteous, holy, and excellent (Rom. 7:12). But man is full of sin. He is full of sin within and without. However, from Adam to Moses, man had no transgressions although he had sin. God established the law, not in order that man would not sin, but in order to expose man's sins and make them transgressions. Today the law is here. Once a person breaks the law, he realizes that he has sinned. Hence, we can say that God gave man the law not for him to keep, but for him to see that he has sinned. When there was no law, he did not realize that he has sin. Now he knows.

The strange thing is that man takes the law, which is there to prove his sin, to try to prove that he is righteous. He turns the law around. God wants us to know through the law that we have sinned, but we want to prove through the law that we are righteous. God wants to show us through the law that we are perishing, but we want to prove through the law that we are saved. Man does not see himself. His thoughts are full of the law. He does not see that he is corrupt inside and cannot keep the law. Man's flesh cannot keep God's law. It will not submit to God's law. However, man still wants to seek out righteousness from the law and earn life through it. God uses the law to show man that he is helpless and that he needs to receive salvation. But when man sees the ordinances, he tries to earn a little righteousness through them and be saved. Romans 3:19 says, "Now we know that whatever things the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may fall under the judgment of God." Here it says that the law was given for the purpose of stopping every mouth, so that no one can say anything, and so that everyone can be subject to the judgment of God. Following this, there is a verdict concerning us: "Because out of the works of the law no flesh shall be justified before Him; for through the law is the clear knowledge of sin" (v. 20). One can see that the original intention of the law was to expose sin; it was not to justify man. It is so clear that the purpose of God's law was to expose sin rather than to establish our own righteousness.

In the Old Testament, not only did God give man the law, He gave man the types as well. These were the ceremonial laws. They explained how to offer up sacrifices and how to pay the money for atonement. These matters typify the Lord Jesus' accomplishment of redemption and its subsequent salvation for us in the New Testament. This is what God has shown us. It is so strange that man would try to establish his own righteousness not only through the law, but also through these types. He tries to establish his righteousness through these ordinances. We even find a Pharisee praying that he fasted twice a week and that he offered to God one tenth of what he had (Luke 18:11-12). He thought that these were his righteousnesses and that through them he could be saved. Man does not see the purpose for which God established the law. He misunderstands God's purpose. Man doubts if it is that easy to be saved. He thinks that it is true that man is indeed saved through believing in the Lord Jesus. We who are Christians all the more acknowledge the need to believe. It is right to believe, but many say that we should also keep the law. What man is saying today is not whether one can be saved through the law or not. What

he is saying is that those who believe in Jesus should also keep the law before they can be saved. Faith in Jesus is an undisputed doctrine in the Bible. But Christians say that one should add to that the keeping of the law. Man does not see that to believe in Jesus and to keep the law are two absolutely contradictory things. They can never be joined together. The difference between faith in Jesus and work in the law is the difference between heaven and hell. As heaven is vastly different from hell, so faith in Jesus is vastly different from the work of the law.

To whom was the law given? It was given to the Jews. Why then does the New Testament mention again and again the keeping of the law? In the New Testament, the apostles, or we should say the Holy Spirit, knew clearly that the readers of it may not necessarily all be Jews. Only a minority of those who believed in Jesus at the very beginning were Jews. One person asked me once, "You say that the Jews were the ones to receive the law. But who are the Jews?" I told him that the Jews were like guinea pigs. When a researcher of pharmaceutical products is not sure of a drug, he does not experiment with humans. Instead, he first injects it into guinea pigs. If the guinea pigs die, then the drug cannot be used. Only after the drug is proven effective will it be injected into human beings. The same is done for oral drugs. First, it is taken in by guinea pigs. If it works, then the drug is used. Otherwise it is discarded. The same is done for immunization against bacteria. If it works on guinea pigs, it will work on man. If it does not work on guinea pigs, it will not work on man. I would say in a most respectful way that the Jews are the guinea pigs. God tried out the law on the Jews. If the Jews could make it, then it could be used. If they could not make it, then it cannot be used. God did try the law on the Jews, and they did not make it. This means that the whole world cannot make it. The Jews were selected by God as objects of an experiment. The Jews are representative of the whole world. Hence, one sees that the law was officially given to the Jews. But the principle of the law is given to all men. It is given to all flesh. God gave man the law to forewarn him that man is of the flesh and is fleshly.

What is Christianity? Christianity does not tell the sons of Adam to do good. That is not Christianity. Christianity says that Adam has been crucified and removed and that the Adamic race has been annihilated through the cross of the Lord Jesus. Man in Christ receives a new life and becomes a new race. The law is useless for the new race, for there is no such thing as law in the new race. The law was given by God to the sons of Adam to expose their sins. If

one wants to be saved through keeping the law, he has to realize the serious consequence of the phrase keeping the law. Once man keeps the law, he will have righteousness. But this righteousness would be of the flesh. In other words, it would mean that the sons of Adam, that is, the Adamic race, need not die. It would mean that man can please God with his flesh. Perhaps one would argue that he does not mean to keep the whole law, that he realizes that it is impossible to keep the whole law, that what he means is to believe in Jesus and then keep the law. But if the work of the law has a millionth fraction of ground before God, it means that Adam did not have to die. This would revoke the very nature of Christianity. Christianity is not here to establish a ground for Adam. It is not here to maintain the old creation. It is here to transfer us to the new creation. We are of the flesh, and we cannot obtain the righteousness that comes from the keeping of the law.

Since the fall of man, the cherubim and the flaming sword were guarding the tree of life in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24). Why were the cherubim and the flaming sword guarding the way to the tree of life? It was to prevent man from eating of the tree of life. After man became a sinner and had eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, there was no other way for him to go back to the tree of life and eat of its fruit except through the judgment of the cherubim and the slaying of the flaming sword. God shows us that man cannot eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and at the same time eat of the fruit of the tree of life. Man cannot eat of both. Man cannot receive the seed of sin on the one hand and take in the Lord's salvation on the other hand.

Here lies the difference between Christianity and Judaism. Judaism says to the man in the flesh that in keeping the law he shall live. But Christianity says he cannot live, for he cannot keep the law. Christianity asserts clearly that man cannot do this. There is no possibility for him to keep the law. Hence, we can see that in the Old Testament, God gave the law for man to keep. In the New Testament, we see that man cannot keep the law at all, nor does he have to keep it. This is one of the greatest truths in the Bible. Now there is a danger of mixing faith and the law together, and annulling the principle of the Bible. Right away, Adam will have the ground, and the fleshly man will be able to live again. God's judgment is that man must die. Through Jesus Christ, God has removed man. He does not want the fleshly man to come up with anything. If man still tries to produce something from the flesh, he has overturned the principle of the New Testament. If the law is given some

ground, then the flesh also will have some ground. But God says that the flesh has no ground, that all grounds have been removed.

We may wonder whether this is to annul the law. Please remember that according to the Bible, the law requires two things from us. First, the law says that he who keeps it shall live (Rom. 10:5). The law demands us to keep and to do something. Once man keeps it, he will have righteousness. If we have righteousness, we will have the reward, which is life. But there is a second aspect. The law says that the day we eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, we shall surely die (Gen. 2:17). On the one hand, the law requires man to keep something. On the other hand, its punishment is death for all those who do not keep the law. All who do not keep the law receive the recompense of not keeping the law. Hence, in the Old Testament, in principle, we see that the law required man to keep it and to be righteous. Those who did not keep it were condemned and punished.

In Shanghai, the traffic department has many traffic regulations. For example, to ride after dark, one has to have lights on his bicycle. If there is no light for the bicycle, then there will be a fine of sixty cents. This regulation requires two things: it requires man to install a light, and it requires those who do not do this to be punished. What then is to annul the law? To annul the law means that one does not need a light, and he does not have to be punished. What is to keep the law? To keep the law is to meet either of the two requirements. For those who have a light, they are keeping the law. For those who do not have a light, but are willing to pay sixty cents, they are also keeping the law.

The problem today is that we cannot keep the law. The law of God requires that we be righteous. If we are not righteous, then we fail. Only by being righteous can we live. But no man of the flesh is able to keep the law. None among us can have righteousness before God through keeping the law. Once man touches God's law, he will fail. Paul said in Romans 7:7 that even if God has only one law, man is not able to keep it. Paul did not transgress all the laws. He mentioned only one law, the one concerning covetousness. In the original language, covetousness is lust. Paul said, "I am helpless. The lust keeps coming back again and again. It is impossible for me not to have lust." He could not get the light of his bicycle to work, yet he had to travel in the city. For some, the problem is not that the light does not work. For them, they simply do not want to have the light. These people do not even want to light

the lamp. What is annulling the law? It is when someone pleads with God saying, "O God, I cannot keep Your law today. Please let me go on account of the Lord Jesus. I have done my best. Please do not punish me." All who plead for the Lord Jesus to be lenient or for God to have mercy on them are annulling the law. On the one hand, they do not want to keep the law. On the other hand, they do not want the punishment of the law. They do not want to have a light. Yet at the same time, they want to avoid the fine of sixty cents. What about us today? Do we have our lights today? If we have the lights, then we can travel peacefully in the city. But none of us are able to have the light. Hence, the only way is to pay the sixty cents. This is what the Lord Jesus has done for us. This is the judgment that we have borne in Christ. We have to say, "Praise and thank the Lord that we are already judged in Christ!" We have been punished in Christ. God has punished us in Christ. Since the Lord Jesus has died, resurrected, and ascended, the salvation we receive now is equivalent to what we would obtain if we keep the law. The ones who have the light are free. The ones who have been punished are also free. Today if a man keeps all the laws, he will be justified and will be saved in the same way that we who have believed in Jesus are saved and justified. Of course, we are not just saved when we believe in Jesus; in saving us, the Lord Jesus grants us many other things apart from the law as well.

Paul said in Romans 3:31, "Do we then make the law of no effect through faith? Absolutely not! Rather, we establish the law." Hence, when we are saved through faith in Jesus, we have not made the law of no effect. Since we have met the requirement of the law in us, the law has nothing to say. Never think that we should add the work of the law to our faith. For us to believe is like paying the sixty cents. For us to keep the law is like having the light. No one in the whole world would have the light and pay sixty cents at the same time. This is unreasonable. Why does one have to pay sixty cents and at the same time have the light? If he is able to have the light, then he does not have to pay the sixty cents. If there is the word of faith, then there cannot be the law. If there is the law, there cannot be the word of faith. No one can have faith and keep the law at the same time, for to do so would be to despise the Lord Jesus. It would mean that one fails to see his utter weakness and filthiness.

Please read again Galatians 2:16-17: "And knowing that a man is not justified out of works of law, but through faith in Jesus Christ, we also have believed into Christ Jesus that we might be justified out of faith in Christ and

not out of the works of law, because out of the works of law no flesh will be justified. But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves also have been found sinners, is then Christ a minister of sin? Absolutely not!" The book of Galatians shows us that some in Galatia contended that even though man was justified through faith in the Lord Jesus, it was not enough; he still had to keep the law. They were not saying that a man should not believe. They recognized that a man was justified in Christ. But they were saying that one still needed to keep the law. Paul said a very strong word here. He said that if while seeking to be justified in Christ we have been found sinners, it meant that after we have believed in the Lord Jesus, we are still not justified, that we are still sinners, and must still keep the law before we can be saved. For example, suppose that I am sick, and I spend ten days with one doctor. Afterwards, because the sickness is still present, I have to consult another doctor. If I seek to be justified in Christ, and at the same time try to keep the law, it means that I am still a sinner and have not yet been saved. If I am no longer a sinner, then I should not need to keep the law anymore. If I am still a sinner, is Christ a minister of sin? Paul asked that if he was not justified after he had believed in the Lord Jesus, did that mean that Christ is a minister of sin? The answer is, "Absolutely not!" In the New Testament, Paul said "absolutely not" many times. In Greek, it is an idiom. It is translated in the King James Version as "God forbid." It is equivalent to the expression "heaven forbid," a very strong word. This means that even heaven would reject this. There is no reason under the sun that this should be so. Hence, one can see that a man cannot have faith in Jesus and at the same time keep the law.

In Romans 3, Paul made another clear statement. Verse 28 says, "For we account that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law." This is a conclusive statement. Now it is a matter of faith. It has absolutely nothing to do with the law. Thank the Lord. Jesus is enough. When the Bible pays attention to faith, it pays attention to God's grace. This shows us that everything comes by receiving. Some like to exalt men in their gospel preaching. But if we know the Bible, we will see that apart from God, man is absolutely helpless. Please remember these two sentences: man is not saved by the law, and neither is he saved by faith with the law. This is the first and most common mistake of man. Man has mixed faith with the law.

SALVATION NOT BEING FAITH WITH GOOD WORKS

"The works of law" is an expression we find in the Bible (Gal. 2:16). We have covered this aspect already. A more common understanding of the condition of salvation is that salvation is by faith and also by works. Salvation by faith is a doctrine of the Bible, and man cannot argue against it (Eph. 2:8). But man says that it is also by works. Let us now consider what the Bible says about this. We are often polite and accommodating in our speaking, but the Bible is not polite in its speaking. It is very definite. Ephesians 2:8 and 9 say, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works that no one should boast." These verses tell us that salvation is absolutely by grace and through faith. The word through means to traverse. It is like saying that the electric light shines by electricity and through the wire. It is also like saying the water from the faucet comes by the reservoir in the water department and through the pipes. Man is saved by grace, but the channel through which salvation comes to us is faith. The channel is not works but faith. It is through faith and has nothing to do with works. It is not adding faith to works. One has to know that faith and works are basically opposed to one another. The grace of the Lord Jesus is based on the love of God. When we believe, grace and love flow into us. As a result, we are saved, have life, and are justified. None of the above are communicated to us through works.

Thank the Lord that salvation is not because of work. Why should it be so? The answer here is that no one should boast. What Ephesians 1 tells us is that God wants to have all the glory. That is why He does all the work. Suppose a certain brother is very capable and educated and has suffered much for the Lord. If another brother comes to me and says, "Brother Nee, I praise you and glorify you for the fine work that this brother has done," we would surely say that he is mentally ill. Glory can only go to the one who has done the work. There is no such thing in the world as one working and another getting the glory. Those who work deserve the wages. Whosoever works, the same should get the glory. Why has God done all the work of saving us? It is so that He would get all the glory. The reason God gave us grace is that He would get all the glory. He does not want us to work, lest we boast in ourselves. To boast is to glorify oneself. If we have done anything that deserves any glory, we will not thank and praise God before Him. Right away we will say, "No doubt, the salvation is given to me by You. It is Your work. But I have added my part to it. If I had not added my part, I would not be like I am today." Man loves to overestimate his own merits. He likes to overemphasize his own outstanding

points. If God said that He would accomplish ninety-nine percent of the work of salvation and leave one percent to us, this one percent would silence the heavens. The angels would not praise anymore, and the stones would not cry out anymore. Instead of the stones becoming the sons of Abraham, the sons of Abraham would become the stones, for out of the one hundred percent, some would lay claim to one percent. They would then tell the wonder of their own work and say, "I passed through that in this way, or in that way. How did you get through? What contribution did you put in?" Everyone would be boasting about his own work, and God would have no possibility of getting the glory.

Thank and praise the Lord! Since He wants to get all the glory, He did not leave one thing for us to do. When we reach heaven, we will have to say that we are still helpless persons. We are able to get there because of "free" grace. This word "free" will stop all supplication in heaven and will fill it with thanksgiving and praise. It will be all thanksgiving and praise because everything is done by God. We have to see that this is the truth of the Bible. Man's work and God's grace cannot be mixed together. Once man works, it comes into conflict with glory. Hence, whether I am on the street, at my home, or in a Lord's table meeting, I can say from my heart, "God, I thank and praise You, because I have nothing to do with my salvation. My salvation comes one hundred percent from You. Therefore, what can I do except praise You?" God delights in praise. The Bible calls one kind of prayer loathsome, but the Bible never calls any kind of praise loathsome. Some prayers are rejected by God, but God never rejects any praise. God wants to have all the glory, for He has done all the work.

Does that mean that we can be loose and do not need to do good anymore? Ephesians 2:10 explains, "For we are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand in order that we would walk in them." Verses 8 and 9 show us what God has done for us objectively. Verse 10 immediately shows us the subjective matters. God has not saved us in a foolish way. He has given us a new life, a new nature, and a new spirit within. The Lord Jesus is living in us through the Holy Spirit and has prepared us for all good works. Please remember that God has not included these good works in the previous two verses. It does not matter how many good works you do after you are saved. Salvation is still of grace. It does not matter how fast you advance spiritually, for salvation is still of the free grace of the Lord Jesus. Even if you have a work like Paul's, a result like Peter's, a love like John's, and a suffering like James's—even if you have all of these four things—you are still

saved through free grace. In the future, while your work can show that you are saved, it is never your condition for salvation. My faith does not mean much. It is only a receiving of God's work.

Man is not saved by works. No one can argue against this. But man is very pitiful. Because his heart is darkened and filled with sin, because his flesh is wicked and full of the law, although he recognizes faith, he presumes that he should add works also. Man does not see that works come after he is saved by faith. Salvation has nothing to do with works. I am not saying that we do not need works. We do pay attention to work. But this is not the condition for salvation. Salvation is an altogether different problem. One must not forget that the Bible says that if we pay but a little attention to work, God's grace is annulled (Gal. 2:21). Since it is grace, it must be of faith only and not of work.

Romans 4:4 and 5 say, "Now to the one who works, his wages are not accounted according to grace, but according to what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted as righteousness." Now we are clear. If a man can be saved by works, then salvation becomes a reward. It is no longer grace, but something that one deserves. If it is something that one deserves, then it is no longer free. The word freely in the Bible (3:24) means in the original language without a cause. In other words, there is no reason for it. The Lord Jesus said in the Gospel of John that "they hated Me without cause" (15:25). In the original language, it can mean, "They hated Me freely." The Lord never spent anything to buy that hatred, but they hated Him just the same. There was no reason attached. It was free. God's grace during those three and a half years was accomplished freely for us.

We are like the younger son in Luke 15. One day we came to God and said, "God, give me the share of the estate that falls to me." God gave us what we should have. After we took our estate, we squandered it with evil companions. Today we have come back to the Father's house. The robe, the ring, and the shoes that we wear and the fatted calf that we eat are not what we deserve. That which was rightfully ours has been spent. We do not deserve the ring. We do not deserve the robe. We do not deserve to eat the fatted calf, and we do not deserve to wear the shoes. What then is grace? When those who do not deserve to be saved are saved, that is grace. Grace is what those who should not obtain have obtained. What the younger son took away the first time was not grace. He spent that already. What he received the second time was all

grace. His own portion was long spent. When he enjoys another meal at home, it is not what he deserves to get; it is the Father's grace.

Hence, if one works, the question of wages comes in, and it is no more grace. Grace is in conflict with what one deserves. How then does faith work? When it is not work or labor, but only faith in the God who justifies the sinner, that faith is reckoned as righteousness. This is the relationship between faith and grace. If it is work, then it is not grace. If it is grace, then there is only faith. To believe is to accept what God has done. It is not how much I have done. We must emphasize that, before God, we are not justified by what we have done. We are justified by faith. Today we have justification by faith. Therefore, the question of work is forever over.

Everyone who knows me well knows that I like soy sauce. It is all right if there are not many dishes at the table. As long as I have soy sauce, I can get by. At one time, one who was serving me saw that my soy sauce was almost gone. He went to the market and brought more back. Then he mixed it in with the good soy sauce. When I tasted it, I noticed that the taste was different. I asked why the soy sauce tasted different that day. I checked with the serving one whether or not he had poured the soy sauce from the same bottle. He answered yes. I wondered if my taste had changed. It did not seem that likely. I then asked if he had mixed it with something else. He had to admit that he had. Today man does the same thing to God's work and His grace. He tries to mix something else into them. Once we mix something in this way, grace is no longer grace. That is why God says that if it is of grace, then it is no more of work (Rom. 11:6). If it is of work, then it is no more of grace. Work can never be mixed with grace. Hence, we must not merely say that salvation is of faith. We must say that salvation is solely of faith.

I love Romans 3:27. This word is based on verses 25 and 26 which speak of how the Lord Jesus has become a propitiation place and how God has justified those who believe in Him. It is not unrighteous for God to do this. Hence, in verse 27 it says, "Where then is boasting? It is excluded." There is no way for us to boast. There is no possibility to boast anymore. The next sentence is very important. It says, "Through what kind of law?" This means that we have nothing to boast of anymore. By what way are we excluded from boasting? By what principle are we excluded from boasting? Verse 27 continues, "That of works? No, but through the law of faith." Paul asked how man can be excluded from boasting and how boasting can be removed. His

answer is by the principle of faith. If one is in the principle of faith, then he is not in the principle of works. If it is by the principle of works, then boasting cannot be excluded. But thank the Lord. Today we have the principle of faith. Hence, we cannot boast. We can only praise.

Philippians 2:12 says, "So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only but now much rather in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Many have told us that Paul said explicitly in Philippians that we have to work out our own salvation. If we are to work out our salvation, does that not mean that we have to do something? Is it true that the Lord has done the work, but man also has to do something? This is like saying that He supplies the material, we supply the labor, and the two of us work out our salvation. A person says this because he does not understand the word of the Bible. If we are to work out our salvation, then what has the Lord Jesus done on the cross? What has He accomplished on the cross? If a thing has been accomplished, it cannot be accomplished any further. If you are a child of God, you cannot become a child of God again. On the cross, the Lord Jesus clearly said, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). The cross of the Lord Jesus has accomplished the work of salvation. It has accomplished the work of redemption. Since the work of salvation and redemption have been accomplished, there is no possibility for us to work out this salvation. If we still want to work out our salvation, we must first overturn the work of the Lord on the cross. We must declare that the work of the Lord Jesus has not been accomplished; the Lord's work has not been finished. That is why we have to work it out.

Many times, we do not know what it means to shame others. But once you have experienced it, you will know what it is. For example, here is a sister. Someone has asked her to wash some handkerchiefs. After she has washed them, she hangs them up to dry. But another person comes along and takes the handkerchiefs away. When she asks for the reason, she is told that they were taken down to be washed. This is an open shame to the sister, for it means that the other person does not believe that the handkerchiefs are washed. It means that they think that the sister has lied. In the same way, for us to work out our salvation is not a glory to Christ but a shame to Christ. The Bible says clearly that Christ has accomplished all the work.

Then why does Philippians 2:12 say that we have to work out our salvation? The word work out in the original language carries the meaning of out. We

should work out our salvation in fear and trembling. Did Paul's word stop here? If it had stopped here, we would not know what he meant. Verse 13 says, "For it is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure." Since God has operated in you, it is possible for you to now work it out. If God has not operated in, we have no way to work it out. Since God has operated in, you can work out. God has already saved you within and has given you life. Now there is no other way but to let Him come out. God does not want you to work. He wants you to work out. Hence, this is not a question of salvation or perdition, eternal life or eternal death. This is a question of whether or not one receives the reward after his salvation. God has already operated in you, causing you to will and to work for His good pleasure. Hence, you have to work it out. This is the proper condition of a Christian. In other words, this is your work after salvation. If a man has not yet been saved, he cannot work out his salvation. If a man does not have life, he cannot live out a life. Only after a man has been saved can he work out his salvation. Hence, one sees that there is no such thing as being saved through good works.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ETERNAL LIFE AND THE KINGDOM

There is one thing we have to be clear about. To have eternal life is different from entering the kingdom of the heavens. Whoever cannot see the difference between eternal life and the kingdom of the heavens will never be clear concerning the way of salvation and the way of preservation. The Lord Jesus said that from John the Baptist until now the kingdom of the heavens is taken by violence (Matt. 11:12). The violent take it. The law and the prophecies of the prophets ended with John (11:12-13). Based on this word, some have said that we must be violent, that is, we must strive before we can be saved. If we do not strive, we will not be saved. A person says this because he cannot tell the difference between the kingdom of the heavens and eternal life. There is a difference between eternal life and the kingdom of the heavens.

The first difference between eternal life and the kingdom lies in time. Eternal life is for eternity, but the kingdom is not for eternity. When the new heaven and the new earth come, the kingdom of the heavens will be over. The kingdom of the heavens denotes God's rule. The period of God's rule is the period of the kingdom of the heavens. God's sovereignty on earth and His rule

on earth will be manifested for only one thousand years. What are the heavens? The book of Daniel talks about the ruling of the heavens (7:27). Hence, the kingdom of the heavens is the sphere in which the heavens rule. When the Lord Jesus comes to rule on earth, that will be the time when the heavens rule. Today the ruling one on earth is the devil, Satan. The worldly politics and authorities today are of Satan. The Lord Jesus will not rule until the time of the kingdom of the heavens. But the period during which the authority of the heavens is realized is very short. First Corinthians 15:24 says, "Then the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to His God and Father, once He has abolished all rule and all authority and power." The kingdom will be delivered up to God the Father. Hence, there is a time limit to the kingdom. But eternal life is forever. Everyone who reads 1 Corinthians 15 knows that at the beginning of the new heaven and the new earth, that is, at the conclusion of the millennium, the kingdom will be delivered up. Hence, there is a difference in time between eternal life and the kingdom of the heavens.

The second difference lies in the method that man enters the kingdom of the heavens and the way he obtains eternal life. The receiving of eternal life is the subject of the entire Gospel of John. The way to have eternal life is by believing. Once we believe, we obtain. We never read of another way. But to enter into the kingdom of the heavens is not a simple matter. The entire Gospel of Matthew mentions the kingdom of the heavens thirty-two times. Not once does it say that the kingdom of the heavens is received by faith. How does a man gain the kingdom of the heavens? Matthew 7:21 says, "Not every one who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he who does the will of My Father who is in the heavens." One can see that the entry into the kingdom of the heavens is a question of work rather than of faith. Matthew 5:3 also tells us, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens." Here it does not say eternal life but the kingdom of the heavens. To have the kingdom of the heavens, one needs to be poor in spirit. The Lord also says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens" (v. 10). One does not have to be persecuted to receive eternal life, but the kingdom is for those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness. Even if a man has eternal life, if he has not been persecuted for the sake of righteousness today and is not poor in spirit, he may still have no share in the kingdom.

There is a third difference. It lies in the attitude Christians should have concerning eternal life and the kingdom of the heavens. Concerning eternal life, God has never told us to seek after it. Rather, every time it is mentioned, He shows us that we have it already. However, concerning the kingdom, the word of the Bible says that we have to seek after it and pursue it diligently. Today, concerning the kingdom, we are in the stage of pursuit; we have not obtained it yet. We still have to put forth the effort to seek and pursue after the kingdom.

The fourth difference lies in the way God treats the kingdom and eternal life. God treats eternal life as a gift; it is given to us (Rom. 6:23). One never sees a person going to the Lord to seek for eternal life. There is not such a thing, because eternal life is free grace; it is given through the Lord Jesus to all those who believe in Him. There is no difference between a seeking one and one who is not seeking. But the kingdom is not the same. One recalls the mother of the two sons of Zebedee coming to the Lord Jesus and wishing that the Lord would cause her two sons to sit on both sides of Him in the kingdom (Matt. 20:21). But the Lord Jesus said, "To sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father" (v. 23). Grace is obtained once we call on Him. But the kingdom depends on whether one can be baptized in His baptism and drink the cup which He drank. Both of the disciples said that they could. But the Lord said that even though they promised that they would and could, the matter is still not up to Him to decide. The Father is the One who gives.

Furthermore, the criminal who was crucified along with the Lord said to Him, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). Did the Lord Jesus hear his prayer? Indeed, He did. But He did not grant his request. The criminal asked the Lord to remember him when the Lord receives the kingdom. The Lord Jesus did not answer him that he would be with Him in the kingdom. Rather, He answered him, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (v. 43). The Lord did not answer his question concerning the kingdom. But He did give him a reply concerning Paradise. As long as we call on Him, we can go to Paradise. But it is not so simple to go into the kingdom. Hence, there is a big difference here. God's attitude toward eternal life and the kingdom of the heavens is different: one is the gift of God, and the other is the reward of God.

Concerning the difference between the kingdom of the heavens and eternal life, there are other passages in the Bible which are quite interesting. Now we come to the fifth difference. Revelation 20 shows us that the martyrs receive the kingdom, although it does not say that they are the only ones who receive the kingdom (v. 4). The Bible, however, never shows us that man must be martyred to receive eternal life. If that were the case, Christianity would become a religion of death, for then man must die. But one does not see such a thing. However, the kingdom is different. The kingdom requires striving. It even takes martyrdom to obtain the kingdom. For example, poverty is a necessary condition for the kingdom of the heavens. In order to obtain the kingdom of the heavens, one has to lose his riches. The Bible shows us clearly that no person on earth who is rich according to his own ways can enter into the kingdom of the heavens. We cannot say that no rich man can be saved. We cannot say that no one can enter into eternal life who would not lose his riches. Inasmuch as it is difficult for the camel to go through the eye of the needle, in the same way it is difficult for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 19:24). But have you heard that inasmuch as it is impossible for the camel to go through the eye of the needle, in the same way it is impossible for a rich man to be saved and have eternal life? Thank the Lord. The poor can be saved. So can the rich. The poor can inherit eternal life. So can the rich. But to enter into the kingdom of the heavens is a problem for the rich. If we accumulate wealth on earth, we will not be able to enter into the kingdom of the heavens. Of course, this does not mean that one has to give up all of his money today. I am saying that one has to hand over all his money to the Lord. We are only the stewards. We are not the master of the house. The Bible never recognizes a Christian as the master of his money. Everyone is but a steward of money that is for the Lord. All of us are but the Lord's stewards. There is such a condition for entering the kingdom.

There is another very peculiar thing. One never sees the questions of marriage and family come into play involving the matter of eternal life. But the Gospel of Matthew says that some will not marry for the sake of the kingdom of the heavens. Some even made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 19:12). In order to enter into the kingdom of the heavens, and in order to gain a place in the kingdom, they choose to remain virgins. One does not see a married person being denied eternal life. If such were the case, Peter would have been the first one to have a problem, for he had a mother-in-law (Matt. 8:14). We see that the question of eternal life is

not related to family and marriage at all, but the question of the kingdom is very much related to the family and marriage. This is why the Bible says that those who have wives should be like those who had none. Those who use the world should be as those not using it, and those who buy should be as those who do not possess (1 Cor. 7:29-31). This has much to do with our position in the kingdom of the heavens.

Finally, we have to mention another difference. In the kingdom, there are different levels of rank. Even if men are able to enter into the kingdom, there is a difference in the position that they hold there. Some will receive ten cities, and others will receive five (Luke 19:17-19). Some will merely receive reward, but others will receive great reward. Some will gain a rich entrance into the kingdom (2 Pet. 1:11). Some will enter the kingdom without a rich entrance. Hence, there is a difference in rank in the kingdom. But there is never a question of rank regarding eternal life. Eternal life is the same for everyone. One will not receive ten years more than another. There is no difference in eternal life, but there is a difference in the kingdom.

If one would consider a little, he will realize that in the Bible, the kingdom and eternal life are two absolutely different things. The condition for salvation is faith in the Lord. Other than faith, there is no other condition, for all the conditions have been met by the Son of God already. His Son's death has met all of God's requirements. But to enter the kingdom of the heavens is another matter; it requires works. Today a man is saved by God's righteousness. But we cannot enter the kingdom of the heavens unless our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). The righteousness in one's living and conduct must surpass that of the scribes and the Pharisees before he can enter into the kingdom of the heavens. Hence, one sees that the question of eternal life is completely based on the Lord Jesus. But the question of the kingdom is based on man's works. I am not saying that the kingdom is better than eternal life. But God has a place for both.

CHAPTER TEN

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND WORK IN JAMES 2

God's Word is very clear concerning the condition for salvation. God shows us that salvation is by faith and not by works. We have read enough Scriptures and seen enough clear reasons why our works cannot come into consideration. Because we believe in God's work through His Son, there must not be works of our own. Yet some who do not understand the words of the Bible have come to me, asking, "Is it not true that the book of James tells us clearly that a man is not justified by faith, but by works? Is it possible that James and Paul contradict each other? And is it possible that man is justified by both faith and works?" These ones think that James and Paul do not agree with each other. They think that the books of Romans, Galatians, and James also do not agree with each other. I have to use Paul's expression: "Absolutely not!" Let us come to the book of James and see what James himself had to say.

When we read the book of James, we must take care of one thing. We can only read what is said; we cannot add into it our own thoughts. What counts is what James said. What one adds on top of that does not count. Do not read your own thoughts into the book of James. You must see what James said and not what he did not say.

THE SUBJECT OF JAMES BEING MERCY— JUSTIFICATION BEING INCIDENTAL

We will read James 2:14-26. But before we read this passage, I want to first ask a question: What is the context of these verses? Paul wrote the book of Romans with a subject in mind. He also wrote Galatians with a subject in mind. Romans says that man is justified by faith; Galatians says that man is not justified by works. Romans speaks from the positive side; Galatians speaks from the negative side. Romans declares positively how man is justified; Galatians argues negatively how to be justified and how not to be justified. Hence, the two books, Romans and Galatians, complement each another. The subject of these books is strictly justification. They deal

specifically with the problem of justification. One deals with the problem from the positive side; the other deals with it from the negative side.

Many people feel that James 2 is a difficult chapter. What is the subject of James 2? The subject of Romans is justification, and the subject of Galatians is also justification. But what is the subject of James 2? The subject of this chapter covers at least mercy and help to others. What do the verses prior to this portion say? Beginning from verse 6 James says, "But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you and is it not they who drag you to the courts? Is it not they who blaspheme the honorable name by which you are called? If indeed you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well; but if you respect persons, you commit sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law yet stumbles in one point has become guilty of all. For He who said, Do not commit adultery, also said, Do not murder. Now if you do not commit adultery, but you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who are to be judged by the law of freedom. For the judgment is without mercy to him who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment" (vv. 6-13). The subject of these verses is the showing of mercy. James tells us not to flatter the rich, but rather to care for the lowly and show mercy on the poor. This is what verses 1 through 13 say. Moreover, verse 1 is a continuation of chapter one. The last verse of chapter one says, "This is pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (v. 27). This is James's subject. If a man says that he is a godly Christian, his godliness should be manifested in his care and giving to the orphans and widows. He should not invite someone wearing splendid clothing to sit in a good place and ask the orphans, the widows, and the poor to sit under his footstool. He should care for, show mercy, and give to the despised ones. James's subject is pure and undefiled religion. Pure and undefiled religion is manifested toward the poor, the lowly, and the despised.

After 2:14, he continues to talk about giving: "If a brother or sister is without clothing and lacks daily food, and any one of you says to them, Go in peace, be warmed and filled, yet you do not give them the necessities of the body, what is the profit?" (vv. 15-16). At the end of chapter one, the subject of James is given, that is, to care for the orphans and widows. At the end of the first section of chapter two, he says that we should show mercy to others, that we should give to the poor, and that we should not despise the poor. In the

second section of chapter two, James tells us what one should do when he sees a brother or a sister without clothing and lacking daily food. All these words have to do with giving to others, showing mercy on others, not despising the poor, and helping others. Verses 14 to 26 only speak of justification in passing. Because mercy, giving, and caring for orphans and widows is the subject, justification is mentioned only in passing as a means to arrive at the goal of developing his subject. Hence, we see that James is not teaching the matter of justification in his book.

The subject of our meetings during these past two weeks has been the salvation of God. But suppose that during this period I stand up on the Lord's Day morning and give a message, not on salvation, but on overcoming, or on the kingdom, or on how to reign with the Lord Jesus in the millennium. That would be the subject of my message. While I speak, I may mention eight or nine sentences about salvation in passing. If you wish to understand the doctrine of salvation, would you not consider the other messages I gave during the rest of the two weeks? Would you ignore all that was spoken in two weeks and just take the eight or nine sentences that you hear in that one message? Romans and Galatians are specifically on justification, whereas James only mentions a few words about justification. His subject is not justification, nor is his purpose to teach justification. His purpose is to exhort others to give; the matter of justification is only mentioned in passing. A person cannot overturn Romans and Galatians with James's few words on justification. Is James then in conflict with Romans and Galatians? In a while you will see that it is not. But from the start, I want you to accurately grasp the subject of James. He was not talking about justification. He was talking about mercy, about care, and about what one should do for the orphans and widows.

FAITH WITHOUT WORKS BEING OF NO PROFIT

Verse 14 says, "What is the profit, my brothers, if anyone says he has faith, but does not have works?" Notice that James does not say that this man has faith in God. Do not add into this verse what James does not say. James does not say whether this man is a believer or not. He only says that this man says that he has faith. Regardless of whether he has works or not, this man himself should not say that he has faith. If you actually have faith before God, there is no need to talk about it. Paul says that he who believes is justified. He never says that he who says that he has faith is justified. Certainly one is not

justified just by saying so. I do not know what the man mentioned here is like. I do not know if he has faith or not. James does not say that he actually has faith. What we do see, however, is a boastful man. He may or may not have something within him. But whether or not he has something, he likes to make a show before others. He likes to print faith on his name card and show others that he has faith. Hence, James says, "My brothers, if anyone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?" If you saw a man who is not concerned about his behavior at all, who is free to do anything, but says that he believes in Jesus, you would say the same thing as James does. You also would ask what profit it is if anyone says he has faith but does not have works. Perhaps he was fighting or arguing with someone outside a minute ago, and now he says that he has faith. If such a one had not said anything about having faith, James would not have said anything to him. The reason James says anything at all is that some do not have the works but still brag. Have you ever met such people? Such ones like to boast. They like to be exalted and glorified. Not only did James have to subdue this kind of person; we also have to subdue this kind of person.

Hence, James is not talking about having faith or not having faith. Nor is he talking about works for those who have faith. James is specifically talking about works for those who say that they have faith. He is not dealing with the works of Christians, but with the works of those who say that they are Christians. He is dealing with the works of nominal church members and nominal Christians who say that they have faith. James 2 says "if anyone." It does not say "if any Christian."

Verse 14 goes on to say, "Can that faith save him?" What is "that faith"? If faith cannot save him, then what can? James refers to "that faith," not simply "faith." If faith cannot save us, we do not need to preach anymore. But James refers to "that faith," that is, the faith that some have on their lips. Do not change around what James is saying. He is not talking about faith saving this man. He is talking about that kind of faith saving him, that is, the kind of faith that one has on his lips only. I do not know if you have ever met such people. I have met such people. They say that they are Christians, that they believe in this and that, and that their faith is this and that. Can this faith save them?

FAITH WITHOUT WORKS BEING DEAD

In verses 15-16 James gives an illustration. "If a brother or sister is without clothing and lacks daily food, and any one of you says to them..." This is the man who says that he has faith. He tells the brothers and sisters in lack, "Go in peace! May the Lord bless you. May you be clothed warmly and fed bountifully." If you asked such a one why he tells others to go in peace and why he wishes others to be warm and fed, he would tell you that it is because he has faith. He would say that he believes that these ones will be clothed warmly and fed bountifully when they go home. He would say that he believes they can go home in peace. James is talking about the kind of faith that believes in empty stomachs being automatically filled and in naked bodies being automatically clothed.

"Yet you do not give them the necessities of the body, what is the profit?" The purpose of James' illustration is not to expound on justification. Rather, it is to exhort the brothers and sisters to take practical measures. Our love to the brothers and sisters should not be in word only, but in conduct as well. If you see someone lacking clothing and food, you should give him clothing and food. You have to take care of him. This is why James says this. James is against anyone's saying, "Go in peace, for I have believed for you already." James is saying that now is not the time for you to believe; now is the time for you to open up your wallet. For you now, faith is not the issue; the issue is the letting go of your money. If you hold on tenaciously to your wallet and tell others to go in peace, saying that you have faith, what good does this kind of faith do? If you encounter a poor brother or sister and would not give all that you have to help him and care for him, but would only say that you believe for him and that he can go in peace—if that is the kind of faith you exercised when you believed in the Lord Jesus, would such a faith save you? If that is the kind of faith you exercise toward the brothers and sisters and if that is the same kind of faith you have toward your justification, then I question if that kind of faith will justify you. James indicates that if that is the kind of faith you have toward the brothers and sisters, then perhaps that is the kind of faith you have toward the Lord Jesus, too. If the faith that you have toward the brothers and sisters is the same as the faith that you have toward salvation and justification, I question whether that faith can save you. If there is no basis to your believing in warm clothing and bountiful feeding, then there is no basis to your faith in salvation and justification. But if you see a brother in poverty and give him money, clothing, or food, and then believe, then there is basis for your faith.

When God saw you naked, hungry, and poor, did He say, "Be warm and filled. May you never go to hell. May you go to heaven"? If God's faith were like yours, no one would be saved on earth. But what did God do? When God saw us poor, hungry, naked, and dead in sin, He came to accomplish the work of redemption so that we could be saved. Thank the Lord. First, He set forth His work before us; then we received it. Is your faith toward the brothers and sisters a vain faith? If God were vain toward you, everything would be vanity indeed. And if you are vain toward God, your faith is also empty indeed. We know that we are justified and saved and that we have eternal life. Why is this? It is because God is not sitting in the clouds saying, "May everyone in the whole world be saved, and may everyone not go to the lake of fire." Rather, God came down personally from heaven to accomplish His righteousness and to deal with sin on the cross. Because God has done a concrete work, we can have faith today. That is why our faith is trustworthy.

Verse 17 says, "So also faith, if it does not have works, is dead in itself." James does not say that a man is not saved by believing. He does not mean that a man is not justified or does not have eternal life by believing. He means that when you hear such words from this kind of person, you know that his faith is dead. If you were to ask Paul to come here today and comment on this, even he would say that this kind of faith is dead. If one only says that he has faith, but has no outward expression of it, that faith must be dead. For no matter how great one's faith is, others still need clothing and food. They cannot cover their nakedness with the light of heaven. Nor can they eat air to satisfy their hunger. Hence, a faith without works is empty and dead.

SHOWING FAITH BY WORKS

Verse 18 says, "But someone will say, You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." If a vain and boastful person keeps on boasting, someone will eventually rise up and say, "You say that you have faith. But where is it? You should be quiet. You have faith, but I have works." Notice that this one does not say that he has works only; he does not say that he is without faith. This is not what a Christian would say. He says, "You have faith, and I have works. I have provided someone a meal today. I have given someone clothing today. Please show me your faith without works. What good is it if you only talk about these things?" Can you see the meaning in these words? When you read them, you must pay attention to the tone. When you read James, the most

important thing is to take note of the tone. If you pay attention to the tone here, you have to admit that this word is spoken to the vain and boastful person. James is speaking here about practice; he is not dealing with justification by faith.

We must take note of the word "show" here. This person says, "Show me," and, "I will show you." Hence, James 2 is not talking about whether or not a man has faith before God. It is not dealing with our faith before God at all; rather, it is dealing with our faith before man. If someone boasts before man that he has faith, you should say to such a one, "Show me your faith without works." James 2 deals with the problem of faith before man. No one can see whether or not you have faith. Others see only if you have works, that is, if you feed others and give others clothes to wear. Do you realize that this requires faith also? Suppose that there is a brother or sister here tonight who lacks clothes or food. If I say to him or her that as long as we believe, we will be clothed and fed, that is not sufficient. James says that we have to feed him and clothe him, and at the same time we should have faith. Do you realize that it takes faith to give to others? This faith comes from two sides. If I do not have much money, perhaps only a few coins in my pocket, and I see someone without food and clothing, I have to exercise faith. I do not need to have faith for others; for them I need works only. But for myself, I need faith. If I do not have faith within me, I will probably not be able to give away these few coins until I have reconsidered and counted them a few more times. I will wonder if I will be able to get back what I would give away. But if I can spontaneously give away the few coins, it must mean that I have faith. Hence, when you see a poor man and give him food and clothing, you must have faith before you can have works. Without works, your faith cannot be manifested. Furthermore, even if you are rich and it does not take much faith for you to give away a little, how do you know that after you have given the money, it would not spoil the receiver and cause him to look to you again the next time to bear his burden? If you do good to others indiscriminately, would it not cause others to look to man continually for help? Many times we do not give something to beggars because we are afraid that doing so would cause them to be beggars forever. Thus, even if you are a rich person, you have to have faith that God can keep a person from developing a bad habit of depending and relying on others. You have to believe that God would not make you bear this person's burden continually. This is a work, but it is a work of faith. It is a work that comes out of faith.

He who makes big promises and speaks empty words appears to have great faith. But actually, he has no faith at all. If you have faith, you should take off your coat and let another put it on. You should invite others to eat your food. If you only talk about faith, you do not have it. Hence, James concluded that this kind of talk is sin. The point here is not that faith is wrong, but that speaking empty words is wrong. Last night we talked about faith. The night before last we also talked about faith. But we have not paid attention to this kind of faith yet. Inasmuch as James was opposed to it, we are opposed to it, too. It is useless to speak empty words.

Verse 19 says, "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe and shudder." This is a very strong word. You believe that God is one. You do well to believe this. The demons believe this too, but they shudder. Please take note of the word "and." The question today is not whether or not you believe. If you say that you believe, no one can say that you do not. The problem is that even the demons believe. But they do not have peace. The apostles did not write to the demons, saying, "Peace be unto you. May God bless you and the fallen angels with you." Although the demons believe, they shudder. That kind of faith does them no good. Their faith makes them shudder and lose their peace. If you say that you believe, is your believing the kind of believing that the demons have? James's words are very strong and sharp. Undoubtedly, you do believe in God. But the demons believe, too. You say you believe, but at the same time you shudder, fear, and are nervous. Therefore, you are standing on the same ground as the demons. When we read on, we understand what James is against. James is not against faith at all. He is against a certain kind of faith. James is not saying that faith will not justify. He is merely saying that this certain kind of faith will not justify.

In verse 20 James calls these people by their names. He calls them what they are. He does not call them brothers and sisters. He does not call them his beloved, as Paul did; nor does he call them fathers or little children, as John did. Rather, he calls them vain men. "But are you willing to know, O vain man, that faith without its works is useless?" Notice the words "are you willing" here. That James says this proves how hard their attitude is. When others speak God's Word to them and warn them, they still will not believe. Hence, James asks if they are willing to know that this kind of faith is dead. It is not that they are unable to know or that they are unable to be clear. It is not that no one will teach them how to know. It is simply a matter of their not being willing to know. Suppose I try to speak to a brother, and he looks away. When

I try again, he looks the other way. When I try a third time, he begins to talk to another brother. I would then say, "Brother, are you willing to listen or not?" This is what James is saying here. Are you willing to know that this kind of faith without works is dead?

When we read the Bible, we have to ask God to show us the circumstances under which the portion was written. James calls this kind of people vain men. They put everything out in the open for others to see and talk about and thus exhibit themselves. They want to have a share in everything. They want to speak up wherever they are. James says that this kind of person must be subdued. O vain man, are you willing to know that this kind of faith is useless? Because they will not listen after he has spoken so much to them, he has to taunt them and shout at them a little.

THE EXAMPLE OF ABRAHAM'S JUSTIFICATION

In verses 21 through 25, two examples are given. Both are very meaningful. They show us what justification by faith really is. Verse 21 says, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar?" James 2 mentions the case of Abraham. Galatians 3 and Romans 4 also mention the case of Abraham. Paul says that man is justified by faith, not by works, and he uses the case of Abraham as proof. Both Romans 4 and Galatians 3 prove that man is justified by faith rather than by works. James also mentions the case of Abraham, but he uses it to prove that man is justified not only by faith, but by works as well. If he had used other persons, we might not understand this matter. But in mentioning the case of Abraham, we can surely understand what justification by faith really is.

In using the case of Abraham, Paul refers to Genesis 15, whereas James refers to Genesis 22. In Genesis 15 God promised Abraham that his seed would be like the stars in heaven. In Galatians 3, Paul puts strong emphasis on God's promise to Abraham. In the book of Galatians, Paul repeatedly talks about the promise. The word promise is used very frequently in the book of Galatians. Paul uplifts the promise in Galatians.

Do you know what a promise is? In the whole world, there is only one way for man to receive a promise, and that is by faith. There is no other way for a man to receive a promise. There is only this one condition. If God says that we must do something and we do it, it is work. But God did not tell Abraham that

He would give him something if Abraham did this or that. Rather, God said that He would give him descendants. How did Abraham receive the promise? There was no other way but by faith. Suppose a brother tells his son that if he memorizes a list of vocabulary words tonight, he will receive five pieces of candy tomorrow. If the son is to receive the five pieces of candy, he has to memorize the words. This is work. But if the brother simply promises his son five pieces of candy, what does his son have to do? Will he say, "I have to do this or that before I can get the candy"? The child does not have to do anything. All he has to do is believe that his father will do it for him. In Genesis 15 God did not give Abraham one single thing to do. It is as if God said, "I will do it for you. I will give you descendants." Abraham believed in God, and that was reckoned to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). Going back to the example of the brother's son, the child may say, "Will my father really give me five pieces of candy? It does not seem like such a good thing could ever happen." If he thinks this way, he does not have faith. Everyone who wants to understand the book of Galatians must realize that a promise is without condition and without work. One does not have to do anything. The Father has done everything. Thank the Lord that everything that God promises He will accomplish. As long as God is trustworthy, everything is fine. Even if one tries to do a work, it will not avail.

In Genesis 15 God promised Abraham that He would give him many descendants. Abraham had everything. But he did not have a son. He had cattle, he had sheep, and he had tents. But he did not have a son. However, Abraham believed God. He believed that God would give him a son. He merely believed God. He did not do any work. In chapter twenty-two, after God had given him a son, He said to Abraham, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (v. 2). Then Abraham got up early in the morning and took his son to Mount Moriah. He laid the wood for the burnt offering on his son Isaac's back, and Isaac bore the wood for the burnt offering, in the same way that the Lord Jesus bore the cross. When they reached the mountain, Abraham built an altar, laid his son on the altar, and was about to kill him. This is the incident that James recounts when he refers to Abraham's justification. In Genesis 15 God's justification of Abraham was related to his son. And in Genesis 22 God's justification of him was also related to his son.

In Genesis 15 Abraham had no son. But he believed in his heart that if God said He would give him a son, he would surely have a son. In chapter twenty-two he did have a son, but God wanted him to offer up this son. If Abraham had not had faith, he would have said, "God, You told me that You would give me many descendants. Now if I kill my son, will I not lose them all? It is not that I am unwilling to do this; I just want to see Your promise fulfilled. It is not that I dare not do it; I just want to preserve Your faithfulness." Do you think that Abraham's offering of Isaac was a work or an act of faith? What good work is it to kill one's son? What is there to praise about in killing one's own son? That Abraham raised the knife to offer up his son shows that he still believed the promise of chapter fifteen. God had promised to give him many descendants, and to this end He had given him one son. Now if God wanted him to kill this son, it must be that God would raise him up from the dead. This is what Abraham had in mind when he was about to kill his son. His willingness to kill his son shows that he believed that Isaac would be raised from the dead. The faith in Genesis 15 is a faith in Him who calls things not being into being, while the faith in Genesis 22 is a faith in Him who raises people from the dead (Rom. 4:17). In both instances, what Abraham did was not something of work, but of faith. Abraham's act proved that he had faith. This does not mean that Abraham could be justified by killing his son. It means that in pulling out his knife, he proved that he had faith. The proof of Abraham's faith lies in his willingness to offer up his son.

Hence, James did not say that one cannot be justified by faith. Paul says strongly that justification is not by works, but James could not strongly say that justification is not by faith. If the two contradict each other, we would expect one to say, "Justification is of faith, not of works," and the other to say, "Justification is of works, not of faith." But James does not say this. We must not say what James has not said. James does not say that we should not have faith; he says that one should prove his faith with his work. Paul is the one who talks about the principle, so he can boldly declare that justification is of faith and not of works. James is a man of practice. Thus, he says that one must not have faith only, but should have works as well. Only when there are works can a man prove that his faith is genuine. Let us read James 2:21 again: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar?" His offering up of his son was a work, and it was this work that proved that he had faith.

Verse 22 says, "You see that faith worked together with his works." Paul is bold to say that one can have faith alone, without works. But James does not dare to say that one should have works alone, without faith. He indicates that the faith in Genesis 15 and the work in Genesis 22 go hand in hand. Then he adds another clause. He does not say that justification comes through faith plus work. Rather, he says, "And by these works faith was perfected." In Genesis 15 we see that because Abraham had faith, he was justified before God. In Genesis 22 we see that because Abraham had works, he was justified before men. Abraham's justification was perfected by his work in Genesis 22. The offering up of Isaac in Genesis 22 manifested the faith in Genesis 15, and the faith in Genesis 15 was perfected by the work in Genesis 22.

In verse 23 our brother James also quotes from Genesis 15. In Romans 4 Paul quotes from Genesis 15 to prove that one needs faith only, not works. Now our brother James quotes the same word that Paul does: "And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness.'" In James the word it refers to the act on the mount in Genesis 22. Abraham's offering of Isaac in Genesis 22 was an offering of faith. It was a work that manifested his faith. It was a fulfillment of the words in Genesis 15 that say that Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. In Genesis 15 God justified Abraham due to his faith. Abraham's work in Genesis 22 fulfilled God's promise in Genesis 15. Hence, we cannot say that faith alone does not save and that there is the need of works as well. The condition for salvation is faith, not works. But if there is faith, then spontaneously there will be a change in works.

Suppose there is a man whose occupation is to make paper money to be burned to idols. One day he hears the gospel and believes. But after he believes, he continues to make paper money. Is this wrong? He realizes within that the paper money is for idol worship and that a Christian cannot do such work. If you ask whether or not he believes in the Lord Jesus, he would say yes. But if he gives up his paper money business, how will he support himself? He confesses that he is a Christian, but we cannot say with certainty that he is saved. We do not know if he has been saved before God, if he has faith or not. If we see a person who believes that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God and that He was crucified for him, and believes in the gospel of God fully, yet will not give up such a business for fear that he would lose his livelihood, we have no way to tell if he is actually saved. Perhaps he has faith before God. Though the seed has been sown, the sprout has not yet come out. We can only know with

certainty after the leaves come out. I do not say that he is not saved. I say only that we are not certain whether he is saved or not. Here lies the difference. There is no question about being saved by faith. But if no work issues from faith, others will not know about that faith. This is absolutely not a matter of good or bad behavior. Please note this carefully. James 2 is absolutely not on good or bad behavior. The emphasis in James 2 is on the works that prove one's faith. James 2 does not tell us to focus our attention on good works or bad works. What it emphasizes are the works that issue from faith. Many people are very good in their works. But these works do not manifest their faith. These are works without faith; these are not what James was concerned with.

Verse 24 is very good: "A man is justified by works and not by faith only." See how careful James is? He says man is justified by works and not by faith alone. Paul is able to say that man is justified by faith and not by works at all. But James never says that man is justified by works alone and not by faith at all. If he were to say that, we would have to conclude that the two apostles have divergent views on doctrine. James says that man is justified by works. But following that he adds another word, that it is not by faith alone. When one has works, it proves that he has faith. This does not mean that one should have good works only, but that one should have works of faith.

THE EXAMPLE OF RAHAB'S JUSTIFICATION

James was afraid that we would not be clear about the case of Abraham, so in verse 25 we see another illustration. He mentions the case of a prostitute. Rahab was not an honorable woman. There was nothing of merit in her works. Therefore, we see that justification is not a matter of good works, but of works of faith. I have repeated this a few times already. At issue is works of faith, not works of morality. "And in like manner was not also Rahab the harlot justified by works in that she received the messengers and sent them out by a different way?" What kind of good works is this? The Israelites were crossing the Jordan River to attack Jericho. If Rahab had been even slightly patriotic, she would have handed over the two spies. But when the king of Jericho sent men to look for them, Rahab hid them upstairs. Later she let them get away. James tells us that this woman's work justified her. What work did she have? Her work was to lie. The men were obviously there, but she said that they were not. Is lying a good work? Every Christian knows that lying is not good. Yet Rahab was justified by her work of lying. If some say that this is justification by

works, it is something that they themselves are saying; it is not what James is saying. They are merely saying in the name of James what they want to say. But what does James himself say? He says that when Rahab let the two men who spied out Jericho get away, it was reckoned to her as righteousness.

What does James mean? When the Israelites left Egypt and went into the wilderness, they could not settle down anywhere, but had to wander for forty years. What good is such a nation? At least there was a wall around Rahab's Jericho. All that the Israelites had was sand under their feet. At least there were houses in Jericho. All that the Israelites had were tents. Even their God had to dwell in a tent. What was so special about such a nation? However, when the two spies came and told her how God had cared for them, performed miracles for them, and had promised that Jericho, and even the whole land of Canaan, would be delivered to them, their words caused Rahab to believe. She put her own future, her life, and even her whole family in their trust. She was even willing to do something against her own country. God does not say that this was a good work; He says that this work was the expression of her faith. If the walls of Jericho had been made of straw or chicken feathers, we might think that the walls could have indeed fallen. But the walls of Jericho were as high as heaven. Its gates were fortified with brass bars. How could it have been taken easily? How could Rahab have committed herself to the two spies? This was a work out of faith, and God says that what justifies a person is this kind of work. It is not a question of good or bad. To have good works is not the issue at all. To have bad works is neither the issue. The flesh is absolutely useless before God. It has no place at all. Every work in Adam, whether good or bad, is rejected by God. If a man tells others that only good works save, such a person does not know what the flesh is. Hence, it is not an issue of works. Good works cannot justify. Neither can bad works.

Hence, James 2 is on works of faith. It is not on anything else. Rahab was there risking her life. If the men sent by the king of Jericho had found the spies in her house, immediately she would have lost her life. But her hope was to be saved through the spies of Israel. She committed her own life and future into their hands. Hence, at issue is not good works or bad works, but having faith or not having faith. It is faith that justifies. Although James says that Rahab was justified by works, her works were but a manifestation of her faith.

Finally, verse 26 says, "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." Our spirit resides inside our body. Hence,

we can say that our spirit is the spirit of our body. We say that evil spirits are spirits that have left their body, for they are without a body. There is a kind of work that requires faith and must be linked to faith. There is a kind of work that comes out from faith and that issues from faith. If faith is without works, it is dead in the same way that a body without a spirit is dead. Hence, we are saved through faith, we are justified through faith, and we also receive life through faith. Although there are many different ways to express faith, the source is still faith. Some express it by forsaking their profession. Others express it by not following in the footsteps of their parents. Still others express it by not going along with their husband in certain things or by forsaking their position. There are all kinds of expressions of faith. The question is not good or bad works, but faith. What James is saying is that when the opportunity arises, our faith should be expressed.

Hence, we cannot say that salvation is of works. Hebrews 6:1 mentions the word of the beginning of the Christ. The foundation of the word of Christ is repentance from dead works. What is repentance from dead works? It is repentance from what we have done when we were dead. In the Bible, there are two things that we have to repent for. One is sin. The other is dead works. Everything that is wrong morally is a sin and a transgression. If a man believes in the Lord, he must surely repent and deal with these sins. Furthermore, we must also hate and repent for what we did as dead persons. What are these dead works? They are all the good works that we were able to do by ourselves before we were saved, before we became the children of God, before we received the new life, and before we became a new race. One sees his sins and transgressions for what they are. But one does not see the things that he considers moral and noble as things to be repented of. God says that these are dead works. They were performed when we were dead. We must repent for all these works, not depending on them for salvation.

When we are saved, there are two great repentances. One is repentance for all the things that should not have been done. But when someone understands the gospel and sees the complete work of the cross of the Son of God, he repents for the other things also, which are all the good works that he has formerly done. Formerly, we tried our best to do good, as if God would save us if He were only impressed enough by our good works. Today, however, we have become Christians. We must not only repent for our sins; we have to repent for our dead works as well. Hence, dead works cannot help us to be saved. You may say that one should believe in the Lord Jesus, but one should

also have good works. But God sees you as a torn rag. The righteousness that God gives us far exceeds the righteousness of the law. Hence, if we want to come to God, not only must we not bring our sins along, we also must not bring our works along. If we wish to talk about works, then our works must be as perfect as Christ's are before God, before they can be acceptable.

My friends, you must see that salvation is not of yourselves. You must realize from your heart that everything is of the Lord Jesus. Faith is not a virtue. Faith is just receiving. One of our gospel hymns says, "Working will not save me" and "Weeping will not save me" (#1000 in Hymns, published by Living Stream Ministry). The last stanza says, "Faith in Christ will save me." When I first saw this line, immediately I crossed it out and replaced it with "Jesus alone will save me." Faith is not a virtue. Faith is just to allow the Lord to save us. It is like a person who falls into the sea. When someone comes to save him by throwing him a net, he does not have to do anything. As long as he does not jump out of the net, he will be fine. Everything is done by the Lord Jesus. Hallelujah! I say again, never misunderstand James 2. Work in James 2 is not a question of being good or bad, but of having or not having faith.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE WAY OF SALVATION—
FAITH VERSUS REPENTANCE

In the past two messages, we have seen that the way of salvation on man's side is through faith, rather than the law or works. We have seen that salvation is by faith alone. It is not by faith with the law, nor is it by faith with works (Eph. 2:8-9). However, besides the law and works, man still tries to use other ways to obtain God's salvation. Although we cannot cover these ways in detail, we hope that we can enumerate all of them in the coming two messages. Besides the law and works, repentance also is often considered by man as a very important condition. Man thinks that if he does not repent, he will not be saved. Those who are acquainted with the Bible dare not say that repentance is the only condition for salvation, but they would say that a man is saved by faith with repentance, or through repenting and believing. I admit that the subject of repentance is not easy to understand in the New Testament. But if one would consider the Word of God itself, he would understand the real meaning of repentance and would find out quickly if repentance is a condition for salvation.

THE THREE BOOKS ON SALVATION IN THE BIBLE NOT LISTING REPENTANCE AS THE CONDITION FOR SALVATION

Before we talk about the meaning of repentance in the Bible and its relationship with faith and salvation, we should first clarify a few things concerning repentance. After that, we will consider what the Bible says about repentance. In the entire Bible, there is only one book that tells us how we receive eternal life. This book is the Gospel of John. From the very beginning to the very end of the Gospel of John, we cannot find a single occurrence of the word repentance. The word repentance never occurs in this book at all. This book tells us how we can have eternal life (3:15, 16b, 36), but nothing is mentioned about repentance. It mentions repeatedly that man receives eternal life through faith. When a man believes, he has eternal life. It never mentions repentance. Not only does it not mention repentance directly, it

does not mention repentance even indirectly or metaphorically. This is a fact that we have to remember.

Second, there are two books which tell us how man is justified before God. They are Romans and Galatians. The book of Romans does mention repentance, but it never makes repentance a condition for salvation. Neither of these books has ever made repentance a condition for salvation and promise. Hence, we have to remember that of the three books in the Bible that deal specifically with salvation, eternal life, and justification, not once is repentance mentioned as a condition for salvation. In all three books, faith is mentioned every time as the only condition. This shows us clearly that man is saved by faith and not by works.

MAN EMPHASIZING REPENTANCE THROUGH A MIND FILLED WITH THE LAW AND WORKS

Why does man pay so much attention to repentance? This is because man's mind has the poison of the law and works remaining in it. Salvation is free, but because man's mind is full of the law and works, he never considers that God would give salvation to him freely. He never thinks that God would freely bear man's burden. He always thinks that he has to do something good before he can be saved. Whether it is the keeping of the law, the performing of good works, or the need for repentance, man always thinks that he has to do something. It seems as if man is never willing to be an unconditional beneficiary. He never wants to stand in a position of receiving. Although he realizes that it is impossible to do everything, he thinks that he must at least do something. It is precisely this doing that has twisted the biblical meaning of repentance. It turns repentance into our repentance.

Please remember that the repentance mentioned in the Bible and the repentance that we talk about are two different things. What is repentance according to man's mind? According to the human concept, repentance is improvement. According to his mind, repentance is not something for the past, but is something to deal with the present and the future. Formerly, I was sinful, fallen, degraded, and weak. Now I want to be saved. Hence, I have to improve myself from today on and make myself look better.

The Chinese word for repentance is hwe-gai. *Hwe* means to feel sorry, and *gai* means to change. Some have invented a new doctrine, unknown to the

New Testament, based on this Chinese word, saying that some people only *hwe* but do not *gai*. Hence, they say that it is not enough just to feel sorry; there must also be a change. Why does man pay so much attention to change? It is because man's thought is full of works. This is why he emphasizes works so much. He says that since everything he did before was wrong, he must no longer be wrong. He realizes that he was bad and that he was a sinner, but now, he should not be bad and should no longer be a sinner. Formerly he sinned, and before God he was clothed in rags; he had squandered all of his Father's possessions. How then can he be accepted when he returns home? Surely he has to do business, and make some money. Surely he should have on the best robe and a pair of shoes before he can return home. Man's thought is that he needs a certain degree of improvement before he can return home. If his clothes are not proper and he looks the same as before, perhaps the Father would not accept him. If he would improve somewhat, although there is still no assurance whether the Father would accept him, at least there is a better and greater chance. Man never considers that it is possible to go to God and receive salvation in his present condition. He always wants to improve himself. He admits that he cannot be perfect in his conduct. But he thinks that he still has to have something and trust in the Lord for the rest. To him, it is like gambling; he has to place a bet before he can gamble. This bet which he places is the repentance that man talks about.

REPENTANCE IN MAN'S MIND DIFFERENT FROM REPENTANCE IN THE BIBLE

The repentance that man talks about simply speaks of one thing: he is not willing to lower himself to the bottom rung. He thinks that he should be at least one rung higher before God would grant him salvation. This is repentance according to man's mind. It is not the repentance in the Bible. I am not saying that there is no doctrine of repentance in the Bible. There is the doctrine of repentance in the Bible. The Bible even demands that man should repent. But the repentance that the Bible talks about is different from the repentance that we talk about today. What then is the repentance that the Bible talks about? Let us now look at it.

First, the meaning of the word repentance in Greek is a turning of the mind. The mind is the thinking organ within man. Hence, repentance as taught in the Bible is not a change in conduct, but a change in mind. The word

repentance just means a change in one's thoughts and has nothing to do with works. It does not have any connotation of a change in conduct. This is as far as the meaning of the word goes.

Second, in the New Testament, repentance is always used in reference to our past. It concerns what we have done in the past, what we have thought and said, and what we were as persons in the past. Formerly, we had certain kinds of concepts and certain views which we considered good and glorious. Now, through the enlightening of God, our mind has a great turn. It is not a turn with a view to future conduct, but a change from things of the past. We change our view and evaluation concerning many things. Originally, we thought that it was a glory and a joy to deceive others and that the one who was deceived was such a fool because he was ignorant of being cheated. One might delight and glory in this. But what he once considered glorious, now he considers shameful. Repentance is not for the good of tomorrow, but for the wrong of yesterday. Repentance is not saying what one should do in the future; it is a reevaluation in the mind, a changed view, and a different judgment concerning the things of the past.

In Luke 13:3 the Lord Jesus told the Jews that if they did not repent of what they did, they would die like the Galileans did. Hence, repentance is to take a different view than before. It is to see things in God's light, a light that is from above.

Let us go on. In Acts we see the word repentance used many times. Acts 8:22 says, "Repent therefore from this wickedness of yours and beseech the Lord if perhaps the intent of your heart may be forgiven you." Simon was trying to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit with money, and Peter replied with a very strong word. He told Simon that he had to repent of his wickedness. This does not mean that Simon should do better in the future. It means that Simon should repent of what he has just done, what he has just said, and what his thoughts have been. Repentance is to deal with one's problems of the past. It means that there were great mistakes in what we did and that we should now have a different view. Formerly, the thought was to spend a little money to buy the Holy Spirit. Now, this is seen as a sin. What should be done? There is now the need for a new view and a renewed evaluation. This is repentance. By this we receive forgiveness.

The word repentance appears frequently in Revelation 2 and 3 in a particular way. There, the Lord was dealing with the works of the past. He was calling for men to have a different view concerning their past works. Revelation 2:5 says, "Remember therefore where you have fallen from and repent and do the first works; but if not, I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent." The Lord said this because they had left their first love. They did not do the first works. They had to remember from whence they had fallen. This is repentance. After this, they have to do the first works which are something of the future. One has to repent of what he did in the past. The works in the future are a different matter altogether.

Verse 16 says, "Repent therefore; but if not, I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war with them with the sword of My mouth." The Lord was speaking here to the church in Pergamos. Some had followed the teaching of the Nicolaitans. They considered this teaching to be good. That is why the Lord said that they needed to repent. They needed to consider that the work of the Nicolaitans was evil. They needed to change their view and their concepts.

Verse 21 says, "And I gave her time that she might repent, and she is not willing to repent of her fornication." She had committed fornication, but she would not consider that as wrong. She would not judge that as improper. Verse 22 says, "Behold, I cast her into a bed, and those who commit adultery with her, into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works." This again shows us that they needed to repent of their past deeds. If they did not repent, the Lord would cast them into great tribulation.

Revelation 3:3 says, "Remember therefore how you have received and heard, and keep it and repent." Here, the Lord is again calling them to repent, that is, to change their view concerning their behavior.

Verse 19 says, "As many as I love I rebuke and discipline; be zealous therefore and repent."

After seeing how the word is used in Luke, Acts, and Revelation, we can now understand what repentance really means in the Bible. Repentance is a change of mind. But it is always used in reference to the deeds of the past and is never used in reference to conduct in the future. Repentance is a change in

one's own mind, but what it deals with is in respect to the failures, the sins, the mistakes, the lack of zeal, and the ungodliness of the past. This means that we now see all these as wrong and improper. This is the meaning of repentance. We may say that faith is our looking up to Christ, and repentance is our looking at ourselves in the light of Christ. While we are still sinners, the Holy Spirit shines into us and shows us ourselves. This is repentance. This is most necessary and is indispensable. Without the enlightening of the Holy Spirit and the realization of ourselves, we cannot lift our eyes to the Lord Jesus.

The work of repentance is similar to the work of the law that we have discussed in the last few messages. God's purpose is that man would receive His grace. But man has sinned. He has no light concerning himself. He does not know what kind of person he is. He does not know that he is condemned before God, that he is absolutely useless, and that he is, therefore, unable to receive God's grace. Let us suppose that you are very sick, and your two lungs are completely diseased. You may say that you still have a fair complexion and that there is color in your face. You may not think that some good medicine or a good doctor is necessary. Now suppose you go to have an X-ray. After you see the result of your own X-ray, you will admit that you are a sick man and that you need rest and treatment. Hence, repentance is God's goal in giving the law. Through repentance, we see by the enlightening of God, the shining of the Holy Spirit, and God's Word, that our past deeds were all wrong and that our lifestyle was improper. God has diagnosed our illness, and we have to admit that we are wrong. This is repentance.

There was a brother who always carried others' heavy luggage when he traveled together with them. He volunteered because he thought that others were not healthy, but that he was in good health. Once, after he had completed a heavy task, I suggested that he should go to the hospital and have an X-ray taken. At the beginning he refused. We argued that it would do him no harm, even if he was not sick. So, he went. He found out that he had tuberculosis. From that point on, his behavior completely changed. He dared not do anything anymore. When we asked him to do anything, he would do his best to decline. His change was so drastic that it was as if he were two different persons on the same day. At one moment he thought that he was so healthy and had such good lungs. At another moment his evaluation of himself changed completely. He had a different view and a different

evaluation of himself. This is called repentance. Repentance is necessary. It is the goal which God wants to attain through the law.

If we misunderstand repentance to think that it is a change of our future behavior, we are absolutely ignorant of God's salvation. God's salvation never attempts to improve the Adamic nature. If repentance referred to the future, it would mean that old Adam and the fleshly man still have the possibility of improvement and advancement. But the Lord Jesus said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John 3:6). The flesh will never advance to become the spirit. Only that which is begotten of the Spirit is spirit. If repentance refers to the future, then the foundation of God's salvation is completely torn down. Not only are we not able to improve ourselves, on the contrary, we need to be removed. God's salvation leaves no room for the fleshly man. It removes the man completely. When the Lord Jesus was crucified, all men were crucified with Him. Our old man has been crucified on the cross.

Thank God that the Lord Jesus is a tailor who makes clothes. He is not a mender who mends clothes. It is not that our clothing is torn and the Lord Jesus comes to mend it for us. The Lord Jesus only makes new clothes; He does not mend old clothes. Perhaps we are poor, and we are willing to wear old clothes. But in the house of God, no one wears a mended garment. There is no such thing in God's salvation. God said that the first Adam is finished and that all behavior in the first Adam is also finished. Now, we are in the last Adam. Today everything has been accomplished by the Lord Jesus; He wants to be the new life within us. Therefore, repentance in the Bible does not refer to future behavior. Rather, it refers to a change in concept concerning our past. Biblical repentance is a view concerning past deeds rather than future behavior.

REPENTANCE BEING NECESSARY IN RECEIVING GOD'S SALVATION

When a farmer plants seed, can he sow it on a field without doing anything first to the ground? Wheat grows very easily. Even for us to grow wheat, we have to plow the field and till the soil first. In the same way, there must first be the tilling work in God's salvation before the plants will grow in a deep way. Hence, those who never feel that they have sinned will not be saved, and neither will those who never feel that they are wrong. Perhaps after such a one hears the full gospel as we are preaching now, he would become clear

concerning God's work in Christ and would gladly receive the gospel. I dare not say that he has no repentance. Perhaps he has repentance. But the repentance is not deep. There is not much operation of the Holy Spirit in him. He does not see that he is a weak, filthy, and useless sinner before God. Such a one has to go through the experience of Romans 7 in his later years. What is the experience of Romans 7? It is the make-up lesson for a Christian who has not repented. If a man has passed through repentance when he comes to God, there is no need for the experience of Romans 7. If a man has not repented, and does not know that he is desolate before God, but receives the full gospel readily when he hears it, in his future experience, God still has to show him his desolation. It is necessary for one to know himself, either from the beginning or somewhere along the way. God never allows a Christian not to know himself.

Hence, we can see the true meaning of repentance according to the Bible. It is a new concept of one's past. Repentance sees oneself, in the same way that faith sees the Lord Jesus. When one believes, he sees the work that the Lord Jesus has done for him. When he repents, he sees the deeds that he himself has done in the past. To see what one has done in the past is repentance; to see what the Lord Jesus has done on the cross is faith. If we want to see what the Lord Jesus has done for us, we must first see what we have done ourselves. Unless the thief who was crucified next to Jesus had said clearly with his own mouth that what he was suffering was what he deserved, he could not have said to the One crucified next to him, "Remember me when You come into Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). If he were to curse the magistrates as agents of the imperialists, and if he had not seen that what he suffered was what he deserved, he would not have seen who the Lord was. When we do not see ourselves, we do not see the Lord. When we see ourselves, we see the Lord. This is repentance.

Hence, we can see that repentance does not carry any element of our self, our work, or our behavior. Many people say that I do not believe in repentance. That is not true. I believe in repentance with my whole heart. But I believe in the biblical repentance. I do not believe in the mental repentance that some have had. If it is a repentance according to the Bible, I will gladly believe, for it is real. It gives us a new view and a new perception. Only in this way can we receive the Lord by faith in the presence of God.

THE PLACE OF REPENTANCE BEING IN FAITH AND SALVATION

How then is man saved? The Gospel of John tells us clearly that it is by faith. The books of Romans and Galatians also tell us clearly that it is by faith. Galatians tells us that it is only by faith. In the whole New Testament, there are only these three books that deal with the question of salvation. All three books tell us that salvation is by faith only and is not of the law. Repentance does not come into consideration. What place then does repentance hold? If we read the Bible, we will find out that repentance is never detached from faith. Repentance is never separated from faith. This does not mean that one is saved by faith and repentance. Repentance is included in faith and is included in salvation already. When a man believes in the Lord Jesus, the element of repentance is included there already. If one says that he is saved, then his salvation includes repentance. Repentance is never detached from faith. It is always included in salvation.

Now, let us consider if repentance is a condition. In the New Testament, by the time of the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit had come and the full gospel was preached. The book of Acts seems to show us that repentance is a condition for salvation. Many have misunderstood the matter because they have not seen the place of repentance. No doubt, the Old Testament speaks of the teaching of repentance also. Jonah preached to the men of Nineveh that unless they repented, God would destroy them (Jonah 1:1-2). They repented, put on sackcloth, sat in ashes, and fasted. This was for their past deeds. The putting on of the sackcloth and the sitting in ashes were not for future behavior. If they were for future acts, what did sackcloth and ashes have to do with it? Repentance is to feel sorry for and to condemn one's past behavior. One puts on sackcloth and sits in ashes because he realizes that he is wrong before God. Formerly, he thought he was living. Now, he knows that he was dead. Hence, he mourns for his past wrongdoings. This is repentance. This was what Jonah preached. Before the gospel of the Lord Jesus came, we did not see salvation by faith. What we had then was only repentance for past deeds.

Later, John the Baptist came. He did not preach faith. He only preached repentance, that is, a repentance for past actions and past wrongdoings. In Matthew 3:8, he said one very good thing: "Produce then fruit worthy of your

repentance." He also said that "he who has two tunics, let him share with the one who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise" (Luke 3:11). We have to realize that this is not repentance. Rather, this is the fruit of repentance. Repentance is for the past, and the fruit of repentance is for the future. At John's time, the complete gospel was not yet preached, and the light of the truth was not fully revealed. In order to lead men to God, he had to bring them to a different view of the past.

Following this, the Lord Jesus Himself came. The Gospel of John is different from the other three Gospels. The first three Gospels talk about what the Lord Jesus did in time. The Gospel of John talks about what He does in eternity. Every reader of the Bible knows that the Gospel of John does not talk about things in time. Rather, it talks about things of eternity. It begins with "the beginning" and ends with the receiving of eternal life (1:1; 20:22). The first of the three books speaks of the Son of David, the Son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1). It shows us the Christ in time. John tells us about the Christ in eternity (3:13). The first three books are transitional. Hence, they talk about repentance. But why did the Lord talk about repentance also (Matt. 4:17)? It was because the kingdom of the heavens had drawn near. Because the kingdom has drawn near, we have to repent. But in the Gospel of John, after the full gospel has been preached, there is no more mention of repentance. In Acts, some verses also say that salvation must be by faith. Acts 16:31 says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household." However, in a few places in Acts, repentance is mentioned by itself; there is no mention of faith. This is why some believers misunderstand repentance as a condition for salvation.

THE TRUE MEANING OF REPENTANCE

Let us study a few passages to see what repentance is. Acts 2:37-38 says, "And when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, What should we do, brothers? And Peter said to them, Repent and each one of you be baptized upon the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." When some read these verses, they may say that faith is not even mentioned. All that is mentioned is to repent, to be baptized upon the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and to receive the promised Spirit. Faith is not mentioned at all; instead, only repentance is mentioned. But this was not what was spoken prior to this. The apostle did not begin with

repentance, baptism, forgiveness of sins, and the receiving of the Holy Spirit. This was not the day of Pentecost. It was not the first word that Peter preached. It was the last word Peter spoke after he gave his message. Prior to this, Peter had said, "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man shown by God to you to be approved by works of power and wonders and signs, which God did through Him in your midst, even as you yourselves know—this man...you, through the hand of lawless men, nailed to a cross and killed; whom God has raised up" (vv. 22-24). Peter was saying, "This is our testimony. God has even exalted Him to the heavens and has made Him Lord and Christ. This is the testimony of the Holy Spirit. God has sent us, the apostles, to testify to the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The Holy Spirit has been poured out, giving the one hundred and twenty the gift of tongues. This is the testimony of the Holy Spirit, testifying that the Lord Jesus has been glorified." There are two testimonies here. The apostles testify of resurrection, while the Holy Spirit testifies of glorification. The apostle Peter preached to them the word of God and showed them what they had done to the Lord Jesus and what God had done to Him. Verse 36 says, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you have crucified." The word of God had been preached, and the apostles had shown them what God had done and what they had done.

Please remember that slightly more than a month before Pentecost, the same group of people were shouting, "Take Him away! Take Him away! Crucify Him!" (John 19:15). They were instrumental in His murder and crucifixion. Formerly, they considered the Lord Jesus as worthy of death; they shouted to crucify Him and to release Barabbas instead (Luke 23:18). What had happened? Acts 2:37 says, "When they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, What should we do, brothers?" This is to believe in the word of God. The word of God was preached, and they received it. They realized that what God had done to the Lord Jesus was very different from what men had done to Him. Moreover, the Holy Spirit was also there testifying. They could not refuse that testimony. Hence, they spoke this pleading word, asking what they should do now that they had crucified the Lord Jesus. If they had not crucified the Lord, there would still be the chance of restitution. But once the Lord Jesus was crucified, what should they do? They accepted the apostle's testimony. As a result, the apostle told them that they had to repent. They had to repent because of their

concepts and view concerning the Lord Jesus. In addition, they had to be baptized upon the name of Jesus Christ. To be baptized is to receive Him, to believe in Him, and to confess Him. The meaning of being in the Lord's name is to believe in the Lord. When they do this, their sins will be forgiven, and they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We can now realize that this is a group of people who had received the word of God. Since they had believed that much already, the apostle was able to tell them to repent. This did not touch their behavior, but their view. The apostle was not saying that if they did not change their former conduct, they could not be saved. This is absolutely not a matter of dealing with a person's conduct. What they had to do was judge themselves and be baptized upon the name of the Lord Jesus as an expression of their faith in Him. In this way, their sins would be forgiven, and the Holy Spirit would be received by them. Hence, the condition for our salvation is faith alone. Salvation is given to us freely. We need not do anything to come to God. It is God Himself who has come to save us because of His Son Jesus Christ.

Acts 3:19-20 says, "Repent therefore and turn, that your sins may be wiped away, so that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." When we read this verse, we may think that repentance is a condition for salvation. It is true that verse 19 seems to indicate that repentance is a condition of salvation. But we must pay attention to the whole passage from verse 1 on. We cannot read verse 19 alone. It would be wrong for us to start from verse 19 and explain it according to our thought. From verse 1 on, we find the story of a lame man being healed. When this lame man looked at Peter, Peter said to him, "Silver and gold I do not possess, but what I have, this I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene rise up and walk" (v. 6). When all the people saw a man who was born lame begin to walk, they marveled. Peter then stood up to give a message. First, he explained that this was not his work, and it was not through his godliness that such a person was made to walk. In verses 15-20 he said, "And the Author of life you killed, whom God has raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. And upon faith in His name, His name has made this man strong...Repent therefore and turn, that your sins may be wiped away, so that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." What was he saying? He was talking about faith. He was saying that we believe in His being raised from the dead, that we believe in His name, and that His name had made the man strong. Here was a lame man that everyone knew. It was faith from the Lord that had

made this man whole. If we want to believe, just as they had believed, we have to repent. If we want faith, we have to pay attention to repentance. If we want to receive Him, we must have a new view and a new evaluation concerning Him. We must have this qualification.

I mentioned earlier that repentance can never be separated from faith; it is included in faith. Before man repents, he cannot believe. After a man has some faith, he must repent. If a man has a certain amount of faith in God's word, he must repent. One cannot cut the matter neatly with a pair of scissors, with one side being faith and the other side being repentance. This resembles the salvation experience of many people. If you ask one hundred people when they were saved, perhaps only fifty can give you the exact date and year of their salvation. The other half would not know when they were saved. They do not know how they received God's salvation. To them it matters little how they were saved. The important thing is that they are saved. It is all right if they do not know the date of their birth. As long as they are born, they feel that it is good enough. Hence, we can see that at the beginning, the word of God was first preached (2:16). If they had not believed, why would they be pricked in their hearts?

We may ask that if they had indeed believed, why would Peter have said that they must repent and be baptized before their sins could be forgiven and the Holy Spirit be poured out? If they had believed, why were their sins not forgiven yet, and why was the Holy Spirit not poured out yet? If we say that they had not believed, then why were they so concerned after they heard God's word? Why did they ask what they must do? We have to realize that when the word of God is preached, different people have different reactions according to their own condition. The condition in Acts was different. Some sinners feel that they have sinned, and they are sorrowful for their sins. When we preach the gospel to such people, we may never mention repentance. But some people come to believe in Him without having realized their sins. Such people must be brought back to the point of repentance. Hence, when we preach the gospel, we have to pay attention to this difference. Some have come to the Lord through repentance. We only have to ask them to believe. For others, we have to lead them to repentance and conviction concerning themselves. Even after God has given them faith and they have believed, we still must persuade them to be baptized and have a heart of repentance before their sins can be forgiven and the Holy Spirit can be poured upon them. Hence, we see that repentance can be included in faith. If a man does not

repent, how can he believe? If a man does not realize that he is sick, he will not be willing to see a doctor. Moreover, repentance can also be included in salvation. Man is to believe in God's word, be forgiven, and receive the Holy Spirit after he repents. Hence, we see that Acts 3 speaks of faith also. This man is saved and healed by faith. It is so clear that what is spoken of here is faith.

When we come to chapter seventeen we see something else. Acts 17:30 says, "Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now charges all men everywhere to repent." Here, God does not tell man to believe. If it were up to us, we would surely have changed the word "repent" to "believe." But what Paul was talking about in the following verses was not a question of faith. If he were to tell us that man has sinned and that the Son of God has accomplished the work of redemption and has solved the problem of sin, then he would have to mention faith. But here Paul was talking about judgment. Verse 31 says, "Because He has set a day in which He is to judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has designated, having furnished proof to all by raising Him from the dead." God has designated the Lord Jesus as the Judge to judge all men. At the same time, in order to let everyone know that He has designated the Lord Jesus as the Judge, God has raised Jesus from among the dead as a proof of their faith. This is why it says that we have to repent. So, this is not a question of faith here. Through His resurrection from the dead, the Lord Jesus has become a proof of our faith. He is worthy of our belief already. Now there is no need to talk about faith anymore. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is here as a proof; it is clear and beyond doubt. Now what we must do is repent for the things that we have done. Then we will be able to believe. The Lord Jesus is worthy of our belief. As long as we repent, we can believe.

Acts 26:19-20 says, "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared both to those in Damascus first and in Jerusalem and throughout all the country of Judea and to the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance." If we read these two verses only, we would think that the only thing that Paul was preaching was repentance. Paul confessed before King Agrippa's judgment that his work was to cause men to repent and turn to God and do works worthy of repentance. If that was all, then the gospel according to Acts would not be a gospel of faith. In order to understand this verse, we must look at the previous passage. We cannot take a portion of Scripture out of context. It is

unfair to do this. Verses 14-20 say, "And when we all fell to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads. And I said, Who are You, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom you persecute. But rise up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a minister and a witness both of the things in which you have seen Me and of the things in which I will appear to you; delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles, to whom I send you, to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me. Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared both to those in Damascus first and in Jerusalem and throughout all the country of Judea and to the Gentiles that they should repent." Why do they have to repent? It is because the Lord Jesus has accomplished the work of redemption. All those who believe in Him will surely obtain this redemption. Repentance is something for the believing ones. Everything is done. Now, all that is needed is to repent. What is to repent? Formerly, one says that there is no need to believe. Now, he says that he will believe. This is repentance.

Suppose I see a person today, and I preach the gospel to him, telling him that the Lord Jesus has accomplished everything. I may say, "My friend, you have to repent and believe in the Lord. As soon as you believe, you will be saved. You have to have a different view towards sin. You also have to have a different view towards faith in the Lord Jesus. You have to repent of your inward condition; in this way you will be able to believe." We can see that the repentance spoken of here is not a matter of works. How do we know that it is not a matter of works? It is because repentance is included in God's salvation. Repentance is a part of salvation. Not only does this repentance have nothing to do with man's work, but it becomes one item within the scope of faith. In the few verses that we just read, we can see one mysterious thing—that repenting is a part of believing. Without repentance, there cannot be faith. Hence, faith includes repentance, and repentance is in faith.

REPENTANCE BEING GIVEN BY GOD

Another verse tells us that repentance is not only related to faith but is related to salvation as well. Acts 5:31 says, "This One God has exalted to His right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness

of sins." We see here that repentance is given by God in the same way that forgiveness is given by God. In the Bible a few times repentance and forgiveness are joined together. Acts 2 says that repentance is for the forgiveness of sins (v. 38). Acts 3 says that repentance results in our sins being wiped away (v. 19). Two other places mention repentance without forgiveness. In two of these four instances, repentance and forgiveness are joined together. Repentance is linked to salvation. Forgiveness is something God initiates. Repentance is also something God initiates. The gift of forgiveness is given by God. A heart of repentance is also given by God. Therefore, repentance is a part within faith and a part of salvation. Both of these are something that God initiates. God gives man repentance in the same way that He gives him forgiveness. It is God's word that comes to us. It is God that enlightens us and tells us that our past was wrong. It is God who gives us a heart of repentance, who commands us to repent. I marvel at this. This is salvation. Because we do not see our past, God shines His light on us. This is God's way of working.

If a child's face is dirty, his mother would not ask him to earn some money to buy a towel to wipe it clean. Instead, the mother would find a towel and tell the child to use it. When God wants us to repent, He Himself gives us repentance in the same way that He gives us forgiveness. God Himself gives us repentance so that we would see our past and realize how low, weak, and corrupt we were. After this, He tells us to repent.

Luke 24:45-47 is a most amazing passage. It says, "Then He opened their mind to understand the Scriptures; and He said to them, Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise up from the dead on the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name." The ones mentioned here preached repentance for forgiveness. We should preach forgiveness in His name. We also should preach repentance in His name. Today we can repent in the Lord's name because the Lord has given us repentance. It is similar to God's creating two eyes for us and then asking us to see. If we did not have two eyes, it would be difficult for us to see. Thank the Lord that He first gives us eyes and then asks us to see. First, He gives us feet and then asks us to walk. It is the same with repentance. First, He gives us repentance, and then He asks us to repent. All of this is done by God. Hence, when we preach the gospel, we can say that as we have forgiveness through the Lord Jesus, in the same way we have repentance through Him. If a man says that he cannot repent, that he still considers sin attractive, and

that he does not feel that he is a sinner, we can tell him, "This is all right. I am now preaching the gospel to you in the name of Jesus. God will give you repentance. It is a part of salvation. Just as you receive life and are justified before God, in the same way you receive repentance."

How did we repent? When we heard the preachers telling us of the evilness and loathsomeness of sin and the redemption of the Lord Jesus, we wanted to repent and believe in Jesus. We were not sitting in a corner, telling ourselves how corrupted we were or what sinners we were. Even if we were to repeat this over and over again, this speaking would not make us feel that we were sinners. Would you feel that you were wrong by merely speaking about it? No one among us repented this way. When we first heard the gospel, we opposed it and criticized it; we did not want to accept it. If we chose to argue, we could have put forth many arguments. On the day that we were saved, the gospel that was preached to us may not have been that prevailing. But while we were there or after we had returned to work, or while we were walking on the street or reading a book, we were convicted. Spontaneously we repented, and then we were saved. We ourselves repented; no one forced us, reminded us, or pressured us to repent. It was God who gave us the repentance, and it was we who said, "I repent." Hence, this is God's work. This is why the Bible says that repentance is given by God.

In Acts 11, after Peter preached the gospel in the house of Cornelius, the Jewish brothers rebuked him for going to the house of a Gentile. Peter then related to them how he had preached the gospel. Verse 18 says, "And when they heard these things, they became silent and glorified God, saying, Then to the Gentiles also God has given repentance unto life." Please notice that God has given the Gentiles repentance unto life. Hence, we see that repentance is a part of God's grace. It is a part within God's salvation. This is something done by God.

Second Timothy 2:25 says, "In meekness correcting those who oppose, if perhaps God may give them repentance unto the full knowledge of the truth." Many oppose the truth and will not accept God's truth. We can ask God to give them repentance so that they would come to the knowledge of the truth. This is also something that God has done.

What then is repentance? After reading all of these Scriptures, we must draw a conclusion. The question of repentance is not as clear-cut as other

truths in the Bible. It seems to be quite ill-defined. On the one hand, a man is not saved through repentance but through faith. This is the truth shown to us by the Gospel of John, the book of Romans, and the book of Galatians. We cannot make any mistake about this. But on the other hand, without repentance a man cannot believe. So, in our preaching, many times we tell people to repent. It does not mean that repentance alone will save us. Rather, it means that repentance will bring forth faith. If a man has not repented, he will not be able to believe. But repentance is not works. The Bible says that repentance is given by God. God tells us to repent. We do not sit in a corner thinking that we have to repent, that we have to hate our sins and judge ourselves. We have to realize that no one can do this. I am afraid no one in the entire world can do this. Even if some are able to do this, it is not worth anything. Repentance is a gift from God. Even in the Gospels, when the Lord Jesus came to preach the gospel, not only did He preach forgiveness but repentance as well. He is the One who enables us to repent. Those who repent are the believing ones and the saved ones. If there are those here who have not yet been saved and who do not know how to receive God's grace, we must say that God desires to give you grace. He desires to give you repentance. He is leading you into salvation through repentance.

Lastly there is another verse telling us that it is God's goodness and kindness that is leading us to repentance. The last clause of Romans 2:4 says that "God's kindness is leading you to repentance." May God grant us a spirit of repentance. May God be gracious to us and show us the meaning of repentance and make known to us whether we are saved through repentance or through the Lord Jesus.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE WAY OF SALVATION—
NOT BEING CONFESSION OR PRAYER

We have seen in the past few evenings that the way for a person to be saved is not through law-keeping, good works, or repentance. I must make one point clear; that is, we are only discussing the way of salvation and not the condition for salvation. This is due to the fact that there simply are no conditions required of man for him to be saved. God has fulfilled all the requirements. The question before us tonight is this: What is the way for us to be saved? We are not dealing with the matter of condition, for that implies that one has to work for his salvation.

THE WAY OF SALVATION NOT BEING CONFESSION

Tonight we are going to consider the fourth "not being." We thank God that in recent years He has moved in many places to make many people realize in their conscience what sin is, and thus their need of the Lord Jesus to be their Savior. However, without an understanding of the Bible, they often add their own words to those of the Scriptures. In so doing, they invent different ways to salvation, such as the keeping of the law, good works, repentance, and so forth. A popular method happens to be the confession of one's sins. There are those who advocate that salvation is by confession, that it is necessary for man not only to repent, but to confess his sins. I once heard one who was quite used by the Lord say that when Jesus died, He plastered onto the cross pieces of paper on which one of our sins was inscribed. He said that when we receive the Lord Jesus as Savior, we must confess our sins either before God or before men. Once a confession is made regarding a certain sin, the record of that sin would be removed from the cross. Each additional confession would remove another piece of paper. You would finally be saved when you had finished confessing all of your sins and all the sheets of paper had been torn away. What this man preached was not the gospel of God nor that of the New Testament; he had brought in a human gospel which asserts that unless a person makes confession to man and to God, his sins have yet to be removed from the cross. He utterly failed to realize what the Lord Jesus has accomplished.

I can still remember the case of a rather uneducated brother from Kuling who happened to be in Shanghai a few weeks ago. He is an electrician who installs light fixtures. He was hardly literate until recent days. Some time ago he could identify only the character "I" and not "We." He was unable to recognize most of the words in a Bible verse and needed to ask for help seven or eight times in reading a single verse. Once he said to me, "I went to listen to a sermon by a very famous person. This man maintained that we must confess our sins in public so that each sin we confess will be nailed to the cross. If we do not confess our sins openly to crucify them, we cannot be saved. He said that we must believe in the word of the cross, and that if we did not nail our sins to the cross by way of confession, there would be no way for us to be saved, for that would mean that we do not trust the cross. After his sermon, the speaker sought questions from the audience to see if there were things we were unclear about."

"Mr. Nee," the brother continued, "I am uneducated. If I were to stand up in that meeting to read a verse from the Scriptures, the people would probably have to adjust me seven or eight times. But the more I listened to the man speak, the more I felt something pounding in me. I felt that the Holy Spirit would not let me go unless I stood up. But I really did not know what to say. Eventually, I rose up. The speaker was on the platform, and I was standing on my chair! I asked, 'Sir, according to your speech, are we saved by our own cross or by the cross of Christ?' Then I sat down. Mr. Nee, can you tell me if I asked the right question?"

I told the brother that neither a doctor of divinity nor an overseer of a parish had that kind of clarity. This is the key question: Are we saved by our own cross or the cross of Christ? Does Christ's cross or my own cross save me? That sermon was undoubtedly a word of the cross, but whose cross was it? When Paul said, "For I did not determine to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and this One crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2), he did not allude to Christ and a cross but to Christ and His cross. Dear friends, we are not saved by our own works but by the cross of Christ. Yet man equates confession of sins with works and attempts to be saved through such confession. This is the reason we must see what the Bible says regarding confession. We shall look into the Scriptures thoroughly to find out the proper position we should take in this matter.

CONFESSION IN THE BIBLE

Let me first say a few words lest you think that I do not believe in confession or restitution. Christians ought to confess their sins and make restitution. I admit that these are truths in the Bible, and as such, they should be applied. But I must add that the Bible never considers confession to be a way of salvation. If we think that we can be saved through confession, then the solution to the problem of our sins is still not clear to us. We are presuming that there is another method of redemption apart from the cross of Christ. We may even surmise that we can deal with our own sins before God and man without the cross of Christ.

1 John 1:9

Let us come to a verse many love to quote, that is, 1 John 1:9, which says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." There are a number who, based on this verse, state that confession is indeed a requirement for salvation. However, I must draw your attention to several points in this verse. First, what is mentioned here is definitely not public confession. First John 1:9 deals with our problem before God when it says, "If we confess our sins." This differs from the current practice of open confession before men. First John 1:9 does not say anything about open confession.

Second, the pronoun "we" in this verse is not like the same pronoun used in the books of Romans and Galatians in that it has nothing to do with the Jews. The Epistle of 1 John is also different from the Gospel of John. John's Gospel shows us how an unbeliever can obtain life, whereas his Epistle tells us how one who has life proves before man that he possesses that life in fact. His Gospel reveals the way to receive life, whereas his Epistle discloses how one who possesses such a life goes about demonstrating what he possesses. Thus, properly expounded, the "we" in this verse does not refer to sinners, but to believers. The Gospel of John describes the way a sinner is justified by God, but 1 John indicates how a Christian may restore his fellowship with God. The Word here does not discuss how the world can believe in Jesus to have eternal life. It indicates how a person who has eternal life and is a child of God can have his sins forgiven by God and have his unrighteousness cleansed when he fails. Hence, this verse makes reference to the believers alone, those who have been saved and justified, those who possess eternal life.

Remember that, whereas an unsaved person is forgiven of his sins by faith, a saved one is forgiven by confessing his sins. Sinners are pardoned by believing in the Lord, and Christians are forgiven by confessing their sins before their Father. First John 1:9 does not deal with the sins of a sinner but with those of a believer, not with the sins committed before one's salvation, but with those committed after one has been saved. Consequently, this verse has nothing to do with our present subject.

I would not be so strict as to say that this verse can be applied only to Christians. Rather, I would admit that one may borrow from a host of Scriptures and utilize them to get people saved. Recently a sister told me that a lady was saved by reading the phrase, "The seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:11). I do not know how this could have happened. When I first preached the gospel, I was convinced that it takes clear gospel Scriptures to get people saved. However, much experience in recent years has taught me, and I say this reverently, that many are actually saved by strange verses. One cannot imagine that verses as strange as some are can save people. I am not insisting that no sinner could be saved by 1 John 1:9. I am saying that when John was moved by the Holy Spirit to write his Epistle, in his mind the ones referred to in this verse were Christians and not sinners. He originally intended them to be for Christians. Although one may temporarily borrow this word and apply it to a sinner, he should not keep on borrowing it. Strictly speaking, such a verse refers to Christians and does not imply that one must confess his sins publicly and make restitution to others in order to be forgiven.

Matthew 3:5 and 6

There are another two verses which seem even more obvious than 1 John 1:9. They are Matthew 3:5 and 6, which say, "At that time Jerusalem and all Judea and all the surrounding region of the Jordan went out to him, and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins." We are told when the people heard John's testimony and realized their own sinfulness, they went out to be baptized by him and confessed their sins while they were being baptized. Again, a few matters should be noted in these verses. First, neither of the two verses indicate that the people took confession as their way to salvation. They did not try to obtain salvation through confession. We are merely told that when they heard John's preaching of repentance, they were compelled by the Spirit to be baptized and to confess their sins. They were in fact looking to the very Lord who was to pass through

death and resurrection, and in whom they hoped for their salvation. Though John did baptize, his hands were actually pointing them to the Lord Jesus who was among them. It was he who said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). In baptisms of the church, and in the baptism of John the Baptist, the Christ who died and rose is referred to. John readily admitted how little he was worth by declaring that "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30), and that the people should not believe in him but in the coming One. Although he did prepare the way, he was not the way; the way was the coming One to whom he pointed.

How then were the confessions made? Since John did not tell them to come and confess their sins, his listeners must have done it on their own. Let us assume that one of us who is a worker has just finished witnessing for the Lord, and without any kind of urging, charging, demanding, or suggesting, the audience has been deeply enlightened by God in the conscience concerning their sins. They are compelled to rise up to admit that they have committed certain particular sins. To this I would surely say, "Amen" and "Hallelujah!" I would speak praises and never oppose this sort of open confession before men. If John were to say that a man could not be saved or forgiven unless he confessed his sins, and if John actually encouraged, prompted, commanded, and induced the people to confess their sins, then his actions would hardly match the record in Matthew 3:6. According to this verse, his listeners confessed their sins on their own; they were not encouraged by John.

Do not presume that I do not believe in the confession of sins. We have often encouraged the brothers and sisters to make confessions to others. Yet we refuse to accept confession as the means to be saved. There is only one means of salvation prescribed in the Scriptures, and that is faith. The ancient John the Baptist never urged anyone to confess his sins. Neither should any modern John the Baptist urge man to do the same. Of course, if a person, upon realizing his own sins, should stand up to make a confession on his own, we have to let him do so.

You may have heard of the great Welsh revival. I had occasion to study in detail reports on that revival. Many have made studies on it. This greatest of all revivals began between the years of 1904 and 1905. A correspondent of a well-known British newspaper actually went to Wales in 1909 to conduct an investigation of the event. Wales was not a small place. The pastors of one of

the cities told the reporter that the number of souls saved had declined to almost nothing during the previous two years. When the correspondent inquired whether the revival was in recession, they replied, "Yes. There is no one around here any longer who is asking to be saved, because everyone has been saved already!" Knowing that the revival began with Evan Roberts, he then asked concerning his whereabouts. They answered, "We have no idea." When he asked them about their meeting time, they said, "We do not know." Likewise, when he questioned them about the meeting place, they repeated, "We do not know." They did not seem to know who the leader of a revival meeting was, nor the time and place of the meeting. The reporter then asked what he should do, to which they responded, "We meet anywhere at any time, even at midnight or the early hours of the morning. We do not know where Evan Roberts is, but he may appear at any time. There is a revival gathering in almost every home. You find people praying in different homes at different hours through the night. But it is difficult to find Evan Roberts. Nobody knows where he will be." The reporter remarked that he had never witnessed revival like this in his entire life. He was determined to find Evan Roberts. His efforts in the next few weeks, however, failed to yield any results.

One day, when someone told him that Evan Roberts was in a small chapel, the reporter dashed off immediately to the place. He remarked that the meeting he came upon was most chaotic. A mother was breast-feeding her baby; a few were running in and out of the meeting as if they were salespersons of some sort; another mother was comforting a crying child, while yet another was using a chair as a cradle, rocking her child to sleep. The place was in a mess. And yet there seemed to be an inexplicable and unique element in the atmosphere. "Where is Evan Roberts?" the reporter asked. "The fourth man on the third row," someone answered. "Mrs. Penn-Lewis is also here. There she is on that row." They were all silent in their seats. Once in a while someone would stand to call a hymn, or another might rise to read a few verses from the Scriptures. When one or two hours went by without a single word from the people, no one dismissed himself. At times some would stand to confess their sins on their own without being admonished to do so.

Friends, such a work is the work of God. It is different from platform sermons concerning deathbed stories with an intention to convince the audience that they must either confess their sins or else not be saved at all. I am not forbidding confession. There are times when one should confess his sins. At times one might even declare to a crowd what kind of person he once

was and how God had worked in him. However, none of these should be the result of a preacher's prodding from the platform. Sometimes there is more than prodding; it is as if some are commanding. What is in Matthew 3:6 is indeed public confession, but it is the spontaneous result of the work of the Holy Spirit and not an outcome of John's charge. I am not opposing open confession; I am merely opposing this kind of confession. Much more, I am not opposing the work of the Holy Spirit; I wish there were more of such works! If a person is led by the Spirit to confess his sins, we all have to say, "O God, we thank and praise You, for You have worked among us." But we have to oppose any teaching that says confession must be done in a certain way and to a certain degree before certain results will be achieved. We cannot exchange confession for salvation. We must not take confession of sins as our way of salvation.

We have to note that in the sentence, "And they were baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins," the main predicate according to the original language is not "confessed" but "were baptized." Thus, the people were being baptized by John in the Jordan River, and while they were being baptized, they also confessed their sins. We may say that "he spoke, walking," which would mean that the person was speaking and walking at the same time. While both "spoke" and "walking" are verbs, "spoke" is the main predicate and "walking" the subordinate verb. Hence the man was speaking, but he was doing so while he was walking. Similarly, in Matthew 3 they were baptized in the Jordan River as they confessed, meaning that while they were being baptized, they were simultaneously confessing their sins. Such is the original sense in Greek. So you see, the confession there was absolutely not a method, but an action which took place. While the people were being baptized, they were admitting that they were wrong in this and in that. The picture here is one of the Holy Spirit working among them, rather than a work of regulation. They were being baptized and confessing, just like our example of someone speaking and walking at the same time. In any case, public confession was never treated as a way to be saved in this verse.

Acts 19:18 and 19

There are only three places in the New Testament which record this matter of confession of sins. We come now to the third place, which is in Acts 19:18 and 19, which says, "And many of those who had believed came, confessing and making known their practices. And a considerable number of those who

practiced magic brought their books together and burned them before all; and they counted up the price of them and found it to be fifty thousand pieces of silver." Although there is only the word "confessing," without the mentioning of "sins," the same thing is referred to. In 1 John 1 it says "confess our sins," in Matthew 3 it says "confessed their sins," and here it says "confessing" and "making known their practices." First, the confession and the divulgence of their practices were not reckoned as a way to be saved. Second, those who confessed and recounted their practices were not sinners but believers, people who were Christ's. This can be compared to some brothers and sisters standing up in the meetings to give a testimony acknowledging what they have done in times past. It can also be compared to some who testify at their baptism of things done in the past. We are altogether not saved through this kind of confession. Some have believed and have become the Lord's. They now confess their past history. They admit that they were evil. They are no longer afraid to tell the saints that they have been transferred from the miry clay onto a solid rock. When the Ephesians burned their magic books, they were making an open demonstration that though they had practiced these things, they now belonged to the Lord. Third, "And many of those who had believed came." Not all came. Not every saved person needs to confess in the meetings. It is because the Holy Spirit moves strongly to prompt people that they rise to disclose their practices that they may glorify God by showing the extent of God's salvation in them. Friends, you can discover from these three portions of the Word that the way of salvation is through faith and not through public confession.

These are the three portions of the New Testament where confession of sins is specifically covered. There is one other place, in James 5:16, where confession of wrongdoing to one another, rather than confession of sins, is mentioned. James tells us when a brother or sister is sick, the elders of the church should be called to pray over the sick person and anoint him. And if any wrongdoings are involved, there should be mutual confession and forgiveness. This is a different matter from our subject today. We have looked into all the verses in the New Testament concerning the confession of sins. Do you now see the way for one to be saved? It is through faith and not through the confession of sins.

CONCERNING THE PRACTICE OF CONFESSION

Let me say a few words concerning the practice of confessing sins. We all know whom we have offended and defrauded before we were saved. After we were saved, we felt sorrowful in our heart and wished to confess to those same people. This is something that we should do. God commands, even compels us to do so. It is something taught in the Scriptures. Having seen God's righteousness and the glory in His presence, we now realize that it is unrighteous to be indebted to others. What then shall we do? We refuse to be unrighteous persons. We even tell ourselves, "I am saved. I will be a righteous man. I will thoroughly deal with all the areas in which I have been unrighteous or not right with others so that they may forgive me." There is no problem with your sins being forgiven before God, but you must make confession to men of your offenses to men. However, confession and restitution are absolutely not the way of salvation. You do not need to make confessions and recompense before you can be saved. As a saved person, and one who is just, you are merely asking pardon from people you have wronged.

The thief on the cross must have robbed many and sinned against many. However, he had no opportunity to confess and make recompense to anyone, because he could hardly move on the cross. He was not able to return any item which he had plundered from others. Yet, without any confession or restitution, he still could be saved. The Lord Jesus said to him, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). We may consider this robber as the first person to be saved in the New Testament. He was the first to be saved after the Lord's death. Hence, the problem is not one of confession. The thief on the cross, though deprived of the opportunity of making recompense, was nevertheless saved. If he had lived on, he should have made recompense for righteousness' sake. But the question of his salvation was resolved on the cross in an instant. Confession is something that follows salvation. He was already saved on the cross; his salvation was altogether not due to any kind of confession or restitution. If he confessed his sins again at some later date, it would not have saved him more. Here we are clearly shown that salvation is by faith, whereas confession is a spontaneous expression of Christian living. Since we now know our righteous God, we desire to clear up the problem of our sins before man. Our salvation is totally a matter between us and the Lord Jesus; it is resolved through Him alone.

There are three things here which we must be clear about. First, we confess our sins before God, judging ourselves, repenting, and acknowledging that we are sinners. All these are done before God. This causes us to have faith to

receive the Lord Jesus as our Savior. Second, after we are saved, we become aware of our offenses towards others and wish to clear them up. We wish to make recompense and to confess to those whom we have defrauded so that we may live a righteous life on earth. Third, after we are saved, as the Holy Spirit works in us, we want to tell others what kind of sinners we were and how many sins we have committed. We may do this during our baptism, and we may do this after baptism.

I do not know if you are clear or not. Never deem the confessing of sins so highly. We must put it in the place accorded by the Scriptures. Since the Bible never considers it as a way to salvation, neither should we. Thank God it is the Lord Jesus who saved me. I did not save myself. Thank God it is the cross of Christ that saved me. I am not saved by my own cross; the cross of Christ did the saving work.

THE WAY OF SALVATION NOT BEING PRAYER

We come now to the fifth "not being." There are many people who will add another condition to salvation. It is not law-keeping or good behavior, nor is it repentance or confession. They say that a person must pray in order to be saved. They base their claim on Romans 10: "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (v. 13). As a result, some believe that they must beseech God before they can be saved. On a number of occasions I have encountered some people who wanted to be saved. They said, "Daily I plead with God to save me, and I still do not know when He will do so. I have been praying for three months without any inward sensation. I just do not know if God will see fit to save me." I have also met some others who said, "I am waiting for the Holy Spirit to come and move me to my knees to ask Jesus to save me. I am not saved as yet. I must wait for the Spirit to inspire me to pray before I can be saved." For this reason, we need to see whether a man needs to pray before he can be saved.

First, one seeks to be saved through praying and begging because he is entirely ignorant of God's love and God's grace. He thinks that God hates man, and therefore he must pray for God to change His mind before He will save him. He gives himself to pray, without knowing how much he has to pray before God will hear him or listen to him. Remember how Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel? He challenged them to ask their god to send down fire. The prophets "cried aloud, and cut themselves after their

manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them" (1 Kings 18:29). They supposed that Baal would listen if they would only inflict more pain upon their own bodies. Today there are those who also think that if they bring distress upon themselves and plead enough with God, He will have compassion on them. These kinds of people have never seen the gospel. Because they have never seen God in the light of the gospel, they believe that their begging before God will turn His heart towards them. Actually there is no need for God to turn His heart. His heart has long been turned. We are the ones who need a turn of heart, because we rejected and opposed Him, and we did not believe in Him.

Second Corinthians 5:19 says, "God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself." God did not wrong man; it is man who has wronged God. There has never been a need for God to be reconciled to man. Rather, man has to be reconciled to God because it is man who is totally at fault. The problem is not with God, but with man. Everyone who desires to understand the gospel ought to know that God is love and that He loves the world. He has no problem with us, and neither do we need to plead with Him.

Second, man thinks that he must pray and plead before he can be saved because he simply does not realize that the Lord Jesus has come; He has died and resurrected, all of sin's problems are solved, and all obstacles to salvation are removed. Not only has the Lord Jesus come, but the Holy Spirit has also come. He came to make manifest in man what God and the Lord Jesus have accomplished. Many sinners pray for their salvation as if they were asking the Lord Jesus to die for them again. They do not realize that He has completely finished the work of redemption. Since He has finished His work, there is absolutely no reason for us to plead with Him. Today is the time for thanksgivings and praises; it is not the time for filing requests and petitions. Suppose your parents have brought you something that you asked for. You may perhaps, out of sincerity, bow to thank them. Certainly you would not kneel down and beg to have that item, saying, "Please give this to me because I need it." It is simply pointless and senseless for you to continue to beg after your parents have already given the item to you. Today God is not speaking about the severity of your sins. If He were, then there may be a reason for you to plead. Rather, God is now saying that He has freely given you His Son. It would be a strange thing indeed if someone gave you something and you were still begging instead of thanking! If you know God's heart, and if you are clear about the Lord Jesus' work, you would never attempt to be saved through

prayer. Prayer has no place in this matter. It is better for you to kneel to thank God.

Once after I had shared the gospel with a man, I asked if he would believe. He replied that he would. When I said, "Let us kneel down," he asked if we were going to pray. I told him, "No." He asked, "For what purpose then?" I answered, "Simply to inform the Lord Jesus." There is no need to ask Jesus to die again or to ask God to love, to be gracious, or to forgive us. The Lord has already borne our sins on the cross. Now our only need is to notify Him by saying, "I have believed the Son of God, and I have received the cross of Christ. O God, I thank You." Is this not easy? Yes, to receive salvation is an easy matter. It was, of course, not an easy thing for God to accomplish salvation; it took God four thousand years to accomplish it. After man fell, it took God four thousand years to cause man to realize his sins. He then caused His Son to be born of a woman and to hang on the cross to be judged for sin. In the end He also sent the Holy Spirit. It is only after God has done so much work and expended so much effort that we can receive salvation in such an easy way. He has paid the greatest price to accomplish everything. Now if you have believed and received, all you need to do is to say, "Thank You." This is the way of salvation. There is no place for prayer here.

Why then does Romans 10 bring up the matter of prayer? Romans 10:5 through 7 reads, "For Moses writes concerning the righteousness which is out of the law: ‘The man who does them shall live by them.’ But the righteousness which is out of faith speaks in this way, ‘Do not say in your heart, Who will ascend into heaven?’ that is, to bring Christ down; or, ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ that is, to bring Christ up from the dead." Two kinds of righteousness are mentioned here. One is the righteousness which is out of the law, and the other, righteousness which is out of faith. The righteousness out of the law results from one's works before God, and the righteousness out of faith is accomplished in us through our believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. The former has everything to do with us, and the latter, everything to do with Christ.

It is absolutely impossible for a man to obtain the righteousness out of the law, because it requires him to be sinless in his thoughts, intentions, words, and behavior for every year, hour, minute, and second of his life from the time he was born. If he breaks any one item of the law, he transgresses the whole. For us, this is simply a hopeless proposition. Since we cannot have the

righteousness out of the law, we need to have the righteousness out of faith. This righteousness, as we have mentioned, is the righteousness through which Christ was judged. Since Christ has suffered the punishment, we have this righteousness through faith. This righteousness has absolutely nothing to do with us. The Scriptures say, "'Do not say in your heart, Who will ascend into heaven?' that is, to bring Christ down; or, 'Who will descend into the abyss?' that is, to bring Christ up from the dead." There is no need for us to do this. There is no need to ascend into heaven. This means that there is no need to ask Christ to come to the earth to die for us. There is also no need to descend into the abyss. This implies that the resurrection of Christ is now the basis of our justification. God has already caused the Lord Jesus to die and resurrect, and His resurrection has become the basis of our justification. All that remains for us to do is to believe.

Verse 8 says, "But what does it say?" "It" refers to Moses' word. Paul quoted Moses to show that even Moses preached justification by faith. This is quite amazing, inasmuch as Moses was the promoter of the law and its requirements. But Paul introduced Moses, saying that Moses also spoke concerning justification by faith when he said, " 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart,' that is, the word of the faith which we proclaim." Paul maintained that Moses' words refer to justification by faith. To understand this quotation we need to go back to Deuteronomy 29 and 30 in the Old Testament. There Moses passed on all of God's law and commandments to the Israelites, telling them that if they failed to obey those commandments and keep the law, God would punish them by scattering them among the nations; and if their hearts would draw near to God in the dispersion, the word would be near them, even in their mouths and in their hearts. Moses was saying that God's judgment would be present whenever man breaks the law and transgresses. What shall man do then? He needs to receive a righteousness apart from the law, one which is in his mouth and in his heart. Such a grace outside of the law is a gift to us. When Deuteronomy was quoted in Romans 10, a word of explanation was added. " 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart,' that is, the word of the faith which we proclaim." There is no thought of work here. The righteousness which is out of the law has been thoroughly transgressed against. When the people were scattered among the nations of the earth as predicted in Deuteronomy 30, they could no longer claim to have any work. The question of work was over. The only word which they had then was the word that was in their

mouth and in their heart. Formerly it was a matter of works, and the result was dispersion. Now there are no more works. Hence it is of faith.

Paul continued to define the meaning of "in your mouth" and "in your heart" in verse 9 by saying, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Dear friends, where is your mouth? Each one of us has brought our mouth to this place. None has left his at home. Where our body is, there our mouth is also. At the moment we believed in the Lord Jesus, we spontaneously confessed Him with our mouth. The first words out of Paul's mouth when the Lord confronted him on the road were, "Who are You, Lord?" He had not believed in the Lord before. But at that juncture he did believe. Our confession of Jesus as Lord is made spontaneously from our heart rather than before people. It amazes me to think that some illiterate country folk who have never been exposed to the gospel before can say, "O Lord," upon hearing the good news. This cannot be a work. It is a spontaneous utterance. For one to believe in his heart is not a matter of work. There is no need to take any steps or to spend any money. One only needs to say "O Lord" right where he is, and he will be saved. He can say it audibly or inaudibly. As long as he believes that God has brought Him down from the heavens and has brought Him up from Hades, everything will be worked out. This will prove that he is justified and saved. Our confession can never carry the element of merit. Confession is not a way to salvation; it is merely an expression of salvation. It is a very spontaneous thing. If we call Him Lord with our mouth and believe in Him in our heart, we shall be saved. There is no problem at all.

Verse 10 follows and explains verse 9. Why is one saved when he confesses with his mouth Jesus as Lord and believes in his heart that God has raised Him from the dead? "For with the heart there is believing unto righteousness, and with the mouth there is confession unto salvation." I was always perplexed as to how this matter could be put into people's hearts. I met two people today who consider this word of salvation too far from them. To them, this word is farther than the provinces of Yunnang and Tibet; it is farther than a foreign country. It is simply a word from the heavens. It seems that the word of salvation is so far away that it eludes them. Nevertheless, God says that the way of salvation is not in heaven nor beneath the earth. It is very near, in our mouth and even in our heart. If we had to ascend into the heavens or descend under the earth, we would wonder how anyone could be saved. Today

the word is in your mouth and in your heart. As long as a person opens his mouth and believes in his heart, he shall be saved. God has made this salvation so utterly available and convenient that if a person would believe in his heart and confess with his mouth, he shall be saved. Justification here is more a matter before God than before man. When men see you confessing, they will realize that you are saved. When God sees you believing, He justifies you. Verse 11 says, "Everyone who believes on Him shall not be put to shame." Faith alone is enough.

Although the Word of God is abundantly clear, there are still those who like to argue against it. They insist that confession is the way to be saved. I wish to ask them, "If so, what will you do with Romans 10:8: 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart'?" Here it says the word of faith, not the word of confession. The Scriptures say "believe." They do not say "confess." Verse 6 says, "But the righteousness which is out of faith speaks in this way." Verse 6 speaks of the righteousness out of faith, and verse 8, the word of the faith. There is one confession in verse 9 and another in verse 10. Both confessions are with the mouth. However, verse 11 does not say, "Everyone who confesses Him shall not be put to shame." Rather, it says, "Everyone who believes on Him shall not be put to shame." We must recognize the emphasis here. Verses 6, 8, and 11 mention "believe," and verses 9 and 10 mention "confess." Verse 9 first says "confess" and then "believe"; whereas in verse 10 it is first "believe" and then "confess." In this one portion "believe" is used five times and "confess" twice. At the end, the order of "confess" and "believe" is reversed. All this signifies that salvation should be due to faith and not to confession. Confession issues from faith. What one believes in his heart, he utters spontaneously with his mouth. A person will spontaneously say "daddy" when he sees his father. Where there is faith, confession follows immediately.

The end of verse 12 shows us that confession here is the confession of Jesus as Lord. This confession comes from faith. How can we prove this? We may not see this from verses 1 through 11. But verse 12 says, "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all and rich to all who call upon Him." Verse 13 says, "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Calling upon the Lord's name is equivalent to the confessing of the Lord Jesus in the previous verses. To call on the name of the Lord is to confess Jesus as Lord, to call Him Lord, and to address Him as Lord. By taking care of the context of this passage, we will realize that calling is simply confessing.

Verse 14 says, "How then shall they call upon Him into whom they have not believed?" This is a wonderful word. It shows that calling comes out of believing. Naturally, no one can call without believing. We can see that confessing with the mouth results from faith in the heart. Because a man believes in his heart, he calls with his mouth. He calls because he believes. Do you see this fact? Everything issues from faith; faith is the way of salvation. Although it mentions confession with the mouth, this confession is based upon faith in the heart. It is natural for those who believe to call.

I believe tonight we are all saved ones who have received the Lord Jesus. May I ask how you have received Him? We received Him by faith. Did you also pray? Salvation is due to faith. Prayer is the expression of this faith. Everyone in the world is saved by faith. However, this faith is expressed in prayer. Faith is within and prayer is without. When you believe in your heart that Jesus is the Savior, spontaneously you will pray with your mouth that Jesus is Lord. Whoever believes in his heart will confess with his mouth. But we must always remember that confession is not the way to salvation. Although the word says "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," yet calling is not the way to salvation. The reason is that calling comes from faith; it is a spontaneous action, something uttered before God spontaneously.

Let us come back to verse 12: "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all." I love the phrase, "There is no distinction." Romans 3:22 and 23 say, "Even the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ to all those who believe, for there is no distinction. For all have sinned." Here it says, "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all." Each one must call upon the Lord, confess with his mouth, and believe in his heart before he can be saved.

May the Lord be gracious to us and show us that the only way of salvation in the Bible is faith and nothing else. Salvation is not by faith plus law-keeping, good works, repentance, confession, or prayer. This is the scriptural truth. We have to stand upon the Bible. The Bible reveals clearly to us that the way of salvation is faith alone.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE WAY OF SALVATION— FAITH VERSUS LOVING GOD OR BEING BAPTIZED

During the past two weeks, we have seen man's need for salvation and God's preparation of this salvation. We have seen the problems God encountered when He prepared this salvation for us and how He completely solved all the problems of sin. We have also seen the way to receive salvation. Because men understood the Bible in an incorrect way, they came up with many conditions for salvation. Some want to have one condition, whereas others want to have another condition. We saw that man is not saved by the law or by works. He is not saved by repentance, prayer, or confession. Man is not saved by anything he has in himself. Other than these human ways, there are still two very common mistakes within the church. The first is the concept that in order to be saved, man has to love God: If a man does not love God, he will not be saved.

LOVING GOD NOT BEING THE WAY OF SALVATION

I admit that 1 Corinthians 16 tells us that a man has to love God. If he does not love God, he is accursed. This is a fact. But the Bible shows us clearly that man is saved by faith and not by love. Some think that there are evidences in the Bible that prove that man is saved by loving God, and that without loving God a man cannot be saved. There are some sinners, when the gospel of salvation by faith is preached to them, who would say that they cannot be saved because they do not love God at all. They think that if they really love God and are drawn to God, God will save them. To them man is saved by loving God. They do not realize that man is saved not because of loving God, but because God loves him. It is God who loved the world and gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes into Him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16). On God's side, it is love. On our side, it is faith. Man's side does not have to be the same as God's side. He does not have to love God as God loves him. It does not say that man needs to love God so that he would give his son to God, so that God would trust in him and cause him not to perish, but to have eternal life. We do not have such a Gospel of John. Thank

God that He loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son. The Bible does not say that we first love God, but that God first loves us. The basis of salvation is not that we love God. The basis of salvation is God's loving us. If we put the basis of salvation on our love for God and our sacrifice to Him, we will immediately see that the salvation we would have would not be secure. Our hearts are like the sand of the sea that comes and goes with the tide. If our house is built on the sand, our fate will follow the flow of the tide. Thank the Lord. It is not a matter of our loving God, but of God loving us.

THE STORY OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Although John 3 and other places may say what we have said, some may ask: "What about Luke 10?" Let us now read what Luke 10 says. Luke 10:25 begins, "And behold, a certain lawyer stood up." This man had a wrong profession. "A certain lawyer stood up and put Him to the test." His motive was wrong. His intention was not right. "Saying, Teacher." He had a wrong understanding. His understanding concerning the Lord was wrong. He did not know who the Lord was. "What should I do to inherit eternal life?" His question was wrong. This man was wrong in his profession, wrong in his motive, wrong in his intention, wrong in his understanding of the Lord, and wrong in the question he asked.

He asked, "What should I do to inherit eternal life?" What did the Lord Jesus say? "And He said to him, What is written in the law?" You are a lawyer. You should know what the law says. "How do you read it?" Something may be written in the law. But man can be wrong in reading it. The Lord asked a double question. What is written in the law, and what have you read from it? Sometimes the law is written one way, but man reads it another way. "And he answered and said." He answered what the law says, and how he read it. "You shall love the Lord your God from your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole strength and with your whole mind, and your neighbor as yourself." This lawyer was well acquainted with the law. He knew that the sum of the law is to love God with our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole strength, and our whole mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. He could sum up the whole law in one sentence. This was an intelligent man. Probably everyone who comes to tempt is intelligent. Only the intelligent ones try to tempt. What is it to tempt others? Those who want to be taught ask questions, and those who come to tempt also ask questions. The ones who want to be taught ask questions because they do not understand. The ones

who want to tempt ask questions because they do understand. Some ask because they do not understand; they come humbly to be taught. Some ask because they understand; they want to show you how much they understand. This is the meaning of tempting. This man came to the Lord asking how he could be saved. He said that he wanted eternal life, and that he wanted the life of God. What then must he do? The Lord said, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" The man could recite it by heart. He knew it long ago. One has to love God with his whole heart, his whole soul, his whole strength, and his whole mind, and has to love his neighbor as himself. He knew all these. That was why he recited them immediately. When he answered this way, the Lord told him to do it and he would be able to have eternal life.

Here is a problem. Whatever the Lord Jesus may have meant when He spoke to the lawyer, and whatever the circumstances may have been, all those who are not familiar with the truth and the meaning in God's word would say, "Is it not clear enough that to have eternal life, a man must love God and love his neighbor? If a man does not love God and his neighbors, is it not true that he cannot possibly have eternal life?" Although the Gospel of John mentions eighty-six times that eternal life is obtained through faith, some may say that the Gospel of Luke says at least once that eternal life is obtained through loving God. If a man does not love God or his neighbor, he cannot possibly be saved.

If that is the case, I would ask if any one of us has ever loved God this way, that is, with our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole strength, and our whole mind. No, there is no one like this. There is no one who loves God with his whole heart, his whole soul, his whole strength, and his whole mind. No one can say that he loves his neighbor as himself. There is no such person. Since there is no such person, no one would obtain eternal life. We need to understand why the Lord Jesus said that we should love God with our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole strength, and our whole mind. Thank the Lord that the Bible is indeed the revelation of God. There is absolutely no mistake in it. This is the reason I love to read the Bible. If this passage beginning from Luke 10:25 ended with verse 28, the truths of the Bible would contradict one another. If that were the case, man would have to love God with his whole heart, his whole soul, his whole strength, and his whole mind. None of these four "whole's" could be missing. But if that were the case, no one could ever be saved. Thank the Lord that after verse 28 there are many more verses. Let us read on.

It is fortunate that this man was quite bothersome. "But he, wanting to justify himself." He asked this question for no other reason than to justify himself. He said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Since the Lord said that he had to love the Lord his God with his whole heart, his whole soul, his whole strength, and his whole mind and to love his neighbor as himself, it would have been awkward for him to ask who God was. Did he, a lawyer, not know who his own God was? It would also have been hard for him to ask who he was, for of all the men in the world, only philosophers do not know who they are. With nothing else to ask, he asked who his neighbor was. He seemed to say, "You are saying that I have to love my neighbor as myself, but who is my neighbor?" From verse 30 on, the Lord told him who his neighbor was. He began to tell him a story.

This story is one of the most common and familiar stories in the church. It would be good for us to read it together: "Jesus, taking up the question, said, A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who having both stripped him and beat him, went away, leaving him half dead. And by coincidence a certain priest was going down on that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. And likewise also a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the opposite side. But a certain Samaritan, who was journeying, came upon him; and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion; and he came to him and bound up his wounds and poured oil and wine on them. And placing him on his own beast, he brought him to an inn and took care of him. And on the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, Take care of him; and whatever you spend in addition to this, when I return, I will repay you. Which of these three, does it seem to you, has become a neighbor to him who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

We are very familiar with this story. Let us spend some time to consider it. This man went from the place of peace to the place of a curse. Jerusalem means peace, and Jericho means a curse. He did not go from Jericho to Jerusalem, a journey that goes up. It was from Jerusalem to Jericho, a journey that goes down. He went from the place of peace to the place of a curse. This man was in a downhill condition. He met robbers on the way. It was not one robber, but a whole gang of robbers, who took away all he had, stripped him of his garments, and left him with no outward covering at all. They beat him until he was half dead; he was wounded in his very life. The Bible shows us that a man's garments are his deeds, and a man's being is his

life. Here the shining deeds are stripped away and gone. The life that remains only has a body that is living; the spirit is dead. This is a man half dead. All readers of the Bible know that this is a description of our person. From the time man was tempted by the serpent in the garden of Eden, and since he began to sin, man has never experienced peace in his life journey. Man is continually tempted by Satan. The result is that all his outward deeds are stripped away. Even more his inward spirit is dead. He is living as far as the body goes, but dead as far as the spirit goes. Man can do nothing about his condition. He can only wait for others to come and save him.

A priest came by. When he saw this man, he passed by on the other side. A Levite also came by. After he saw the man, he also passed by on the other side. The priests and the Levites are the two main groups of people in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, the whole law is in the hands of the priests and the Levites. If you take away the priests and the Levites, there would be no law left. To a half-dead sinner, one who is bound by Satan, waiting to go to destruction, and having no outward virtue, there was nothing to do except to wait to die. What would the priests tell him? The priests would have said, "Love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole soul, your whole strength, and your whole mind, and you will rise up and walk." The Levite would also come and say, "That is right. But you must also love your neighbor as yourself." These are their messages. This is what a priest and a Levite would say to a dying man. "It is true that you are half dead and that your shining garments have been stripped away. But if you would do good, you can be saved." This is the meaning of loving God with the whole heart, the whole soul, the whole strength, and the whole mind. This is what it means to love God. If you see one who has not been beaten, that one may still have the heart, the soul, the strength, and the mind to do something. It would still be possible for him to love God with his whole heart, his whole soul, his whole strength, and his whole mind. It would have been possible to tell him this if he were still in Jerusalem. But the problem today is that he is no longer in Jerusalem. He is on a journey, and he is dying. These commandments cannot help him. Therefore, please remember that it is not a question of giving our "whole," but of getting some help. Here is a man who is dying of sickness. He is living in sin. He cannot do anything about his condition. If you tell the sinner to love God with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind, he would say that he has never loved God in his life. If you say that he has to love his neighbor, he would tell you that he has been robbing others all his life. What should you

say to a man who is about to step into eternity? At this juncture, the priests and the Levites are of no help. They can only pass by on the other side. When they see this kind of man, they cannot help him.

The word about loving God with our whole heart, soul, strength, and mind, and loving our neighbor as ourself is not to help us to inherit eternal life. It is only to show us the kind of persons we are. If you have never heard a word about loving God, you would not know how important it is to love God. If you have never heard anything about loving your neighbor, you would not know how important it is to love your neighbor. Once you have heard the word about loving your neighbor, you will realize that you have never loved your neighbor. Actually, the words in the law such as loving God, loving the neighbors, not coveting or killing, are there only to expose our sinfulness. They show us our condition. The end of the law, as James has said, is simply to serve as a mirror. It shows you who you are. You do not know what your face looks like. But if you look in a mirror, you see what you look like. Formerly, you did not know that you do not love God. Now you know. Not only is there no love with the whole heart, whole soul, whole strength, and whole mind, there is not any love for God at all. Not only is there no love for God, there is not even love for one's neighbor. You have been robbed by the robbers already. Yet you still do not know what has happened. With the law, you know. You were beaten by the robbers, left half dead, and stripped of your garments, and you did not even know it. Now you know. What then did the priests and the Levites do? They came to say: "My friend, do you not know that you have been beaten by the robbers? Do you not know that your garments have been stripped off? Do you not know that you are half dead?"

After a while, another one came. This was the good Samaritan. "But a certain Samaritan, who was journeying, came upon him." Unlike the other two, this one came journeying. The priest came by coincidence. The Levite also came by coincidence. But the Samaritan came journeying. He came purposely to save him. "And when he saw him, he was moved with compassion." He had love, and he had compassion. At the same time, he had oil and wine with him. Hence, he could heal the one beaten by the robbers. Who is this Samaritan? John 4:9 tells us that the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. Everyone mentioned in this story was a Jew. The one beaten up by the robbers was a Jew. The priest was a Jew. The Levite was a Jew. What do the Jews represent? And what does the Samaritan represent? The Jews represent us human beings. What about the Samaritan? The Samaritans

have no dealings with the Jews. They do not mix in with the Jews. They are apart from the Jews and above the Jews. We know that this One is the Lord Jesus. One day when the Lord Jesus was on earth, a group of Jews criticized the Lord Jesus and reviled Him with two very strong statements, saying that He was a Samaritan and one who had a demon (John 8:48). Please notice that in Jesus' answer He said that He did not have a demon. The Jews said that He was a Samaritan and had a demon. The Lord denied that He had a demon but did not deny that He was a Samaritan. Hence, the Samaritan here refers to the Lord Jesus. John shows us that in type He is a Samaritan.

This Samaritan came purposely to this half-dead man. When he saw the man, he was moved with compassion, and he saved him with two things. One was wine, and the other was oil. He poured out the oil and the wine, put them on the wounds, and bound up the wounds. We have to see that this is after Golgotha and after Pentecost. This is not at Bethlehem. If it were at Bethlehem, it would have been the wine on the oil. But since Jerusalem and since the house of Cornelius, it is the oil on the wine. Wine represents the work of Golgotha. Oil represents the work on the day of resurrection and the day of Pentecost. Wine is symbolized by the cup at the Lord's table. When you become sick, what the elders bring to your house is the oil. What is represented there is what is spoken of here. In other words, wine is the work of redemption, and oil is the work of fellowship. Wine symbolizes the blood of the Lord in redeeming us, and oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit applying the work of the Lord to us. This is very meaningful. If it were only the oil poured without the wine, there would be no foundation for our salvation. If there were no oil, salvation would not have any effect. Without the cross, it would have been unrighteous for God to forgive our sins. It would mean that He was dealing with our sins in a loose way. It would mean that He was glossing over our sins. But without the oil, though God may have accomplished redemption in His Son and may have solved the problem of our sins, that work could not be applied to us; we would still be wounded.

Here we see that there is oil, and there is wine. Furthermore, the oil is mentioned first. It is the Holy Spirit who has applied the work of the Lord upon us. This is the procedure of salvation. It is the oil that is mingled into the wine. The Holy Spirit does nothing other than convey the Lord's work to us. How wonderful this is! Many of our sisters are nurses. We also have two brothers here who are doctors. Do you know that the function of the wine is altogether negative? It is used as a disinfectant. This means that the

redemption of the Lord is to deal with past filth and past sins. The oil is there to help the wine. Here, on the one hand, there is the removal of what was in the first Adam. On the other hand, there is the new life from the Holy Spirit. Only by this can the dying man be healed. I will speak more concerning this matter if I have an opportunity later.

After the good Samaritan bound up the wounds of the man beaten by the robbers, what happened next? He placed him on his own beast. The beast denotes traveling. With a beast, you can travel without exerting much effort. When there is a beast, I do not have to travel by my own effort; the beast will carry me. Where did the beast go? It went to the inn. This inn is the house of God. When this man is brought to God, God cares for him.

What is the meaning of two denarii? All the metals in the Bible have their meanings. Gold in the Bible signifies God's nature, life, glory, and righteousness. Brass in the Bible signifies God's judgment. All the places in the Bible that require judgment have brass. The altar was brass, the laver was brass, and the brass serpent was brass. The Lord's feet were as shining brass; they are for trampling. In the Bible iron signifies political authority. But silver throughout the Bible signifies redemption. Every time redemption is mentioned, silver is there. In the Old Testament, the money paid for redemption was silver. The two denarii here signify the price of redemption. The two denarii were handed to the innkeeper. This is our salvation. Because of this, God has accepted all those that trust in Him. Spiritually speaking, the inn signifies God's heavenly house. Physically speaking, it signifies the church. "Whatever you spend in addition to this, when I return, I will repay you." After we are saved, we are in the church, waiting for the Lord's return. These points are not my main subject, but I mention them in passing.

The lawyer asked the Lord, "Who is my neighbor?" After the Lord told him this story, He replied to the lawyer with a question, "Which of these three, does it seem to you, has become a neighbor to him who fell into the hands of the robbers?" If you listen carefully to this word, you will realize that the Lord is telling the lawyer that he was the one who fell into the hands of the robbers.

Many today apply this passage incorrectly. They think that the Lord Jesus wants us to love our neighbor as ourself. Whether it is the Bible schools, the Sunday schools, or the Sunday pulpits, they all tell people that one has to be a good Samaritan. You have to love your neighbors, to show mercy to them, and

to help them. To them, who is the neighbor? It is the one who was wounded by the robbers. And who are we? We are the good Samaritan. But this is exactly the opposite of what the Lord Jesus was saying. What the Lord meant was that we are the ones wounded by the robbers. Who then is our neighbor? Our neighbor is the good Samaritan. We think that we are the good Samaritan. We can move. We can walk. When we see those bound by sin, we are able to help them. But the Lord Jesus said that we are not the good Samaritan. Rather, we need the good Samaritan. We are the man wounded by robbers on the journey. We are those who are waiting to die. We do not have any good works. Who is our neighbor? He is the good Samaritan. What is it to love our neighbor as ourselves? It does not say that we have to love others as ourselves. It means that we have to love the Savior as ourselves. It does not mean that we must first love others before we can inherit eternal life. Rather, it means that if we love the Savior, the Samaritan, we will surely have eternal life.

The problem today is that man continually thinks of works. When he reads Luke 10, he says to himself: "Someone is wounded. Someone is dying. If I care for him and love him, I will be a good Samaritan, and I will have eternal life." We think that when we help others, we will inherit eternal life. But the Lord Jesus said if you allow someone to help you, you will have eternal life. None among us is qualified to be the good Samaritan. Thank the Lord, we do not have to be the good Samaritan. We have a good Samaritan already. This Samaritan, who formerly had no dealings with us, has now come. He has died and has solved the problem of our sins. He is now resurrected, and He has given us a new life. This One has bound up our wounds. He has given us redemption. He is helping us and is bringing us to heaven, that God would accept us and care for us.

Finally, we have verse 37: "And he said, The one who showed mercy to him." This time the lawyer answered correctly. He answered that it is the One who showed mercy to him. The One who shows mercy to me is my neighbor. My neighbor is the Samaritan who stopped to bind up my wounds with the oil and the wine, who put me on the beast and brought me to the inn. My friends, the whole question is not to be the neighbor of someone else. Rather, it is the One who showed mercy to you becoming your neighbor.

The Lord Jesus said, "Go, and you do likewise." This word confuses many people. They think that the Lord is telling us to help others. But what this word means is that your neighbor is the good Samaritan. Therefore you

should accept Him as your Savior. Since your neighbor is the good Samaritan, you must be the one wounded by the robbers. This shows us that while we were lying there, He came and saved us. Never say that we can do anything ourselves. Never say that we have the way. He is showing us that we have to let Him do everything. We have to let Him pour the oil and the wine on our wounds. We have to let Him bind up our wounds. We have to let Him put us up on the beast and bring us to the inn. We have to let Him do the work of taking care of us. We have to be like the one wounded. We do not have to be like the Samaritan. Man's greatest failure is to think that he should do something. Man always wants to be his own savior. He always wants to save others. But God has not appointed us to be the savior. God says that we are the ones to be saved.

Hence, the Lord's word fully answered the lawyer's question. It does not mean that one should not love God with his whole heart, his whole soul, his whole strength, and his whole mind. The question is whether or not he can do it. We cannot do it either. We have a wounded life. Actually, our real condition is that we are dead. Our body is living, but our spirit is dead. We need salvation. We cannot help God. Neither can we help man. If we think that we can do something, we will not experience the forgiveness of sins. The work of the cross and the work of the Holy Spirit will not come upon us.

Hence, remember that Luke 10:25-37 never tells us that man is saved through loving God. On the contrary, it says that the Samaritan was first moved with compassion before we could love. He loves first, and then we can love. Before He has loved, we cannot love. It is true that if any man does not love the Lord, he is accursed. In Luke 7, the Lord Jesus told Simon that he who has been forgiven the most loves the most, and he who has been forgiven little loves little. Love comes after forgiveness. It is not a matter that he who loves much receives much forgiveness, and he who loves little receives little forgiveness. However much a person is forgiven, that is how much he loves. A Christian loves the Lord because He has saved him. If you cannot even love the Samaritan, then I do not know what I can say of you. There is no such person on earth. There is no one on earth who does not love the Lord at all; everyone has to love Him at least a little. The Lord said that he who has been forgiven little loves little. It does not say that there is no love. Everyone loves Him to a greater or lesser extent. However, the condition of salvation is not our love. If I am saved because I love the Lord, then one can see that this is very unreliable. Within two or three days, I can change so many times. I am

one who has been wounded by the robbers. I am lying there. I can do nothing at all. I am at the end of myself. I do not love God with all my heart, and I do not love my neighbor. But now I allow Him to save me. After He has saved me, I can love Him. We love Him because He has first loved us. It is God's love in us that has produced our love for Him. It is utterly impossible for us by ourselves to produce a love for God.

SALVATION NOT BEING THROUGH BAPTISM

Now we have to consider another question. Some people say that a man cannot be saved without being baptized. Perhaps those among us would not say this. But some who have been affected by the poison of Roman Catholic tradition may be full of this kind of thought. Recently, a few co-workers and I met a few western missionaries in Canton. They all paid much attention to this matter of baptism. There is a certain missionary in Hong Kong who is very strong about this matter. They certainly have their scriptural basis, which is Mark 16:16: "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned." Some would argue that this means if a man has believed but has not been baptized, he is still not saved, because this verse clearly says that he who believes and is baptized shall be saved.

Here I would like to ask a question. What does salvation mean here? It says: "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved." But following this it says: "He who does not believe shall be condemned." From this we see that the salvation here must not refer merely to deliverance from condemnation. We must be careful here. The Lord says he who believes and is baptized shall be saved. The corresponding sentence should be that he who does not believe shall not be saved. But it is so strange that it says he who does not believe is condemned. Hence, the salvation in the first clause must not refer to the not being condemned in the second clause. We have to see that not only does salvation refer to a man's salvation before God, but it also refers to his salvation before men. Before God, it is a question of condemnation or no condemnation. Before men, it is a question of being saved or not being saved. Before God, all those who believe in the Lord Jesus are not condemned. He who does not believe is condemned already. This is the word of John 3:18. But one cannot say that he who believes and is baptized shall not be condemned. We can say that he who believes and is baptized shall be saved, but not that he who believes and is baptized shall not be condemned. This is because condemnation has to do with God. Salvation here does not have to do with

God. Salvation has to do with man. That is why the question of baptism comes in. To be condemned or not is a matter before God. That is why there is only the difference between believing and not believing. To be saved or not is not before God; it is something for man to see. That is why there is the difference between baptism and no baptism.

When we read the Bible, we have to take care of these distinctions. We will take John 3 again as an example. The Lord Jesus said in verse 5: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Then in verses 6 and 8, when it mentions this matter again, it mentions only being born of the Spirit, without mentioning being born of water. The reason for this is that there are two sides to the kingdom of God. One side is spiritual, and the other side is earthly. Spiritually speaking, if a man is not born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. This is a fact. But there is still the human side. On the human side, there is not only the need to be born of the Spirit, but the need to be born of water also. What is the Spirit like? It says the wind blows where it wills. We can also say that the Spirit blows where it wills. In the original language, wind and spirit are the same word. Both are *pneuma*. The Spirit blows where He wills. One does not know where He comes from or where He is going. Man cannot control the wind in the sky. When it comes, it simply comes. When it goes, it simply goes. Many times, we only hear the sound of the wind, and know that it is here, or that it is gone. We cannot control the wind in the sky, but we can control the water on the ground. I have no way to control the wind blowing on my face. But I can determine whether I want to go into the water or not. The wind blows where it wills, but the water goes where I will. I cannot order the Spirit in heaven to put me into the kingdom. But I can manage to get myself into the water. I can have a part in the kingdom of God on earth. When I am baptized, no one can say that I do not belong to the Lord. This is why the Lord said in Mark 16 that he who believes and is baptized shall be saved.

What is the difference between being saved and not coming into condemnation? Please remember that condemnation is something strictly before God, but salvation is relative; it is something before God and something before man as well. Whether I am condemned or not is a matter before God. But whether I am saved or not has to do with God and has to do also with man. Salvation is toward God and man; condemnation is strictly toward God. Once a man believes, he will not be condemned before God. He who does not believe has been condemned already. Those who are in Christ

shall not be condemned. But those who do not believe have been condemned already. This is the question before God all the time. But thank the Lord, salvation is with God and with man as well. On the one hand we have to believe, so that we can be saved before God. On the other hand, we have to be baptized, so that we can be saved before man.

If there is a man today who continues to be a Christian secretly, should we acknowledge him as a Christian? He has believed and is no longer condemned before God. But one cannot say that he is saved before man. Before God we have to be delivered from condemnation. But before man we have to be saved. If there is a person who has genuinely believed in the Son of God and has genuinely believed in the work of the Lord's cross, yet he never confesses with his mouth, nor has he ever been baptized, others will not know if he is saved. There is only one condition to be saved before God and to come out of condemnation before God, which is to believe. But to be saved before man there is another condition, which is to be baptized. I am not saying that baptism is not necessary. We definitely need to be baptized. Baptism has to do with our salvation. But this salvation is not what some people think. This is absolutely not a question of coming under condemnation. It does not say that if you are not baptized, you will be condemned. Rather, it says that if you do not believe, you will be condemned. Before God there is no question of baptism; there is only the question of faith. Once there is faith, everything is settled. Baptism is not for God. Baptism is for man. It is a testimony among men, testifying of the position that one stands upon. Are you a person in Adam? Or are you a person in Christ? This fact is testified by baptism.

Thank God that the thief next to the Lord's cross went to Paradise. At that time, Peter was not there yet. Neither was John or Paul. Right after the Lord went to Paradise, the thief followed Him. But he was not baptized. Before God, whoever calls on His name shall be saved. Why does a person call on His name? It is because he has believed. But whether those on earth will say that such a person is saved or not is another question. In the next few evenings I will make a clear distinction for you. It seems that in the Bible, justification, forgiveness, and coming out of condemnation are all before God. But salvation is before God and before man as well. If you are not clear about these things, you will create many problems. In the Bible, many places refer to what happens before man. Many other places refer to what happens before God. If we confuse the two, we will fall into error.

I have said that baptism refers to a man's coming out of Adam and into Christ. On one side is Adam. On the other side is Christ. We have to get out of Adam and into Christ. How do we get out? We were a part of Adam. How can we now come out of Adam and into Christ? Let me first ask one question: How did we get into Adam? If I ask how we can get out of Adam, some would say that they do not know. That is why I ask how we got into Adam. The way we enter in will be the way we get out. How did we get into Adam? The Lord Jesus said in John 3:6 that that which is born of the flesh is flesh. How did I become a part of Adam? I was born into him. Now that you know how you got in, you will know how you can get out. If you got into him by birth, you have to get out of him by death. This is quite obvious. But how do we die? God crucified us when the Lord Jesus was crucified on the cross. Therefore, in Christ we have died to Adam. How then do we get into Christ? The Lord goes on to say that that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. I get into Christ by birth. Peter said that we are regenerated through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead (1 Pet. 1:3). Hence, it is His resurrection that has regenerated us. Here we see two things: through the death of the Lord, we are delivered from the family of Adam. Through resurrection, we have entered into Christ. Through death, we are delivered from the first Adam. Through resurrection, we have entered into the second Man. All of these are accomplished by the Lord Jesus. He has died on the cross. As a result we also have died. He has resurrected. As a result we have entered into the new creation.

The death is spiritual, and the resurrection is also spiritual. But our baptism is physical. What then is baptism? Baptism is our acting out. Through His servants, His apostles, the Lord Jesus told us of His work: When He died on the cross, we were also included in His death. What should we do after we have heard this? According to history, this happened two thousand years ago. We were already crucified two thousand years ago on the cross of our Lord Jesus. His word is now preached to us. It tells us that we have died. What then should we do now? I once asked a village woman this question. She answered, "If the Lord Jesus has crucified me, then I need to buy a coffin." This is altogether right! The Lord Jesus has crucified me. Why should I not buy a coffin? Since He has crucified me, I must hurry to bury myself. Baptism is my request to be buried in the water because I have been crucified by the Lord. Baptism is a response to God's crucifixion of us. God has preached the gospel to you and told you that you are dead. Your response is that since you

have been crucified, you will find someone to bury you. Hence, baptism means that we are dead in Adam already. Others are taking me out to be buried. Now we are on the ground of resurrection. Hence, death is our exit from Adam, and resurrection is our entrance into Christ. Baptism is our burial. Death is the termination of Adam, and resurrection is the new beginning in Christ. Baptism is the bridge between these two sides. Through baptism we pass from death to resurrection.

My friends, the Lord Jesus has accomplished everything. There is no condition required for us to be saved. All we have to do is to simply believe. To believe is to receive. I need only to receive because the Lord has done everything. I no longer have to do anything. Baptism is through faith. It is an acting out. Let me ask: If there is no plot, how can we perform? Do we have a plot first and then an act, or do we have an act first and then a plot? All plays exist because there was a plot already. Because there is a spiritual fact before God already, we can act it out through baptism.

May the Lord be gracious to us and show us that nothing other than faith can be a condition for salvation. Baptism has absolutely nothing to do with salvation or condemnation before God. We come out of condemnation before God through faith. Our acting out at baptism is only for our salvation before man. May the Lord be gracious to us and make us clear about our salvation.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE WAY OF SALVATION—FAITH

GOD'S SALVATION BEING FOR EVERYONE THROUGH FAITH

Over the past few evenings, we have looked at the things that man considers to be ways of salvation. If we do not twist the Word of God but trust in it, we will see from it that none of those things are a condition for salvation. As we have mentioned already, according to the Bible there is only one condition for salvation—faith. Together the words faith and believe occur in the Bible over five hundred times. Among these many verses, over a hundred verses tell us that salvation is by believing, that justification is by believing, and that we receive life by believing. In over thirty places we are told that through faith we receive this or that from God. These places show us that man is favored by God through faith and nothing else.

Why does the Bible put so much emphasis on faith? Tonight we will consider why faith has to be the way of salvation. But we must first ask a question. Is salvation a work of man or a work of God? Is it man's plan or is it God's plan? Does it originate with man or with God? Those who do not know God do not know salvation. Only those who know God know God's salvation. Those who know God have to admit that it is God who has initiated salvation. It is God who has planned it, and it is God who has accomplished this plan. As we have mentioned before, everything is done by God. On our side, we do not have to do anything except believe.

Why do we have to believe? It is because redemption is accomplished by Christ. God wants to make the method of salvation so simple that everyone can obtain it. That is why He requires only faith. If salvation is from God, it must be universal. If God's salvation were just for a certain group of people, God would be partial. If God's way of salvation required something from us, that something would become an obstacle to our salvation. If there were the simple requirement that man had to wait five minutes before he could be saved, even that would greatly diminish the number of saved ones in the world. Many people do not have even five minutes to wait. God would not

have to require even perfect righteousness. If He were to require righteousness in only one thing, perhaps you could render Him this righteousness, but hundreds of thousands of people on earth might not be able to do so. If such were the case, salvation would not be so simple.

In America there was a famous preacher named Dr. Jowett. He had a co-worker named Mr. Barry. Mr. Barry was a pastor in a church, but he had not yet been saved. One night someone rang the doorbell of his church. After letting the bell ring for a long time, Mr. Barry reluctantly put on his night robe and went to see who it was. At the door was a young, improperly dressed girl. When he asked her bluntly what she wanted, the girl asked, "Are you the pastor?" When he admitted that he was, the girl said, "I need help to get my mother in." He thought that a girl dressed in such a way must have a terrible home. He thought that perhaps her mother was drunk, and she needed help to get her mother back into the house. He told the girl to call the police, but the girl insisted that he go. He tried his best to turn her down and told her to go to the pastor of the church nearest her. But the girl said, "Your church is the nearest church." Then he said, "It is too late now. Come back tomorrow." But she insisted that he go at once. Mr. Barry thought for a while. He was a pastor of a church with over twelve hundred members. If one of them saw him walking with this young girl dressed in that kind of way in the middle of the night, what would they think? But the girl insisted and said that if he would not go, she would not leave. Finally, he gave in and went upstairs to change. Mr. Barry later told Dr. Jowett that while he was walking to the girl's house, he pulled his hat down very low to cover his face and tucked in his coat for fear that others might see him. The place where they went was not in a nice area. When he stopped before the house that they were to enter, he saw that it was not a decent place at all. Then he asked the girl, "Why do you want me to come to such a place?" The girl answered, "My mother is very sick. She is in terrible danger. She said that she wants to get into the kingdom of God. Please get her in." Mr. Barry could not do anything except step into the house. The girl and her mother lived in a very small and dingy room. Their home was very poor. When the sick woman saw him coming, she cried out, "Please help me to get in. I cannot get in." He thought for a while and wondered what he should do. He was a pastor and a preacher, and here was a woman who was dying. She wanted to enter the kingdom of God; she wanted to be taught how to get in. What could he do? He did not know what to do. So he spoke to her in the way he spoke to his congregation. He began to tell her that Jesus was a

perfect man, that He was our model, that He sacrificed Himself, that He displayed such benevolence, and that Jesus went about helping people. If men follow in His footsteps to sacrifice themselves, to love and help others, and to serve society, they would uplift their humanity and others' humanity. Mr. Barry was talking to her with his eyes closed. When he finished, she became mad. She cried out, "No, no! This is not what I want you to speak about." Her tears began to fall. She said, "Sir, tonight is my last night on earth. Now is the time for me to settle the question of eternal perdition or entry into God's kingdom. This is my last chance. Don't try to take me for a ride or play games with me. I have sinned my whole life long. And not only have I sinned, but I have also taught my daughter to sin. Now I am dying. What can I do? Don't play games with me. All my life I have done nothing but sin. Everything I did was unclean. I never knew what being moral meant. I never knew what it was to be clean. I never knew what it was to have a conscience. Now you are telling such a sinner as me, in the state that I am in tonight, to take Jesus as my model! How much work would I have to do before I could take Jesus as my model! You told me that I have to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. But how much would I have to do before I could follow in His footsteps! Don't play games with me at this hour so crucial to my eternity. Just tell me how I can get into God's kingdom. What you told me will not work for me. I cannot do any of those things." Mr. Barry was taken by surprise. He thought to himself, "These are the things that I learned in theological school. I studied them for my doctorate in theology. I have been preaching them for the past seventeen or eighteen years. And these are the things I have read out of the Bible. But here is a woman who wants to get in, and I cannot help her." So he said, "To tell you the truth, I don't know how to get in. I only know that Jesus was a good man, that we have to imitate Him, that He was benevolent, and that He sacrificed Himself to help others. All I know is that if a man takes Jesus as his example and walks as He walked, he will be a Christian." In tears the woman said, "Can you do nothing for a woman who has been sinful all her life to help her enter God's kingdom at the last hour? Is that all you can do to help a dying woman to get into God's kingdom, who will have no tomorrow and who will have no second chance?" Mr. Barry was stuck. He had nothing more to say. He thought, "I am a servant of Christ. I am a doctor of theology. I am a pastor of a twelve hundred member church. But here is a woman on her deathbed, and I cannot help her at all. She even thinks that I am playing games with her." But then Mr. Barry remembered something he had heard from his mother while sitting on her lap when he was seven years old. She had

told him that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, that He was crucified, and that He shed His blood to cleanse us from sins. Jesus of Nazareth died for our sins on the cross and has become the propitiatory sacrifice. He remembered these words then. He had neglected these words all his life, but that day these words came back to him. Then he rose up and said, "Yes, I have something for you. You do not have to do anything, but God has done everything in His Son. He has dealt with our sins in His Son. God's Son has taken away all our sins. The One who demands the payment became the One who pays. The One who was offended became the One who suffered for the offense. The Judge has become the judged." At that word, the woman's face showed signs of joy. He went on to tell her all that his mother had told him. Then, suddenly the woman's face turned from joy to tears, and she cried, "Why didn't you tell me this earlier? What should I do now?" He then told her that she needed only to believe and to receive. At that word, the woman died. Later Mr. Barry told Dr. Jowett that on that night the woman entered in and he also entered in.

I have been touched in my heart many times by this story. If there is salvation, it should be available to anyone. If you say that one must be baptized before he can be saved, then the thief on the cross could not be saved, because he was not baptized. If you say that one cannot be saved unless he makes restitution, then the thief on the cross could not have been saved, because both his hands and feet were nailed firmly to the cross. I am not saying that we should not be baptized or make restitution. But the condition for salvation is not restitution, baptism, confession, or repentance. Repentance is nothing but a changed view about one's past. If it were a matter of law and work, who could fulfill it? This woman is the best example of God's salvation being for everyone.

BELIEVING IN THE LORD'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION

The only condition for God's salvation is faith. Faith is saying that you are willing and that you want it. What is the faith that the Bible talks about? First, God has accomplished redemption by the death of His Son Jesus Christ on the cross. His work on the cross has been completed. Why has it been completed? I do not know why. Neither do you. Only God knows why. How can the blood of the Lord Jesus redeem us from our sins? Why is the Lord's redemption effective? We do not need to ask these questions. These are

matters for God. The Lord's work on the cross has been accomplished, and God's heart is satisfied.

The cross of the Lord Jesus is not for satisfying our heart. It is for satisfying God's heart. Does the settlement of a debt satisfy the heart of the creditor or the heart of the debtor? If God feels that something is sufficient for Him, we also should feel that it is sufficient. God is righteous. If He says that the Lord's work is able to redeem us from sin, it is surely able to redeem us. Whether or not you think that the work is sufficient is irrelevant. What matters is that God thinks that the work is sufficient. It is not just a matter of whether or not the money has been paid. What matters is whether or not the creditor considers the money paid. If the money you pay satisfies his heart, you will have no problems. I wish I could repeat this a hundred times. The work of the Lord Jesus is not to satisfy our heart. The work of the Lord is first for the satisfaction of God's heart. It is God who demands the judgment on sins. It is God who requires that sins be dealt with. It is God who said that without the blood there is no remission of sins. If God were unconcerned, the blood would be unnecessary. The blood is there because God is concerned. If God were unconcerned, the cross would be unnecessary. There is the need of the cross because God is righteous.

The Lord has accomplished all the work on the cross. Hence, God raised Him from the dead. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is the proof that God is satisfied with the Lord's work on the cross. Although we do not understand how the cross has satisfied God's heart, we know that Jesus of Nazareth has risen from the grave. Was it the death of Jesus of Nazareth that the apostles went all over the world to preach? Have you heard such a gospel? I have never heard such a gospel. They went all over the world only to tell others that Jesus of Nazareth has been resurrected. If you read the book of Acts, you will see that the apostles did not preach the death of Jesus for our sins. What they told people everywhere is that this man had resurrected. They preached this because the fact of the Lord's resurrection proves that His death has glorified God. The Lord Jesus was resurrected because His work had been accepted before God. His redemption is complete, and we can now be saved. If the Lord's work had not been completed, He would have been left in the grave. Hence, resurrection is nothing other than the Lord Jesus satisfying God's heart. The Lord Jesus has resurrected from the dead. The apostles preach this to us as a proof for our faith, calling us to believe in the Lord Jesus. On the one hand, salvation has to do with the Lord's death. On the other hand, it has

to do with the Lord's resurrection. His death is for the settlement of our debt and the forgiveness of our sins. By this death the problem of our sins is solved. His resurrection is the proof that His work of death has satisfied God's heart. God considers His work right and proper.

I have used an illustration before, which I will use again for the sake of the many new ones with us. If I have sinned, I should go to jail. But suppose a friend of mine volunteers to go in my place. Because he goes to jail, I am released. But it is not until he is released that I know my case is settled. Only then will my heart be relieved. My body is released because his is imprisoned. But my heart is released only when he comes out. Until the case is over, he will still be inside. If he is still in jail, I will not know if he has borne my punishment or if I will still be wanted. When he is out of prison, I will know that the case is settled. In the same way, as soon as the Lord Jesus died, the problem of my sin was solved. But the Lord Jesus had to resurrect before I could know that the problem of sin was solved. He was delivered for our transgressions and was resurrected for our justification. He resurrected because the problem of our justification was solved. We can go to the world to tell everyone of the work God has accomplished through the death of His Son Jesus Christ. At the same time, we can tell others that through the resurrection of the Lord, God has given us a receipt and a proof. It informs us that the task is finished. Today we do not merely believe in the cross. Rather, we believe also in the resurrection.

Can you find one verse in the Bible that tells man to believe in the cross? It is very strange that we are always told to believe in the resurrection. If you meet a nominal Christian today who may have been a member of a church for ten, twenty, or thirty years and talk with him a little, you will realize that there is a big difference between believing in the cross and believing in the resurrection. I met a member of a denomination once who had been an elder for thirty-eight years and a "Christian" for fifty or sixty years. When I asked if he believed in the Lord Jesus, he said, "Yes." But when I asked if he knew that his sins were forgiven, he dared not say yes. Then I asked him if Jesus was his Savior, and he said, "Yes." But when I asked him if he was saved, he said that he did not know. When I asked him if he believed that the Lord Jesus had been judged on the cross for our sins, he readily said that he did. Not only does the Bible say this, even our hymn book says it. It says that thousands of bulls and goats on the Jewish altar will not forgive us of our sins, but the one sacrifice of the Lord cleanses us from all sin. When I asked this man if he were

cleansed from his sins, he said he believed that the crucifixion of the Lord was for his sins, but he dared not say that his sins were washed away. I cannot blame him for being unclear. It is true that the Lord Jesus died on the cross. But how can one know that this cross counts? He believes in the cross, but how does he know that the cross has solved all his problems and settled his case? Although the settlement for sin happened on the cross, what makes us clear is the resurrection. If you repay someone some money, how do you know that the amount paid is sufficient and that the bank notes are genuine? What if the notes are counterfeit? Only one thing will assure you that the amount has been fully paid—a receipt from your creditor saying that the amount has been paid in full. When you pay the money, the creditor clears your account, and you know that the matter is settled. In the same way, the death of the Lord Jesus speaks of what He has done for God, while His resurrection speaks of what God has done for us. Death is the settlement between Him and God, but resurrection is the announcement to us of the settlement between God and His Son. God said that the debt has been cleared. If you believe that the Lord's death is for your sins, the Lord's resurrection will then declare that your sin record has been cleared. Many people say that we have to settle our sin account, and that if it is not settled, we cannot be saved. Thank the Lord that my sin account was settled before I was even born. Even the receipt was issued. The death of the Lord Jesus was the settlement of the debt, and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus was the proof of this settlement. Resurrection is the proof of justification. We are justified because God has been gracious to us and has redeemed us from sin. The death of the Lord Jesus was for the solution of sin. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus was for the proof of justification. Hence, our faith rests on the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

This is not all that resurrection accomplished. If we think that it is, we are wrong. This is only the objective aspect of resurrection. There is still the subjective aspect. Objectively speaking, the resurrection of the Lord becomes the proof of our salvation. If anyone were to ask me how I know that I am saved, I would tell him that I have the proof. This proof proves that I am saved. You may tell me that you were saved on a certain date in a certain year because that was when you received the Lord. I would then ask how you could know that was sufficient. You may say that you confessed your sins that day, but how do you know that confession is sufficient? You may say that you cried for your sins that day, but how do you know that your tears will wash your sins away? You may say that you have repented, confessed your sins, and

accepted the Lord Jesus, but how do you know that this repentance, confession, and receiving of the Lord is sufficient? If you asked me, I would answer that I am actually saved because of the Lord's death, but I know that I am saved because of the Lord's resurrection. My friends, you have to differentiate between the two. I am saved because of the Lord's death, but I have the assurance and clear knowledge that I am saved because of the Lord's resurrection. When I pay the money, I settle my debt. I know that I have settled the debt because I have a receipt. Thank God that He has given us a proof and a receipt. His Son has paid the debt for all our sins on the cross, and through the resurrection of His Son, He has informed us that the matter is fully settled. Hence, all of the Lord's work is now finished.

If there is anyone here tonight who still doubts that he is saved, I only need to ask him what he has believed in and what he has received. It is not sufficient for a person just to believe in the cross and to receive the redemption of the Lord on the cross. One must also believe in His resurrection. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is God's message to us. It shows us that God has accepted the Lord's work. Thank God that the cross has satisfied God's heart. That is why there is the resurrection. Thus, the foundation of our faith is the death of Christ, but our faith is also based on the proof of resurrection. Death is His work of redeeming us. Resurrection is the proof of His having redeemed us. Notice that here I have said "having redeemed." Death is His work of redeeming us, and resurrection is the proof of His having redeemed us.

RECEIVING THE LORD'S WORK THROUGH FAITH IN GOD'S WORD

The work of the Lord is now complete. His death has taken place, and His resurrection has also taken place. What happens next? The Bible shows clearly that God has put all His Son's work in His Word. What is the Bible, and what is God's Word? Many times I like to think of God's Word as God's pocket for His work. God put all His work into His Word. If God were standing among us today, and He wanted to show us His Son's work and the proof of this work, how could He do it? He put the work of His Son's cross in His Word. He also put the proof of His Son's resurrection in His Word. Today God communicates all these things to us through His Word. When we receive His Word, we receive the proof of His work. Behind the Word are the facts. If

there were no facts behind the words, the words would be empty. Behind the words there surely are the facts.

In winter, everyone, both male and female, wears gloves. God's Word is God's glove. All His works are contained in it. One day I met a western female missionary. She did not know what it was to believe in God's Word. She thought that all she needed to do was to believe in God, in His Son Jesus Christ, and in God's work. I told her that without God's Word there is no way to believe in God, in His Son Jesus Christ, and in God's work. Once we believe in God's Word, all these items become effective to us. After two hours of talking, I still could not get through with her. Later, she was about to leave. She had on a pair of deerskin gloves. She was about to take off the gloves to shake hands with me. I said, "You don't have to take them off. I can shake with your gloves on." To her this was quite impolite. Perhaps she considered that I was a Chinese and that I did not know proper manners. When I shook her hand I asked, "What am I holding now, the hand or the glove?" Immediately she understood what I meant. I told her that the hand was in the glove. When I shook the glove, I was shaking the hand. I shook the glove, because in it was the hand. This is like the Word of God. God has put Himself and all the work of His Son's cross in His Word. When you hand me God's Word, you are handing me God in His Word, plus all the work of His Son. When she left, she told me that everything else that had been said was useless. This one word cleared her up.

Today we preach to others the work of God's Son and the testimony of His resurrection. However, it is by His Word that we preach these things. If a man receives God's Word, he receives God's work and God's grace. God's Word is precious because in it there is the substance. What use is it if the gloves are empty? Even if you squeeze them all day long, it is useless. They are useful only when the hands are there. Without the Lord Jesus, the Word of God is dead letters. Without the Lord Jesus, I would surely burn this book.

Hence, what is faith? It is nothing other than the receiving of God's testimony for the work of His Son. God has placed the work of His Son in the Word and has communicated this Word to us. When we believe in His Word, we are believing in Him. First John 5:9 says, "If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater." What is the characteristic of God's testimony? "This is the testimony of God that He has testified concerning His Son." The Word of God is concerning His Son. Please read verse 10: "He who

believes into the Son of God has the testimony in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar." Please notice the next clause: "Because he has not believed in the testimony which God has testified concerning His Son." What is it to not believe in God? It is to not believe in God's testimony of His Son. What is to believe in God? It is to believe in the words God has spoken, the testimony that He has made concerning His Son. Hence, to believe in God is nothing other than to believe in God's testimony. In the past two weeks, we have seen God's testimony. We have seen what God has done for us, what problems He has solved through His Son, and what proofs He has given us. God has spoken to us His Word. What should we do now? We should believe in Him, that is, we should receive the testimony He has concerning His Son. If there are some here who have not been saved, some may have told you already that you should believe. But what should you believe in? You do not have to believe in a Christ that is sitting in heaven. That is too far away. All you have to do is to believe in this book. This is so near. God's hand is already in the glove. The glove is God's Word. When you believe in God's Word, you are believing in God's Son. When you receive the words of the Bible, you are receiving everything in the Word. Over the past eighteen hundred years, George Müller may be considered as one of the men with the greatest faith. When others asked him what faith was, he answered that faith is when God says something, I say the same. Faith is to believe in God's Word. It is to believe in God through His Word.

THE HOLY SPIRIT COMMUNICATING GOD'S WORK TO US

There is another matter related to faith in God's Word. How can God's work become ours? The key is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has come. The Holy Spirit is the keeper of God's Word. The Word of God is living because the Holy Spirit is keeping watch over it. God has placed all His works in His Word. The Holy Spirit is keeping watch over it on the side. Whenever man receives God's Word by faith, the Holy Spirit comes and applies all of God's works to him. Here we see how complete the work of the Triune God is. It is God who has loved us and who has purposed the work of redemption. It is the Son who has accomplished the work of redemption. It is God who has placed the work of the Son in the Word, and it is God who communicates to us through the Holy Spirit all the works of the Son contained in the Word. The greatest problem of man, and his most foolish thought as well, is to be confused about the condition for the Holy Spirit's work. Man thinks that if he repents God will work, or if he is baptized God will work, or if he confesses his sins or does

good works, God will work. But there is not such a thing. The Bible tells us clearly that only the Holy Spirit can communicate the Lord's work to us. The characteristic of the Holy Spirit's work is fellowship. After the Lord Jesus accomplished all the work, the Holy Spirit came and communicated this work to us. If there were only the accomplished work of the Lord Jesus without the fellowshipping work of the Holy Spirit, it would still be useless to us. Without the Father, man cannot be saved. Without the Son, man cannot be saved. Likewise, without the Holy Spirit, man cannot be saved. Although there is the work of the Father and the Son, there is still the need of the Holy Spirit to communicate these works to us and to cause the objective matters to become subjective.

The question is now what we should do in order for the Holy Spirit to work on us. The Bible shows us clearly that there is only one condition for the Holy Spirit to work— faith. Do we receive the Holy Spirit by the works of the law or by faith? It is by faith. This is what Paul told us in the book of Galatians. When we believe in God's Word, the Holy Spirit will apply this word to us. That is why I said that the Holy Spirit is the keeper of God's Word.

If there is anyone here tonight who is not yet saved, I hope that you will open your heart to receive God's testimony. You do not have to worry about who the Lord Jesus is. You do not have to worry about who God is. What relates to you directly is the Word of God. If you have a proper relationship with the Word of God, the Holy Spirit will communicate to you all the works of God and the Lord Jesus. If you open your heart and call on Him and invoke Him, like the publican who prayed for God to be merciful to him, or more accurately translated, to be propitiated to him, you will be justified. Once you open your heart to call on Him, the Holy Spirit will communicate God's work to you. This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Tonight I am only speaking about the initial things of salvation. Actually, all the works of the Holy Spirit follow this principle. Whenever you come to God to receive His Word, the Holy Spirit will make this Word come alive. It may seem that what you receive are dead things, but when the Holy Spirit comes, He will make them alive in you. Do not try to accomplish anything yourself. Do not think that the Holy Spirit is ignorant of your faith in God's Word. No, as soon as you believe, He comes in immediately to work. There is nothing that He does not know. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in redemption. The

Triune God has accomplished all the work of salvation for us in order that we may be saved.

THE FUNCTION OF FAITH—SUBSTANTIATION

Perhaps you may ask, "Why would the Holy Spirit communicate to us all of God's work in His Word when we believe in this Word?" The words in 1 John that we just read tell us what faith is. That is the work of faith. But what is the function of faith? The function of faith is the substantiation of the Lord's work in us. This is what Hebrews 11 shows us. Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is the substantiation of things hoped for." The King James Version translates this word as the noun "substance," but in the original language it is not a noun but a gerund, a verbal noun. Darby's translation renders it "substantiating." This is not a noun but a gerund from a verb. This kind of gerund is used often. For example, in the church there is the "overseeing" by the elders. This overseeing is not a noun but a gerund. "Substantiating" is also used in the same way. Faith is a substantiating. Do not underestimate this translation. I have been looking for ten years without finding a suitable word. Then, when I discovered Darby's use of "substantiating," I think I came across the best translation. Everything in the world, whether animals, plants, or minerals, has to be substantiated by us. While we live on the earth, we are constantly substantiating things around us. My eyes substantiate every sight and color. While I am speaking here, some brothers and sisters who are hard of hearing do not know what I am talking about. They only see my mouth moving. I have the words, but they lack the substantiating. I have the substance, but they do not have the power of substantiating it. They cannot substantiate my word in themselves. If there were a singer or some wonderful music here, I could substantiate it with my ears. When our hands touch something, we know that it is smooth or coarse. Our nose can identify a good or a bad smell. Our tongue can identify a sweet or a salty taste. All these are substantiations. All the organs in the human body are doing the work of substantiating.

What is faith? Faith is not making something out of nothing. Faith is substantiating what is there. Faith is not daydreaming or the speaking of a dream. Faith is to manifest what is there already. This is why Hebrews says that faith is the substantiating of things hoped for. The word "things" should be translated "substance." Although they cannot be seen, it does not mean that they are not there. The greatest problem of man today is that he does not have the substantiating ability. As a result, he doubts the reality of the things.

If you tell a person who has lost his taste buds to take a sweet drink, he will say that it tastes like some soy sauce he just drank. This is to have the substance without the substantiation. All the spiritual things are there. God has placed all His works in His Word. If you have faith, you will substantiate them.

We who are preaching the gospel are not preaching nonexistent things. The problem today is that many will not substantiate them. In Christ I am full of substance. But many would not substantiate these things. Tonight we have two brothers here who cannot see. I can say that this book is black and that book is brown. When they touch these books, the two are the same to them. You can tell that one is black and another is brown because you can see, but to them there is no distinction between black and brown. If they ask me what black is, I can only say that black is black. I cannot explain it. There is no way to explain it. What is the difficulty? The difficulty lies in their lack of the substantiating ability. It is the same way with us before God. Many are like deaf or blind people. When you talk to them about spiritual things, they say that they do not feel this or that. They have no way to substantiate those things.

Hence, what is faith? The apostle told us clearly that the function of faith is to substantiate the spiritual things. Something was not there with you. Now it is there. Today we are living in a physical world, but God has put all the spiritual things in His Word. The Word of God is full of the things of God. Do not take the Word of God that lightly. Even eternity is in the Word of God. What is the function of faith? The function of faith is to manifest spiritual things in the same way that eyes manifest shapes and colors, ears manifest sounds, and the nose manifests smells. Faith manifests spiritual things. This is why God wants us to have faith.

RECEIVING BY BELIEVING THAT WE HAVE RECEIVED

Now we have to see how we have to believe. In the Bible, faith has its own laws. In the whole New Testament, there is only one place that tells us the function of faith—Hebrews 11:1. At the same time, in the whole New Testament, there is only one place that tells us how to believe—Mark 11:24: "For this reason I say to you, All things that you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and you will have them." Here it tells us what it is to believe. What is faith? Faith is to believe in the Word of God. "Believe that you

have received them." We have to pay attention to the word "received." It is in the past tense. If you meet a man today who says that he will receive, immediately you know that he does not have faith. If you ask someone if he has believed in the Lord Jesus and if he has been saved, and if he tells you that he hopes to be saved, then he surely is not saved. All those who say that they want to receive or that they hope to receive do not have faith. Mark 11:24 shows us clearly that faith is to believe that we have received. Faith is not to believe that we will receive. It is not to believe that we shall receive, are about to receive, or can receive. All these "wills," "cans," and "shalls" are not faith. Only the faith that believes that one has received is the faith that the Bible talks about.

Many times when I preached the gospel to someone, he would hear about the work of God and realize that all has been done. I would show him his corruption, his weakness, his sins, and his degradation. As a result, he would confess his sins and come to see the work of the Lord Jesus. After this we would kneel down to pray. First I would pray for him. Then he would pray himself. He would confess that he is a sinner and that he has committed many sins. He would ask for forgiveness and ask for the Lord to give him life. After he prayed in this way, I would ask, "Are your sins now forgiven?" If he said, "I believe that God will forgive my sins," I would say to myself, "Forget it. Here is another dead case." If he said, "I believe fully that God will forgive my sins," I would know immediately that he did not have faith.

When will a preacher rejoice over a listener? It is when such a one prays and says, perhaps in tears, that he is clear about everything now. You know that such a one has passed the gate and has obtained eternal life. He may say, "Thank the Lord, the problem of my sins has been solved," or he may say, "Thank the Lord, He has accepted me," or "Thank the Lord, God has forgiven all my sins on account of His Son." When you hear this, you know that such a one has believed and is saved. There is only one kind of faith in the Bible—the faith that believes that one has received. Everyone who says that he will receive, can receive, shall receive, and must receive, has not received.

My friends, this is the way to believe in all the facts in the Bible. With some people, after you pray with them, you know if they have passed from death to life and if they are saved. Many hope to be saved. This is not the real faith. Once I talked with a man who said that he fully believed that he would be saved. I said, "You had better change your wording a little. You should say, “I

fully hope” instead of "I fully believe." If you fully believe, then you have received it already. Hence, anyone who has not put the word "have" or "already" into the word of God has not believed. If you say that your sins have been forgiven, this shows that you have believed. If you say that you have overcome your sins, this also shows that you have believed. Or if you say that you have received, this again shows that you have believed. Whenever you can say that you have received, at that time you have truly received. My friends, the matter today is very simple. I will not lower the standard of the Bible. All of God's works are accomplished. The Word of God has been preached to us. The Son of God has died. The Lord Jesus has resurrected. What should we say now? We should say, "Thank the Lord, I have received." This is good enough. Sometimes, when I attend revival meetings, I can almost cry. When the people there cry, I also cry. They cry for themselves, but I cry for God's salvation. They plead to God saying, "Oh God, save me," as if by this begging, God would be touched to love them or to turn and save them.

Thank the Lord. Those who have faith do not need to pray. Those who have faith are full of praises. Never say that prayer is a sign of faith. Please remember that, on the contrary, prayer is a sign of lack of faith. All experienced Christians know that where there is faith, there is praise. One hymn [Hymns, #690] says:

Hear the message from the throne,
Claim the promise, doubting one;
God hath spoken, "It is done."
Faith has answered, "It is done."
Prayer is over, praise begun.
Hallelujah, "It is done."

You cannot say, "It will be done." All those who say it will be done do not have faith. God said that everything is done. You also must say that everything is done. God said that He has accomplished everything, and I believe in this. This is all that matters.

The greatest problem today is that when you go to many denominations, you meet hundreds of church members who say that they believe that Jesus will save them. They believe that Jesus will and can save them, but this is not faith. This is hope. To do this is to annul the Word of God. For example, if I give this book to Brother Hu and he says, "I believe that you will give it to me

tomorrow," this is not politeness but an insult to me. Today God has sent His Son to accomplish redemption. If we still say, "Please save me," what is this? What we ought to say is, "God, I thank You because You have taken care of all my sins on the cross." My friends, a sinner cannot be saved by prayer. A sinner can only believe that Jesus has saved him.

Faith is not a merit. Never consider faith a work. Some say that they do not know if their faith is strong enough. God has made faith so simple for you, but man has made a simple thing very complicated. Suppose I have a brother who is short of money and has become very poor. Now I want to give him some money. I tell him, "You do not have to do anything. You cannot afford even to work. Here, take this money and go." By doing this, I am making the matter most simple. However, suppose his mind is very complicated. Suppose he would ask, "If my brother is going to give me money, should I take it with my left hand, or should I take it with my right hand? Should I take it at noon, or should I take it in the afternoon? Should I take it standing up, or should I take it sitting down?" He wants to study how he can take it. This would be the greatest mistake in the whole world.

While I was in Cheefoo, I met a sister. I told her that if she would believe, she would receive. She said, "I have been doing this for a week. I still do not know how I can believe. I do not know if this is the right way or that is the right way to believe. I do not know if my faith is strong enough." I told her that God has accomplished all the work. She only needs to believe in a simple way. But she was too analytical. She made faith a work.

Thank the Lord that it is the simplest thing on earth to receive salvation. We do not have to do anything. It does not mean that nothing has to be done. It only means that the Lord Jesus has done everything. God says that He has died. I say that I believe He has died. God says that the Lord Jesus has resurrected and become a proof. I say, "Yes" and agree that His resurrection has become a proof of my justification. He says that my sins are forgiven, that He has saved me. I will not wait. I believe, and the matter is settled. When I believe, I have received. Thank the Lord. This is all. We have passed from death to life. There is no need to feel anything or to wait for any peace or joy to come.

A few years ago, I preached the gospel to one person. He told me that he believed in the Lord Jesus, that he believed that he was a sinner, and that he

believed the Lord Jesus had forgiven his sins. But he had a problem. He did not feel that the Holy Spirit was working mightily in him like he thought He was working in other Christians. I asked if his sins were forgiven. He answered, "No." I asked him why. He said that he did not feel the Holy Spirit working in him yet. I said, "My friend, you are absolutely wrong. The Bible does not say that whoever feels that he has believed in the Son of God has eternal life. We do not believe by our feelings. Rather, we believe by the Word of God." When a person gives this book to me, I do not have to feel anything. I only have to believe in his word. Salvation is without any condition. There is, however, the proper procedure. The procedure of salvation is not work; it is simply to believe and to receive. Whatever God says, I say the same. This is to receive. Thank the Lord that His grace is sufficient for us.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

SALVATION BEING ETERNAL—
POSITIVE REASONS (1)

In the last few messages, we saw that there is a distinction between sin and sins in man. We saw how God loves us and gives His grace to us, how His grace is manifested in His righteousness, how the Lord Jesus has accomplished all the work for us, and what His death and resurrection have done. Furthermore, we saw how man can receive God's salvation. Man does not receive God's salvation through the law, good works, confession, prayer, and many other things. In the last message, we saw how to believe and what faith is. In this message, we will continue with our study.

The Bible shows us that the duration of God's salvation is eternal; it is not temporal. In other words, God's salvation is given to man eternally, rather than temporarily. Once a Christian is saved, there is no possibility for him to perish. I am not saying that there is no chastisement for a Christian once he is saved. Neither am I saying that there will not be judgment and loss of reward if a Christian is not faithful in the Lord's work after his salvation. A Christian can be disciplined in this age, and also be punished in the millennium. I am not saying that a sinner will be disciplined. I am saying that a believer whose work is not approved by the Lord will lose his reward at the time of the judgment seat of Christ. If a believer has sins that have not been repented of in this age, he will receive definite punishment in the coming kingdom. All of these are truths in the Bible.

The Bible also shows us that there is no possibility of a Christian being lost again, once he is saved. In other words, once we have been saved before God, we are eternally saved. Man always has the thought that even though he is saved, he does not know whether he will become unsaved after a while. God says that we have passed out of death into life (John 5:24). But we wonder whether or not we can pass out of life into death. God says that we will not perish but will have eternal life (3:16). But we wonder if we will not have eternal life but will perish. We do not know if our salvation before God can be shaken. However, after we read the Word of God carefully, we find that once a person is saved, he is eternally saved. We want to consider this question from

two sides. First, we want to consider it from the positive side. Later, we will consider it from the negative side.

In this message, we want to see from the Bible how God's salvation is eternal. If God's salvation could be lost, what would happen to man? Later, we will consider this matter from the negative side. We will consider verse by verse all the Scripture that seemingly speaks of salvation not being eternal and being able to be lost. We will see whether or not the salvation granted to us by God can be lost. In this message we will consider what is mentioned on the positive side. We must see clearly whether or not the Bible says that we can lose the salvation that we have received.

GOD'S GRACE AND LOVE

We have previously mentioned what grace is. All of the readers of the New Testament know that we are saved by grace. No one would be so incorrect as to say that salvation is by the law and not by grace. If a man says that a person is saved by the law and not by grace, he has never read the New Testament. This light is too great in the New Testament. Some things we can let go of easily. But we cannot let this matter go by in a light way. If salvation is by grace, then we can never be a debtor before God. If I show grace to others, I cannot expect any repayment. If I had any thought of repayment, and if I had any hope of being repaid, this would be a loan and not grace. If I give something to you with the hope that one day you will return it, this is not grace. If God gives us grace today with the hope that we will render good works to Him later, it is not grace either. There is absolutely no return regarding grace.

What does the Bible say about the way to receive eternal life? The gift of God is eternal life in Christ (Rom. 6:23). Therefore, the eternal life that we have received cannot be lost. What is a gift? A gift is a present from God. It is something that God gives to us. If others give something to us, can they ask for it back? We are not kindergarten children, giving others some candy one day and asking for it in return the next day. A gift is something given freely. If our salvation could be lost, Romans 6:23 would have to say, "The loan of God is eternal life in Christ." A loan can be reclaimed, but something that is given cannot be reclaimed. Once it is given, it is given forever. If eternal life is given to us in Christ, then it can never be reclaimed. The word gift in the original language clearly indicates that it is something given freely; it cannot be

reclaimed. If it cannot be reclaimed, then there is no possibility of us losing the gift.

The Bible shows us clearly that God's gift is without repentance. Eternal life is an important item of God's gift. Salvation is also an important item of God's gift. There are many other items besides these. God's gift is given without repentance. If there is no repentance, how can God reclaim it? In order to reclaim it, there must first be regret. Without any regret, there can never be any reclaiming. At the same time, if there is any reclaiming, it is no longer a gift. With giving, there is no such thing as reclaiming. Can I say that I am giving something and then claim it back again tomorrow? I cannot do that. If it is given, it cannot be reclaimed.

God is not like us, wavering and changing frequently. He is not one way today and another way the next. Once God has given us something, He will never claim it back. As far as God's character is concerned, salvation is given to us as a gift rather than as a loan. Hence, we have to admit that it is eternal. Thank and praise the Lord that God never borrows and never lends. He never expects repayment; He only gives. God is too great. Not only does He never borrow or lend, He never sells either. God saves us by grace. God is so great that He cannot sell, borrow, or lend anything. He is so great that He can only give away. Hence, we see that the gift of God is eternal life.

Why does God have to give us eternal life? Why does He have to give us the gift in His Son? Most have probably read John 3:16 which says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that every one who believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life." Why did God give His Son to the world? It is because He loves us. Why did God give to us eternal life? It is also because He loves us. If while we were yet sinners, God loved us to such an extent that He gave us the life of His Son, is it possible that after we become Christians and are weak and short of God's glory that He would reject us? If God's Son can die for us on the cross while we were yet sinners, can He refuse to love us after we have believed in Him merely because we are a little weak? If God's love cannot change, then there is no possibility for His grace to change either. He was so willing to give up His only begotten Son to die for our sins, and He had such a great love for us. Since the time He showed such love to us, has He completely changed? Does it mean that now that we have become Christians, He has decided to cast us into hell and not love us anymore? Humanly speaking, if He previously loved us so

much that He would die on the cross for us, how could He have such a change today? How could we be unsaved again? This is impossible.

Not only is this impossible according to human reason, but God's Word also says the same thing. John 13:1 says, "Jesus...having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the uttermost." Hence, there is no change in the love with which God loves men. Inasmuch as His heart was full of love for us when He went to the cross, God is still loving us today. His love has not changed. His grace has not changed either. If we think that there is the possibility for salvation and eternal life to be lost, then we have to conclude that there is the possibility for God's love to change. But this is impossible! If the source cannot change, then the outflow will never change. If the life does not change, then the fruit produced cannot change. We must know God's heart. We must realize that God cannot claim His Son back. Romans 8:32 indicates that since God is willing to give us His Son, He cannot claim Him back.

Which do you think is greater: the Son of God or our salvation? Is the Son of God more precious? Or is the life that we have received more precious? Because we are fleshly, we think that the Savior is not that important, and that life is more important than the Savior. As long as we have life, everything is all right. We are not that concerned about the Savior. But in God's eyes, the Savior is more precious. He is more precious than our life. The Son of God is more precious than the life that we received. Hence, Romans 8:32 tells us that if God did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things? If God is willing to give up His Son for our sins, and if He is willing to give us this very Son freely, would He consider taking eternal life back from us after some consideration? Suppose a brother owes me ten thousand dollars and cannot repay this amount. If I am a rich man, I may say to him, "You are not able to pay your debt. But I am gracious. Here is ten thousand dollars. Take it so that you can pay your debt." Later, we may ride a tramway to the pier. The tram fare costs eight cents per person, but he may only have seven cents. He may say to me, "Can you give me one penny, for I am short one cent." I not only have many more pennies, but bank notes and other cash as well. But what if I asked him for the money back and told him that he had to pay back the penny. Would you not feel strange if I did this? Yesterday I gave him ten thousand dollars. Today I do not let him go for one penny. What is this? You would probably say that I have a high fever and that I am sick. Why would I not care about ten thousand

dollars yet be concerned for one penny? If God has given us His only begotten Son through His great love, would He argue with us about the salvation that we have received? We must remember that the difference between one penny and ten thousand dollars is far less than the difference between life and the Savior, between life and the Lord of life, and between the salvation we received and the only begotten Son of God. Since God has given us His only begotten Son, how can He ask for salvation back? For man to have such a thought shows not only ignorance and a lack of understanding concerning God's grace and love, but sheer unsoundness of mind. Only those who are unclear and unsound in their mind would say such a thing.

Thank God that He has given us His Son; He will not claim Him back. Besides His Son, He has also given us many other things such as eternal life and salvation. God has given us His Son and has also given us eternal life. If He cannot reclaim His Son, then neither can He reclaim the eternal life that we have received. Hence, according to God's grace, it is impossible to lose the salvation and the life that we have received. This is God's clear word to us.

GOD SAVING US WITH A PLAN

Second, is our salvation an accident or a purposeful act of God? Is God's salvation like giving two pennies to a beggar that one happens to come across in the street? Or is God purposefully seeking to find a man to whom He can give money? Is God's salvation an accident, or is it according to a definite plan? Those who do not understand salvation may think that God's salvation is an accident. But all those who understand the Bible and who know God realize that His salvation is not an accident. Instead, it was planned long ago according to a definite plan. Romans 8:29 says, "Those whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son." Verse 30, a parenthetical word, says, "And those whom He predestinated, these He also called; and those whom He called, these He also justified; and those whom He justified, these He also glorified." The salvation that we are talking about involves all the things covered in verses 29 and 30. The history of our salvation began with justification in verse 30. We were saved at the time that we were justified. We only know that we have believed in Jesus and that we have been saved and justified. We think that justification is our first encounter with God. We think that the first time we touched God in our life was when we were justified. But the Bible says that God touched us long ago.

He knew us long ago. Our justification came afterwards. God's knowledge of us came first.

Some have said that Romans 8:29-30 is the only chain in the entire Bible. It is a chain of different rings linked together. This is a most precious and complete chain. The first ring of this chain is God's foreknowledge of man. The second ring is our predestination to be conformed to the image of His Son. The third ring is the calling of those who have been predestinated. The fourth ring is the justification of those who have been called. The fifth ring is the glorification of those who have been justified. It is a series of rings linked to one another. We think that we first knew God when we were saved and justified. But the Bible says that before we were saved and justified, God knew us already. Those whom God knew long ago, He marked out. To be marked out means to have a check mark put by our name, indicating that He has claimed us for Himself. For what purpose were we marked out? It is so that we would be like His unique Son, Jesus Christ. He not only wants one Son, Jesus Christ; He came to mark us out so that we would be identical to His Son. Those who were marked out are called. The ones who are called are known by Him. He called the ones whom He knew and marked out. After He called them, He justified them.

If justification is the first step in a Christian's relationship with God, it does not matter much for us not to be justified again in the future. If I pick up two pennies today and throw them into the fire tomorrow, it does not matter much to me. Not to be justified is, of course, a loss on man's part. But God suffers no loss. However, we have to know that the history of our relationship with God does not start from justification and salvation. Rather, it starts from God's foreknowledge. God's foreknowledge is the beginning of everything. To be marked out is the second step. To be called is the third step. Only after the third step do we have justification. If we were to lose our justification and become sinners again, we would put a question mark on God's omniscience. Since God foreknew us and marked us out, how can we still perish after we are saved? A person predestinated by God can never be thrown into hell and burned like a piece of wood.

It is a simple thing for us to make a decision because we change so easily. One minute we can be in heaven, and the next minute we can be in hell. We may change once a day for the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year. But since God is God, His foreknowledge and predestination cannot be

shaken. The God whom we know and whom we worship cannot change what He has decided. Because He has the foreknowledge, the predestination, and the calling, our justification is eternal. It is a small thing for us to lose our justification. But it is a great thing for God to lose His foreknowledge. For us to lose our justification does not mean much. But for God to make a mistake in foreknowing and calling us is a serious thing. God cannot annul justification without affecting His foreknowledge, predestination, and calling. If you take away one ring, the other three rings will not stand. Whenever our salvation is lost, God's foreknowledge, predestination, and calling are all negated.

In addition, there is another item. The Lord says, "Those whom He justified, these He also glorified" (v. 30). Unless God brings those whom He justified into glory, His work is not complete. If we cannot get into the new heaven and the new earth, and if we cannot enter into eternal glory, God's work is not complete. The last ring of God's work is glory. Until we are in glory, God's work is not complete. This is God's Word. What are we going to do with it? We cannot set it aside. God says that those whom He justified will enter into glory unconditionally. He does not say that those who are justified will enter into glory if they have good works. He does not say that only those whose works are approved can enter into glory. Neither does God say that those whom He justified must also be considered saved by man before they can enter into glory. There are no such conditions. All of the things that are mentioned here are related to God. It is God who foreknew. It is God who predestinated. It is God who destined us to be like His Son and to be conformed to the image of the Son of God. It is God who has called us and justified us. It is God who will bring us, the justified ones, into glory. It is also God who will bring us into the new heaven and the new earth to inherit the eternal glory.

Which of the rings is the greatest in the Bible? Some say that glory is the greatest. Others say that foreknowledge is the greatest. Actually, there is no difference between them; every one is the same. We cannot say one is greater than the others. As many as God foreknew, that many are marked out. As many as are marked out, that many are called. As many as are called, that many are justified. As many as are justified, that many will enter into glory. Hallelujah! Can God foreknow that one hundred will be saved, but mark out only ninety, call only eighty, justify fifty, and merely bring ten into glory? God cannot change. It is impossible to mark out many and call a few. Please

remember that the words "those whom" in these verses convey this meaning. "Those whom" He foreknew, these He also predestinated. "Those whom" He predestinated, these He also called. "Those whom" He called, these He also justified. "Those whom" He justified, these He also glorified. These "those whoms" join the five rings together. In the original language, the word "these" means "these people." So, those whom He foreknew, "these people" He also marked out. Those whom He marked out, "these people" He also called. Those whom He called, "these people" He also justified. Those whom He justified, "these people" He also glorified. We cannot be short of any one item. These are all works of God. If they were our works, we could get some saved by mistake because we do not know which ones should be saved. But if they are God's works, there can be no mistake. If we do not know God and His works, we may still think that there is the possibility of losing some people. But if we know God and His works, we will realize that no one can be subtracted or added.

The Bible says that God is eternal; He is not like us, having a beginning without an ending. God says that He is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega (Rev. 22:13). He says that He is the beginning and the ending. We sometimes have a beginning without an ending. At other times we have a good ending, but we do not know how to have a good beginning. But God is both the beginning and the end. God's work cannot stop halfway. If salvation is only the result of our work, then failing in regard to the matter of salvation only means that we have stopped halfway. But we know that salvation is God's work. It is God who has saved us. Hence, if we cannot be saved to the uttermost, this does not mean that we have stopped halfway; it means that God has stopped halfway. Certainly, we can never imagine that God can stop halfway.

Philippians 1:6 says that God has begun a good work in us. Since God has started it and has given us salvation Himself, He must complete this work until the day of Christ Jesus. We must remember that the work of God never stops halfway. He will complete this work until the day of Christ Jesus, that is, until God glorifies us. We can see how far-reaching is God's Word, how wide its scope, how long it lasts, and how deep its roots. Verse 6 says, "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun in you a good work will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus." Either God will not start, or He will have to finish what He has started. If God was not willing to save us, that would be the end of the story. But if God's desire is to save us, there will be no

way for us not to be saved. Therefore, we can say, "God, we thank and praise You, because our salvation is eternally secure." If it were up to us to follow up, we would fail. The work of following up is accomplished by Him; the work of preservation is also accomplished by Him. We can never follow up what He has started.

When I was in school, I had to practice Chinese calligraphy. Many times I was too lazy to do it, so I asked some classmates who were good at it to do it for me. Of course, later I made confession of this sin. Every week we had to submit five pages of calligraphy. All of them were done by my classmates. On one occasion after my classmate had finished one line of calligraphy, he was called away. He told me that he was busy and that I should finish what he had started. When I picked up the brush, I realized that I could never follow up on what he had started. His calligraphy was so fine that my characters simply could not match his. In the same way, the work of salvation was started by God. He must be the One to conclude it. If we had to conclude it, we would never make it. If the work of salvation began with God and was followed up by us, none of us would be qualified to be saved. All those who want to follow up do not know God and do not know themselves. If we know Him, we will realize that there is no way for us to finish whatever He has begun. And if we really know ourselves, we will realize that we simply cannot follow up. The entire work of salvation is accomplished by Him. He has given us salvation. He will save us to the uttermost. We do nothing to preserve our salvation.

Hence, we see two things here. First, because the nature of God's salvation is grace, it is impossible for us to lose it. Second, since it is God who has started the work, who has foreknown and predestinated us, who has called and justified us, who has saved us, and who will bring us into glory, God's attribute would be put into question if we lost our salvation.

REGENERATION AND ETERNAL LIFE

The third point that we need to consider is the salvation that God has given us. What has God done for us, and what has He given us? We all know that God has given us His life. He has regenerated us. All those who believe in Him and who receive Him are given the authority to become children of God (John 1:12). We are begotten of God, and we have the authority to become His children (vv. 12-13). John 3 says that we are to be born anew; it is the Holy Spirit who has regenerated us (v. 6). The first Epistle of John tells us how

man can be regenerated. First John 5:1 says that everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been begotten of God. How are we regenerated? We are regenerated through believing in Jesus as the Christ whom God appointed. After reading the above three verses, we can realize who we, as Christians, are. We are the children of God. When a sinner believes in the Lord Jesus and is saved, God gives him a new life. This is regeneration. The Bible shows us in at least three or four places that being regenerated is to receive eternal life. The Bible repeatedly shows us that those who receive eternal life are the ones who have believed, and those who believe have eternal life. This is shown to us repeatedly by the Gospel of John.

Here we have a problem. God has given to us eternal life, but what should we do? We must realize that this is both the beginning and the end. If I do not desire to have a relationship with someone, I have to approach it in one of two ways. Since human relationships are bilateral, they always have two sides. Therefore, not having a relationship also involves two sides. First, there must not be a beginning. If there is not a beginning, there will not even be a relationship. Second, the relationship can terminate and die, in which case there will no longer be a relationship. For example, suppose I am a very bad son, a prodigal. There are two ways for my father not to have a relationship with me. First, he should not have begotten me. If there had not been a beginning, he would not have to be related to me. But if there has been a beginning, he cannot use the first way anymore. In this case, he can only wait day by day for me to die. When I die, my relationship with him will be over. If I am not born of him, I will have nothing to do with him. If I have died, I will also have nothing to do with him anymore.

What happened between God and us? God has begotten us. At the time that we believed in Jesus, God begat us with His Spirit and with His own life. We have become the children of God. Can this relationship be severed? If you have a son today who is bad, undisciplined, and lawless, you can disown him in court. But the fact that you have begotten him still remains. He is still your son in reality. Today God has begotten us. Can He say that He has not begotten us? Even if we become worse than we are, we are still begotten of Him. Even if our father denies us, we are still begotten of him. No one can deny the fact of begetting. A good son is begotten of his father. A bad son is also begotten of his father. No one can nullify this relationship. Hence, when God justified us, He did not do it in the way that a person sends people away on the street with two pennies. He said that He has begotten us. God is in

Spirit, and we are also in spirit. God and we have a father-son relationship. This is what God Himself has said. He has given us authority to become children of God. He has given to us eternal life. We are children of God by authority. That is the beginning.

What then can God do now? He can only hope for us to die. But the strange thing is that our relationship with Him begins with regeneration and ends with eternal life. Not only has God begotten us, He has also given us eternal life. If God had started the work but had been unable to complete it, we would be finished. In that case, we could not be saved. As far as the eternal life that we received from God is concerned, it is impossible for God not to save us. Thank the Lord that He has regenerated us and has given us eternal life, which is the life of His Son. If there is a man today who thinks that a Christian can perish again if he becomes weak and that only a good son will have eternal life, while a bad son will perish, this man does not know God's salvation. He may think that the Lord is a debt collector, coming to collect eternal life and redemption. If we do well, we can keep them. If we do not do well, He will take them back. This is not the salvation of God. The beginning has to be of Him. The continuation also has to be of Him. Since God has given us salvation, how can we lose our salvation? Since God has started this relationship, and the life we received is an eternal life which can never cease to exist, we can never perish again.

God gave us another type in the Bible to show us that we can never lose our salvation once we have received it from God. Genesis 3 is a familiar passage to us. It tells us how Adam sinned. After Adam ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, God drove him from the garden of Eden and guarded the way to the tree of life with the cherubim and the flaming sword that turned every way (v. 24). Why did God have to surround the entrance to the tree of life with the flaming sword and the cherubim? Why did He not allow Adam to eat of the fruit of the tree of life? Genesis 3:22 says, "And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever." Here we see a picture. We all know that the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil signifies independence from God. The fruit of the tree of life, on the other hand, signifies life—the life given to us by the Son of God. After Adam sinned, God was afraid that Adam would eat of the fruit of the tree of life and that if he ate of it, he would not die. If Adam could still die after eating the fruit of the tree of life, then why did God have to do so much

work? Why did He have to guard the way to the tree of life with the cherubim and the flaming sword? God did this because He was afraid that Adam would live forever if he ate of it.

We are those who have been redeemed. What we have eaten is not the fruit of the tree of life, which is a type only. We have eaten Life Himself. Can we still die? If Adam could not die after having eaten a symbolic fruit, how can we die after having been washed by the blood of the Lord Jesus, having eaten of the tree of life itself, and having received eternal life? Adam knew the tree of life as a type, whereas we have received what the tree of life typifies. How can we possibly die? Only those who do not know what regeneration is and what eternal life is can say that salvation can be lost. Thank the Lord that eternal life is a fact that can never be annulled. It is a history that can never be blotted out. This is why we can live before God. What grace God has bestowed upon us! The relationship between God and us is such that we can strongly say that no power on earth can separate us from Him. Even if God were to be unhappy about it, He cannot annul this relationship.

WE BEING THE MEMBERS OF CHRIST

Let us look at a fourth point. When we were saved, not only did God regenerate us and give us eternal life; He made us one spirit with the Lord. First Corinthians tells us that we have not only become one spirit with Christ, but we have become members of His Body (12:27). In 1 Corinthians 6:15 we have the same word. It says that our bodies are the members of Christ. Hence, when an unbeliever is saved, not only has he received regeneration and eternal life from God, but he at the same time is joined to the Body of Christ to become a member of the Body of Christ. The Bible says that we are the Body of Christ.

If God saves us one by one in Christ, and if Christ died for us, washed away our sins, gave us eternal life, and caused us to have a life relationship with Him to become His members, what is our end? Salvation includes being a member of the Body of Christ. If we were to perish, what would the end be? The end would be that the Body of Christ would be maimed. This Body would either be short of an ear or short of half a nose. It would either be one finger short or one toe short. The Body of Christ is a definite truth in the Bible. It is a concrete thing. If we have become one Body with Christ after being saved, the

perishing of any one person will mean the missing of a part of the Body of Christ, and the Body of Christ will be maimed.

Once a black slave woman was working in the home of a white family. The lady of the house was a nominal Christian, but the black woman was a genuine believer. All day long the slave woman sang joyously. The lady was so bothered by the joyous singing that she could not refrain from asking why she was so happy. The woman told her, "Don't you know that God has sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to wash away all of our sins? Don't you know that we will be with God in the future? Why should I not be joyous?" The lady asked, "How do you know that you will be with God in the future? What happens if you are lost?" The slave said, "The Lord Jesus told us that the Father is greater than all. I am in my Father's hands. These hands are upholding me and preserving me. How can I be lost?" The lady thought about it for a while and then said, "But you are a fool! If God is greater than all, His hands would be large! If things can slip through your fingers, then things can slip through His fingers also. Since His hands are large, the space between His fingers must also be wide. If you slip through His fingers, He would not even notice it. You claim that His hands will protect you. But God is so great, and you are so small. There is no comparison between you and God. If you slip out of His hand, He will not know it." The woman answered, "Madam, you do not understand. I am not only in His hand, I am a little finger in His hand. If I were only in His hand, He may not notice when I slip out. But if I am a little finger in God's hand, how can I slip away?" If a man has believed and has become a Christian, he is a member of the Body of Christ and is a little finger in God's hand. If I am a member of the Body of Christ, God will never allow me, as a member, to slip away. I thank the Lord today that I can never slip away.

First Corinthians 12 says that if one member in the body suffers, all the members suffer (v. 26). We cannot have one finger hurting while the other members remain unaffected. If every believer is a member in the Body of Christ, then if one day one of us were to suffer in hell, everyone else would feel the hurt in heaven. If one person perishes, then every Christian will have to perish as well. This is the oneness of the Body of Christ.

Not only does 1 Corinthians tell us that we are the members of the Body of Christ, but other books tell us the same. The book of Ephesians talks about the process that the Body of Christ goes through. It also says that we are the members of Christ, but in a different way. First Corinthians talks about the

relationship and sphere of the members. Ephesians talks about the future of the members. Ephesians 5:29-30 says clearly, "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ also the church, because we are members of His Body." We are the members of the Body of Christ. Let us read the preceding verses. Verses 25 through 27 say, "Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her that He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word, that He might present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she would be holy and without blemish." If we read the entire portion from verse 25 to verse 30, we will discover one thing—the church is the Body of Christ. Christ is washing the church by the water in the word. He will continually wash her until she becomes holy. The end is to present her to Himself a glorious church. If there are any lost ones in the church, we will have a maimed Body, and there will not be the presenting of a glorious church. The persons will not even remain, much less the glorious church. This church has no spot or wrinkle or any such things. What does this mean? Ephesians 5 explains, "But that she would be holy and without blemish." To be without blemish is to be without any spot. If it is possible for the members of Christ to perish, then not only will there be blemishes, but maimed parts as well. But the Bible says that this Body is not only without maimed members; it is without any blemish.

Hence, we cannot lose our salvation. Since Christ will have a glorious church without spot or wrinkle, one that will be presented to Him holy and without blemish, none of us can perish.

WE BEING THE SPIRITUAL HOUSE GOD IS BUILDING

Fifth, the church is not only a Body. When the individual Christians come together before God, they become a temple. Every Christian is like a stone, and the church is the spiritual house that God is building. The Lord Jesus is the foundation of this spiritual temple. He is a great stone. Every Christian is a small stone built upon the Lord Jesus to become the temple of God and the habitation of God. This is what is spoken of in 1 Peter 2:5. If there were a possibility for Christians to perish, the temple of God would become more unsightly than our run-down meeting hall; one minute the stones would be taken out, and another minute they would be put back in again, and the walls would be full of holes. If that were the case, why would God not make up His mind before He saved men? God intends that we be built up into a spiritual

house. If it is a spiritual house, then not one stone can be lost. If any stone can be lost, the spiritual house would be in trouble and would not be up to standard.

The Old Testament record in 1 Kings 6:7 tells us how the temple of Solomon was built. Chapter five is an account of Solomon sending men to the mountains to cut the stones. The stones were cut in the mountains. By chapter six, they were moved to mount Moriah for the building. Hence, when the temple was being built, there was no sound from iron tools. There was no need for further cutting. The skilled workmen had calculated accurately and prepared everything on the mountain before the materials were moved to the building. There was no more need of improvement; everything was done properly. If while building the earthly temple, Solomon's skilled men could cut the stones so well that they were exact in every way and had no need for improvement, could God change us, the living stones, once every two or three days when He builds the spiritual temple? Could God have such oversight? Would God not know how to calculate? Is God worse than man? In the Old Testament, God used men to build. In the New Testament, He builds by Himself. Is God's own work inferior to man's? If the believers are stones for the building of the spiritual house, can they be lost? Therefore, if we are in God's temple, we can never be lost.

HAVING THE HOLY SPIRIT AS THE SEAL AND THE PLEDGE

Sixth, there is another very important and wonderful thing. At the time that every unbeliever is saved, not only does he receive eternal life and become a member of the Body of Christ and a living stone in the temple, but he receives the Holy Spirit as a seal. God places the Holy Spirit in him as a seal. Ephesians 1:13 says, "In whom you also, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, in Him also believing, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise." Is that not our history? We have heard the gospel of our salvation and have believed in Christ. What happened after we believed? We were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise. Every Christian has the Holy Spirit as the seal. It is very obvious that the Holy Spirit does not belong just to some special Christians and that only specially sanctified Christians have life. Verse 13 says that all who have heard the gospel of salvation and who have believed, have received the Holy Spirit as the seal. This proves that

the seal of the Holy Spirit is something that all Christians have in common. As soon as one believes, he is saved and has the Holy Spirit as the seal.

What does it mean for a Christian to have the Holy Spirit as the seal? What is a seal? There are over three million people in Shanghai. How does God know who belongs to Him and who does not? If you bring me a Bible today, how do I know that it is yours? There are countless Bibles like yours. The Bible Society recently published a report saying that it sold over eleven million Bibles last year. Among all those Bibles, how do you know which one is yours? When you go home and put a seal on your Bible you know that it is yours. Even if you were to mix this Bible with all the Bibles in the world, you could still identify it as yours. Today, because there are so many people in the world, how do you know who belongs to God and who does not? God has put a seal on you, proving that you belong to Him. God did not seal you on your forehead with a large wooden chop. He is not like the coming Antichrist, who will place a mark on man's forehead. God put the Holy Spirit in you as a seal. All those who have the Holy Spirit belong to God. All those who do not have the Holy Spirit do not belong to God. At the time a person is saved, God does a sealing work on him and puts the Holy Spirit within him to prove that he is of God.

If the seal of the Holy Spirit in us can be erased, then it is possible for us to perish; we may be considered as not belonging to Him. We may be considered as typical people in the world or even as God's enemy. But if this seal is within us, then we belong to God. How long will the seal of God be in us? The last part of Ephesians 4:30 says, "In whom you were sealed unto the day of redemption." "Whom" refers to the Holy Spirit. The previous clause says, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." This seal will last unto the day of redemption. How long does the Bible say that we will have the seal of the Holy Spirit? We will not have it for merely three or five years, or for three or five hundred years, but until the day of redemption. What is the day of redemption? Romans 8 says that the day of redemption is the day when the Lord Jesus will come back. The day of redemption is the day when our bodies will be redeemed (v. 23). Hence, this denotes the day when the Lord Jesus comes back. The seal of the Holy Spirit remains in us until the coming again of the Lord Jesus.

When the Lord Jesus comes again (not the time of the first rapture at the beginning of the tribulation, but at the time that the whole Body will be

raptured), all the believers will be taken up into the air. The Lord Jesus will send the angels to come and gather these believers. The angels are limited. They are not omniscient; they do not know everything. The angels are the servants sent out to invite the guests. When these angels see all those with the seal of the Holy Spirit, they will gather them. Hence, the Holy Spirit is not in us for three or five days, or for three or five hundred days, but in us until the day of rapture. Today if a man says that he can lose his salvation and perish, then I will ask him what he will do with the seal of the Holy Spirit. Since God has said that we have been sealed by Him, there is nothing we can do to remove this seal. God has said that this seal will remain until the day of Jesus Christ and the day of rapture.

In John 14 the Lord Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will be with us forever (v. 16). Once the Holy Spirit of the New Testament comes into us, He will never leave us. Never believe in the diagram that some Christians display, which depicts a man with a heart full of snakes, pigs, dogs, and many other animals. Next to the heart is a dove representing the Holy Spirit. When a person's heart is clean, the Holy Spirit supposedly will come into him and stay there, and all the other animals will depart. But if his heart is not clean, the dove will fly away, and all the other things will come in. This is absolutely wrong! The Holy Spirit can never fly away.

The Bible says that we should not grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30). Grief is the expression of love; anger is the expression of hate. Wherever there is hate, there is anger. Wherever there is love, there is grief. Please remember that both anger and grief come from mistakes. In both cases they are caused by mistakes. If there is love, mistakes will result in grief. If there is hate, mistakes will result in anger. If you love a person, you will grieve for his mistakes. If you hate a person, you will be angry about his mistakes. Both are caused by the same thing—mistakes. But the results are different. Here, it is not anger, but grief. The Word does not say not to anger the Holy Spirit. Rather, it says not to grieve the Holy Spirit. He is not upon us, but in us. When He sees our failure, He grieves within us; He will not go away. Why will He not go away? It is because He is a seal. As a seal, He will be in us until the day of redemption. If we read the Word of God, we will not be able to deny this fact.

In the Old Testament, Psalm 51 records a very precious prayer. There David prayed that the Lord would not take His Spirit of holiness from him (v. 11).

But in the New Testament, no believer can pray this prayer. Those who do not know the Bible may pray that God would not take the Holy Spirit from them. But those who know the Word of God know that the Holy Spirit can only be grieved within us; He will not go away. I am not saying that it is all right for Christians to sin. I am saying that at the time that we were saved, the Holy Spirit entered into us to be our seal. This fact has nothing to do with our weakness or our sin. The two are entirely different matters.

If we perish, who really suffers? If I lose a hymn book, of course, the hymn book suffers. But the first one to suffer is me. I have spent the effort to obtain the hymn book. I have paid the price and the money to obtain it. Hence, I am the one who suffers the most. How did God gain us? We were dead in sin and fallen. God caused His Son to die for us and shed His blood to redeem us with a great price. Do not think that if we lose our salvation only we have lost it and only we have suffered. Remember that we have been purchased by God. If we lose our salvation, God will also lose something. We have been purchased by His blood. Why does God preserve us? God preserves us for His own sake. If we are lost, the One who suffers is not us, but God.

The biggest problem today is that we do not believe how important we are in God's hands. Man finds it difficult to believe that God loves him. He finds it difficult to believe that God wants him. He always thinks that he is dispensable to God. God has given up His Son for our sake and has sent His Son into the world to pass through all the sufferings for our sake. He was crucified on the cross for the purpose of gaining us. If He does not care, then who would care? If I do not safeguard my hymn book, would my hymn book keep track of itself? Ephesians 1:13 says that the Holy Spirit is in us as a seal. Following this, verse 14 tells us that the Holy Spirit comes to be the seal because we are God's acquired possession. Therefore, we can tell the entire world that we are God's possession. It is not a question of our losing or not losing. It is a question of God's losing or not losing. It is not we who are keeping watch. We do not have to exhaust our mind over this matter. The whole work is His. If it were not, why would He send His only begotten Son to the cross? If He has exerted great effort and paid a great price to send His Son to the cross, He must exert greater effort and pay a greater price to keep us from being lost.

Suppose we have a most precious and expensive diamond ring, a very precious pearl, or an expensive gem. However much we spent to acquire it, we

will spend the same amount to preserve it. If we bought it for ten thousand dollars, we would not lose it easily; we would surely guard it closely. We have to realize that we have been purchased by God with the greatest price. We were saved by the Son of God. The Son of God is greater than the entire world and the entire universe. Do not think that God does not care for us. God treats us in the same way that we treat our own treasure. It was the good shepherd that sought out the sheep (Luke 15). It was not the sheep that sought out the good shepherd. The Lord Jesus said that one day He would die for even one of His lost ones. It is not the sheep's business. It is the good shepherd who died for the sheep. Before God, we are those who have been purchased by Him. If we are lost, God is the One who will suffer. Therefore, we must remember that since we have the Holy Spirit as a seal, there is no possibility for us to be lost.

Can the grace which God gives to man be preserved by man? If it were preserved by man, we would have lost it long ago. Not only would we have lost it, even Peter and Paul would have lost it. We have to realize that God has already set us aside completely. Everything is of God. God alone has saved us. God alone is preserving us. May God show us clearly how long our salvation lasts, so that we can remove all fleshly thoughts and accept His thoughts.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SALVATION BEING ETERNAL—
POSITIVE REASONS (2)

Last evening we saw a number of things that God has already done. When we were saved, God gave us His Holy Spirit as the seal. It is not that the Holy Spirit seals a seal upon us, but that the Holy Spirit is a seal upon us; the Holy Spirit is the seal of God upon us. This seal will remain until the day of redemption. Therefore, not one Christian can lose his salvation. Tonight we shall continue to see that the Holy Spirit is not merely the seal given to us by God, but also the pledge given to us by God to assure us of our eternal inheritance. The Holy Spirit is the proof of our receiving the inheritance.

Here we see that there are two aspects to the Holy Spirit in us. On the one hand, God puts His Holy Spirit in us as the seal to prove that we belong to God; on the other hand, God puts His Holy Spirit in us as the pledge, that we may know that whatever God will give us is guaranteed. One can see that these two aspects are different. On the one hand, the Holy Spirit causes God to know that we belong to Him. On the other hand, His Holy Spirit causes us to know that we belong to Him. We have already seen the Holy Spirit as the seal; now, we want to see the Holy Spirit as the pledge.

Let us read Ephesians 1:14, which says, "Who is the pledge of our inheritance." When we believed in the Lord Jesus, God promised us that He would give us the incorruptible inheritance in the heavens. How do we know that God would not change His mind and take it back? We know that God will not withhold it from us because He gave the Holy Spirit to us as a proof or pledge. The word "pledge" in the original language means a deposit. Originally, I should pay someone twenty thousand dollars, but I first pay him two hundred as a deposit. A deposit means giving someone a little today and a large sum in the future. Have you ever paid or received a deposit when you bought or sold something? When you rented a house, did you ever pay a deposit? Originally, one should pay thirty dollars a month to the landlord, but he first pays five dollars as a deposit for the house. When he gives the five dollars, he is saying to the landlord that the other twenty-five dollars will definitely come. God said that He will give you the incorruptible inheritance

in the heavens. How do we know that we will definitely obtain that inheritance in the future? How do we know that we will not lose it? This is because the Holy Spirit has been given to us. The Holy Spirit is the earnest money, the collateral, the pledge, and the token deposit given to us by God. When God gives us the Holy Spirit, He is telling us that all the inheritance in the heavens will be ours in the future.

If a person were to lose his salvation after his believing in the Lord Jesus, what would he do with God's collateral? For instance, I have a house which rents for fifty dollars a month. A brother comes to rent it by first putting down five dollars. This is short of forty-five dollars. He says that the forty-five dollars will surely be given to me. If after a while he does not give me the forty-five dollars, what should I do? I would confiscate his five dollars. However, God cannot do this. First, the promise God has given us cannot fail. Even if God had not given us the deposit, as long as He has spoken, He will fulfill it. Even if God does not give us a pledge or a deposit, when He says that He will give us an inheritance, He will surely keep His word. Because our mind is full of legality, God gave us the Holy Spirit as the proof for us to know that God has given us the deposit. Since we have the deposit, will He not give us the inheritance?

There is a wonderful portion in the Old Testament. Genesis 24 shows us the old servant of Abraham seeking a wife for Isaac. The servant brought with him a lot of riches and precious things from Abraham's house. After he had settled with Rebecca concerning her marriage to Isaac, he gave all these things to Rebecca as engagement gifts. On the one hand, the old servant gave her all these, such as what was on her nose, fingers, head, neck, and hand, to adorn her. On the other hand, all these things were an indication to Rebecca that they were only a little token, that eventually all of Isaac's possessions would be hers.

After we are saved, due to our unbelief, we may think that God did not have the intention to save us. We wonder what would happen if salvation were merely God's toy for us, which, after a few years or a few decades, may be lost and we may become lost again. God is concerned that there may be doubts in our heart. He puts the Holy Spirit within us as the proof to assure us that He will definitely give us the inheritance. My friends, when we look at the Holy Spirit within us, we will realize that we definitely will obtain the eternal inheritance. If God is not going to give us the future inheritance, why did He

give us the Holy Spirit? If God is not going to give us the future inheritance, the pledge of the Holy Spirit is meaningless. Our salvation cannot be lost, because the Holy Spirit has been given to us as the pledge. As long as this Holy Spirit is with us, we are saved. The Bible says that He will be with us until the day of redemption. Therefore, we can say assuredly and with concrete proof that we will obtain the future inheritance.

THE BELIEVERS BEING THE GIFTS GIVEN BY GOD TO THE LORD JESUS

Seventh, there is another reason why we will not lose our salvation. In the Bible we see that a relationship exists between the Lord Jesus and God, and a relationship exists between the Lord and us. Many Christians have not clearly seen the relationship between God, the Lord Jesus, and us sinners. Therefore, they misunderstand and think that they can lose their salvation. There is a wonderful word in the Bible that says we Christians, the saved sinners, are the gifts given by God to the Lord Jesus (John 17:6). The Father is here, and the Son is also here. The Father gave the saved ones as gifts to the Lord Jesus. If God has given us as gifts to the Lord Jesus, is there the possibility for us to lose our salvation? We have to consider the matter from two angles.

First, God gave us to the Lord Jesus as a gift. If we were to perish and lose our salvation, if our salvation were not eternal, God's giving us to the Lord Jesus would become a joke on the Lord. This is like a mother giving soap bubbles to her son. Have you ever played with soap bubbles? One dips a tube into soapy water, blows on the tube, and out come the bubbles. We know that those bubbles will disappear in a few minutes. But when the son sees it, he will be thrilled; he will think that the ball is great fun. He does not know that it will break after a little while.

If God were not omniscient, it might be possible for us to perish because God would not know whether our salvation would be temporary or permanent. But God is omniscient; He knows whether we will be saved eternally or temporarily. If God were not omniscient, it could be possible that He would give us as a soap bubble to the Lord Jesus. But if God is omniscient, He would know that after three or five years, that bubble would break. If He were to do that, He would simply be giving air to the Lord Jesus; He would not be giving a gift to Him. God is an eternal God; whatever He does is eternal. If God gives us as a gift to the Lord Jesus, He cannot regard that as a token favor only.

Second, for God to do this would cause a problem to the Lord Jesus also. Suppose God gave us to the Lord Jesus, but three or five years later we perished and lost our salvation. To us, we would have lost it. But whose fault would it be that we lost it? You could blame the gift given by God for being corruptible. But you could also blame the Lord Jesus for not being able to take care of it. Many times people have sent me some very good gifts. When I was away from home, I lost one of them, or damaged them. Either I can blame the gift for being poor, or I can blame myself for being careless in keeping it. God told the Lord Jesus that He gave those people to Him. What would happen if one day those people were to become lost? We cannot blame only God for giving the Lord Jesus a token favor, but we have to also blame the Lord Jesus for not being able to keep those whom God had given Him.

In John 17:6, the Lord Jesus said to the Father, "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world. They were Yours, and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word." All the saved Christians are given and awarded by God to the Lord Jesus. Verse 9 says, "I ask concerning them; I do not ask concerning the world." The Lord Jesus did not pray for the world, but "concerning those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours." Hence, we Christians are the gifts given by God to the Lord Jesus. Verse 12 says, "When I was with them, I kept them in Your name, which You have given to Me, and I guarded them; and not one of them perished, except the son of perdition." In the Lord's prayer, He said that He kept every one of those whom God had given Him. There was only one son of perdition. He was Judas. Judas never believed; from the beginning he was the son of the enemy and was never saved. The Lord Jesus said that except for Judas, not one of the ones God had given Him perished.

My friends, you have to know that God has already given you to the Lord Jesus; He has already given you away. This is like a girl being given in marriage. When we were saved, God had given us to the Lord Jesus already. Therefore, all those whom God has given to the Lord Jesus, who have believed in the Lord Jesus, will be kept by the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus said, "I kept them in Your name, which You have given to Me." How could a Christian lose his salvation again? After God has given you to the Lord Jesus, how could you vanish away? The Bible says that not one of those whom God has given to the Lord Jesus would perish.

God has given so many of us to the Lord Jesus. Think about it: After God has given all of us to the Lord Jesus, could we perish again after three or five years, simply because we are not good? You should listen to what the Lord Jesus said in 6:37: "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and him who comes to Me I shall by no means cast out." Why did you believe in the Lord Jesus? Why did you come to Him? You came to the Lord Jesus and received Him because God gave you to the Lord Jesus. "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me." In other words, all those who come to the Lord are given to Him by the Father. The only reason that you come to the Lord Jesus, that you receive Him as Lord, that you trust in His redemptive work and in His resurrection as your proof of justification, is that God has given you to the Lord Jesus. In heaven God gave you to the Lord Jesus, and on earth you believed in Him and came to Him. God gave you over so that you would come to the Lord Jesus. What does it say after this? "Him who comes to Me I shall by no means cast out." There is no way for us to lose our salvation because God has already given us to the Lord Jesus.

This is not all. There is another portion in the Bible, John 10:29, which says, "My Father, who has given them to Me." Who are the sheep of the Lord Jesus? We are the sheep. In the Gospel of John, we are shown numerous times that we are the gift given to the Lord Jesus by God. God cannot give us away as a token favor that has no substance to it, and the Lord Jesus cannot simply throw us away after He has received us. Do not think that our salvation is a small thing. Since we are not saved by doing this or that, neither can we be unsaved by doing this or that.

I thank God that formerly I was a sinner. I, Watchman Nee, was not asking to be saved. I rejected and opposed Him. But unexpectedly, God brought me through and caused me to accept the word which I had formerly rejected. God took me and gave me to the Lord Jesus. Once I was given, I no longer had any way to escape. When God gave me to the Lord, I received Him as the Savior. From that day on, I was in the Lord's hands. Since we have been given by God and received by the Lord Jesus, how can we escape? If it were we working by ourselves, and if it were we trying and striving to save ourselves, a little negligence or carelessness and we would be through. But we must realize that it is God who has given us to the Lord Jesus and who has saved us.

Let me give you a somewhat imperfect illustration. We know that recently Szechuan had a very severe famine. I read many reports concerning it.

Children two years old, who could not even talk yet, were stretching forth their little hands to beg. They begged for food and clothing and maintained their livelihood through begging on the street; they had no other way to go on. Suppose there was a rich person who had plenty of food and clothing at home. If I delivered one of these children over to such a person, in reference to the material things, the child could be said to be saved. Once I give the child over, he is saved. In the same way, we the sinners were dead in sin and perishing. But as soon as God gave us over to the Lord Jesus, we were saved. To be saved means to be given over by God. While we were dead in sin and were waiting for judgment under condemnation, God gave us over. As a result we are saved. This has nothing to do with you. Since God has received you, He could not forsake you again. You were a lost person. You had neither food nor clothing. God gave you to the Lord Jesus, and He received you. How could you be cast out again now? There is no way it can be done. God has given, and the Lord Jesus has received. The Lord said that whoever comes to Him will not be forsaken. Whoever is given to Him by God will not be forsaken by Him. Hence, there is no way for such a one to perish. If you were able to perish, it would mean that God would not be consistent. God has already given over; and the Lord Jesus has already received. How can you perish? It would be a miracle if it were again possible for you to perish. I can say to God, "God, I thank You. I was a sinner; I was dead in sin. While I was yet a sinner, I had no desire to be saved. But You gave me over, and the Lord Jesus has received me. Once You have given me over, and He has received me, I cannot help but be saved."

The Lord Jesus said, "Him who comes to Me I shall by no means cast out." The phrase "by no means" in the original language is very emphatic. It means regardless of anything. "By no means" is a strong expression, but because of our familiarity with the words, we do not pay so much attention to it. It means regardless of any reason, the Lord will not forsake us. There is absolutely not a single Christian whom He has forsaken. We are saved because of the Lord Jesus; we can continue in our salvation and be preserved in our salvation also because of the Lord Jesus. If we think that salvation is of the Lord but that preservation is of ourselves, we will discover that no one can preserve himself for even a single day. I am putting aside man; I am putting down man, but I am exalting the Savior. Everything is accomplished by Him. This is a gift; it is a present. We will never be forsaken.

THE LORD JESUS BEING OUR HIGH PRIEST

Now we come to the eighth point. It is precious to know from the Bible that the Lord Jesus is our offering, but it is more precious to know that He is our High Priest. Many times I asked the brothers and sisters in various places what we would do if the Lord Jesus were not our Savior. Many said that we would be hopeless. If the Lord Jesus were not our Savior, we would be through; there would be no way for us to be saved. Then I asked what would happen if the Lord Jesus were not our High Priest. Many said that this would not make much difference. They think that it would not make much difference if the Lord Jesus were our High Priest or not. We have to know that there is not such a thing. We can keep our salvation only because the Lord Jesus is our High Priest before God. There is no need to mention the former sins or yesterday's sins. The sins that we have committed today alone are enough to cause us to perish. We can continue being saved only because the Lord Jesus is praying for us. The intercession of the Lord Jesus keeps us being saved. Hebrews 7:25 says, "Hence also He is able to save to the uttermost those who come forward to God through Him." Why can He do this? "Since He lives always to intercede for them." The Bible clearly tells us that the Lord Jesus is able to save to the uttermost those who come forward to God through Him. Some people may tell us that we may lose our salvation or that we may still perish. If this were the case, where would you put the prayer of the Lord Jesus? God says that the Lord Jesus lives always to intercede for us. He continues to live to intercede for us.

Who can comprehend all the effectiveness of the intercession of the Lord Jesus for us? If we have a friend who is not saved and we pray for him, God can save him. How much more can the Lord Jesus, who is always before God interceding for us, keep us saved forever! Suppose you have a friend who fell away after believing in Jesus. You prayed for him and wrote letters to him with the hope that he would be a good Christian again. God heard your prayers. After a few years, he was revived. Now would not the continuing, eternal, and lasting prayer of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is always before Him, be much more effective? Because the Lord Jesus is the perpetually living High Priest who intercedes for us before God, surely we will be saved by Him to the uttermost.

I am very happy about one thing. Others may forget to pray for me, but I am still a person being prayed for. Man can give up praying for me, but I am still a person being prayed for, because the Lord Jesus always prays for me. I

have One who is the High Priest before God. Although man may forget, He never forgets. He lives perpetually as the High Priest to intercede for us.

The Lord Jesus told us that His prayer is for all those who believe; it is for all those who belong to Him. It is not for those in the world. John 17, which we have just read, is quite clear. Verse 9 says, "I ask concerning them; I do not ask concerning the world." "Them" refers to those given to Him by the Father, as mentioned in the previous verses. "I do not ask concerning the world, but concerning those whom You have given Me." Here we see the scope of the Lord's prayer; it is for those who believe in Him and not for the world. There is another matter which we can mention here in passing. The Father is related to the world; and the Son is related to the church. The New Testament never says that Christ loves the world; one only sees that God loves the world. On the other hand, one sees that Christ loves the church and gave Himself for her. The realm of the Father is the world, and the realm of the Son is the church. He said that He did not pray for the world. The effect of His work causes the world to be saved; yet His prayer, His priesthood, is only for Christians. It is not for outsiders.

He prays for us. What is the purpose of His praying for us? He prays for God to keep and protect us so that we can be like Him, so that we can be separated from the world, and so that we can be one. Regardless how strong the world is, how severe the temptations of Satan are, or how intense man's flesh is, the prayer of the Lord Jesus constitutes all the strength; He is able to keep us. If God were not a God who listens to prayer, nothing would happen. But God is One who listens to prayer. In John 11 the Lord Jesus said, "Father, I thank You...You always hear Me." If God continues to listen to prayer, it will be impossible for us not to be saved. Friends, before you could perish, you would first have to escape from the prayer of the Lord Jesus. The prayer of the Lord Jesus is the guardrail of hell. If you want to go to hell, you need to jump over this guardrail. If you cannot push away the prayer of the Lord Jesus, and if you cannot get rid of the guardrail of prayer, you have no way to perish. Thank God that the prayer of the Lord Jesus is trustworthy.

Let me cite a very clear example. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, Peter once said very proudly to the Lord, "Everyone can deny You, but I will never deny You." Afterwards, Peter failed. The Lord Jesus told him in advance, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has asked to have you all to sift you as wheat. But I have made petition concerning you that your faith would not fail; and

you, once you have turned again, establish your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32). Because of this word, Peter was able to rise up again after he failed. Not only was he able to rise up, but he was able to help many others. Many people have risen up even today because of Peter. Peter's turning again was not out of himself. It was the power of the Lord's prayer that was holding him all the time. Later, when he remembered the Lord's word, he wept and repented. All this came about by the power of the Lord's prayer. God listens to the Lord's prayer.

The Lord Jesus never prayed for Judas, because Judas was a perishing one from the beginning; he was not saved. From the first day, he was a perishing one. He never believed in the Lord Jesus; he never acknowledged the Lord Jesus as Lord. He merely called Him Master. Judas was a perishing one. The Lord Jesus could not pray for him. But Peter was a saved person; he was definitely saved at the latest by the time of Matthew 16, when he confessed the Lord Jesus as the Son of the living God.

We should not trust in our own prayer. Rather, we should trust in the prayer of the Lord Jesus. It is not a matter of us praying fervently every day. The question is not how many times we have prayed in the last few days. We need to remember that regardless of how many times we pray, nothing will be effected. It is not our prayer that keeps us saved to the end; it is the prayer of the Lord Jesus that can keep us saved to the end. I do not know how many of us here tonight believe in the power of the prayer of the Lord Jesus. Can you entrust yourself without reservation to the prayer of the Lord Jesus? You may think that Satan's temptations are severe, the world's temptations are strong, the fleshly desires are intense, and Satan's attacks are heavy. I cannot agree with your word. If we look at ourselves, oftentimes we will feel like saying we are finished. After a few more temptations from Satan, we think that our flesh will be out of strength. Many times we feel discouraged and are unable to continue in prayer. At such times, we need to look to the Lord Jesus. He is our High Priest. We have to lift our head and look to Him. We should say, "I cannot make it. I cannot even pray. Yet I will trust in Him. He is my High Priest; He can save to the uttermost those who come forward to God through Him because He lives always to intercede for us." We have to rely on Him. Since we have such a High Priest interceding for us, would it be possible for us to lose our salvation?

GOD BEING THE ONE WHO KEEPS US

I am not saying that we should forget about the difficult passages in the Bible. We will address those passages in the next message. But there are many positive things which are undeniable. Not only do we have the prayer of the Lord Jesus and the functioning of the Lord Jesus as our High Priest; the Bible records many other items besides. Our salvation does not depend merely on our believing, but it also depends on the keeping power of God. It is not we who are keeping ourselves, but the power of God that is keeping us. We are kept by the same condition that enabled us to be saved. The condition for receiving is the condition for keeping. It is impossible to have one condition for receiving and another condition for keeping. By grace we received God's salvation; by grace we also enjoy God's preservation. If we say that salvation is by grace but preservation is by works, we have never read the book of Galatians.

We have studied the books of Romans and Galatians many times. Romans talks specifically about sinners; Galatians talks specifically about believers. Romans says that man cannot be justified by works, and Galatians says that man cannot keep his justification by works. Romans tells us that sinners cannot trust in works; Galatians tells us that believers cannot trust in works. Romans tells us that the sinners' justification before God has nothing to do with the law and works; Galatians tells us that the believers' preservation by grace likewise has nothing to do with the law. Having begun by the Spirit, should we be perfected by the flesh? Having begun by faith, should we be perfected by the law? Hence, Romans is for unbelievers and speaks from the angle of unbelievers. Galatians is for believers and speaks from the angle of believers. If the receiving of grace before God is free, the keeping of salvation before God must also be free. The Bible shows us quite clearly that it is God rather than we ourselves who keeps us.

First Peter 1:5 says, "Who are being guarded by the power of God through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed at the last time." The last step of salvation is redemption at the coming of the Lord Jesus. Salvation can be divided into three stages. The salvation spoken of here refers to our redemption at the coming again of the Lord Jesus. Through faith we are being guarded by the power of God unto redemption. Are we the ones who hold fast to God, or is God the One who holds fast to us? Is it we who keep ourselves, or are we kept by God? The Bible says that it is God who keeps us. The guarding

by the power of God implies that if I were to become lost, the responsibility would not be mine, but God's. I speak reverently, that if we were to be lost, more responsibility would fall on God than on us. However, we should not have any thought at all that Christians can be loose. We will talk about this issue in the next few messages. The problem today is salvation. Salvation is altogether something to do with God.

Suppose I leave a seal with Brother Ma because I have to take care of some matters. If Brother Ma loses my seal, whose responsibility is that, mine or Brother Ma's? It is true that I am partly wrong for trusting in Brother Ma; but the direct responsibility lies with Brother Ma because I have entrusted my seal to him. If I handed myself over to God, and later I were to lose my salvation, indeed I would have made a mistake in trusting God. But the mistake would be directly with God. It would be God who would be wrong. We are preserved because of the power of God. Those who do not know God may say that the power of God would be inadequate to keep us. But all who know God have to bow down and say, "We who are being guarded by the power of God through faith will definitely receive the salvation ready to be revealed at the last time." Peter was quite sure that we will receive it. No matter what happens, we will be fully saved.

Why will we be fully saved? Second Timothy 1:12 says, "For I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard my deposit unto that day." Whatever Paul had deposited in the Lord, the Lord would guard unto the day He returns. Therefore, we are saved all the way until that day. Many times I consider what would happen if one day I, Watchman Nee, were to go to hell. My perdition would not be a big thing. However, for God's glory to suffer loss would be a big thing. For me to go to hell and perish would not matter very much, but the loss of God's glory would matter a great deal. My perdition would not be that important. But if I were to perish, God would surely not be glorified; His glory would surely be damaged, because it would indicate that God does not guard well. If I were to perish, that would be because God did not keep me well. On account of God's glory, all those who know God and His keeping power would say that there is no way for them to lose God's salvation. Hallelujah! We have no way to lose it. The Word of God is more than clear in this respect.

Concerning the verses on keeping, the one I like the most is Jude 24-25a. It is more peculiar than any of the other verses. It tells us what the name of God

is. The name of God is "Him who is able to guard you from stumbling and to set you before His glory without blemish in exultation, to the only God our Savior." What is God's name? God's name is the One who is able to guard us from stumbling; God's name is the One who is able to set us before His glory without blemish in exultation; God's name is the One who is the only God our Savior. This is our God. What is it to not stumble? It does not say that God will keep us from falling, but that He will keep us from stumbling. To fall is to lie down on the ground. But to stumble is only to make a slip. He says that God can keep us from slipping. Not only can God keep us from falling, but He can keep us from slipping.

No teaching in the Bible can have the sinners as its starting point; all teachings must have the Lord Jesus as the starting point. It would be terrible if sinners were taken as the starting point; but if the Lord Jesus is taken as the starting point, things will be clear. If we take the sinners as the starting point, the problem of sin will become obscure to us. There will be many things that we will not consider as sins. Many filthy matters will be regarded as clean; many matters that are weak will be considered as very strong; many shameful things will be considered as glorious. Even after we have become a Christian, we still consider many sinful things as glorious. With those who know God, there are still many sins which have not been judged. There are still many sins that a Christian considers as glorious. If a believer is unclear concerning the matter of sin, how much more will a sinner be unclear? There are many sins that God has already judged in the Lord Jesus, but that were not manifested as sins to us when we were sinners. Only after we believed in the Lord Jesus have we become clear that those were sins. When we were sinners, we were not clear; only after we believed in the Lord Jesus were we clear. However, even Christians are not trustworthy; there are still many things which they do not see. Concerning the losing of one's salvation, if we consider the matter from man's viewpoint, we will never see anything. If we consider the truths of the Bible from our own viewpoint, everything will become confusing. We may think that one thing is greater than others. It is only when we consider things from the Lord's viewpoint that we will be clear. The question is not whether one is able to keep his salvation. The question is whether or not the Lord Jesus is able to guard his salvation.

The proper view is one which stems from the Lord Jesus. If it is up to us to keep our salvation, we may not even be able to keep it for two hours, much less two days. But if it is the Lord Jesus who does the keeping, even if a

righteous person were to stumble seven times a day, he would still be able to get up. It is not we who are able, but God who is able. If we turn towards ourselves, our eyes will be in the wrong direction. The Bible tells us that we should look away unto Jesus, who is the Author and Perfecter of faith. The keeping power is the Lord's and not ours. We can trust in God because it is God who keeps us.

The question today is: What method is God using to keep us? Today we have given our life to God. But how will God keep us until the day of the coming of the Lord Jesus? There is no other way but for God to hide our life together with the Lord's life in Him (Col. 3:3). As I read this verse, I am so overjoyed that I could laugh out loud. Nothing can be better than this verse. I do not know if many Christians know how good this verse is. It is impossible to lose the life that God gave to us, because our life and that of the Lord are already hidden in God.

I remember when I was still an unbeliever, as a student, once I finished writing something very important. I told my schoolmate that it was a very important matter and that I would not sell it even for five thousand dollars. I had to go out for a while, and I asked him to keep it safely for me. I gave him that sheet of paper and left. When I came back, I asked him for the paper. He said that he could not give it to me, because after I had said that it was so important, he soaked it in water and swallowed it into his stomach. He patted his stomach and assured me that the paper was there and that it would never be lost. That day I did not know whether to laugh or to cry about it. That sheet of paper was in his stomach; it would never be lost. But neither would it ever be taken out. It was indeed very secure. What God has done today is something more secure. God has hidden our life together with that of Christ in Himself. Where can we find it now? How could we lose it again? God's life to us could only be lost if God Himself were lost. Thank God that God will never be lost. As a result, the life He put within a Christian can never be lost either. The life of a Christian is securely kept; it is kept in God.

THE PROMISES OF GOD

Besides the nine points covered already, there is still another point. Of the nine points that have been covered, none can be overthrown by you, or even by God. No method or way can overthrow them. Once a person is saved through God's grace, no longer can anyone cast him away. But the Lord Jesus

considered this as not good enough; He was concerned that we would doubt His work. For this reason, He gave us promises to purposely show us that we will not be lost. We all remember John 10. This portion of the Scripture shows us clearly what our destiny hinges on. Our destiny does not hinge on ourselves; rather, it hinges on the Lord Jesus and the Father.

John 10:28-30 says, "And I give to them eternal life, and they shall by no means perish forever, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and the Father are one." The word of the Lord here cannot be clearer: "And I give to them eternal life, and they shall by no means perish forever." These words alone are adequate. Here the Lord speaks in such a solemn and definite way that we shall "by no means perish forever." It is just like saying that we shall not be cast away forever, as mentioned earlier. It is also like saying that we will not come into judgment, but have passed out of death into life, as mentioned in John 5:24. These are all absolute words: "And I give to them eternal life, and they shall by no means perish forever." God is an eternal God. Those who do not know God do not know what God has done. If a man knows God, he knows that whatever God does is eternal. God does not ever do anything temporary. God never changes from one time to the next. What God has done is done once for all. God will not change after two days. Once God has done something, it is done forever. God will not save you today and cast you into hell tomorrow. He will not save you again the following day and cast you into hell again the day after that. If that were the case, the book of life would not look very nice; there would be deletions and corrections here and there. God is eternal. What He gives to us is eternal life. That is why we can never perish. We need to see that whatever God does is eternal. God will never change after a while. Man can change at will, but God cannot change at will. Once He saves us, we are saved eternally; never again could we be in danger of perishing.

What proof do we have of this matter? "No one shall snatch them out of My hand." The words "no one" in the original text have the meaning of "not any created thing." The Lord says that none of the created things can snatch us out of His hand. "I am a good shepherd; I gave life to My sheep, and My sheep shall never perish." As the Father has given the Lord the sheep, no created thing can snatch them out of the Father's hand. John 10:28 speaks of the Lord's shepherding. Verse 29 makes a turn and mentions the Father. Verse 29 says, "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one

can snatch them out of My Father's hand." The hand mentioned in verse 28 is the Shepherd's hand, and the hand mentioned in verse 29 is the Father's hand. Who is the Father? He says that the Father is greater than all. All things are included in this "all." All the created things, all the angels, all the evil spirits, all the human beings, all the created things in the world, including you and me, are included in this "all." The Lord says that the Father is greater than all. No one can snatch us from His hand. He has a big hand that keeps His sheep. How can they ever be lost again? Only one that is greater than the One who is greater than all could possibly snatch us away.

Some may say, "True, others cannot snatch us away, but I myself can go out." For one to say this proves that his mind is fallen. He does not know God's Word, and he does not know himself. After a person is saved, if he were to perish, would it be because he himself wants to perish? Or would it be because of the temptation of the world, the seduction of the enemy, and the attack of Satan? For a Christian to perish would mean that lust can snatch man from God's hand; it would mean that the devil and the world can snatch man from God's hand. Man does not go to hell because he wants to go to hell; even sinners themselves do not want to go to hell, not to mention Christians. It is clear that man is dead in sin because of the evil spirits' binding work. Everyone in the world is possessed by demons. All the sinners have demons working in them. If the believers can be snatched from the Father's hand, then the evil spirits are greater than the Father of all creation. Here is a sheep in the hand of the Father of all. If nothing is greater than the Father of all, there is no possibility that this sheep can be snatched away. Moreover, it is impossible even for us to escape ourselves, because even we are part of the all things. The Lord Jesus said, "My Father is greater than all." You cannot put yourself outside of the all things.

Thank God that verse 28 shows us the hand of the Lord Jesus and verse 29 shows us the hand of the Father. Verse 28 tells us about the hand of the Shepherd. This is not a matter of law, nor a matter of curse, nor a matter of mercy, but a matter of the keeping by the Lord's hand. Verse 29 says that the Father's hand is greater and more powerful than all. We should consider ourselves securely held by two hands: the Father's hand and the Shepherd's hand.

Not long after I believed in the Lord, Brother Leland Wang and I went to listen to a message in Jiang Wan. The preacher said that we Christians should

be fervent. We should preach the gospel and serve the Lord; otherwise, we would be dropped. After the message, I asked Brother Wang, "When do you think you will be dropped?" He said, "I am afraid that I will be dropped tonight." I said, "Yes, I am afraid that I will also be dropped. If I am dropped, I will go to hell." I further said, "If we can be dropped, what is the use of exhorting people to believe in Jesus any longer?" He agreed, saying, "I cannot even eat tonight." I said that not only would we not be able to eat, but we would not even be able to sleep that night. Those in the world do not know the danger of eternal death; they can still eat and sleep. We know the peril of eternal death; we know that we are like chaff before the wind. How can we not worry? This was my story before I knew about this aspect of the truth.

Thank God that it is my Father who keeps the salvation for me. It is my Lord who keeps my salvation for me. Therefore, I know that I am very secure. Twelve years ago, I was in Southeast Asia. Once I rode a bicycle through a big forest on my way to preach the gospel. In the forest, I saw a big mother monkey carrying many little monkeys stacked up one upon another on her back. They were like the human pyramid seen in acrobatic shows. The mother monkey carrying the little ones was running amid the trees. Every so often, she had to jump from one tree to another with a long distance in between. The mother monkey would jump and grab onto a branch of another tree. After swinging over a little, all the little monkeys on her back would fall onto the ground. The mother monkey would then jump down and let the little ones climb up and pile themselves onto her back again. On that day I watched them there for about two or three hours. They were very intriguing to me.

About two months ago, I was in Kunming. There was a Mr. Lin there who had a cat in his house. That cat gave birth to three kittens. One day I went to Mr. Lin's house, and neither Mr. or Mrs. Lin were there. So I went to see the cats. I played with them and used my hand to pet them. The mother cat took the kittens in her mouth and ran away. None of the kittens were dropped. God's saving of us is not like the mother monkey bearing the little monkeys; we do not have to hold onto Him like the little monkeys holding onto their mother with their strength. If that were the case, and if the branches were a bit softer, a few swings and we would be dropped. God's saving of us is like the cat holding the kittens in its mouth. No matter how He runs, we will not be dropped. This is the keeping of God. If you want to hold onto God, it is too strenuous. In three to five years, or even much sooner, you would be dropped. We thank God that it is God who is holding us.

Finally, let us read Romans 8. Last night we read chapter eight, verse 30. We saw five rings. There is no difference in importance in these five rings. We saw that all those who were justified will be glorified. The glorification here in the original language is in the past tense. God is an eternal God. From God's viewpoint, all those who are justified have already been glorified. Maybe, on your side, you still have to wait for a thousand years for your glorification, but on God's side, in His purpose and His plan, it has already become history. Therefore, He says, "And those whom He predestinated, these He also called; and those whom He called, these He also justified; and those whom He justified, these He also glorified." God has already glorified them, and they have already been glorified. Hallelujah! The history has already been written. How can it be wrong? Your future history has already been written, and there is no way for you to change it. Since God has completed the writing of your future history and the future events, He has determined to accomplish it for you.

Because of this, the beginning of verse 31 says, "What then shall we say to these things?" If all the justified ones will be glorified, "What then shall we say?" We shall say nothing. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" God has already made up His mind. How can man be against it? "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's chosen ones? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ Jesus who died and, rather, who was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or anguish or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword?" Here God is asking, even shouting to the whole world, "Who shall?" Paul asks "who" four times. "Who can be against us?" "Who shall bring a charge against God's chosen ones?" "Who is he that condemns?" "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Paul knew that there is no possibility for any of these things.

Paul did not say, "Who shall cause us not to love Christ?" We often do not love Christ. Oftentimes our love is shaken because it is drawn off by the world. We may not love Christ, but who can cause Christ not to love us? Whether tribulation or anguish or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword, all of these cannot separate us from the love of Christ.

Verse 37 says, "But in all these things we more than conquer through Him who loved us." It is not through our loving the Lord, but through the Lord loving us. If it is through our loving Him, we are hopeless. If it is through our Lord loving us, then "in all these things we more than conquer...For I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." This shows us clearly and definitely that once God has given us salvation, it is ours eternally. No one can overthrow this fact. These words are too high, too broad, and too profound.

May God show us that whatever God does, He does it thoroughly. God is the Alpha and the Omega. He never stops until the work is completed.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

SALVATION BEING ETERNAL—ARGUMENTS AGAINST IT (1)

We have seen on the positive side that all the work that God has done and all the grace that He has given us at the time we were saved cannot be annulled by the passage of time. We can boldly say that once we are saved, we are eternally saved. Once God has shown mercy to us, we are eternally under His mercy. Once we have the eternal life of the Son of God, we will never lose it.

Although I am very bold in saying this, we human beings are still human beings. Even today many Christian workers do not see this matter. Because man's heart is filled with the flesh and the law, he cannot understand how God's grace can be so great. It is too incredible to him. It is natural for man to think this way. Man is of the flesh, and the flesh is of the law. The flesh knows only the law; it does not know grace. Anything that originates from the human flesh is of the law. But anything that originates from God, from the Holy Spirit, and from grace, is of faith.

In the world we know nothing about grace and gift. All we know is to barter. All day long, our minds are filled with how much we should work and how much we should get for our work. We think that in order to gain anything, we have to work for it. This is our life. For years, we have bartered away our lives, our time, and our energy. We think that if one is to pay a certain price, he first has to be paid an equal amount. If he has accepted a certain amount, then he has to offer certain things in return. Our life is a life of bartering. Because this is the way we live, we also think that God's grace and eternal life toward us are in the same principle of bartering. When we hear the clear gospel, we may see the light for a while. At that time, we may realize that grace is free and that it is not a matter of bartering. But this realization seems to happen only at the time we are saved. Many people still have not been delivered from the thought of God's grace as a loan to us. They think that if they do not do well, God will claim back the grace He has given. But if a man knows the Bible and is clear about the ten items of truth mentioned in the previous messages, he has to admit at the very least that there can never be such a thing.

Everyone who knows the Word of God should never doubt what he knows because of what he does not know. Since one has seen clearly the sealing and the pledging of the Holy Spirit, eternal life, the hand of the Lord, the Body of Christ, the temple of God, and the promises of the Lord, he cannot overturn what he knows with problems concerning things that he does not know or understand. We cannot overturn the facts we know. However, there are still things we are ignorant of. What we will do now is to take a look at some of the things that we do not know. We will take a few of the supposedly contradictory arguments—especially the more convincing ones—and consider them one by one.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF ETERNAL SALVATION NOT LEADING ONE TO SIN AT WILL

Before we consider some of the problems in the Scriptures, we have to consider one strong objection and doubt that some men raise. Some think that if a person is "once saved, always saved," such a person will surely sin more freely. This can be considered as the most common and strongest point of objection. If a man knows that he is eternally saved and will never be condemned, will he not become loose, start to commit all sorts of sins, and be bold to do anything? Since this could be the case, is not this kind of teaching very dangerous?

I remember that a man once wrote a letter to Mr. Mackintosh—the one who wrote a commentary on the Pentateuch. In that letter he told Mr. Mackintosh that he had heard a preacher a week earlier preaching on the matter of being a child of God eternally. A young man in the audience said that since such was the case, he could do anything he wanted to now. Within a few days, the young man committed all sorts of sins. The writer of the letter complained that because of the teaching of "once a child, eternally a child," the young people had been damaged. In response to his letter, Mr. Mackintosh wrote, "It is true that once a person is a child of God, he is eternally a child of God. But I doubt whether the young man you mentioned is a child of God in the first place. I have a son. Suppose I were to say to my son that since he is my son, he will be my son eternally. Upon hearing this, would my son be so overjoyed that he would right away smash the window with a stone, break his dishes on the floor, pull off the tablecloth and roll the bowls on the floor, and do all sorts of impolite things before me? Can there be such a person? It is true that

when a person becomes a son, he is a son eternally. But he will not act lawlessly just because he is a son. If he acts lawlessly, I doubt if such a one is really a son."

According to the Bible, there is nothing wrong with the preacher's word. But the young man's action is totally wrong. To determine if a teaching is right, we can only judge it by the truth in the Bible; we cannot determine it by man's conduct. As teachers of the Bible, we can only be responsible for telling others what the Bible says. We cannot be responsible for telling others what the Bible should say. We do not have this authority. We know that the Word of God says that once we are a son, we are a son eternally. We do not know to what result this knowledge will lead us. The problem today is that man would not judge God's Word with God's Word. Man likes to drag out someone from the corner and say that since man is the way he is, how can one say that a man is "once saved, eternally saved"? It is true that some believers have failed and are weak. It is also true that some people are false ones. It is true that there are millions of believers who have different experiences. We can only judge them by the truth of the Bible. We cannot judge the truth of the Bible by what others have done. We can only prove them wrong by the truth of the Bible. We cannot condemn the truth of the Bible as wrong because of what they have done.

The starting point of a Christian is the Word of God, not man's conduct. Today you may ask me whether you are still saved, because you lied yesterday. I cannot ascertain whether or not you are saved based upon whether your lie was a good lie, a bad lie, a bright lie, or a dark lie. I can only tell you what the truth of the Bible says. If this is not the case, there will be no need of the judgment seat and the great white throne. We can only look at what the Word of God says. We can only judge man's act by God's Word. We can never judge God's Word by man's act. It is God's Word that says once a man is saved he is saved eternally. There is nothing wrong with it. Though it is wrong for man to act irresponsibly because of this word, we still must judge everything by God's Word. God's Word is our complete constitution and our highest court.

OPPOSING ETERNAL SALVATION DUE TO IGNORANCE OF IT

I once heard an evangelist from Shanghai say that the teaching of "once saved, eternally saved" makes a person irresponsible, loose, and not very

watchful. One can only make such a statement because he does not fully understand the Word of God. Only those who do not understand God's salvation can say that a man will be irresponsible and loose because he knows that he is eternally saved.

Such people are ignorant of at least three things. First, they are ignorant of God's way of salvation. They do not know how God has saved them. In saying this, we are not talking about the way of preservation, but the manner in which God has saved us. God does not threaten us with going to hell in order to gain our belief in Jesus. He does not scare people into heaven. Man always thinks that if he does not repent of his sins, change a little, and perform meritorious works, he cannot be saved. For this reason, he continues to look for ways to be saved. Is this God's way of saving us? Does God put the question of sin continually before man, threatening him to solve it right away? Does God threaten people with the judgment seat and His wrath, coerce them to do various things, and hold in suspense those who do not know what their future holds, to strive with all their strength? If a man has any knowledge of God, he will say a thousand no's to these questions. Those who do not know God will say that it is a good way to cause man's heart to be in fear and trembling and in suspense, not knowing what lies ahead. But those who understand the salvation of God know that this is an evil tiding from hell. It is not the glad tidings. God said the judgment is over. The problem of sin is solved. God's way of salvation is not to hold us in suspense or to scare us into pursuit. He has never coerced us into holiness, righteousness, and sanctification. He said that all things are prepared. The servants said all things are ready (Luke 14:17); God has prepared everything. Now He is coming to give things to you. However, we have changed things around today. We think that a man can be scared into being good. Please remember that a man can only be scared into fainting; he can never be scared into being good.

Second, those people mentioned above are not only ignorant of the way of God's salvation, they are also ignorant of the content of this salvation. What is salvation? It is not just a matter of God solving our problem of sin by His Son. Salvation not only causes our sins to be forgiven, it also gives us eternal life. God's salvation justifies us, and it also gives us the Son of God, putting Him inside of us. Salvation not only causes us not to be condemned by God, but it has put the Holy Spirit within us. Not only does it enable us to live forever in the future, but it has imparted to us God's nature today. This is the content of salvation. Not only do we have forgiveness and justification, and not only are

we not condemned and judged, but we have God's nature, Christ, and the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. As a result, man will spontaneously have a new desire, a new inclination, and a new aspiration. God's salvation adds something new to us.

Some have said that salvation is objective. But there are many aspects of salvation which are subjective as well. Salvation has not only solved the problem of sin before God, it has also solved many other problems inside us. Within us, we now have a new life, a new nature, the Lord, and the Holy Spirit. As this is the case, can we be loose? I am not saying that a Christian will never sin. But I am saying that if a Christian does sin, it is a suffering to him. It is not a joy. If a man thinks that he has received a license and a certificate to sin just because he now knows that he is eternally saved, and if such a one does not feel anything when he sins, has no sense of suffering, I doubt that such a one is a true child of God. I am saying that a person is eternally a child of God only after he has first become a child of God. I am not saying that a person can be a child of God eternally without ever once having been a child of God. The Lord is within us. He forbids us to sin.

Third, a person as mentioned above does not know the issue of God's salvation. For those of us who have been saved by God, there is surely a consequence, a result, and an issue. What is this issue? After a man is saved, can he then break the law just because he is now justified in Christ? Can he now freely transgress the Ten Commandments from beginning to end? Can he now do anything he wants to do? Please read the words of Paul in Philippians 3:6 through 9: "As to zeal, persecuting the church; as to the righteousness which is in the law, become blameless. But what things were gains to me, these I have counted as loss on account of Christ. But moreover I also count all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is out of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is out of God and based on faith." Paul had righteousness through faith in Christ. He received righteousness through faith in God, and not through the work of the law. Was he then free to do anything and to be irresponsible and loose just because of this? He said that the things which were gains to him he had counted as loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. On account of Christ, he suffered the loss of all things and counted them as refuse. Hence, with every regenerated

Christian, mature or immature, there is a desire for holiness, a love for God, and a heart to please Christ. I do not know why this is the case. I only know that this is the issue of salvation.

You may reason that because Paul was an apostle, he was therefore able to speak as he did in Philippians 3. Let us now look at the ordinary believers. Second Corinthians 5:14-15 says, "For the love of Christ constrains us because we have judged this, that One died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all that those who live may no longer live to themselves but to Him who died for them and has been raised." Here Paul gave us an answer. A man will not be irresponsible and loose just because God has saved him and Christ has resurrected for him. On the contrary, because of Christ's death and resurrection, a person will live to "Him who died for him and has been raised." While he is living on earth today, he does not live to himself, but to the Lord, who has died and resurrected for him.

Thus, the reason a person can say that he can be loose because he knows that he is eternally saved is due to three things: First, he is ignorant of the way, the process, of salvation; second, he does not know the content of salvation; and third, he does not know the issue of salvation, that is, he does not know what salvation can do for man. If you see these three things, immediately you will see that eternal salvation will not only keep you from lawlessness, but it will also make you godly. Eternal salvation will keep us from looseness and will make us sober.

Peter told us in his letter, "According to His promise we are expecting new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet. 3:13). Are we free to be loose now that we know where we are going? In the following verse, Peter continues by saying, "Therefore, beloved, since you expect these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace without spot and without blemish." Because we know that we will be with Him, we cannot be loose or lawless. If we do not know where we are going, we will turn around in circles. But anyone who has a goal, who knows where he is going, will surely choose the straightest path.

THREE THINGS TO UNDERSTAND IN GOD'S WORD

Now let us spend some time to consider some portions of the Scriptures that seem to speak of perdition after salvation. Before this, we have to know a

few things. First, the Word of God has absolutely no conflict with itself. On the one hand, God can never say that His sheep will never perish or lose their eternal life, and on the other hand, tell man that he will perish. Man can say wrong things, but God's work is a work of glory. He can never say anything by mistake. If it is so clear on the positive side, it can never be contradicting on the negative side. The things on the negative side must be concerned with other matters related to God.

Second, we have taken the time to identify these passages. Among them we see both genuinely saved ones as well as false ones. The Lord Jesus had a false disciple, Judas. When Peter was baptizing people, there was a person named Simon who might not have been saved. Paul also met many false brothers. Peter said that there were many false prophets, and John said that many had departed from them and proved to not be of them. Hence, in the Bible, there are the genuinely saved ones and the nominally saved ones. Some are not saved at all. Of course they cannot pretend or cover up forever. If we can clearly differentiate between these few kinds of people, the problems will be solved. But if you mix these different kinds of people together, it is like mixing the tares with the wheat. The result will be much confusion.

Third, many places in the Bible speak of the discipline of Christians in this age and not of eternal perdition. Do not think that because we are eternally saved, there is no such thing as discipline. Indeed, there is discipline. If you fail and have become weak today, God will discipline you. There is a difference between discipline and eternal perdition. One cannot mix eternal perdition with discipline. Many verses, which seem to speak of Christians being lost again, actually speak of Christians being disciplined. Not only is there the question of discipline and the question of falsity, but also the question of the kingdom and of the reward. These few things are fundamentally different. Many times, we apply words for the kingdom to the eternal age, and words concerning the reward to the subject of eternal life. Naturally, this will produce many problems. We must realize that there is a difference between the kingdom and salvation, and there is a difference between eternal life and reward. The way God will deal with us in the millennium is different from the way He will deal with us in eternity. There is a difference in the way God deals with man in the restored world and in the new world. The millennium is related to righteousness. It is related to our works and our walk after we have become a Christian. The millennial kingdom is for the purpose of judging our walk. But in eternity, in the new

heaven and new earth, everything is free grace. All who are thirsty may come and drink freely (Rev. 22:17). This word is spoken after the new heaven and the new earth have come.

Hence, in the Bible, free gift and the kingdom are two entirely different things. Eternity and the kingdom are also two entirely different things. One cannot put the two things together. In the coming millennial kingdom, God will reward man in a particular way. God will reward man with his rightful crown and glory based upon his works. But as soon as the kingdom is over and the new heaven and new earth begin, everything becomes a matter of grace. Everyone who trusts in the grace of the Lord Jesus will enter in. There will not be the question of work at all. One's personal walk is related to the question of reward, while salvation and justification for the sinner are related to the work of the Lord Jesus. We must differentiate between these two things clearly. Otherwise, when the Bible speaks of the loss in the kingdom, you might be thinking about the loss in eternity, and when God speaks of reward, you might be thinking about salvation. It is true that man's salvation is eternal. But before this eternal salvation is manifested, God will first manifest the matter of reward in the millennial kingdom. One cannot mix these two things together.

In addition to these things, there is another matter that Protestantism has buried in the grave for a long time. Although some may feel that this is something new, actually it was recorded in the Bible long ago. In the Bible there are at least three things which must be distinguished one from another. We have just mentioned two of them, which are the discipline that a Christian receives in this age, and the loss of reward in the kingdom. If we fail, we will not only be disciplined today, but will lose the reward in the kingdom. However, there is still another thing. In the kingdom, there is definite punishment. The Bible is very clear concerning this truth. When a person believes in the Lord and is saved, it is true that the problem of salvation is solved. It is also true that the questions concerning the new heaven and new earth and eternal salvation are settled. But if this one continues to sin and would not repent, he will not only be under God's government and discipline today and lose the reward in the kingdom, he will also suffer some definite punishment in the kingdom.

Some have told us that to lose the reward is punishment enough. But the defeated ones will still be punished. The Bible devotes much space to speak of

this. The Bible not only tells us that Christians may not receive the reward in the kingdom, it also tells us that if Christians sin and do not repent, they will receive very heavy punishment in the kingdom. We must distinguish this matter clearly. The question of eternal salvation must not be mixed with the question of nominal Christians. The question of eternal salvation must not be mixed with the discipline of this age. The question of eternal salvation must not be mixed with the question of losing the reward in the kingdom, and it must also not be mixed with the question of punishment in the kingdom. One cannot put these four distinctions together and make "chop suey" out of them. If one does that, God's work will become a mixture of everything that does not resemble anything. If God has made the distinctions, and we ignore the distinctions, we will end up with many unsolvable problems.

Today, we will first take away these four things. We will put aside all the words in the Bible that speak of nominal Christians, the discipline of the believers, the loss of reward, and the punishment in the kingdom for the believers. In the next few messages, we will cover them one by one. What we will talk about in this message are the verses apart from these four kinds of cases. We will talk about the verses that seemingly speaks of perdition after salvation.

THE ARGUMENT BASED ON EZEKIEL 18

We will first begin from the Old Testament. Let us consider Ezekiel 18:24 and 26, which say, "But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die...When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die." These two verses can be considered as the main verses in the Old Testament concerning this matter. No other verses in the Old Testament are as important as these. These are the most common and most frequently quoted verses. Hence, we have to devote some thoughtful consideration to these two verses.

Ezekiel 18 never speaks of salvation. It does not say anything about Jesus dying for man, nor does it say anything about believing in the Lord to receive life. It does not say how one takes care of the problem of sin. It does not

mention anything about the gospel or about Christ. If one tries by force to apply this passage to the gospel, he is confusing the issue. Ezekiel 18 speaks of God's government. What precedes this passage are things related to God's government. One must remember that things in God's government are totally different from things in salvation. God's government refers to how God works, manages, and arranges things according to His plan and will. If a man does not understand the difference between God's salvation and His government, and if he mixes the two together, he is mixing up God's law court with God's family, the father with the judge. He is confusing the word spoken by the father to the servants with the word spoken to the sons. He is confusing the attitude a man has toward his employees with the attitude he has toward his wife and children. Government is government. Government is not the same as salvation. The difference between government and salvation is as great as the distance between the north pole and the south pole.

Ezekiel 18 does not show us salvation. Its subject is how the Israelites can live on the earth. It does not speak of eternal life. It speaks of the problem with the body. It does not deal with the question of perdition for the soul. Rather, it shows us that if a man does not keep the commandment of God, he will die early physically. It is a question of physical existence rather than spiritual salvation. No one can ever say that a son's teeth should be set on edge just because his father has eaten sour grapes. If someone sitting next to you eats sour grapes, you might feel like you can taste that same sourness in your own mouth. But if a father rebels against God's Word and sins, it has nothing to do with the son. If the father has to die, the son cannot be a substitute for him. If a man sins, he himself should be cut off from God's promised land. This passage is absolutely on the death of the physical body. This is what the end of verse 2 tells us. Then, after these words, from verse 3, chapter eighteen repeats that those who sin shall die. This is not spiritual death. Rather, it is what Adam experienced, the death of the body. If a man sins, his days on earth shall be shortened by God. From verse 3, this chapter repeatedly tells us who can live on earth through the blessing of Jehovah. This is the context of the words preceding verse 24. If a righteous man who was righteous has now turned evil, he will die. All his former righteousnesses shall not be remembered. This has absolutely nothing to do with salvation. It is a matter of God's government. It tells us why God would not let a man live on the earth. It explains why many people die early. It is a word concerning the judgment of sin for the Jews. It has nothing to do with us.

THE ARGUMENT BASED ON MATTHEW 24

Now let us take a look at the New Testament. Matthew 24:13 says, "But he who has endured to the end, this one shall be saved." When many see this verse, they jump up in surprise. They think that this verse is surely about salvation and not about God's government, as we have just claimed. For example, some would say that since I lost my temper yesterday and did not endure, I am now unsaved. They would say that it is true that a person must believe in the Lord Jesus in order to be saved. But they would also say that a person must endure as well. But if you say this, you are twisting the Word of God. You have cut off the head and the tail in God's Word and have taken a sentence out of context. No wonder we confuse the Word of God! If you would understand the meaning of endurance spoken of in this verse, you have to know what was spoken of before verse 13. You must also know what was spoken after verse 13.

Verse 13 is not speaking about the Christians at all. It is speaking about the Jews. What evidence do we have? First, in the following passage we have the Holy Place, the holy temple, and the Sabbath. All these are Judaic matters. What these verses say is that the Jews should flee to the countryside and should pray that their fleeing would not be in winter or on the Sabbath. When they see the abomination of desolation, that is, the image of the beast in the Holy Place, they have to flee. They should not stay in Jerusalem. If this word is for us, how can we possibly know these things, seeing that we are in Shanghai and the image of the beast is to appear in the temple? Although we do have wireless communication today, what Matthew is speaking about here is a knowledge that comes after actually having seen something. Only one who is as near as those in Jerusalem can see. Hence, this passage refers only to the Jews.

Second, the time in this verse does not refer to the time of the apostles, nor does it refer to the time of the church. The time spoken of here refers to the time of the great tribulation. It refers to the last three and a half years at the end of this age. At the beginning of the tribulation, Antichrist will set up his image in the temple. This passage of Scripture has nothing to do with the church. It refers to the future, not to today. There is no possibility for this to happen today, because Antichrist has not yet come, his image has not yet been set up in the temple, and the great tribulation has not yet started.

Matthew 24 refers to the time of the great tribulation. The salvation mentioned here does not refer to the salvation of the soul. Rather, it refers to the salvation of the body. All the things mentioned here have to do with the salvation of the body. All those who understand the Bible know that this is the period of time when Antichrist will set up his image in the temple, forcing men to worship it and putting his seal upon people's foreheads. When all the Jews who worship and serve God see the beginning of the tribulation, they must not worship in that way and must not receive the seal. Because of this, they will suffer much. Many persecutions will come upon them. That is why the Lord Jesus told the Jews to flee when they see the image of Antichrist in the temple. If anyone has things at home, they should not bother to get them. They should hide themselves quickly in safe places. Furthermore, the Lord told them to pray that their flight would not be on a Sabbath (v. 20). The reason for this is that they keep the Sabbath. The women should not be pregnant at that time because it would be hard for them to escape. Woe will be to those who are nursing babies at that time. It would also be better if they did not face winter at that time. They should flee to the mountains or to the countryside with the hope that by chance they would not see suffering, persecution, and affliction. At that time, all the forces of Rome will come upon them like a net. They will suffer many difficulties. Many verses in Revelation show us this matter. These people will be saved if they endure during this great tribulation. Because we are too concerned for the matter of salvation, every time the word save appears, we apply it to ourselves. But one cannot apply this word to himself here. If he does, he will be twisting the Word of God. In verse 22 the Lord Jesus said another word: "And unless those days had been cut short, no flesh would be saved." When Antichrist is on earth, no one will be able to escape. Thank the Lord that his day will not be that long. Because of this, there will still be some who can flee. If one endures, he can be saved. Hence, the question of salvation here is not a question of eternal life or death. The nature of the salvation mentioned here has to do with falling into the hands of Antichrist or not.

THE ARGUMENT BASED ON GALATIANS 5

Galatians 5:4 says, "You have been brought to nought, separated from Christ, you who are being justified by law; you have fallen from grace." When many read this verse, they think that, first, one can be separated from Christ, and second, one can fall from grace. Such a one is surely not saved. This understanding is wrong. We have to realize the background in which Paul

wrote the book of Galatians. When the clear gospel of God was preached to Galatia, the people there heard it. After this, false prophets came to Galatia to preach the gospel. They did not change the first half of the gospel; they changed the second half. The first half said that man was saved only by trusting in Christ and receiving Christ. However, the second half said that before one believes in the Lord Jesus, he cannot have the righteousness from the law; but after one receives the Lord Jesus, he should have the righteousness of the law. Paul wrote the book of Galatians just to refute them. He argued that as a man cannot have the righteousness of the law while he is yet a sinner, in the same way, he cannot have the righteousness of the law after he is saved. We have seen in the previous few messages that Romans and Galatians are different. Romans says that while we are sinners, we cannot have the righteousness of the law. Galatians says that after a sinner is saved, he still cannot have the righteousness of the law. The subject of both books is not having the righteousness which is of the law. These ones taught that after a man has believed in Christ, is saved, and has eternal life, he has to have the righteousness of the law. The first thing and the minimum requirement of the righteousness of the law is circumcision.

After you are clear about the background of this book, you will know what Galatians is speaking of here. In chapter one Paul said that he marveled that the Galatians were so quickly removing from Him who had called them in the grace of Christ to a different gospel. He marveled that they were so quickly deceived to follow another gospel (v. 6). He also said that if he, an angel, or any spirit came and preached to them a gospel different from what they had received, they should be anathematized. The word anathematize is the strongest word of curse in the Greek language. It means that all the curse in heaven falls on the cursed one and that all the blessings are withheld. Paul said that his gospel was revealed to him by God alone. He received it in the wilderness of Arabia. This is the reason that his gospel could not contain any mistake. Galatians 2 tells us what this gospel is. In this chapter Peter pretended. When he saw the Jews coming in from James (vv. 11-12), he maintained himself as a Jew. Paul rebuked him to his face. Circumcision means nothing. Christ has already died. It is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives. Chapter three tells us that God's goal is not the law but the promise. The reason that God gave man the law was to cause man first to know his sin and then to accept the Son of God. Chapter four brings out two other things to show us that it is useless for man to keep the law even if he is able to do it.

Hagar represents the law, and Sarah represents grace. Hagar must go before Sarah can remain. Even if you can keep the law, you are just Hagar, and you still have to go. The first sentence in chapter five is, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free." Christ has brought us into freedom. We must now stand firm in this freedom. Do not lose this freedom. If a man keeps circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to him. If the system of the law is retained, Christ will have to be denied. One cannot keep the law a little and then ask Christ to make up the rest. Christ never does this kind of piecemeal work. Hence, Paul said, "And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to do the whole law" (5:3). Why would some not choose other things in the law? Why would some only pick up the matter of circumcision? Why would they only pick up what they liked and not keep the whole law? If they wanted to keep one item of the law, they would also have to keep the entire law. If one stays, all have to stay. They cannot choose one and reject all the others. Verse 4 says, "You have been brought to nought, separated from Christ, you who are being justified by law; you have fallen from grace." To be brought to nought from Christ means the same thing as Christ profiting nothing at the end of verse 2. It seems as if Christ is not expressed in you. You do not have forgiveness, joy, and peace. Furthermore, if you follow the law, Christ will be brought to nought in you. Here, it is not a matter of receiving salvation. It is speaking of the condition to be saved. Suppose a brother comes to me and says, "Mr. Nee, I should keep the Sabbath. If I do not keep the Sabbath, my salvation will not be complete." I know that this brother is indeed saved. There is no question about it. Now that he has received such a wrong teaching, I must tell him, "If you keep the Sabbath, the work of Christ will have no effect on you. It is of faith that we are in Christ. Now you have gone back to the law. You have fallen from grace." Thus, it is not a question of salvation or perdition. It is a matter of the condition for being saved. It shows us that a man is saved by Christ and not by himself. If a man keeps the law, there will be no grace.

We know that sin leads to perdition. But we must realize that the book of Galatians is not on the subject of sin. The book of Galatians speaks of good works. It speaks of keeping the law of God. Galatians is on the keeping of the law and circumcision. Paul did not say that they had fallen into sin. He said that they had fallen from grace. There is a big difference between the two. To be fallen from grace and to fall into sin are two entirely different things. To be fallen from grace is to be fallen from the principle of grace and to follow the

principle of works once again. Today, there are numerous saved believers who have fallen from grace. But they have not lost their salvation. Even we ourselves are the same. A countless number of times we think that we are through. But our salvation is because of the grace of the Lord Jesus.

Paul said that those in Galatians 5 strove to overcome, but they had fallen from grace to trust in their works instead. They wanted to have good works, but when they did this, they fell. What is to be in grace? Grace means that we are lowly and helpless persons. We can do nothing. We have received grace before God. We are in a lowly position. We are looking to God to give us grace. As such, we are those that live in grace. It is not a matter of sin or evil conduct here. If a man trusts in his own work, he is obstructing the grace of Christ. Paul rebuked the Galatians here for following the law after they were saved. They had fallen from grace. He reprimanded them for not having received enough grace and not having received enough mercy from God. To receive mercy and grace from God is to allow God to work. This proves that the flesh is incapable and cannot do anything. We can work by our flesh. But those in the flesh do not please God.

Suppose Brother Yau is an unprincipled man. Every day he earns a dollar fifty cents but spends two dollars. Tonight I have pity on him. He is short of fifty cents. I give him sixty cents. He is like this every day, and I have pity on him also every day. Suppose one day Brother Yau starts thinking, "Mr. Nee has had pity on me and has sent me money every day. But I have to think of a way to discipline myself a little." When he does this, he is doing what the Galatians were doing with circumcision. They were doing it in the flesh, and as a result, they had fallen from grace. I have met such people. From the world's point of view, I like such people. They do not want others to feed them the rest of their lives. They want to be independent. This is good. But the Bible says that, as far as God is concerned, this is wrong because such people have fallen from His mercy. Paul was not rebuking them for sinning. Paul was rebuking them for doing good. Paul rebuked them for doing good because their doing good meant that they did not need God's mercy anymore for the rest of their lives. They would not live in God's mercy anymore.

My friends, man's thought is totally different from God's thought. We think that we can please God by doing a little. But God is happy when we remain in His grace. He repeatedly says that He desires mercy and not sacrifice (Matt. 9:13). Mercy is for God to give you something, and sacrifice is for you to give

something to God. God desires mercy. This means that He likes to give things to you. He does not desire sacrifice. This means that He does not want you to give things to Him. If God can give things away, He will feel happy. This is salvation. Salvation is not to make us happy. Salvation is to make God happy. God likes to keep giving. He wants to work continually on us. He wants to give us grace. You might think that it is enough. But He thinks that it is not enough. You are a poor man and can get by with a few pennies a day. But now you are given a few dollars. No wonder you would think that it is too much. If God is to do something, He wants to do it to the uttermost. If you allow Him to do only a little, He will not feel happy. If you want to be saved, you have to willingly allow God to work. You have to ask God to be merciful to you. God can only be happy if He is allowed to work this way. If you keep trying to give God something, He will not feel happy. When God sees you being shown mercy, He is happy. This is why I say that God desires mercy and not sacrifice.

Galatians 5:4 says that we should not fall outside of grace. It does not say that we should not fall into sin. What is contended here is not the question of salvation, but the question of enjoyment. Before God, we need not move, and we need not keep the law. We do not have to do anything. We should just allow God to work on us and to give us grace. Once we have works, we are fallen from grace. Hence, to say that one has fallen from grace does not refer to the question of salvation and perdition. To be fallen from grace is a question of whether or not we enjoy Christ's benefits for us. To be fallen from grace is a matter of whether or not one allows the work of Christ to operate in him. We thank the Lord that salvation means to be continually under God's mercy and to be continually under His grace.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

SALVATION BEING ETERNAL—
ARGUMENTS AGAINST IT (2)

NO TEACHING CONCERNING ETERNAL DEATH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the last message we read Ezekiel 18. Here let me add a few additional words. All those who study the Old Testament carefully and who understand the Old Testament know that it does not have the teaching of eternal death, nor does it have anything like eternal punishment. All the deaths mentioned in the Old Testament refer to the death of the body, and the only place that people go after they die is Hades, and not hell. Two or three places seem to speak of hell. But they are either wrong translations or should be interpreted otherwise. All the deaths mentioned in the Old Testament are the death in the body. They are not eternal death. The Old Testament was written to the Jews. Because they were earthly men, their failures were also earthly failures, and their punishments, earthly punishments.

I am not saying that there is no such thing as eternal death in the Old Testament; there is such a thing in the Old Testament. But the Old Testament never teaches us about eternal death. In the Old Testament, those that were blessed by God had much cattle, sheep, gold, and silver bestowed upon them. These were the signs of God's blessing. But in the New Testament, those who are blessed by God can say, "Silver and gold I do not possess, but what I have, this I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene...walk!" (Acts 3:6). In the Old Testament, there were the gold and the silver. In the New Testament, there is no silver or gold. The Old Testament, though not exclusively dealing with things in the flesh, mainly speaks of the physical and material aspect of things. In the Old Testament, when a man was blessed by God, he would enjoy long life, have many offspring, and have much wealth. These are the blessings of the Old Testament. But in the New Testament, we do not see these things. On the contrary, we see that James died. Stephen died. Many were martyred for the sake of loving the Lord. They were not at all cursed. Moreover, the New Testament never made offspring an item of blessing. On the contrary, those who live for the Lord should remain virgins.

Hence, what the Old Testament shows us and what the New Testament shows us are two entirely different things.

This does not mean that in the Old Testament there is no such thing as eternal death. But this is not taught as a teaching. Because man does not understand this truth, the New Testament tells us about eternal death. In the Old Testament are a few places that seem to speak of eternal death, but are wrong translations. One of them is translated as the wicked being turned into hell (Psa. 9:17). But actually it should be translated as the wicked going to Sheol. It is temporary, and it is not for eternity. In Isaiah 66:24 it mentions worms which shall not die and the fire which will not be quenched. It seems that this is speaking of the same thing that the Gospel of Mark speaks of (Mark 9:48). But please remember that Isaiah was not saying that unless the Israelites repented they would go down to hell, where the worm will not die and the fire will not be quenched. Isaiah was prophesying concerning a group of people who will go to hell at the end of the millennium, where the worm will not die and the fire will not be quenched. Isaiah was not speaking of eternal death at all. If we drag him into the subject of eternal death, we are trying to import something foreign. This would become an imported item.

CHRIST OF NONE EFFECT

BEING DIFFERENT FROM SEPARATION FROM CHRIST

One thing more we have to know. Galatians 5:4 says, "You have been brought to nought, separated from Christ, you who are being justified by law; you have fallen from grace." In the original language the word "brought to nought" is katargeo. This is a passive verb. There is a little of the sense of separation. Kata has somewhat the sense of detachment, but the sense is not very strong. The word katargeo means to be led away from the effect and the function. Stephan's lexicon of Greek words can be considered as one of the best. It tells us that the word here means to be led away from the function. One must see the difference between separation from Christ and being led away from the effect of Christ. These are two different things. If a man has left Christ and is separated from Him, then everything is through. But this is not what Paul was saying here. Paul said that if they keep the law, they have fallen from grace. If they want to hold on to the law, they have to let go of grace. If they follow the law, they will lose the effect of Christ.

What is the effect of Christ? If the effect of Christ is manifested in me, I can rejoice. Though I may be weak and worthless, I know that His grace is sufficient for me, and my heart is able to be at peace. This joy and peace that I have in my heart is the effect of Christ on me. This is Christ working out His effect on me. I do not try to be saved by my works. I know that I am saved already. I do not have to strive to be saved. I do not have to plead desperately. Nor do I have to struggle. I can rest in His work. This is the effect of Christ. Today many Christians have turned away from Christ. Christ does not have much effect on them.

Suppose I owe someone a great deal of money. I cannot repay it even if I were to sell all that I have. Now I have a best friend. He says that since I am so heavily in debt, he will write a check for me so that I can clear my debts. But I am a lazy man. I am too lazy to cash the check. Now do I have money at home? I do, but I also have a debt at home. I have the check, but the check has no effect on me. The debt is still there; it has not been repaid. I am still bearing the burden of the debt. Today God has given us the check already. But we have not cashed in on the effect of this check.

Hence, to be separated from Christ and to have Christ made of none effect on us are two different things. To be separated from Christ is to be not saved. But we can never be separated from Christ. Romans 8 tells us that there is no way for us to be separated from Christ. It says that no one can separate us from the love of Christ. The grace we receive from Christ and the blessing we have from God are ordained by God. No one can overturn them. They cannot be overturned, because they are based on righteousness. Through the many things that Christ has accomplished for us, the problem of eternal life and death is solved. There is no way to overturn this, for this is based on righteousness. But on the subjective side, the absence of peace in the heart and the continual presence of unhappiness is a Christian problem. A man may worry about how he can receive grace and how he can preserve his salvation. Every day his heart is held in suspense, not knowing what he should do. When a man has turned away from the effect of Christ, he will not receive the effect he should receive from Christ. Hence, Galatians 5:4 shows us that for a man to pursue after law is for him to fall from grace. When he falls from grace, he is away from the effect of Christ. Therefore, this does not refer to man's losing his salvation after he is saved. Rather, it refers to one's not having the joy and peace of salvation.

THE ARGUMENT BASED ON 1 CORINTHIANS 8:11

In this message, we will consider a few more verses. First Corinthians 8:11 says in the King James Version, "And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?" This verse presents a problem. This person mentioned here is definitely saved, for he is called a brother. It is true that he is a weak brother. But nevertheless he is a brother, a person who belongs to the Lord. But here it says that he could perish. The word perish, *apollumi,* carries two meanings in the original language. One can be translated as perish. The other can be translated as destroy. But this word is the same as the word perish used in John 3:16. John 3:16 says that everyone who believes in Him shall not *apollumi*, but have eternal life. If we can use the word destroy in 1 Corinthians 8:11, then we can translate John 3:16 as destroy also. Here then is a problem.

When we read the Bible, we cannot read it in a superficial way. We have to study the context in detail. Only after reading the context carefully can we know what the verse says. One cannot hear clearly what others are saying by leaning the ear against someone's window. One of the most foolish things on earth is to listen to others through the keyhole behind closed doors, for one may not catch what is spoken before or after. If you pull a sentence out of context from the Bible, you will surely not be able to understand it clearly. To understand it clearly, one must read the context.

The subject of 1 Corinthians 8 is on the forbidding of Christians from eating food offered to idols in the idol temple. The Corinthian believers proposed that it was all right for Christians to eat food offered to idols in the idol temple. Their reason was that there is only one God in heaven and on earth. The idols are nothing. If one offers food to the idols, and the idols are real, then the offerings are real offerings. If the idols are not real, then the offerings are not offerings at all, but are food only. If they are not offerings, what harm is there to eat them? If the idols are not real, then the temples are but non-temples, and it would not mean anything for one to eat the offerings in the temples of the idols. They therefore thought that the offerings could be eaten. This is what the Corinthians said.

But Paul said that the offerings should not be eaten. His reason was not that the idols were real or the temples real. At the beginning of chapter eight, Paul said, "Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all

have knowledge." The word "we" refers to the Corinthian believers. Because all have knowledge, therefore they can eat. However, "knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." The purpose of love is to build others up, whereas knowledge puffs up. It is true that the Father is God, that Jesus is the Lord, and that the idols are nothing. But there were many weak brothers in the church in Corinth. They did not have the knowledge; their minds were not as keen as yours are. Although you can turn the words around and consider there to be nothing, these ones do not understand the things you are saying. They still think that it is against the commandment of the Lord to do something like this. One has to remember who these people were and what their backgrounds were. Today you may think that idols are nothing. But these ones had offered to idols before, thinking that they were offering to God; they thought that the idols were gods. When you eat, you do not feel anything. But if they eat, they would be reviewing their past sins. They were not like you. You have the knowledge, and therefore you can eat and go away. But they would feel that they were doing the same thing that they had done before and were sinning the same way they had sinned before. In their mind, they still consider this as sin. Hence, for the sake of the other Christians, and for the sake of loving them, though you may have the knowledge, you would rather not do it. You have the knowledge, but they do not have the knowledge. They feel condemned in their conscience before God. They feel that they have committed some great sin and are falling away again. Therefore, for their sake, we would not eat. This is the general meaning of this passage.

First Corinthians 8:4 to 7 say, "Concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, either in heaven or on earth, even as there are many gods and many lords, yet to us there is one God, the Father, out from whom are all things, and we are unto Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we are through Him. But this knowledge is not in all men; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat the food as an idol sacrifice, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled." Please notice the word accustomed here. This was their past habit. Verse 12 says, "And sinning in this way against the brothers and wounding their weak conscience, you sin against Christ." This passage teaches people to refrain from food offered to idols on account of the love for the brothers. You cannot act freely and put your brother into trouble simply because you have the knowledge.

From verse 7 until the end, the problem was that of the conscience. It was not a problem of the spirit. Paul was not talking here about eternal salvation or eternal perdition. Paul was telling us what to do in relation to a brother with a weak conscience. If a man does something that he knows he can do, his conscience will not condemn him. But if he does something that he knows he should not do, his conscience will condemn and rebuke him continually. For example, we know that we do not need to keep the Lord's Day, and we do not need to keep the Sabbath. It is all right to shop and to work on the Lord's Day. Our conscience never condemns us. This is a grace of the New Testament. The Lord has not laid upon us the burden of the Sabbath. But some do not have this knowledge. When they shop on the Lord's Day, they think that they have sinned a great sin. After such a one does this, his conscience will not be at peace. Sometimes the question of sin is simply a question of the conscience. Man's conscience determines for him what his sins are.

Paul was saying that here is a weak brother. Formerly he worshipped idols. Now he sees others eating, and he wants to join them. For you to eat is all right, because you have the discernment and you know that the idols mean nothing. You could therefore freely eat. He eats, not because he has the discernment, but because he sees you eating. All the time he is eating, he has no peace. You eat with joy. He eats with fear. After this meal, he can no longer pray. His conscience tells him that he has just sinned and that he has forsaken God to worship idols just as he used to do. His conscience begins to perish before God. He feels guilty before God. He thinks that he is through and that he has gone back to his former sins again.

In addition to John 3:16, the original word for perish also appears in Luke 13, 15, and 21. But in those three places, this word was used very differently. In chapter thirteen, Pilate had killed quite a number of people and had mixed their blood with their sacrifices. The Lord Jesus told the people that they should not consider these Galileans to be more sinful than they were. Unless they repented, they would all likewise perish. The perishing here refers to the body being killed; it has nothing to do with man's soul. The Lord said that there were eighteen killed when the tower in Siloam fell. Unless these repented, they would similarly perish. This refers to the killing of the outward body.

In the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15, the prodigal said, "How many of my father's hired servants abound in bread, but I am perishing here in famine!" Perishing here does not refer to the perishing of the soul. Hence, this word does not refer only to eternal death, but to the killing of the body and to starvation. One can be considered as perishing when he is killed. He can also be considered as perishing when he is starving to death.

In Luke 21 the Lord says that the hair of our head shall by no means perish. Even our hair can perish. Now this cannot possibly mean eternal death anymore. From these three places, one can immediately get an idea of what Paul referred to here. He was referring to something that would cause the conscience of a weak brother to perish. In the meeting he would not be able to pray anymore. He would think that he was through, that he had worshipped idols again and had eaten of the food offered to idols in the idol temple again. He would think that he had left the living God again, and his conscience would be destroyed because of you.

If we read this portion of the Scripture in 1 Corinthians 8 carefully from verse 7 on, we will see why Paul said what he did. "But this knowledge is not in all men; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat the food as an idol sacrifice, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled." Please note that this refers to those whose conscience, being weak, is defiled. "But food will not commend us to God; neither if we do not eat are we lacking, nor if we eat do we abound." This is absolutely our standard: If we eat there is no merit, and if we do not eat, there is no loss. But those without the knowledge have a problem here. "But beware lest somehow this right of yours become a stumbling block to the weak ones." The weakness here does not refer to a moral weakness or a doctrinal weakness. Rather, it refers to weakness in the conscience. If it meant weakness in one's moral condition or doctrine, the verse would lose its meaning. It refers rather to the weakness in the conscience. "For if anyone sees you who have knowledge reclining at table in an idol temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be emboldened to eat the things sacrificed to the idols?" Those with a weak conscience think that since others can eat it, so can they. But if such a one eats it, his conscience will be defiled. "And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?" (KJV). Hence, the perishing here does not refer to eternal perdition of a saved brother. The perishing here refers to the spiritual stumbling of a brother due to weakness.

If what 1 Corinthians 8 says is that a brother's knowledge can cause another to eternally perish, then I can say that a person's being saved or perishing depends on another's knowledge. If that were the case, I could send every one of you to hell by my knowledge. If that were the case, man's perishing would not be determined by himself, but by some others. We know that there can be no such thing. The Bible says that all who believe in the Lord Jesus will have eternal life. Whether or not a man will perish before God depends on whether he believes in the Lord Jesus. How could others bring me to hell? This is absolutely unscriptural. Concerning the use of the word perishing, we can say that perishing here does not refer to the matter of eternal life and death. Rather, it refers to the damaging of the conscience and the bringing of a person under.

Let us go on. Verse 12 says, "And sinning in this way against the brothers and wounding their weak conscience, you sin against Christ." The sinning against the brothers here refers to the causing of the weak brother to perish through knowledge in verse 11. The sinning in verse 12 refers to the causing to perish in verse 11. Verse 12 says that when you cause your brother to perish because of your knowledge, you are wounding his weak conscience. Hence, the perishing mentioned in the previous verse refers to the wounding of the conscience. This does not refer to eternal life or eternal death and perdition.

Verse 13 goes on to tell us what it is to wound their conscience. "Therefore if food stumbles my brother, I shall by no means eat meat forever, that I may not stumble my brother." If you put the three verses together, you will see what perishing here means. To perish is to have the brother's weak conscience wounded, and to wound the weak conscience of the brother is to cause the brother to stumble. Therefore, verses 11, 12, and 13 are three rings that are linked together. They show us what perishing is. What is covered here is absolutely not the perishing in relation to salvation. If you insist on explaining it this way, saying that a saved person will perish, you will find this argument hard to support. You will have a hard time explaining it that way.

THE ARGUMENT BASED ON JAMES 5:20

James 5:19-20 says, "My brothers, if any one among you is led astray from the truth and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner back from the error of his way will save that one's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." Some people also infer from these two verses

that a saved person can perish. To them, in verse 19 we have the brother. Then in verse 20, we have the sinner. To them, verse 19 says to turn a brother back, and verse 20 says that in turning back the brother, the soul is saved from death. This would mean that some brothers need to turn back, and some need to have their souls saved from death. Would this not say plainly that a brother can lose his salvation?

In order to understand these two verses, there are a few things here that we have to pay attention to. First, James 5:19 and 20 are like a lone mountain. They are not connected to the preceding verses, and they have nothing to follow. All the other Epistles in the Bible have greetings and benedictions. James is the only book that ends this way. Verses 17 and 18 speak of prayer. All of a sudden these few words seem to break in from nowhere. This is a very peculiar thing.

Second, from chapter one until the end, the book of James is on practical love among the brothers and sisters. Because of love, there is the mercy, the care, and the concern for the brothers. This is what the book of James shows us. From 1:1 to 5:18, there is a continuous line, a definite goal, and a subject. Verses 19 and 20, however, seem to drop down from nowhere. One can say that 1:1 to 5:18 are very organized. But we do not know where these two final verses come from.

Third, in principle, since James 1 through 5 speaks of love expressed in one's conduct, verses 19 and 20 should not deviate from this point. They should also tell us what we should or should not do when we love the brothers. If a sinner continues in the error of his way, and you save him in love, you are saving a soul from death. In addition, you will also cover a multitude of sins. All readers of the Bible know that what covers a multitude of sins is love (1 Pet. 4:8). The many sins spoken of here do not refer to sins before God. They refer to the sins before man. If you turn a sinner from the error of his way, God will no longer remember his sins and will cast them into the deep sea. All his sins will be under the blood. Now what about us? Suppose Brother Yuan was a very evil man before he became a Christian. His past history is very black and unseemly. I know his past history and stories of his past. I could lay them out and expose them. But if I expose his sins of the past, I am acting contrary to God's will. God has cast his sins into the sea. After we are saved, God does not mention our past sins any longer. When I see a brother, I have to cover his past because among us God has covered our past sins.

Verse 20 is on the matter of principle, and verse 19 is on the matter of example. In other words, verse 20 is the formula, the law, and the principle of action, whereas verse 19 is the case study and the individual incident. Verse 20 says that if anyone turns a person, he will not die and his sins will be covered before God and before men. Verse 19 shows us what happens when one brother among us is led astray from the truth or has erred in his way. We have to turn him back. The exhortation in verse 19 is based upon the principle in verse 20. If you see a brother in the church led astray from the truth, you have to recover him. When a sinner is turned, his soul will not die and his many sins will be covered. This being the case, how much more should we do the same on behalf of a brother? What James was saying here was that we should do unto the brothers as one would do unto the sinners. James is telling us here that a Christian should treat his brothers and sisters with love and should recover them. This portion is not speaking of a brother perishing.

THE ARGUMENT BASED ON HEBREWS 6:6

Now we have to consider Hebrews 6:1-8. This passage presents the greatest problem in the Bible. Almost all the ones who doubt that salvation is eternal take Hebrews 6 as their city of refuge. All of them dig their support material from here. They argue that if a man was saved and now has fallen away, it will be impossible for him to be renewed again to repentance. Would that not mean that such a person is through and is doomed to perish? Because many are not clear, they take this passage as reason for man's perishing.

But we have to realize that the subject of Hebrews 6 is not salvation. It has nothing to do with salvation at all. If one wants to understand this passage, he must begin from the end of chapter five. There it says that many who should be eating solid food are still taking milk. According to their age, this group of believers should have been the teachers already. But they were still like babes and were not progressing, but were staying at the same place. Hence, chapter six begins by saying, "Therefore leaving the word of the beginning of Christ, let us be brought on to maturity." The subject of Hebrews 6:1 is therefore progress, and not salvation. If you put the subject of salvation in, surely you will encounter difficulty. The purpose of this chapter is to tell others how to progress, and not to tell us how to be saved. The first thing we must take note of is that the topic here is on progress to maturity, not regressing to perdition.

The apostle was here talking about being brought on to maturity. Verses 1 through 8 can be divided into three sections. We can use three words to represent these three sections. The first section is on having no need, the second section is on having no possibility, and the third section is on having no right. This portion tells the Hebrew believers from these three standpoints that they have to progress. First, they have to leave the word of the beginning of Christ and should not lay again a foundation. The word of the beginning of Christ is like the cornerstone in a building. In building a wall, a person does not need two foundations. The apostle said that these ones had been talking about foundational things. But the foundation was laid already; there was no need to lay the foundation again. The word of the beginning of Christ are teachings such as repentance from dead works, faith in God, baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. All these are the words of the beginning of Christ. The apostle said that these need to be done only once. There was no need to do them again. He was exhorting them to go on to perfection.

The second section requires an introduction. Before we read verse 4, let me first tell you about this introduction. Before the apostle wrote verse 4, he anticipated that these ones would ask, "If you say that we should not lay again the foundation, what then should we do if we sin again? If a person has failed, backslidden, and sinned, does he not have to lay again the foundation?" Here the apostle said something in anticipation of their question. "For it is impossible for those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift..." If you have a Greek New Testament in your hand, you will see that the word once according to the grammar of the original language does not refer only to the first item of the list, but to every item in the list. It should read, "...those who have once been enlightened, and who have once tasted of the heavenly gift, and have once become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have once tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come..." This is very clear in the original text. Here is a man who has been enlightened, has tasted of the heavenly gift, and has become a partaker of the Holy Spirit, and has tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come. The age to come is the millennium. This one has tasted the powers of the millennium. In other words, he has seen and tasted miracles, wonders, healings, and the casting out of demons. If such a one falls away, it is impossible for him to be renewed again to repentance. "And yet have fallen

away..." One British brother who studied Greek and who specialized in the book of Hebrews for his whole lifetime said that the falling away here means to have a slip of the foot. When it says that it is impossible to again renew themselves unto repentance, many think that it means perdition. But this explanation is not valid.

If there is a man who has once been enlightened, who has once tasted of the heavenly gift, who has once become a partaker of the Holy Spirit, who has once tasted the good word of God and once tasted the powers of the age to come, is it possible that such a one cannot any longer repent once he makes a slip? Are there cases of fallen Christians who have risen up again? The Word of God tells us that indeed there have been many, and church history also tells us that indeed there were many. Many Christians who had once slipped eventually became the best runners of the heavenly kingdom course. Beginning from Peter, there have been countless Christians who have fallen and have risen up again. If there were no possibility for these to rise up again, then Peter would have been the first one that could not have risen up. He slipped terribly. We can say that he had fallen flat on his face. Peter was not the only one. Throughout the two thousand years of church history, countless Christians have failed. But eventually they became the best testimonies. I can enumerate countless proofs of this. If what was said before was right, then there should not have been a single one; if there is one, the Bible would be wrong.

In this passage, there is a word in the original text, *palin*, which means again. There is also another word, *anakainizo*, right after this word, which means to renew. Hence, according to the original text, this part should be translated as "once having slipped, it is impossible to again renew to repentance." The apostle was telling the Hebrew believers here that the repentance from dead works, the faith in God, the teaching of baptisms and of the laying on of hands, of the resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment, are all words of the beginning of Christ. If they have once been enlightened, once tasted of the heavenly gift, once partaken of the Holy Spirit, once tasted the good word of God, and once tasted the powers of the age to come, and have then slipped, they cannot lay again the foundation and cannot again be renewed to repentance.

Please remember that the repentance here is the foundation spoken of in the first section. The repentance here does not mean repentance in general,

for in the previous verses there are six items of the words of the beginning of the Christ. The first is repentance from dead works. Hence, we cannot take the repentance we have in our concept and equate it to the repentance here. We must consider the context of the Scripture, and we must expound it according to the thought of the apostle. The repentance spoken of by the apostle is the same as the repentance from dead works in verse 1. The meaning here is that after a man has believed in God and has been baptized, and after he has understood the coming judgment and the truth of resurrection, and has repented of dead works, he cannot repent again for what he has repented of. Once he is baptized, he cannot be baptized again. Once he has believed in the teaching of judgment, he cannot try to believe again. Once he has believed in the teaching of resurrection, he cannot try to believe again. The word repentance here includes all six items mentioned above. The apostle did not repeat the words "to renew again" as many times as I did: to renew again the repentance from dead works, to renew again faith toward God, and to renew again this and that. He only needed to use the words to renew again once. If there had never been anything yet, we would use the words to begin. But if there was something already, we would use the words to renew again. The apostle was afraid that we would not understand the meaning of renew, anakainizo. Hence, he added a further word again, *palin*. Hence, the repentance spoken of in verse 6 must refer to the repentance in verse 1. If the repentance in verse 1 were mentioned as the second item, we might not be very clear. But thank the Lord, it is placed as the first item. As long as it is the first item, we know that all the other items are like this one.

The apostle was saying that the word of the beginning of Christ can be compared to the foundation. For one to be a Christian, first there is the need for the repentance from dead works, to judge his sins. Then he has to have faith in God, to be baptized, to have the laying on of hands, and to believe in the resurrection of the dead and the eternal judgment. All these are foundational matters. Once the foundation has been laid, there is no need to lay it again. While one is building on this foundation, even if his foot slips, there is no need to lay again the foundation. Even if one wants to lay a foundation again, it is impossible to do so. For example, Brother Wu has just come into the meeting hall from the main entrance on Wen-teh Lane. After he came into the alley from the entrance, and as he was turning the corner to come into the building, he slipped. What then should he do? His goal is to

come to the meeting. Now he has slipped. He does not need to start all the way from Wen-teh Lane again. He can rise up from where he has slipped. The apostle was saying that once a person has been enlightened and has tasted of the heavenly gift, if he slips, he cannot repent from dead works again, believe in God again, be baptized again, have the laying on of hands again, and believe in resurrection and eternal judgment again. In other words, the apostle has no intention to say that a man can perish again after he is saved. What he means is that after a Christian is regenerated, he cannot be re-regenerated. At most we can be regenerated once. The apostle was not saying that one is not allowed to repent again. He was saying that it is impossible to repent by starting all over again.

The next part of verse 6 says, "Crucifying again for themselves the Son of God and putting Him to open shame." Some have said that to fall is to crucify the Son of God again. Who can crucify the Lord again? The work of the Lord Jesus was accomplished once for all. He was not like the bull and the goat, which must be slaughtered when they are needed. On your side, you cannot renew your repentance. On the Lord's side, He cannot renew the crucifixion. If you have to renew your repentance, that means that the Lord Jesus will have to renew His crucifixion. If that were the case, then you would be putting the Lord to open shame. You would be saying that the Lord Jesus' onetime crucifixion was not enough, that there have to be more crucifixions. Hence, this is not a question of salvation and perdition here.

In the previous messages, we have seen that eternal salvation is a fact that cannot be overturned. If there is a fallen and backslidden Christian among us, who was once clearly saved and was clear about God's salvation, for him to rise up again does not require a fresh start. As long as he would rise up today, that is all that is needed. There is no possibility of crucifying the Lord Jesus again and putting Him to open shame.

In the last section in verses 7 and 8, not only was the apostle saying that there is no need and that there is no possibility, but he went on to say, in a more serious way, that there is no right. Why do we not have the right? It is because a laying again of the foundation would crucify again the Lord Jesus. If one does that, there would be serious danger ahead of him; he would suffer great punishment. "For the earth, which drinks the rain which often comes upon it and brings forth vegetation suitable to those for whose sake also it is cultivated, partakes of blessing from God. But if it brings forth thorns and

thistles, it is disapproved and near a curse, whose end is to be burned." We will leave the detailed discussion of this passage until later. After one reads Hebrews 6, he can see that this chapter speaks of the matter of progress. It is not on the question of salvation or perdition. Hebrews 6 never tells us that a saved person can perish.

FOUR THINGS TO BE DIFFERENTIATED

Here we have to consider again the four things mentioned in the Bible. They are the four things that must be distinguished one from the other, which we mentioned earlier. If a man wants to understand salvation, first, he has to differentiate between the genuine Christian and the false Christian. Second, he must differentiate between the discipline of the believers and eternal salvation. Eternal salvation is one thing, and God's discipline of His children is another. It is one thing for a Christian to be chastised in this age. It is another thing for an unbeliever to perish in eternity. A Christian will not perish eternally, but he can be chastised. There are many verses that speak of chastisement for a Christian. One cannot apply these verses to salvation.

Third, there is a great difference between the kingdom and eternal life. In other words, there is a great difference between reward and gift. It is one thing for you to be saved. It is another thing for you to reign, to rule, and to share the glory with the Lord Jesus in the millennium. There are many places in the Bible that speak about a person being removed from the kingdom. Because many are not clear about the difference between the kingdom and eternal life, the reward and salvation, they apply the verses on the kingdom to the matter of salvation. Many think that to be removed from the kingdom means to perish. These, however, are two entirely different things. A Christian can lose his position in the kingdom, but a Christian cannot lose his position in salvation. Although a Christian can lose his position of reigning together with Christ, he cannot lose his position of being a child of God.

Fourth, not only does the Bible say that a Christian will suffer discipline today, and not only does it say that some Christians can lose the kingdom, but there are definite punishments for a Christian in the kingdom as well. The Bible says that many Christians will suffer discipline in this age. They will lose the reward in the coming age and will also suffer punishment. A Christian can lose his reward in the future. He can also be punished with definite, positive punishments. But one cannot mix the punishment in the millennium with

eternal perdition. Eternal perdition is one thing. Chastisement in the kingdom is another. When a Christian is chastised, it does not mean that he will perish eternally. Salvation is eternal. Chastisement is only a discipline in the family. If some children cannot be disciplined well in this age, they will be disciplined in the coming age. Hence, there are four things here that must be distinguished one from the other. The four things, the false Christians, the chastisement in this age, the losing of the kingdom, and the punishment in the millennium, are different from eternal life and death.

Let us now consider the first group, the false Christians. Second Peter 2:1 says, "But there arose also false prophets among the people, as also among you there will be false teachers, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction." Some would ask if this verse indicates that a Christian can perish. The ones mentioned here are those that have been bought by the Lord. Some will say that this verse obviously says that a Christian can perish, because it says here that they have followed the heresies and have denied the Master who bought them, and their end is swift destruction.

But please remember a few things. Here it mentions the Master who bought them. The word bought is used in a particular way. Does the word convey the sense that the bought ones are the saved ones? If these bought ones are the saved ones, then we have to admit that a saved person can perish. But if this word has a different meaning, then one cannot say this any longer. It is true that the Bible tells us that we are bought by the Lord with a price. But we have to see the scope of what the Lord Jesus bought on the cross. Did He buy the believers only, or did He buy the whole world? From the Bible we can see that the Lord did not buy the believers only, but He bought the whole world as well. Matthew 13:44 says, "The kingdom of the heavens is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid, and in his joy goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field." This shows us that the Lord Jesus sold whatever He had to buy the treasure. But not only did He buy the treasure, He bought the field as well. The treasure is a small part, but the field is a big part. The treasure is in the field. In order to obtain the treasure, the Lord bought the whole field. The purpose of buying the field was not for the field, but for the treasure. Please remember that the purpose of the Lord's buying was for the small part, but He bought the big part. His purpose is to get the treasure, but the scope of His buying was the field. Those in the kingdom of the heavens are the treasure. But what the Lord bought was the field.

Hence, we cannot say that everyone that is bought by the Lord is saved. The scope of buying is greater than the scope of salvation. The work of buying and redemption on His cross is different from His work of substitution. The Lord's substitution is only for all the believers, but He died for the whole world. He made the scope wide enough. But this does not mean that the whole world is saved. If Peter were to change a word here, if he were to say "denying the Master who saved them," then it would be very serious. But Peter has used a big enough word. He said "denying the Master who bought them." Hence, we can see that this group of people has not been saved at all. This word bought is a very broad word. By this word alone, one cannot say that they are saved.

Second, the word Master, despotes, here is not a common word either. It should not be translated as lord, but should be translated as master. It is not the Lord as in the Lord Jesus, but the Master as one who has temporal control of a person. It refers to an earthly master. There is no life relationship here. According to a strict interpretation of the Bible, this is not a relationship between them and the Lord, but a relationship between them and their master. Hence, this group of people has not been saved at all. No one can say, Jesus is Lord, except in the Holy Spirit, for whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. These ones are like Judas. They have never confessed Jesus as Lord.

Third, Peter tells us that this group of people are the false teachers and the false believers. Peter also told us that there were false prophets among the people. He also said that there will be false teachers. These false prophets refer to the false prophets in the Old Testament. All the readers of the Bible know that no false prophet in the Old Testament was saved. We can say boldly that this group of people have not been saved at all. They followed their cleverness and their ideas, secretly bringing in destructive heresies, and even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. Hence, 2 Peter 2:1 does not refer to the perdition of the saved ones.

There are more words in the Bible like these. All of them refer to the nominal believers. They do not refer to the perdition of the saved ones. Some have argued about a few words at the end of chapter two. Verse 20 says, "For if, having escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ but having again been entangled in these, they are defeated, the last state has become worse for them than the first." Verse 22

says, "It has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘The dog has turned to its own vomit, and the washed sow to wallowing in the mud.’" Based on the words of verse 20, some have thought that these ones refer to the saved ones, because it says plainly that these ones have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; surely such ones were saved.

But please note that Peter was very careful in the way he spoke. Verse 20 says that these ones have the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and that they have escaped the defilements of the world. But verse 22 tells us who these people really are. If there were only verse 20, we might think that these are the saved ones. But if we read verse 22, we will know who they are. "It has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘The dog has turned to its own vomit, and the washed sow to wallowing in the mud.’" It says that although these ones have escaped the defilements of the world, and outwardly they have the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they were later entangled again, and their last state has become worse. These people are simply dogs and sows.

The Lord Jesus has never said that He gives to His dogs eternal life. Nor has He ever said that His dogs will never perish. The Lord said that He gives eternal life to the sheep. He never mixes the sheep with the dogs. He cannot say that He gives eternal life to the sows and the dogs, nor can He say that the sheep have been entangled by the defilements of the world. These two kinds of people can never be mixed together. Many who have heard the gospel would say that Jesus is Lord and Savior. They can quickly tell you about doctrines related to the Lord. Outwardly they do not have any defilements. But actually they have never been regenerated. They have never received the Lord and have never experienced the Lord living in them. They only confess the Lord temporarily. They have removed a little of the outward defilements. But when sentiments change, they go back to their old ways. The last state of this kind of people is worse than their first state. These are not the sheep at all. They are the dogs and the sows. Because they are the dogs, they turn to their own vomit. Because they are the sows, they wallow in the mud after they have been cleansed without. This does not mean that Christians will not sin, and it does not mean that they will not touch the mud or wallow in the mud. A Christian may touch the mud; he may wallow in the mud. But for a Christian to wallow in the mud is an uncomfortable thing. If he is comfortable in wallowing in it, then he has to be a sow. A Christian could perhaps also

swallow his own vomit. But he will feel that it is repulsive, and he will be uncomfortable if he does that. This is the difference between the sow, the dog, and the sheep. One has to identify clearly the nature of the dog and the sow. In the Bible, sows and dogs refer to the unsaved ones. They do not refer to the saved ones. If a person is a sheep, he will never perish.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

SALVATION BEING ETERNAL—ARGUMENTS AGAINST IT (3)

In this message we will continue to look at the verses which seem to argue against salvation being eternal.

THE ARGUMENT BASED ON 2 CORINTHIANS 2:7

Second Corinthians 2:6-7 says, "Sufficient for such a one is this punishment by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with excessive sorrow." In some translations, the words "swallowed up" are translated as "perish." A brother in Corinth had received punishment by the majority because of his sin. Paul was concerned that the brothers and sisters had dealt with him too severely. He asked them to forgive and encourage such a one, lest he should "perish" with excessive sorrow. Some may argue that if excessive sorrow can cause such a one to perish, is this not an indication that a believer can still perish?

We must realize that this brother is the same one that is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5. This one committed a gross sin, the sin of fornication of an abnormal sort. Paul said that such a one needs to be removed (vv. 2, 13). The saints in Corinth took Paul's word and removed him. After being removed, he realized that he was sinful, and was in much sorrow and agony over his sin. Paul told the saints in his second Epistle that they had to comfort and encourage him, lest he be swallowed up with excessive sorrow. If we are careless, we may think that "perish" here means to go to hell. Yet Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:5 says "to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord." Based on this word, we can say boldly that such a one was saved. What is mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:7 is definitely not a matter of the perishing of the spirit.

Second, the word for "be swallowed up" is not a commonly used word. It is a special word in Greek. The word *katapino* denotes something being swallowed up, as a ship sinking in the sea and being swallowed up by it. After such a brother sinned and was excommunicated, he repented. He thought

that he was excommunicated and fully rejected. He thought that he had lost all hope. Therefore, he continued in his sorrow and agony. Paul's thought is that if the church would not forgive and comfort him right away, he would be swallowed up by sorrow. This is not a matter of the saving or the perishing of the soul.

THE ARGUMENT BASED ON 2 PETER 3:16

Let us look at another passage. Second Peter 3:16 says, "As also in all his letters, speaking in them concerning these things, in which some things are hard to understand, which the unlearned and unstable twist, as also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction." Some would argue after reading this word that Peter is telling us that Paul's letters were hard to understand, and that some who are unlearned and unstable, that is, untaught and unestablished, bring in their own destruction by twisting Paul's letters. If they can be destroyed, does this not indicate that they will perish? Will a saved person perish? In this case Peter is not talking about eternal perdition at all.

According to the Bible, whether one perishes or not does not depend on the way that he interprets the Scripture. Today in China, I have seen a number of good Christians who love the Lord and who labor everywhere in the gospel work. Yet they do not really understand Paul's letters. When they preach, they do more than twist the word of the Scriptures. Are these Christians going to perish? Can a wrong exposition of the Scriptures be a factor of perdition? The Bible never makes a sound exposition of the Bible a condition for salvation. Hence, Peter's word here must mean something else.

Second, the word *apoleia* in Greek does not refer to an ordinary kind of destruction. It is different from the one used in 2 Corinthians 2:7. It is different from the usual word for "perdition." In Greek, this word, *apollyon*, means to destroy or to be corrupted. If something is taken from you smoothly, it is a "taking"; if something is wrung out of your hands by force, it is an *apollyon*. What Peter meant in his Epistle is that some misunderstood Paul's letters and did not have light from God. They twisted his word in the same way that something is wrung out of a person's hand. In so doing, they were destroying themselves and not building up themselves. Destruction is the opposite of building. If you are not being built up, you are being destroyed. By so doing, you will not be built up but will have your work destroyed. Hence, these two verses do not tell us that a man can perish after being saved. They

tell us of those whose work and living after salvation are not perfected, and who are unable to be built up day by day. If you twist Paul's Epistles, you are destroying what you already have.

THE ARGUMENT BASED ON HEBREWS 10:26

There is another portion of Scripture that we must mention. It is also a passage that many do not understand. Hebrews 10:26-29 says, "For when we sin willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice of bulls and goats for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fervor of fire, which is to consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without compassion on the testimony of two or three witnesses. By how much do you think he will be thought worthy of worse punishment who has trampled underfoot the Son of God and has considered the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing and has insulted the Spirit of grace?" The person mentioned in this portion of the Word must be saved, because he has already had the sacrifice for sins. The apostle said that if one who already had the sacrifice for sins sinned willfully, there would be no more sacrifice for sins. We have no problem after verse 27. However, the verse that many readers of the Bible find difficult to understand is verse 26, which says, "There no longer remains a sacrifice of bulls and goats for sins." Some people think that if, unfortunately, a Christian commits sins willfully, there will be no more sacrifice for sins for him. In this case, it would mean that he will surely perish. Hebrews 10:26 is a problem to many people. When I was first saved, I also thought that this verse was a big problem. For over a year, I considered myself unsaved because of this verse. For this reason, we have to spend an amount of time to find out what Hebrews 10:26 speaks of.

The first thing that we need to mention is the word "willfully." What is meant by "willfully"? Does this word mean "consciously"? This may be the answer that we would give. But I would ask if there are many Christians who sin unconsciously? Every day we sin. Yet how many times do we sin unconsciously? I believe that probably every time we sin, we sin "willfully." Very few people commit sins unconsciously. Most of the time, we sin "willfully." In Romans 7, Paul says, "For what I work out, I do not acknowledge; for what I will, this I do not practice; but what I hate, this I do" (v. 15). By this we know that Paul did not fall into sin accidentally. All of his sins were committed after he was fully conscious of their wrong. Hence, it is

clear from Romans 7 that all of Paul's sins were committed "willfully." If Paul sinned "willfully," then according to Hebrews 10:26, there would remain no longer any sacrifice for sins. If a person perished and went to hell, he would see Paul there, because even Paul had no more sacrifice for sins. Hence, we need to see that the word "willfully" in Hebrews 10:26 does not mean consciously. If this were the case, then all of the Christians would perish. No matter what kind of Christian you may be, countless times in your life, you sin consciously rather than unconsciously. If the above situation were true, no Christian would be saved. Hence, "willfully" here must mean something else.

A second point is that verse 26 begins with the word "for." For this particular word to be used at the beginning of a sentence, something has gone on prior to its use. This word cannot be used without a preceding sentence. In verses 26 through 29, the first sentence begins with "for," which means that there was something mentioned before. Prior to this, verse 25 says, "Not abandoning our own assembling together, as the custom with some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more as you see the day drawing near." Why should we not abandon our own assembling together, but exhort one another? It is because when we sin willfully after receiving the full knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. If we do not read this portion carefully, we will not realize that these two verses go together. If we read it carefully, we will realize that these two verses are linked together. They are very meaningful. We must realize that not abandoning our own assembling together and sinning willfully go together. We must not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, but exhort one another, for when we sin willfully, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. Negatively, we should not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Positively, we must not sin willfully. If we assemble ourselves together, then we are not ones who sin willfully. If we customarily forsake the assembling of ourselves together, we are ones who sin willfully. Here, the apostle put the abandoning of our assembling and sinning willfully together. Why is there such a close relationship between abandoning the assembling of ourselves and sinning willfully? At this juncture we must come to the third point. We have to know the background of the book of Hebrews. Who were the ones mentioned in this book? They were the Jews who believed in the Lord Jesus. Hence, the book of Hebrews was written to believing Jews. The position of the Jews is different from that of the Gentiles. The Gentiles have the spiritual position only and not the earthly, physical position. The Jews have both a spiritual and a physical

position. They have a heavenly as well as an earthly position. Today when we speak of the Holy of Holies, immediately we think of a place where God dwells in heaven. But to the Jews, when they consider the Holy of Holies, what occurs in their thought is the Holy of Holies inside the temple at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah. Not only do the Jews have a Holy of Holies in heaven, but they also have a Holy of Holies on the earth. Not only do they have a temple in heaven, but a temple on earth also. Thus, in their mind, there is the spiritual aspect as well as the physical aspect, the heavenly aspect as well as the earthly. They have the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. They still have the physical Holy of Holies, and with it the offerings.

To us, the sacrifice for sins is the Lord Jesus Christ; He is our sin offering. Yet, the Jews were still not clear whether the Lord Jesus Christ or bulls and goats was their sacrifice for sins. At that time, they still had the priests, the altar, and the sacrifices of bulls and goats on the altar. Not only did they have the spiritual sacrifice for sins, they also had the earthly sacrifices for sins. Christians and Jews do not stand on the same ground. The Gentile believers are different from the Hebrew believers. In A.D. 70 the Roman prince Titus destroyed the temple at Jerusalem, and not one stone was left upon another. However, when the book of Hebrews was written, the earthly temple was still there, and the sacrifices were still being offered. After a number of Jews had believed in the Lord Jesus, they had to make a decision whether they wanted the earthly altar or the heavenly one, the earthly sacrifices or the heavenly sacrifice. At that time, the Jews could not have both the heavenly and the earthly sacrifices at the same time. Everyone who reads the book of Hebrews knows that this book was written with the purpose that Christians would forsake Judaism and would accept Christianity. The purpose of the book of Hebrews is to encourage the Christians to drop the earthly sacrifices and to accept the heavenly sacrifice. This is the background of the book.

Therefore, when it says that one should not abandon the assembling of oneself together, it does not mean that the assembling of Christians can save them or qualify them to have eternal life. The assembling of Christians indicates whether a believer wants Judaism or Christ. The assembling of ourselves becomes an expression of our attitude toward Christ. At that time, all those who assembled together were Christians. No matter if you were a Gentile or a Jew, if you assembled together, you were a Christian. Hence, assembling together became a sign of accepting Christ, and forsaking the assembling together was a sign of forsaking Christ to embrace Judaism. In the

same way, sinning willfully here does not refer to things such as murder, arson, eating, drinking, gambling, and licentiousness. Sinning willfully here does not refer to moral sins; it refers to doctrinal sins. This does not pertain to whether or not your walk is proper. This refers to the fact of whether or not you receive Christ or Judaism. To assemble yourselves together means that you want Christ and that you stand on the ground of Christ. To abandon the assembling together shows that you have your back toward Christ and that your face is toward Judaism. To abandon the assembling means that you want the earthly temple, the earthly altar, and the earthly sacrifices. This indicates that you want to go back to Judaism and forsake Christ. If this is the fact, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.

Now let us return to the first point. Verse 26 says, "After receiving the knowledge of the truth." It does not say, "After being regenerated," nor does it say, "After our sinful deeds are washed away." If it had said, "After being regenerated" or "After being washed," then to sin willfully would be a matter of our conduct. However, it says, "After receiving the knowledge of the truth"; it is a matter of knowing. Do we know what the truth is? The truth is the faith of a Christian. The truth is that God sent His Son into the world that He would become the sin offering. The truth is that God sent His Son to die for us and resurrect to satisfy all of God's requirements. All of these have to do with the items of faith on God's side. Hence, to sin willfully does not mean transgressions in life. It means to sin against the truth. This is not a behavioral sin, but a doctrinal sin, and a sin regarding one's belief. This is a sin that opposes the faith and the truth, after receiving the full knowledge of the truth.

The Hebrew believers were Jews and had been in Judaism for years. Now that they were Christians, if they still wanted to go back to Judaism, if they still wanted both, that is, if they wanted to stand on the ground of Judaism and also wanted to stand on the ground of Christianity, there would no longer remain a sacrifice for sins. In ancient times, the Chinese worshipped idols. The Temple of Heaven in Beijing was the place where emperors offered sacrifices. There men killed bulls and offered them to the highest deity in heaven. It was the earthly emperor offering up sacrifices to the highest deity in heaven in order to redeem the sins of the people. Suppose the earthly emperor believed in the Lord Jesus. Do you think that he could go back to the Temple of Heaven to offer sacrifices? After he received Christ as the sacrifice for sin, he could not go back to the Temple of Heaven to offer sacrifices

anymore. Either he took the Temple of Heaven or the Lord Jesus. This is what the Bible means by sinning willfully. This is not a matter of sin in our conduct.

Verse 26 continues, "There no longer remains a sacrifice of bulls and goats for sins." The words "no longer" mean "again." Whenever the words "no longer" appear, this shows that there must be something in the foregoing verses. Some misunderstand the Word of God. They think that the sentence, "There no longer remains a sacrifice of bulls and goats for sins" implies perdition. This is absolutely not God's thought.

We have to look at Hebrews 7:27b, which says, "For this He did once for all when He offered up Himself." This tells us that after the Lord Jesus offered up Himself once before God as the sacrifice for sins, everything was fully accomplished. Please take heed to the word "once." Let us take a look at Hebrews 9:12b, which says, "Entered once for all into the Holy of Holies, obtaining an eternal redemption." Here it tells us again that the Lord Jesus offered Himself only once, and then the work of redemption was eternally accomplished. Let us look at the word "once" again. Hebrews 9:25-28 says, "Nor in order that He might offer Himself often, just as the high priest enters into the Holy of Holies year by year by the blood of other creatures; since then He would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world. But now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested for the putting away of sin through the sacrifice of Himself. And inasmuch as it is reserved for men to die once, and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time to those who eagerly await Him, apart from sin, unto salvation." Twice these verses mention "often," and twice the word "once" is used in reference to Christ. Not often, but once for all, Christ offered Himself up before God as the sacrifice for sins and completed the work of redemption. Please take heed to the word "often" and the word "once" here.

Hebrews 10:10 says, "By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Verse 12 says, "But this One, having offered one sacrifice for sins, sat down forever on the right hand of God." Verse 14 continues, "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified." The earthly priests had to offer sacrifices to God time after time. Yet, Christ offered Himself only once, and we are sanctified. After Christ offered Himself once as the eternal sacrifice, He sat down on the right hand of God. He sat down because He does not have to work anymore.

He offered Himself once, and we are eternally perfected. Since He has already completed His work, there is no problem anymore.

Therefore, after reading so many verses, we can know the meaning of the verse, "There no longer remains a sacrifice of bulls and goats for sins." The portion of Hebrews from chapters seven through ten, with the exception of chapter eight, says that the work of redemption, once finished, is eternally accomplished. If you do not want Christ, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. Christ only offered Himself once as the sacrifice for sins. If you do not want the redemption of Christ, but turn to Judaism, you will no longer find any other sacrifice for sins. So, it is not a matter of being saved or perishing here. What is said here is that the work of Christ is accomplished once. If you do not want this sacrifice, you will no longer have a second one.

If you take heed to the words "no longer," you will see what they are linked to. The foregoing verses repeatedly mention the words "once for all," and the following verse says, "There no longer remains." It is equivalent to saying, for example, in chapter eight, "Here is the only pencil." Then in chapter nine I repeat, "Here is the only pencil." Again in chapter ten I say, "Here is the only pencil." After this I may explain, "If you do not want this pencil, or if you want to exchange this for another one, there will not be another one. Take this one if you want it. If you do not want it, there is no other one left for you." This verse does not mean that after receiving the knowledge of the truth, and then sinning willfully, you will not receive forgiveness anymore. This is not a matter of sin. This is a matter of the truth, a matter of the Christian faith. If you forsake the Christian faith and look for another Savior, another sacrifice for sins, you will not find it.

Some of the Jews at that time probably thought that if they rejected the Christian faith, they could still go back to the temple. They could still go back to the altar and have the priests offer bulls and goats for them. But this would indicate another sacrifice for sins. The Jews during that time still had the priests and the altar. Their believing in Christ was different from our believing in Christ. To them, they could choose to believe or not to believe. They were not like the Gentile believers, who could only go back to idol worship if they did not believe. If the Gentile believers wanted God, they could choose God. But if they did not want God, their only choice would be the world. They did not have a third choice. With the Jews, it was different. The Jews thought that if they did not want Christ, they could still be saved. If they did not want

Christ, they could still have redemption for sins, because they still could keep the priests and the offerings. If they had more money, they could buy a bull. If they did not have that much money, they could still purchase a goat.

The apostle was telling the Jews that Christ had already offered Himself once for all and had completed the eternal redemptive work before God. God had already abolished the old covenant together with the old sacrifices. Before the coming of Christ, the bulls and goats could atone for their sins. But after the coming of Christ, the sacrifices of the bulls and goats could no longer take away their sins; these sacrifices have actually been abolished. This is what Hebrews chapters seven through ten point out. God not only gave His Son as the sacrifice, but He abolished the sacrifices of bulls and goats. The first half of chapter ten mentions that God does not take pleasure in bulls and goats, nor does He take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sins. God prepared His Son. Bulls and goats cannot redeem men from their sins. Only His Son can redeem us from sins. The sacrifice of bulls and goats in the Old Testament were only types and shadows. They refer to the Son of God as the sacrifice. God said that the old covenant is a thing of the past; the types are over, and the reality is here. It will no longer be acceptable if they reject God's Son, that is, if they reject the reality and offer up the types. According to God, there is only one sacrifice for sins. Besides Him, there is no other sacrifice for sins. Hebrews 10:26 tells us that if we forsake Christ to look for another Savior, we will not find one.

Hence, strictly speaking, this portion is not for us at all. If some say that after a man receives the Lord Jesus and sins willfully, he will perish, this will contradict the context of the passage; it will also contradict the entire book of Hebrews. The speaking here is about a doctrinal issue. Hebrews shows us that besides the name of Jesus Christ, "there is salvation in no other, for neither is there another name under heaven given among men in which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). This does not mean that a Christian will go to hell if he sins.

Hebrews 10:27 says, "But a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fervor of fire, which is to consume the adversaries." After receiving the knowledge of the truth, and after having a clear knowledge that the Lord Jesus Christ is the God-ordained sacrifice for sins, if the Jewish believers forsake the assembling of themselves and reject Christ, and if they go back to Judaism to look for other sacrifices for sins, there will no longer remain any

sacrifice for sins. They can only expect judgment in fear and the fervor of fire that consumes the adversaries. Before they were saved, they could depend on bulls and goats to atone for their sins. But after they realize that the Lord Jesus is the only Savior, they cannot depend on bulls and goats anymore. If they reject the Lord Jesus, they can only expect a fearful judgment and fervor of fire about to consume the adversaries. They can only take the Lord Jesus as the Savior. Besides Him, there is no other way of salvation. All of the bulls and goats point to Christ. Bulls and goats are but types of Christ. Christ is the reality of the bulls and goats. It is impossible for them to reject the reality of the bulls and goats and ask for the types instead. Hence, Hebrews 10:26-27 never says that after a person is saved he may still perish. This is man's twisting of God's truth.

When we read the Bible, we have to read what is there instead of reading into it what is not there. Someone asked me once how he could understand the Bible. I answered that to understand the Bible, we must first be those who do not understand the Bible. If we do not understand, then we will understand. If we say that we know this and that, then we are not sober-minded. Once we are not sober-minded, we will have problems. Hebrews 6 and 10 should be as easy and simple and clear as John 3:16. The reason the human mind is unclear is that man puts his own words into the Bible. Many people find it difficult to read the Bible, not because the Bible is unclear, but because in their minds they have prejudices and preconceived ideas.

CHAPTER TWENTY

HOW GOD DEALS WITH THE BELIEVERS' SINS— DISCIPLINE AND REWARD

We have to differentiate two things in the Bible: God's discipline of believers in this age and their salvation in eternity. In the previous message, we saw the first difference. In this message, we are going to see the second. Hebrews records the matter of the discipline of the believers. Now we have to see what are the kinds of people that God disciplines and what is the purpose of this discipline.

THE MOTIVE AND GOAL OF DISCIPLINE

Hebrews 12:5-6 says, "And you have completely forgotten the exhortation which reasons with you as with sons, 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when reproved by Him; for whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.'" Here, we see clearly that the motive of discipline is the love of God. Those who receive God's discipline are the sons of God. If someone is not a son of God, God will not discipline him. You can never find in the Bible that God disciplines an unbeliever. God does not waste His time and energy to discipline all the people on this earth. It is the same with us. We do not discipline our neighbors' children. If the neighbors' children do not dress well or do things properly, we do not discipline them. Only when it is a case of our own children do we discipline them. Therefore, the realm of discipline is confined only to Christians, and the motive of discipline is love. It is not because God hates man that He disciplines him. He disciplines man because He loves him. Revelation 3:19 also says that God disciplines because of love.

Hebrews 12:7-8 says, "It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons. For what son is there whom the father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all sons have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons." Therefore, the extent of discipline is limited to the children only. Verse 9 says, "Furthermore we have had the fathers of our flesh as discipliners and we respected them; shall we not much

more be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?" If we accept the discipline of our parents in the flesh, how much more should we accept the discipline from our Father, the Father of spirits.

Verse 10 says, "For they disciplined for a few days as it seemed good to them; but He, for what is profitable that we might partake of His holiness." This tells us the purpose of discipline. It is not because God likes to discipline us that He does it. Neither is it because He wants us to suffer. He disciplines us so that we can partake of His holiness. If a Christian lives in a very loose way on earth, without manifesting God's nature and holiness, God's hand will fall heavily on such a one. God does not like to chastise us. His purpose is to have His holiness manifested in us. He will only stop disciplining us when His holiness is manifested in us. Therefore, we see that discipline does not prove that we are not the Lord's. Rather, it proves that we belong to the Lord. There is no need of discipline for someone who does not belong to the Lord. Only those who belong to the Lord are qualified to be disciplined.

There is a big difference between punishment and discipline. God's disciplining of His children is not His punishment upon them. Even when God chastises them, this chastisement is not a punishment, but a discipline. Discipline is with a definite goal, which is that we may partake of His holiness, that we may not live foolishly day by day. After a Christian believes into the Lord Jesus, although he will never lose his salvation, he may receive severe chastisement from God. We should never say that a Christian can do whatever he wants after he is saved. The Bible clearly tells us that after a Christian is saved, even if he is defeated and fallen, he will not perish eternally and will not lose eternal life. However, he will receive God's chastising on earth today.

We should not make the mistake of thinking that because we are eternally saved, we can live loosely on this earth. No one can refute the fact that once a person is saved, he is eternally saved. This is a fact. If a Christian unbridles his lusts, commits sins, falls into defilements, and does not have God's holiness, God will extend His hand and will discipline such a one through his environment, his family, his personal health, and his future plans. He may encounter difficulties in his family. He may experience much illness and misfortune in his environment. The purpose of God in allowing these things to fall upon him is not a matter of punishing him; they are not there to give him a hard time, but to make him partake of God's holiness and to become

worthy of the grace of His calling. This is the proper understanding of salvation.

One should not say that if a Christian does not do good, God will deny that he is a child of God and kick him out like a dog. If one would say such a thing, either he is blind to the work of the cross of Christ, or he thinks that the work of Christ is a very light matter.

The Bible shows us that salvation is eternal. At the same time, the Bible also shows us that there are quite serious punishments among the believers. If we fail, there will be much punishment for us. God wants us to partake of His holiness. On this earth He wants us to live like sons of God. He does not want to intimidate us with hell so that we will pursue holiness. To be saved is totally of grace, but God has His way to lead us into His holiness. He causes us to encounter many things in our families, in our bodies, in our career, and in our environment so that we will turn back to Him. This is the purpose of discipline.

Ananias and Sapphira were believers; they were saved. They committed the sin of lying to the Spirit, and they received a very severe discipline (Acts 5:1-10). At one time, I thought that perhaps Ananias and Sapphira were not saved. By reading the Bible carefully, one has to acknowledge that they were saved because they were with the disciples at the time of Pentecost. In addition, they also made an offering. They were only after some vain glory. Their sins were not as severe as one would think. They did not get drunk or commit fornication. The fact that they were taken from the world quickly proves that they were believers. If they were worldly people, they probably would have lived much longer. The fact that they were removed quickly from the world proves that they were our brother and sister.

The Corinthian believers did not respect the Lord's table meeting. They did not respect the Body of the Lord, and they treated the Lord's supper loosely. What were the results of these things? Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:29-30, "He who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not discern the body. Because of this many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep." The disciplining hand of God makes people sick and weak and even causes them to die. God treated them this way because they treated the Body of the Lord lightly. They did not see the Lord's death nor the work of Christ, and they did not see the Body of Christ. They did not see the respect

they should render to the Lord Jesus, and they did not see their proper standing in the Body of Christ. This resulted in weakness, in sickness, and even in death. After they had sinned, God disciplined them.

Verse 32 says, "But being judged by the Lord, we are disciplined that we may not be condemned with the world." There is a purpose in God's discipline. It is to save us from condemnation in the future. God disciplines us so that we will not fall into the condemnation that the world will receive. In other words, discipline proves that we are saved. Discipline preserves our salvation. God's way and our way of doing things are totally different. We think that if we tell people that they are saved, they will be loose and unrestrained. God is not like this. He proclaims clearly, absolutely, and without limitation to all those who believe in Him that all who believe have eternal life and will not perish. But He has His way of saving us from sinning and keeping us from being wanton and loose Christians. His discipline is a substitute for our being condemned. Man may think that condemnation is the best method to keep us from sinning, but God does not use the way of condemnation. Rather, He uses the way of discipline. It is very clear that God separates the believers from the worldly people by discipline. The matters of discipline and salvation must be clearly differentiated. Discipline is exercised only for the present and has nothing to do with our eternal salvation.

There is a good example in 1 Corinthians to show that discipline for a Christian proves that he is saved. Even if a Christian has committed a very gross sin, he is still saved. First Corinthians 5 talks about a Christian who committed adultery. Such an act of adultery with one's stepmother was not even found among the unbelievers. Those who are clear about the law of Moses would say that this person will surely perish and is guaranteed to go to hell. But surprisingly, 1 Corinthians shows us clearly that here is one who had committed a very grave and despicable sin; it is a sin that is not committed by ordinary people. Paul says that with the power of the Lord Jesus, he delivered such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that is to allow Satan to exhibit his power on the body of this one to cause him to be weak, to be ill, and even to die. The purpose of Paul in doing this was that this one may be saved in the day of the Lord. Discipline is something for this life. It is absolutely not related to salvation in eternity. If it were up to us, we would say, "It is finished. Although such a one has been saved, surely he will perish again because of committing such a gross sin." However, Paul says that this one will not perish even though he has committed such a sin. A saved one can

temporarily receive discipline, but he cannot be penalized with eternal perdition. This is the teaching of Paul. A Christian can have temporary discipline in this age, but he cannot perish eternally. We may need discipline, but we will still be saved in eternity. Paul made a clear distinction between these two things many times in the New Testament. The destruction mentioned here and the sleep mentioned before relate to the body only; they do not refer to the spirit. The matters of the spirit and of eternal salvation were decided already when we believed in the Lord.

Some people have a problem with 1 John 5:16, where it says that we should not make request for anyone who has committed a sin unto death. They have this problem because they do not understand the Word of God. They think that to sin unto death as spoken of here means perdition. Actually there is no such thing. First John 5:16 tells us of some people who sinned to the extent that God would have them die and their flesh removed from the world. The death mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11, the destruction in 1 Corinthians 5, and the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira are all deaths of the flesh and have nothing to do with the death of the spirit. Discipline is totally a matter with the body. Therefore, in the Bible, many places which seem to say that believers may perish are actually speaking about discipline.

REWARD AND GIFT

Now we want to see the third difference—the difference between reward and gift, in other words, the difference between the kingdom and eternal life. There are many Christians in the church today who cannot differentiate between the kingdom of the heavens and eternal life. They think that the kingdom of the heavens is eternal life and that eternal life is simply the kingdom of the heavens. They have mixed up the Word of God, taking the condition for the receiving of the kingdom as the condition for the preservation of eternal life. They take the losing of the kingdom as the losing of eternal life. However, the distinction between these two is very clear in the Bible. One may lose the kingdom of the heavens, but he will not lose eternal life. One can lose the reward, but he will not lose the gift.

What then is the reward, and what is the gift? We were saved because of the gift. God gave the gift to us freely by His grace; therefore, we were saved. The reward pertains to the relationship between us and the Holy Spirit after we were saved. When we were saved, we were related to Christ. This relationship

allows us to obtain the gift that we are absolutely unworthy of receiving. Similarly, after we have been saved, we have a relationship with the Holy Spirit. This relationship allows us to obtain the reward which we could not otherwise obtain by ourselves. If one believes in the Lord Jesus as Savior, accepting the Lord Jesus as life, this one is saved before God. After he is saved, God immediately puts this one on a pathway, so that he will run in the race and will obtain the reward placed before him. A Christian is saved because of the Lord Jesus. After he is saved, he has to manifest the victory of Christ by the Holy Spirit day by day. If one will do this, then at the end of the race, he will obtain the heavenly glory and the heavenly reward from God.

Hence, salvation is the first step of this path, and the reward is the last step. Only the saved ones are qualified to gain the reward. The unsaved ones are not qualified for this. God has given us two things rather than one thing. God places the gift before the worldly people and places the reward before the Christians. When one believes in Christ, he receives the gift. When one follows Christ, he receives the reward. Gift is obtained through faith, and it is for the worldly people. Reward is obtained by being faithful and having good deeds, and it is for the Christians.

There is a big mistake in the churches today. Man thinks that salvation is the only thing and that there is nothing else besides being saved. He takes the kingdom of the heavens and eternal life as the same thing. He considers that since one is saved when he believes, he no longer has to be concerned with works. The Bible makes a distinction between God's part and man's part. One part is the salvation given by God, and the other part is the glory of the millennial kingdom. To be saved has absolutely nothing to do with one's works. Once anyone believes in the Lord Jesus, he is saved. But after his salvation, God immediately places the second thing before him, telling him that besides salvation, there is a reward, a coming glory, a crown, and a throne for him. God puts His throne, crown, glory, and reward before the believers. If one is faithful, he will obtain these. If he is unfaithful, he will lose them.

Therefore, we do not say that good works are useless. However, we do say that good works are useless as far as salvation is concerned. Man cannot be saved by his good works. Neither can he be prevented from salvation by his evil works. Good works are applicable to the matter of the reward, the matter of the crown, the matter of the glory, and the matter of the throne. Good

works are useless regarding the matter of salvation. God cannot allow man to be saved by his work; neither will He allow man to be rewarded by his faith. God cannot allow man to perish because of his evil works. God can determine only man's salvation or perdition by whether or not he believes in His Son. Similarly, God cannot determine a man's receiving of His glory by whether or not one believes in His Son. Whether or not you have His Son in you determines the matter of eternal life or perdition. Whether or not you have good works before God determines the matter of receiving the reward and the glory. In other words, God will never save a person because he has merits, and He will never reward one who has no merit. If someone has merits, God will not therefore save such a one. On the other hand, God will never reward anyone who has no merit. Man has to come before God totally helpless and meritless in order for God to save him. But after salvation, we have to be faithful, and we have to endeavor to produce good works through His Son Jesus Christ in order to obtain the reward.

Please do not think that good works are useless. We are saying that good works are useless towards salvation. Good works have nothing to do with salvation at all. Salvation depends on whether or not you would repent of your former position. It depends on whether you would have regret over your past to believe in His work on the cross and in His resurrection as the proof of your justification. This is the crux of all problems. The matter of work is related to reward. Work is useful, but only in the matter of reward.

Today's problem is that people will not differentiate between salvation and the kingdom. In the Bible, there is a clear distinction between salvation and the kingdom and between the gift and the reward. Because people would not differentiate these matters, the question of salvation is mishandled, and the question of reward is also mishandled. God has never placed the matter of reward before the unsaved ones. God only wants the unsaved ones to obtain salvation. However, after salvation, God places the reward before them so that they will endeavor, pursue, and run after the reward. Salvation is not the last step of the Christian experience. Rather, salvation is its first step. After we have been saved, we have to run and pursue after the reward before us. The problem is that we think that our salvation is our reward. The sinners think that to be saved is to obtain the reward, and therefore they rely on their works. The Christians think that the glory is simply grace, and therefore they become foolish in their living. Please apply work only to reward and grace to salvation.

Through salvation God separates the saved ones from the unsaved ones; He separates the ones having eternal life from those being condemned. Similarly, God also separates His children into two groups by His reward. Just as salvation separates the worldly people, in the same way, reward also separates God's children. God separates His children into the obedient and disobedient ones. With the worldly people, it is a matter of having faith and not having faith. With the Christians, it is a matter of being faithful or not being faithful. With the worldly people, it is a question of being saved or not being saved. With the Christians, it is a matter of having or not having the reward. Today's problem with God's children is that they magnify salvation too much; all that they see is simply salvation. They think that only when their work is taken care of can they be saved. As a result, they have no more time to pursue after the reward. If one has not passed through the first gate, he cannot pass through the second. May God be merciful to us that we would realize that the matter of salvation is solved already. It cannot be shaken, for it has been accomplished by the Lord Jesus already. It is fully done. Today what we have to strive for is the reward before us. There will be a big differentiation in the kingdom. Some will have glory, and some will not have glory.

Now we need to see on what basis reward is given. God's Word says that the reward is given because of work. Just as the Bible says clearly that salvation is by faith, in the same way the Bible says clearly that reward is by work. The Bible reveals to us that salvation is by the faith of the sinners, and the reward is by the work of the Christians. Faith is related to salvation; this is more than clear. Work is related to reward; this is also more than clear. One should not mix up these two.

Romans 4:4 says, "Now to the one who works, his wages are not accounted according to grace, but according to what is due." To give a reward to one who works is not grace, but a debt. In other words, how can one obtain a reward? Reward comes by works and not by grace.

Revelation 2:23 says, "And her children I will kill with death; and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the inward parts and the hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your works." This verse says that the Lord will make all the churches know that He is the One who searches the inward parts and the hearts, and will give to each one according to his works. In other words, He will reward each one according to his works. How does He reward or recompense? It is according to our work. Of course,

this work is not our own work. We only wash our clothes to be white in the blood. When the Holy Spirit lives out Christ in us, we have the works of a Christian. Some will live out Christ, and some will not live out Christ. All the capital comes from Christ. All the power also originates from Christ. But some let the Lord work within them and some do not. Therefore, this verse clearly shows us the matter of recompense. The matter of reward depends on whether or not a Christian is worthy. Today God will not save a person who is worthy, and in the future God will not reward a Christian who is not worthy.

First Corinthians 3:14 says, "If anyone's work which he has built upon the foundation remains, he will receive a reward." Here it says that if his work remains, he will be rewarded. It does not say that if his faith remains he will be rewarded. The matter of reward depends on one's work. The Bible distinguishes clearly between salvation and reward. It never mixes up salvation and reward, and it never mixes up faith and work. Without faith, man cannot be saved. Without good works, man cannot be rewarded. One's works must withstand before the judgment seat and survive under the scrutiny of the burning eyes before there is the possibility of receiving a reward.

Luke 6:35 says, "But love your enemies, and do good and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great." Reward is entirely due to one's work. To lend money to another without hoping to be repaid is your work, and to love your enemy is your work. You have to do these to obtain the reward. Nowhere does the Bible mention that one has to love his enemies and do good before he can receive eternal life. Neither is there any verse that says one has to lend to others before he can be saved, or that he has to lend to others before he can avoid perdition. But there is such a verse that says if you lend to others and do good to others, your reward in heaven will be great. Reward is of work and not of faith. Faith can save you, but faith cannot help you obtain the reward.

Second Timothy 4:14 says, "Alexander the coppersmith did many evil things to me; the Lord will recompense him according to his works." Here an example is cited. A Christian was trying to hurt Paul; he had sinned against Paul. The person mentioned here was a Christian. He was not a worldly person. In the future, Christians will be rewarded before God according to their works.

THE REWARD BEING THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS

Let us go on. Many people know that there is a difference between salvation and reward. But there are many people who do not see what the reward is. In the Bible, whether with the Lord Jesus, or with the apostles, the words they spoke concerning the reward and the kingdom were not spoken lightly, in the same way the gift and eternal life were not spoken of lightly. When the Lord Jesus says in the Gospel of John that He gives eternal life to His sheep, He is speaking reality and not some empty words (John 10:28). Romans 6 says that the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (v. 23). It is so clear that the gift of God is eternal life. What then is the reward? The Bible clearly shows us that the reward is the crown, the throne, and the kingdom of the heavens. The kingdom of the heavens is the reward. In the Bible, there are three aspects to the kingdom of the heavens. In the first aspect, the kingdom of the heavens is theoutward manifestation of God's authority today; it is the outward manifestation of God's sovereignty. The Bible calls this the kingdom of the heavens. The second aspect is the authority of the heavens controlling and limiting man. This is also called the kingdom of the heavens. However, there is a third aspect of the kingdom of the heavens; it refers to the reward.

The Lord's sermon on the mount in Matthew 5—7 speaks of the kingdom of the heavens. These teachings of the Lord tell us how man can enter into the kingdom of the heavens. Matthew 5—7 repeatedly speaks of the matter of reward. We see very clearly that the words "the kingdom of the heavens" and the word "reward" are found together many times. Many are familiar with the Beatitudes. The Chinese call them the Eight Blessings. Actually, there are nine blessings in the Beatitudes. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Also, blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens. The kingdom of the heavens is mentioned twice in these few blessings. At the end, the Lord says, "Blessed are you when they reproach and persecute you, and while speaking lies, say every evil thing against you because of Me. Rejoice and exult, for your reward is great in the heavens" (Matt. 5:11-12). Here we must admit that the reward is the kingdom of the heavens. The Lord begins by saying that this kind and that kind of people are blessed because the kingdom of the heavens is theirs. At the end He says that

these people are blessed because their reward is great in the heavens. These parallel sentences show us that the kingdom of the heavens is God's reward. There is no difference between the two.

In the sermon on the mount, the Lord mentioned the matter of the reward many times because this portion concerns the kingdom. Matthew 5:46 says, "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?" Matthew 6:1-2 says, "But take care not to do your righteousness before men in order to be gazed at by them; otherwise, you have no reward with your Father who is in the heavens. Therefore when you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be glorified by men. Truly I say to you, They have their reward in full." Verse 5 says, "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites...They have their reward in full." Verse 16 says, "And when you fast, do not be like the sullen-faced hypocrites...They have their reward in full." Verse 4 says, "So that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you." Verse 6 says, "But you, when you pray, enter into your private room, and shut your door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you." The last part of verse 18 says, "And your Father who sees in secret will repay you." Every reader of the Bible agrees that the main subject of the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5—7 is the kingdom of the heavens. But here, the matter of reward is also repeatedly mentioned because the kingdom of the heavens is the reward.

Matthew 16:27-28 says, "For the Son of Man is to come in the glory of His Father and with His angels, and then He will repay each man according to his doings." God will reward or punish a saved person according to his doings. "Truly I say to you, There are some of those standing here who shall by no means taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." There are three facts here. First, man will be rewarded according to his works. The matter of reward is entirely based on works. Second, at what time will the reward be given out? It will be given out when Christ comes in the glory of His Father with His angels. When Christ comes in the glory of His Father with His angels, that will be the time for Him to establish His kingdom on the earth. Hence, it is only when the kingdom begins that the reward will begin. Third, here is a type which speaks of a fact. The transfiguration of the Lord on the mountain typifies His manifestation in glory in the coming kingdom. By that time some believers will be rewarded.

The verses in Matthew 6 which we just read regarding the reward for giving, the reward for prayer, and the reward for fasting all involve reward. Some think that the reward for prayer is God's answering of our prayer. But this is not all that is meant. The Lord Jesus said that we have to pray to our Father who is in secret, and our Father who sees in secret will repay us. It may be possible to interpret this as the Father answering our prayer. However, both in the first part when the Lord mentions alms-giving, and in the second part when He mentions fasting, He said, "And your Father who sees in secret will repay you." This repaying must refer to something in the future. Furthermore, the Lord said that we have to pray to the Father who sees in secret. It does not say that the Father hears in secret, but that He sees in secret. When God gives out the reward in the future, He gives according to what He sees. God sees with His eyes. Hence, the reward is in the future.

Revelation 11:15 says, "And the seventh angel trumpeted; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever." Verse 18 says, "And the nations became angry, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to give the reward to Your slaves the prophets and to the saints and to those who fear Your name, to the small and to the great." This verse clearly shows us that when the Lord becomes King and the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, that is the time for giving the reward to the saints, to the small and to the great. In other words, the time of the kingdom is the time of reward. Whenever the kingdom comes, the reward will come also.

There is a further point. The reward is the obtaining of the crown and the obtaining of the throne. Once a Western missionary told me, "If I cannot have the crown, at least I can have the kingdom." You can ask King Edward of England, if he loses his crown, will he still have the kingdom? What is a crown? It is not merely a hat beaten with gold and studded with diamonds. That kind of crown can be gained with a little money. What is a crown? A crown represents position in the kingdom. It also represents glory in the kingdom. If a crown is only a physical thing, it does not mean much. If one has money, he can make a golden one. If he does not have money, he can make a brass one or an iron one. Even if one is very poor, he can still make a crown out of cloth. In the future, it will not be a matter of one crown being bigger than the other in size, or one crown having more diamonds than the other. A crown stands

for something. When one loses the crown, he loses the thing that the crown represents. We have to see that the crown is the symbol of the kingdom.

What is the throne? The Bible shows us that the twelve apostles will sit on twelve thrones. The crown is a reward for the overcomers, and the throne is also a reward for the overcomers. Hence, the throne is also a symbol of the kingdom. It represents position in the kingdom, authority in the kingdom, and glory in the kingdom. There is no such thing as losing the crown but still having the kingdom. Similarly, one cannot lose the throne but still have the kingdom. If one loses the throne, he will lose the kingdom. Similarly, if one loses the crown, he will lose the kingdom. The throne and the crown are not significant in themselves; they are there simply to represent the kingdom. In other words, the reward is the kingdom. The Bible clearly shows us that the reward is simply the kingdom.

JUDGMENT AT THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

How will God give us the reward? The time for us to be rewarded is when Christ comes again to execute judgment. Peter tells us that judgment begins from the house of God. In the future, God will judge the Christians first, before He judges the worldly people. Concerning what will God judge us? He will not judge us for eternal salvation or perdition. That judgment has been taken care of on the cross. All our sins have been judged on the cross, and the problem of eternal perdition has been resolved. But we Christians will be judged in the future. That judgment will determine whether or not we will participate in the kingdom. For some, not only will there not be participation in the kingdom, but there will be punishment as well. At that time, Christ will set up the judgment seat, and He will judge His believers at that judgment seat.

We will read two verses which are even clearer concerning this matter. Second Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done through the body according to what he has practiced, whether good or bad." Every one of us who has believed in the Lord will be manifested before the judgment seat. The word "judgment seat" is bema in the original Greek. It means a raised platform. Bema is the place where matters are settled in the family. This verse says that we must all be manifested before the judgment seat that each may be recompensed according to what he has practiced. Eternal

salvation or death is a matter of believing. But the judgment of a Christian is according to what he practices, whether good or evil. This is the judgment before the judgment seat.

Regarding the kingdom, there are a few things which we must know. Whether or not one can enter into the kingdom is one thing. Even if one can enter into the kingdom, there will still be a difference of position in the kingdom. If one cannot enter into the kingdom, he will go into outer darkness or will be chastised. Therefore, after we have believed in the Lord, though our good work cannot save us, it will determine our status in the kingdom. Thank God that the question of our eternal life or death is settled, but we will still be judged before the judgment seat of Christ. That judgment is not for determining our eternal life or death. It is for determining our position in the kingdom.

There are many other verses in the Bible that show us that believers will be judged by the Lord Jesus before the judgment seat of Christ. Among these verses, 1 Corinthians 3 shows us most clearly how we will be judged by the Lord before the judgment seat. First Corinthians 3:8 says, "Now he who plants and he who waters are one, but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor." The subject here is how each one will be rewarded according to his own labor. Verse 10 says, "According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, and another builds upon it. But let each man take heed how he builds upon it." The foundation is Jesus Christ. Each one's own labor is the way each one builds. The way we build is determined by the material we use. Verses 12-15 say, "But if anyone builds upon the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, stubble, the work of each will become manifest; for the day will declare it, because it is revealed by fire, and the fire itself will prove each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built upon the foundation remains, he will receive a reward; if anyone's work is consumed, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." This passage shows us that everyone who is building on this foundation is saved. The work which some build upon it will remain, and those ones will be rewarded. The work of some will not remain, and it will be consumed by fire. They will suffer loss, even though they will still be saved. Let us remember that there is still a judgment before us. That judgment will not determine whether or not we will perish, but it will determine whether we will receive a reward.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

HOW GOD DEALS WITH THE BELIEVERS' SINS— THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR ENTERING INTO THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS

We have made it clear that the kingdom is the time when God will reward the Christians according to their works. In the kingdom, the faithful believers will be rewarded, and the unfaithful believers will be punished. Many people think that if a Christian is unfaithful, although he may have to occupy a lower position, he will nevertheless make it into the kingdom. Many who do not understand God's word and God's work think that they are guaranteed an entrance into the kingdom of the heavens. They think that when the Lord Jesus comes to rule, there will merely be a distinction between higher and lower positions in the kingdom; no one will lose the kingdom of the heavens altogether. However, in the kingdom of the heavens, there is not only a distinction between higher and lower positions, but also the distinction between being allowed to enter and being kept out. The Bible shows us that there is a clear distinction between ten cities and five cities, between a large crown and a small one, and between a greater glory and a lesser one. As one star differs from another star, so also are the positions in the kingdom different. Not only is there the difference of lower and higher positions in the kingdom; there is also the distinction of being able or not able to get in.

DOING THE WILL OF THE FATHER

The Bible tells us of a very serious truth. Although someone may have eternal life, he may still be rejected from the kingdom of the heavens. One verse that speaks of this is Matthew 7:21: "Not every one who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he who does the will of My Father who is in the heavens." The persons in this verse all address the Lord as "Lord." The Lord will make a distinction between those disciples who can enter into the kingdom of the heavens and those who cannot. The Lord clearly shows us here that the condition for entering the kingdom of the heavens is doing the will of God. Although some have been saved and have

called Him Lord, and although they have also done some works, without doing the will of God they nevertheless cannot enter into the kingdom of the heavens. The reward of the kingdom of the heavens is based on the obedience of man. If one is not faithful while living on the earth, though he will not lose eternal life, he will lose the kingdom of the heavens. When the time comes for the heavens to rule, that is, when the Lord Jesus comes the second time, some will not be able to enter the kingdom, but will lose it instead.

First, the Lord mentioned this matter in verse 21. Following this, in verses 22 and 23, He explained the matter to us in the way of a prophecy. There will be many, not only one or two, who will not do the will of God. "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, was it not in Your name that we prophesied, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name did many works of power? And then I will declare to them: I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness." Here the Lord Jesus tells us what will happen before the judgment seat. He says, "In that day." Hence, this does not refer to today, but to the future. There are many who work hard but do not see the light of God in their lives. When the time of the judgment seat comes, and when Christ begins to judge from the house of God, these Christians will have light for the first time. They will see that they are off in their standing and in their living.

In that day many will say before the Lord, "Was it not in Your name that we prophesied, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name did many works of power?" Within one sentence, the phrase "in Your name" is mentioned three times. This proves that these ones are the Lord's. The fact that they say, "Lord, Lord," proves that their standing is that of a Christian. Not only do they say that they prophesy, cast out demons, and do many works of power; they do these in the Lord's name. The mentioning of "in Your name" three times tells us of their relationship with the Lord.

Amazingly, the Lord tells them, "And then I will declare to them: I never knew you." Because many do not understand the meaning of these words, they think that these surely are not saved ones. But if these are not saved ones, then the Lord's word here would be meaningless. Matthew 7 is a conclusion to the sermon on the mount following the Lord's word concerning the Beatitudes. These words on the mount were spoken by the Lord Jesus to the disciples. After the Lord went up the mountain, His disciples came before

Him, and He opened His mouth and taught them from chapter five to chapter seven.

The Lord Jesus said that they should not call Him Lord with their mouth only. If they call Him Lord, they should do the will of the Father. Even if they have the outward works of prophesying, casting out demons, and doing works of power, these works must not replace the Father's will. Doing the Father's will is one thing, whereas prophesying, casting out demons, and doing works of power are another thing altogether. Sometimes, one can prophesy, cast out demons, and do works of power without doing the will of the Father. We must remember that we should not only call Him Lord with our mouth, but we should do the Father's will in our walk as well. If the Lord were speaking about unsaved persons, this word would lose its meaning altogether, for if these are not saved ones, it would not matter much for the disciples to listen or not to listen to His word. The disciples may say that His word is for the unsaved ones, but they are the saved ones; therefore whether or not they do the Father's will, the Lord cannot deny knowing them. If this were the case, then all the unsaved ones would be those who do not do the will of God, and all the saved ones would be those who do the will of God. This would take away the highest meaning of these words.

The Lord Jesus must be warning the saved ones here by speaking about the saved ones. He cannot be warning the saved ones by speaking about the unsaved ones. Suppose one has a maid and two daughters, and suppose this one were to say to the younger daughter, "Do you see that maid? She is not born of me; I am beating her. You have to be obedient today. If you are not obedient, I will punish you in the same way I am punishing her." Is this word logical? A maid is not born of the family. If she becomes disobedient, she may be beaten. But the daughter of the family is not a maid. One cannot apply the way to deal with a maid to a daughter. The mother ought to say, "Last night I punished your sister because she was disobedient. Now be careful. If you are not obedient, I will punish you as well." The mother must take the sister as an example. The maid cannot be used for a comparison. There is no reason for the Lord to use unsaved ones as an example to show the disciples that they ought to do God's will. If He did, the disciples would rise up and say, "They are the unsaved ones, but we are the saved ones." If they were to say this, no one could say anything further.

What the Lord Jesus is saying is this: "Many people are God's children. They are saved and are the same as you are. They call Me ‘Lord,’ and they have done many works. But they are nevertheless shut outside the kingdom. For this reason you must be careful. You have to do the will of God." Only in this way will the disciples know that though they do many works, if they do not do the will of God, they will receive the same punishment. If He were speaking to the unsaved ones, there would no longer be the piercing element to His word. The Lord was warning us that only those who do the will of God can enter the kingdom. If one were to rely on his own work to come before God, the Lord Jesus would tell him, "I never knew you."

Let me give you another example. Suppose a judge's son drives carelessly and hits another car. He is taken by the police to the court for a hearing. The judge would ask, "Young man, what is your name? How old are you? Where do you live?" The son down at the stand may think, "You should know all these things better than I do." He may answer the first few questions. But after a while, he may shout to the father, "Father, don't you know me?" What should the judge do then? He may bang his gavel and say, "I do not know you. In my home, I know you. But in the court, I never knew you." If one sees the matter of the kingdom, he will realize that in the kingdom, it is not a matter of whether or not a person is saved and whether he is a child of God; what really matters is his work after becoming a believer. Suppose after you are saved, you are very zealous. Although you have not carried out God's will, you nevertheless prophesy, cast out demons, and do works of power in the Lord's name. If you come before the Lord asking to be admitted into the kingdom because of these unprincipled works, the Lord will say that He never knew you.

Why did the Lord say, "I never knew you"? The next sentence explains: "Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness." Please remember that the Lord did not tell them to depart from eternal life. In the original Greek the meaning of workers of lawlessness is people who do not follow the rules, keep the law, or abide by the regulations. In the eyes of God, to do evil does not mean only to do bad things. It does not matter how much one has done; as long as he has not hearkened to God's demand, His judgment, and His sovereign arrangements, it is evil in God's eyes. If this word "lawlessness" were translated as "evil," as some versions have done, many would have the ground to argue. The problem here is not a matter of doing evil, but a matter of being unprincipled. What are the principles? The principles are God's word.

But what is God's word? God's word is God's will. If you are not doing the will of God, no matter what you do, the Lord Jesus would say that you are lawless. Those who do things according to their own self will have no part in the kingdom of the heavens.

My purpose in saying these things is to show you the importance of a Christian's works. The Bible shows us clearly that after a person believes in the Lord, though he will never lose eternal life, he may lose his place and glory in the kingdom. If we do not do the will of God, but work according to our own will instead, we will be shut out of the kingdom. We may think that prophesying, casting out demons, and doing works of power are most important, because we think that if we can do these things, we will be a marvelous person. But these things can never replace the will of God. All those who have never learned not to work for God are not worthy to work for God. Those who do not know how to stop their own work surely know nothing about God's will. Only those who know the will of God can stop working. God wants us first to obey His will and then to work. God does not want us to volunteer to work for Him. The more one knows about the will of the Lord, the more he will learn not to work carelessly. Thus, there is a big difference between working and doing the will of God. Today we may appreciate the works and may be interested in prophesying, casting out demons, and doing works of power. But one day, many will be awakened.

BUFFETING THE BODY TO PLEASE THE LORD

Another passage which some misinterpret as referring to perdition actually refers to the losing of the kingdom and the losing of the reward. First Corinthians 9:23-27 says, "And I do all things for the sake of the gospel that I may become a fellow partaker of it. Do you not know that those who run on a racecourse all run, but one receives the prize? Run in this way, that you may lay hold. And everyone who contends, exercises self-control in all things; they then, that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we, an incorruptible. I therefore run in this way, not as though without a clear aim; I box in this way, not as though beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest perhaps having preached to others, I myself may become disapproved." Paul feared that, having preached to others, he himself might be disapproved. Here Paul was saying that he could also be disapproved. What is the meaning of being disapproved here? And of what is one being disapproved? In these

messages, we have emphasized the fact that in reading the Bible, one should pay attention to the context. Here we must also consider the context.

In verse 24 Paul likens himself to one who is running in a race in which only one will get the prize. Therefore, the problem here is not a matter of salvation, but a matter of receiving the prize. Paul is talking about how a saved one can receive the prize; he is not talking about how an unsaved one can be saved. Only the ones who are saved, who have believed in the Lord Jesus, who are reborn, and who have become the children of God are qualified to enter the race. Only the children of God can run in the race and pursue the prize that God intends for us to gain. If someone is not a child of God, he will not be qualified even to enter the race. Nowhere does the Bible say that salvation is gained by our running the race. The Bible never says that if someone is able to run, he will be saved. If that were so, then very few could be saved, and salvation would be dependent on works. The Bible says that the prize comes from the running; God has placed us on a racecourse for us to run the race.

What is the prize? Verse 25 says, "And everyone who contends exercises self-control in all things; they then, that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we, an incorruptible." Here it says that the prize is a crown. We have mentioned that the crown signifies glory and the kingdom. Therefore, the word "disapproved" does not refer to the losing of salvation. The word "disapproved" means to fail to receive the crown and the prize. If Paul could be disapproved, then we all have the possibility of being disapproved. If Paul had the possibility of losing his prize and losing his crown, then each one of us also has the possibility of losing the prize and the crown.

Verse 26 indicates the reason for being disapproved: "I therefore run in this way, not as though without a clear aim; I box in this way, not as though beating the air." Paul had a purpose and a direction. He was not beating the air. His goal and direction were what he said in 2 Corinthians 5, that he was ambitious to be well-pleasing to the Lord. Whether he would live or die on this earth, his desire was to please the Lord. How did he run in the race? He did not run in a loose way. He had a definite direction and a definite goal. He was not beating the air. He did not simply do whatever others told him to do. Nor did he do something simply because the need was there. If he were to work according to the need, he would have to run day and night, for the need was too great. We are not for the work, but for pleasing the Lord.

If we want to receive the prize, what should we do? "But I buffet my body and make it my slave." Many would place their own bodies above the prize. Many would place their own bodies above the will of God. But Paul said that he subjected his body; he was able to control it. Paul could control the lust of his body, the excessive demands of his body, and the desires of his body. He did not let his body get on top. He said that he buffeted his body and made it his slave. Whether or not a Christian can please the Lord depends upon whether he can control his body. Many people cannot control their own bodies. Whenever a little stimulus comes to their body, all kinds of sins result. We must see that all those who cannot control their own bodies will lose their prize and their crown. Although they can preach the gospel to others, they themselves will be disapproved.

We believers are saved once and for all and will never lose our salvation. But when the Lord Jesus returns in His glory to rule the earth, He will not give crowns to everyone. In the new heaven and new earth, although every saved one will receive the same glory, when the Lord Jesus comes to rule on this earth for a thousand years, some will lose their prize, their authority, and their glory. Some will not be able to enter the kingdom and will not be able to receive a crown.

The Lord's word is very clear concerning the matters of salvation and eternal life: both are totally of grace. Moreover, whether or not one can enter into the kingdom of the heavens depends upon his works. We have just seen that we have to do the will of God. Here we see that we have to buffet our own body. We may do many works outwardly, but as long as we do not restrict our body, we will not be allowed into the kingdom.

In the Bible there seems to be a fixed number of crowns. Revelation 3:11 says, "I come quickly; hold fast what you have that no one take your crown." Some who do not understand the Bible do not know the difference between a reward and a gift. Neither do they know the difference between the crown and God's salvation. They think that salvation can be taken away from them. The word "take" here does not refer to salvation but to the crown. One can be saved yet still lose the crown. There was a very sensational headline in the news recently. A certain king of a certain country had lost his crown. If a saved one does not hold fast to what he has, if he does not keep the words of endurance of the Lord Jesus, and if he forsakes the name of the Lord Jesus,

he will lose his crown some day. If you are loose, and if you do not hold fast, you will lose your crown. Someone else might take away your crown from you.

Revelation 2:10 has a word similar to this: "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." Here it does not say give life, but give the crown of life. Life is obtained through faith; it is not obtained through faithfulness. If a person does not have faith, he cannot have life. But if a person is unfaithful after he has life, he will lose the crown of life. Hence, if a Christian does not have good works after being saved, though he will not lose life, he will nevertheless lose the crown.

BUILDING WITH GOLD, SILVER, AND PRECIOUS STONES

The clearest passage in the Bible about the reward is 1 Corinthians 3:14-15: "If anyone's work which he has built upon the foundation remains, he will receive a reward; if anyone's work is consumed, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved." This shows us clearly what a Christian cannot lose and what he can lose. Once a person is saved, he is surely saved forever. But whether or not such a one will receive a reward cannot be decided today. A Christian's eternal salvation is settled already. But the future reward is a question that is still pending. It is decided by how one builds upon the foundation of the Lord Jesus. Our salvation does not depend on how we build. It depends only on how the Lord builds. If His work is perfect, we are surely saved. However, whether or not we will receive the reward or suffer loss depends on our own building work. If one builds with gold, silver, and precious stones, things with eternal value, upon the foundation of the Lord Jesus, he will surely receive a reward. But if he builds with wood, hay, and stubble, he will not receive a reward before God. He may have much before man, yet he will not have much before God. This shows us that it is possible for a man to lose his reward and to have his work burned away.

Let me repeat this. Thank God that the matter of our eternal salvation was decided over nineteen hundred years ago. When the Son of God was hung on the cross, the question of our salvation was settled. But whether or not we will receive the reward depends on how we behave. The truth of the gospel is very balanced. Salvation rests totally with the Lord Jesus. The giving of salvation depends absolutely on the Lord Jesus. However, whether or not one can obtain his reward depends on his own building work. Man must believe, and he also must work. This work is not his own work, but what the Holy Spirit

has worked out in him. Here we see that it is possible for us to lose our reward. It is also possible for us to be disapproved for the kingdom and to have our crown taken away. It seems that our position in the kingdom is never settled; it is subject to change and not assured.

HOLDING FAST THE BOAST OF HOPE

Hebrews 3:6 gives us a similar word. "But Christ was faithful as a Son over His house, whose house we are if indeed we hold fast the boldness and the boast of hope firm to the end." Here it seems uncertain as to whether or not we are His house. The apostle said that we are His house if we hold fast the boldness and the boast of hope firm to the end. What is this house and this hope? This blessed hope is nothing other than that of the Lord Jesus returning in glory to set up His kingdom on the earth. If a Christian has such a hope, knowing that the Lord Jesus will come again to set up His kingdom in glory, and knowing that all those faithful ones who do the will of God will reign with the Lord, if such a one holds fast to this, he will be His house. Today we are His house already. We are all living stones built into a spiritual house. This is what Peter has told us (1 Pet. 2:5). But how we will fare in the future kingdom depends on how we hold fast. This matter cannot be decided once and for all. There are many verses in the Bible concerning this, and all are very clear. The problem of eternity is totally settled, but the matter of position and reward in the kingdom depends on how we hold fast today.

BEING THE MORE DILIGENT TO MAKE THE CALLING AND SELECTION FIRM

We come to 2 Peter 1:10: "Therefore, brothers, be the more diligent to make your calling and selection firm, for doing these things you shall by no means ever stumble." If one does not know the truth about selection, he will not see that this refers to the hope of the kingdom being firm. Here it says that a person's selection and calling is not necessarily firm. Does this mean that a person will become unsaved again? No, it does not, because Romans 11 clearly tells us that the calling of God is irrevocable (11:29). Here it is not talking only about calling, but selection as well. Peter put calling and selection together. The Bible says many times that many are called, but few are chosen. Except for one place which I am not absolutely sure about, all the other places refer to many being saved and few obtaining a reward. Hence, the selection here refers to the position in the kingdom.

Peter said, "For doing these things you shall by no means ever stumble." These are the things mentioned in verses 5-7, such as faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, and love. If we do these things, we will never stumble. This is the same as saying that if we are the more diligent, our calling and selection will be firm. These are parallel expressions. The first of these parallel expressions says that we should be diligent to make our calling and selection firm. The second of these parallel expressions says that by doing these, we will never stumble.

Verse 11 says, "For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly and bountifully supplied to you." The Bible shows us that the kingdom of Christ is eternal. But some will enter it only in eternity future, whereas others will enter it during the millennium. The ruling of Christ begins with the millennial kingdom. Therefore, Revelation 11:15 says, "And the seventh angel trumpeted; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever." This verse shows us that the kingdom of Christ is linked to eternity future; it lasts forever and ever. However, it begins at the trumpeting of the seventh angel, that is, at the beginning of the tribulation. When Christ begins His reign, some will enter the kingdom. They will not only enter in, but will be richly and bountifully supplied an entrance. Therefore, to make our calling and selection firm is to be richly and bountifully supplied with an entrance into this eternal kingdom.

One can see that salvation has been settled, but that the entrance into the kingdom has not yet been settled. Once a Christian believes in the Lord Jesus, he can immediately praise the Lord because he knows that the question of eternal life or death is settled. However, after one believes, there are experiences ahead of him; he still has the kingdom before him and a future glory waiting for him. Some will obtain these things: the kingdom, the crown, the glory, and the reward; whereas others will not obtain them. Some will enter into the kingdom of Christ; others will not be able to enter in. Some will not only enter in, but will be richly and bountifully supplied an entrance into the kingdom of Christ. This does not mean that those who cannot enter the kingdom of Christ are not saved. But it does mean that their reward and glory are taken away. Hence, we need to run and strive. Our being able to reign with Jesus the Nazarene in the future depends on how we strive today.

ENTERING THE KINGDOM
TO SHARE IN CHRIST'S GLORY

I wonder if you have ever thought of the kind of glory with which God will reward Christ in the millennium for what He suffered nineteen hundred years ago. A reward must match a suffering. If a man is brought to the lowest position, his reward must be the greatest. Suppose your house is burned or you have encountered a grave danger, and a servant in your house risked everything and nearly lost his life trying to save you. How would you reward him? Would you say, "I reward you with twenty cents"? No one would do this. The reward has to match the suffering. Christ has glorified God in such a way and has died such a death on the cross. How shall God reward Christ in the future? And how shall He glorify Christ?

The kingdom is the time when Christ and the Christians will receive glory together. The kingdom is the time when God will reward Christ. At that time, we will have a portion there as well. Whether or not we would be counted worthy to receive the Lord's glory depends absolutely on the results of our personal walk and work. There is no question of worthiness in the new heaven and new earth. But in the kingdom only those who are worthy will receive the glory. The Lord has suffered persecution, difficulties, and shame. If we suffer persecution, difficulties, and shame today in the same way, we will share a portion with Him in the coming kingdom.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

HOW GOD DEALS WITH THE BELIEVERS' SINS— DISCIPLINE IN THE KINGDOM (1)

SUFFERING GOD'S DISCIPLINE IN THE COMING AGE

The Bible tells us that the Lord disciplines us because He loves us (Heb. 12:6). When man loves, he overlooks. But when God loves, He disciplines. When man loves, he is loose. But when God loves, He is serious. If God had not loved us, He would not have sent His Son to die for our sins on the cross. Similarly, if God does not love us, He would not discipline us. God's disciplining love is the same as His saving love, which caused Him to send His Son to die for us on the cross. It was His love that caused His Son to die on our behalf. It is also His love that disciplines us. Every Christian knows that there is no contradiction between God's discipline and God's grace. On the contrary, God's discipline manifests God's grace. Although we have seen that a man cannot perish again after he is saved, we can never say that such a one will never suffer God's discipline. Now the question is whether God's discipline is confined to this age or whether it will be found in the coming age as well. This is a question that many people have never considered. We will take a look at this matter.

The Bible shows us that God's discipline is not restricted to this age only. It is also found in the next age. Many people have confined God's discipline to this age. But you cannot find the basis for such a teaching in the Bible. In terms of the experience of Christians, there is surely the possibility for discipline in the next age. Many have not been disciplined in this age. Although they are God's children, they have not lived a consecrated life in this age. They do whatever they want and do many things in disobedience throughout their lives and until their death. Although some have been zealous for the Lord and have worked and have even experienced many miracles and works of power outwardly, these things are all done according to their own will and contrary to God's purpose. Some even have obvious sins and specific transgressions. But we do not see much discipline in these ones. On the

contrary, they live peacefully and depart from this world in peace. However, in addition to losing the reward, these people will be disciplined in the kingdom. They will experience specific discipline from God. Hence, experientially speaking, if a Christian lives on earth today without checking his lust and instead loves the world and walks in his own ways, he will be disciplined in the coming age. We have ample evidence of this from the Bible.

THE PURPOSE OF DISCIPLINE BEING FOR THE CLEANSING

According to the Word of God, discipline is for cleansing. Man is defiled; therefore, he needs to be cleansed. In the Bible there is not only one kind of cleansing. The first cleansing is the cleansing of the blood, that is, the cleansing by the blood of the Lord Jesus. The Bible mentions the cleansing of the blood over three hundred times. Here we will mention only two verses. Hebrews 9:22 says, "And almost all things are purified by blood according to the law, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." This verse speaks of the purification by the blood. Hebrews 1:3 says, "Who, being the effulgence of His glory and the impress of His substance and upholding and bearing all things by the word of His power, having made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Here we can translate "having made cleansing of sins." In the Bible we see the cleansing of our sins by the blood of the Lord Jesus. After He cleansed our sins, He ascended to the heights and sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. This is the first kind of cleansing in the Bible.

However, although many people have received the cleansing of the blood of the Lord Jesus, they still have many filthy thoughts while living on earth. They are still very much defiled by the world and have many fleshly sins. Because there are these many other things, God uses other means to cleanse us. This is the way of cleansing by discipline and chastisement which we will now talk about.

In John 15:2 the Lord says, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes it away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it that it may bear more fruit." The pruning here is a cleansing. God cuts away the unnecessary, unimportant, and hindering elements that the branches may bear more fruit. This is God's discipline. Hence, the purpose of God's discipline is not for

destroying us but for perfecting us, so that we may become more worthy of God's glory, of God's holiness, and of the righteousness that is set before us.

Thus, there are two lines and two cleansings in God's Word. One is the cleansing by the blood of the Lord Jesus. The other is the cleansing by God which comes through our environment, our family, our personal health, or our job. If we indulge in what we should not indulge in or refuse to cut off what we should cut off, God's disciplining hand will be upon us in our environment.

THE CLEANSING IN THE COMING AGE

Is this cleansing discipline from God restricted to this age only, or is it found also in the coming age? From the Bible we know that death never changes anyone. Nowhere in the Bible are we shown a case of a man changed by death. We know that in the future we will be with God forever. In eternity we will be the same as the Lord; we will be holy, even as the Lord is holy. But can we say that today we are as holy as the Lord is? Can we say that we are worthy to be with the Lord for eternity? The blood of the Lord Jesus has cleansed us and that the record of our sins has been wiped away. This is a fact. But subjectively speaking, do we have Christ living in us experientially? Have we allowed the resurrected Christ to live out from us? Our walk today is far too different from what our walk must be in eternity; the two are too far apart. Today we come far short of the Lord's holiness, righteousness, and glory. Many Christians today are still full of sins and filth.

So then, we have a problem. If things are so bad today but will be so good in the future, if things are so imperfect today but will be so perfect in the future, when will the change take place? Somewhere along the way there must be a change. If you are not perfect today, but will be perfect in that day, when will such a change take place? In eternity, when we are with God and the Lamb in the New Jerusalem, we will be in the light as God is in the light. But when will we become such ones? The human concept is that when we die we will change. But the Bible never tells us that physical death will make a person holy. This was a doctrine that was preached five or six hundred years ago. But the Bible never says that death can change a person. If death could change a Christian, then death could also change an unsaved person. But death never changes anyone. The slothful servant is still slothful when he is resurrected. The foolish virgins are still foolish when they wake up. When they wake up, their

slothfulness and foolishness have not gone away. If a man is not changed in this age but will be different in the new heaven and new earth, and if death does not cause a person to change, then when does the change occur? The Bible shows us clearly that in the coming age there will be discipline, and this discipline will prune and cleanse us.

SOME SERVANTS OF GOD TO BE JUDGED IN THE COMING AGE

We need to look at a few verses concerning this future discipline. Luke 12:45-48 says, "But if that slave says in his heart, My master is delaying his coming, and begins to beat the male servants and the female servants and to eat and to drink and become drunk, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him asunder, and will appoint his portion with the unbelievers. And that slave who knew his master's will and did not prepare or do according to his will, will receive many lashes; but he who did not know, yet did things worthy of stripes, will receive few lashes. But to every one to whom much has been given, much will be required from him; and to whom much has been committed, they will ask of him all the more."

The first thing in these verses that we have to decide is whether or not the slave belongs to the Lord. Is he a Christian? Is he saved? Surely the slave is a saved one. How can I say this? First, in the New Testament God never considers those who do not belong to Him as His slaves. In going from the Old Testament to the New Testament age, first, man is a slave and then becomes a son. Thus, in the Old Testament there are many unsaved slaves. But in the New Testament the order is reversed. If a man is not God's son, he is not qualified to be God's slave. All slaves of God are sons in the New Testament. Therefore, the slave spoken of here is surely a saved one.

There is a second proof that the slave in Luke 12:45-48 is saved. The proof is in the previous verses. Verses 42-44 say, "And the Lord said, Who then is the faithful and prudent steward, whom the master will set over his service to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Truly I tell you that he will set him over all his possessions." Is the slave in these verses the same one as the slave in verses 45 and 46? Or are there two slaves? There is only one slave. The slave in verses 43 and 44 is the one in verse 45. The same person can be a

good slave as well as a bad slave. This slave can have two different minds. If he is faithful to the charge of the master of the house and would give to the household their portion of food at the proper time, the master will reward him well and will set him over all his possessions. But if the slave says in his heart, "The master is delaying his coming; I can act any way I want," and he begins to beat the male servants and the female servants, the master will come and judge his sins. This proves that a saved person can both be a good slave and a bad slave.

If a saved person has unfortunately become an evil slave, what will his end be? Verse 46 says, "The master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him asunder, and will appoint his portion with the unbelievers." Does this chastisement occur in this age or in the age to come? What does the day and hour which he does not know refer to? They must refer to the time when the Lord will come back. This is something in the future. The Lord says that a slave can be faithful or unfaithful and that an unfaithful slave will not only miss the reward, but will also be condemned and receive a definite punishment. Verses 47 and 48 are based on the words of verse 46. They tell us of the future of those who belong to the Lord and who work for the Lord. "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not prepare or do according to his will, will receive many lashes; but he who did not know, yet did things worthy of stripes, will receive few lashes. But to every one to whom much has been given, much will be required from him; and to whom much has been committed, they will ask of him all the more." These verses do not say that those who do not know will not receive any lashes; they only say that they will receive few lashes. There will still be the lashes. God does not let those who do not know get by, because His word is here. Those who know have to be responsible before God; those who do not know and who have done things worthy of lashes will still receive lashes, yet they will receive few lashes. Everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required from him; and to whom much has been committed, they will ask of him all the more. This is the principle of God's future chastisement. Luke 12:47-48 settles for us the question of future chastisement of Christians before God.

My friends, I am here preaching the gospel of grace. When a man is saved, he is saved forever. This is an immutable fact. However, after we are saved, if our conduct is unbecoming of Christians, we will be chastised in the future. I am only a preacher of the Word of God. I am responsible to speak only what

the Bible says. I am not responsible for what the Bible ought to say. Today some may ask why Christians need to be chastised in the future. I do not know. You can ask the Lord for yourself. I am only saying what the Bible has said. This is the Lord's word.

Let us read Colossians 3:23-25. "Whatever you do, work from the soul as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as recompense. You serve the Lord Christ. For he who does unrighteously will receive what he unrighteously did, and there is no respect of persons." The context of this passage makes it clear that these verses refer to Christians, not to unbelievers. The preceding verses speak of how a Christian should be a wife, a husband, a father or a mother, a son or a daughter, a master or a slave. Then Paul says that if a Christian does unrighteously, he will receive what he unrighteously did, because there is no respect of persons. This shows us clearly that a Christian's recompense comes at the judgment seat of Christ. If he does unrighteously today, he will receive a recompense according to what he has done unrighteously. If he acts righteously, he will receive his recompense according to his righteousness. Hence, we cannot say that Christians will not receive a certain amount of discipline and chastisement.

RECEIVING THE THINGS DONE THROUGH THE BODY

Now let us read 2 Corinthians 5:10. "For we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done through the body according to what he has practiced, whether good or bad." All Bible readers know that the judgment seat of Christ is in the air. Hence, those standing before the judgment seat are those who have been raptured. And who can be raptured? The Bible tells us that only Christians can be raptured. Those who are not Christians cannot be raptured. If a man is not saved and is not a child of God, he is not even qualified to be judged at this judgment. This is God's judgment within His own family. Here it tells us what we will be faced with at the future judgment seat of Christ. We will be recompensed for the things done through the body. In other words, we will be recompensed for the things done in the body, that is, for the things we have done while living on earth, whether good or bad. If you do good in the body, you will receive a good reward. If you do evil in the body, you will receive the recompense of evil. The Word of God shows us clearly that at the judgment

seat those who do well will receive a reward and that those who do not do well will lose their reward and will be recompensed according to their evil.

Because there is a future judgment, the apostle Paul prayed concerning mercy in the future. Second Timothy 1:18 says, "May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord in that day. And in how many things he served me in Ephesus, you know best." Paul expressed the wish that Onesiphorus would find mercy from the Lord in that day. If a Christian will at most lose his reward in the future when he stands before the judgment seat and will not be punished or disciplined, then this word is meaningless. Paul hoped that the Lord would be merciful to Onesiphorus at His judgment, because Onesiphorus had helped Paul so much and had propagated the gospel with him. If there were any wrongs that Onesiphorus had done, Paul hoped that the Lord would be merciful to him. Hence, we see that Christians need not only forgiveness, but also God's mercy at the time of judgment at the beginning of the millennium; otherwise, they will fall under God's chastisement.

In 2 Timothy 4 there is another verse which we should read. Verse 16 says, "At my first defense no one was with me to support me, but all abandoned me. May it not be counted against them." This is another prayer. While Paul was in Asia, the whole of Asia abandoned him. While he was before the king being judged, many Christians were fearful of death and hid off to the side. Yet even though they had abandoned him, Paul prayed that this sin would not be counted against them. Hence, we see that in the future God will still judge our sins. Paul prayed here that this sin would not be counted against them. There is enough light in the Bible to show us that if a saved person is not disciplined for his loose conduct in this age, or if he does not repent after discipline, he will not only lose his reward but will also be chastised in a definite way.

In Matthew 12 the Lord Jesus specifically mentions blaspheming the Holy Spirit. All sins can be forgiven. All the words spoken against the Son of Man can be forgiven. But the sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven. There will not be forgiveness in this age, and there will not be forgiveness in the next age (v. 32). In the Bible the coming age always refers to the kingdom. In the original language the word for age is *aion*, not *cosmos*. If the word were cosmos, it would refer to the organization of the world. But since it is *aion*, it refers to a time span. Hence, it is translated age. Today is the age of grace. The next age is the age when the Lord will come to reign for a thousand years.

When you read Matthew 12, you see that the forgiveness of sins is divided into two time periods. Some sins are forgiven in this age, and some sins are forgiven in the coming age. Some people, through discipline, are forgiven in this age. Some people may not have done well today, but they will be forgiven in the kingdom. Some people are forgiven when they are saved, but their subsequent sins will not be forgiven in the kingdom; they will be chastised severely instead. This is the biblical teaching concerning chastisement. Chastisement for the Christian in this age is clear enough. Some sinning Christians whose problems are not solved before God today will receive chastisement in the future.

THE KINGDOM BEING
THE TIME OF THE FUTURE CHASTISEMENT

When exactly will the future chastisement be? It is clear that there will be chastisement in the future after the Lord comes back, but when after the Lord's return will it be? Let us consider three ages in the Bible. The present age can be called the age of grace. It can also be called the age of the gospel or the age of the church. The coming age can be called the age of the kingdom or the millennial age, because that age will only last a thousand years (Rev. 20:6). After that age, there is yet another age, which is an eternal age. It is the age of the new heaven and new earth.

The Bible presents to us these three ages. The age of the church is the age of grace because God's grace and love are manifested in it. In this age God saves the unrighteous ones and causes man to receive the grace of the Lord Jesus. Everything in this age is of grace. The coming age is the age of righteousness. The eternal age is also an age of grace. Today is an age of grace, and the new heaven and new earth is also an age of grace. But the kingdom is all righteousness. If you are not clear about these ages, your reading of the Bible, theology, and biblical understanding will be all wrong. Both the church age and the age of the new heaven and new earth are ages of grace. But the millennial age is a parenthetical age specially prepared by God for the reward of the faithful ones and the chastisement of the sinful ones. That is a special period.

Both the New Testament and the Old Testament tell us that in this period, God deals with man in righteousness (Psa. 72:2; 85:10-13; 96:13; 97:2; Isa. 11:5; 26:9; 33:5; 62:1; Jer. 33:15; Dan. 7:27). We can quote at least two

hundred verses from the Old and New Testaments concerning the righteous judgment in the kingdom.

What is the difference between the kingdom and the new heaven and new earth? The Bible makes a clear distinction between the two. Let us consider Revelation 19:6-8. "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunders, saying, Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns." Please notice that here is the beginning of the kingdom. "Let us rejoice and exult, and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints." Here we read that fine linen is given to the bride. But though it is given, it is nevertheless of righteousness. The fine linen is the righteousness in the actions of the believers. In the original language, the righteousnesses mentioned here refer to righteousness in actions. The word has the sense of actions. Hence, it refers to our own righteous acts.

Now let us read 20:4-6. "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and of those who had not worshipped the beast nor his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no authority, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years." These verses tell us who will be the kings who reign with Christ a thousand years. The kingdom is not for everybody. The kingdom is only for the martyrs. It is only for those who reject Satan and Antichrist. Only these ones can reign for a thousand years. Hence, only the martyrs can reign; only those who reject Satan and Antichrist will be kings. This proves to us that the millennial kingdom is not given as a free gift, but is obtained through good works before God. Although in other passages we see other kinds of people reigning, in Revelation we see that there must be specific righteousness before there can be participation in the marriage feast of the Lamb. Only those who are the martyrs can be the kings. Without having the particular righteousness and without being martyred, no one can have a part in the kingship. This is the millennium.

THE AGE OF THE NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH

Let us now consider Revelation 21. Verses 1 through 7 say, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice out of the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will tabernacle with them, and they will be His peoples, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death will be no more, nor will there be sorrow or crying or pain anymore; for the former things have passed away. And He who sits on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said, Write, for these words are faithful and true. And He said to me, They have come to pass. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give to him who thirsts from the spring of the water of life freely. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be God to him, and he will be a son to Me."

The description of the kingdom in Revelation 19 and 20 is entirely different from the description of the new heaven and new earth in chapter twenty-one. When describing the kingdom, the Bible speaks about what man has done. But when it describes the new heaven and new earth, there is no more mention of what man has done. From chapter twenty-one on, the Bible simply speaks of what God has done. God said that He has made all things new. God said that the first heaven and the first earth have passed away and that the sea is no more. All these are done by God. The tabernacle of God will be with men. He shall tabernacle with men. We are His people; God Himself will dwell with us and will be our God. He will wipe away all our tears, so that we will have no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain, for all the former things will have passed away, and all things will have been made new. God said all these words are faithful. He said that He is the Alpha and the Omega. Man has no place here at all. These verses go on and on, telling us what God has done. There is no condition or demand. If you wish to know how to obtain such a wonderful new heaven and new earth, just listen to His word: "And He said to me, They have come to pass. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End" (v. 6a). In other words, everything is done by God. "I will give to him who thirsts from the spring of the water of life freely" (v. 6b). After all these things have been said, everything is summed up in one sentence: "I will give

to him who thirsts from the spring of the water of life freely." As long as there is the thirst, as long as there is the need, God will give from the spring of the water of life freely. This is grace. Grace is to give from the spring of the water of life freely. The new heaven and the new earth is of grace. God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. The new heaven and the new earth are absolutely from Him.

The next verse says, "He who overcomes will inherit these things." Who are these overcomers to whom John refers? The overcomers here are different from the overcomers in the epistles to the seven churches at the beginning of Revelation. Here, by the use of the term overcomers, a distinction is being made between the worldly people and the Christians. The distinction here is not between one kind of Christian and another kind of Christian. The overcoming in the first three chapters of Revelation is the overcoming by some Christians among other Christians. But the overcoming in chapter twenty-one is the overcoming by the Christians among the worldly people. How can we drink of the water of life? It is by faith. Those who believe can drink. In order to drink of the water of life freely, we have to believe. It is faith that enables us to overcome the world. Compared to the worldly people, every Christian is an overcomer. But compared to other Christians, many Christians are failing ones. Compared to those in the world, we are all overcomers because we have a faith before God that the worldly people do not have. Those who overcome and those who drink of the water of life will inherit these things, and God will be God to them, and they will be sons to God.

Chapter twenty-two also mentions the new heaven and new earth. Verses 1 through 5 say, "And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the middle of its street. And on this side and on that side of the river was the tree of life, producing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. And there will no longer be a curse. And the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His slaves will serve Him; and they will see His face, and His name will be on their forehead. And night will be no more; and they have no need of the light of a lamp and of the light of the sun, for the Lord God will shine upon them; and they will reign forever and ever." The main thing in the New Jerusalem is the river of water of life. This river proceeds from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Because it is the river of life, there is the tree of life, with the fruit of life growing. In Revelation 22, after everything has been said, one thing is prominent, the

river of life. This river of the water of life flows throughout the city. How can we enjoy the river of the water of life? At the end of Revelation, after the kingdom is over and after the church is over, verse 17 says, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him who hears say, Come! And let him who is thirsty come; let him who wills take the water of life freely." In other words, everyone is welcomed into the new heaven and new earth. In the new heaven and new earth there is a throne, and beneath the throne there is a river. The river comes forth from God and has the throne as its source. The throne is the center of the new heaven and new earth.

Furthermore, the word Lamb is never mentioned related to the kingdom. But in the new heaven and new earth, the Lamb is indeed mentioned. The throne is of God and of the Lamb (22:1); the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of the city (21:22); and the Lamb is the lamp of the city (21:23). That the Lamb is mentioned related to the new heaven and new earth indicates that this will be an age of grace. When we come to the end of Revelation, the church, the kingdom, and the tribulation are no longer mentioned. Instead, we find only that all who are thirsty can come and take of the water of life freely. This means that you are invited to the new heaven and new earth. Everything is free. And that it is free means that it is of grace. Therefore, the new heaven and new earth are entirely different from the kingdom. The new heaven and new earth are freely given to us. According to the teaching of Revelation, we can say that in the new heaven and new earth God deals with man in grace. In the kingdom, however, He deals with the Christians in righteousness. Therefore, we have to admit that it is in the kingdom that God chastises us. In the new heaven and new earth everything is received freely.

In this we see the relationship between today and the future. If we love the world today, walk by the flesh, and live a loose life, in the age to come we will be chastised by God. But if we love the Lord today and forsake everything for the Lord's sake, we will receive God's grace and His reward. This is the biblical teaching concerning these three ages. I am not responsible for what I am speaking here. I am only speaking God's Word. God's Word says that in the coming age there will be these things. God Himself is responsible for all of His own words. I only know that the Son of God has said these words. It is true that a man can enjoy eternal life today. But the kingdom is the time when God will deal with His children. If you live a loose life today, you will be disciplined in the future. Hence, we have eternal security, but we also have

temporary danger. We have the security of the new heaven and new earth. But we also have the peril of the kingdom. In the kingdom we may suffer severe punishment and chastisement. Whereas salvation is settled by the work of the Lord Jesus, reward is judged by one's work. Salvation comes by the work of the Lord Jesus. Reward comes by our own work. We are rewarded because we obey the will of God and walk not according to our own will. May we treasure the grace that we have received, and may we receive the warning from God and pursue after the reward of the kingdom.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

HOW GOD DEALS WITH THE BELIEVERS' SINS— DISCIPLINE IN THE KINGDOM (2)

RECEIVING LIFE IN THE KINGDOM IN THE COMING AGE

When we preach the gospel, we tell others that we receive eternal life through believing in Jesus Christ. If a person believes in Him, he will have eternal life. Everyone who understands the Word of God knows that in the church age, as soon as a man believes, he has eternal life. This is our message. But the question now is this: When is this eternal life manifested, revealed, and enjoyed? Today our minds and spirits are constantly being harassed by death. Satan is still very strong. So when will the eternal life be fully manifested? Will it be in the new heaven and new earth? Or will it be in the kingdom? Let us read John 5:24-29. "Truly, truly, I say to you, He who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. Truly, truly, I say to you, An hour is coming, and it is now, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, so He gave to the Son to also have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming in which all in the tombs will hear His voice and will come forth: those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have practiced evil, to the resurrection of judgment." Verse 24 says that as soon as a person believes, he has eternal life and will not come into judgment. He who hears the word of the Lord and believes the Father who sent the Lord has eternal life. But verse 29 says that those who have done good will come forth to the resurrection of life, while those that have practiced evil will come forth to the resurrection of judgment. The word life (Gk. *zoe*) in verse 29 is the same word as in verse 24. Those that have done good will come forth to the resurrection of zoe, and those that have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment. Verse 24 says clearly that we have eternal life already. But verse 29

says that some will not have eternal life until after the resurrection. Can you see the difference here?

Verse 25 is on the church age. It says that the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God. We all are these dead people. We have heard the voice of the Son of God, and as a result, we live. Verses 28-29 say, "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming in which all in the tombs will hear His voice and will come forth." Verse 25 says that an hour is coming and it is now. Verse 28, however, omits the phrase "and it is now," saying only that an hour is coming. Hence, it refers to the future, not to the present. Also, the Lord Jesus says that in the future all the ones from the tombs will come forth from the tombs. In verse 25, He refers to "the dead." In verse 28 He refers to the dead who are in the tombs. Verse 25 talks about the dead, referring to those dead in trespasses and sins. When the Lord speaks of those dead in the tombs, He is not referring to the death of the soul in sin; rather, He is referring to those dead in the body. All those who are dead in their body, that is, those who are in the tombs, will hear the voice of the Son of God for the second time. Those who have done good will go into the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil will go into the resurrection of judgment. This second time is the time when all those in the tombs will rise up.

Let us read Mark 10:30. "But that he shall receive a hundred times as much now at this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and fields, with persecutions, and in the coming age, eternal life." Here the Lord Jesus mentions eternal life again. We have to note what kind of eternal life this is. The eternal life in Mark 10:30 is not the eternal life of the church age spoken of in the Gospel of John or the eternal life in the new heaven and new earth. Please note that this eternal life is in the coming age. The phrase the coming age in the original language means the next age or the subsequent age. Today we are in the age of grace. The next age is the age of the kingdom, that is, the age of the millennium. Here, the Lord says that one can receive eternal life in the coming age. This does not refer to the eternal life we receive when we believe in the Lord.

Before the Lord spoke this word, a man came to Jesus asking what he should do to inherit eternal life. This was a question concerning works. Hence, the Lord Jesus told him of an eternal life that is gained by works. He told the young man that he must keep the law and sell all he had before he could inherit this eternal life. In the Gospel of John, the Lord Jesus shows us clearly

that eternal life comes by grace and not by works. So why does He say here that we have to keep the law and sell all that we have, before we can inherit eternal life? It is because the eternal life described here in Mark 10 is different from the eternal life described in John. The eternal life in Mark 10 is received through works. The eternal life in John is received through faith.

After the young man left, the Lord Jesus looked around Him and said to the disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" (v. 23). In saying this, the Lord put eternal life and the kingdom together. After the Lord Jesus said this, the disciples wondered what His word meant. The Lord said, "Children, how difficult it is for those who trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (vv. 24-25). The disciples were astounded and asked who then could be saved. The Lord said that "with men it is impossible, but not with God, for all things are possible with God" (v. 27). Peter then asked what he would get for having left all to follow Him, and the Lord told them of the things that are to come. "Jesus said, Truly I say to you, There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now at this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and fields, with persecutions, and in the coming age, eternal life" (vv. 29-30). They will receive eternal life in the kingdom.

Hence, the eternal life spoken of here is the eternal life in the kingdom. The eternal life in the kingdom is obtained through works. It is acquired through consecration, through suffering and bearing reproach for the Lord. For the Christian, the question of eternal life in this age is solved. The question of eternal life in eternity is also solved. But whether or not he will have eternal life in the kingdom depends on whether he loves the Lord, forsakes everything for the sake of the gospel, denies himself in everything, and rejects the world. It depends on whether or not he is living for money, for material gain, for his family, or for the worldly people. If he loves the Lord and forsakes all things for the sake of the gospel, the Lord promised that he will not lose these things even in this age, but on the contrary, he will gain a hundred times as much. If one gives up a little for the Lord today, he will reap a hundredfold return in the heavenly bank. Who can get such a high interest rate? A deposit of one dollar will yield a hundred dollars. You cannot find such a bank in the world. In addition, there is eternal life in the coming age.

In many places in Matthew, the phrase "eternal life" is used interchangeably with the word "kingdom." In these places the living ones are the ones who enter into the kingdom. For example, Matthew 7:14 says that the gate is narrow and the way is constricted that leads to life, and there are few that find it. Today many preach the gospel using this passage, and exhort people to enter the narrow gate and take the constricted way. But if one were saved through entering the narrow gate and taking the constricted way, salvation would not be of grace, but of works. Salvation would then become a reward for entering the narrow gate and taking the constricted way. The eternal life revealed in the book of Matthew does not refer to the eternal life of today; rather, it refers to the life in the millennial kingdom. In order to reign with Christ in the kingdom, a person must enter the narrow gate and take the constricted way. If one does not obey God's commandments and God's will, he will lose his eternal life. However, this does not mean that he will perish. But he will lose the eternal life in the kingdom.

If this problem is solved, then the problem of the ages in the Bible will be clearly resolved. In the age of the church, everything is by grace. At the end of the church age, God will establish His kingdom through His Son. In the kingdom only the faithful servants will reign with Christ by being resurrected from among the dead. The Bible shows us this very clearly.

PUNISHMENT IN THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM

The Bible says that many children of God will have specific punishment. Many Christians have improper walks. They do not live in a godly way. They love the world and walk according to their will. They worship God according to man's way. They have not obeyed God's Word in taking care of God's work, but have instead done what they themselves like to do. They try to please men. They seek man's glory rather than God's glory and are not willing to stand in the same place of shame that the Lord stood in. They commit many mistakes and many sins. They have not been disciplined by God in this age. After they die and are resurrected on that day, can they reign with the Lord? The Bible says that we have to suffer and bear reproach with Him first before we can reign and be glorified with Him (2 Tim. 2:12). Not only have many believers never suffered, they have many sins. They love the world and walk according to the flesh. When they leave the world, they will still have much unrighteousness and many sins that were not dealt with. The Bible shows us that such believers will have specific and definite chastisement.

Matthew 18:23-35 speaks of a slave being forgiven of his debts by the master. Another slave owed this first one a debt. But the slave who was forgiven of his debt would not forgive his fellow slave. The first slave definitely represents a saved person, because he pleaded for the master's forgiveness, and the master, who was moved with compassion, released him and forgave his debt. We are all helpless persons coming to the Lord to seek grace. The Lord has forgiven our debt and has let us go. If this one represents a Christian, then whatever this one faces represents what we will face. The way the master deals with this slave will be the way the Lord deals with us.

Verses 28-30 say, "But that slave went out." He went out because he was now a free man. "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii, and he took hold of him and began to choke him, saying, Repay me what you owe. Then his fellow slave fell down and begged him, saying, Be patient with me and I will repay you. But he would not; instead, he went away and threw him into prison until he would repay what was owed." This passage is about one Christian not forgiving the sin of another. You are a forgiven person. But you are not willing to be forgiving. The Lord has forgiven you of ten thousand talents. Now your brother owes you a mere one hundred denarii, but you say in your heart that he must repay. He must repay you even the last cent. What will the result be then? Verses 31-33 continue, "Then his fellow slaves, seeing what had taken place, were greatly grieved and came and explained fully to their master all that had taken place. Then his master called him to him and said to him, Evil slave, all that debt I forgave you, because you begged me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave even as I had mercy on you?" That this person represents a saved one is again proved by the fact that the Lord had mercy on him. The Lord said, Should you not have mercy on your fellow slave as I have had mercy on you? Should you not forgive your fellow slave as I have forgiven you? This proves that this one represents one who has received God's mercy and forgiveness. He must be one that has life already. But he will not forgive other Christians. "And his master became angry and delivered him to the torturers until he would repay all that was owed" (v. 34). This one, who had been shown mercy and who had been forgiven, was put back into the hand of the torturers until he repaid all that was owed to the Lord. Whether he could repay all that he owed is another matter. The fact is, he would have to suffer. This shows us that if a Christian will not forgive another, on that day the Lord will deal with him in the same way that he has dealt with others. If you would

not forgive your brother, the Lord will deal with you according to your unforgiving attitude.

MERCY AND JUDGMENT

We know that our God is a righteous God. In the future, at the judgment seat, He will judge us according to righteousness. However, though there is righteousness at the judgment seat, there is mercy also. If you show mercy to others, the Lord will be merciful to you. If you are unforgiving toward others, and if you are so righteous and unyielding toward others' failures and weaknesses, the Lord will deal with you in righteousness in that day. If you are merciful to others, the Lord will show mercy to you. Luke 6:37 says that if you do not pass sentence on others, sentence will not be passed on you; if you will not judge others, you will not be judged, and if you forgive others, you will be forgiven. Some Christians are too mean today. When they criticize others they scrutinize every mistake others make. When they do their best to criticize and judge others, they have to be careful. In the future God will deal with them in the same way they deal with others. With what measure you measure to others, it will be measured to you. If you give to others good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, the Lord will give to you in the same way. He who forgives will be forgiven, and to him who shows mercy, mercy will be shown.

Hence, the Bible says that mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:13). There is one thing which even judgment cannot triumph over—a person showing mercy to others throughout his entire life. We cannot be without mistakes. But if we show mercy to others today, God will be unable to deal with us. Many Christians are not able to lose in their dealings with others. They argue all the time with others. They give little ground to others and grant themselves all the ground. But we should rather show mercy to others today. When the time of judgment comes, there will be some whom even the Lord of judgment will not be able to hold anything against. This does not mean that man can purposely change God's commandment. It simply means that if you are merciful to others while you are living on earth, God will be merciful to you. Your mercy today will triumph over your judgment tomorrow. The way you judge others will be the way that you will be judged. This grace is righteous. The way you treat others will be the way that the Lord will treat you. The way you treat others will fashion for you a vessel, with which God will measure out judgment to you. James 2:13 says, "For the judgment is without

mercy to him who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment." Those who show no mercy to others will be judged without mercy. But those who show mercy to others will triumph over judgment. Your mercy will surpass the judgment. This is an amazing fact.

Matthew 18 shows us clearly that God's children can still fall into the hand of the torturers. If they do, they will have to remain there until they pay off all their debts. Of course, there is no way to pay off all the debts. But at least one day they will learn to be merciful and to forgive others in the same way that the Lord showed mercy to them and forgave them. By then they will still have to show mercy to others. Hence, in verse 35 the Lord says, "So also will My heavenly Father do to you if each of you does not forgive his brother from your hearts." This portion of the Word is not spoken to unbelievers, but to Christians. It shows the relationship between the heavenly Father and His children and the relationship between the brothers.

Prior to this portion of the Word, Peter asked the Lord, "How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" (Matt. 18:21). The Lord told him that he should forgive up to seventy times seven. Then the Lord spoke the word about the two slaves. Peter will face chastisement if he does not forgive his brother. The word of the Lord shows Peter that there is the possibility that he could be thrown to the torturers. There is the possibility that he could be put into prison. If there is the possibility for Peter to be thrown to the torturers and cast into prison, there is the possibility for us to be treated the same way also. That is why the Lord used the plural "you" in verse 35. His word is not for Peter only; it is for everyone. If we do not forgive each one of our brothers from our heart, the heavenly Father will do the same to us. Please remember that our eternal salvation in the new heaven and new earth is unshakable. Thank the Lord that this is by grace. But if our problems today are not dealt with specifically, we will still suffer specific punishment in the future kingdom.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

HOW GOD DEALS WITH THE BELIEVERS' SINS— THE GEHENNA OF FIRE IN THE KINGDOM

There are many places in the Bible that mention God's punishment for the defeated Christians in the millennial kingdom. We will take a look at these places now. Later, we will draw a conclusion concerning them.

THE ENTRANCE INTO AND THE POSITION IN THE KINGDOM

Let us first consider Matthew 18:1-3. "In that hour the disciples came to Jesus, saying, Who then is greatest in the kingdom of the heavens? And He called a little child to Him and stood him in their midst and said, Truly I say to you, Unless you turn and become like little children, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens." Here the disciples asked a question concerning the kingdom of the heavens. It is a question concerning greatness in the kingdom. It is not a question concerning salvation and perdition, but a question concerning being great or small, high or low, in the kingdom. The Lord Jesus showed us that unless we turn and become like little children, we cannot enter into the kingdom of the heavens. Following this, verse 4 says, "He therefore who will humble himself like this little child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of the heavens." Verse 3 gives us the condition for entering the kingdom, while verse 4 gives us the way to be great in the kingdom. Verse 3 says that we must turn and become like children before we can enter the kingdom, and verse 4 says that if we continue to be children and humble ourselves, we will be the greatest in the kingdom of the heavens. This shows us that in the kingdom we should continue in the same way that we begin. The direction we face when we enter the kingdom should be the same direction we face when we continue in it. To enter into the kingdom of the heavens, we must turn and become like little children; and to be great in the kingdom of the heavens, we must continue to be humble like children. Here the Lord continues to bring up the matter of being like children.

Following this, the Lord said, "And whoever receives one such little child because of My name, receives Me" (v. 5). Whoever receives someone like this child because of Christ's name, that is, someone who turns to become like a child and who continues to be humble like a child, receives Christ. "And whoever stumbles one of these little ones who believe in Me, it is more profitable for him that a great millstone be hung around his neck and he be drowned in the open sea" (v. 6). This word indicates that stumbling others is a bigger problem than suffering and being killed in an ignoble way. Suppose someone kills you and casts your body into the sea. You are not even buried properly. Indeed this would be an unfortunate tragedy. But if you stumble others, your fate will be worse than this. Verse 7 says, "Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! For it is necessary for stumbling blocks to come, but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes."

THE GEHENNA OF FIRE IN THE KINGDOM

Verses 1 through 7 are the general words of the Lord. We will just mention them briefly. We want to pay more attention to the words beginning in verse 8. The Lord Jesus expanded on this matter to point out that it is not only wrong to stumble others, but it is a serious and grave matter even to stumble yourself. Verse 8 says, "If your hand or your foot stumbles you, cut it off and cast it from you." Who does "you" refer to here? In verses 3 through 7, "you" refers to the disciples who asked the question in verse 1. After the Lord Jesus answered them, He told them to be watchful and not to stumble others. The Lord's words in verse 8 are directed at the same people. If a hand or a foot stumbles you, it is better to cut it off and cast it away. Of course, this need not be taken literally. If your hands steal and your feet walk in improper paths, that is, if there is sin and lust in you, you must deal with them. "It is better for you to enter into life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire" (v. 8).

The Lord shows us that if Christians tolerate sin, they will suffer either the casting into the eternal fire with both hands and both feet, or the entering into life with one hand or one foot. This shows us clearly that there are those who deal with their sins and lusts in this age and who will enter into the kingdom with one hand or one foot. There are also those who will leave their lusts unchecked and will be cast into the eternal fire. The fire is an eternal fire, but it does not say that they will remain in the eternal fire forever. What the Lord Jesus did not say is as significant as what He did say. If a person has become a

Christian but his hands or feet sin all the time, he will suffer the punishment of the eternal fire in the kingdom of the heavens. He will not suffer this punishment eternally, but will suffer it only in the age of the kingdom.

What does it mean to cut off a hand or a foot? When a man cuts off his hand or foot, he can still sin. If he does not have a foot, he can travel by car. If one of his hands is cut off, he can still sin with the other hand. It is not necessarily the Lord's intention that we cut off a hand or foot, for even if we do cut off a hand, we still cannot remove our lust. Therefore, this word must not refer to the outward body, but to the inward lust. What we have to cut off is that which drives us to sin.

Another thing that we have to realize is that the person spoken of here must be a Christian, for only a Christian is clean in his body as a whole and can thus enter into life after dealing with his lust in a single member of his body. It would not be enough for the unbelievers to cut off a hand or a foot. Even if they were to cut off both hands and both feet, they would still have to go to hell. In order to enter the kingdom of the heavens, it is better for a Christian to have an incomplete body than to go into eternal fire because of incomplete dealing.

Following this, verse 9 says, "And if your eye stumbles you, pluck it out and cast it from you; it is better for you to enter into life with one eye than to have two eyes and be cast into the Gehenna of fire." This shows us that if a saved person does not deal with his lust, he will not be able to enter into life, but will go into eternal fire. The eternal fire here is the Gehenna of fire. The Bible shows us that a Christian has the possibility of suffering the Gehenna of fire. Although he can suffer the Gehenna of fire, he cannot suffer it forever. He can only suffer it during the age of the kingdom.

Matthew 18 is not the only portion of Scripture that says this. Other portions of the Bible also contain the same teaching. For example, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5—7 contains clear words of the same kind. Matthew 5:21-22 says, "You have heard that it was said to the ancients, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders shall be liable to the judgment.’ But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, Raca, shall be liable to the judgment of the Sanhedrin; and whoever says, Moreh, shall be liable to the Gehenna of fire." At the beginning of chapter five, we read that the Lord Jesus

saw the multitude. But He did not teach the multitude; rather, He taught the disciples (v. 1). The Sermon on the Mount is for the disciples. Therefore, the one who reviles others in verse 22 is a brother. He calls another brother Raca, that is, good-for-nothing, or Moreh, that is, a fool. When he calls his brother this way, he shall be liable to the Gehenna of fire. This does not refer to an unsaved person, for an unsaved person will go to hell even if he does not call anyone Moreh. Every time the Bible talks about works, it refers to one who belongs to God. If such a one does not belong to God, there is no need to mention such things. This is a saved person, a brother, but because he has reviled his brother, he is liable to the Gehenna of fire.

Verse 23 says, "Therefore if you are offering your gift at the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you." Many times others hold things against us on purpose, and there is nothing that we can do about it; but if others complain because of our reviling, we have to be careful when we offer up our gift at the altar. If you think poorly of a brother and have spoken something against him, you have to go to him and deal with the matter. "Leave your gift there before the altar, and first go and be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (v. 24). The important thing is to be reconciled to your brother. Verse 25 says, "Be well disposed quickly toward your opponent at law, while you are with him on the way." Your brother is the plaintiff, and you are the defendant. Now he is bringing you to court: "Lest the opponent deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison." Such a thing will happen in the kingdom. The kingdom is very strict.

Tonight I will speak a few frank and serious words. No two brothers or two sisters who are at odds with each other can appear in the kingdom together. In the coming kingdom, there will only be love and mercy; only those who love and show mercy to one another can be in the kingdom of the heavens. If I am involved in an argument with a brother, and if the matter is not dealt with in this age, then in the future, either both of us will be barred from the kingdom, or only one of us will get in. It cannot be that both of us will enter in. It is not possible for us to have a problem with each other and yet reign at the same time in the millennium in the future. In the kingdom all the believers are in one accord. There are absolutely no barriers between any two persons. If while we are on earth today, we have some friction with any brother or sister, or if we cause a hindrance to any brother or sister, we have to be careful. Either we will go in and the other will be excluded, or the other will go in and

we will be excluded, or both will be excluded. The Lord says that while you are with him on the way you have to be reconciled to him. That means that while you and he are alive and before the Lord Jesus comes back, you have to be reconciled to him. The Lord Jesus will not tolerate two enemies complaining about each other in the kingdom. Today we may harbor complaints about others very easily; but these complaints will either keep us outside, keep others outside, or keep both us and others outside the kingdom. It seems that the church today is very free, but it will not be like this in that day. "While you are with him on the way," says the Lord. If you die, or if he dies, or if the Lord Jesus returns, the way is ended. Hence, you have to settle the matter quickly before the Lord comes back and while both he and you are on the way. "Lest the opponent deliver you to the judge." The judge is the Lord Jesus. "And the judge to the officer." The officer is the angel. "And you be thrown into prison." This shows us clearly that a brother who has offended another brother will suffer very severe punishment.

If you study this passage carefully, you will see that the prison here is the Gehenna of fire in verse 22, because verse 23 begins with "therefore." The words from verse 23 on are an explanation of the words in verse 22. Verse 22 says that anyone who calls his brother Moreh will be liable to the Gehenna of fire. Verses 23-25 follow by saying that those who are not reconciled to their brothers will be put into prison. Hence, the prison in verse 25 is very clearly the Gehenna of fire in verse 22. We are clear that there is no possibility for a Christian to perish eternally, but if a Christian has any unrepented of and unconfessed sins, which are not forgiven, he will suffer the Gehenna of fire. Notice the severity of the words of the Lord in verse 26: "Truly I say to you, You shall by no means come out from there until you pay the last quadrans." There is the possibility to come out if one has paid off everything. In the coming age, there is still the possibility of forgiveness, but one cannot come out until he pays the last quadrans and clears up everything with his brother.

Verses 27 through 30 form another section. This section is similar to the preceding one. "You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman in order to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." The commandment in the Old Testament says that we should not commit adultery, but the commandment of the New Testament says that we cannot even have adulterous thoughts. The word woman in the original language refers to another man's wife. If the woman is not another man's wife, there would be

no possibility for adultery, because adultery is unfaithfulness in marriage. If this is not another man's wife, this cannot be considered adultery; it is fornication. The Bible judges fornication, but not as much as it judges adultery. Here it is saying that an adulterous thought is produced towards another's wife.

Second, the scope of the word in the original language for look here is not as broad as that of our word look. The word look brings too many under the category of this sin. In the original language it does not imply a casual looking but an intentional looking. Looking could simply be glancing at something accidentally on the street. Watch may be a better word because watching is an intentional looking. Furthermore, in the original language the watching here is done with a specific purpose. We could translate, "every one who watches a woman with the purpose of lusting after her." What the Lord condemns are not the sudden thoughts that enter your mind. What He is dealing with is the further watching for the purpose of lusting, after a sudden thought comes in. In other words, our sins do not lie in Satan's inciting of the flesh by giving us filthy thoughts. Our sins lie in the further watching after Satan has given us a sudden thought. This is adultery. Sudden thoughts are from Satan. Watching is from you. Sudden thoughts are temptations. Your watching is your accepting of the temptations. We must know how to differentiate between these two things.

Verse 29 says, "So if your right eye stumbles you, pluck it out and cast it from you." If your right eye causes you to watch, pluck it out and throw it away. "For it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna." If the lust is not removed, if the sin is not dealt with, a person will be "cast into Gehenna." Then verse 30 says, "And if your right hand stumbles you, cut it off and cast it from you, for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to pass away into Gehenna." These are words that the Lord Jesus spoke to the disciples. Christ told those who belonged to Him and who desired that their righteousness would excel that of the Pharisees and the scribes (v. 20) that they have to deal with their sins. If they allow sin to develop in them, though they will not eternally perish, there is the possibility that they will "pass away into Gehenna." This is what the Lord shows us in the book of Matthew.

FEARING HIM WHO HAS AUTHORITY TO CAST INTO GEHENNA

Now let us look at what other places in the Bible say concerning this matter. Luke 12:1 says, "Meanwhile, when the myriads of the crowd were gathered together so that they trampled on one another, He began to say to His disciples first." He did not speak to everyone, but to the disciples first. "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." The Lord's word proves that the disciples are not the hypocrites; they are the Lord's people. Then in verses 4 and 5 the Lord said, "My friends, Do not fear those who kill the body and afterward have nothing more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: fear Him who, after killing, has authority to cast into Gehenna." The Word of God is clear enough. It tells us, not once, but many times, that it is possible for a Christian to be "cast into Gehenna." It says this clearly here. The Lord told the disciples not to fear those who kill the body but afterward can do nothing more. They should not fear what some can do to their body, as long as this is all they can do. But they should fear the One who can cast them into Gehenna.

The verses following also prove that the ones spoken of here are the disciples, that is, the believers. Verses 6 and 7 say, "Are not five sparrows sold for two assaria? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But even the hairs of your head have all been numbered. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows." Only Christians are sparrows. The unsaved ones are not sparrows; they are crows. In Matthew the lilies in the field refer to the Christians and so do the sparrows. The sparrows neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns (Matt. 6:26). This refers to Christians and not to unbelievers. Here we are told clearly that it is possible for God's "sparrows" to be "cast into Gehenna." Note also that it says the hairs of these ones have all been numbered. God would not exercise that much care on unbelievers. Therefore, what is meant here is that those belonging to the Lord need not fear what others do to their bodies. The One they must fear is God, for God has the authority to cast them "into Gehenna." We have to fear God who has the authority to deal with our souls. We have no fear of those who can only kill our bodies.

The next two verses, verses 8 and 9, are very precious. "Moreover, I tell you, Everyone who confesses in Me before men, the Son of Man will also confess in

him before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God." Christians can be divided into two classes: those who confess His name and those who do not. Some confess His name while others do not. Some are prepared to be persecuted while others are not. Some will only be Christians secretly. They desire man's glory. Others confess the Lord openly and are ready to be martyrs. Hence, you can see whom the Lord is talking about in these verses in Luke 12. We should not fear any suffering that comes through confessing His name. If we do not confess His name, our sin is more serious than all other sins. Consequently, He will not confess our names before the angels of God. When you take verses 1 through 9 together as a whole, you see that the "casting into Gehenna" in verse 5 is equivalent to the Lord not confessing their name before the angels in verse 9. The confessing before the angels can be illustrated by an example. Suppose a teenager has done something wrong and ends up in jail. His parents or other family members can bail him out of his trouble and let him slide by. But suppose that the child is really bad, and his parents feel that he needs some suffering. As a result, his parents will not bail him out. The same is true with the believers. Unless the Lord confesses our names, we will fall into punishment.

There is a wonderful word in Revelation 3:5. "He who overcomes will be clothed thus, in white garments, and I shall by no means erase his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels." At the beginning of the kingdom, before the judgment seat, the angels of God will take the Christians up to God. The book of life will be there. In the book of life the names of all the Christians are recorded. There will be many angels and many Christians. The Lord Jesus will also be there. One or more angels will then read off the names from the book of life, and the Lord Jesus will confess some of the names. Those whose names He confesses will then enter the kingdom. When the names of the others are read, the Lord will not say anything. In other words, He will not confess their names. The angels will then put a mark against these names. Hence, the overcomers' names are clean in the book of life, while the defeated ones' names are marked. As for the unsaved ones, their names do not appear in the book of life at all. One group does not have their names in the book. Another group has their names there, but their names are marked. And still a third group, by the time of the kingdom, has their names preserved in the same way as they were first written in the book.

If your name is marked at the judgment seat, that does not mean that you are through and are no longer saved. Revelation 20:15 says, "And if anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire." This shows us that those whose names are not recorded in the book of life will be eternally in the lake of fire. Those whose names do not appear in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire. This is at the beginning of the new heaven and new earth. We cannot say that the ones in Revelation 3 do not have their names written in the book of life. We can only say that their names have been marked. By then they will not be thrown into the lake of fire because their names are already in the book of life. Eternal salvation is most secure; it can never be shaken. But on the other hand, there is a danger. If we tolerate sin, if we do not forgive others, if we commit adultery, if we revile the brothers, if we are afraid to suffer, to be ashamed, to be persecuted, and to confess the Lord, we have to be careful, for God will cast us "into Gehenna" so that we may be punished temporarily.

THE HURT OF THE SECOND DEATH

There are similar passages in the Bible that speak of these matters. Revelation 2:11 tells us that those who overcome will not be hurt by the second death, and Revelation 20:6 says that one group of people will not die again and that the second death will not have authority over them. The second death is the lake of fire at the end of Revelation 20. This means that the defeated ones will suffer the hurt of the second death. Although they will not suffer the second death itself, they will suffer the hurt of the second death. Once a person is saved, he will not suffer the second death. But this does not guarantee that he will not suffer the hurt of the second death.

We know that the time of the lake of fire and brimstone is the time when the new heaven and the new earth begins. Satan, the world, and death will all be cast into the lake of fire at that time (Rev. 20:10, 14). Also at that time a man will be cast into the lake of fire if his name is not recorded in the book of life. That will be the time when unbelievers are officially put into the lake of fire. However, during the millennium, the defeated Christians will suffer the hurt of the second death. Of course, this dealing will not be like the dealing that the unbelievers will have; it is not for eternity. If a Christian is joined to the world and if he loves the world and the things of the world, the Lord will allow him to go into corruption, to suffer a little of what the unbelievers will suffer. This is what being hurt by the second death in Revelation 2 means, and

this word is spoken to Christians. The word "hurt" in the original language means to injure someone and to damage him. The second death will cause pain for some. From the time of the great white throne on, there is the second death itself, which is the suffering for eternity in the lake of fire and of brimstone. But in the millennium there is only the hurt of the second death. If some Christians have not dealt with their sins, they will still suffer the hurt and pain of the second death.

THE END BEING TO BE BURNED

Let us now read two passages from the book of Hebrews. Hebrews 6:4-6 says, "For it is impossible for those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and yet have fallen away, to renew themselves again unto repentance." These verses describe a person who has many qualifications. It is impossible for him to be an unsaved person. He has seen the light. He has seen the revealed God, the Only Begotten of the Father. He has known the love of God, and he has tasted the heavenly gift, the unique gift, Jesus Christ. In the Bible, gifts as a plural noun refer to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and gift as a singular noun refers to the unique gift, the only begotten Son of God, as in John 3:16. This gift is different from the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This person not only has God and the Lord Jesus, but has also become a partaker of the Holy Spirit. He knows God, he has tasted the Lord Jesus, and he has the Holy Spirit living within him. Furthermore, he has tasted the good word of God and the powers of the coming age. The powers of the coming age are the powers of the millennial kingdom. The gifts and powers of the Holy Spirit are particularly abundant in the millennial kingdom. The millennial kingdom will be full of works of power, miracles, wonders, and other such things. To say that one has tasted the powers of the coming age is to say that one has tasted the things of the millennial kingdom. Hence, this person is definitely a saved person.

If such a person leaves the word of the beginning of Christ today and slips and falls, there is no repentance for him. He cannot start all over again to believe in the Lord Jesus. He has too much history with the Lord already. He has received so much rain. He has fallen and does not bring forth good things for God, but has brought forth thorns and thistles. He, like "the earth, which drinks the rain which often comes upon it and brings forth vegetation suitable to those for whose sake also it is cultivated, partakes of blessing from God.

But if it brings forth thorns and thistles, it is disapproved and near a curse, whose end is to be burned" (vv. 7-8).

Notice three things about such a person and his end. First, he is disapproved. The word "disapproved" here is the same word as that used in 1 Corinthians 9:27 where Paul said that he feared that though he had preached the gospel to others, he himself would be rejected and would not be used by God anymore in this age and in the kingdom. To be disapproved, to be rejected, means that God will reject such a one and will not use him anymore in the kingdom. Second, such a person is "near a curse." The verse does not say that he will receive a curse, but the punishment that he receives is similar to a curse. He will not perish forever, but he will suffer the hurt of the second death and will suffer the Gehenna of fire in the kingdom. Third, his "end is to be burned." What is this? For example, a few weeks ago, I intended to burn up some land in Jen-ru. Could I burn the land forever? Could I burn the land for even five years? The burning here refers to something temporary.

Here it speaks about burning, whereas Matthew 5 says that some will be liable to the Gehenna of fire. If you put these two passages together, they match each other. If a Christian receives all these wonderful things but does not bear good fruit to God, but rather thorns and thistles, he will be burned. However this burning will only be for a while. Even an elementary school boy knows that if you burn a piece of land, the burning will stop after all the thorns are burned up. The burning in the kingdom will go on at most for a thousand years. How long it will actually burn depends on you. If you have brought forth many thorns and thistles, then there will be more burning. If you have brought forth few thorns and thistles, then there will be less burning.

How many things are there in us that are still not dealt with? How many things have not been cleansed away by the Lord's blood, and how many things are not yet confessed, dealt with, and settled with the brothers and sisters? These are the thorns and thistles referred to by the Lord. In Matthew 5 the Lord said that one cannot go out from there until every quadrans is paid. All the debts have to be paid. When everything is burned away, all the debts will be paid.

A Christian is likened to a field, and his improper behavior is likened to thorns and thistles. Suppose I have a five-acre piece of land. Is it possible that

after it has been burned by fire, only two acres are left and three acres are gone? This is impossible. What is burned are the thorns and thistles. The field itself cannot be burned. In other words, only those things in Adam that are cursed, that should be removed but have not been removed, are to be burned. They are the object of the burning of the Gehenna of fire. The life that God has given us cannot be touched by fire. Therefore, after the thorns and thistles are burned away, the land will still remain. No part of it will be taken away. There is absolutely no problem with our salvation, but there is so much that has grown on top of it, so much that has come out of the flesh. If these things have not been dealt with by the blood of Jesus, we must pass through quite a bit of dealing.

Now let us look at another place, Hebrews 10:26-29. "For when we sin willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice of bulls and goats for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fervor of fire, which is to consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without compassion on the testimony of two or three witnesses. By how much do you think he will be thought worthy of worse punishment who has trampled underfoot the Son of God and has considered the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing?" These verses refer to someone who has rejected Christ and returned to Judaism. He thinks that by spending a few dollars he can buy a bull or a goat as an offering for sin. But if someone has come to know Christ and returns to Judaism, he is trampling underfoot the Son of God and is regarding His blood as a common thing. He is treating the Lord like a bull or a goat. To him there is no difference between the Lord and a bull or a goat. The verse concludes, "And has insulted the Spirit of grace." While the Holy Spirit is giving him grace, he is insulting Him by going back to Judaism. These verses show us the way of an apostate. I will not say that such a one is saved; rather, I will only say that such a one may be saved. Perhaps he is not saved. The apostle does not tell us if such a one is saved or not. He only says that if a person has come to Christ and then returns to Judaism, he will suffer worse punishment. His end is an expectation of judgment and fervor of fire. Here we see a kind of fire.

In addition to all of these passages, we also have the Lord's own words in John 15. Verse 2 says, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes it away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it." These are not branches that have nothing to do with Him; these are branches in Him. What

is indicated here may not refer to the temporary punishment, but to the discipline of this age. But look at verse 6: "If one does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is dried up; and they gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." Some branches will be thrown into the fire and burned. Some branches have sprouted and have borne green leaves, but do not have fruit. Though they have life inwardly, they do not have fruit outwardly. The Lord Jesus said that they would be cast out, dried up, and burned in the fire. Here we see clearly that Christians may have to pass through the fire.

Having read all these passages, we can conclude that if a Christian does not take care of his sins properly, there will be punishment waiting for him. The Bible shows us clearly what kind of punishment this will be. It is not an ordinary kind of punishment but the punishment of the "Gehenna of fire." But it is the fire in the kingdom, not in eternity.

The question now is this: What kind of sin will bring us into this state? Once a person is saved, it is important that he deal with his sins. None of the sins that he has confessed, repented of, dealt with, and made recompense for under the blood of the Lord Jesus will come back to him at the judgment seat. All of these will be gone. Even the greatest sins will be gone. But there are many sins which will not be passed over. These are the sins that one regards in his heart. Psalm 66:18 says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, / The Lord will not hear." What are the sins that the heart regards? The heart is where our love and desires lie. The heart represents our emotion. It represents the psychological man. If the heart regards iniquity, the Lord will not hear us. Many confessions are made only because the person knows that he has sinned. There is no hatred for the sin nor condemnation of the sin. Such a one the Lord will not hear. Moreover, if we have a problem with another person that has not been solved, or if there are things that need to be forgiven but have not been forgiven, or if we have wronged others or the Lord, we have to deal with these things in a specific way. At the same time, we have to put these things under the Lord's blood. Only then will these things be dealt with, and we be delivered from the coming judgment.

SUMMARY

Now let us summarize what we have seen. The future of Christians is very simple. For a saved Christian the question of the new heaven and new earth,

including all eternity, is solved. But the age of the kingdom is controversial. No one dares to say anything about what will happen. What we have to solve today is the problem of the kingdom. In the kingdom there are many ranks of Christians. Many will reign with Christ because they have worked faithfully and have undergone persecution, reproach, and suffering. Some may not have undergone persecution, reproach, and suffering, but they do not have sins either. They have lived a clean life. Although they have done nothing that deserves special merit, they have at least given a cup of water to a little one for the sake of the Lord's name (Matt. 10:42). They will also receive a reward, but their reward will be very small.

In the age of the kingdom, some Christians will receive a reward in the kingdom. Some will receive a great reward; others will receive a small reward.

Those who will not receive a reward are also divided into a few categories. One group will not enter into the kingdom at all. The Bible does not tell us where they will go. It only says that they will be kept outside the kingdom in the outer darkness (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Luke 13:28). They will be left outside the glory of God. Second, there will be many who, in addition to not having worked well, have specific sins not yet dealt with. They are saved, but when they die, they still have sins which they have not repented of and dealt with. They still have the problem of sin with them. These ones will be temporarily put into the fire. They will come out only after they have paid all their debts. This will last at most until the end of the kingdom. I do not know how long this period will actually be.

There are still many things which we are not clear about concerning the future, but the Bible has shown us enough. Although there are details which we have not yet seen, we do know what the children of God will face. Some will receive a reward; some will go into corruption. Some will be put into prison, and still some will be cast into the fire and be burned.

The matter of our salvation is quite clear. When a man trusts in the Lord Jesus, both salvation and eternal life are settled for him. But after a person is saved and up until he dies, his works, that is, his failures or his victories, will determine his fate in the kingdom. Our God is a just God. On the one hand, our salvation is free, and those who believe will have eternal life. No one can overturn this fact. On the other hand, we cannot sin at will just because we have received eternal life. If we bring forth thorns and thistles, we will be

burned. If the Lord Jesus cannot disassociate us from our sins and if we have not settled everything in our lives, God has no choice but to chastise us in the future. He has no choice but to cleanse us with specific punishments, so that we can be together with Him in the new heaven and new earth. God is a just God. What He has prepared is also just. Once we have seen these things, we must learn the lesson and take the warnings from God.

THE PROPER ATTITUDE IN READING THE BIBLE

Concerning the way we study the Bible, I would like to mention a few things. First, there is a group of people who believe only in grace. Whenever they read about things related to the kingdom in the Bible, they apply it to the Jews. If you listen to their sermons and read their books, they invariably push everything related to the kingdom onto the Jews. Everything related to grace is for the church, and all the terrible things are for the Jews. To them, everything burdensome, difficult, and demanding is for the Jews, not for us. This is foolishness. God's Word is for His children, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. Some say that Paul never specifically said that his Epistles were written to Gentiles, and therefore, they are not for Gentiles. But this kind of explanation explains away and cuts apart the Word of God. Others say that the portions of the Scriptures quoted earlier refer to unbelievers only. But how can the distinction between overcomers and non-overcomers exist among the sinners? This is foolish talk. The Word of God shows us these matters in a clear and definite way. We have to eat what God has given us, whether it is sweet or bitter. When men hear about grace, they are happy; when they hear about the kingdom, they are unhappy. But the Word is balanced. On the one hand, we see grace; on the other hand, we see righteousness.

There is the fable of the eagle and the cat. Once a cat met an eagle. The eagle said to the cat, "The sky is really great. It has this and it has that. Would you like me to take you up to the sky?" The cat said, "No, I do not care to go there." When the eagle asked why not, the cat said, "There are no mice in the sky. If there were mice there, I would go. But since there aren't, I won't." Heaven is so holy; sin, the world, and Satan are not there. If God brings you to heaven, will you be able to live there? If we do not turn today, we will have to wait until we are worthy to enter in. It is true that the Lord Jesus has saved us, but subjectively speaking, if we do not allow the Holy Spirit to work the Lord Jesus into us, God will have to chastise us that we may receive the benefit and

be counted worthy to be with Him. If we only preach grace without preaching the kingdom, the church will suffer and God's children will suffer; and when the kingdom comes, there will be even greater suffering. I must speak as I ought to speak.

I admit that after my speaking in these few days, some will increase their opposition against me. If these are my words, I am willing to see them opposed. Even I myself would oppose them. But if these things are the Word of God, and if God has spoken them, what can I do? How I wish that I did not have to talk about these things. How I wish that I could preach something that everyone would like to hear. I am not Matthew. I am not Mark. I am not Paul. I did not write the book of Hebrews, and I did not write Revelation. If I were the writer, I could change things. But these things are God's Word. God has spoken them and determined that they should be so. My friends, when you read the Bible, you have to read what God has said. You must not consider what man has said. You should only care for what God has said.

The greatest difficulty today in studying the Bible lies in the prejudice in the mind of God's children. They have what they consider as truth and what they consider as heresy. They think that everything that matches them is truth, and everything that does not match them and that differs from them is heresy. Regardless of how scriptural a basis there is for it, any thought or concept contrary to theirs is considered heresy. But if that is one's attitude, he is through. At issue today is what God has said.

I am happy in my heart because I can preach the "heresy" of God's Word and I can oppose the "truth" in man's teaching. Today we have to be clear before the Lord. We cannot be under any other authority but that of God's Word. I know no other authority. I do not know what theology is; I do not know what man's word is; I do not know what the tradition of the church is. I only know what the Bible says, and only what it says counts. We must subject ourselves to it only. We cannot change God's Word. The Word of God tells us the destiny of His children. It tells us what we will experience in the kingdom. We must pay attention to these issues because sooner or later we will face them again. If we pay attention to them we will be careful how we live on earth today.

The second thing that we must realize is that only those who understand the truth can oppose heresy. One heresy cannot oppose another heresy. But

all heresies are not pure heresy; they are the truth plus a little error. Heresy is to add wrong things to right things. Add a little of man's thought to God's thought, and you will have heresy.

Because Catholicism does not fully know the truth in the Bible, it preaches the doctrine of purgatory. If you do not know the truth that we have released in the last few meetings, you will not be able to tell whether the doctrine of purgatory is right or wrong. Now that you have heard these messages, you will realize that the doctrine of purgatory is absolutely wrong. You can say that it is heresy. In the Bible we see that God's discipline of the Christians happens in the millennium, but Catholics say that there is a purging going on today. They say that if a Christian does not live up to standard on earth today, he will not be able to go to heaven. Hence, he must be purged. Therefore, they say that as soon as a Christian dies, he begins to be purged and is purged until the job is done. However, there is absolutely no such teaching in the Bible. The Bible never says that as soon as a Christian dies, he will be purged in Hades. The Bible shows us that there will be the discipline in the kingdom in the future, but there is no purging in Hades today.

Second, Catholics make another grave mistake. They think that if they secure for themselves indulgences while they are alive or if the priests pray for them after they die, they will be relieved of some of the purging of purgatory. But the Bible never says anything like this. The Bible says only that he who has mercy on others will obtain mercy. Praying by the priest will not do anything for the dead. The Bible never teaches us to pray for the dead.

Third, Catholics tell people that a man will not be saved until he has been completely purged in purgatory. This is an absolute overturning of the teaching of the Bible. The Bible shows us that there is no other name in heaven or on earth besides that of the Lord Jesus whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12). Only He can save us. Apart from the Lord Jesus, there is no salvation. Discipline and chastisement are not for salvation but for sanctification. The matter of our salvation is settled long before God disciplines us, but there are still things in us that do not match Him. There are still imperfections and areas that are not up to standard. Therefore, there is the discipline in this age and the discipline in the coming kingdom.

Once a person is clear about the biblical truth, he will see the heresy in Roman Catholicism. The Roman Catholic Church takes a few verses and

utilizes them for her own purpose. But if we know the biblical truth, we will realize that the doctrine of purgatory annuls grace. Thank God that, although I am a filthy sinner, through the Lord Jesus I am now saved. When I die, I do not have to be purged any further, because salvation is not of me, but of the Lord Jesus. Surely I am saved. Now we know what discipline is. Discipline is God's means to make us perfect as He is perfect. He chastises us so that we will be like Him, even the same as He is. This has nothing to do with our salvation. It is a matter within His family.

Finally, only after we know this will we be able to deal with the heresy in Protestantism. Today among the Protestants, two kinds of errors are being promulgated. First, one group of Protestant theologians proposes that since a man is "once saved, always saved," he can get away with anything in his conduct. Since a Christian is saved eternally, they say, he could be evil until the day he dies and still be in the kingdom. He would, however, occupy a lower position in the kingdom. His greatest loss is confined to occupying a lower position in the kingdom. This kind of teaching will make a man loose and irresponsible. What then is grace to them? To them grace is an excuse for looseness and licentiousness.

There is another group of Protestants who say that after a man believes, there is still the possibility that he will not be saved. Perhaps he can be saved and unsaved again three or four times within a day. If that were the case, the book of life would get very messy indeed. A brother once said that if we are not eternally saved once we have believed, then the book of life will be extremely thick. My name alone would be deleted and inserted many, many times. If a man is condemned as soon as he sins and if he is bound for hell as soon as he transgresses, we must wonder whether salvation is by grace or by works.

Both of these groups are too extreme, even though both have their scriptural basis. The Bible shows us clearly that when a man is saved, he is eternally saved. The Bible also shows us clearly that it is possible for a Christian to be "cast into Gehenna" temporarily. But the problem is that some brothers hold onto one side, insisting that salvation is eternal and that there is no such thing as discipline in the kingdom, while other brothers hold onto the other side, insisting that if we can be "cast into Gehenna," eternal life is shaky, and therefore we can go into eternal perdition. But if we see the difference between the age of the kingdom and the eternal age and the difference

between the temporary punishment of the millennium and eternal punishment, we will be clear that a Christian can receive punishment in the future, but at the same time, God has given His sheep eternal life, and they can never lose it. This knowledge gives us the boldness to say that once we are saved, we are eternally saved. After a man has been saved by grace, he will never perish again. Thus, not only have we properly settled the problem of the purgatory of Catholicism, but we have also made a clear distinction between eternal salvation and discipline. May the Lord grant us grace tonight and show us that the matter of eternal salvation is solved because of the work of Jesus of Nazareth, but as for one's situation in the kingdom, it is determined by the person himself.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

HOW GOD DEALS WITH THE BELIEVERS' SINS— CLEANSING AND CONFESSION

After a man has believed in the Lord Jesus, all his past sins are forgiven by the redemptive work of the Lord. But what should he do if he sins again after he has believed and is saved? It is not right to sin, but sinning is a fact of life. It is a shame for a Christian to sin, but it is also an undeniable fact that Christians do sin. We know that we should not fail and that we should not make mistakes, but we have to admit that we do have times of failure and we do make mistakes. What then will we do with these sins? To put it more accurately, what will God do with these sins? Earlier we mentioned temporary chastisement. God warns us that if we become apostate, we will be punished in the millennial kingdom. But if we want to deal with our sins and if we want to be cleansed of our sins, what should we do? How can our sins be washed away and forgiven? Although there are only three or four places in the whole Bible that mention this problem, they afford us clear light. In order to know how to deal with this problem, all we have to do is to read these few passages.

ONE CLEANSING BY THE BLOOD

Tonight let us start from the beginning. We know that when the Lord Jesus was crucified on the cross, He shed His blood to wash away all of our sins. After He washed away our sins, He sat down at the right hand of God (Heb. 1:3). If, after we are saved and have been cleansed of our sins, we sin again and are defiled again, will the blood of the Lord Jesus wash away our sins again? Man thinks that if he sins, the blood of the Lord Jesus will have to cleanse away his sins again. But there is no such truth in the Bible. The blood cleanses away our sins only once; it never cleanses twice. There is no such thing as a re-cleansing of man's sins.

The book of Hebrews shows us clearly that there is only one cleansing of sin. Hebrews 10:1-14 says, "For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, not the image itself of the things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, perfect those who draw near. Otherwise

would they not have ceased to be offered, because those worshipping, having once been purified, would have no longer had the consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a bringing to mind of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, coming into the world, He says, ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You did not delight. Then I said, Behold, I have come (in the roll of the book it is written concerning Me) to do Your will, O God.’ Saying above, ‘Sacrifice and offerings and burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You did not desire nor delight in’ (which are offered according to the law), He then has said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will.’ He takes away the first that He may establish the second, by which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands daily, ministering and offering often the same sacrifices, which can never remove sins; but this One, having offered one sacrifice for sins, sat down forever on the right hand of God, henceforth waiting until His enemies are made the footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified."

We see that the Lord Jesus has offered Himself up once as a sin offering for our sins. He has accomplished eternal redemption once for all. By His one work we are eternally perfected. Verse 2 implies that those who have been purified no longer have the consciousness of sins. Hence, there is only one offering of the Lord Jesus. There is no second offering. If someone rejects this sin offering, there will be no other sin offering for him. This is why verse 26 says that if we sin willfully, there is no more sacrifice for sins. The sins of a sinner are forgiven through the cross of the Lord Jesus. After a Christian is saved, even if he sins, the Lord Jesus cannot die for his sins again. His one-time accomplishment has accomplished everything eternally. In Him everything is included.

Let us now read a few verses from chapter nine. Verses 25, 26, and 28 say, "Nor in order that He might offer Himself often, just as the high priest enters into the Holy of Holies year by year by the blood of other creatures; since then He would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world. But now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested for the putting away of sin through the sacrifice of Himself...So Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time to those who eagerly await Him, apart from sin, unto salvation." His coming the second time will have nothing to do with their sins; rather, it will be for their

salvation. Verses 12 through 14 say, "Not through the blood of goats and calves but through His own blood, entered once for all into the Holy of Holies, obtaining an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who are defiled sanctifies to the purity of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Verse 9, speaking of the first tabernacle, says that it is "a figure for the present time." According to this tabernacle "both gifts and sacrifices are offered, which are unable to perfect, according to conscience, him who worships."

By reading chapters nine and ten we see that those in the Old Testament differ from those in the New. If I were in the Old Testament and committed a sin, I would have only one way to deal with my sin. If I had enough money, I would buy a bull. If I did not have that much money, I would buy a goat. If I could not afford either, I would buy a turtledove. Then I would ask a priest to offer up the sacrifice for me to atone my sin. When I saw the bull or goat, I would be happy at heart, for I would know that the offering had served as a substitute for my punishment. Because the blood of the bull or goat would be like my blood, God would forgive me. I could go home happy and joyful at heart. I would be the happiest person on earth, because my sins would have been forgiven. I did not have my sins anymore. The darkness in my conscience would be removed, and I would suffer no more. But after two days, I would begin to think, What if the sacrifice offered that day did not work? What if the priest did not do the right thing the other day? Because of these thoughts, I would begin to worry and suffer again. Finally, I would decide to buy another bull or goat, take it to the priest, and tell him that the sin offering the other day was not done well, and ask him if he would perform the offering once more. The priest then would slaughter the bull or goat and offer it once more to God, and assure me that the bull or goat had been offered up for my sins.

When the conscience was troubled in the Old Testament, one could always bring another bull or goat to offer a sin offering through the priest. This is what Hebrews 9 shows us. It tells us that the blood of bulls and goats did not do a complete job. Chapter ten says that if a complete job had been done, there would have no longer been consciousness of sins. God reckoned that the work of bulls and goats was incomplete according to the conscience, because

every time a person's conscience lost its peace, he felt that his sins had not yet been fully taken care of, and there was the need for further offerings.

However, the apostle shows us that a Christian does not have to do the same thing. The propitiatory sacrifice that God has set up in the New Testament is not a bull or goat but His very own Son. When His Son came to the earth, He said plainly that God did not desire nor delight in bulls and goats. Instead, God prepared a body for Him that He might die to accomplish the work of eternal redemption. The Lord has accomplished on the cross the sacrifice for eternal redemption. Now we are able to obtain this eternal redemption. He has offered up a sacrifice of eternal redemption, thus accomplishing an eternal redemption. Because of this eternal redemption, we are eternally perfected. He is the Son of God. Because His eternal work has been accomplished once, we do not need to offer up sin offerings anymore. We cannot offer up a sin offering for the same sin any longer, for the Lord Jesus has accomplished all the work.

The Son of God cannot be crucified for our sins again. One cannot trample underfoot the blood of God's Son and make it something common. If something is one of a kind, it is precious. But if there are two of a kind, they are common. To treat the blood of the Son as common means to consider it the same as the blood of bulls and goats. But if you honor His blood and consider it as something unique, it will be precious to you. Here is the sin offering which He has accomplished. After the Lord has accomplished this work, God said that there cannot be any other work. The Son of God cannot die again. His work is finished. If you want it, you have to trust Him for it. You cannot add anything to it. Either you depend on Him or you have nothing. After a man has been enlightened by the truth, there is no more sacrifice for sins for him. There is only one sin offering. This is what we preach to others. Those who come to worship through this one sacrifice will have their consciences cleansed. They will no longer have the consciousness of sins. All their sins are washed away, and there is no more consciousness of sins. Furthermore, there is no need for another cleansing. The Bible never teaches the doctrine of a second cleansing. The blood of the Lord Jesus cannot cleanse us again. Once we have been cleansed, we are cleansed forever.

RECEIVING THE CONTINUAL CLEANSING AFTER WE HAVE BELIEVED

The question now is this: What should we do if we sin again? What should we do if we become filthy again? All the sins we committed before we were saved have been washed away by His blood. But what should we do about the sins that are committed after we are saved? We do not want to be chastised. We do not want to lose the kingdom. We do not want to suffer the hurt of the second death. What can we do before God? Let us consider 1 John 2:1: "My little children, these things I write to you that you may not sin." A Christian's goal is not to sin. John wrote these words so that we would not sin. According to the status that Christians possess, it is possible for us not to sin. Unfortunately, according to actual history, we often do sin. Positionally speaking, we should not sin. But experientially speaking, we often do sin. There is no need to sin. But sin is an unshakable fact.

John continues, "If anyone sins." Here we are dealing with the problem of a Christian who sins. He is a little one of God; he belongs to God. If he sins, what should he do? "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous." It does not say that we have an Advocate with God; rather, it says that we have an Advocate with the Father. Thus, this verse refers to the children of God. It refers to those that have been saved. If anyone among the saved ones, the children of God, sins, he has an Advocate with the Father. This is not a dispute in a law court, but a matter within a family.

The word Advocate in the original language is *paracletos*. Para means alongside of. To be alongside of means that you are there and another is there. You are in Shanghai, and this one is also in Shanghai. When you go to Canton, this one also goes to Canton. It is like railway tracks. You cannot have one track in Szechwan and another in Nanking. *Cletos* means helper. A *paracletos*, therefore, is someone who is alongside helping. You can run away. But wherever you run, the *paracletos* will be there also. Many who help are very good, but they sometimes come too late. There may be a lot of rice in Shanghai, but the starving ones in Szechwan will not be able to get it, because it is not alongside. The Greeks used the word *paracletos* to refer to a defense lawyer in court. Suppose that you do not understand the law, and others accuse you. Others may sue you or take advantage of you. But you do not have a way to answer them. Now there is a *paracletos* to answer for you. Others charge that you have sinned. But your *paracletos* will say that you do not have sin. He will answer for you like a defense lawyer. The meaning here is to have someone next to you to speak for you. If a Christian sins, there is One with the Father speaking for him.

Satan will never stop his accusations against the Christians. Revelation 12:10 tells us that he accuses the brothers day and night. Day and night we are the defendants and he is the accuser. But we have an Advocate, who is Jesus the Righteous. Here it says that He is the Advocate. Here He is not the gracious One, but the righteous One. Why does it not say that He is the gracious One? It is because in the heavenly law court there is no talk of grace, in the same way that there is no talk of grace in earthly law courts. Any judge who wants to forgive others is an unrighteous judge. Only those who are for righteousness can be judges. God is for righteousness. He did not forgive our sins unrighteously. He did not overlook our sins, gloss over our sins, or let us get by with our sins. Rather, He judged our sins in righteousness.

The Lord Jesus does not defend us by saying that the temptation was too great and as little children we could not handle it, and that therefore God has to grant us grace. The Lord Jesus does not say that Christians are too small and their knowledge is too little, that the flesh is too weak and the enticement of the world is too strong. He does not say that the wiles of Satan are too cunning and that there is no way to reject Satan. This is not the way that the Lord Jesus makes our defense. He does not plead for grace. Neither is He there as a dispenser of grace. John says that Jesus Christ is the Righteous. He tells God that on account of Him and what He has done, God has to forgive us.

How does this Advocate make a defense for us? We are told in the next verse: "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). The Lord Jesus makes His defense for us based on His accomplished work, that is, His propitiation on the cross for us. As a result, we are able to come to God. This is a complete propitiatory sacrifice. It includes all the sins of all the Christians in time and space. When this propitiatory sacrifice is shown to God, God no longer has a reason to punish the Christians. The Lord's propitiatory sacrifice is not just for past sins, but for all present and future sins as well. The verb in this verse is in the present tense, not in the past tense. God cannot condemn us based on Satan's accusation, because Christ's redemptive work accomplished on the cross includes all the sins of today and all the sins that will be committed until the day of His return. All our sins are included in His work. God must forgive us. He cannot do otherwise, because this forgiveness has a foundation.

THE LORD JESUS AS ADVOCATE FOR CHRISTIANS

The work of the Lord Jesus as Savior is for sinners. The work of the Lord Jesus as Advocate is for Christians. As the Savior, the Lord Jesus accomplished the work of the cross. As the Advocate, the Lord Jesus applies the work of the cross. The sins of sinners are forgiven through the redemption of the cross. The sins of Christians are forgiven through the advocacy that is based upon the redemption of the cross. This advocacy presents the work of the cross to God. It shows God what the Lord Jesus has done, so that God cannot punish man for his sins. We have an Advocate before God. His death is presented to God.

The Lord Jesus has become an Advocate for every Christian who sins, in the same way that He has become the Savior for every sinner. It is not that first we repent, believe, and are regenerated, and then the Lord Jesus dies for us. Rather, it was while we were yet sinners that Christ became our Savior (Rom. 5:8). In the same way, it is not that we first repent, and then He becomes our Advocate. Rather, even while we are sinning, He becomes our Advocate. It is not that He becomes our Advocate when we confess our sins before God. Rather, even while we are sinning, He becomes our Advocate. This is why John says that if any man sins, we have an Advocate with the Father. He does not say that first we repent, confess our sins, and pray for forgiveness, and then He becomes our Advocate. Instead, John says that if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father already. Whenever you sin, at that moment the Lord Jesus is already your Advocate before God. At that very moment, the Lord Jesus will show God His work of the cross, and God will have to let your sins go. A Christian can confess and repent because the Lord Jesus is his Advocate. Because we have the Lord Jesus as our Advocate, advocating and speaking for us while we sin, we eventually repent, confess our sins, and ask for forgiveness. The Lord Jesus' work of advocacy does not happen at the moment we repent. Rather, it happens while we are sinning. When we sin, the Lord Jesus is our Advocate already. Afterwards, we are brought to repentance and confession. The Lord Jesus accomplished all the work in one day. Everything is included in that work. Today the Lord can present this work to God. God can no longer punish us, because all the debts have been paid. All the debts, past and future, are paid. All our sins have been washed away by the blood of Jesus.

WALKING IN THE LIGHT AS HE IS IN THE LIGHT

He is the Advocate. But what should we do on our part? Let us now go to 1 John 1:7. "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin." What does it mean to be in the light? Man thinks that to be sinless and to be holy is to be in the light. But that is not the sense here. John does not say that we should walk in the light as God walks in the light. It is not said of God here that He walks. If that had been said, the meaning would be entirely different. It says here that we should walk in the light as He is in the light.

What is the meaning of this difference? For example, in this meeting hall there are many light bulbs, but we call them the light. We are now sitting in the light. On the other hand, while we are meeting, many people often sit on the stairs next door. They are in darkness. They may not have sinned out there. They may not have stolen from others out there. Perhaps they are even better and holier than we. But those who sit in the light can see, while those who sit in darkness cannot see. For God to be in the light means that God can now be seen.

In the Old Testament, God was shrouded in darkness. He was in the Holy of Holies, and man could not see Him. In the Holy Place there was a lamp, and in the outer court there was the sun, but in the Holy of Holies, there was no light at all. God was an unknown God there. Man could only make conjectures about Him. But thank the Lord that today God has been manifested in Jesus of Nazareth. God is now in the light; He is no longer in darkness. Today God is a known God, a revealed God. When you see God today, you know that He is God. The gospel concerning Jesus of Nazareth is the revelation of God. The shining out of the light of the gospel is the shining out of God. When the light of the gospel shines out, we see God. I am not saying that we should not be holy or that we should not reject sin. I am saying that this verse tells us that as God is in the light, we should therefore walk in the light. As God has manifested Himself in the light of the gospel, even so we should see God in the light of the gospel. We no longer look for God in the Old Testament. Today God has manifested Himself. If He had not manifested Himself, we would be hopeless. If He had not manifested Himself, we would still be bewildered, not knowing what kind of God He is. We would still have to make conjectures about Him. Thank God that He has been manifested. Today our God is no longer a "backstage" God. He is now the "onstage" God, the revealed God. The

word revelation is apocalypsis in Greek. Apo means away, and calypsis means veil. Hence, apocalypsis means the taking away of a veil. I used to watch theater performances. Onstage there is always a thick curtain. You do not know what is behind the curtain. An apocalypsis is the opening up of the curtain.

Today God is in the light. He is an open God. What then should we do? We should walk in the light. This means we will see God and know God in the light. Today we do not know God by way of conjecture as those in the Old Testament did. Today God has spoken. There is no need to make conjectures anymore. Today God is already in the light. He has already revealed Himself in the gospel. If we walk in this revelation, the result is fellowship. There will be fellowship between Christians, and there will be fellowship with God.

Since we are participants in the gospel and since God is also a participant in the gospel, the blood of His Son Jesus cleanses us from all sin. If we truly know God in the gospel, we will see that the blood of His Son Jesus is continually and eternally cleansing us of all sin (1 John 1:9). In the original language, this verse says that the blood of Jesus His Son is continually cleansing us from all sin. The Bible never shows us that the blood of the Lord Jesus does a second cleansing work. It shows us that the blood of Jesus cleanses us all the time. There are no multiple cleansings. There is only the continual cleansing. The Bible never has the thought of multiple cleansings. The biblical truth is a continual cleansing.

The blood of the Son of God continually cleansing us from our sins is the work of the Advocate. The work of the cross is once for all. But the operation of His cleansing and His blood is continuous. The cross dealt with our sins and washed away our sins only once. But it is forever effective. Why is it forever effective? Why is it cleansing us continually? It is because His Son is presenting the accomplished work to God continually. It is not a re-cleansing, but a continual demonstration to God that He has died and that all the sins are dealt with already. Today He is continually cleansing away all of our sins. All our sins are included here. The effectiveness of His blood lasts forever because the Lord Jesus is our Advocate continually in heaven. His work as the Advocate is a continuation and extension of His work as the Savior. The work of the Savior happened only once, but it is continued in the work of the Advocate. This is God's side of the work.

FORGIVENESS THROUGH CONFESSION

We must never neglect God's side. However, we must never forget our side either. It is true that the Lord Jesus is presenting His blood and His accomplished work before God continually. But if we sin intentionally, continuously, and without repentance, repudiation, or an inclination to deal with our sins, the work of the Lord's blood will lose its effect and efficaciousness for us. The work of the Lord's crucifixion is not just for us, but for the whole world also. The one work of the Lord Jesus has included everyone. But this work of the Lord can be realized only in those who believe in Him. Christ's work of advocacy is the same in principle. It is continuous. Regardless of whether a Christian will confess and repent of his sins or not, the cleansing work of Christ is continually effective. But how this can be realized in the believers is another problem.

First John 1:7 tells us that a Christian is forgiven of his sins before God because of the work of Christ. On the other hand, verse 9 shows us what we should do on our side. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." First John 2:1 tells us that the Lord Jesus is our Advocate. But 1 John 1:9 tells us that on our side we have to confess our sins. This does not mean that it is our confession that grants us forgiveness. If confession itself can earn forgiveness, the forgiveness is unrighteous. Suppose that I stole a hundred dollars from a brother, and I go to him and confess my sin. If he forgives me on account of that confession, is he righteous? If that were the case, I could steal another hundred dollars again and could confess again. If confession alone can earn us forgiveness, this is the most unrighteous thing there is. If that were the case, we could not say that God is faithful and righteous. We would have to say that God is an unrighteous, sloppy God, who overlooks our sins.

Why does John say that God is righteous to forgive? It is because the Lord Jesus has become our Advocate. His blood has cleansed away all of our sins. Our sins have been judged and condemned in Christ. Therefore, when we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us. If I have stolen money from a brother and someone has paid it back for me, then confession will indeed bring me forgiveness. Without the blood of the Son of God, God's forgiveness would be unrighteous. Today the blood of the Son of God has been shed. The Son of God has become the Advocate before God. God has to forgive us now. If He does not forgive, He will be unrighteous. Today when I

confess my sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive my sins. The Word of God tells me that the Lord Jesus has died. God has to be faithful to His own Word. He also has to be righteous regarding the work of the Lord Jesus. That is why He has to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God's forgiveness of our sins is based entirely upon the blood of the Lord Jesus. The sins of the sinners are forgiven through the blood of the Lord Jesus. The sins of the Christians are likewise forgiven through the blood of the Lord Jesus. Because the Lord Jesus is the Savior, God can forgive the sins of the sinners. Because the Lord is the Advocate, God can forgive the sins of the believers. In the Lord Jesus' being both the Advocate and the Savior, it is His blood that grants us forgiveness of sins and justification.

CONFESSION

What then is confession? The apostle did not say that confession is praying that God would forgive our sins. Many prayers and pleadings before God for forgiveness are not confessions. Nor did the apostle say that confession is just to utter something with our mouth. What the apostle said was that we have to acknowledge the sin, to treat the sin as sin. Confession means that we stand on the same ground as God does, admitting before God that our deed is indeed a sin. The moment you confess your sin, you will be forgiven. To confess is not to plead for forgiveness. Forgiveness is the Lord Jesus' business. What you have to do is judge the sin as sin. You have to judge it, acknowledge it, and confess that it is wrong. You have to take sin as sin and treat sin as sin. What you must confess before God is that a sin is indeed a sin. If you confess your sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive all your sins and unrighteousness. Just as a sinner receives the forgiveness of sins through the work of the Lord Jesus, a Christian receives the forgiveness of sins from God by judging his sin as sin and through the work of Christ upon him. Simply put, confession is our saying that something is sin because God says that it is sin. For example, suppose a brother's child goes out into the street and plays with some bad children. Because he picks up foul language and gets into mischief, the brother brings in the children who have been leading his son to do these things and tells them that they are wrong and that they should no longer play with his child. He also tells his son not to play with them anymore. The child says that he wishes to confess that he is wrong and asks for forgiveness. But although he says this with his mouth, in his heart he is thinking of a way to sneak out the back door to go out and play again. He does not stand one with

his father. At issue here is not forgiveness, but whether or not we acknowledge something as sin.

Confession means that whatever God considers as sin I also consider as sin. It means that I say the same as what God has said. If God says that it is wrong, I say that it is wrong also. Confession is your recognition and declaration of sin. When you do it, God forgives your sins and cleanses you from all unrighteousness. He is not forgiving you because of your confession; He is forgiving you because of the work of the Lord Jesus. His blood is the basis of everything in this matter. But through confession, the blood produces forgiveness. Salvation is by the blood through faith. But forgiveness is by the blood through confession. This is like saying that tap water comes by the source of the water department through the pipes. In the same way, forgiveness comes by the blood through confession.

THE OLD TESTAMENT TYPE OF THE RED HEIFER

There is a kind of cleansing in the Old Testament which is a type of the forgiveness of believers in the New Testament. The words in 1 John 1 and 2 are typified in the Old Testament. Let us read what can be considered as the only portion in the Old Testament dealing with the forgiveness of the Christians' sins.

Numbers 19:1-13 says, "And Jehovah spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, This is the statute of the law which Jehovah has commanded, saying, Tell the sons of Israel to bring you a red heifer without blemish, in which there is no defect, and upon which a yoke has never come. And you shall give her to Eleazar the priest, and she shall be taken outside the camp and slaughtered before him; and Eleazar the priest shall take some of her blood with his finger, and shall sprinkle some of her blood toward the front of the tent of meeting seven times. And the heifer shall be burned in his sight; her skin, her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall be burned; and the priest shall take cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet, and cast them into the midst of the burning of the heifer. Then the priest shall wash his clothes and bathe his flesh in water, and afterwards he shall come into the camp; and the priest shall be unclean until evening. And he who burns it shall wash his clothes in water and bathe his flesh in water, and shall be unclean until evening. And a man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and place them outside the camp in a clean place; and they shall be kept for the assembly of the sons of Israel for

the water for impurity; it is a purification of sin. And he who gathers the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until evening. And this shall be to the sons of Israel, and to the stranger who sojourns among them, for a perpetual statute. He who touches the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days; he shall purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, and so be clean; but if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean. Whoever touches a dead person, the body of any man who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of Jehovah, and that person shall be cut off from Israel; because the water for impurity was not sprinkled upon him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is still on him."

In Numbers 19 a sacrifice is described. This sacrifice is the most unique sacrifice in the Old Testament. The book of Numbers is not a book on offerings. The book on offerings is Leviticus. But this sacrifice is not mentioned in Leviticus. Rather, it is mentioned in Numbers. We know that the Passover lamb was slain in Egypt. This typifies the Lord Jesus' death for our sins. At Mount Sinai God showed us again what the Passover lamb is. The five offerings in Leviticus are the Passover lamb analyzed and broken down. They show us the different aspects of the Lord Jesus and how He satisfies God's requirements in redeeming man's sins. All of these are for the sinners and were spoken of at Mount Sinai. The book of Numbers, however, is a book on the wilderness. It is a history of the children of Israel's wandering in the wilderness of Paran. There the children of Israel lived as sojourners in the wilderness. They were a nation sojourning in the world. There God gave them another sacrifice, which is the sacrifice of the red heifer.

All offerings are for God, and thus their blood is to be poured out. This is the only sacrifice whose blood is first sprinkled directly before the tabernacle and then burnt up. Most offerings are of male bulls and goats. But this sacrifice alone is a heifer, a female cow. Most sacrifices have no color specification. But this sacrifice has to be of a specific color; it must be a red heifer. Most sacrifices are offered on the altar. Only this sacrifice is burned outside the camp. Other sacrifices are for the forgiveness of sins. But the second half of this sacrifice is for cleansing. The five offerings of Leviticus describe the Passover lamb. They are prepared for sinners. This is why they are recorded in Exodus and Leviticus. This sacrifice, however, is prepared for the people of God. This is why it is recorded in Numbers. It is a sacrifice for the experience of God's people in the way of the wilderness. The other

sacrifices are for sin. Only this sacrifice is for the filth in the wilderness. Other sacrifices are male animals. This sacrifice is female. Everything that is related to sinners is male, and everything that is related to God's people is female (Deut. 21:3-9). Leviticus 5:6 says that a female goat can be offered up as a trespass offering. The trespass offering is not just for sinners, but is frequently for believers. It is not like the sin offering, which is strictly for sinners. The trespass offering is for both sinners and believers. When something is offered up for God's people, it can be female. This is the regulation in the Old Testament.

This sacrifice, though dealing with man's offenses toward God, is actually offered up for believers. The color red signifies redemption before God. This sacrifice is not offered on the altar, because it is not for sinners. A sinner has to pass through the altar before he can come to God. This sacrifice is burned outside the camp. The camp is the place where the people of God are. Hence, the camp is a type of the church. To be outside the camp is to be cut off from the fellowship. But if you are cut off from the fellowship, a sacrifice is waiting for you. This is a sacrifice to deal with the believers' sins. It is for the restoration of fellowship.

Let us now consider the sacrifice itself. This sacrifice is of two parts. In the first part, the blood of the sacrifice is offered. In the second part, the sacrifice is burned. The first part begins from the second half of Numbers 19:2. "Tell the sons of Israel to bring you a red heifer without blemish, in which there is no defect, and upon which a yoke has never come." All those who understand the Bible know that this refers to the Lord Jesus. Hebrews 10 indicates that this red heifer refers to the Lord Jesus. What are the Lord Jesus' qualifications to become this sacrifice? Numbers 19:2 says that this sacrifice was to be without spot and without blemish and was never to have come under a yoke. Being without spot and blemish refers to His life. Never having come under a yoke refers to His work. In life He is without blemishes. In work He has never been under a yoke. In His life and person, the Lord Jesus is without spot and blemish. Not only is He without blemish, but also in His experience He is clean, that is, He has never been under a yoke. He is a clean man, and He has a clean experience. Many people are without blemish, but they have been yoked. But in His experience, the Lord Jesus was never yoked. He never touched the things of sin. He was never oppressed by sin or dominated by sin. He was never provoked to sin. He is completely free. Tonight we cannot say this for ourselves, for we are not free people. We have

been oppressed by sin and have been dominated by sin. We have been provoked by sin and are not our own masters. The Lord Jesus has no spots. Only the Lord Jesus has never been put under the yoke of sin.

This is a heifer, a female cow, signifying that this sacrifice was offered up for believers. It is red. That means it is offered up for the redemption of sin. In the Bible, red signifies the redemption of sin. Every time the Bible mentions scarlet or red, it implies sin. The woman in Revelation 18 rides on a scarlet beast and wears a scarlet robe. These refer to her sins.

Numbers 19:4 tells us what happens after the heifer is slaughtered. "And Eleazar the priest shall take some of her blood with his finger, and shall sprinkle some of her blood toward the front of the tent of meeting seven times." The priest did not do many things. He only sprinkled some blood before God in the tabernacle. This shows us that the death of the Lord Jesus has satisfied the requirements of God. The blood was not sprinkled on the children of Israel. It was sprinkled directly before the tent of meeting. The tabernacle is the place where God met with the Israelites. It is a type of the fellowship between God and man. Where God's tabernacle is, there God is also. Christ is the tabernacle; He is God living among men. He is full of God's grace and truth. He tabernacled among us (John 1:14). This is the fellowship. How can we have fellowship? There must be the blood, that is, sin must be judged. If there is no blood, man cannot come to God.

There are only two ways for man to come to God. Either he comes without sin, or he comes with the blood. If you are without sin, you can come to God in bold strides, and He can do nothing to you. But if you have sin, there must be the shedding of the blood (Heb. 9:22), because God must judge sin. If sin is not judged, man cannot have fellowship with God. God cannot overlook man's sins. God cannot let man's sins go by. If man has sin, he must come to God with the blood. God is a judging God. Without passing through judgment, sin cannot be removed. Judgment demands the blood. Therefore, there must be the shedding of the blood before fellowship can be recovered. The blood was sprinkled seven times. Seven signifies perfection. The death of the Lord Jesus has satisfied God; His blood is sufficient to wash away our sins. Here all the problems are completely solved. God's righteous requirements are met. God said that the work is done. This is the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross. It has been done once and is forever finished. There is no need for another red heifer to die. It is good enough for one red heifer to die. In the first part of this

offering we see that the sprinkling of the blood signifies that the problem of the sinner is solved. This part of the offering is the same as all the other offerings in the Old Testament. They are all just the Passover lamb.

Now we have to consider the second part of the offering, which shows us what is to be done for the sins of the believers. Numbers 19:5 says, "And the heifer shall be burned in his sight." This is most unique, for the heifer was not simply burned, but "her skin, her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall be burned; and the priest shall take cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet, and cast them into the midst of the burning of the heifer." God judged sin. After a little of the blood was sprinkled, the rest of the blood was poured into the fire. Then the whole heifer was also cast into the fire. The priest burned the whole heifer—skin, flesh, blood, dung, and all. In addition, cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet were all cast into the midst of the burning. In verse 9 we are told what happened after the heifer was burned: "A man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and place them outside the camp in a clean place; and they shall be kept for the assembly of the sons of Israel for the water for impurity; it is a purification of sin." After the heifer was slaughtered, the blood was applied. But after the heifer was burned and became ashes, the ashes were to be applied.

What are ashes? Ashes are the final state of everything in the world. I am not referring to the facts of chemistry, but to our everyday experience. Ashes are the last state of all things. If a table undergoes corruption again and again, its last state will be ashes. Hence, ashes represent the final state. When something has reached its very end, and cannot be changed to something else anymore, it is ashes.

Everything of the heifer is burned. Note particularly the blood. In these ashes are the skin, the flesh, and the blood. This means that in these ashes are the redemption of Christ and the eternal efficacy of His redemption. Christ is eternally efficacious before God. He has become the ashes. The shedding of His blood is eternally efficacious. Even the blood has become ashes. The work of redemption is finished. The red heifer portrays the Lord's redemptive work, and this work has now become ashes.

There are three other things added to the offering: the cedar wood, the hyssop, and the scarlet. In the Bible, when cedar wood and hyssop are put together, it denotes the whole created universe. First Kings 4:33 says that

Solomon had great wisdom. He spoke of all the trees, from the cedar tree to the hyssop. He went from alpha to omega. He exhausted the whole subject. The Bible uses the cedar tree and the hyssop to represent the whole world. Putting the cedar wood and the hyssop into the fire means that when the Lord Jesus was judged for sin, not only was He burned, but all of us were burned as well. God has judged all men in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. When the fire passed over Him, you and I, the cedar wood and the hyssop, all, passed through the same fire. Everything in the world, whether great or small, sweet or bitter, rich or poor, was laid on Him and judged by God. Here scarlet was also put in the fire. Isaiah 1:18 says that our sins are as scarlet. Hence, scarlet denotes sin. Not only has God judged us, but He has judged our sins as well. All sins were included with the Lord Jesus. When He was judged by God, our sins were judged as well. All the problems related to sin were also judged. Hence, the casting of the cedar wood, the hyssop, and the scarlet into the fire indicates that the whole world and all the sins of the world have passed through the fire with the Lord Jesus and have become ashes. The ashes include all the work of the Lord Jesus. They also include us and our sins. These ashes are eternally efficacious. Hence, this work has an efficaciousness that meets all of God's demands before Him. These ashes were kept outside the camp in a clean place.

From Numbers 19:11 on we are told about the function of the ashes. "He who touches the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days. He shall purify himself with the water on the third day..." Verse 9 tells us about this water for impurity. "And a man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and place them outside the camp in a clean place; and they shall be kept for the assembly of the sons of Israel for the water for impurity; it is a purification of sin." The impurity spoken of refers to the impurity of touching a dead body. Why is touching a dead body considered an impurity? It is because death is the evidence of sin. Without sin there would be no death. Therefore, where there is death, there is also sin. A dead body means that sin has done its work. The result of the work of sin is death. For this reason, the Old Testament uses leprosy as a symbol of curable sin and a dead body as a symbol of incurable sin. When a man is dead in sin and trespasses and therefore dead in his flesh, he is a dead body. The Lord Jesus talked about these dead ones. He said to let the dead bury the dead (Matt. 8:22). If you touch these dead ones, if you have intercourse with the world, if you build up a friendship with it, and if you have your living among it, you are touching

dead bodies. If you touch dead bodies, you will surely be infected and defiled with impurities. When Christians sin and fail through touching the world, the ashes are needed.

The ashes are the work of the cross. They are put into the living water (Num. 19:17) and become the water for impurity. The living water typifies the Holy Spirit. Once while the children of Israel journeyed, they struck the rock and out came living water (Exo. 17:6). First Corinthians 10:4 says that the rock was Christ. Hence, the living water refers to what flows forth from Christ, which is the Holy Spirit. Taking the living water and making it the water for impurity means that there is the need for the power of the Holy Spirit to be upon us. Without the work of the Holy Spirit, the work of the Lord will be in vain. If there are only the ashes of the red heifer without the living water, they will not be of much use. With the work of the Lord Jesus, there is still the need of the Holy Spirit. Only by the mixing together of the two will we be purified and cleansed. The Lord Jesus does not have to die again. We merely apply the efficacy of the one-time work of the Lord for our cleansing. The ashes of the red heifer represent the eternal and immutable efficacy of the Lord's work on the cross. It is this efficacy that is cleansing us. Because the Lord Jesus has died, the efficacy of His ashes becomes eternal, and by the Holy Spirit He is now applying this efficacy to us.

Every time we sin, we do not have to bring a bull to God again. The efficacy of the Lord's work two thousand years ago continues until today. By those ashes we are cleansed.

What happens if a man is not cleansed? Numbers 19:12 says, "He shall purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, and so be clean; but if he does not purify himself the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean." Why is such a one not clean until the seventh day? The man cleanses himself on the third day, but he is not clean until the seventh day. He is not clean until the seventh day because the goal is the seventh day, not the third day. The third day is the day the Lord Jesus resurrected. After the Lord resurrected, He gave to us the word of the forgiveness of sin. What then is the seventh day? In the Bible the seventh day is the Sabbath. Hebrews 4:9 says that there is another Sabbath. This is the universal, great Sabbath, which will take place in the millennium. This means that a person who is not cleansed in the age of the Lord's resurrection will not be clean in the age of the kingdom. If he is cleansed today in the age of the

Lord's resurrection, he will be clean on the seventh day, the age of the kingdom. The third day is for the seventh day. The problem is with the seventh day. The problem of eternity is settled. The problem of being God's children in this age is also settled. All other problems are settled. The only problem today is whether we will be clean in the kingdom.

At the end of this portion, Numbers 19:13 says, "Whoever touches a dead person, the body of any man who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of Jehovah." What is the tabernacle of the Lord? The tabernacle of the Lord today is not a meeting hall or some chapel. The tabernacle of the Lord today is our body. If a man destroys his body, God will destroy him (1 Cor. 3:17). If a man defiles his body, God will say, "That person shall be cut off from Israel" (Num. 19:13b). Such a person will be rejected from Israel. It does not say he will be rejected from Egypt, but from Israel. This means that at the time the children of God reign in the kingdom, such a one will be kept outside. If a person is not clean today, he will be kept outside the kingdom in the future.

Following this we read: "Because the water for impurity was not sprinkled upon him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is still on him." All the unconfessed sins and all the sins that have not passed through the blood of the Lord Jesus leave their uncleanness on the person. This uncleanness will cause one to lose his share in the coming kingdom. Conversely, those who have been cleansed by the water for impurity will be clean in the kingdom. Let me tell you one thing: No sin that has been repented of, that has been confessed and put under the blood of the Lord Jesus, and that has had the ashes applied to it, can ever raise its head at the judgment seat. The water for impurity is able to remove uncleanness because of the power of the blood in it. It is the power of redemption in this water that enables it to remove the uncleanness. Every sin that does not have the effectiveness of the Lord's redemption applied to it will leave uncleanness on the person until the "seventh day." Hence, do not let your sins remain on you. You must remove the uncleanness with the ashes of the Lord Jesus. I thank the Lord that the Son of God does not have to die for me anymore. By His ashes I am clean. But it is foolish as well as dangerous to allow any uncleanness to remain.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

HOW GOD DEALS WITH THE BELIEVERS' SINS—FOOT-WASHING

THE ASHES OF THE RED HEIFER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In Numbers 19 God shows us that if a man touches a dead body, he is defiled and must cleanse himself with the ashes of the red heifer. The way to apply the ashes is to put them in the running water (Num. 19:17). If a man has any impurity, the water with the ashes can be sprinkled on him, and the man will be cleansed. The work of Christ is completed. There is no need for Christ to be crucified again. Our need now is to apply the ashes to us, that is, to apply the efficacy of this work to us. The way to apply it is to mix it with the Holy Spirit. Only the work of the Holy Spirit can transfer its effectiveness over to us.

Hence, at issue today is not the work of the Lord Jesus. At issue today is the work of the Holy Spirit. There is no question about the Lord's dying for us. The question is whether or not this work has produced an effect on us, whether or not the Holy Spirit has applied the work of the Lord Jesus to us. When we confess our sins, the Holy Spirit applies the Lord's work of redemption to us. He will cause us to think of the Lord and to realize how complete His work is. The Holy Spirit reminds us in our heart of the redemptive work of the Lord. He causes us to remember and to enter into this truth. By this our heart will have peace and joy. The Holy Spirit comes and applies the work of the ashes, that is, the eternal work of the Lord Jesus, to us. The Lord has accomplished all the work. There is no need to ask for anything or to do anything. Now when we confess our sins, the Holy Spirit comes and causes us to consider this truth so that we can receive the benefits of the Lord's redemption.

FOOT-WASHING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Not only does the Old Testament show us the cleansing by the death of the Lord Jesus, but in the New Testament the Lord Jesus also did something to

show us the same thing. John 13 shows us a picture of what a Christian should do when he sins. John 13:1 says, "Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that His hour had come for Him to depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the uttermost." After this word, the Lord Jesus did something which shows not only His love, but His love to the uttermost. John 13 is different from John 3. John 3 is about God's initial love. John 13 is about God's uttermost love. Once God loves His children, He loves them to the uttermost.

John 13:3-10 says, "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all into His hands and that He had come forth from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His outer garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself; then He poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. He came then to Simon Peter. Peter said to Him, Lord, do You wash my feet? Jesus answered and said to him, What I am doing you do not know now, but you will know after these things. Peter said to Him, You shall by no means wash my feet forever. Jesus answered him, Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me. Simon Peter said to Him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus said to him, He who is bathed has no need except to wash his feet, but is wholly clean."

Foot-washing has two meanings in the Bible. Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet has one meaning, and the disciples' washing of each other's feet has another meaning. To wash each other's feet is to recover one another and to revive one another. Jesus' washing the disciples' feet has another meaning.

All of us have shoes and socks; therefore, foot-washing is not that necessary for us. But some of us come from the southeast Asian countries. There foot-washing is necessary because many wear sandals only. They do not wear socks. The Jews were like the southeastern Asians; they wore sandals and did not have socks. Often they walked through desert lands, and their feet were constantly dirty. Not only did their feet get dirty when they traveled, but sometimes their feet got dirty when they walked across the hall immediately after a bath. Even when their body was already clean, their feet still needed washing before they would be wholly clean.

What does the Lord Jesus want to show us in this picture? Verse 10 says, "Jesus said to him, He who is bathed has no need except to wash his feet, but

is wholly clean." Who are those who are bathed? Ananias told Paul to rise up and be baptized for the washing away of his sins (Acts 22:16). Bathing in the Bible signifies the full cleansing from sin of a person when he believes in the Lord Jesus. Last night we saw the slaughtering and the burning of the heifer. The slaughtering is for our redemption, and the burning is for our cleansing. Tonight we also have to consider two kinds of cleansing. One is foot-washing. The other is bathing. There are two sides to the Lord's work—the slaughtering and the burning; and when we apply the effects of this work to us, there are also two sides—the foot-washing and the bathing. He cleansed us with His own blood. This work of redemption was accomplished once for all. When we believe in and receive Him, we are washed in the pool of His blood and are fully cleansed. Thank the Lord that we have all taken the bath. All our sins have been washed away by the Lord Jesus. But now that we have believed in the Lord and have been washed, while we are on our journey in the wilderness, we cannot avoid coming in contact with the world. We cannot avoid picking up impurities. In our journeying in the wilderness, spontaneously we come into contact with the world, and spontaneously the dust of the earth defiles our feet.

BATHING AND FOOT-WASHING

Although we Christians are bathed once only, the Bible shows us that foot-washing happens many times. There is only one bathing, but there are many foot-washings. It is like the cleansing: There is only one cleansing by the blood, but there are many cleansings by the water of the ashes. The accomplished redemption of Christ occurred once only. But there are many applications by the Holy Spirit of this accomplished work to us. We are bathed only once, and all our sins are washed. But it takes many foot-washings to wash away all the dirt that we pick up on the wilderness journey. There needs to be only one bathing. But foot-washing is a daily work before the Lord. Foot-washing is a washing that comes about by the Word of God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, and based upon the work of the Lord Jesus. If we have been cleansed once by His blood, we must continue to be washed daily by His blood as well. The Lord Jesus does not have to come and do another work. We are cleansed again and again based on that one work. It is not the ashes that are cleansing us but the water of the ashes. The ashes of the red heifer are the mark of our judgment.

God did not substitute our judgment with the judgment of the Lord Jesus. Rather, He judged us in Christ Jesus. Today man thinks that the Lord Jesus died in place of man; but actually, we died in and with the Lord Jesus. In other words, we are judged in Christ. This alone will cleanse us. My daily cleansing is based on the death of the Lord Jesus.

We know that we have taken a bath, that is, our sins have been cleansed. Once we are saved, we are eternally saved. All the problems are solved. What then should we do when we touch the dirt while living on earth and coming into contact with the world every day? We all cannot be like the thief on the cross, who went straight to Paradise without his feet ever touching the earth after he was cleansed by the blood. Most people are not saved while on their deathbeds. Most still have to take the wilderness journey. Every one of us knows that while we take the wilderness journey, we should not sin. But sinning is a fact with all of us. As a result, our feet get dirty. Many times we are rash and speak words that we should not speak. Many times we have improper thoughts. Thus, we admit that we are defiled. But God has prepared the foot-washing of the Lord Jesus for us. This is not just a sign of His love for us, but a sign of His love to the uttermost. He loved us; hence, He was crucified for us. Now He loves us to the uttermost; hence, He washes our feet. Figuratively speaking, foot-washing is not the love before marriage. Foot-washing is the love after marriage. He causes us to be continually clean before Him. This is why the Lord said that he who has been bathed will be wholly clean once his feet are washed. We thank the Lord that His Son has given us a bath already.

The Lord allowed Peter's foolishness to be manifested as a lesson for us. When He came to Peter, Peter said, "Are You going to wash my feet?" Peter thought that this was a matter of politeness and courtesy. The Lord said that Peter would not understand what He did then but would understand later. There is much spiritual truth here. When the Holy Spirit comes, we will see. Now we are bewildered. All we see is a basin of water and the Lord's washing. We do not see what they mean. In the future, however, we will understand. But Peter always had his opinions. He exclaimed that the Lord would never wash his feet. The Lord told him that the foot-washing was very important. If the Lord did not wash Peter's feet that night, Peter would have no part with Him.

Do not think that it is enough to have a bath once and be cleansed by the blood of the Lord once. Do not think that we can get by loosely when we are defiled by the dirt on our way through the world. The Lord said that if our feet are not washed, we will have no part with Him. This means His fellowship with us today will be terminated. His fellowship with us in the future kingdom will also be lost. How important are the daily cleansings. We must allow the Lord to wash our feet every day. We have to come back every day to be recovered and to get the application of the power of Christ's redemption. We do not need the blood of the Lord Jesus to wash us again before God. The Lord's work before God has been finished once and for all. But we can experience the washing many times. The blood of His Son washes our sins again and again continuously. Therefore, we must have our feet washed every day. We have to take care of the cleanliness of our feet every day.

Peter was like we are. He always went to extremes. He went to one end at one time and then to the other end at another time. At one moment he said that the Lord would never wash his feet. Then when he heard the Lord say that he would have no part with Him if there were no foot-washing, he asked that his head and his hands be washed as well. The Lord Jesus showed him that this other extreme is wrong also. The Lord said that he who is bathed has no need except to wash his feet. No one can repent and believe in the Lord twice. No one can be regenerated twice. No one can receive the Savior twice. Once you come to the Lord Jesus and accept Him as Savior, that is enough. Perhaps you doubt for a few days. Perhaps you think that when you accepted Him as Savior the last time, you did not do a good enough job, and perhaps you begin to doubt after a few days; you want to accept Him again. But the Lord said that there is no need. The head does not need to be washed again, and the hands do not need to be washed again. The Lord Jesus said that those who have taken a bath only need to have their feet washed in order to be wholly clean. We only need one bath for the whole body. Although we touch the world and dirty our feet often, this does not affect the cleanliness of our whole body. There needs to be only one bath for the whole body. The bath cannot be repeated. Hallelujah! Even if you walk in the mud and your feet become black, it will not affect the cleanliness of your whole body. Your body does not need to be cleansed again. Once you have received the Lord Jesus as the Savior, your body is cleansed. From then on, you do not need to wash your body again. When a man is cleansed once, he is cleansed forever. No one can deny this. One's feet can get dirty, and he can be cut off from the fellowship of

the Lord. He can have no share in the kingdom, but the whole body is still clean. All those who are bathed need to wash only their feet, and they will be fully clean. What we are doing day by day is looking back at our Savior. The Lord Jesus has done an eternal work. Day by day as we live on earth, we need to keep only our feet clean and free from dirt. If we pick up some dirt by accident, we can still receive a daily washing, so that we can enjoy uninterrupted fellowship with the Lord and reign with Him tomorrow. This is our way. May the Lord keep our feet clean day after day, so that we can glorify His name here on earth.