

Life Messages



Witness Lee



LIVING STREAM MINISTRY

LIFE MESSAGES

by Witness Lee

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CONTENTS

1. Building by Keeping the Oneness through Growing in Life
2. How to Grow in Life
3. The Vine—God's Economy (1)
4. A Practical Way to Abide in the Vine (1)
5. Questions and Answers (1)
6. The Vine—God's Economy (2)
7. A Practical Way to Abide in the Vine (2)
8. Abiding—Death and Resurrection
9. The Word of the Cross and the Word of Life
10. The Life Way to Take the Word
11. The Way That Leads to Life
12. Christ Our Portion and Our Life
13. God's Gifts—the Word and the Spirit
14. The Recovery
15. Leadership among the Saints
16. Growing Up into Him
17. Oneness
18. How to Conduct Ourselves in the House of God (1)

19. How to Conduct Ourselves in the House of God (2)
20. Walk in Christ
21. The Law of Freedom
22. How to Conduct Ourselves in the House of God (3)
23. The Life, the Reality, and the Way
24. God and His Word
25. Living by Another's Life
26. The Tree of Life
27. Eating in Exodus
28. Eating in the Good Land
29. Eating in the Gospels
30. Eating in the Epistles and Revelation
31. The Heavenly Vision
32. Questions and Answers (2)
33. God's Good Pleasure
34. Living a Divine Life—God's Good Pleasure
35. The Resurrection of Christ—God's Good Pleasure
36. In Our Spirit—God's Good Pleasure
37. Strengthened into the Inner Man—God's Good Pleasure
38. Worshipping in Spirit—God's Good Pleasure
39. The Father's Life and the Son's Living
40. Two Persons with One Life and One Living
41. The Revelation of Life and the Way to Take Christ as Life
42. The Vital Position of God's Word in His Economy
43. Some Basic Items in the Gospel of John
44. The Wide Scope of the Gospel of John
45. A Living Person, Not Any Substitute
46. The Perfecting of the Saints (1)
47. The Perfecting of the Saints (2)

48. A History of the Word of God
49. The All-inclusive Gospel
50. Living by Christ
51. Taking Christ as Life
52. How to Abide in Christ
53. How to Live by Christ
54. Christ, the Mystery of God
55. The Church, the Mystery of Christ
56. Christ in the Four Focal Books
57. The Good Land and the Spirit
58. Two Lives Grafted into One
59. Two Spirits Joined as One
60. The Triune God Saturating the Tripartite Man
61. Regeneration, Sanctification, Transformation, Conformation, and Glorification
62. Living Christ
63. Living Christ Only
64. Walking according to the Spirit
65. God's Mystery and God's Economy
66. How the Lord Became the Spirit
67. The Life Supply of the All-inclusive Spirit
68. God's Lampstand and His Lamps
69. The Church Becoming the Lampstand of God
70. The Spirit—God's Ultimate Expression
71. The Spirit of Man
72. The Practical Expression of the Processed Triune God
73. To Be a Person in Spirit
74. The Testimony of the Golden Lampstand
75. God's Twofold Lamps

PREFACE

This book is part of a three-volume set containing messages given by Brother Witness Lee during the years 1978 and 1979.

This volume, entitled *Life Messages*, volume 1, includes messages given during special conferences on July 9 through November 26, 1978, in Anaheim, San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose, Sacramento, and Berkeley, California; Boston, Massachusetts; Washington D.C.; New York City; Atlanta, Georgia; Miami, Florida; Spokane, Moses Lake, and Seattle, Washington; Vancouver, Canada; and Dallas, Texas.

Life Messages, volume 2, includes messages given on January 9 through November 4, 1979, in conferences held in Tulare, Fresno, Hayward, San Francisco, San Jose, and Berkeley, California; Austin and Houston, Texas; Taipei, Taiwan; Quezon City, Philippines; Hong Kong; Singapore; and Tokyo, Japan.

The companion volume, *Truth Messages*, includes eleven messages given during weekly ministry meetings in Anaheim, California, on September 24 through December 16, 1978.

CHAPTER ONE

BUILDING BY KEEPING THE ONENESS THROUGH GROWING IN LIFE

In this chapter we need to see what the building of the church is. This matter has been neglected by today's Christians. Neither fundamental Christians nor Pentecostal Christians care for it. To some degree, certain teachers have been concerned about this. However, their concept of the building is not accurate according to the New Testament. These teachers say that the building of the church is typified by the building of the Old Testament temple. The period of David was for the preparation of the building materials, and the period of Solomon was for the actual building of the temple. They go on to point out that Christ is typified by both David and Solomon, David typifying Him in His suffering and Solomon typifying Him in His reigning. According to their application of these points to the church, during the time of Christ's suffering, the materials for the building of the church are being prepared. Then when Christ comes again to reign, these materials will be brought together, and the building of the church will be realized.

TWO MAJOR MISTAKES

If you do not consider the teaching of the New Testament, you may be influenced by this teaching concerning the building. Any interpretation of the Old Testament types, however, must correspond to the New Testament teaching. In this light we see that there are two major mistakes in the understanding held by these teachers. The first mistake is that they say that Solomon represents Christ only after Christ's second coming. But according to Matthew 12, Solomon typifies Christ from the time of Christ's resurrection. In Matthew 12:42 Christ even said that He was greater than Solomon. Because the greater Solomon was there already, it is not accurate to say that only after His second coming is Christ typified by Solomon. Immediately after His resurrection Christ entered into His reigning, and today He is the King of kings. Therefore, today is not the time of Christ's suffering. His time of suffering is over; it ended with His crucifixion.

David typifies Christ up until His crucifixion, and Solomon typifies Christ beginning from His resurrection. The materials for the building of the church were prepared not before Christ's resurrection but after His resurrection, beginning no later than the day of Pentecost. This means that the materials are prepared after Christ's resurrection, not in the period of His suffering.

The second major mistake made by these teachers regarding the building of the church is that they say that the building of the church does not take place today. But according to Ephesians 2:22, we are being built into God's dwelling place right now. Therefore, it is not accurate to say that we are being prepared today and that we will be built only after Christ comes again. Ephesians 2:22 says that we are being built, not that we are being prepared. According to the concept of some teachers, the building of the church is not yet; only the preparation of the materials is taking place today. This concept, however, is wrong. Although these teachers did have a concern for the building of the church, their understanding of it was not accurate.

In Matthew 16 the Lord Jesus spoke about the building of the church. After Peter received the revelation concerning Christ, the Lord said, "Upon this rock I will build My church" (v. 18). In saying these words, the Lord certainly did not mean that the building of His church would begin at the time of His second coming. At the latest, the Lord began to build the church on the day of Pentecost. In 1 Peter 2:5 Peter says that we are living stones being built up as a spiritual house. This indicates that the building of the church is taking place today, not only in the future.

THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCH BEING THE GROWTH IN LIFE

We thank the Lord for showing us that the building is taking place now. Moreover, He has shown us the way to have the building. Ephesians 2:21 says that all the building is growing, and the next verse says that we are being built together into God's dwelling place. Thus, growing equals being built, and being built equals growing. This indicates that the proper building of the church is the growth in life.

In Ephesians 4 we also have the thought of growth. Verse 13 speaks of a full-grown man, and verse 15 says that we should hold to truth in order to grow up in all things into the Head, Christ. Furthermore, verse 16 speaks of

the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love. Even verse 14 has the thought of growth, for it says that we should be no longer little children tossed by waves. To be no longer children is to have the proper growth. Therefore, in Ephesians 4:13-16 the thought of growth is found in every verse. According to these verses, the building of the Body comes through the growth in life.

In 1954 I first began to minister on the building of the church. At that time, however, the light I received was neither clear nor complete. I pointed out that, although hardly any Christians today care for the building or speak about it, the New Testament emphasizes it very strongly. Therefore, we must care for the building. Using the illustration of the construction of a meeting hall, I told the saints that, like the materials in the building, they must have someone above them, below them, in front of them, behind them, and on both sides of them. I told them that they had to know who was next to them in order to be built up with them. I gave the same kind of messages in the United States. However, after 1964 I discovered the awkwardness of speaking of the building in this way. Prior to that time, both in Manila and in Taipei, I could boast that I knew who was above me, under me, and beside me. However, after coming to the United States, I found it awkward to say this, for I found it difficult to say who was beside me. I came to realize that this illustration is not accurate because it applies only to a material building, a building with lifeless materials. Once these materials are put into a building, they do not move. We, on the contrary, are living building materials and are constantly moving.

Take the example of Aquila and Priscilla. Both in Rome and in Ephesus the church met in their home. Because Aquila and Priscilla had been built in, there was no problem with them wherever they lived. This type of building is much different from a building with physical materials. We are not a material building; we are a living house, living people who move about from place to place.

THE COMPLETION OF THE BUILDING

In the entire universe God has just one dwelling place. The building of this dwelling place began, at the latest, on the day of Pentecost, and it is still going on. The process of building will be completed not at the time of the Lord's coming back but at the end of the millennium.

According to the New Testament, from the time of Adam until the time of the millennium there are four ages: the age of Adam, the age of the law, the age of grace, and the age of the kingdom. The building of the church takes place during the age of grace and the age of the kingdom. It began on the day of Pentecost, the beginning of the age of grace, and it will be completed by the end of the age of the kingdom. Then the fullness of time with the New Jerusalem will come. Thus, the completion of God's building will be in the new heaven and new earth, which will appear after the millennium. Although the New Jerusalem comes at the beginning of the millennium, its full completion, the completion of God's building, will not be until the end of the millennium.

Although the building is going on today, the majority of Christians are not concerned about it and have no heart for it. They neither understand it nor speak of it. But God's mercy has reached us, our eyes have been opened, and we have a heart for the building. My heart is very burdened for God's building. My heart has been on this matter since 1954, and I have written a number of hymns about it. Today many of us have been captured by the vision of the building. We have seen that what the Lord is seeking today is the building. Without the building, there is no way for Him to come back.

GROWING IN LIFE THROUGH KEEPING THE ONENESS

Now we come to what the building is. The building is simply the growth in life. I would remind you that the title of this chapter is "Building by Keeping the Oneness through Growing in Life." By considering our experience and by examining the Word, we have found that if we do not keep the oneness, we have no way to grow in life. Breaking the oneness spoils the growth in life. Genuine growth in life is safeguarded by keeping the oneness. In other words, once the oneness is damaged, there is no growth in life. This is not a mere doctrine; it is our experience. Through our experience we have learned that true growth in life is in the keeping of the oneness. We may advance in knowledge or improve our behavior, but we cannot have the genuine growth in life apart from keeping the oneness. The genuine growth in life is regulated by the maintaining of the oneness. Thus, it is crucial that we know how to be one.

KEEPING THE ONENESS

AND ARRIVING AT THE ONENESS

Ephesians 4:3 tells us to keep the oneness of the Spirit, and in verse 13 we see that we need to arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. In these verses we see the two ends of oneness: keeping the oneness and arriving at the oneness. On the one hand, we have the oneness already. If not, how could we keep it? Keeping it implies having it. The oneness we have already is the oneness of the Spirit, and the oneness of the Spirit is the Spirit Himself. Because we have the Spirit within us, we have the oneness. Now we simply need to keep it. For example, the lamps in the meeting hall have the same electricity. The electricity within them is their oneness. They are one not in themselves but in the electricity. Likewise, we have the one Spirit in us. This Spirit is our oneness. Hence, the oneness is called the oneness of the Spirit.

We need to keep this oneness until we arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. At one end of the oneness is the oneness of the Spirit, and at the other end is the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. We need to keep the oneness of the Spirit as we go on to arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God.

The oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God is a full-grown man. Arriving at this oneness means arriving at a full-grown man. This oneness is also the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Christ has a fullness, the fullness of Christ has a stature, and the stature has a measure. Thus, Ephesians 4:13 speaks of the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. As a man, I have a stature, and my stature has a measure. The measure of this stature is my fullness. The oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God is both the full-grown man and the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

ARRIVING BY GROWING IN LIFE

Although we have not yet arrived at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, our destiny is such an arrival. Today we are on the way. Some of us may be very close to this destination, and others may be quite far from it. The way to arrive is by growing in life. The more we grow, the closer we come to the end. When we are fully grown, we will arrive at our

destination. This means that full growth is our destination. Thus, the process of coming to our destination is the growth in life.

DIFFERENCES ACCORDING TO GROWTH

In a family there are the grandparents, the parents, and children of various ages. According to Ephesians 2:19, we are God's family. In God's family, as in a human family, we are at different stages according to our growth. Therefore, there must be differences among us; yet we are all in the same family. The little ones may cry or fight over their toys. This fighting, however, is normal and even somewhat necessary. But as the children grow, they should no longer fight over toys. All the ages are included in the family. The older ones cannot exclude the young people, and the young people cannot exclude the very little ones. If we exclude any, we break the oneness. In such a case, the oneness of the family is damaged.

In Ephesians 4 we can see this matter of differences. Do not be concerned whether these differences are right or wrong; they are normal. Although my wife and I are no longer young, we do not exclude any of our naughty grandchildren. If they never visited our home, we would miss them very much. This is the family life. All the churches in the Lord's recovery need to be like this.

The problem with today's Christians is that instead of a family, they have a class as in school. In an elementary school, children are grouped according to age. Nearly every Christian group is a class. But in the church we are not a class; we are a family.

The genuine oneness, the oneness of the Spirit, must come first. In order to keep the oneness of the Spirit, we must have the growth in life. Today we are all in the process of growing in life. As we continue in this process, there will be differences among us. If we do not have the growth in life, we cannot keep the proper oneness, for the oneness of the Spirit is maintained by the growth in life.

Lowliness

It is in the growth in life that we have genuine lowliness (v. 2). Lowliness is not a human virtue. When I was young, the pastor advised us to be lowly. But

the more he admonished us to be lowly, the higher we desired to be. Lowliness comes from the growth in life. If we would keep the oneness of the Spirit, we must have lowliness. Never think highly of yourself. The first requirement, the first prerequisite, of maintaining the genuine oneness is lowliness. Instead of considering ourselves so highly, we need to say, "Lord, I would like to be lowly. I do not want to be high."

Meekness

The second requirement is meekness. Meekness means not to resist. If we do not resist whatever happens to us, then we have meekness.

Long-Suffering

Along with lowliness and meekness, we need long-suffering. No place exhausts our endurance more than the church. The church exhausts everyone's endurance. If you think that you are able to endure, the Lord will bring to you those who can exhaust you. We all need to be exhausted. The Lord's intention is to exhaust us. The elders may expect the brothers to be nice and lovable and the sisters to be quiet and agreeable. But the more you expect the brothers and sisters to be like this, the more naughty they will be. The elders must be prepared to face the difficulties caused by naughty brothers and sisters. They will exhaust you to the uttermost and then, after exhausting you, will complain that you have no patience or sympathy. Thus, we need long-suffering.

In addition to long-suffering, we must bear one another in love. Instead of vindicating ourselves or justifying ourselves, we need to bear everyone. We should not only bear a few according to our preference but all the saints. We need to bear them in our spirit to the throne of grace and pray for them. This is easy to talk about, but difficult to practice. For this we need the Lord's mercy. Apart from His mercy we cannot bear anyone. Those who have been elders for five years will agree with this, for they have suffered a great deal in the eldership, having been cut into pieces by the brothers and sisters. But this is our destiny, our life, our way. If an elder tries to drop the eldership, he will be through with the church life.

As we go on to the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, there will be differences among us according to the various stages of

life. These differences are unavoidable, and we should not try to eliminate or reduce them. Rather, we need to allow the brothers and sisters to be what they are. This is the way to keep the oneness through lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, and bearing one another in love. There is no other way.

NOT UNIFYING THE SAINTS OR THE CHURCHES

This is true not only among the saints, but also among the churches. Because all the churches are in different stages, we should not expect them to be the same. In a certain church there may be many young ones playing with toys. Instead of troubling them, we need to say Amen to their toys. Today is not a day of unification. We simply cannot unify the saints. If we attempt to unify them today, new ones will come tomorrow. The same is true with the churches. We may have the ability to unify the churches today, but after a period of time some new churches will be raised up that are childish and even babyish. If we attempt to unify them, we will kill them. Instead of unifying the saints or the churches, we should minister life to them and help them to eat well and grow normally. We need to help them to continue on in the unique oneness no matter what their stage of growth is. If we do this, we will keep the oneness of the Spirit. We maintain this oneness by allowing the differences to exist.

If we practice this, the problems among the churches will disappear. The problems are all caused by our attempts to unify the churches. We want every age to be the same. But this is impossible. We are a very large family, and we are all on the way toward arriving at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God.

As we continue on in this process, we should be thankful for all the differences. For example, if in a certain locality you find something childish and babyish, do not be disappointed. Instead, you should praise the Lord for the new ones in that place. Sometimes we may visit a church that is full of experience, filled with grandfathers and grandmothers who are all very qualified. After visiting such a church, we may be convinced that it is the best because everything is excellent and there are no problems. However, a church without problems is a poor church. But a church with many problems is a rich church, perhaps even the best church.

Suppose my wife and I, two elderly people, have no problems. When you visit our home, you find everything quiet, neat, and in good order. After staying with us a few days, you may think that this is the best home. There are no arguments, but mutual love, sympathy, and serving of one another. But is such a family really the best family? The best family is one in which there are many children of various ages. However, you may find it difficult to tolerate such a family and prefer a family composed of two elderly people where everything is quiet and neat. After visiting the home of such an orderly family, you may be influenced to say that your home is poor because it is so noisy. Attempting to make your home like the home of the elderly ones, you kill it. Sometimes, however, the situation is the opposite. Certain ones may think that my home is too quiet and encourage us to adopt some young ones. The point of this illustration is that we need to make allowances for all. Do not go to a place either to change it or to be influenced to change your locality. Let every church be the way it is. Wherever you go, simply minister life to the saints. Do not change them, correct them, or attempt to improve them. This shows our faith in life; we trust in life. Because we believe in life, we can leave the saints and the churches to life, praying for them and ministering the life supply to them. Leave their condition entirely to life. If we do this, we will keep the oneness of the Spirit and we will grow.

THE TEST OF OUR GROWTH IN LIFE

The extent to which we keep the oneness of the Spirit in this way tests how much growth in life we have. The more we grow in life, the more we will be able to bear various kinds of differences. However, if you cannot go along with differences, you are still very young. But if you can go along with all kinds of differences, this indicates that you are quite mature. The more we grow in life, the more differences we will be able to take. We will not want to reduce the differences, change things, or correct the saints. Rather, we will minister life to the saints and let them grow. If they give us some difficulty, we will bear them in love. This is a sign of our health, of our growth, and of our maturity. But if we like to unify, to change, to correct, and to adjust, this is a sign that we are still immature. For the keeping of the genuine oneness, we all need to grow.

CHAPTER TWO

HOW TO GROW IN LIFE

In this chapter I want to fellowship with you about how to grow in life.

GROWTH IN LIFE

BEING THE INCREASE OF CHRIST

In the last chapter we saw that the genuine building is the growth in life. In the language of the New Testament, to be built is to grow. Most Christians, however, consider growth as merely a matter of improvement. But it is possible to have a great deal of improvement without any growth. The growth in life is the addition of Christ as life into our being. Not only Christians but even unbelievers may improve as their natural life matures. For example, as a young person grows from a teenager to a man in his late twenties, he will improve. But this improvement is not the growth in life. Many Christians have been helped to improve themselves by listening to sermons. Although sermons may help people to improve, they do not help them to grow in life. According to the Bible, to grow is to have more of Christ wrought into our being. The growth in life is simply the increase of Christ in our being.

For the building of the church, the growth in life is urgently needed. If we do not have this growth, we cannot have any building. The growth in life is the real building. This building is not a matter of having someone above you, below you, or beside you. Take the example of Aquila and Priscilla, who were one with the other saints wherever they were. Aquila and Priscilla could be one with others because they had considerable growth in life.

THE DEGREE OF ONENESS AND BUILDING

DEPENDING ON OUR GROWTH

The degree to which we can be one with the saints depends upon the growth in life we have. You may be one with certain saints that are close to you. But if you do not have the proper growth in life, you will not be able to be one with the saints in another locality if you move there. This inability to be one with saints in a new locality proves that you do not have the growth in life.

If you have the genuine growth in life, you will be one with the saints wherever you may be.

The more we grow in life, the more we are built. If you have the real growth in life, you will be able to be built together with others whom you have not met before. When you come together with them, there will be no problems because you all have had the growth in life. To repeat, the real growth in life is the building, and the genuine building is a spiritual matter in life since the building of God's house is absolutely not material but spiritual. I must strongly emphasize the fact that the house of God, the church today, is not a physical entity but a spiritual entity. How much we have been built into the church depends upon how much we have grown in life. Many have been Christians for years but do not have any growth. Thus, there are problems whenever they come together.

In a family we have brothers and sisters but no special friends. Likewise, in the church we have only brothers and sisters, not any friends. Nevertheless, some may still want to have friends among the brothers and sisters. In a sense, they are one with their friends because their friends suit their taste, choice, and preference. However, if they move to another place that does not match their taste, they will not be one with anyone. But if you have the growth in life, wherever you may go, you will be one with the saints. This oneness is the building.

Some brothers always want their own preference. If they cannot get it in one place, they will move to another and to still another. I have seen saints who moved from one church to another trying to find their preference. With them there was no growth in life. Because there was no growth in life, wherever they went, there was no oneness. They simply could not be one with others. But suppose you have the genuine growth in life. Even in a church where the situation is the most difficult, you will still be able to be one. If you cannot be one in the place where you are, do not think that by moving elsewhere you will be able to be one. If you should move to another place, you may find it worse than the place you left. This may cause you to go to even a third place. Nevertheless, the situation will be the same. Do not move to a certain place in order to have your choice. Instead, stay in the difficult place, the place where you can have the growth in life. Actually, it is not a matter of the place but of the growth in life. I say again that if you have the growth in

life, you will be able to be one with the saints. This is the building. By this we see that the genuine building is the growth in life.

THE NEED FOR A PRIVATE TIME OF PRAYER

Because the building is the growth in life, it is important that we know how to grow in life. In this chapter I have the burden to share about this matter in a very practical way. Throughout the years we have greatly emphasized, perhaps overemphasized, the corporate aspect of the Christian life. We have laid great stress upon coming together to meet, to pray, and to read the Word. However, I am concerned that many, especially the young people in corporate living situations, do not have a private time of prayer. They have only the corporate prayer. I admit that no private time of prayer can replace the corporate time. The blessing, help, and life we receive in the meetings cannot be found elsewhere. Nevertheless, we need to remember that in the things pertaining to life there are always two aspects. In the Christian life there is the individual side and the corporate side, and neither can replace the other. We must have both. Furthermore, these two sides should be evenly balanced.

Among us there is a shortage in the matter of having a private time to contact the Lord. Many simply do not have a private prayer life. Most of the brothers and sisters who are over forty-five or fifty do have such a private prayer life. But most of the younger brothers and sisters, especially those in corporate living, do not. I am very concerned about this, for it is a matter that affects their growth in life. If you do not go to the Lord directly and privately by yourself, your dealing with the Lord will not be very practical or detailed.

Ephesians, a book that presents such a high vision concerning the church, also encourages us to pray. In chapter 1 Paul gives us the vision concerning God's well-speaking that produces the church. But there must be the prayer to follow this vision. Hence, Paul prayed that we would have a spirit of wisdom and revelation. Without prayer, the vision is not adequate. Many of us have seen the vision of God's purpose concerning the church. But we also need to pray, both corporately and individually.

We all need to have a private time with the Lord. This needs to be built up into a daily habit. The best time for such a private time with the Lord is in the morning. Some who leave for work very early, however, may need to choose

another time of the day. Nevertheless, we all need to set aside time for the Lord daily, preferably at least thirty minutes.

During this time you should go to the Lord and pray, not for so many affairs or business matters but to contact the Lord, asking Him to examine you, to enlighten you, and to expose your situation in His light. As the Lord enlightens you, you will need to confess one item after another. When we do not come to the light, we do not see the uncleanness, especially the offenses on our conscience. But when we are enlightened, we are aware of all the dirt. We need to confess everything exposed by the Lord's light. Once, I made a confession to the Lord that lasted more than two hours. The more I confessed, the more I needed to confess. After I confessed one thing, I had to confess another, and then another. To confess is the best way to contact the Lord in prayer for the genuine growth in life. The more we are dealt with by the Lord, the more He will be wrought into our being. This is what it means to grow.

In order to grow we must first contact the Lord in our time of private prayer. I encourage all the saints, especially the young people, to build up such a habit. Every day you must have a time of prayer. Sometimes you may pray for the church or for the Lord's recovery, if you are burdened to do so. You may also pray concerning your affairs. But the primary matter is to pray for the Lord's enlightenment, exposing, and examining. Ask the Lord to show you what is within you and ask Him to deal with you. You should say, "Lord, expose through Your light my real situation and condition." If you pray like this, the light will come, and you will be dealt with. Then whatever you pray will not be a performance but a genuine prayer from your cleansed spirit.

READING THE BIBLE AND SPIRITUAL BOOKS

During our private time with the Lord, we should also read and study the Bible. I am concerned that many of the young people do not read the Bible or study it. Yes, you may read the Bible in times of corporate fellowship or in the meetings. But you also need to have a private time to read the Word. You need to lay a good foundation in the Word of God by reading through it consecutively from Genesis to Revelation. Read book after book without selection, choice, or preference. Try to read the Bible through once every year or every two years. It is important to build up the habit of reading and studying the Word.

Ephesians 6:17 and 18 cover both the matter of prayer and the word. These verses tell us to receive the word by means of all prayer. This refers to pray-reading, or, at least, to reading the Bible prayerfully. We need to pray and to read the Word, putting these things together.

Along with prayer and reading the Word, we should also read some spiritual books or Life-study messages. It may not be adequate to read the messages just once. I can testify that although I give the messages, I am nourished by reading the printed messages again and again. I do not care who prepared the food, whether I prepared it or someone else did. As long as it is food, I take it and I am nourished by it.

In our eating we need variety. For example, for breakfast it is not sufficient to have toast and milk every morning. My breakfast includes more than twenty items, a real variety of food. This rich nourishment makes me very energetic. The principle is the same in reading spiritual books. Along with reading the Bible, we need to develop the habit of reading some profitable and nourishing spiritual books, doing this in a very balanced way and not eating too much at one time. Rather, it is better to eat several times a day. You may read four pages of a message at one time and then read more later in the day or the next day. In reading spiritual books, do not try to take in too much at once. If you build up the habit of reading the Word and spiritual books, you will be healthy spiritually and you will grow.

BEING ENLIGHTENED

We also grow by being enlightened by the Lord. Whether through prayer or reading the Word, the most important thing is to be enlightened by the Lord. If you pray, study the Bible, and read spiritual books for several days without receiving any light, you have some problem. In every time of prayer and reading the Word, we should receive light, because the Word of God is light. If you take the Word without receiving light, there must be a problem within. There can be no problem with the Word, for the Word is light. Because you do not receive light, you need to ask the Lord to show you what is wrong, to show you why you have not been receiving light from Him. When you receive light on certain matters, accept the light and confess to the Lord immediately without excusing yourself. Make a thorough confession according to the Lord's light.

BEING FILLED WITH THE LORD

The last item I would mention is being filled with the Lord. In Ephesians 3 Paul prayed that the Father would strengthen us with power through His Spirit into our inner man, that Christ may make His home in our hearts, that we may be filled unto all the fullness of God. In Ephesians 5:18 Paul tells us not to be drunk with wine but to be filled in our spirit. We need to be filled in spirit with the fullness of God. The way to be filled is the same as the way to grow in life: to pray properly, to take the Word of God, to read some nourishing spiritual books, and to be enlightened. If we pray, read the Word, and are enlightened, we will spontaneously and immediately be filled with the Lord, and the Lord will be added to us. This is the growth in life.

Although we may see the highest vision, the vision presented in the book of Ephesians, without a private time of prayer, reading the Word, being enlightened, and being filled with the Lord, the vision will fade away. It will be something that we enjoy for a moment, and then it will disappear. If we want all the visions we have seen to be wrought in our being, we need to have a private time with the Lord to pray, to read the Word, to read some nourishing messages, to be enlightened, and to be filled with the Lord. Then we will grow in life.

CHAPTER THREE

THE VINE—GOD’S ECONOMY (1)

The Gospel of John reveals to us even more than the book of Revelation what God’s economy is. Why did God create the heavens? the earth? the universe? mankind? you? In this Gospel this profound matter is unveiled to us in simple words.

What is God’s heart’s desire? Christianity has been on this earth for more than twenty centuries, and its influence, works, and activities have spread throughout human society. Yet if you have the vision from the heavenlies, you will wonder what Christian work satisfies the Lord’s heart.

The New Testament tells us clearly that what the Lord wants is a bride. The Lord likened Himself to a bridegroom (Matt. 25:1-13). Suppose there is a wedding, and you offer the groom many good things, even the whole world. The groom would just say, “What do I care about all those things? Where is my bride? I only want her.”

THE PROFUNDITY OF JOHN

It is the Gospel of John that unveils to us God’s heart desire. Of the four Gospels, Christians love John’s Gospel the most. Matthew, you may think, is too complicated, too tough to chew on, and Mark is not all that interesting, but John is as sweet as candy. Do you think John is so easy to understand? How would you explain verse 1? “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” What beginning is this? When was it? What is the Word? How could the Word be God? This is surely not soft candy! Then verse 4 adds, “In Him was life.” In Him, in this wonderful One, was life. What is life?

Not too long ago, I heard a strange definition of life. One of the saints said, “Life is liberty.” Then do the birds in the air have more life than we do? Do the people yelling and screaming at football games have more life? That is not life. That is looseness. It is the release of the flesh.

These two verses show that life is linked with God. The Word was God, and in Him was life. Here is another trinity—the Word, God, and life. What is life? Life is something in Him, in the very Word who was God. Life is just God.

John 10:10 has another reference to life: “I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly.” When Christ came, life came; surely when life came, it became available to all of us, even life abundant.

In chapter 14 this One who is life declared to His disciples that the Spirit of reality would come and abide with them and be in them (vv. 16-17). Who is the Spirit of reality? Is He with you? Is He in you? Then verse 20 says, “In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” Do you know practically that He is in the Father? Do you really know that you are in Christ and that Christ is in you?

Then we come to chapter 15: “I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman...You are the branches” (vv. 1, 5). The Lord told us that we must abide in Him that He may abide in us (v. 4). What is the meaning of these simple words—*vine, husbandman, branches, abide*?

In chapter 17 verses 21 through 23 say, “That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that You have sent Me. And the glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, even as We are one; I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.” These verses are hard to follow. Verse 21 mentions being one. What is the difference between being united and being one? Then verse 22 refers to the glory the Lord has given us. Do you have this glory? He has given us the glory that we may be one. What does verse 23 mean when it says “perfected into one”?

Now consider chapter 20, when the Lord in resurrection came back to His disciples and breathed into them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (vv. 19-22). What is the meaning of this? And what does 6:63 mean when it says, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life”? What is the Spirit? What is life?

THE HUSBANDMAN AND THE VINE

I believe you are persuaded that John is not so simple. This book is on the profound economy of God. It is expressed in these simple words: *I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman*. In the universe God is a husbandman, a farmer. Farming is God's economy. Just as the farmer's economy is farming, growing things, so is God's.

What does God grow? He grows a vine tree, a vine with many branches. Christ is this vine; Christ is God's economy. A vine differs from a tree in that it has virtually no trunk. If you cut off the branches of a vine, there is practically nothing left, only the root. Christ said, "I am the vine; you are the branches." This vine, including the branches, is God's economy. This means that His economy includes us, for we are the branches of this vine. Hallelujah!

THE BRANCHES OF THE VINE

How could we be branches of Christ? If a farmer grows wheat, wheat is his economy, but wheat is not the farmer himself. But this vine, which is Christ, is the embodiment of God. God as a farmer grows Himself. By cultivating and developing this vine, God develops Himself. How does He do this? It is by the branching out of the vine. The branches are just the spreading of the vine. Whatever is in the vine is in the branches.

By your natural life, by yourself, are you a branch of the vine? No. By your fallen nature you are not only a branch of Adam but even a branch of the devil. Just as a branch is the branching out of a tree, so when we were born, we were just the branching out of Adam. As branches of Adam, we were also branches of Satan; this is what all the people on earth are today. The wonderful thing is that the moment we believe in the Lord Jesus, He branches out into us. This branching out makes us branches, branches of this wonderful Christ.

Do not look at yourself. This morning you may have lost your temper, and even now you may feel like a branch of the devil. The more you look at yourself, the more you will be disappointed. Look at the Word. "I am the vine; you are the branches." You just say, "Hallelujah, Lord, You are the vine, and I am a branch. The Bible says so."

To be a branch in the vine means that Christ has become your life. Life is not liberation; it is a person, a living person—Christ. As branches, we are those filled with Christ. Do not say you do not feel that you are filled with

Christ. When the Lord says, “I am the vine; you are the branches,” you have to say a strong Amen. Just keep saying, “Hallelujah, I am a branch!” You will be filled with Him.

DISTRACTED FROM CHRIST

God wants you to be filled with Christ, to have Christ as your life and as your person. He is not interested in religion, nor in any work or service you would like to do for Him. He wants you to live Christ day by day. If we do not have such a daily life, when we meet together, it will be just for a theatrical performance. When we shout to release our spirit, we will be actors in a theater. This is not what the Lord wants. If you take Christ as your life, you will not say even a word without the assurance that you are speaking with Him.

The whole of Christianity is off. Even the saints in the Lord’s recovery today are somewhat off, distracted, from the center lane of life. If we are concerned about how to meet—in a quiet way or a loud way, with or without guitars—this is a sign that we are off. The Bible has nothing to say about how to meet or what kind of instrument to use for our music. Shouting or silence, guitars or no guitars, mean nothing. But to meet with Christ and in Christ means everything. Do not push the saints to release their spirit. What kind of spirit are they releasing? Perhaps it is a spirit full of self or of the natural life.

CONCERNED ABOUT HOW TO MEET

There is talk among us about how to meet. Are we for a good meeting? Are we for a piano or a guitar? Are we for a certain style meeting? No! We are for Christ. When you come to the meeting, you must come with Christ and in Christ. You must come into Christ. If you say that our meeting is too legal, that there is too much ministry, that you prefer an informal, family-style meeting, you are far from the center lane.

I want to say a word here for the whole recovery. We have no particular way to meet. Nearly all our meetings are open to everyone. If you have Christ, you are free to share Christ with the saints. If you say our meetings are too formal, I say I do not know of anything on earth that does not have a form. Without a form nothing can exist. A family-style meeting is a form. In fact, it is more

formal, because you insist on it. If we insist on any way to meet, that way is a form. This is not of the Lord. It causes division.

TWO ASPECTS OF CHRIST

Now let us come back to a further point regarding God's economy. We have seen that it is not something religious or ethical, but it is Christ wrought into our being. Now we need to consider who Christ is. The Gospel of John reveals this One as the Word (1:1) and also as the Spirit (14:17). Hallelujah! God has given us two precious treasures, the Spirit within and the Word without.

In one aspect the Lord Jesus is the Word; in the other aspect He is the Spirit. Why are there these two aspects? It is because God cares about our experience of Him.

The Lord Jesus As The Spirit

Without the Spirit we cannot experience Him. How could we be in Him and He in us? All by the Spirit. Are you not in the air? Is not the air in you? The Lord Jesus today is the life-giving Spirit. The Greek word *pneuma* means both "spirit" and "air." The Lord Jesus is the heavenly, spiritual air.

We are now in this *pneuma*, and this *pneuma* is in us. Because He is the Spirit, I have the full assurance that I am in the Spirit and the Spirit is in me. This is why after His resurrection He came back to His disciples, breathed into them, and told them, "Receive the Holy Pneuma" (20:22). Today we are all in the Holy Pneuma, and the Holy Pneuma is in all of us.

The Lord Jesus As The Word

If God had given us only the Spirit without the Word, we could easily be misled, because the Spirit is not tangible. In contrast, the Word is so solid, so touchable. Whenever we have a particular experience of the Spirit, we must check the Word. This is our safeguard.

THE BALANCE BETWEEN THE WORD AND THE SPIRIT

If you care only for the Word and disregard the Spirit, you may be accurate in your beliefs, but you will be dead within. The Word is our safeguard, and the Spirit is our livingness.

These two extremes are apparent in Christianity. The fundamentalists stress the written Word; the Pentecostals, a kind of “Spirit.” The Lord’s desire is to balance us between the Spirit and the Word, the Word and the Spirit.

If you regard only the Spirit and neglect the Word, your spiritual life will peter out. After not too long a time you will have the sense that your spirit is extinguished and that you have no way to kindle it again. You may try prayer, but you will find that no words come to your lips. Many of us have experienced this. When you run out in the spirit and have no words on your lips to pray, there is a prayer book you can turn to, the Bible.

Just open the Word. Disregard your feeling. Do not try to compose a prayer. Suppose you open to John 1:1. Just read it. Even without any feeling, sometimes as you read, something within is kindled, and prayer spontaneously rises, not in your own words but from the written Word. “Lord, I thank You. You were in the beginning. You are the Word. O Lord, You are just God. How I thank You that in You is life.”

The Word will spontaneously kindle your spirit. This is how the wonderful Lord, who is both the Word and the Spirit, will be your experience.

HANDLING OUR CHANGING MOOD

You may get up in the morning and find that your spirit is on fire. But when you get home from work that evening, you are as cold as a block of ice. There seems to be no reason. What should you do? Hallelujah, when your spirit is frozen, you have the Word! You may open to John 4:23. Read it. As you do, your reading will become your praying. You may say something like this: “O Lord, an hour is coming. Hallelujah! Lord, the hour has come, and it is now.” With just one Hallelujah the ice is melted, and you are filled with the very Christ. The coldness is gone. You do not need to deal with it. It just disappears.

The same is true with your temper. In fact, this is the way to take care of your whole Christian life. Do not try to overcome your temper. Just care for Christ. Today He is both the Word and the Spirit. As the Spirit He is in me, and as the Word He is here in the Bible. Whether I am hot or cold, the Word remains the same. However I fluctuate during the day, the Word is always the same. It always says the same thing.

If you think that this is practicing psychology, try picking up a book about Abraham Lincoln or the thoughts of Confucius. Such books do not provoke such a response in you. Why is the Bible the only book that can stir you? It is because “the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life” (John 6:63). Neither the words of Abraham Lincoln nor those of Confucius are spirit. It is only the words of the Bible that are spirit, for these are the words spoken by God. Hallelujah for this inheritance of the Spirit within and the Word without!

The Spirit may seem to disappear, but the Word always remains. Learn to contact the Lord through the Word. I encourage you to build up a habit of reading the Word daily, preferably in the morning. Make this a legality.

KEEPING SOME LEGALITIES

To live we have to keep some legalities. We must be legal about four things: eating, drinking, breathing, and sleeping. Do you think it is too legal to eat three meals every day? Without such a legality you will soon be ready for a funeral! In order to live in a healthy way, you must eat, drink, breathe, and sleep. I am careful to practice these four legalities. That is why I am still so energetic even at my age. Without such practices you will die.

Now there are some spiritual legalities that you must pay attention to. In order to live and be healthy spiritually, you must practice these daily. The young brothers especially must have at least ten minutes of prayer every day. Then you must also have at least ten minutes for reading the Bible. You can read a chapter in ten minutes. If you insist on keeping these legalities, you will be a strong, healthy Christian. Look to the Lord for His grace to practice them.

THE VALUE OF READING THE BIBLE

Suppose you have no interest in praying or reading the Bible. You have done it for a while, and you seem to get nothing out of it. I know the story. If you will keep these two legalities for half a year, you will see the difference it makes. Then if you are still bored, stop for three months. This will give you a comparison. You will see what a loss it is. If you try to put water into a strainer, the water will flow right out. However many times you try, no water will stay in the strainer. But the strainer nonetheless is getting washed. Every day when you read the Bible, it seems that nothing remains. But your being is washed; your person refreshed. If you neglect your Bible reading for ten days, you will see how dull and dirty you feel. Reading the Bible makes you different, whether you sense that you have received something or not.

HOW TO APPROACH BIBLE READING

Come to the Bible not with the purpose of understanding it. Come not even with the purpose of receiving light or the life supply. Just come to the Bible to read it. Eventually, the Lord knows when, light will come, life support will come, secretly, wonderfully, even mysteriously, but not at your time and not in your way.

When I was young, I read a biography that said whenever So-and-so read the Bible, the letters would jump out, and the light would shine brightly. I decided to practice that. I opened the Bible, knelt down, and prayed, "Lord, enlighten Your Word. Make some letters jump out. Make some words stand out to me." Day after day I prayed this way, but not one letter jumped out. They just seemed to sink deeper into the page. In time, though, the light came, and the life supply came. In some instances it was thirty-five years later. Since coming to the United States, I have had a great deal of light that came through my reading of forty years ago.

Just come to the Bible for the sake of reading it and contacting the Lord, not for any other purpose. When the right time comes, the Lord will give you the light or the life supply or the understanding.

ANSWERED PRAYER

As with reading the Bible, so with prayer. You may expect that if you pray, the Lord will surely answer immediately in your way. Well, after years and years of being a Christian, I can testify that not a single prayer has gone

unanswered. Every one has been answered but not according to my way or in my time. Sometimes I did not hear of the answers till after three or five or even more years. As I look back over the years, I worship the Lord that whatever I have prayed He has answered in His way and at His time.

Prayer is not in vain. The answers will come. But the answers are secondary. When you pray, you touch the Lord. This breathing in of the Lord is primary.

THE LONG-TERM EFFECT

By taking the time, at least ten minutes a day, to read the Bible and pray, you are contacting the Lord in your spirit through the Word day by day, week after week, month after month, and year after year. You will be growing all the time and will be built up with Christ. Eventually, you will know that the Christian life is just living by Christ. In thinking, you will think by Him; in speaking, you will speak by Him. You will express your attitude by Him. He will be your life and your person.

If we practice this, our coming together will not be with a way to meet. We will come with Christ, in Christ, and into Christ. Our meetings will not be something theatrical but a living testimony of Jesus, not a performance but an actual testimony of our daily living.

This is what God desires to have. Christianity has been disappointing Him in this for many centuries. Let us receive grace and rise up to say, "Lord, here we are. We want to satisfy You by living You out as a testimony and by coming together in You, with You, and into You." This is the church life.

CHAPTER FOUR

A PRACTICAL WAY TO ABIDE IN THE VINE (1)

Throughout the centuries scholars and philosophers have tried their best to find out the meaning of the universe and the meaning of human life. None of them has ever found the proper answer. But the Lord's simple illustration in John 15 of a vine and branches and a husbandman reveals nothing less than this.

I was saved as a teenager over fifty-six years ago and since then have never fallen away. Yet for many years in the early period of my Christian life, I did not know what God's economy was. I tried my best to love Him, to study the Bible, and to testify of Him to others, but I was ignorant of His economy. (This word in Greek as used in the New Testament means a dispensing of something in a kind of administration; a stewardship to dispense something into certain vessels.)

One day I saw that God chose and redeemed us with a purpose, a purpose so high that no human mentality can grasp it. It is that the Triune God, the infinite God, wants to dispense Himself into our being. Then I began to understand why God created us tripartite. We have a body outwardly, a spirit within, and in between a soul. Just as a glove is made for a hand, so we were designed for God to get into us.

CHRISTIANITY'S FALSE CONCEPT

We have the wrong impression that we must do something for God. Christianity has instilled in us the concept that we should serve God, preach the gospel, win souls, improve our behavior, honor our parents, love our enemies, and be kind and humble. This is the kind of Christian I tried to be for years, without ever realizing that God did not want this.

God does not want you to do things by yourself for Him. If He wants something done, He can do it Himself. In creating this universe, He just spoke and it came into existence. When He said, "Let there be light," there was light. God does not need you to work so hard. Mankind, with all its religions, is off

from God's goal. God would have us take Him as life. This God is embodied in Christ. Outside of Christ you cannot find God. Christ is God, the practical God, not the doctrinal God. This God is to be your life and your person.

THE VISION

Before I realized this, I hated my sins, my evil deeds, and my bad temper. I tried to love the Lord and to work for Him. But one day the Lord said, "My little child, I do not want you. I want Myself. Even if you were not so ugly, if you were lovely and excellent, I still would not want you. You can never satisfy Me. I want Myself, but it must be Myself in you. Once you take Me and leave your self out, I shall be happy."

When I saw that vision, I prayed, "Lord, have mercy on me. From now on I shall never live by my self." After that prayer I felt that I had wings. I wanted to run into the street and proclaim to everyone that from then on I would live by Christ, that it was no more I but Christ living in me. All this was more than forty years ago.

THE EFFECTS OF THE VISION

But after such an experience and such resolve, I still did not express much of Christ. Mostly I was still expressing myself. Why? Because I was born into this way, I was raised and educated to express myself, and I had been practicing this all my life. In actuality, however, it was not so much that I had grasped the vision; rather, something from heaven had grasped me. It controlled and directed me, again and again reminding me when I was living by my self. I would be about to do something when the vision would come, and I would see, "That is you again! That is your self." I would stop in the middle of what I was doing.

If you see this vision, it will rescue you from your struggle. God does not want husbands by themselves to love their wives or sisters to submit to their husbands. God wants you neither to love nor to hate but to live by Him. It is not a matter of religion or ethics but of Christ. Paul says that he was crucified with Christ, that it was no longer he but Christ living in him (Gal. 2:20). If I hate, I hate by Christ. If I love, I love by Christ.

To see this will save you from arguing. When I was a young Christian, I loved the Lord and the Bible. I would fight whatever I thought was wrong doctrine. I was sprinkled when I was young, and one day I realized that was wrong. From then on I fought for immersion. But one day I said, "Why am I fighting for immersion? Neither sprinkling nor immersion is Christ. He just wants Himself in me."

In the churches these days there is discussion about whether to meet in homes or in the meeting hall. Some even say that they like to go to the beach to enjoy the Lord. We must drop all the talk about ways to meet. No way is wrong; no way is right. As long as we have Christ, every way is right. Without Him, every way is wrong. Let us forget all the arguments and come back to the center lane, Christ Himself.

ABIDING

"Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me" (John 15:4). The real Christian life is described in this one verse. It is not to work for Christ but to abide in Him. When the Lord said, "Abide in Me and I in you," He meant that He can only abide in us as we abide in Him. If we do not do our part by abiding in Him, He cannot do His part by abiding in us. If you are quarreling with someone and saying hateful words, can the Lord abide in you? No. For Him to abide in you, you first of all have to abide in Him.

The Lord did not say that we have to get into Him. He said, "Abide in Me." This means that we the branches are in Christ already. To abide means to remain; some versions render it this way. Just stay where you are. If my arm does not abide in my body, it is detached from all life supply. God has put us in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30). This happened the day we believed in the Lord Jesus.

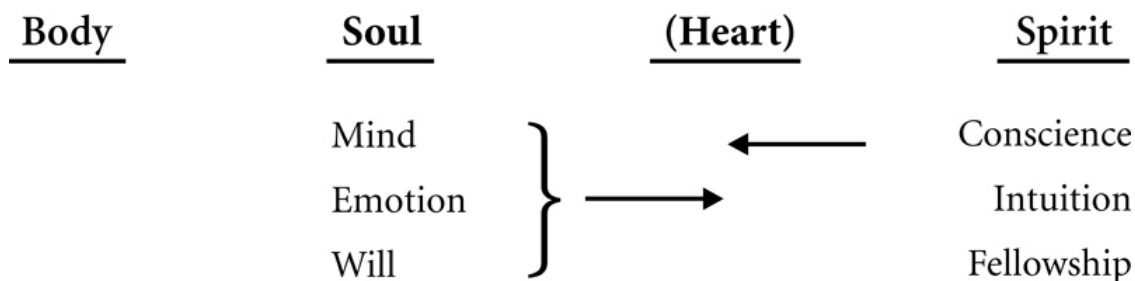
THE HINDRANCE TO ABIDING

How can we abide in Christ constantly? Let us use the illustration of a radio. Inside a radio are some complicated mechanisms that must all work properly in order for it to receive the waves from the air. One simple thing can be wrong, and the radio will not work. So it is with us. Inside we are complicated by a conscience, a mind, a will, and emotions. If these are not all properly regulated, the heavenly electric wave cannot come in. If just one is out of

order, this radio does not work. Should our conscience have an offense on it, for example, our abiding in Christ is frustrated.

As we know, man is composed of a body, a soul, and a spirit. A large part of our spirit is our conscience. If we add to the conscience the three parts of the soul—the mind, the emotion, and the will—we have the heart. The other two parts of the spirit, the intuition and the fellowship, are not part of the heart. Only the conscience is part of both the spirit and the heart. See the diagram that follows:

THE PARTS OF MAN



THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONSCIENCE

Of all God's creatures, only human beings have a conscience. This is the part within that either accuses or excuses us (cf. Rom. 2:15). When we deal with our conscience, we are dealing with both our spirit and our heart. If our conscience has never been dealt with, we are of no use to the Lord. A radio has a little receiver, without which it will not work. The paint may be chipped, but the radio will still work as long as the receiver is good. The same is true of our conscience; it must be kept in good working order. When we first received the gospel, the Lord required that we confess our sins. Confessing our sins clears our conscience. Without repenting and confessing our sins, we could not have been saved. The Spirit of God could not have gotten into us. Once we repent and confess, the Spirit enters into us. The more thorough the confession is, the more Spirit we have within.

PURIFYING THE CONSCIENCE

The Spirit, then, comes into our being through our cleansed conscience. Without this cleansing, He cannot enter. Hebrews 9:14 says that the blood of Christ purifies our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Do not

think that serving the living God means doing something for Him. In the Bible to serve Him means to contact Him, to receive Him, to have Him infused into us. The proper service or worship of God is that we give Him an opening so that He can infuse Himself into our being. This kind of serving requires a purified conscience. The blood of Christ purifies our conscience so that we may serve not the doctrinal God but the living God.

In Matthew 5:3 the Lord said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Without a purified conscience, your spirit cannot be poor. Then in verse 8 He said, “Blessed are the pure in heart.” Even more, a pure heart requires a purified conscience.

CONFESSION

We need to go to the Lord to deal with our conscience. You may feel that you have only one little, unimportant thing to confess. If you will just confess that one thing, that initial confession will be a little turn to lead you onto the highway. You may then find that you need a long time to complete a thorough confession.

As soon as you attempt to deal with the Lord in this way, the phone may ring. Once you take care of that phone call, it will take some effort to get back on the highway of your confession. After you confess two more things, the phone may ring again, this time probably a wrong number. This is the subtle enemy. It is best to get away by yourself, away from the phone and everyone else, or at least take the phone off the hook. If you share a room with someone else, you may need to find another place so that no one can disturb you.

Once you kneel or sit before the Lord and open up to Him, you will find that you have miles of confession to make. You may need hours to confess all your shortcomings, your weak points, your evil doings, your sinfulness, and your flesh. When you start cleaning your house, you may think that you can finish in fifteen minutes. But when you get into it, you will find dirt and dust all over, in all the corners. You are like your house. In every corner of your being, in every room, on every shelf, there is dirt. Your eyes have been dirtied by the many sinful things you have looked at day after day. Your ears have been sullied by listening to gossip. Your mouth needs cleansing from the gossip you have spread.

THE EFFECT OF A PURIFIED CONSCIENCE

After such a confession you will not want to go back home. You will be afraid that you may hear more gossip. It takes a great deal of effort to clean a badly smeared window. Once it is clean, you will try very hard not to let it get dirty again. This is the way to keep a clear entry for Christ to come into you. This entry, your purified conscience, will keep you from gossip.

THE EFFECT ON THE SPIRIT AND THE HEART

Thus, to abide in Christ we must first purify our conscience by making a thorough confession. Once your conscience is purified, you can be poor in spirit. You will no longer feel that you know so much. You will be humble and hungry for the real experience of the Lord. If you are proud, your spirit is not open to the Lord, and He has no way to abide in you. Purifying your conscience will issue in an open spirit.

A further effect of making confession is the purifying of your heart. Your heart will be pure because your conscience is cleansed. I have traveled this way myself; these are not doctrines I have learned merely through studying the Bible. Rather, they are a map I have drawn for you, based on my travels through all these experiences.

THE EFFECT ON THE MIND, EMOTION, AND WILL

If your conscience is not purified and your spirit is not open to the Lord, if you are not poor in your spirit and pure in your heart, what kind of mind will you have? It will be sloppy and dull. You may come to the meetings and listen to the messages, but after a time you will conclude that all the messages are about the same. To you, a “b” is about the same as a “d,” an “m” is about the same as a “w.” You have no discernment.

But once your conscience is purified, your mind will be keen and your discernment clear. No one and nothing can deceive you. This is what the Scripture calls a sound, or sober, mind (2 Tim. 1:7). Whenever you hear a message, your mind will be sharp to grasp and confirm what is being said.

A purified conscience will also affect your emotion. Before you make a thorough confession of your failures and weak points, your emotion is just lukewarm. (If your emotion were cold, you would be going to places of

entertainment rather than coming to meetings.) But once you have confessed, your lukewarm emotion will catch on fire. You will declare, “Lord Jesus, I love You! I am on fire for You!”

Your will also will be changed from being stubborn to being submissive. You will enjoy obeying (cf. Phil. 2:12). Whatever it is, big or small, you will be willing to obey.

THE KEY TO ABIDING

With such a purified conscience, open spirit, pure heart, sober mind, loving emotion, and submissive will, there will be a flow of the Lord within your whole being. You will surely be abiding in Him and He in you. This is the way to have the Lord added to your being all day long. The key is the thorough confession. Without it this chapter is just doctrine.

LIVING OUT CHRIST

Let us look to the Lord that we may see the unique vision concerning God's economy. His only desire is that we take Him as our life and person and live by Him. Branches bring forth fruit by abiding in the vine. In the same way our fruit-bearing is the outflow of life. It is not a work but our living. The same is true of our meetings and our gospel preaching. Our gospel is the Christ we live. This will also take care of the spreading; it is not something that we need to plan. In Christianity nearly everything is a matter of doing. In the Lord's recovery everything must be a matter of living, living by Christ and living out Christ.

CHAPTER FIVE

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (1)

Question: How can I deal with the Lord to get Him to act on my prayers?

Answer: This question opens up a field that covers the whole Christian life. To answer briefly, I would say that most of our efforts to know the Lord's will are futile. What we think is His will turns out to be incorrect. The right way is just to contact the Lord in the same way as you breathe. Open to Him. Then, when the time comes, something will come to you. That will be the Lord's will.

Question: Can you recommend some specific materials to use in our times with the Lord?

Answer: The more variety you have, the better. You need at least ten minutes of prayer and at least ten minutes of reading the Bible. If you have an hour's time, you can read three chapters from the Old Testament and one from the New; in this way you can finish the Bible in a year. As for spiritual writings, I surely recommend the Life-study messages and the issues of *The Stream* magazine, published in the early years. In addition, read the books *The Economy of God*, *The All-inclusive Christ*, *The Knowledge of Life*, and *The Experience of Life*. This last book would be especially helpful, since some chapters treat in detail how to deal with the conscience, the heart, the flesh, and the natural constitution.

Try to build up a habit of praying the whole day long. During your time in the morning, pray. At your break time, pray. Replace your vain talk and gossip with prayer. You will see how much more time you have to pray if you avoid the phone.

One year Brother Nee read through the New Testament every week. He did not drop any duties but just carried a little New Testament with him wherever he went. By squeezing in a minute here and two minutes there, he read it through fifty-two times in that one year.

If we can learn to use our time this carefully, there will be plenty of time to pray, read the Bible, and read some spiritual books. I greatly enjoy going back

over the Life-study messages, even though they were given by me. Just as a housewife enjoys her own cooking, so I am refreshed and nourished when I read over the Life-study messages. I long that the saints in the Lord's recovery may be able to digest them more. If you try this for half a year, it will make a big difference in your Christian life.

Question: My Christian life is like a pendulum swinging back and forth. Is this normal?

Answer: It is normal but only for a baby. Do not be troubled about feeling that way. Just keep praying daily, reading the Bible daily, and digesting a Life-study message or one of our spiritual books. Within a half year you will be steadfast. You will be rooted and grounded, and nothing will be able to shake you. Ephesians 4:14 says, "Be no longer little children tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching." Every teaching is a wind blowing people away from the center lane. If you can be carried away by this wind, then you are still a child. You need to grow. Verse 15 mentions this: "Holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things."

Do not be preoccupied with how you feel. Just go on and build some good Christian habits. Your feelings are not trustworthy. Just say, "Little devil, I do not believe in you." No matter how you feel, just keep these legalities we have mentioned: pray, read the Bible and some spiritual books, and deal with your conscience by confession. Whatever is on your conscience as an offense, confess right away to the Lord, asking Him to cleanse you and keep you constantly with a purified conscience.

Question: How can I distinguish between a prayer burden and my own desire to pray for something?

Answer: Just go to the Lord and pray. Do not have your mind made up about what you will pray. Simply go to the Lord and be taught by Him to pray. Just as a little child gradually picks up new words and learns to talk, so little by little you will learn to talk to the Lord. This kind of prayer helps you to grow.

Do not worry about praying for your family. Whether you pray for them or not, the Lord takes care of them. He says to seek the kingdom and

righteousness of the Father first; then whatever you need, He will add to you (Matt. 6:33).

Question: While I am driving, I want to talk to the Lord, but I do not know what to say, and it seems as though the Lord is not really there.

Answer: Do not exercise your mind so much. Remember, you have an inheritance of the Spirit within and the Bible without. These are the unique means by which to contact the Lord. As you are driving and have the desire to contact the Lord, begin to talk to Him in a spontaneous way. Just follow the Spirit within. If you have a sense to thank the Lord, just say, "Lord, thank You." When you say this, some further feeling will be there: "Lord, thank You that You are so good to me. Thank You that You are now with me. I enjoy Your presence. Thank You, Lord. You are one with me. I am one with You." To your surprise, all these words will come. This is the moving of the indwelling Spirit. Unbelievers have no such living sense within.

Whatever you are doing, just address the Lord in a talking way. "Lord, I am here again with You. What shall I say, Lord? Thank You for this day. It is a day for me to live Christ. Today I can experience Christ." Something will come from within because you have the Spirit. Sometimes you may feel dull. Take out your Bible and turn to the portion you have been reading. (It would be helpful for you all to have a pocket version of the Bible at hand all the time.) Do not open it at random. Since the Ephesians training I have been on Philippians, going through it very slowly, perhaps only two or three verses a day. These verses become my prayer. Spontaneously, the verses you are reading through consecutively will become your prayer. They will give you prayer for the saints. If you contact the Lord like this, you will have more and more of Him added to your being. This way will cleanse, enlighten, correct, and transform you.

Question: Sometimes I feel that I am dishonoring the Lord if I speak to Him in a normal way, in a conversational tone.

Answer: In all our daily life we should respect the Lord. The whole day we are to be in His presence, even if we are not praying or reading the Bible. Anywhere and at any time we can talk to Him. The best prayer is not a religious prayer but a talk with the Lord. To pray in a talking way does not

dishonor the Lord. If we live a life of constantly respecting Him, however we pray honors Him.

Question: I have gone to the Lord and repented of certain things that happened before I was saved. They still keep coming back. Is this of Satan, or do I need to deal with them further?

Answer: No doubt this is of Satan. The principle is found in 1 John 1:9 and 7. Whatever sin you confess before God is cleansed by the blood of Jesus. God is faithful and righteous to forgive us. This is not only a promise but also a speaking of the fact; whenever we confess a sin, we must believe that it was cleansed by God.

Many believers are bothered by sins they have already confessed. Then they confess again. Once you do this, you fall into a snare. If you confess the same sin a second time, it means you do not believe that the blood has cleansed you.

I remember when I was young I confessed to the Lord that I had offended someone. According to the word of the New Testament surely I was washed by the blood. But Satan came and said, "No, you did not confess in detail." I then went back to the Lord and confessed in detail. Again Satan said, "No, you have left out some of the details." I made a further confession. Then Satan said, "You have confessed, but you were not sincere." So I told the Lord I was sorry I had not confessed sincerely and asked Him to make me sincere. Again Satan said, "You did not say 'in the name of the Lord Jesus.'" Eventually, I got clear and told Satan, "Get behind me. Why should I confess more than once when I was washed the first time? The Bible does not say that if you confess your sin in detail, sincerely, and in the name of the Lord Jesus, you will be washed. It only says that if you confess your sins, God is faithful, and the blood of Jesus cleanses." Hallelujah! That shut the door to the enemy.

Do not confess a sin that you have already confessed. Satan is subtle. Either he will keep you from confessing, or he will push you to keep confessing the same thing over and over.

Question: Paul said that he practiced to have a conscience without offense toward God and men (Acts 24:16). How do we know what to deal with?

Answer: There is a principle in the Bible that if we offend someone, we must go to that one and confess (Matt. 5:23-24). Not only do we confess to the Lord but also to the offended one. Suppose I have gotten angry with one of the brothers. When I go to contact the Lord, my conscience condemns me, and I must say, "Lord, forgive me. I was angry with Brother So-and-so." I must also go to the brother and ask him to forgive me for getting angry with him on that occasion. By keeping this principle our conscience is clear and void of offense.

Question: I have been going to the Lord every morning, asking Him to examine me, but I feel that I do not get any answer. I think I need to think over what should be examined.

Answer: No, you must never think over what to confess. When you need to confess, you will sense a specific offense. That you confess. Do not try to seek out your faults. It is not healthy and can result in an attack from the enemy. Just confess what you sense as an offense that you have not yet confessed.

Question: What if I do not have any sense of anything wrong?

Answer: If you do not have any sense that you are wrong or sinful, praise the Lord. It might be good to tell the Lord, "Lord, even though I do not sense that I am wrong in anything, I do believe I am still in the old creation, in the natural life, in the flesh. Many things must still be dirty, but I do not have the consciousness of them. Lord, cleanse me." It is good to pray this way. But if you try to dig out your faults, you will be cheated and attacked by the enemy.

Question: Something has been bothering my conscience, but I do not have any definite feeling.

Answer: We must all learn that if we have no sense about something specific, there is no need to go further. Rather, we must exercise our faith that we have no problem, trusting the Lord to tell us if we do. It may be that after a time the Lord will enlighten you. Have faith in the blood. This is a good principle. It is easy to be deceived by the enemy. Stay under the blood.

Question: Many times I have gone to the Lord and sensed that there was something really wrong within. But I did not have the utterance to say anything specific.

Answer: Just pray according to what you can utter. Tell the Lord, “Lord, I sense that I am wrong in certain things, but I do not know how to express it. Lord, You know; wash me according to Your knowledge.” Many times when you say, “Lord, I cannot utter,” the utterance comes. Then you can tell the Lord what is wrong. The Lord is gracious. If you are not willing to confess your sins, the Lord is legal, but as soon as you are willing, He is not legal. If you will not confess, He will not let you off. Once you are ready to confess, He will say, “That is all right, My child.”

Question: Ever since I heard the word about contacting the Lord, I have wanted to do it, but because of feeling self-conscious and not knowing how to go about it, I still have not gone to Him and opened up.

Answer: There are many cases like yours. First, you must realize that you are under the covering of the blood. Second, you are willing to confess, but you have no knowledge of any offense. Do not be bothered. Turn your prayer to praise: “Lord, I praise and thank You. I have no utterance, but You know. I am with You. I am under the blood.” This is a good lesson to learn. Rest in His faithfulness. Rest under the blood. If you wait till you sense something or try to shed tears, you leave ground for Satan to attack you. Just offer your praises to the Lord; this praise closes the door to Satan.

If you are hard, unwilling to confess, unwilling to contact the Lord, that attitude is to be condemned. But when you are soft and willing to talk to the Lord, just lacking the words, you must exercise your faith that you are under the blood and that the Lord is gracious to you; then turn to thanks and praises.

Question: Should we confess as soon as we do something wrong?

Answer: Whenever your hands are dirty, you wash them. After you confess in the morning, you do not need to confess again until something sinful arises. Then you immediately confess.

Some of the saints are applying the Lord’s blood in a wrong way. They say, “We apply the blood to our situation,” without making any confession. The Bible says that if we confess, the blood cleanses. In other words, our confession is a condition to the Lord’s cleansing. Without our confessing, the Lord does not have a way to cleanse us.

Once we confess, we get cleansed. As soon as we get dirty again, we again confess and again are cleansed. In this way all day long we keep our conscience clean and pure. Then we can contact the Lord at any time.

Question: Andrew Murray spoke of having a time to be quiet so that the Lord may speak to us. I find it hard to be that quiet.

Answer: This is a matter of terminology and understanding. Of course, I do not know what Andrew Murray meant by a quiet time. No one can be quiet to the extent of stopping his thinking, unless he dies! Even in your sleep you are thinking; that is why you have dreams. Activities you can stop; thinking, never. Probably what Andrew Murray meant is that you need to set aside a time when you are free from taking care of your affairs. Then in this time the best way to keep yourself quiet is to pray not for your concerns but however the Lord leads. Just pray, "Lord, I just love You. I want to walk with You. I want to be one with You." Do not pray about your sister in Washington who is sick; that is praying according to your thought. It may be that the Lord will sometimes burden you to pray this way, but to have a quiet time before the Lord you need to be kept from any kind of care.

The best way to arrest your thinking is to pray something from within according to the instant leading. Also, read the Bible; spontaneously your reading will become prayer. In such a quiet time the Lord many times will speak to you and reveal something to you.

Question: How does the enemy know what is on our conscience, and how do we know that he has put something into our mind?

Answer: You must go according to the fact. An offense is an actual offense on my conscience. If I offend you, that is an offense on my conscience that I need to confess. We confess according to our sin, not according to a thought that comes to us. Suppose you have not committed any sin or offended anyone. A thought crosses your mind that you need to confess. This is of Satan. There is no sin, no offense, yet you have a thought charging you to confess. Do not confess in this case; it is not a fact but something of Satan to bother you.

Question: What is the relationship between the conscience, the anointing, and the law of life?

Answer: In The Knowledge of Life there is a chapter called “The Inward Knowledge,” which deals with this. In the Old Testament the law of commandments regulated the daily life of God’s people, telling them to honor their parents, for example, and not to steal. There were also the prophets directing the people what to do, where to go, and what to say. To be right with God under the Old Testament, one had to take care of both the law of commandments and the prophets.

In the New Testament the law of life (Rom. 8:2) replaces the law of commandments, and the anointing (1 John 2:27) replaces the prophets. You have been born again, and within, you have a new nature. In that new nature is the law of life.

The law of life gives you a taste. A three-month-old baby does not have the knowledge of what is sweet and what is bitter. But he will take anything sweet that you put into his mouth and spit out anything bitter. A Christian who goes to a movie has this same rejecting sense. The inner law does not approve of his going there, and he will not be able to pray until he senses and confesses this disobedience to the Lord and to the law of life. This confession is according to the conscience, which is operating according to the law of life, just as in ancient times it operated according to the law of commandments. After the sin is confessed, it is forgiven, and the blood cleanses him.

The anointing corresponds not to the law but to the prophets. While the law was concerned with morality, the prophets had to do with the comings and goings, the daily manner of life, the speaking, of God’s people. It is the anointing that tells you where you should go and what you should do. While I am speaking, I trust in the anointing for what I should say. If I disobey the anointing, my conscience troubles me. Then I must confess, “Lord, forgive me. I did not obey the anointing.” The anointing is just the moving of the Lord Himself within us.

Question: What about friendships among Christians? And, how does fellowship relate to oneness?

Answer: If I keep having special fellowship with a certain brother day after day, this fellowship will become a friendship. Among the saints friendship is to be avoided. It is like honey, which was prohibited in the meal offering (Lev. 2:11). When fellowship becomes friendship, it has leaven in it, because

underneath is a personal, natural preference. Our fellowship is common, unless for a particular reason there is a need for more contact. If there is no reason, there should not be more contact.

Oneness and fellowship are the same. Our practical fellowship is just the oneness. Because we Christians are all one, we can have fellowship together. This fellowship is the indwelling Spirit Himself. The electricity that goes through the overhead lights is like oneness and fellowship. Without the electricity the lights are separate and apart from each other. What makes them one is the current of electricity. That current is fellowship, or the Holy Spirit indwelling us. The indwelling Spirit is our oneness and our fellowship. If we add honey or leaven to the fellowship, we change it to friendship. This will bring corruption and rottenness into the church life.

Question: Sometimes when I share with someone what I have enjoyed of the Lord in the Word or in a message, he adds what he has been reading, and what I wanted to share gets lost. What is the best way to fellowship about our enjoyment of the Lord?

Answer: Even in this kind of sharing, you need to learn to be restricted by the Spirit. As you grow, you will sense that the Lord wants you to share only a certain amount. This is another way that we are kept from being corrupted. We would like to tell others what we saw in a message, and they want to say what light they have received. Talking too much about what we have seen is also honey. Many times when I would like to tell the brothers about some light I have received, the Lord says no. Even in spiritual things we need to be restricted. Not to obey this restriction is an offense that sooner or later we will have to confess to the Lord.

Question: Are the law of life and the anointing the same thing as the Lord's speaking?

Answer: Both could be considered as the Lord's speaking, but actually the law of life is rather a principle, giving us a certain taste. The anointing is a speaking. The law of life does not change, but the anointing does. The law of life will always prohibit you, or any child of God, from attending a movie. The anointing, on the other hand, may tell one brother to take a plane and another to go by car. The difference is that the law is related to morality or ethics, while the anointing concerns activities.

Question: Is this the same speaking that we get from the Lord in prayer?

Answer: Yes. Prayer will strengthen your sensitivity to the law of life. If a child has a heavy cold, when you put something into his mouth, he may not be able to tell whether it is sweet or bitter. The law of life is not functioning because he is sick. If you do not contact the Lord in prayer and in the Word, your sense of the law of life will be weak. Some Christians can go to a movie without feeling troubled, not because there is no protest from the law of life but because their sensitivity to it is weak through lack of exercise. If they will go to the Lord to confess, to pray, and to study the Word, the sense will soon return.

Question: I want to go on with the Lord, but the more I am with Him, the more I am fearful of His holiness, because of all the sins I, as a fallen person, have committed.

Answer: There are two kinds of fear of the Lord. One is wholesome; the other is to be rejected. If we contact the Lord through prayer and His Word, we will have a proper, holy fear lest we offend Him by disobedience. We need such a healthy fear. The other fear is that the Lord may punish or reject or forsake us. This is of Satan, and we must overcome it. We must declare, "I am a child of God, chosen, redeemed, and cleansed by the precious blood. I have nothing to fear. God will not forsake me or cast me away." This second fear is the enemy's threat to rob you of your rest. If you are not at rest, you cannot enjoy the Lord or grow. You must be at rest from all such unnecessary fears. Challenge the enemy by telling him that you are God's child and under the blood, that God is your Father and loves you, and that you do not believe He will cast you off. The only fear you need is a holy fear to not offend the Father by grieving Him.

Question: How can we determine which things need the attention of the elders and which things we should not pass on any further?

Answer: This is a good question. Concerning the saints in the church, the less we know the better. There is a lust in our natural life to know others' affairs. It is not healthy and damages the church life. But there is another side. We need to know where the saints are spiritually so that we can get their help or supply some nourishment to them. The church life requires a high

standard of exercise, not that we snoop into the saints' affairs but that we find out their true situation in order to be helped by them or to help them.

Question: Is this information about the saints for the elders to know or for all the saints?

Answer: Everybody should be the same. If all the saints would exercise in this way, the church would be healthy, having all its weaknesses taken care of. Even in the churches in the Lord's recovery there are far too many phone calls. Spreading unnecessary information has a deadening effect. Do not give out or seek to get any information except what will enable you to supply others or be supplied by them. Then the church will grow, be built up in a healthy way, and be spared the killing that comes from knowing what we do not need to know about others.

CHAPTER SIX

THE VINE—GOD’S ECONOMY (2)

We all need more personal contact with the Lord Himself. In this chapter I would like to share with you how to carry this on in a daily way. We shall consider again this familiar chapter, John 15.

The Gospel of John is a book on life. Even our physical life, not to mention the divine life, is mysterious. Though what he is dealing with is mysterious, abstract, and profound, John’s words are very simple: “In the beginning was the Word...and the Word was God...In Him was life, and the life was the light of men...And the Word became flesh...full of grace and reality” (1:1, 4, 14). Then in chapter 15 this One who was the Word, the very God, in whom were life and light, and with whom were grace and reality, declared that He was the true vine, His Father the husbandman, and His disciples the branches (v. 1).

WHAT GOD IS DOING

The Bible covers many different topics in its more than one thousand pages, but in this chapter, John 15, is the focus of what God is doing. Here the Father is a husbandman, a farmer, cultivating the true vine, Christ, with its branches, the believers in Christ. To see this is to see God’s economy, what God is doing in this universe. God is growing Christ, and all of us are branches in this vine. In chapter 1 we can see how Christ, the true vine, began attracting some of God’s chosen people to Himself (vv. 35-50). Eventually, in chapter 15 there was a group of New Testament believers around Him; to these followers He said that He was the vine and that they were branches.

We are here branching out this vine. A vine is mainly made up of its branches. In contrast, the tall pine trees have quite short branches. But if the branches of a vine are cut off, there is very little left of the vine. Do you realize that you are one of the branches of this universal vine cultivated by God the Father? Are you clear that God is doing nothing in this universe except tending this vine?

THE WORK OF THE BRANCHES

What do the branches of a vine do? They do not do anything! They have no work. They have no activities. Their living is just to live, grow, and produce the vine. We, as the branches of the true vine, must see that the Father, the husbandman, does not want us to do any work. All He wants is that we live, grow, and produce Christ.

Just two or three weeks ago the Lord burdened me afresh with this vision. “Where,” He asked, “among all the Christian works, is there a work that satisfies Me? I do not want works. I want Myself lived out of My people. Has there ever been such a people throughout all these centuries who would live Me out? Where is there such a people on the earth today?” In spite of the countless good, even prevailing Christian works, the Lord’s heart is still not satisfied.

I remind you again that in this universe God is a farmer occupied with nothing else but the growth of this vine and its branches. If you see this vision of God’s heart desire, you will say, “Lord, rescue me from everything other than this. I have been doing many things. I have been making many plans. But this is not what You are doing. Lord, rescue me.”

Years ago I saw this vision and lived according to it, but in these last six years I have unconsciously and unintentionally left the mountaintop and come downhill. I regret that many of you who have come into the Lord’s recovery have not been clearly shown what God’s economy is. We have been distracted by other things. The result has been dissension among us. May this vision bring us all back to what God wants. I do not trust in my words. Human words are vain. But I surely trust in the revealing Spirit that He would impress you that you are nothing but branches of the vine, and that all God wants of you is to live, grow, and produce this vine.

In Philippians 2:2 Paul exhorted the Philippians to think the one thing. For us to think the one thing, we must see the vision. Otherwise, we will be distracted by talk, works, or meetings. We will be saved many times from thinking or speaking something other than the one thing if we see that God is only cultivating this vine. We are not workers, not laborers, but branches.

God is only growing Christ, but we are busy in many other things. They may be scriptural things, considered good or even spiritual by us, but they are not what God is doing.

LIVE CHRIST!

GROW CHRIST! PRODUCE CHRIST!

By His mercy and grace I would like to share with you how to live Christ, grow Christ, and produce Christ. In John 15:7 the Lord said, “If...My words abide in you,” and in verse 26 He said, “I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of reality.” Right in John 15 are mentioned the two matters of the Lord’s words and the Spirit. According to my experience, there is no other way to live, grow, and produce Christ except by receiving the word and by touching the Spirit. These are our direct means.

THE VALUE OF THE NAME

Besides the Word and the Spirit we have two other provisions. One is His name. When you come to touch the Lord and to touch His Word, you should realize that your condition is not what it should be. In yourself you are off; it is only in His name that you are accepted. If you will say, “O Lord, I am before You in Your name,” you will sense right away that you are no longer off. You cannot come in anything you are; you cannot come in anything you do. It is in His name alone that you are accepted.

THE VALUE OF THE BLOOD

When you come to the Lord with a sincere desire to live Him, grow Him, and produce Him, the light is there. You will sense not only that you are off, but even that you are sinful in many things. You may say to others that everything is all right, but there will be a question within: “Are you sure you are all right? Your present condition is not all right. It is too loose. You are too light. You are too much in the self and in the natural man. You are too much in your lusts. You are sinful.” If you think that you are all right, then you are in darkness. No one who is in the light would think that he is all right.

Why is it that whenever anyone comes to God, he needs an offering? It is because while we are walking on this earth, we are contaminated with the natural things. Because we are still living in our natural man, in the flesh, whenever we come to God, we need the trespass offering or the sin offering (see Lev. 4 and 5). Without the shedding of the blood we could not come into the presence of God. No one who is in the light would dare to say that there is nothing wrong with him. Without the light you may think that you are clean.

But when you come under the light, you will see how dirty you are and that you need a thorough cleansing.

We need the blood. This is the other provision God has made for us. In ourselves we cannot come to God. We need both the name and the cleansing blood. When we come, we say, “Lord, I come to You not in myself but in Your name. I come under the blood and with the blood. I take the cleansing of Your redeeming blood.” This will clear the way for us to receive the Word and touch the Spirit.

HOW TO TAKE IN THE WORD

You must spend time in the Word regularly. You can no more neglect the Word than you can neglect your regular meals. Before you leave for work in the morning, you must spare at least ten minutes for reading the Word. Build up this habit in a legal, strict way. You will see what a difference it makes in your life.

When you get home from work, again you must get into the Word. First take a short nap, then kneel down, open the Word, and begin to read, pray-read, study, and search for half an hour or so. Do not say that you are too busy. You are not too busy to talk on the phone. Leave the yard work for another time. This is your time to be watered and pruned.

EFFECTS OF RECEIVING THE WORD

If you really touch the Word, you will find life. You will know that there is life in the word because you will be enlightened. Even in small things the light will shine brightly. You will have no place to hide. Whenever you come to the Word, you should experience this light searching and exposing. If you do not, you must pray, “Lord, have mercy upon me. Why do I not sense the light? Take away the dullness, the numbness, the blindness, and the veils, that I may sense Your light.”

Besides being enlightened, you will experience being nourished and strengthened. The word first comes as light, then as nourishment and strengthening. Eventually, it does a killing work. Once the light exposes and the nourishment strengthens, you will say, “Lord, I am willing. Take this away. Cut it off.” In receiving the word, you will find that it does much killing within

you. It will kill your natural concepts about your husband or wife, about the brothers and sisters, about the church and the elders. It will kill your carnal desires and fleshly lusts. You will find yourself praying, “Lord, kill my pride. Kill my natural humility. Kill my performed meekness. Kill my hypocrisy. Kill my politics with the brothers and with my wife.” If you build up the habit of getting into the Word, you will have this experience daily.

Eventually, you will find this Christ so close and so precious to you. You will begin to breathe Him and to live Him. By taking the Word in this way, you will live Him, grow Him, and produce Him. You will have the soil of your heart cultivated by the Father to grow Christ. He will cultivate the soil of your conscience, which is the gate. He will cultivate also the soil of your emotion, your will, and your mind. This will make a way for the vine to spread into every part of your soul.

If you will all go to the Word in this way over a period of time, the outcome will be a genuine revival in the church life, brought about from within, without any stirring up, promotion, or performance. This is what the Lord’s recovery needs today.

Do not correct or adjust yourself. Just come back to the Word and to abiding in the vine by abiding in His words. When it says in John 15:7, “My words abide in you,” in Greek *words* is the plural form of *rhea*, the present, instant speaking. We digest the logos, and it becomes the rhea to us. Then we get the enlightening, the nourishing, the strengthening, the killing, and the living of Christ.

HOW TO TOUCH THE SPIRIT

We have the Bible in our hands and the Holy Spirit in our spirit. Whatever our condition—weak, backsliding, or wrong—thank God we do have these two legacies. The Spirit and the Word are inseparable. As you read, the Holy Spirit cooperates with the Word. In contrast, if you try to exercise the spirit in reading the *Los Angeles Times*, there will be no inward response. But every time you come to the Bible, in the name and under the blood, something inside works in coordination with what you are reading outside. That is the corresponding Spirit.

Obedience is the only way to touch the corresponding Spirit. You may be weak, but you cannot deny that the dear Spirit of our God is in you. You may grieve Him, but He will never leave you. This is why, whenever you have a heart to come to the Lord in His name and under His blood, the Spirit within will echo what you read in the Word. Then the more you say Amen to this speaking, the more the responding Spirit will work within you. You will be either rebuked to the depths of your being or rejoicing in the heights. You will never be indifferent.

THE SPIRIT AND THE WORD WORKING WITHIN

With the word occupying and saturating your mind and the Spirit dwelling in your spirit, you will live, grow, and produce Christ. You will have the fragrance of Christ, which others will sense without any advertising. How does this come about? By receiving the word into your being time after time, the Spirit has wrought Himself, even Christ, into you. Your mind will be possessed by the word, and your spirit will be permeated with the Spirit.

The word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psa. 119:105). The word that occupies your mind will shine before your feet, lighting your way. You will not be walking in darkness, because the mind-occupying word will shine over your steps.

At the same time the indwelling Spirit will keep speaking to you, comforting and nourishing you all day. It is like the food we take in; we may finish a meal in thirty minutes, but for several hours afterward that food sustains us.

May we take Christ as our food through His Word and drink Him as our water through the Spirit. Thus we shall live, grow, and produce Him, fulfilling the Father's desire.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A PRACTICAL WAY TO ABIDE IN THE VINE (2)

The writings of the apostle John are in three categories—the Gospel, the three Epistles, and the book of Revelation. In his Gospel John tells us about abiding in the vine. In fact, this is the central thought in the Gospel of John. Not till we come to his Epistles, however, do we find how to abide in the vine. Then in Revelation we have the reaping.

Before we consider what the Epistles tell us of the way to abide in the vine, I would remind you of the vision shown us in John 15. It is nothing less than the dispensation of the Triune God. The Father is a husbandman cultivating a vine, the Son. What the Father is and does has become embodied in the Son. The Spirit transmits what the Father cultivates and what the Son embodies, into us the branches.

What is the secret of the growth and spread of this vine? Life. We the branches have only to live the life of this vine, grow this vine, and produce this vine. This life is simple and ordinary, without the encumbrances of organization, gifts, or doctrine. Life does not mean teachings, natural talents, plans, or activities. John 15 does not refer to teachings, gifts, and organization, though these are what Christianity requires for its existence and spreading. The vine in John 15 grows by life alone.

We need this vision to kill all our dependence on arrangements, schemes, and gifts. It is not easy to live such a simple life. We were born and raised in an environment that has encouraged us to teach, organize, use our gifts, and take action. These things are still in our blood. Sooner or later they will crop up, unless our natural man has been put to death. May God have mercy upon us, that our plans and activities may be fully killed and that we may see that He wants nothing but His Son lived out as our life and as our fruit. If we see this, we will prostrate ourselves before Him and repent of living by our natural man.

THE WORD AND FRUIT-BEARING

The Word is the embodiment of the Triune God and also of His life, light, and economy. The divine life is embodied in the printed page of the Bible. This Word is concrete and substantial. We can all touch and receive it. From the Lord's word in 15:7, "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you," we can see that our abiding in Him is a condition for His words abiding in us.

The result of this mutual abiding is fruit-bearing. If you were to ask the branches of a vine how they are able to bear fruit, they would say that they do not plan, organize, or use their gifts; their fruit is just the outflow of their inner life. Let us stop all our doings and just live Christ, grow Him, and produce Him. "Consider your ways. You have sown much, but you bring in little" (Hag. 1:5-6). What has been the result of all our labor?

ABIDING—FIRST JOHN

In 1 John we are given the practical ways to experience abiding in Christ. The first chapter gives us the first way. We will consider the chapter verse by verse.

The Word of Life

First John 1:1 says, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life." By comparing this verse with the first verse of the Gospel of John, we know that "That which was from the beginning" is the Word. The Word is for hearing; it can also be seen and handled. The Word of life is a person; *Word* is capitalized because it is personified. This person is the Lord Jesus. If we add John 1:4, "In Him was life," to the description of Him in John 1:1 as the Word, we have the term used here, *the Word of life*.

The Word of life cannot be separated from the Word of letters. To do so would be like separating your spirit from your body; the result would be death. The Word of life is one with the Word of letters. We must treasure this book, the Bible, because within its printed pages is the Word of life.

First John 1:2 says, "The life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and report to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us." Eternal life can be reported. This is not just a matter of

preaching or teaching but of showing the eternal life. The words *which was with the Father and was manifested to us* again indicate that eternal life is nothing less than Jesus Christ Himself. He is the very life.

Fellowship

Verse 3 says, “That which we have seen and heard we report also to you that you also may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” The word translated “report” means to hand over, not just to show you my hymn book, for example, but also to hand it over to you. When we hand this life over to others, the outcome is fellowship. If we have life, we are in the fellowship. We hand this eternal life over to others so that they may have fellowship with us, with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Light

Verses 4 and 5 say, “These things we write that our joy may be made full. And this is the message which we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” God’s being light to us is subjective. The context makes clear that God is light when we have life and are in the fellowship of life. In this fellowship of life is light. All these key words—*Word, life, light*, and *God*—are also found in John 1. The difference is that in the Gospel they are objective, whereas in the Epistles the reality of these words is within us. The light is in the fellowship; any darkness means that something is wrong.

First John 1:6 continues, “If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and are not practicing the truth.” With some of the saints, we can sense a transparency. As we talk and fellowship with them, there is no sense of any darkness or opaqueness. With others this is not so; perhaps only one part is transparent, and the rest of their being is in darkness. You may be in darkness yet say that you are not. You may be deceived by the enemy and unintentionally tell a lie. Unconsciously, you are deceiving others because of darkness within.

Cleansing By the Blood

“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” (v. 7). Since light is God Himself, to walk in the light is to walk in God. We may go to a fellowship meeting or to someone’s home for fellowship and yet not have any true fellowship. Fellowship is not possible if we are in darkness. We may have outward contact, but without the flow of life within, there is no true fellowship. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood cleanses us from every sin. If we are walking in God and are in the fellowship, our real situation will be exposed. We will see that in this matter we were wrong and in that matter mistaken. Surely we will confess and ask the Lord’s forgiveness. This confession comes spontaneously from the light in the fellowship. Then the blood cleanses, even without our applying it. Too often we apply the blood in darkness, outside the fellowship, and in death. With such a loose, light attitude the blood does not cleanse.

Walking in the Light for the Blood to Cleanse

The real abiding in Christ is a fine, sensitive matter. That is why we must go to the Lord day by day to spend time in His presence and to have Him check whether we are in life, in the fellowship, in the exposing light, and fully under the cleansing of the blood. If we are, we will have the assurance that we are transparent, with nothing between Him and us. This is abiding. To abide in Christ we need the fellowship, the light, the enlightening, the confessing, and the cleansing.

Confession

Verses 8 and 9 say, “If we say that we do not have sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Even in the apostle’s day some were saying that once they were saved, they no longer sinned. This is a deception. The reality is that we still have sin in us.

How do you confess your sins? There is a confession according to knowledge. You realize that you have offended people, so you ask the Lord to forgive you. Your conscience is not touched, you have no feeling of regret, and you shed no tears. This is a confession outside of life, with your real situation

not exposed to the light. Whether God recognizes such a confession that is only according to knowledge I dare not say, but I can tell you, it has no effect on your life.

Confession In Life

There is a confession that changes your life. While you are in the fellowship, the light shines penetratingly through you, exposing your true condition. You are filled with regret, the tears may flow, you confess, and the blood of Jesus cleanses you. True confession comes from the exposure of the inner light.

If you confess only according to knowledge, you may pray, “O Lord, forgive me for gossiping,” but within a short time you will find your loose talk continuing as before. But if you confess in life, with the light shining on your gossiping, such a confession will seal your lips, and it will be a long time before another vain word crosses them.

Notice that both sins and unrighteousness are mentioned in verse 9. When this light exposes, it has no regard for your person. Your actions may not have been sinful, but under this light you will see that you have wronged this brother, you have cheated that sister, in this matter you were unjust, and in that matter you were unrighteous. Your confession will touch the very depths of your being, not just your conscience, and it will transform you.

The final verse in 1 John 1 says, “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” (v. 10). We not only “have sin” (v. 8) but also “have sinned.” If we are in the fellowship, we will be fearful and trembling in the realization that we not only have sin but that we are also sinning.

THE WAY TO ABIDE IN CHRIST (1)

What is the way to abide in Christ? First John 1 tells us that we must come to the light and be fully exposed, with no sin or unrighteousness hidden. We must recognize that we both have sin and do sin, that we are guilty of both sin and unrighteousness. We have no escape but to confess and be cleansed. By this way we abide in Christ.

If you are abiding in Christ, you will sense a light shining over you and within you. Be faithful to this shining. It will expose not your wife’s mistakes

but yours. You may feel that you have only a little offense compared to your wife's, but if you complain to the Lord that He should deal with her as well, you will be out of the abiding. If it is during the night that the light comes, you can tell the Lord that you will make things right with your wife first thing in the morning. By taking care of every matter in such a tender way, you will be kept in the abiding. Keep yourself fully clear under the exposure of the inner light.

THE WAY TO ABIDE IN CHRIST (2)

In chapter 2 of 1 John we will consider only verse 27: "The anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone teach you; but as His anointing teaches you concerning all things and is true and is not a lie, and even as it has taught you, abide in Him." Here we see that we abide in the vine according to the inner anointing. This anointing is a moving within us, the working of the all-inclusive Spirit as the compound ointment (see Exo. 30:23-25).

There is a contrast between these two chapters in 1 John. Chapter 1 deals with sins, failures, and unrighteousness, all of which are negative things. Chapter 2 is positive, with the anointing directing us what to say, what to do, and where to go.

Many times the sense of the anointing is "no" to our plans, our thoughts, or our words. How many times do we obey the "no"? Very few. This means that we are not abiding, for we are not going according to the teaching of the inner anointing.

Understanding The Anointing

Without a thorough knowledge of the Word, you will be unable to understand much of what the anointing teaches. In the Lord's recovery every saint must be built up with the full knowledge of the Bible. Gradually, your ability to understand and interpret spiritual things will develop; this will give the anointing the means to speak to you.

It grieves me that in the Lord's recovery these days there are so many signs of dissension, division, looseness, and lightness. A false liberty has crept in. These are offenses to the Lord. I entreat you to come back to the way of life.

Spend time on the Word every day. If you run a race, you will be disqualified unless you stay within the two lines. We must be just as strict. All of us in the Lord's recovery must maintain a high standard lest we give the recovery a bad name. Be strict with yourself about getting into the Word. Only in this way can you come to understand what the anointing is teaching you and thus abide in Him.

THE WAY TO ABIDE IN CHRIST (3)

Now we come to the third way to abide in the vine. "If our heart blames us, it is because God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not blame us, we have boldness toward God" (3:20-21).

A Heart Free Of Condemnation

How can we have boldness toward God? It is by a heart without condemnation. This heart has been sprinkled from an evil conscience (Heb. 10:22) and is without offense toward God and men (Acts 24:16). We must deal with anything that our conscience condemns.

From these three chapters in 1 John we can see that to abide in Christ we must walk in the light so that the blood may cleanse us, obey the teaching of the inner anointing, and keep our heart clean from any condemnation. By taking care of these three things, we are abiding in Him.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ABIDING—DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Before we consider an Old Testament picture of the Spirit and its relationship to our abiding in Christ, we will answer some questions based on the previous two chapters.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: I do not understand the difference between growing Christ and producing Christ.

Answer: We stressed that the Father wants us to live Christ, grow Christ, and produce Christ. Living Christ is the beginning and is somewhat general. By living Him we grow Him; this is the second step. Producing Christ comes out of growing Him and is the fruit-bearing. To produce Christ is to bear fruit.

While I was growing up, I lived near a vineyard. In the fall the vine would be heavily laden with grapes. When winter came, the branches would be severely cut back. In the springtime those sparse branches would begin living the vine and then growing the vine. Day by day I would see them growing and spreading. Eventually, fall would return, and the branches would bear fruit, that is, produce the vine. There was much fruit. This process illustrates the difference between growing Christ and producing Him.

Question: How can you tell when your heart is condemning you and when Satan condemns you?

Answer: We need to distinguish between God's condemnation and the enemy's accusation. God condemns; the enemy accuses. When we have something wrong or sinful, both the condemnation and the accusation will be present. In such a case there is no need to distinguish between the two. Just confess and get the matter cleared up: "Lord, I am wrong in this. How I thank You that You have enlightened me regarding it. Forgive me. I regret it, and I repent and confess, asking You to forgive me." Then right away exercise your faith to take the Word, which says that if we confess, the blood of Jesus cleanses (1 John 1:7, 9). Next, turn your confession to praise and thanks:

“Thank You, Lord. Praise You for the cleansing of the blood.” If something still comes to bother you after such a confession and thanksgiving, that is Satan’s accusation. To differentiate between it and God’s condemnation is now easy. Say to the enemy, “Get behind me, Satan. I refuse to listen to you. The blood has cleansed me.”

Question: I do not have the vision of the vine and the branches. Should I pray for this vision, or is it something that will be worked out in time?

Answer: When we use the term *vision*, we do not mean the strange seeing of something that the Pentecostalist refer to as a vision. Do not expect that while you are studying or praying over John 15, you will see before you a vine with some branches, one of which even has your name on it. If such a vision appears to you, reject it as demonic.

The first time I went to a Pentecostal meeting was with Brother Nee, who had been invited to speak. I had been in Christianity for many years, but I had never before seen such shocking behavior. One person fell over, another was laughing hysterically, another was in the corner claiming to see a vision, and some older women kept jumping in the air. It was wild. They talked about seeing a vision.

A few years later I was serving the Lord in Tientsin, China’s largest port, some two and a half hours from Beijing, the capital. Among us was an elderly sister, the wife of a medical doctor. She became involved in the Pentecostal movement. Whenever she prayed, she would roll on the floor. In time, she saw a vision of an old man with a white beard. Eventually, every time she prayed, she saw this vision. The old man would come, gaze at her, and then disappear. We warned her to be careful, but Pentecostalist are so subjective that they trust implicitly in their experiences. She would not heed us. At first she was happy about her vision, but after some time it began to trouble her. Then she became sick and was bedridden for a long period. During her illness that old man often appeared to her. She became quite disturbed and again referred her case to us. We told her that the old man was a demon, which she must reject. It was hard for her to believe our word and to reject the demon, but we prayed for her. The Lord eventually gained the victory, and the demon left.

Such is a Pentecostal vision. In our dictionary, however, *vision* does not mean this. Rather, it is a seeing without any Pentecostal vision. As you read John 15, for example, you are so deeply impressed within that you can no longer be the same. Before, you were engaged in making plans and carrying out activities. Now, whenever you turn to what you had been doing so easily before, you have the sense, “No, this is not life. It is activity.” You try to keep on making your plans, but the sense comes: “This is not the branch living the vine, growing the vine, and producing the vine. This is not life.” If you are getting this kind of reaction within you, you may be assured that you have the vision. Formerly, you may have enjoyed your work and even boasted about it. Now the sense of pleasure is gone, and a bothering has come, causing you to reduce, even stop, what you have been doing. Every spiritual seeing has this effect.

Question: In the matter of confessing, what about the things we do repeatedly?

Answer: When you clean a room in a hurry, it does not get very clean. Later, when you come to look it over, you can see that it needs a much more thorough job. The same is true with our confessing. If we go to the Lord in a rough, hasty way, we will not take thorough care of our confessing. The next time we go to Him, not in a rush, we will find that the same matters still need our attention. Do not think that this is a repetition of what you have already confessed; it is that you must complete your unfinished confession.

Question: How can we avoid confessing according to knowledge and be sure that we are confessing by life?

Answer: Sometimes we may confess by knowledge, yet because we do so before Him, the Lord extends His mercy. When you have a little feeling that you have touched the Lord’s mercy even in confessing by knowledge, go on to the confession by life. The test of genuine confession is whether it results in life. The phrase in Acts 11:18, repentance unto life, can be translated “repentance issuing in, or resulting in, life.” You may think that your confession is by life, but if there is no change in your life, it is not genuine. On the other hand, you may go to the Lord one night and say, “O Lord, forgive me. I offended the brothers,” and go to bed feeling that you have confessed by knowledge without any inspiration. The next morning, though, when you are about to talk to your wife and say something negative about the brothers, you

are stopped by fear. This change in life proves that the previous night's confession was genuine. This "repentance unto life" produces fruit worthy of repentance (Matt. 3:8). Every time you repent, there must be fruit. Your feeling about your confession is not reliable. Do not go by your feeling; go by the fact of the resulting fruit.

Question: I am not clear about the matter of the blood in our confession.

Answer: There is no need to say, "Lord, I apply Your blood to my situation." First John 1 says that if we confess our sins, God forgives. It also says that if we walk in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus cleanses. In these verses confession is implied. If I offend a brother, when I am in the fellowship, the light will expose. Then I will ask the Lord to forgive me for offending Brother So-and-so. Spontaneously, I will also go to that brother and ask him to forgive me. It is at this point that the blood cleanses. If I repent and confess, the blood is effectual for me, without my applying it.

Question: When you really want to repent but feel that you are just in the area of knowledge, how do you get from knowledge into life?

Answer: Just confess sincerely. Pray, "Lord, have mercy on me so that I may confess to You from a sincere heart." Life is just the Lord Himself. Today as the Spirit He is waiting within us. When we turn our heart to Him, we touch Him. In Him we spontaneously confess by life. Alas, sometimes our confession is just a performance for the purpose of deceiving others. How much we need the Lord's mercy!

Question: Could you share a little more about getting into the Word consistently?

Answer: It is profitable for us to cultivate good habits and not to take up bad habits. Doing something that is not wholesome can lead to worse things. This is like walking around a well; you may feel quite safe and certain that you will not fall in, but a naughty boy may come along and give you a push. Beer, for example, is a threshold to wine. Stay away from the one lest you be lured to the other.

Not only your own well-being is at stake. We must “abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thes. 5:22, KEV). C. H. Spurgeon was once invited by the manager of a newly built theater to go there for an open house to preach the gospel. After agreeing to go, Spurgeon did not feel peaceful about it. Some circumstance arose that made it impossible for him to keep his commitment. When the manager came to find out why Spurgeon had not fulfilled his promise, Spurgeon apologized. Then the manager told Spurgeon that if he had gone to preach the gospel in the theater, its business would have flourished. Spurgeon realized why God had intervened and prevented his going. To go into a theater, no matter how good the motive, is to give an appearance of evil.

After saying so much about Christ in the earlier part of Philippians, Paul admonishes us in 4:8, “What things are true, what things are dignified, what things are righteous, what things are pure, what things are lovely, what things are well spoken of, if there is any virtue and if any praise, take account of these things.” Taking account of these things, most of which are not Christ, still is a good habit. This is the kind of habit that we need to build up. Praying, studying the Bible, and contacting the Lord are also good habits that we need to cultivate in a legal way. Do not wait till you are moved by the Spirit to contact the Lord. It may be a long time before any inspiration comes; make it a habit to contact Him regardless of how you feel.

Building up these good habits will keep you from sin. Do you think that if you spend time in the Bible every day you will want to go to the movies? On the other hand, if you neglect the Bible day after day, you may feel free to go. Do you call that liberation? It is your lusts that are being liberated. Do you feel free to pray and to thank the Lord for His mercy when you walk into a movie? Contrast your feeling on entering a theater with your feeling on entering the meeting hall. There is an atmosphere in the meeting hall that constrains you to pray and praise even as you are walking up the stairs.

Be faithful to build up these good habits of touching the Lord through the Word and through prayer. If you do not sense His mercy and grace toward you today, you may tomorrow. Our consciousness fluctuates, but actually His grace and mercy remain the same. His blessing is upon us, whether we sense it or not, every time we come to the Word.

Question: When is confession enough, and when is restitution also required?

Answer: If only God knows of your wrongdoing, there is no need to tell others; just confess to Him. If others know of it, even if the offense was not against them, it is best to confess to them too, to clear up their poor impression of you and also to be a testimony to them.

THE ANOINTING OINTMENT

One of the Old Testament pictures that helps us to understand the mysterious abstraction of the Spirit is the anointing ointment, described in Exodus 30:23-25. It is this passage that is referred to in 1 John 2:27, the New Testament verse on the anointing. To understand the anointing we must understand this ointment. Notice that it is a compound; that is, it is made up of different elements chemically combined into one unit. This signifies that the Spirit of God is compounded of several elements.

Here is a list of the spices that were added to the hin of olive oil representing the Spirit. The quantity and the meaning are also given.

<u>Spices</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Myrrh	500 shekels	Precious death
Cinnamon	250 shekels	Sweetness of the precious death
Calamus	250 shekels	Precious resurrection
Cassia	500 shekels	Flavor of the precious resurrection

SPICES IN THE ANOINTING OINTMENT

The one hin of olive oil is compounded with these four spices so that it becomes a compound ointment. It is clear in the Bible (Psa. 45:7; Isa. 61:1) that oil represents the Holy Spirit. With what is the Holy Spirit compounded? These spices indicate that it is with the death and resurrection of Christ.

If you notice the measure of the spices, you will see that by combining the middle two spices there are three units of five hundred shekels each. All three units are added to the one hin of olive oil. Together they form a picture of the Triune God. Why is the second unit of five hundred shekels divided into two? This reminds us that the second of the Triune God was split on the cross.

When was the Spirit of God compounded with these spices of death and resurrection? In John 7:39 we are told that “the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.” There was surely the Spirit of God before this time but not the compound Spirit. It was after the death and resurrection of Christ that the Spirit was compounded.

THE ANOINTING

We abide in Christ according to the teaching of the anointing. This anointing is the moving and working of the compound Spirit. His teaching reflects Himself and is also compounded with Christ’s death and resurrection.

When 1 John 2:27 says that the anointing “teaches you concerning all things,” it implies that the anointing is related to the Bible. Without laying a firm foundation in God’s Word, you have no way to interpret what the anointing is speaking to you. This Word outside us is always one with the Spirit inside us. And the Spirit within always echoes the Word without. When the Word gets into us, it becomes the Spirit. When the Spirit is spoken out from us, He becomes the Word. How can we get the Word that is outside us into us? By praying. The writings of godly men down through the ages all attest to the value of the prayerful reading of the Word. We must stay with the Word till it becomes the Spirit through our spiritual breathing, that is, our prayerful reading, of it.

TAKING CHRIST IN THROUGH THE WORD

All that the Father is and does is embodied in the Son, who in turn is embodied in the Word. Whenever you touch the Bible in a sincere way, with some exercise of the spirit, you touch Christ, as well as life, light, and the Spirit, for these abstract, mysterious verities are all embodied in the solid Word. Now do you see the importance of having the habit of regularly getting into the Word? Even if you have no consciousness of touching the very Christ and all He is, that is what will be happening. The prayerful, regular reading of the Word will make a tremendous difference in your life. You will never regret being legal about reading the Word, but you will surely regret being loose in your daily living.

THE COMPOUNDED NEW TESTAMENT

The Spirit, as we have said, is compounded with the death and resurrection of Christ. What is true of the Spirit is also true of the New Testament. The death and resurrection of Christ are both compounded in the Word. Abiding in the Lord is according to the anointing's teaching, which is based upon your knowledge of the Word. Since the Word is mainly compounded with death and resurrection, this is the teaching of the anointing. You need knowledge concerning His death and resurrection. Then you will find that the more you abide in Christ, the more you experience His death and participate in His resurrection. This kind of abiding is the real release of the spirit, based upon the termination of everything natural. The spirit we release should not be mixed with our natural ability, our flesh, our self, or anything else of the old creation. Our spirit needs the imprint of the death of all these natural things.

Abiding in Christ, then, is according to the working of His death and resurrection in you. All your natural being, all the old creation, must be put on the cross. When you experience this killing, your abiding in Christ will be genuine and deep. On the positive side, you will also experience the resurrection, and your release of the spirit will be without any mixture.

A THOROUGH KILLING

To experience more of this putting to death of whatever is of your self, your flesh, and the old man, read the Word, pray, and breathe in the compound Spirit. If anything of the old still remains, it becomes an insulation between Christ and you, making your abiding superficial. Abiding in Christ in a thorough way depends upon a thorough killing, carried out by the Word and executed by the Spirit. With this killing comes resurrection. Then whatever comes forth from you will be from a crystal-pure spirit.

Herein is the way for the living, growing, and producing of Christ. This will make us shining luminaries individually (Phil. 2:15) and a shining lampstand collectively (Rev. 1:20). The Lord will be expressed, and God's economy will be fulfilled.

CHAPTER NINE

THE WORD OF THE CROSS AND THE WORD OF LIFE

If you have only a superficial knowledge of the New Testament, you may think that its pages contain just stories and teachings. Buried beneath its surface, however, are the implications of the death and resurrection of Christ. We will discuss this further after we answer some questions.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: I believe I have had the experience of dying that you mentioned in the previous chapter, but I am not clear about resurrection.

Answer: In the Bible death is the threshold of resurrection (2 Cor. 4:11-12). If you have the experience of death, you do not need to understand resurrection; it is the complement of death. They go together both in the Bible and in the Spirit and therefore in our experience.

Question: When we go to the Word, how do we know what portion to read?

Answer: Let me suggest a way that I learned from Watchman Nee. Have two copies of the Bible. One should be plain, just the pure text of the Bible without any notes. This is for your morning reading, not too long a portion, a half chapter at most. For this reading, prayerfully select a book, like one of the Gospels or one of the Epistles. (Do not choose Ezekiel for nourishment. Wait till you are full-grown and can handle that kind of food.) Go through this book consecutively verse by verse, praying over every phrase so that you thoroughly digest it. This kind of reading is for your spiritual nourishment.

Use the other copy of the Bible to study for knowledge. Make notes on its pages of light that you receive or of comments from messages or from reference books. For this reading, go through the whole Bible consecutively, once a year, four chapters a day. Gaining this knowledge will give you a solid foundation for life and will enrich the nourishment you receive from your morning reading.

These two ways of getting into the Word, one for nourishment and the other for knowledge, I surely recommend to all of you.

Question: What is the difference between being legal with oneself to get into the Word whether one feels like it or not, and Christian behavior?

Answer: The routine, daily eating of the Word will surely influence your behavior. Because the Bible is the word of our God, when we come to it, we have the sense, even before we read it, that we are coming to God Himself. You will be improved just by this sense. Suppose you were to use your time for the Word on a secular magazine or newspaper instead. Do you not think that giving that time to what the world thinks will have a negative, worldly influence on your behavior?

For over fifty years I have been kept by the Lord in His Word, without ever becoming loose. It would grieve me to see any of you become loose by not diligently reading the Word. The time you waste cannot be recovered, and the poison you take in has a lasting effect. Some of you who are ex-hippies can testify how drugs have damaged your mind, even though you have repented. Go the legal way, not the loose way.

Question: When you talk about being strict and legal, do you mean living like a monk?

Answer: It is not only monks who are legal. Think how strict the armed forces are. Even though the United States is so democratic, once you are in the military service, even the length of your hair is regulated. You have a precise time to get up and get your bed made, and you must keep all your belongings in order. This strict treatment has improved the character of many sloppy young men.

I do not want you to become like a monk or a nun; just be a proper person. Do not get to bed too late. Get up and get dressed at an early hour. Make your bed; then pray and read the Word. Keep all your books in order. Keep all your clothes in their right place. Do not leave dirty clothes around. Put your shoes where they belong. Every room in your house must be neat. Even your yard, including the part by the street, should have a well-kept appearance.

Our testimony as Christians must be that we are people of the highest caliber. We are the witnesses of the Lord Jesus. Do you think we can be both sloppy and spiritual? In God's creation everything is in good order. We do not want to live in the fallen situation of the worldlings. From my observation of over fifty years, I can state that everyone ever used by the Lord has been one who was strict with himself.

Question: Should we have a specific time to come to the Lord to confess?

Answer: We do not go to the Lord with a certain purpose; we go because we love Him and want to be with Him. Sometimes our grandchildren living nearby stop in to see us. If they behave well, we have learned that they are after something. As soon as they get the cookie or piece of gum they have come for, they take off. Such behavior is like our coming to the Lord with a purpose.

He wants us to come out of love for Him. It would please us so much if our grandchildren came to visit us just because they loved us, not for any other purpose. So it is with the Lord. Early in the morning He would have us contact Him. In our need and out of love for Him, we go to Him. Then in His presence, because He is light, we see our faults, spontaneously make confession, and are cleansed by the blood. To go to the Lord with the purpose of confessing, on the other hand, may result in several minutes of frustration.

Question: Some of us have seen the need for physical exercise and have started jogging, or playing tennis, volleyball, or softball. As you have said, the trend of this age is with sports. Can you help us have the proper attitude toward taking care of our body and yet, on the other hand, be preserved from the world of sports?

Answer: In this crooked, perverse generation, sports and entertainment lead many people into sin and are, in fact, their means of fulfilling their lusts. We need to follow the principle of avoiding the appearance of evil (1 Thes. 5:22).

Your question indicates that you love the Lord and are seeking after Him. As Christians we are not under the law but under the Lord Himself. Thus, when you would go out to participate in some sport, first ask Him, "Lord, will

You go with me?” The Lord may say, “I do not like that. I will not go there with you.”

If that is the case, how are you going to get the needful exercise for your body? You may think that young people will not exercise if they cannot be in games. It all depends on your love for the Lord. As a young man, I played on the school team. One day after I was saved, the ball came to me, but I could not kick it. No one outwardly restrained me, but I could not exercise my foot to kick the ball. That was the end of my participation in that sport. Nonetheless, over the years I have surely gotten plenty of exercise. Even now I spend an hour or so a day in exercise, walking, sweeping the yard, watering the plants, and cleaning. Without exercise I cannot sleep well; I need to be exhausted of my preoccupations through exercise.

If you love the Lord, He will lead you as to the kind of exercise you should have.

THE CONSTITUENTS OF THE WORD

I would like to give you some examples of death and resurrection in the Word. As we said in the previous chapter, the spices of the compound ointment (Exo. 30:23-25) are the constituents of the Word as well as of the Spirit. What is the difference between the teachings in the Bible and the ethical teachings of Confucius? Both contain corrections and adjustments, but in the Bible those corrections and adjustments contain a killing element. Both this killing factor and the element of resurrection are the main constituents of the Bible.

Let us illustrate how this killing factor works. Suppose you come home from work tired out, and as soon as you step into the house, something provokes you to be annoyed with your wife. You do not say anything because you have made a commitment to take a nap before you do anything else. After your short nap you read the Word for thirty minutes or so. When that is over, your annoyance will be gone. Even if you try to stay annoyed, you will fail. What has happened? Whatever you read in the Word has killed your annoyance. You may even find yourself going to your wife to apologize for not greeting her when you got home. The killing has brought in resurrection; that is why you now feel happy. The holy Word includes the Lord's presence. It both kills you and supplies you with the Lord Himself. The resulting sense of

joy, of the Lord, of the Spirit, of strength, and of nourishment is resurrection. This illustration shows how the two constituents operate in us when we are faithful to get into the Word.

THE WORD OF THE CROSS

How did Paul deal with the problems in the church at Corinth? “The word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). The word of the cross means the word of killing. This was the word that the Corinthians needed to combat their divisiveness, their confidence in knowledge, and their wild exercise of the gifts. The whole book of 1 Corinthians is the word of the cross. Paul applied the cross to kill what was natural.

BEHEADING THE PHILOSOPHICAL GREEKS

How do you think the Greek mentality at Corinth would receive this word: “A soulish man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he is not able to know them because they are discerned spiritually” (2:14)? The Greeks were famous in the ancient world for their philosophy. Yet Paul here told them that the man who lives by the soul rejects the things of God as foolishness. Was not this belittling the Greek philosophical mind? More than that, Paul was beheading the Corinthians for their reliance on their clever mind.

As we pray over such a word, it will have the same killing effect on us. We may say, “The soulish man—am I not a soulish man? I surely trust in my shrewd mind. It says here that he does not receive the things of the Spirit of God. Could that be why for all these years I have had so little spiritual understanding? The soulish man thinks that the things of the Spirit are foolishness; he is not able to know them. Oh, the soulish man must be broken.” This is the killing effect of the word of the cross.

LABELING THEM AS INFANTS

How would you like to receive this further word from Paul: “I, brothers, was not able to speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to fleshly, as to infants in Christ” (3:1)? Would you not be offended to be told that you are not spiritual, that you are a man of flesh, that you are just an infant in Christ? If you protest

such labels, you are proving that is exactly what you are. The word here again is a killing word. In fact, in every chapter of 1 Corinthians there is a killing of some aspect of your being.

THE WORD OF LIFE

In Philippians we have another kind of word: “That you may be blameless and guileless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine as luminaries in the world, holding forth the word of life” (2:15-16). Here in this book on the experience of Christ is the word of life. In 1 Corinthians is the word of the cross, but in Philippians is the word of resurrection.

The Bible is composed of these two kinds of words—the word of the cross, which kills, and the word of life, which brings resurrection.

DEATH OPERATING

Second Corinthians 4:10 through 12 says, “Always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who are alive are always being delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death operates in us, but life in you.” Did you know that death operates? This death is typified by myrrh and is one of the spices of the compound Spirit (Exo. 30:23).

Although we may not understand how death and life do their work, we get the benefit by daily coming to the Word. The Bible, as the word of the cross, is an “antibiotic,” killing all the negative things in us; at the same time, as the word of life, it supplies us with “vitamins” to keep us spiritually healthy.

LED BY THE SPIRIT

Notice the connection between these two verses: “If you live according to the flesh, you must die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the practices of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Rom. 8:13-14). Putting to death the practices of the body is a killing. This killing is in the Word and is executed by the Spirit. When verse 14 mentions being led by the Spirit, it is referring to our being led to put to death the practices of the body.

If we are led by the Spirit regarding sports, we may put that practice of the body to death. If we are led by the Spirit regarding attending a movie, we may choose not to go. If we are led by the Spirit when we shop, what the stores have to offer will lose their attraction. The practices of the body are the manifestation of its lusts. As these practices are put to death under the leading of the Spirit, we show to the worldlings that we are the sons of God and do not live like the sons of the devil.

THE CROSS AND THE SPIRIT

Here are two more related verses: “They who are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and its lusts. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:24-25). In verse 24 we have the crucifying of the flesh; this is the killing, seemingly done by ourselves. In verse 25, however, it is plain that this killing is done by the Spirit. The way to walk by the Spirit is by the cross. By experiencing the killing of the flesh, the self, and the natural man, we abide in Christ and enjoy the resurrection also.

THE DIVIDING OF SOUL AND SPIRIT

“The word of God is living and operative and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow, and able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). When the word of God pierces even to the dividing of soul and spirit, it is both a killing and a resurrection. This dividing work is done by the word of God, which keeps the soul under the killing and the spirit in resurrection.

This dividing by the word is the means by which we abide in Christ in a deep, rich way. May the whole recovery be brought into such an abiding life.

CHAPTER TEN

THE LIFE WAY TO TAKE THE WORD

You may think it is awkward English to title this chapter “The Life Way to Take the Word,” but I want to suggest some ways for you to get more life from your reading of the Word. I do not say “The Living Way...” because sometimes *living* connotes excitement or loudness rather than life. Before we consider how the Word can bring us into life, we will answer some questions based on the previous chapter.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: I have been considering the context of the verse, “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thes. 5:22, KJV). From the verse before and the verse after, it seems that if our behavior is proper, God will sanctify us wholly and preserve us blameless. Is this the case, or is it that the sanctifying life within results in a high standard of behavior?

Answer: Sanctification is surely a matter of life, but both sanctification and life will keep us away from all negative things. The young people especially need to be familiar with 1 Thessalonians 5:22. For your own safeguard you need to avoid all appearance of evil. Do not think that you are too spiritual to be affected. Run away from anything that bears the appearance of evil. Just a quick glance can stain your thoughts. For the sake of others and for your own sake, you must be careful; behind every appearance of evil, evil is lurking. Even after fifty years of seeking to walk in the Spirit, I still have no confidence in my flesh; it could still do any kind of evil.

In north China around 1928 there was a strong Pentecostal movement. Some of those who experienced the filling of the Spirit felt that they no longer had any flesh and could not sin; men and women began to live together. The resulting fornication brought such shame to the Lord’s name that for a long time afterward the gospel had no entry among the people there. Do you see how the appearance of evil leads to evil?

Do not think that you are being religious to practice a holy life. Our mentality can so easily be under the subtle usurping of the enemy. For the

years I have been in this country, I have stressed that Christ is in opposition to religion. Now the enemy has come in and twisted my words. Some are saying that it is religious to read the Bible and pray at a regular time every day. Some say that coming into a meeting quietly is religious. Some have stopped meeting regularly on the Lord's Day so as not to be religious.

What is religion? It is any kind of worship or service to God without Christ. If in a meeting you are silent with Christ, you are not religious. If in a meeting you are shouting without Christ, you are religious. Neither silence nor shouting is right, and neither is wrong. The question is whether Christ is in what you are doing. Not to have regular church meetings is a deception of the enemy.

Do not have confidence in people; truth is our center. Even if the apostle Paul were to come and contradict his writings in the New Testament, we would have to reject him (see Gal. 1:8-9). If I were to propose that you worship idols, you would have to refuse and cast me out. We must stand for the truth and not regard any man's person.

Question: Is it good to kneel down to pray?

Answer: Ephesians 3:14 says, "I bow my knees unto the Father," indicating that there was something heavy on Paul's heart, and he was not praying in a light way. If you are heavily burdened and want to kneel down, and your environment allows it, go ahead. If not, there is no need to make kneeling a formal legality.

Question: If we have to choose between corporate morning watch and a private time with the Lord, how should we decide?

Answer: Corporate morning watch is helpful, but a private time is more crucial to your personal contact with the Lord. How you choose depends upon your need. The elders can also make a decision in this regard, but you are not obliged to follow it.

Question: I'd like to know how to deal with inward things like pride.

Answer: You deal with this in the same way as the outward matters. Whenever you sense something sinful, you should repent, confess to the Lord, and get cleansed. Also, by getting into the Word, the killing factor it contains

will smite your pride. If you take in the word, the word will become the Spirit to show you your pride and then to live out Christ instead of pride.

Question: What about our failure to obey? You said that the only way we could touch the Lord's life was by obedience.

Answer: Today the Lord as the Spirit is merciful and gracious. Like air and water, wherever He finds a narrow crack, He slips in. Even if you are only slightly obedient, the Spirit comes. Are any of us completely obedient to the Spirit? No. But we all enjoy Him to some extent. The amount depends upon the degree of our obedience. The more we obey the Spirit, the more we enjoy Him.

Question: When we come to contact the Lord, how do we empty ourselves of all our busy thoughts?

Answer: The best way to set your mind on the spirit (Rom. 8:6) is to get into the Word; this will release you from your distracting, disturbing thoughts.

Question: As a new Christian and the mother of four children, I would like to know how much scriptural teaching I should impose on them and how much I should insist on their behaving properly.

Answer: This is a very practical matter. As human beings, we fell and thus need the Lord's salvation. After the fall, God came in to restrict man. For example, God imposed restrictions on the woman because the fall had come in through her (Gen. 3:16); this restriction was actually a protection. In human society today, chaos would prevail were it not for the restraints of ethical teachings, the police, and the law courts. These have been ordained by God to limit the fallen race. Since our families are part of the fallen race, we as parents must exercise God's ordination to restrict our children by ethical teachings, regulations, and discipline. For proper human living in your home, you must teach your children to behave properly by honoring their parents, caring for their brothers and sisters, respecting their neighbors, and not stealing.

Do not say that ethical teachings are apart from Christ and therefore worthless. The necessities of our human existence are one thing; the

experiences of Christ, another. For our human living we must buy groceries, do laundry, lock our doors to prevent burglaries, be careful about fire, open and close windows, and cook and eat. Besides taking care of these earthly matters, we are also learning to experience Christ. These are two different areas; both are needed.

Question: Does 1 Thessalonians 5:22 also apply to corporate housing? The neighbors have cause to wonder what is going on in a young couple's house, if the husband is at work and there are brothers coming and going while the wife is there by herself.

Answer: It is better for the single brothers to live by themselves in a brothers' house and for the young single sisters to have a sisters' house. This is not only for the sake of appearance but also as a safeguard of morality. One of the reasons for the divorce and fornication that are so prevalent today is that there is not the proper separation between men and women. The first charge I was given when I came out to serve the Lord at the age of twenty-seven was to always have a third party present when talking with a sister for any length of time. Practicing this has been a protection to me.

We have the example of the Lord Jesus in this regard. He spoke with Nicodemus privately at night (John 3:1-2), but when He spoke to the Samaritan woman (4:6-7), it was under the sun in the open air. Had the situations been reversed, even the disciples might have had a question. (The Lord was about thirty-one or thirty-two at that time.)

The flesh is still prevailing, even in us older people. To keep a proper separation between the sexes is a needed protection. In former days young girls would always be chaperoned when they went out; today the intermingling of young men and women, which has become common even in college dormitories, is an invitation to immorality. Nothing defiles you in the presence of God like fornication. I exhort you to protect yourself from this by maintaining a separation. The young sisters should have a third party present when they are out with a young man. We must learn to keep our vessel clean and honorable before the Lord (1 Thes. 4:3-7).

Question: The appearance of evil is so apparent wherever we turn. Even when I go on the campus, I sense a spiritual leak in myself after a short time there.

Answer: Before you go into such a situation, you must be clear that you are going there just for the gospel's sake, for no other purpose. Then you must be in prayer for the Lord to cover and safeguard you.

Question: Sometimes we are not willing to obey what the Lord touches in us; this unwillingness may persist for three or four years. How can we handle this situation?

Answer: In Revelation 3:8 the Lord told the church in Philadelphia that they had a little power. The Lord does not require too much of us. We just have to be faithful to what we are able to do. There is no room for us to be proud, because none of us is wholly obedient to the Lord. Realizing we are so weak, we keep looking to Him for His mercy and grace.

Obedience is a matter of practice. Your obedience will increase by your being obedient. Just obey insofar as you are able, looking to Him for His help.

Question: What should I do if my parents invite me to do something that has the appearance of evil?

Answer: Try to get their sympathy. Tell them that you are a Christian and that you love the Lord.

Question: What about praying for others?

Answer: Everyone who contacts the Lord normally and properly will have some burden to pray for others, not in a religious way but under the living guidance of the Lord. If you love the Lord and live by Him, surely a burden to pray for others will come to you. Pray according to this inner burden.

TASTE

“How sweet are Your words to my taste! / Sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (Psa. 119:103). Whenever we come to the Word, it would be good to pray, “Lord, grant me a sweet taste for Your Word. Make it so precious to me.” When we come to the Word, we come not only with our mind and with our eyes but also with our heart. Taste is related to the heart. We need a heart that loves and appreciates the Lord's precious Word.

After I was saved, I found the Bible so sweet. I went to bed reading the Word and left the Bible beside my pillow. Upon awaking in the morning, I would pick up my still-open Bible and continue reading where I had left off. If we have this taste for the Word, surely it will bring us life.

GOD'S BREATH

“All Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16). Just as the nature of a tree is wood, so the nature of the word in the Bible is the divine breath. If you consider the Word as only letters on a page, you will use only your mentality in reading it. But because it is God's breath, we must breathe it in. How do we do this? By praying. When we are taking in the Word for nourishment, we need to pray over the words we read. We should use the very words of the Bible to pray; our prayer will turn the printed matter into breath. The verses, in other words, become spirit to us.

But how can we say that 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us the Scripture is for breathing? Does not the rest of the verse say, “and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”? Is instruction breathing? Is correction breathing? Is conviction breathing? To argue this way shows blindness. If you use only your mentality when you study the Word, you may read that it is “profitable for...correction” and feel that you do need to be corrected and convicted for your attitude toward your wife. This is not the life way to take the Word.

Rather than exercising your mentality, exercise your praying spirit. Do not bring in your thought. Do not interpret. Do not explain. Do not even pray for the Lord to help you to understand the verse. Just breathe all the words into your being. “O Lord, profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction. Lord, for instruction in righteousness.” Eventually, the verse will be wrought into you as a life supply. Because the nature of the word is divine breath, when you breathe it in, it becomes life to you. “The words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life” (John 6:63). The words become spirit and life through your prayer, through your breathing.

FOOD

Matthew 4:4 makes it clear that the Bible is good for food: “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out through the mouth

of God.” So does Jeremiah 15:16: “Your words were found and I ate them, / And Your word became to me / The gladness and joy of my heart, / For I am called by Your name, / O Jehovah, God of hosts.” How can we eat God’s words? To eat is to take food into us and digest it so that it becomes part of us. To eat God’s words is to take them in by prayer while exercising our whole being to enjoy them. This verse in Jeremiah says that the word “became to me / The gladness and joy of my heart.” We must keep pray-reading the Word till it becomes our enjoyment and rejoicing; then we have eaten it.

MILK AND SOLID FOOD

In 1 Peter 2:2 the word is referred to as milk: “As newborn babes, long for the guileless milk of the word in order that by it you may grow unto salvation.” The portions of the Bible that are easy for us to take in are milk. They are also called “the good word” (Heb. 6:5) and the word of grace (Acts 14:3; 20:32). When we read some parts of the Word, we feel like a child enjoying a refreshing glass of milk. Other portions of the Word, though, have more weight to them; taking them in is like eating a steak. These weightier portions are referred to in Hebrews as solid food (5:12) and as the word of righteousness (v. 13). When we can receive them, they give us the weight of maturity.

These, then, are the life ways to take the word: taste it, breathe it, eat it, drink it as milk, and take it in as solid food.

RAIN AND SNOW

Notice how the word is described in Isaiah 55:10-11: “Just as the rain comes down / And the snow from heaven, / And does not return there, / Until it waters the earth / And makes it bear and sprout forth, / That it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater; / So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; / It will not return to Me vainly, / But it will accomplish what I delight in, / And it will prosper in the matter to which I have sent it.” The word is likened to rain in summer and snow in winter, watering us to produce the seed for fruit-bearing and the bread for our satisfaction. This is a marvelous picture of our experience in taking the word.

THE WORD WITHIN

“I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one” (1 John 2:14). This word that makes us strong and able to overcome the wicked one is no longer only external; it is the word of God abiding in us. This means that we have taken it into us by breathing, by praying, by eating, and by digesting. It is now the word in our life experience, not just the word in knowledge.

THE WORD SANCTIFYING

“Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (John 17:17). How does the word of God sanctify us? We are sanctified not by teaching but by being saturated with the very element conveyed in the word. That element is the Lord Himself, the essence of the Spirit. As we are daily in the Word, the word gets into us and saturates us subjectively and dispositionally with the divine essence.

MEDICINE

The word of God even brings health to our body. Proverbs 4:20-22 says, “My son, be attentive to my words; / Incline your ear to my sayings. / Do not let them depart from your sight; / Keep them in the midst of your heart. / For they are life to those who find them, / And healing to all their flesh.” How can God’s word make us physically healthy? Illness is often caused by anxiety or anger. If people are made happy, their sickness often disappears. When we get into the Word, joy comes in to heal. The word kills the bothering things and brings in resurrection. Then we can eat and digest our food well, and our body becomes healthy.

ALL PRAYER AND PETITION

“Receive the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which Spirit is the word of God, by means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit” (Eph. 6:17-18). How can we receive the word “by means of all prayer and petition”? It is by pray-reading the Word according to its content. If we are reading concerning abiding, our prayer must be concerning abiding; if the word is concerning righteousness, our prayer should be about righteousness. *All prayer* means different kinds of prayer according to the portion of the Word we are reading. Whenever we can make time, we should

practice this way of receiving the word by praying. Then we shall be fully built up, not only spiritually but also physically.

HELPS TO UNDERSTANDING THE WORD

It becomes apparent when you read the New Testament that its roots are in the Old Testament. The New is both a continuation and an interpretation of the Old. Without Hebrews, for example, how could you understand Leviticus? Galatians also is actually a cooked and digested part of the Old Testament.

To understand the Bible, then, we need to be thoroughly acquainted with both the Old and New Testaments. In addition, we need the benefit of what so many saints in the past have researched in the Word. When I was young, I spent many hours going from one used bookstore to another, trying to find helpful, but often rare, books. Reading them was of great help to me.

The fruit of all this research is now available to you in simple form—the Life-study messages. How appreciative I would have been fifty years ago if they had been available to me! This is why I urge you to get into the Life-study messages. You will be well nourished if you get into the book of Hebrews, for example, using the sixty-nine Life-study messages as a guide to your study and research. Find time every day, maybe a half hour or so, and you can probably cover the whole book of Hebrews in a month. Like a camel about to make a long journey through the desert, you will store a great deal of nourishment within you and so be helped to grow.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE WAY THAT LEADS TO LIFE

“Narrow is the gate and constricted is the way that leads to life, and few are those who find it” (Matt. 7:14). Before we consider various aspects of the way that leads to life, we will answer a few questions.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: Could you clarify the distinction you made between living by Christ and living Christ?

Answer: I realize that to say “live Christ” is grammatically odd, but we had to invent this new term to express what is on our heart. If we are living *by* Christ, we are still doing the living. To live Christ means that Christ is our life (Col. 3:4). When we live, He lives. When He lives, we live.

Question: Of the four legalities, what does sleeping represent?

Answer: Usually spiritual sleep has a negative sense, but we need to be aware of its positive value also. To sleep means to rest from all activities. It is most healthful to have a time every day of doing nothing. Do not think that I mean meditation. Just rest; be free from your thoughts and anxieties. Most of us are too busy, and our minds are too active, worrying about ourselves or the problems in the church. It is hard to make a time to have a spiritual sleep, but if we do, it will make us spiritually healthy. This time is not for praying, not for reading the Word, and not for answering the phone. It is a time set aside just for rest.

With all these legalities—eating, breathing, drinking, and sleeping—there is a need for us to exercise a strong will. The will is the only part of our natural being that is useful to the Lord. If we are to keep these legalities and the commandments in the New Testament, we need to ask the Lord to strengthen our will. Gossiping does not take will power, but bringing ourselves to pray and read the Word surely does.

Question: Sometimes when I am reading the Word or trying to pray, I get bored and fall asleep.

Answer: It is hard for us fallen human beings to stop even for a short while. If we fall asleep, that will stop us. It is good for our health.

Question: How can we help those who have left the church?

Answer: If the Lord wants us to help some of these dear ones, He will give us a burden, prepare the situation, and afford us the opportunity. There is no need to be distressed. Psalm 127:1 reminds us, “Unless Jehovah builds the house, / Those who build it labor in vain. / Unless Jehovah keeps the city, / The guard watches in vain.” The Lord is the Head. If this is His recovery, His church, nothing can damage it. The Lord told the Jews, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19), meaning that when they destroyed His body, He would raise up an even greater one in resurrection.

Question: Is it all right to submit myself to someone?

Answer: This is a good question. Many great men throughout history submitted themselves to someone or to some idea when they were young. Even if you submit yourself to a wrong person, your submission is still healthy. One who has never submitted himself is raw and of little use. Even materials like iron, copper, and cotton have to be processed before they can be put to use. This is God’s ordination for us as human beings too. Regrettably, the modern trend is to throw off this principle.

As a child, submit to your parents. As a student, submit to your teachers and the other school authorities. If you are working, submit to your employer. To be successful, be successful in your submission. In the church, even if the elders are not so adequate, your position is to submit. This will help your growth. There is more need in the church for submission on the part of the young people.

Question: What if the submission offends our conscience?

Answer: Submission is surely against your conscience if it leads you to worship an idol or to do something against the truth. Daniel and his three friends are an example of submission at the highest level, yet they did not defile themselves (Dan. 1:8-20).

In 1938 there was a sister in Beijing whose unsaved husband greatly troubled her. He would go to the theater and then not get home till after midnight. Her way of handling the situation was to lock the door and not let him in till he had been knocking for an hour or so. When she recounted this story to us, we told her she must change her way in order to save her marriage. She asked us for advice, and this is what we suggested: "You have to submit yourself to your husband. When he wants to go to the theater, offer to accompany him. Ride in the carriage with him right to the theater entrance. Then tell him to go on in and that you will return home and wait for him. When you get back home, cook his favorite snack and have it all ready. As soon as you hear him knock at the door, open it right away and give him a warm welcome. Offer him the snack you have prepared and sit down with him while he eats it. Sister, if you will practice this, before too long your husband will be a brother in the church." This is what subsequently happened. That theater-going husband became a brother because of his wife's submission.

I believe this story illustrates submission according to the Bible. Submit as much as you can without defiling your conscience.

LIFE

Matters pertaining to life may not be easy to explain, but they are easy to experience. Medical doctors spend years studying the physical body, but they do not know what life is. Even a baby, however, experiences life just by breathing, without any instruction or study. Without understanding it, I enjoy my physical life; it enables me to speak and move. The experience of life is just to breathe. A hundred books cannot explain breathing, but the act of breathing is simple. So is life in our experience.

To experience the life of God, we must have the Son (1 John 5:12). Life is a person, Christ Himself. Do not think that jumping or shouting are indications of this life. Life is not a condition but a person. Whether I sleep or jump, whether I shout or am quiet, I have life. Sorry to say, it has often seemed to me that the ones who shout in the meetings are the ones who are short of life.

Those who are rich in life have no need to shout. When they come into the meeting and sit down, life radiates from them. I remember the meetings in Shanghai in the early 1930s. Brother Nee was twenty-nine, two years older than I. He would be in the meetings, perhaps not speaking, not praying, not

even singing well, but full of life. If there was a meeting and he was away, how much we missed him! We would try hard to exercise in prayer, but we sensed a lack of life. The life in just one person makes a difference.

THE REASON FOR THE UNIVERSE

Why did God create the heavens and the earth? To accomplish His purpose, He needed the earth, the air, the sunshine, and the rain. All these things He made as the environment for the vine He wanted to grow (John 15). To our Father God, the earth is a vineyard in which He nurtures and tends the vine, His Son. Yet a vine amounts to very little without its branches. Is it not marvelous that we are those branches (v. 5)? Why does God have the church? Why has He gathered us together? He intends to cultivate us, but not our natural life, as the outgrowth of this vine. When the branches grow, the vine grows. It is our profession, our calling, our responsibility, to grow and produce this vine. When we live Christ (“To me, to live is Christ,” Phil. 1:21), we grow Him. When we grow Him, we produce Him.

HOW WE MEET

Our meetings must be a show window of our Christian life. God’s economy ordains that we should live, grow, and produce Christ. We live this way, so we meet this way. There is no need to discuss what kind of meeting to have. This matter is resolved in our daily life—in our married life, in our business life, and in our school life. If we do not live Christ in our personal, private life, how can we release Him in the meetings? Even if the attempt to release our spirit is sincere, the meeting still is only a performance.

FRUIT-BEARING

The fruit-bearing of the branches is not a labor but the outflow of the inner life. Our preaching of the gospel must be our living. Living this way will attract the best people. We have put forth much effort, yet our fruit-bearing has been meager; this indicates that there has not been much living of Christ.

A FALSE LIBERTY

These past few months I have been deeply concerned about the course of the recovery. The Lord has troubled and burdened me that its nature has been changed from life to activities, concepts, and arrangements.

For the sake of the Lord's recovery, we must drop our opinions. Do not be distracted by any concept. Do you not realize that you sacrifice the oneness by supporting your concept?

You say that the meetings are boring. You say that to attend all the meetings is religious. You say that you can enjoy the Lord at the beach. I ask you, is the family not your family whether it is good or bad? Which do you think you will regret in the age to come—attending boring meetings or not attending the meetings? Have you ever received grace by staying away from the meetings, by going to the beach, by watching television, or by engaging in sports?

Do drop all such damaging concepts. A number of times when the meetings were low and I had no heart to go, I went anyway because I make it a point to attend the meetings. (In my whole church life there are very few meetings that I have missed.) In those low meetings especially, I have often received the Lord's grace.

TAKING IN THE WORD

Nothing honors our Father more than when we take His Word and keep it. The Bible is the word of our Father. Suppose you receive a letter from your mother. When you come to read it, you have the sense that you are coming to her. In a similar way, when you come to the Bible, you have the sweet consciousness that you are coming to your God, your Father, your Lord. Furthermore, if you take in the word, you get the reality of the Triune God. Even the Spirit who dwells in you is embodied in the word.

TOUCHING THE SPIRIT

Within us there is an inner consciousness. If we take care of this when we are praying over the Word, we are touching the Spirit. For example, if the sense comes that we are wrong or mistaken in a certain matter, we must confess and be cleansed by the blood. Then there may be a consciousness of something else; take care of that. Do not argue; just take care of the inner consciousness. To take the Word and to touch the Spirit in this way is to abide in the vine and to enjoy all the riches of the Triune God as your portion.

THE GATE OF THE CONSCIENCE

The real growth in life is to have Christ added to us. He is the Spirit, mysterious yet real. What is the gate through which He can enter? He is added into our being through the narrow gate of our conscience. The gate of our heart is wider, but He cannot enter there without passing through the conscience. First Timothy 1:19 describes what happens to those who fail to deal with their conscience: “Holding faith and a good conscience, concerning which some, thrusting these away, have become shipwrecked regarding the faith.”

Besides legally getting into the Word and legally spending time in prayer, we also need to legally take care of our conscience. If you do not want to be bothered by your conscience, stay away from the Bible! Many times when you are reading the Word, you will be enlightened, and your conscience will condemn you. You may be reading Romans 12, for example, and come to verse 5, where it says that we are “members one of another.” Your conscience may then accuse you that you have not been a proper member to your brothers. You will have to confess and get forgiveness. Had you not been in the Word, you would not have experienced such an accusation.

When you confess, you open the gate for Christ to come in. The more you confess, the more Christ you will gain. This is the way to enrich your abiding in Christ.

If you think that you are enjoying the Lord but you are not dealing with your conscience, you are deceiving yourself. The enjoyment of the Lord comes from abiding; abiding in the Lord is based on dealing with your conscience.

A SUITABLE ENVIRONMENT

For seeds to grow they must be planted. They will not sprout if they are kept on the table. Against their will we must force them into the earth. This is what I am trying to do with you—force you into the earth so that you will grow! For your growth you need the environment of the church meetings and of the Word. To stay away from them is of Satan.

When I was vacationing recently on a mountain, I noticed that above a certain level grew tall pine trees. I asked why there were no trees below that level. For the tall pines to grow, I was told, they need cold weather. Below the tree line the weather was too mild. What is true of the pine trees is also true of

us. Do we want to be tropical Christians? Children need a wintertime from their parents to help them grow tall. The saints also need to experience a winter in the church to help them grow.

If you will get into the Word regularly as I have exhorted you, even if you consider such legality like a cold blast of winter, in two months you will see what a difference it makes in your life and in the church life.

THE VALUE OF LEGALITY

I have encouraged you to get into the Word and to pray every day in a legal way. Do not be afraid of following legalities. I have far more legalities than the four I passed on to you. I am legal about putting my shoes in the same place every night; keeping all the books on my library shelf in a certain sequence; and taking a shower regularly. Such legalities keep me healthy and help me find things when I need them.

Most aspects of our life are governed by legalities. Does a mother cook breakfast for her family only when she feels like it? In writing, do you form your letters however you please? In speaking, do you make up your own grammar rules? Little would be accomplished without our being legal.

NEW TESTAMENT COMMANDMENTS

Do you think there are only ten commandments and that they are all in the Old Testament? The pages of the New Testament contain more commandments than the Old. Here are a few:

(1) “Unceasingly pray” (1 Thes. 5:17). It does not say, “Please pray if you have time.”

(2) “Be filled in spirit” (Eph. 5:18). Do not say that you are tired or bored, but God is merciful. God is stricter than I am.

(3) “Be transformed” (Rom. 12:2). You need to spend time praying to be transformed.

(4) “Grow in...grace” (2 Pet. 3:18).

(5) “Be empowered in the Lord” (Eph. 6:10).

(6) “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). We are not told to work out our salvation with joy or with shouting but with fear and trembling. How can we do this without being legal?

(7) “Do all things without murmurings and reasonings” (v. 14). When you are about to murmur, you must remember this commandment and restrain yourself. When you want to reason about church matters or why the elders behave as they do, remember that you are forbidden to do so by this commandment.

(8) “Flee youthful lusts” (2 Tim. 2:22). Here is a commandment the young people especially need to heed.

(9) “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thes. 5:22, KJV). The appearance of evil leads to evil.

These days I have heard some strange talk. It surely does not sound like the New Testament to me. Some are saying that they do not want any standard. To me this is ridiculous. Everything has a standard. I have also heard that we should be what we are. If you think Christians should stay as they are, why does the Bible say, “Be transformed”? Do you want to remain as you are? I want to grow and be transformed. Some have even said that we should not control ourselves but just let some flesh come forth and do whatever it pleases. I would remind you that as fallen human beings we are capable of doing any lustful thing. God came in right after the fall to ordain restrictions. It is only because of such restraints that we are kept from indulgence in lust. Can you trust your flesh? Whatever your age, however long you have been in Christ, if you do not exercise restrictions over your flesh, you are capable of any evil. If you say, “Do not be legal,” I say, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

THE CONSTRICTED WAY

The standard in the Bible is the highest. “Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens” (Matt. 5:20). We Christians must be strict. We enter through a narrow gate and walk along a constricted way (7:14). “Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter through it” (v. 13). To take a pathway of looseness is to choose the

wide gate whose end is destruction. May we be those who are led to life by taking the narrow gate and the constricted way.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CHRIST OUR PORTION AND OUR LIFE

Christ is the portion of the saints (Col. 1:12). God has prepared this eternal, unlimited portion for us to enjoy. Before we consider how we can partake of Him daily, let us answer some questions.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: How do we get in spirit and stay there? Many times we feel that we are in our spirit, but a moment later we are out of it.

Answer: To stay in your spirit, you need to learn to abide in the Lord. The Lord today is the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17). If He were just the Savior (1 John 4:14) and the Lamb of God (John 1:29), how could He get into us? He could only be in the heavens (Acts 2:32-35; Phil. 3:20). The Scripture says clearly, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). He can only be in us as the Spirit. How could we reach Him and abide in Him if He is confined to heaven? Even logically speaking, for the Lord to ask us to abide in Him surely indicates that His nature is Spirit. The Greek word for *spirit* is *pneuma*, which is also the word for *air*. Christ today is the holy air. We have no trouble abiding in the air, and the air is obviously abiding in us.

Like the air, the *pneuma*, He is in us and we are in Him. If you remain there and let Christ remain in you, you will be abiding in Him. According to our experience, however, we find that, in spite of our efforts and good intentions, unconsciously we slip out of Him. I may be in Christ while talking at the dining table, then suddenly realize I am out of Him. What has been the cause? I talked too much. Overtalking may get us out of the abiding.

A hint to help you remain in spirit is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:17: “Unceasingly pray.” I used to wonder how anyone could pray twenty-four hours a day. Gradually, I came to realize that to pray in the spiritual life is to breathe. Whether you are eating, speaking, or sleeping, you keep breathing.

Another kind of prayer is illustrated by drinking. This we do not do without ceasing. We may drink with our meals, and perhaps also at mid-morning, at

mid-afternoon, and in the evening. Drinking typifies customary prayer. David said in Psalm 55:17, “Evening and morning and at noontime / I complain and moan,” indicating that he had this customary prayer at least three times a day. Acts 10:30 also hints to us that in ancient times people had set times to pray. This is a habit we all need to build up. Spend at least ten minutes for customary prayer every morning. Sometimes you may find yourself burdened to pray for an hour or more. This kind of praying is like drinking.

Unceasing prayer, which can be likened to breathing, is the key to remaining in spirit. While I am speaking outwardly, I am praying inwardly. While you are operating your machine at work, you can be praying inwardly. Practice saying “O Lord” whenever you feel that you are not in the spirit. There is no need to pray with composed sentences.

Suppose you are on the verge of losing your temper. Satan has filled you with anger against your husband. If you will pray “O Lord,” the anger will be gone. If you think this is just a psychological technique, try saying “O Washington” instead. It will have no effect. “O Lord” is a prayer that brings you back to the spirit. As long as you keep breathing this way, you will be filled with the pneuma. The respiratory process is complicated and hard to understand, but breathing is easy. Such is the simplicity of abiding in Christ. Pray without ceasing.

Question: Suppose after fifteen minutes in the Word and prayer, you feel that you have not gotten anything. Should you persist or by faith consider you have gotten something?

Answer: Learn to live not according to your feeling. Of course, your normal feelings help, but if you have a high fever, you may feel that the temperature in the room is warm when it is not. If you want to be spiritual, do not behave according to your feeling. Do not let circumstances determine how you feel. In the spiritual life learn to drop your feeling and go according to the facts.

It is a fact that you need to read the Word. Many young Christians get excited when they first start studying the Bible. They want to prolong the time and come back the next day for more because it is so much fun. Such excitement is short-lived. After a week or so, it fizzles out. If you feel excited when you first start getting into the Word and feel that there is light shining, do not have regard for that feeling. Prepare for a cold day soon to come. It is

your duty to spend time in the Word and in prayer. Your day-to-day feeling about it makes no difference. Just fulfill your duty; go by the fact that you need to do these two things.

Do not think that you are wasting your time. A sister once asked Brother Nee if there was any point in her continuing to read the Bible every day; she could never remember what she had read. Brother Nee reminded her of how they washed the rice there in southern China. They would put the rice into a basket made of willow branches and then repeatedly immerse the whole basket in the water. The water would never stay in the basket, however many times it was immersed. Brother Nee pointed out to her that nonetheless the rice and the basket were both getting washed. By continuing to read the Word, this sister would be getting washed even though she could not remember what she had read.

Another fact is that you need to pray regularly. You may soon find that your time of prayer is dry and lifeless. Do not persuade yourself that this legality is killing you and that you should drop it. This would be going by your feeling rather than the fact. The truth of the matter is that having wonderful times in prayer can lead to deception. I can give you two examples.

One day while a sister was praying, she thought the Lord told her that He would come back at a certain time. It made her neglect her daily duties to get ready for His return. A number of times saints have been deceived in this way.

Once while a brother was praying, he received a “revelation” that he was no more in the flesh. Alas, not only was his flesh still with him; it was stronger than ever. He made many blunders as a result of this wrong feeling and eventually ended up in fornication.

Let me warn you to beware of excitement when you contact the Lord. Do not go the way of feelings. Whether you feel high or low, just come to contact your Lord for ten minutes every morning. Do not allow yourself to be played upon, directed, and even fooled by your untrustworthy feelings.

Sometimes when children will not drink their milk, the mother puts sugar in it. In like manner, when we are young, the word is sweet to our taste because God has added some sugar. You may also find singing hymns so sweet. But as time goes on, the sugar will be reduced, and eventually the sweet

taste in the word and in the hymns will be gone. Eventually, we will have no ups and downs; all the days will be the same.

Question: But it is hard not to go by our feelings. I hear some brothers and sisters pray so strongly and loudly in the meetings. I highly regard them; yet when I touch their daily lives, they disappoint me. Then I cannot stand it. I love the saints, but I cannot control the bitter feeling about the lack of correspondence between their daily life and their meeting life.

Answer: The disparity you mention between how we live and how we behave when we meet has been greatly troubling me. Some of our meetings have become theatrical performances, an offense to God and an offense to the saints. If we feel down at home, we should just come to the meeting that way. That is being real. When we are real, God will come in to heal us. After we have been sitting in the meeting for a short while, the merciful God may visit us, touch our heart, and cause the tears to flow. Then we may say, “O Lord, forgive me. I am so down. Lord, forgive me.” This is genuine, because it results from the Lord’s visiting us. When we thus receive grace, others are helped and we are changed. Such is the genuine Christian life and the genuine Christian meeting. To stir yourself up to perform in the meeting is abominable in the eyes of God.

CHRIST IN COLOSSIANS

In the Epistle to the Colossians Christ is portrayed as the Head; the book of Ephesians deals with the Body. We will consider some of the descriptions of this Christ, our divinely allotted portion, as they are given in Colossians, and then go on to discuss how we can daily partake of Him.

The Image of God

Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (1:15). God is real yet abstract. Like electricity, He cannot be seen. But as light is the expression of electricity, so this invisible God has an expression, Christ. This very Christ is our portion, our heavenly food (cf. John 6:35, 48-58). By daily partaking of Him who is the very image of God, we too become the image of God.

THE FIRSTBORN AND THE CREATOR

In Colossians 1:15 and 16 Christ is described as both “the Firstborn of all creation” and as the Creator, the One by whom “all things were created, in the heavens and on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or lordships or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and unto Him.” How Christ could be both the first item of the creation and also its Creator, the One in whom all things were created, we cannot comprehend.

The Hub of the Universe

“He is before all things, and all things cohere in Him” (v. 17). That all things cohere in Him means that He holds everything together the way the hub of a wheel holds all its spokes together. Without the hub, the spokes would fall away. Scientists say there is some force that keeps the universe in its place. We do not know much science, but we do know who that force is; without Him the planets would fly apart. If such a hub can keep the universe on course, surely He can keep all our inward parts. What is the center of our being? Christ. Whatever happens, we do not fall apart because all our spokes are firmly fixed in this hub.

The Preeminent One

Christ is not only the Firstborn of all creation but also “the Firstborn from the dead” (v. 18). Our God is the God of both creation and resurrection. This One, who is also “the Head of the Body,” is in the highest position as the first among all things; this is what it means for Him to have the first place in all things (v. 18). In us also He must have the first place in all things.

The Mystery of God

God is a mystery, and this mystery is Christ (v. 27; 2:2; 4:3).

The Reality of All Positive Things

“Let no one therefore judge you in eating and in drinking or in respect of a feast or of a new moon or of the Sabbath, which are a shadow of the things to come, but the body is of Christ” (2:16-17). The food we eat and the drink we take are just a shadow whose reality, body, is Christ. Holidays are days of joy and good times; to have Christ is to have a holiday every day. In a dark night a new moon is like a fresh, new beginning. This is what Christ is to us when we

are in a dark night without hope and with no way out. Christ is also the rest pictured by the Sabbath. Food, drink, holidays, new moons, Sabbaths—all these positive things have Him as their reality.

The Embodiment of the Fullness of God

“In Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell” (1:19). God is rich, full, and complete; all His fullness dwells bodily in Christ (2:9).

Our Life

This very Christ portrayed in Colossians is our life (3:4). This all-inclusive, excellent, wonderful One is our life. We have a physical life. If that life were gone, we would not have one to live. Christ is for us to live. We should not live American or Chinese; we should not live old folks or young people; we should all live Christ. Whether you are humble or proud, pleasant or tough, does not matter. Not only when you hate people but even when you love them, you may not be living Christ. The Bible is not a book of ethics, teaching you to love rather than hate; its message is that we should live Christ. We are to be neither moral nor immoral. We are called Christians, which means “Christ-men.” Thus, we must live Christ.

Religion’s wrong concept is that God wants us to be good. If God wanted good men, He could create billions of them. But He cannot create people who live Christ. God is omnipotent, but He cannot live Christ for you. He needs you to live Christ. The world has many good people, but where are those who live Christ?

When you were married, you were a “raw” husband, a beginner. But now your crudeness and toughness have worn off, and you seldom offend your wife. Please be assured that God does not want your kindness and gentleness any more than He wanted your crudeness and toughness. He wants you to live Christ.

In 1933 I was a young man staying in Shanghai. Two or three times a week I would go to visit Brother Nee and spend the afternoon with him. One afternoon we sat down together, he in a rocking chair and I on the sofa. After a long, long silence he suddenly asked, “Witness, what is patience?” Everyone knows what patience is; why would he ask me that? I dared not answer, but

he just kept rocking and again asked, “What is patience?” I repeated his question, and he did too. Finally, the long time of waiting forced me to say, “Patience is enduring and suffering when one is mistreated.” In Chinese the character for patience is a knife pierced into a heart. My answer was obviously right, but Brother Nee shook his head. Another long silence ensued. Then he said, “Patience is Christ.” I was puzzled. “What do you mean, Brother Nee?” I asked. He would not explain further, though I kept begging him to do so. He just went on rocking and repeating, “Patience is Christ.” Evening came on, and I had to leave for dinner at my lodging place. So I said, “Sorry, Brother Nee, I have to leave now.” He replied, “Patience is Christ.” I said goodbye, and again his answer was, “Patience is Christ.” When I got back to the church guesthouse, I had no heart to eat. I went to my room, knelt down, and, nearly weeping, prayed, “Lord, what is this? Patience is Christ. What is this?” The Lord heard my prayer and that of Brother Nee, who was also praying for me. Within a few days the light came. I saw that patience is Christ because Christ is my life. Every human virtue is Christ. Because He is my life, He is my everything. I was so exhilarated that I felt like a bird soaring in the air. That very day I began to delve into the book of Colossians. “When Christ our life is manifested, then you also will be manifested with Him in glory” (3:4).

Do you live Christ? Do not say that this is poor English. Every day we should live Christ. He is “the hope of glory” (1:27). Now He is life to us; in the future He will be glory to us. That glory is our hope. Our hope is in knowing that glory is coming and that that glory is also Christ. Christ is in me now as my life and before me as my glory. This is the genuine Christ, our portion. Do not take Christianity’s wrong picture of Him. Do not be put off because this Christ is beyond your understanding. The things of life are hard to explain but easy to experience. I do not understand about the vitamins contained in wheat and what good they do me, but it is easy for me to eat bread and get its nutritional value anyway. This Christ too I can partake of without understanding.

Partaking of Christ

Christ is our portion, our life, and our glory. How can we touch Him? Colossians says to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (3:16). The word *dwell* here is a more solid word in Greek than the word *abide*; its root means “house.” We are to let the word of Christ make its home in us; here is the key to enjoying Him. Christ is abstract, mysterious, and intangible. But

the Bible is tangible, solid, and receivable. Christ as the life-giving Spirit is embodied in the word of the Bible as our food.

You can see now why it is so important to be in the Word daily. However busy you are, you must begin your day in the Word. Buy an alarm clock if you need one to help you to get up early enough to set aside at least ten minutes for the Word. Then do not just read it; pray it with your spirit. Let the word of Christ thus make its home in you. With Christ embodied in the word and the word embodied in you, you will live Him. If you have not digested Him through His word, how can you live Him? When you are saturated with His word, you will be saturated with Him.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

GOD'S GIFTS—

THE WORD AND THE SPIRIT

Today many Christians are interested in spiritual gifts. Too often, however, we neglect two of the greatest gifts, the Holy Bible and the Holy Spirit. One is without; the other is within; and the two correspond to each other. In the Bible we find Christ as light and life; in the Spirit we also find Christ as light and life.

Suppose on earth today there were no Bible. After two thousand years, what would there be on this earth concerning the Lord? There would be just a mass of confusion. You may say that we would have the Spirit. It is right to trust in the Spirit, but just as a physical life cannot exist without a body, so the Spirit and the Word must always be taken together. Your life is like the Spirit, and your body is like the Word. If you take care of your body and keep it in good health, your life will last longer. Similarly, if you are built up through regularly reading the Word and spending time in prayer, your spirit will be healthy, and your family life and the church life will be greatly improved.

Let us answer some questions before we continue.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: My day starts very early. Should I still get up extra early to spend time in the Word?

Answer: It is not too hard for anyone to get up ten minutes earlier in order to eat the Word. It is a healthy habit, beneficial not only spiritually but even physically. Our anxieties will be replaced by joy when we read the Word; it is a medicine to heal us of our tensions and worries (see Prov. 4:20-22).

Question: Is it best to get into the Word before the sun is out?

Answer: That thought comes from the typology of the gathering of manna. The Israelites had to gather manna before the sun rose, or it would melt (Exo. 16:21). If you can get up that early, that is good. But I am not that legal. If you

are a nurse, you may have irregular hours. I just ask you to spend ten minutes before you start your day, whether it is at 5:30 or 8:30.

Question: Should we eat the Word alone or corporately?

Answer: Personal contact with the Lord is basic; corporate contact, helpful. If you have time, do both; if not, take care of your private contact with Him. Personal contact can be likened to textbooks; corporate, to reference books. If you are taking a course in school, you must study the textbook in order to pass; if possible, study the reference books too. In the past few years some saints have had only a corporate morning watch; when they come to pray-read alone, they do not know what to do. It is poor to be able to read the reference books but not be able to study the textbook.

Question: Suppose we do not sense a speaking during our ten minutes with the Lord. Should we be concerned or expect this to be the case sometimes?

Answer: When you go to breakfast, do not be thinking about how it will taste; just sit down and eat. Intending to get a “good taste” from your morning reading will just be a frustration to you. Our feelings are complicated and fluctuating, as changeable as the weather. Do not trust them. Even if the Word seems not to stay with you, it is doing its cleansing work. I encourage you by saying not to try to get anything from your reading; then you will not be discouraged when you do not seem to get anything.

Before you start any day, it is a necessity to come to the Lord. To thus put Him first is to pay Him high honor. He will surely reward you, whether it seems so or not.

Question: Many times in a meeting I sense the anointing to do something. Then the next day when I am supposed to do it, the sense is gone. It has happened countless times. Sometimes I think I should go ahead and take care of it on the basis of my previous sense, and other times I decide to let it go.

Answer: The Christian life is a life by faith, not by feeling. We should come to the meetings regularly, for example. After a meeting we may feel that we have not received anything, but nonetheless we are getting the benefit every

time. If you stop coming, you will see how like the world you will become after a few months.

At the beginning of our Christian life, out of sympathy for our weakness, the Lord surely gives us a feeling. But in order to train us to live by faith, after a certain period He removes the feeling. Then we descend into the valley. Knowing that we cannot take too much, the Lord for a shorter period restores the feeling. This gives us the sense of being on the mountaintop. Such a cycle is repeated until gradually the dependence on feelings is gone; there is no mountaintop and no valley. Whether we are opposed or welcomed matters little. Whether it is bright or cloudy, we do not care.

Before you enter such a stage, do not be troubled. If you feel that the anointing of the evening before is gone, contact the Lord again. If the anointing returns, follow it; if not, do not do anything. The Lord does not expect you to live by last night. He just asks us to live today. This is the simple way of faith.

THE COMPLEXITY OF LIFE

Life is exceedingly complex. How would you define it? There are many kinds of life—vegetable, animal, human, angelic, and divine. When John says, “In Him was life” (John 1:4), what kind of life does he mean? And what is the difference between divine life and human life? When a person dies, what life dies and what life still continues?

THREE LIVES

How many lives do we Christians have? The New Testament, in Greek, uses three different words for *life*. The first is *bios*, from which we get the word *biology*, the study of life. *Bios* refers to the life in our body that the medical doctors deal with. Another word is *psuche*, which is the root of our word *psychology*. *Psuche* is translated “soul”; it refers to something other than our physical life. When a man dies, his *bios* dies, but his *psuche* continues. The third word is *zoe*, a kind of higher life. This is the word that John uses when he says, “In Him was life.” By natural birth *zoe* was not in us; we had only *bios* and *psuche*. But John 3:16 tells us that when we believe in the Son (i.e., receive Him, take Him in), we have *zoe*.

Perhaps some illustrations will help us to keep these distinctions straight. When you neglect having breakfast, you feel hungry by mid-morning. Which life in you is hungry? Bios is. If you have eaten well, but you still feel hungry for some enjoyment of music or a good time, which life is hungry? In this case it is your psuche. You may come to the church meeting and have a good time singing and enjoying yourself. Afterward, your psuche may be satisfied, yet within there may still be a sense of emptiness, or hunger. Here it is your zoe that is crying out to be fed. Why do you care only for your bios and psuche and neglect zoe? Surely our experience confirms that we have these three lives in us.

CHRIST IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Not only was life in this One who was both the Word and God (1:1); “the life was the light of men” (v. 4). In John 10:10 Jesus further said, “I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly.” He called Himself “the bread of life” (6:48) and “the living bread which came down out of heaven” (v. 51). How much He is—the Word, God, life, light, and the bread of life!

He is more than this. In John 15 He told His disciples that He was a vine—not a tall tree sweeping the heavens but a low, spreading vine, reaching even to the uttermost part of the earth. He is not too high for us to reach. He is low and spreading. This vine grows horizontally to reach the whole inhabited earth.

NOT A PARABLE

Some say that the picture given us in John 15 is a parable of our relationship with Christ. It is more accurate to say that this vine with its branches is a divine, spiritual fact. God the Father is a farmer tending this great vine, which is growing and spreading throughout the earth. We, as the branches, are here to branch Christ. I hope your coming to the church meetings is not to have a good time; that is too low a reason. We are not here for a good time but rather to branch Christ.

I long for us all to be in the reality of this vision. It is our background that hinders our seeing. From our Christian background, our natural background, and our national background, we have the impression that we must do this

and that for God. So we think, plan, schedule, and even move across the country. Branches, though, just stay where they are and live the vine.

INVISIBLE YET REAL

Christ lives in us, yet we cannot see Him. How can we prove that He is real? In the early days of my ministry I did a lot of gospel preaching. Once, a professor came to me and said, “Mr. Lee, your preaching is good, and your doctrine is quite philosophical. What you say is logical, but how can you prove that the Christ you preach is real?” I replied, “Do you have a life inside you?” “Yes,” he replied. “Is it real?” I further asked. “If so, show it to me. Otherwise, do not say any more.” He could not show me his life. I went on, “Mr. So-and-so, you are not as philosophical as you think. You may have a doctorate in some area of science, but you are surely not a doctor of yourself. Tell me, how many hearts do you have?” “Mr. Lee,” he answered, “What are you talking about? Everybody knows we have only one heart.” “Sorry, you are mistaken. You have two hearts,” I told him. “Besides a physical heart that pumps your blood, you have a heart that can love. Isn’t this true?” He was subdued. He had a life, yet he could not show it to me. I have a real and living Christ, but I could not show him either.

As a person He may be invisible, but He is also the Word. This book called the Bible differs from all other books. When we read it with an open heart, we find something moving within us. This is because it is God’s Word. In it the mysterious, invisible Christ is embodied. When we take this Word into us, it becomes the Spirit. Then when we speak this Spirit out, it again becomes the Word. The Word and the Spirit, God’s two gifts to us, are one, Christ Himself. We cannot touch Christ, but we can touch the Word; we cannot sense Christ, but we can sense the Spirit. The Spirit and the Word are the two means by which we abide in Christ.

THE ALL-INCLUSIVE SPIRIT

In this New Testament age, whenever we touch the Spirit of God, we touch the all-inclusive Spirit of Jesus Christ. This enriched Spirit is pictured for us in the compound anointing ointment described in Exodus 30:23-25. You may remember the meaning of the spices that were added to the hin of oil; we discussed this in chapter 8 of this book. Myrrh signifies death; cinnamon, the sweetness of the death of Christ. Calamus is a plant that grows out of the mud

high into the air; it speaks of resurrection. Cassia is an aromatic plant, used in ancient times to repel insects and especially snakes; it represents the sweet fragrance of resurrection. In this ointment, portraying the Spirit, are the death of Christ, His resurrection, His divinity (one, the measure of oil), His humanity (four, the number of spices), the Trinity (three units of five hundred shekels), and the Godhead. When we have this ointment, we have an all-inclusive dose.

Thus, every time we touch the Spirit properly, we experience this death and resurrection. In the Holy Spirit there is a killing factor and a resurrecting factor. I may find, for example, that my wife is bothering me too much; I get tired of her tight control over my eating. I want forty dumplings, but she restricts me to thirty, telling me that is all she has made. It is so aggravating. Well, when I get into the Word and truly touch the Spirit, what happens to my precious dumplings? My appetite for them is killed. What happens to all the bad feelings toward my wife? The negative thoughts are all gone. When I touch the Spirit, there is first a killing, and then there is something rising up, bringing me into resurrection. Once I am in resurrection, however much she restricts my eating will not affect me. But, sad to say, the sense of resurrection seems to vanish after a couple of days. I feel low. When I look at my wife, I can see she has not changed at all. I have changed, but here she is, still the same. (Actually, I am still the same!) Then again I must seek the Spirit, experience the killing, and be brought into resurrection. This is the way to grow in life.

THE ALL-INCLUSIVE WORD

What is true of the Spirit is also true of the Bible. There is both a killing factor and a nourishing factor in the Word.

I was raised in China, where the teachings of Confucius were widespread. His book *The Great Learning* aims at developing the natural virtues, even the conscience, which he terms “the bright virtue.” I remember hearing missionaries say that the teachings of Confucius were just like the teachings of the Bible. As one who had been reared and educated in Christianity, I was troubled; why did we need the Bible if its teachings were already in the writings of Confucius? After some comparative study I concluded that the ethical teachings were the same: honor your parents, love your neighbor, be

kind, and be humble. At that time I could not distinguish between the virtues advocated by Confucius and those revealed in the Bible.

Now I am clear. The Great Learning is just a cultivation of the natural virtues. The Bible, on the other hand, kills your natural virtues and then brings in the divine virtues of Christ. The more you read the Bible, the more killing you will get. From my experience the killing is first of the negative things, like pride, hatred, and jealousy. Once these are dealt with, the finer killing begins—of your love, humility, patience, and niceness. You may protest that the Lord is killing such desirable qualities, but these must be dealt with until eventually you yourself are also killed. Everything in our natural make-up must be killed.

When I saw this, I fell before the Lord and said, “Lord, forgive me. I will take the killing. I want You to cut this poor self into pieces.” And He did. By the Word in the Bible I was killed and cut into pieces. But the Bible not only kills; it also resurrects. Here rather than a cultivated bright natural virtue, we have the resurrected Christ living in us.

Day by day we must contact the Word and touch the Spirit; both do the same work of killing us and then resurrecting us. We must live this way during the week, then bring this crucified and resurrected life to the meetings. When our meetings are such a showcase of the riches of Christ, thirsty ones will be attracted, and all the members will grow, be knit together, and be built up.

THE VANITY OF “A GOOD TIME”

In some of the churches an atmosphere has come in encouraging the young people just to have a good time—singing, shouting, playing guitars. If this is your aim, how can the young people be solidly built up? Within a few years the Lord’s recovery will vanish. The church should be (1) a home with a family, (2) a school, (3) a hospital, and (4) a camp to train an army. In the Lord’s recovery we do not want our meetings to be places of entertainment; that is the way of Babylon. If the young people are built up with the Word day after day, week after week, other serious-minded young ones will be attracted, and the future of the recovery will be bright.

WHY BE STARVING?

Man must not “live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out through the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). The Bible is likened to food. Food is not for you to understand but to eat. If you go to a restaurant, you do not just read the menu and then feel that you have finished your meal. How much have you been eating of the Word? I am afraid that many of you are starving!

It is a necessity that you have a “breakfast” of the Word daily. Do not say that you are too weak to do this regularly. Do not quote Romans 7:18: “To will is present with me, but to work out the good is not.” Romans 7 is referring to the overcoming of sin; we are talking about a necessity of life, like breathing or eating. This “breakfast,” though you may have no sense of it, will nourish, enlighten, water, and strengthen you.

Do not be casual about your Christian life. Paul says, “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” (1 Cor. 9:26-27). If you are a loose Christian, you may become disapproved.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE RECOVERY

“Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint” (Prov. 29:18). For us to run a straight course, we need a vision. If the vision is clear, we shall not be misled. After answering some questions, I would like us to consider together what the Lord’s recovery is.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: Romans 16:17 says, “Mark those who make divisions.” How can we keep the oneness yet not open ourselves to a negative element?

Answer: This is a clear principle given us in Romans 16. We surely need to be on the alert regarding divisive ones. Yet I would encourage you to love the saints more than watch for divisiveness. The love should occupy perhaps eighty percent of us, but the watchfulness only twenty percent. Otherwise, our attitude toward one another will be one of suspicion rather than care. If we emphasize loving rather than being watchful, we may be able to help a brother who shows signs of being divisive.

Question: What can we do when language causes a separation?

Answer: This kind of separation is best helped by providing interpretation.

Question: What should we do if we see that someone is divisive?

Answer: A surgeon’s decision to operate is not easily made. He hesitates to sacrifice some part of the body unless this is essential to maintain the life. It is not simple for us to handle the sickness of divisiveness in the Body either. As members of the church, we should be keen to sense if there are some brothers who are subtly and secretly divisive. Though we should not be blind or ignorant, we should nonetheless be loving toward such brothers. Because we want to cover and preserve them, we may in a loving tone hint to them that some are aware of their divisive intent. A thief will not steal if he knows that everyone has been alerted and is watching for him. By such a loving way we may quench the divisive fire.

The elders especially must be wise and loving not to cut off one who is secretly working to cause division. When a member of our body is sick, we must tenderly care for that part, seeking the best medication or even an operation to heal it. We have followed this practice in the past and have seen many divisive ones healed and recovered. Never again did they practice their subtle undermining; they realized they had been healed of a sickness.

It is not a simple matter to practice the church life and to keep the oneness. Others may not see through the divisive one's subtle ways. If you have the insight and the wisdom, you will keep tabs on him, watching his movements and his contacts with different ones. Then, as the Lord leads, you may have a hidden opportunity to say some "inoculating" words to help heal him of his "illness." You will also need to be wise to know when to talk with the elders about his situation. You may need to wait a month before the time will be ripe for exposing the matter to the elders. How much we have to learn about keeping the oneness!

Question: Should there be different levels in the church? When you come to visit, for example, shouldn't everyone be invited to meet with you instead of just the important ones?

Answer: I am sorry to say that this type of question indicates an unhealthy condition. Whatever the state of the church—whether there are two levels or twenty-two levels—you should have no criticism and nothing to say. As long as you talk about levels, you are opinionated and a factor of damage.

The truth of the matter—not my opinion—is that every family has levels. There is a grandparents' level, a parents', an older children's, and a younger children's. When we invite saints to our house, I do not ask my two-year-old granddaughter to come and join our conversation. It would be silly of her to protest that I am keeping levels. The church is a family. Surely the elders are not on the same level as those who were saved just last week. There is also the level of those who serve as deacons and deaconesses. There are some who bear the burden to minister from the Word. Your level depends on your growth in the Lord.

In 1 John 2 the apostle John distinguishes between fathers (vv. 13-14), young men (v. 14), and young children (vv. 13, 18). The fathers have the experience of knowing the Father, so they have become fathers. The young

men are strong and have overcome the evil one because of having the word of God abiding in them. The young children—even the young children—have the anointing within.

Be careful not to allow democracy to creep into the church. We may all be brothers, but we are not the same age. Four-year-old boys cannot be trusted to cook a meal; they may make a mess even if you ask them only to empty the trash. Our level in the church is according to our spiritual growth.

Question: What shall we do about children's meeting?

Answer: First, go to the elders and pray with them. This is your family; it is not for me to say what to do with your little ones. Have fellowship and prayer with the elders and see what you should do.

A CONTRAST

For us to appreciate the Lord's recovery, it is helpful to know what the background is. Such a contrast will help us to be clear. The background of the Lord's recovery is Christianity, whose characteristics are confusion and division. These characteristics first appeared at Babel (Gen. 11:1-9) or Babylon (Gk. for *Babel*), whose very name means "confusion." This is why in the book of Revelation the Lord called today's Christendom Babylon the Great (17:5; 18:21).

First Corinthians 12:12 tells us what the Lord would have instead of the confusion and division: "As the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ." *One* stands out here in contrast to division, and *Christ* in contrast to confusion. This is what the Lord's recovery is: an answer to confusion and division.

EARLY CHURCH HISTORY

By reading the New Testament you can see that even in the time of the apostle Paul (around A.D. 60–70) confusion had begun to creep in. On the day of Pentecost there was nothing but Christ in the church. But before long, the subtle serpent, Satan, introduced Judaism. Religion stands at the top of human culture, and among the religions none can exceed Judaism. It teaches the worship of God, morality, ethics, proper social relations, and good human

living. Only something attractive like this could have gained an entrance into the church, which is on the highest level. If I had some dollar bills and someone wanted to add a counterfeit, he would not add just any piece of paper. The counterfeit would not be taken unless it resembled the dollar bills in every respect; it would need an expert to discern that it was false. It was because Judaism seemed so close to Christianity that it was able to creep in. Even today historians say that Christianity is the offspring of Judaism.

Paul also had to contend with Greek philosophy. Philosophy ranks next to religion, and Greek philosophy was the highest. At the end of the first century, then, the so-called church had within it Christ, Judaism, and Greek philosophy. Galatians was written to deal with Judaism; Colossians, to deal with philosophy.

The third source of confusion made its appearance in the second century. This was the satanic snare of Christology, the study of Christ's Person, undertaken by the so-called church fathers. From the studies of these great, fundamental Christian teachers arose various schools regarding Christ. One said that Christ was not God till after His resurrection. Another said that Christ was God but not a man in the flesh. The result of these Christological studies, on such a seemingly good scriptural topic, was actual division, no longer just confusion.

There seemed no way to solve the problem till Constantine the Great summoned the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325. As emperor, he utilized Christianity to appease the warring factions within the kingdom. This worldly Constantine presided over that council, which resolved the theological differences and produced the Nicene Creed, accepted by both Catholics and Protestants.

Darkness followed. Several centuries were even called the Dark Ages. Then the Reformation under Martin Luther brought in the truth of justification by faith. Regrettably, it also brought in the state churches. From this time on, there was the Church of England (Anglican or Episcopalian), the Church of Germany (Lutheran), and a national church in most of the northern European countries. Not too long after these were formed, private churches, like the Baptist, Presbyterian, and Methodist, came into existence.

Now here we are in the twentieth century, surrounded, even in this city, by all these divisions. By the Lord's mercy we are in His recovery. If we do not clearly see what this means, we may become a continuation or extension of Christianity. If that is all we are, it is meaningless for us to continue to meet; we may as well go back and join them.

WHY NOT REJOIN CHRISTIANITY?

We cannot go back, because the Lord has a desire. At the end of the first century He said, "Behold, I come quickly" (Rev. 22:12). Why has He still not come? He does not yet have what He wants. He is after a Body to express Him and a dear bride to satisfy His heart. Do you think the Body and the bride can be found among today's divisions and confusions? How could the bride be prepared there? The Lord must have something other than Christianity, apart from its denominations, if He is to have His Body built and His bride prepared.

Do you see that the Lord is out to recover His church from confusion and division, back to Himself and back to oneness? In the early years of the Lord's recovery in this country, from 1962 to, say, 1973, those of us who were part of it can testify that among us there was no confusion and no division. Originally, there was only Christ. What life, peace, and enjoyment there were in those years!

SIGNS OF CONTAMINATION

Have you sensed something amiss in the Lord's recovery these last few years? I fear that the old history is being repeated. Some other factors besides Christ have come in. It is damaging to accept others' concepts and opinions. Anything other than Christ, even something as good as Judaism, Greek philosophy, or the study of Christ, is a factor of confusion. If we would preserve the Lord's recovery from contamination, we must turn away from our concepts and come back simply to Christ.

What is a concept? It is hard not to offend when we deal with this matter, because our concepts are highly regarded by us. Here are two concepts being spread among the saints: attending the meetings regularly is religious; going early to the meetings is legal. Whether such concepts are right or wrong is not the issue, but as long as you hold and preach them, you cause division. You

bring in confusion. If the saints want to come to the meetings early, they have the freedom. If some want to come later, let them. Why bother the saints with your concepts? You create barriers and destroy the peace.

Consider what has happened to you since you began paying attention to concepts. Is your enjoyment of Christ greater now? If you are quiet before the Lord, I believe you will sense that since being diverted from Him to concern about which meetings to attend and what time to come, your enjoyment of Christ has been less.

THE CONTENT OF THE RECOVERY

It is not too late to come back and say, “Lord, for Your sake I drop my concepts, whether they are good or bad, useful or useless. I want only to go along with You, Your church, Your recovery, and all the saints. You are the First and the Last; You are everything. Whatever concept I have, I would put it aside.” Let us all look to Him for grace that we may be brought back. The content of the Lord’s recovery is only Christ, nothing else.

He as our life is the material of which the church is built.

THE STANDING OF THE CHURCH

Besides the material for a building, you also need ground on which to build.

There was a gentleman in China who was having a house constructed. Unbeknownst to him, a portion of it was being erected on his neighbor’s property. That neighbor bided his time till the house was finished; then he went to the gentleman and told him about the house’s improper location. Here was a house designed and built exactly according to its owner’s plan, yet he lost it because it was on the wrong ground.

The ground or standing of the Lord’s recovery is the genuine oneness.

I have heard of some forming a little group in their locality and meeting by themselves. They decide together, on the basis of some kind of feeling, which church meetings they will attend. The other church meetings they do not attend. Is this keeping the oneness? Is Christ divided? Do you come only to meetings that suit your taste? Can the church be built according to your individual or group preference?

The church is built upon oneness. Anything other than Christ, however much we treasure it, we leave outside, because bringing in something besides Him will cause division. There will be no confusion and no division if we have regard for only these two things: Christ as life and the oneness. The church is not built upon a style of meeting or upon aggressive people.

Dear ones, as you love the Lord and His recovery, be willing to drop any concept about how to meet. Some may shout, some may sleep, but you just enjoy the Lord and praise Him no matter how foreign the meeting is to your taste.

This is the recovery of Christ upon the oneness. Such a vision will keep us on a straight course.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

LEADERSHIP AMONG THE SAINTS

In the New Testament economy nothing is more serious than insulting the headship of Christ. In the previous chapter we pointed out that the church is built with Christ as life and with oneness as its ground. There is one further aspect. For the church to be safeguarded, it must be built according to the truth. Of all the truths related to the church, the most important one is the headship of Christ. Life is crucial, oneness is important, but without the headship of Christ the church is not safeguarded. As some of the questions below illustrate, this matter is related to leadership among the saints.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: Why do we who follow the churches turn first this way and then that way?

Answer: Too often it is true that we sway back and forth. With no sense of direction eventually we are all disappointed. This needless turning first to the right and then to the left is a sickness in the churches. The cause is the failure to practice the truth. We must all come back not only to life and oneness but also to the truth. Any movement, any direction, or any speaking that leads to a hierarchy is an insult to the headship of Christ; as such, it must be rejected. By practicing the truth in this way, each local church will be safeguarded from fluctuating and be kept to the one goal.

Question: What is the function of a full-time worker?

Answer: According to the Bible, for one to be a full-time worker, he must have a ministry or burden from the Lord that occupies all his time, and he must also be in an environment that can provide him with his living. You recall that Paul was fully occupied by the Lord's work. After a certain time, however, his environment did not supply his material needs, and he resumed his occupation of tentmaker (Acts 18:3).

Question: How can one serve and even help others to serve in a proper way in spirit and under the headship of Christ?

Answer: With the church service the less direction there is, the better. There is, however, the practical need to know, for example, where the mops and cleaning supplies are. If you can help by saying where they are, such a direction is not an offense to Christ's headship. Be careful, on the other hand, not to issue kingly directives: "Sisters, you can go clean over there. Then go and help those downstairs to finish." This is a matter of the attitude of the spirit. If you help others because they need some help, that is good. If you help others in the spirit of being the service group leader, that is poor.

That we should not take the role of head is a far-reaching truth. It governs the elders, the co-workers, the saints, and the churches. It will kill the ambition that is in all of us as fallen human beings.

Question: Then if you see the need and take the initiative, is that in the same realm as taking the headship?

Answer: It is the Lord's place to initiate. To bring to the Lord what we propose and ask His blessing on it, as is the common practice in Christianity, is an insult to His headship. We must respect His lordship by letting Him initiate; unless He does, we refrain from doing anything.

Question: Suppose when you were in our locality you were not speaking the truth. How would the brothers deal with the situation?

Answer: In order to avoid confusion, the elders would probably not interrupt the meeting. But there would be no second meeting. After that first meeting, the elders would invite me to their home and tell me in a gracious way that I was not speaking according to the truth and that the church could not take it; would I please refrain from going further?

It would not be too good for the administration of the church to step in and stop the speaker, but for a single saint to do so is according to the Bible. ("As to prophets, two or three should speak, and the others discern," 1 Cor. 14:29.) A saint may interrupt the speaker by saying, "Brother So-and-so, I have a question to ask. You have said such-and-such, but it seems to me this is not according to the truth. Please prove it to me." If all the churches and all the saints are this alert, think how careful the speaker will be.

On the other hand, a church that takes whatever I say just because I say it is not healthy and does not know the truth. If you follow what I tell you, it must be because you have checked that it is according to the truth. It must not be a matter of following a man but of keeping the divine truth. If what is spoken is checked out by every saint and by the church to see that it is according to the truth, we will be kept from falsehood.

Be sure your questioning is done in spirit. In the church everything must be genuine and true, but it must also be in spirit. If you challenge a speaker, you must do so in your spirit with love. We are not opposing someone; we are studying the truth. Let us go on, then, by growing in life, by keeping the oneness, and by seeking after the truth.

Question: When something is bothering us and we want to take that to the Lord, that is not the same as going to the Lord with a purpose, is it?

Answer: The best contact with the Lord is simple. Whatever burdens or problems I have, I come to Him without any. I lay them aside to come to Him with no purpose. The truth of the matter is that the Lord is bearing our burdens. A number of times I have gone to Him with my burdens, and He has said, "Foolish child, why do you bear the burdens that are on My shoulder? Just enjoy Me."

This is a basic lesson for our whole Christian life. If we learn to cast our burden on the Lord, we will grow. Do not think that if you do not bear the burden, no one will. The Lord will bear it.

ORGANIZATION

Among any group of people there is a need for organization. Though we say that the church has none, there are practical matters to be taken care of and relationships to be worked out. Who will open the doors of the meeting hall? What relationship should there be among the churches in the Bay Area? Who should take the lead among the elders in a local church? What is the relationship between the church and the work?

All these matters, which apparently concern organization in the church, are related to the headship of Christ. Any relationship that insults or damages the

headship of Christ is wrong. We cannot work out these relationships properly without understanding the meaning of His headship.

THE UNIQUE HEADSHIP

Of all the members of our physical body, only one is the head. Is the shoulder the head of the arm? the arm the head of the hand? the hand of the fingers? the fingers of the nails? No! There is no subhead in the body, as medical doctors will confirm. The head gives orders even to the fingernails directly.

God will not allow anyone to share the headship with Christ. The elders should be careful about claiming to express His headship; they do not have even an indirect share in that headship. The Catholic teaching that the popes represent Christ as the successors of Peter is a blasphemy. But the denominations and even the small Christian groups also insult the headship of Christ by having a head.

A SHIFTING LEADERSHIP

Was not Peter the leader in the early days of the church? Yes, he surely was, but please notice that his leadership was not official, nor permanent, nor organizational. When Peter stood up with the eleven on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14), he was the leading one. When his name is mentioned with the other apostles in the Gospels or in the first part of Acts, it is always first (e.g., Matt. 10:2; Luke 6:13-14; Acts 1:13; 3:1; 5:29). The reason was that during those periods Peter's spiritual measure exceeded that of the others.

However, notice the order of names in Galatians 2:9: James, Cephas [Peter], and John. Why has James replaced Peter as the first one? Peter, as the rest of the chapter recounts, slipped in his spiritual standing out of fear of the Jews. Though he well knew that there was no difference between the Jewish and Gentile believers, he withdrew from eating with the Gentiles when the Jews came down from Jerusalem. Paul, who was younger in the faith, opposed him to his face for this failure to walk according to the truth of the gospel. At this point the leadership was in the hands of James.

In the account given in Acts 15, again James was the leading one. In that conference Peter had something to say and so did Paul, but it was James who

gave the final word in verse 19: “Therefore I judge that we do not harass those from the Gentiles who are turning to God.”

Another example of this shifting leadership is the case of Barnabas and Saul. It was Barnabas who brought in Saul (9:26-27) and whose name was mentioned first when they were called by the Holy Spirit to the work (13:2). But the sequence of names changed in verse 43, indicating that between the two apostles the leadership depended upon the spiritual measure, not official appointment.

ELDERS

“God has placed some in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then works of power, then gifts of healing, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues” (1 Cor. 12:28). *Helps* refers to the services of the deacons; *administrations*, to the functions of the elders. Why did Paul list the services of the deacons ahead of the functions of the elders? (Note that *various kinds of tongues* is last; that is where tongue-speaking always is.) It may be that at Corinth the elders thought too much in terms of rank. Paul wanted them to know that they were not the head. It is best not to say that the elders represent the headship of Christ; the Scriptures do not say so, and they must not think of themselves as subheads.

Peter underscored this in his first Epistle: “Nor as lording it over your allotments but by becoming patterns of the flock” (5:3). The elders are not leaders but examples. When I was in Scotland, I saw how the shepherds took care of their flocks. Whenever a sheep went astray, the shepherds would order one of the sheepdogs after it to bring it back into line. This is not the kind of shepherding Peter is referring to. If there is some cleaning to be done, for example, the elders should take the lead to do it, not ask others to take care of it.

The Lord said, “Neither be called instructors, because One is your Instructor, the Christ” (Matt. 23:10). “You are all brothers” (v. 8). These verses indicate that in the New Testament economy God does not want any permanent, official leadership.

In the New Testament the eldership is always plural. Which elder will be number one depends on two matters. As the example of Peter illustrates, it is

decided according to the spiritual measure and condition. The elders' positions may vary from week to week. The one who was up last week may be fighting with his wife this week, and the leadership may pass to another elder. Leadership also depends upon spiritual ability. An elder may have ability in a certain area; he will take the lead in that, while in another area another elder will be responsible.

By such a flexible leadership the church is kept from hierarchy. It is also safeguarded from error. If Peter had been an official leader, he might have introduced a wrong concept about Judaism during his time of weakness.

Elsewhere in human society there is no such leadership as this. How wise is our God! This leadership is plural, not single; temporary, not fixed; conditional, not organizational; spiritual, not official. It has position but no rank. "The greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matt. 23:11). If you want to be great among the saints, you must be a servant. For the service of the church you may take the lead to vacuum the carpet, but this "leadership" has no rank.

Hebrews 13:17 admonishes us to "obey the ones leading you and submit to them." We are to obey the leading ones in serving, but this does not make the leading ones lords, having rank over the saints. That would make them the head and insult the headship of Christ.

THE MINISTRY

For over fifteen years the recovery has been in this country. Throughout this period I have made it a point never to give orders to anyone. I am not a leader and I have no rank, though some of you may so regard me. I am a bonds slave of Christ to serve His household. Frequently I have been asked to advise various churches. Individuals have often sought my advice. In fact, many have begged me to tell them what to do. In every case I have refused, because for me to give an order is to insult my Lord and slight His headship. You must receive your orders directly from the Head. All I can tell you is to pray and get your directions from Him.

THE CHURCHES

All the local churches, regardless of their size, are on the same level. Do not think that Anaheim is the lead church. What happened to Jerusalem when the early churches began to look to it for direction? The Lord sent Titus with his army in A.D. 70 to destroy it. There is no ground for any church to be over another.

THE WORK

According to the Bible, the work is regional. Peter worked in the Jewish region, whereas Paul worked among the Gentile areas. These two works in two regions were on the same level and were not merged into one unit. A hierarchy would have arisen if they had been combined. The regions are not to be merged. Regions of the work exist today in Brazil, Germany, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia. In the United States also there are regions of the work where churches have been raised up: Ohio and Texas are examples. If we organize these regions into one unit, it will lead to hierarchy with an official leadership. This would insult Christ's headship.

CHRIST—THE QUALIFIED HEAD

How important it is for us all to learn to go to the Lord and take orders directly from Him! God has ascribed the headship only to Him. This truth is a safeguard to the church life. Once a hierarchy was established in Christianity, all kinds of evil, devilish things were brought in. If we take Christ as the content of the church and the genuine oneness as its ground, and are careful to practice the truth, the church will be steady and kept from evil.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

GROWING UP INTO HIM

We need to grow spiritually. In Ephesians 4:13-16 the matter of growth is mentioned three times. We must become a full-grown man, no longer little children. Then we are to “grow up into Him in all things.” Last, the whole Body must grow (“causes the growth of the Body”). Let us answer some questions before we consider how the Body can grow.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: How can we deny ourselves?

Answer: When we read the Scripture that tells us to deny ourselves, our natural response is to determine to put our self aside. Such a response is not biblical but ethical. Confucius taught self-denial. When the learned Chinese believers read Matthew 16, their background of ethical teachings leads them to react, “Lord, from today I am no more for myself. I will deny myself.” This is the way of self-endeavor.

What is the biblical way? “If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me” (v. 24). Do you see what follows *deny himself*? It says to take up the cross. To deny the self is to take up the cross. When Christ was crucified, He included you. Receive and abide in the fact that you were crucified with Him. “Lord, thank You that I do not need to deny myself by my own effort. I just accept and stand on the fact that on the cross I was crucified with You. It is no longer I but Christ who lives in me.” The real denial of the self is to remain under His crucifixion.

Question: I think we do need your sharing with us to be more legal about reading the Word, but there is a problem that crops up. We tend to pressure others instead of just taking the word for ourselves.

Answer: It is not helpful to pressure others. If you are faithful to practice contacting the Lord every day in the Word, there will be a change in you that will have an effect on those around you.

While my brother and I were studying in college, I got saved (at the age of nineteen) and began to love the Bible. I lost interest in the activities we had been doing together and spent most of that summer at home reading the Bible. My younger brother, who was fifteen at the time and quite naughty, observed the change taking place in me, and on his own he too began to read the Bible. As a result, he was saved. His salvation came about not because of anyone's exhorting him but by the transmission of life from me to him.

If you will go to the Lord for ten minutes every morning and read the Word, you will be nourished, and your life will become shining. This change in you will minister life to others and attract them. Do not try to recruit them to study the Word.

Question: Is it good to practice releasing our spirit in the meetings even if we may be in our emotions and full of self?

Answer: It is better not to be so analytical. The practice is simple. Your spirit is gradually purified by the working of the Word and the Spirit in you. As you are contacting the Lord by these means, the negative things within you—your natural emotion, tendencies, dislikes, and such—are being killed, and the resurrection life is being ministered into you. Little by little you are being unconsciously transformed by the life of Christ. When you come to the meetings, just release your spirit in a genuine and spontaneous way. At first, your spirit is not so pure, but as the months go by, and the Word and the Spirit do their killing and resurrecting work, your spirit will be more and more purified.

Question: How can we have our will strengthened?

Answer: The Lord's presence, as you receive the Word and touch the Spirit, will benefit you in every way. This habit of contacting Him will make your mind sober, without your even thinking about it. It will affect your emotions too. You may not ask the Lord to strengthen your will, but contacting Him will strengthen it unconsciously.

Question: How is it that after so many years of being a Christian, there does not seem to be any change in me? Why do I still lose my temper? Should we expect to improve?

Answer: I understand your problem. Day after day a mother takes care of her children, but she can see very little change in them. She does not do anything purposely to make them grow, but by feeding them properly and by regulating their behavior, exercise, and sleep, little by little they are changing. The time will come when they will be full-grown.

Why is our Christian growth stunted? It is from our failure to take in the Word. Our eating and drinking are deficient. If the main point of our meetings is guitar playing and singing the psalms, we may enjoy ourselves, but year after year there will be no change in us. Just as our human life requires that we eat, drink, sleep, and breathe, so for our spiritual life we must contact the Lord and take in His Word. Our meetings must also supply us with the solid food. The result will be transformation. We will change not by any outward doing but by the life supply dispensed into us from within.

Question: What is the proper way to handle saints who would push “windy teachings” on you?

Answer: This requires wisdom. Arguing with them is worthless. If you realize they cannot take your word, do not say anything. But you must be nourished with the good things of the Word and be faithful to attend all the meetings. Time will show how you have grown, while those who persist in looseness remain degraded.

Question: A new sister is having a hard time reading the Word. How can I help her?

Answer: Help her to pray-read. All the new ones need such help to open them up.

Question: How does a young person get started on studying the Word?

Answer: As I have previously mentioned, you must have your morning nourishment and your daily reading of four chapters. For study, you first select a book. To get into it thoroughly, studying every word, you need reference books and some good translations, like Darby's and the American Standard Version. A Greek-English interlinear translation is a help, as is Young's or Strong's Concordance. By these means you will find out the proper meaning of the words. This will help you to interpret and expound the verses.

You must do this consecutively and continually, not according to your whim. After you have studied the book in this way, you may come back to study the major topics of that book. Romans, for example, has such topics as justification, reconciliation, sanctification, and glorification. You can study the distinction between sin and sins, between being in Adam and being in Christ, etc. By going through a book verse by verse and then studying its major subjects, you will become thoroughly familiar with it and gain the proper knowledge. Then take another book. It would especially benefit you to go through Matthew, John, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Hebrews, 1 John, and Revelation.

Question: In reading through the Old Testament, sometimes we go through a dry period. How can we get through this?

Answer: If this reading is part of your four chapters, just let it be dry. The genealogy in Matthew 1 may be a frustration to you, but reading it still profits you. The Scripture is God's breath; it refreshes you whether you understand it or not. Further, when you come around to read it the next time, or the third time, you will find that it is less and less dry. I have come to cherish those first seventeen verses in Matthew 1; they are rich and solid.

When you read the Bible, do not try to understand it. You may even need to pray sometimes, "Lord, help me not to try to understand Your Word." Just understand as much as you can; the next time you read it, you will have more understanding.

Question: How can we gain more knowledge of the Son of God (Eph. 4:13)? Would it be through studying, memorizing, pray-reading, or how?

Answer: I encourage you to read and study as much as you can. This is better than memorizing. From your reading and studying, you will spontaneously remember. The study of the Bible requires your whole mentality and much of your time. Whatever we do with the Bible is a benefit, but spending the time to study is more useful, I think, than exercising so much to memorize.

Your study of the Scriptures will be helped by referring to other books too, especially the recovery books that we have printed.

Question: When we come to contact the Lord, is it better to pray first or to read first?

Answer: Usually I find that I contact the Lord before I get to the Bible on my desk. By saying “O Lord” I am in the spirit already, before I open my Bible. Please do not think that meditating on Him is helpful. You will no sooner close your eyes to meditate than your thoughts will travel to your nagging mother-in-law, then on to London, to Hong Kong, or elsewhere. The prevailing way to touch the Lord is to be in the spirit and in the Word; then you will fully enjoy Christ.

THE SPIRIT AND OUR GROWTH

In chapter 4 of Ephesians I would call your attention first of all to the Spirit: “Being diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace” (v. 3). Without the Spirit there is no oneness. He is also the seal and guarantee of our salvation. We know that we are saved because the Spirit is within. We may worry sometimes, the way the unbelievers do, but in the midst of our fretting, the sense comes that there is no need to worry, that we can be at peace. It is this same Spirit within that makes us brothers and sisters. Without Him we are Gentiles, not children of God. It is by His constraint that we gather for meetings rather than seek worldly entertainment and excitement. We are here because we have the same Spirit, flowing in us just as electricity flows to the lights in the ceiling and unites them in shining.

The Spirit is mysterious. If you say that He is great, I say that He is small. If you say that He is kind, I say that sometimes He would rather trouble you. When you would be at peace, He gives you no peace. Yet when He seems unkind, He is being kind to you. This is the wonderful Spirit by whose working within we grow.

TWO KINDS OF ONENESS

Verse 13 of Ephesians 4 says, “Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith.” The third verse says, “Being diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit.” We must keep the oneness of the Spirit until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith. We “drive the car” of the oneness of the Spirit until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith.

THE FAITH

The faith referred to in verse 13 does not mean your believing but rather the object of what you believe. An abstract of our faith would be: Our God, who is triune, became a man by the name of Jesus. He went to the cross and died for us, for our sins. After three days He was resurrected from the dead and ascended to the heavens, where He now is as our Redeemer, Savior, and Lord. At the same time, in His resurrection He became the life-giving Spirit, came into us, and now lives within us as our life, and His blood cleanses us of all our sins.

This is what we all believe. We have the same faith and the same Spirit. These are what make us one. Whatever our age, nationality, or background, we are one because we have the same Spirit and the same faith.

WIND OF TEACHING

Teaching, as verse 14 says, is a wind that tosses the children to and fro. Sometimes a teaching may bring in a storm or tornado or whirlwind. If you have been carried about with the winds that have blown through the recovery these past two years, it is an indication that you are a child. They may have blown you to the movies or kept you in bed when you should have been having morning watch or encouraged you to despise the elders and be loose in your daily living. What will save you from these winds? Your salvation lies in growing up. You are a child playing with toys. That is all right for a while, but you need to grow up. “Be no longer little children.”

THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE SON OF GOD

We also need to arrive at the oneness “of the full knowledge of the Son of God” (v. 13). We do not have sufficient knowledge of the Lord Jesus. What, for example, does Colossians reveal concerning Christ? (See chapter 12.) We need to know Him in all these different aspects. Such solid, detailed knowledge of Him will save us from the wind of teaching.

THE TRUTH

The last matter that affects our growth is found in verse 15: “Holding to truth in love.” As we hold to truth in love, we will “grow up into Him in all things.”

There is no way to grow without getting into the Word in a serious way. That is why I have urged you to set aside time for this every day. Some need to study the Word in a thorough way so that in times to come they may be able to teach and shepherd in the church. Return to the Word. Follow in life and truth. Follow in knowledge and experience, that we may “grow up into Him in all things” until we arrive at “a full-grown man.”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

ONENESS

The matter of oneness is a common topic among Christians today. We are one not because we have common concepts, similar interests, and the same goal, nor because we are doing the same kind of work. Though there is a oneness that arises from the factors people have in common, this is not the genuine oneness. Any unity other than the genuine oneness is a oneness in division. For example, there is a oneness to be found among Catholics or Presbyterians or those engaged in a Christian work; without some kind of oneness people could not work together.

THE ONLY SOURCE OF ONENESS

Outside of Christ there is no true oneness. Every true believer has Christ within. Apart from Him no two human beings are truly one. There is no need to say that the Chinese cannot be one with the Americans, nor the French with the Germans; even the Yankees cannot be one with the Texans! To come even closer to home, what husband and wife are one apart from Christ? He is the only real oneness.

LIVING IN GOD

The Lord prayed, “That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that You have sent Me” (John 17:21). The secret for believers to be one is for them to be in the Triune God. Christians do not have the genuine oneness because they are not living in Him, though positionally they are in Him.

ONE BY BEING IN HIS GLORY

In the next verse, John 17:22, the Lord prayed further about the oneness: “And the glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, even as We are one.” What glory is referred to here? There is something in the universe that is called the glory of the Triune God. The glory that the Father gave the Son, the Son has given to the believers for the very purpose of their all being one. Whatever glory means, it is surely something

just of God. Glory is God expressed. When we are in the expression of God, we are one. Electricity is hidden until we turn the lights on. The shining lights then become one in the glory, the expression, of electricity.

IN THE TRIUNE GOD

To have the genuine oneness, you must be in the Triune God. Positionally and doctrinally all believers are surely in Him. In experience, however, where are you? Are you in the Triune God in your daily living? in your family life? in your relationship with your mother-in-law? when it is your turn to wash the dishes? Most of the time, we must admit, we are in ourselves—in our choice, our preference, our flesh, in jealousy, hatred, or pride. While we may be aware that we need to be in the genuine oneness, we cannot attain this because we do not live in the Triune God.

Over these many years I have seen a good many saints who really loved the Lord come into the recovery, stay for a while, and then leave to become part of some division. There were even some dear Christian co-workers on the mainland of China who went out from us to set up a division. The simple reason for such a regrettable departure was that they failed to live in the Triune God. If you are not in fear and trembling to live in Him day after day, the time may come when you too will cause a division.

IN HIS EXPRESSION

Just to live in the Triune God is not adequate. For the oneness to be doubly secure we must also be in God's expression. Our work together here is to express Him. It is not for the accomplishment of our own purpose. We all have our own intention, our own aim, and our own goal. All these are killed in the expression of the Triune God. To whatever extent they are not killed, to that measure we are not secure in the genuine oneness. If our goal is anything other than the expression of the Triune God, sooner or later this other goal will cause division.

Why is it that Christians cannot be one? What is the cause of the countless, endless divisions? All the denominations have had splits. Even a small group, after it meets together for just two or three years, will end up divided into perhaps three groups. This divisiveness is because most Christians do not live in Christ and do not care for the expression of God. Their low concern is for

their taste and their preference. Their high concern is for the achievement of their goals. Because they care for these things and not for the expression of God, the genuine oneness is not secure with them.

THE TRIUNE GOD IN US

The Lord's prayer about the oneness reached a further stage in John 17:23: "I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one." Notice that in verse 21 the prayer was that we might be in the Triune God. In this verse the prayer is that the Triune God may be in us. For Him to be in us is more experiential.

Is the Triune God in you? Or are you occupied by a girlfriend? your wife? a new pair of shoes? your children? your savings account? If these other things are in you, there is no room for God. Christians may blame doctrinal differences, but the real reason they are not one is that the Triune God is not in them, they do not care for His expression, and they do not live in Him.

From verse 23 we can see that even if we are in the genuine oneness, we still need to be perfected. The Triune God is in you to work in you until you are perfected. You may say that you are one with others, but your oneness is shallow because you are still so natural, so full of the flesh, so selfish. Once the Triune God has worked in you to rid you of the old man, you will be perfected into one.

Surely there is a oneness in the church in your locality, but that oneness is not so high and not so secure. We all need the Triune God to be more deeply in us, that we may be perfected into one. If Peter and Paul and Mary were here, they would all be thoroughly one. Our oneness may be genuine, but it is fragile because our living in the Triune God is shallow, and we do not care enough about His being expressed.

Pray regarding the points on oneness covered in these three verses:

- (1) Verse 21 stresses our being in the Triune God.
- (2) Verse 22 says that it is the glory of God that makes us one.
- (3) Verse 23 emphasizes that the Triune God is in us to perfect us into one.

As you pray, you will see the need of grace to keep the oneness. Today your oneness is spontaneous and natural. When the test comes, however, you will find that you cannot stand it. If you do not realize the need for the genuine oneness, eventually you will drop out of the church life even if you have been in the recovery for many years.

THE NATURE OF THE RECOVERY

What differentiates the Lord's recovery from Christianity is our nature and standing. The church has Christ Himself as its nature. In contrast to Christianity, it is not an organization built upon certain concepts but an entity with Christ as its content and nature. Christianity is composed of divisions and has sundry things as its nature. As for our standing, the ground of the church is the genuine oneness. If we miss this, we are no longer the church but rather a continuation of Christianity. To remain in the Lord's recovery we must keep Christ as life and the oneness as our standing.

KEEPING THE ONENESS

Ephesians 4:3 refers to the oneness of the Spirit, whereas 4:13 refers to the oneness of the faith. When you believed in the Lord Jesus, the Spirit of God entered into you. That Spirit, in you and in so many other believers, is the very oneness. The lights in the ceiling are individual units until the electric current is turned on; then they become one. They are not one in themselves but in the electricity. Believers likewise are one by the current of the Spirit in all of them. How can we keep this oneness of the Spirit, which is already ours?

The faith in verse 13 means what we believe; we listed some of the items of our faith in the previous chapter. These beliefs concerning Christ's Person and redemptive work comprise our Christian faith. Because we hold these beliefs in common, we have oneness.

ADDING OUR CONCEPTS

Unfortunately, when we are saved and come into the church, we bring some things from our past with us. As time progresses, we also pick up other things and treat them as items of the faith, though they are not.

Suppose, for example, that there are four students who are saved during a gospel campaign. The Spirit enters into all of them; thus, they have the

oneness of the Spirit. Further, they all believe the same thing: they have the same faith. One of them, however, a doctoral student, comes into the church with some peculiar concept; eventually, his concept becomes a great problem to the church. Another student decides to study theology after being saved. He quits his secular studies and goes to a so-called theological seminary, where he is indoctrinated with modernism. The third one starts attending a Baptist Church and becomes persuaded that immersion as practiced by the Baptists is the only right kind. The fourth one gets involved in speaking in tongues.

On the day the four were saved, they were one. But now, if they come together, surely they will fight. The doctoral student will defend his strange concept; the theological student, his modernistic interpretations; the Baptist, the practice of immersion; and the Pentecostalist, the speaking in tongues. What has happened to the oneness? In addition to the oneness of the Spirit and the oneness of the faith, they have taken on something. Actually, what they have picked up as their choice is a toy and reveals that they are just children. Yes, one may be earning a Ph.D. degree, but in the Lord he is a little boy who likes to play with his toy. The other “children” need their “toys” too, whether modernistic teachings, insistence on immersion, or speaking in tongues.

Verses 13 and 14 of Ephesians 4 remind us that when we arrive at the oneness of the faith, we will “be no longer little children tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching.” All these doctrines are winds blowing us from the real oneness.

As you grow, you will lose interest in your toys. After you grow up in the Lord, you will find that the age of toys is over. Then you will have the oneness of the Spirit and the oneness of the faith. No doctrine will blow you away.

Remember that the church and its nature are Christ and that the standing of the church is the genuine oneness. Sooner or later you will find the winds blowing around you. Some in the charismatic movement may ask you if you have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and tell you how good it is to speak in tongues. Will you allow this wind of doctrine to blow you away from the genuine oneness?

CHARACTERISTICS OF A SECT

Christianity is made up of denominations. To be denominated means to be named. Any group that has a particular name, not common to all believers, is a division or a sect. If you are a Presbyterian or Methodist or Episcopalian, such a name is a sign that you are in a division.

Some groups may not have a distinctive name, yet they hold to a special doctrine. They may insist that all their members be immersed. They may even require a certain style of immersion before they will receive you as a brother. This is sectarian.

Other groups practice a special fellowship. Some Pentecostals, for example, will not accept you into their circle unless you speak in tongues.

To have a name, to have a special teaching, and to have a restricted fellowship are the characteristics of a sect. What is our name? What is the name of the church in your locality? We have no special name. The term *church* includes all believers, not a select number. If it is in Boston, it is the church in Boston. We could compare it to the moon; no matter what part of the earth the moon is over, it is still the moon. If we were to take a particular name, we would become a sect. Further, we have no particular teaching. We are not a tongue-speaking church, though many of us may have spoken in tongues in the past. Neither our teaching nor our fellowship are particular. We accept as brothers all those who believe in the Lord and are saved.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR DIVISION

Many Christians choose to hold on to their divisive name, their special doctrine, or their particular fellowship. Some have tried to bring tongue-speaking into the church, but if we become a tongue-speaking church, we become a sect. Others may believe in pretribulation rapture. It is all right for them to hold this doctrine, but if they try to preach it and make the whole church believe this way, such an attempt would lead to division.

For the oneness of the church, we must be common and general. Those Christians who insist on their special teaching or requirement for fellowship must bear the responsibility for the division that exists. When we came into the recovery, many of us dropped our particular teachings in order to share

the common oneness with the saints. We are still learning not to be particular but to receive all real Christians and thus keep the oneness.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

HOW TO CONDUCT OURSELVES IN THE HOUSE OF GOD (1)

The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy so that he would know “how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). If Timothy needed such instruction, how much more do we! Let us answer some questions before we consider our conduct in the house of God, which is the church.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: How can I have a proper regard for the headship of Christ in dealing with my husband? I have been in the recovery for only six months and am not clear about the right relationships between brothers and sisters in the church.

Answer: In ordinary times the wife must follow her husband. However, if a robber breaks into the house, you do not have to wait for your husband to phone the police. If your house is on fire, you do not have to submit to your husband to the extent of letting him stay asleep. To wake him up and to call the fire department is not overstepping your place. If someone in the church stands up and preaches that we should worship Satan, everyone, even the youngest sister, should rise up to protest.

Question: Even if we read the Bible over and over, I do not think we would ever come up with what you have shared with us regarding leadership among the saints [see chapter 15]. How can we as young people get into the Word and really get the meat, or the divine concept, out of it?

Answer: As I have said before, we first approach the Word not to understand it but to get into God’s presence, to breathe Him in and be washed by Him. As for seeing the light in the Word, this requires much labor. I have been clear for many years that God does not want human leadership in His service, but it is only in these last two years that I have put the various Scripture references together that prove this point (Matt. 23:8, 10; 1 Pet. 5:3; 1 Cor. 12:28; and the cases of Peter and Paul. All this we covered in chapter 15,

“Leadership among the Saints.”). It takes time for the understanding to come on these matters. In the house of God we have the prophets and teachers (Eph. 4:11). It is a family with both older and younger ones. Gradually, you will have more understanding, not by the mere passage of time but by accumulating the knowledge of the Bible as you contact the Lord in its pages.

Question: I have heard it said that when we come into the church life, we are getting into a boat, and that we should all stay in the boat, even if it means going over the cliff together. This has made us feel that even if we sense an objection within us to something, we must not disturb the oneness but all stay together and let the Lord rescue us.

Answer: Such talk, I am sorry to say, is foolish and superstitious. It is true that we do not want to be rebellious and disobedient; we are not out to make trouble or cause turmoil. However, our obedience is based upon the logical truth and the proper knowledge. Suppose I tell you that Satan is God and that you must worship him. Will you stay in such a boat to keep the oneness?

I have also heard of the saints’ being told not to try to discern others, that if they discern, they are not showing love. Does not the Bible say, “Two or three should speak, and the others discern” (1 Cor. 14:29)? In Philippians 1:9 the apostle Paul prayed “that your love may abound yet more and more in full knowledge and all discernment.” Love should not abound in foolishness; we should not love blindly. A love that abounds in full knowledge is the proper love.

The truth about leadership among the saints has two sides; we must keep the balance. On the one hand, there is no permanent leadership in the New Testament economy. On the other hand, the younger are to be subject to elders (1 Pet. 5:5). While we practice the truth of not recognizing human leadership, we must also practice the subduing of our flesh by learning to submit humbly to others.

Question: Could you explain more specifically what the truth is that Paul wrote about in 1 Timothy 3?

Answer: The word *truth* means what is real. In actuality, only God is real; thus, in the Bible *truth* refers to God Himself. “The law was given through Moses; grace and reality came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). When Jesus

came, God came to be our enjoyment. When Jesus came, God came to be the reality. All the truths in the Bible refer to God Himself, not to doctrines. In the Bible there are many doctrines, which contain the truth. The truth is not mere doctrine. There is a distinction between doctrine and truth, though many Christians confuse them.

CHRIST'S INAUGURATION

In order for us to conduct ourselves properly in the house of God, we must realize that God gave Christ to be Head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22). In God's administration there was a specific time when this inauguration of Christ into the headship of the universe occurred. It is clear from Peter's words on the day of Pentecost that this enthronement took place at the time of Christ's ascension (Acts 2:32-36).

A MAN TO DEAL WITH GOD'S ENEMY

Why was the headship of Christ not fully established during the time of the Old Testament? Acts 17:31 gives us a hint: "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 in His administration wanted a man to exercise His judgment; it was not His will to deal with the enemy directly. During the time of the Old Testament, Christ had not yet been incarnated; He was the Son of God but not the Son of Man. For Christ to be the fully qualified Head, He could not be just God; He had to have the human nature as well as the divine. We may think that God Almighty is surely adequate to head up the universe, but in His economy He does not will to exercise His administration in His deity.

Why is there a need for a governmental administration in the universe? We all realize that government is mainly to restrain the lawless, like robbers and murderers; if everyone behaved properly, there would not be much need of human government. Similarly, if in the universe there were no Satan with his evil spirits and demons, there would not be so much need for the divine government over the universe. This is the negative reason for God's government. Positively speaking, God also has an eternal purpose to carry out. For its fulfillment there is the need of a man.

God would not directly deal with Satan, because their relationship is that of Creator and creature. So as not to lower His status as Creator, God must use man, another of His creatures, to defeat the creature Satan, His enemy.

By His incarnation Christ, the Son of God, gained the humanity that made Him the Son of Man also. By His death on the cross He accomplished God's purpose and defeated His enemy. Now He qualifies to be Head over all things in God's government: He has taken on the human element by incarnation, and He has accomplished God's purpose and destroyed the enemy by crucifixion. Once this work was finished, He rested in the tomb for three days.

Then He was resurrected and ascended into the heavens. At this point He was inaugurated into the full headship of the whole universe. He is not only the Head of the church but also the Head of every man. What we are touching here is not a doctrinal matter but a truth, for the seeing of which we need to have our inner eyes enlightened.

A MAN EXALTED

"Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you have crucified" (2:36). When Peter made that declaration in the first gospel message, he was proclaiming that God had inaugurated a little man from Nazareth into the universal headship over all things. Let us exult that a man has been exalted to the throne, a man from a small country village in the despised district of Galilee. This Jesus has been made Head not of just one country but over all things.

HONORING THE HEAD

Proper conduct in the house of God first means that above all else we honor the One whom God has exalted. It is God's intention that there be no other head among His people. In the Old Testament economy there were kings who acted as head over the people of God. Not so in the New Testament.

Do you think that Peter was the leading apostle? He may have been listed first when the apostles' names were given, but a careful reading of the four Gospels will make plain that it was never the intent of the Lord Jesus to make Peter number one. Even though Peter's natural disposition was to take the lead, the Lord was always making things hard for him. He may have been the

first to jump out of the boat and into the water, but in the end he began to sink and was reproached for his little faith (Matt. 14:28-31). He may have been the first of the disciples to speak out on the Mount of Transfiguration, but even before he finished, he was stopped by the Father's voice from the cloud (17:4-5).

You have probably noticed that when the women went to the tomb after the resurrection, they were told, "Go, tell His disciples *and Peter* that He is going before you into Galilee" (Mark 16:7). Surely you do not think that the little phrase *and Peter* means that Peter was first among the apostles. If Peter was foremost, he was foremost in denying the Lord (14:66-72). No other disciple denied the Lord three times. This phrase *and Peter* was the Lord's way of telling Peter that he was forgiven and would be welcomed back.

We have already discussed Peter's role as leader in the Acts in chapter 15.

ORGANIZING

The relationship among believers in the house of God again touches the headship of Christ. How should the church be "organized" (to borrow a word that does not really apply)? Throughout the twenty centuries of church history this problem has never been solved. Myriads of people are involved. On just one day three thousand were saved and brought into the church (Acts 2:41). Soon after, five thousand more were added (4:4). What could be done with so many people? In time there was not only the church in Jerusalem. There was a spread into Samaria, into Antioch, from there to Asia Minor, and then to eastern Europe. In the house of God there were not only believers but also apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers. There were also elders, deacons, and deaconesses. How could all these interrelationships be worked out?

Most of you realize that there is no more need to organize the church than there is a need to organize the physical body. Who organized your two eyes? Why are your arms where they are? The church is organic, an entity of life. It is not many pieces, devoid of life, organized into a unit by human hands.

From the second century Christianity's history has, alas, been one of organization. To impose such a structure on the church is an insult to the

headship of Christ. Were your arms voted into place? Has your nose won an election? Could your arm be fired and a replacement hired?

Yet we still need to resolve how the thousands upon thousands in the church should be related. With saints scattered in different places and then coming together in their respective localities to be local churches, how could the practical matters be arranged and carried out? I have been told that seminaries offer a course on the way to organize a church. *The organization of the church* is surely not a term found in the New Testament.

Well, you may ask, what is wrong with organization? It is a basic principle that organization leads to hierarchy, a leadership having one rank subordinate to the next. This insults Christ's headship.

The Catholic Church demonstrates this in its organizational setup. The papacy began with the recognition of Peter as the unique representative and successor of Christ. Peter was later called the first pope, and the subsequent popes were called the head of the church. What an affront to Christ! Then their local congregations have leaders responsible to a bishop who heads up a district. In the New Testament the word *bishop* should be translated "overseer" (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1-2; Acts 20:28) and refers to the office or function of an elder. The Greek word for *elder* means an older person. The elder's function is to oversee. Thus, these two words, *elder* and *overseer*, refer to the same person. It was Ignatius who brought in the wrong teaching that a bishop is higher than an elder. Once the church accepted this teaching and set bishops over the elders, the hierarchy developed with archbishops over bishops and cardinals over archbishops. The cardinals select one of their number to be pope. This pyramid of rank—elder, bishop, archbishop, cardinal, and pope—is a contradiction and insult to Christ's headship.

"YOU ARE ALL BROTHERS"

Do you remember the request of the mother of the sons of Zebedee? She came seeking position for her two sons. It was on that occasion that the Lord told His disciples, "The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever wants to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you shall be your slave" (Matt. 20:25-27). The one who wants to be great must be a servant. The Lord pursued this very subject further in

chapter 23, when He said, “Do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers...Neither be called instructors, because One is your Instructor, the Christ. And the greatest among you shall be your servant” (vv. 8, 10-11).

The so-called Plymouth Brethren in their early days called themselves “brethren” because of Matthew 23:8. They did not consider that they had any leader among them. When Brother George Müller came to the Lord’s table, he would always sit at the back.

The concept that we must have a leader influences us who are in the Lord’s recovery too. If even twenty of us come together, is not our first thought, who will be the leader? But the practice in our meetings does indicate some degree of a transformed mentality. When we meet together, one will call a hymn, some others may pray, and then there may be a testimony or requests for more hymns. This is an indication that we are not waiting for someone to lead the meeting. It is surely an improvement over our days in Christianity, when we came into a church building Sunday morning and quietly took our seat, waiting for the leader to come and conduct the service.

For years I have been concerned about the elders’ sitting in the first row. This practice was begun by me in order for the elders to have a way to confer about anything that might come up during the meeting. But I realize it may give a false impression that these are the leaders.

NO INTERMEDIARY

To rightly conduct ourselves in the house of God also requires that we receive our orders directly from Christ, without any intermediary. The toenails may be the farthest from the head positionally, yet their orders go directly to them from the head, just as do those of the shoulder, which is closer to the head in position. We may refuse the Catholic blasphemy about a “holy mother” between the believers and Jesus, yet in practice we may want another saint to advise us what course to take.

Suppose a young believer goes to an elder and asks him if it is all right to go to the movies. In one way it is good that this new believer does not trust himself and would check with another saint, but from another aspect it is wrong to let someone else act as a leader or go-between to make his decision.

From the very first time the young believer comes for advice, that elder should instruct him, “I may be able to help you, but I am not the Lord. You may be young, but the Lord Jesus is within you, just as He is in me. Go and check with Him. Kneel down and pray for Him to guide you.” To counsel the young one in this way means that both are respecting Christ’s lordship. How offensive it would be to His headship if that elder should say, “Brother, because I love you, I want to tell you the truth. Now that you are saved, you should not go to the movies. Christians should never go to the movies. That is a damage to the Lord’s testimony. Do you understand, brother? You must not go.” Do you realize that for the elder to speak in this fashion is for him to take the Lord’s place? We must instruct others to go again and again to the Lord until they are clear. The house of God is the church of the living God. We are living members with the living God inside us. The proper way to conduct ourselves in His house is to contact Him directly and to help others to do the same.

THE PILLAR AND BASE OF THE TRUTH

Besides being called the house of the living God, the church is also called the pillar and base of the truth. Here Paul alluded to the Mediterranean architecture of his day. The ancient buildings were designed to be supported by strong pillars or columns, which were placed on a base. The pillars held up the whole structure. The church is both the base and the pillar that bears the truth. It is not the elders but the church—every member—that bears this responsibility. This is why it is important for you young people to be well built up in the church. You must realize that the meetings are not for your entertainment but for your edification, your building up, so that you will have the discernment of the truth and will resist any lie that may be brought in.

One reason the United States is so strong is because of the respect given to the Constitution. Even the president must conform to it. What other country could peacefully depose a president for his disregard of the law of the land? As the pillar and base of the truth, the church must exercise the same vigilance to see that no falsehood, no evil, and no hierarchy contradicting the headship of Christ can be brought in. This is the responsibility of all the members.

The Epistle to the Philippians opens with this verse: “Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and deacons” (1:1). Please notice the little word *with*. It

indicates that the church's major component is the saints; the elders and deacons are like attachments. By the choice of word in this verse the Holy Spirit would further impress us that the headship is Christ's alone. The responsibility to uphold the truth belongs to the whole church, not just to the elders or deacons.

This is a need in the church today. We must learn the truth and how to defend it. Otherwise, the church will have no future. All of us must bear responsibility to know and practice the truth.

These are the two main matters concerning our conduct in the house of God: respecting the headship of Christ and knowing, keeping, and defending the truth.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

HOW TO CONDUCT OURSELVES IN THE HOUSE OF GOD (2)

The two Epistles to Timothy were written when the church had become degraded. In such a time of confusion, Timothy needed these two letters on how to conduct ourselves in the house of God. I would like us to focus our attention on four terms that recur throughout these two books.

The first is *God's economy*, mentioned in 1 Timothy 1:4: "Nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God's economy, which is in faith."

GOD'S ECONOMY VERSUS DIFFERENT TEACHINGS

Chapter 1 of 1 Timothy makes it clear that even while the apostle Paul was still here on earth, different teachings had come into the church. The main teaching that Paul confronted came from ones "desiring to be teachers of the law" (v. 7). The law, as we all realize, was scriptural; it had been given by God to Moses and had been taught for centuries during the Old Testament times. Nonetheless, it differs from the teaching of the gospel, God's economy. Thus, Paul wrote to Timothy in verse 3, "I exhorted you, when I was going into Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus in order that you might charge certain ones not to teach different things."

The four Gospels present Christ from four different angles; the words and style of writing are different, but the ministry is the same. The Gospels are like four photographs of one person, all taken from a different side. Suppose, on the other hand, Peter had written a record of Moses. We would have to protest that he was speaking differently. He would have been speaking of Moses and the law, whereas Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were speaking of Jesus Christ.

There are those who say that we in the Lord's recovery do not accept the ministry of others. It is clear from Ephesians 4:11 and 12 that the gifted persons mentioned all had only one ministry, that of building up the Body of Christ. That there is only one ministry is confirmed in 2 Corinthians 4:1 and 1

Timothy 1:12. The one ministry does not imply that the apostles and prophets repeated each other's words. The four Gospels are indeed different from each other, but only in that they present different aspects of the same thing. In this New Testament period God has raised up many gifted persons with varied functions, but all belong to the same ministry, that of ministering Christ for the church.

The Law

Hebrews 1:1 and 2 tell us that God spoke to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways. But now "at the last of these days" He has "spoken to us in the Son." God in the New Testament age speaks only in one person. What, then, of Paul, Peter, and the other apostles? All the apostles, and we as well, are parts of the Son, members of His Body. When God spoke in the Old Testament, it was through the prophets in many separate speakings, because Moses, David, Isaiah, and Jeremiah were not in the Son. In this New Testament time the twelve apostles, Paul and Barnabas, Martin Luther, Watchman Nee, and all of us have been constituted into the Son. Thus, when God speaks in this age through His servants, He is speaking in the Son.

Fables and Genealogies

First Timothy 1 tells us that besides the teachers of the law, some were speaking "myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings" (v. 4). Besides the law, there were these two other categories of speaking differently. Let us say that for several years you have been listening to the word that the Triune God wants to dispense Himself into us, that all His riches are embodied in Christ, and that Christ today is the life-giving Spirit indwelling us. You have become bored with all this teaching. Now along comes a talented young speaker, whose messages are full of fascinating stories, or fables. He seems also to have a deep understanding of the Old Testament genealogies. Would you be attracted? This was the kind of speaking that was being heard in Ephesus.

Actually, there are only two categories of teachings. The fables and genealogies are part of the Old Testament things concerning the law; they are either tradition or opinion. The other category is the New Testament economy, Jesus Christ as life for the church.

Foot-washing

Suppose a brother comes among us and begins to rebuke the churches in the recovery for their failure to practice foot-washing. The Lord Jesus Himself set us an example of this in John 13 and specifically told us that we ought to wash one another's feet (v. 14). This is a New Testament teaching. Would you say that this is part of God's economy or that it is teaching differently? We can be sure that foot-washing, even though it is found in the New Testament, is not part of God's economy, because it ministers questions. Once we begin to consider foot-washing, we open the door to endless questions. Should brothers and sisters wash each other's feet? Should the sisters' foot-washing be done openly in the hall or in private rooms? How frequently should it be done? The result of these questions that arise is that we are distracted from prayer and from contacting the Lord and begin to discuss all the varied opinions on the merits of foot-washing and how it should be practiced. I trust that you can see that even some New Testament matters are not part of God's economy and may in fact damage it.

Wine or Grape Juice?

Another brother, in his studies of the New Testament, may come to the conclusion that grape juice, not wine, should be used at the Lord's table. Suppose, after the breaking of bread, he should give a message exhorting us to use grape juice instead of wine. Wine may encourage a weaker one to drink. Should we heed his exhortation? He may scarcely finish speaking when another brother may stand up and say that grape juice was unknown in ancient times, that according to the word of the whole Bible, there was only wine. We could further add that the Lord, in Matthew 26:29, did not use the term *wine* but rather *the product of the vine*. Do you see the questions that are engendered by such talk? It does not minister life but rather causes disputations. Let us learn to avoid opinions and matters that would stir up others' opinions. Learn not to speak differently.

Avoid anything that might distract God's people from His economy. The one ministry dispenses God into the believers so that He may be their life, nature, and being. This chosen people form the Body of Christ, the church. Do not add to this central thought of God your concept or opinion. Do not refer to different flows among us; a flow is a concept. Do not think in terms of an old way and a new way. Concentrate on God's economy.

THE TRUTH

In a time of degradation in the church, it is important that all the saints know the truth. Thus, this term is used more than ten times in these two Epistles. The church is the pillar and base of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15); as such, all of us must be clear about the truth of the headship of Christ. Is not that headship disregarded by organized Christianity? Several years ago I read a booklet by Dr. A. W. Tozer of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Entitled *The Waning Authority of Christ in the Churches*, it discusses how little Christ and His authority are esteemed by the denominations and other Christian groups, though they pay lip service to the doctrine of His lordship.

Among us these past few years there have been indications that we too do not see the significance of Christ's headship. An effort was made to organize all the churches in the recovery under an international coordination. It may seem wonderful to have such "oneness," but actually this was a subtlety to gain control of all the churches, thus taking the headship away from Christ and putting it in the hands of the "coordinator," who in essence would be a pope. Such a hierarchical setup robs the saints of their personal contact with God.

Distinguishing Truth from Doctrines

In the universe God is the one reality. Whatever is related to God is reality or truth. Doctrines, in contrast, are teachings. Consider the Lord's table, for example. Who is qualified to participate? Should there be grape juice or wine? one cup or many small cups? leavened or unleavened bread? one loaf or small cut pieces? How often should the Lord's table be held? Who should distribute the bread and the cup? All such questions are doctrinal and do not touch the reality. The truth of the Lord's table is that it represents the Head and the Body. His blood separated from His body displays His death. The loaf of many grains of fine flour speaks of a body in resurrection. The truth of the Lord's table, then, is the reality of the Head, in death and resurrection, and the Body.

Baptism provides another illustration of doctrines versus truth. Who should be baptized? Who should baptize? In whose name are we baptized? By immersion or sprinkling? Once or three times? In salt water or fresh? Outdoors or in a baptistery? These questions concern the doctrine. The truth

of baptism concerns the death and resurrection of Christ. “All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death” (Rom. 6:3). Shallow, shortsighted people do not look beyond the doctrines to see the truths within those doctrines.

If we think that a church needs elders because that is the way it is set up in the Scriptures, we are in the realm of doctrine. The truth behind this doctrine is that the plurality of elders indicates that God’s people have no official, organized, permanent leadership, because Christ is the only Head recognized by God.

A strong and healthy church depends upon all the saints’ knowing the truth. Doctrines confuse and bring in opinions, but truth consolidates and builds people together. Whether we use wine or grape juice is not crucial, but caring for the truth of the death and resurrection of Christ and seeing that the one loaf signifies one Body are a safeguard against any divisive thought. Arguing about sprinkling or immersion divides us, but being in the reality of the death of Christ unites us. If our concern when we baptize new believers is that we are putting them into the death of Christ, we will all be in a prayerful spirit that this may be their reality.

GODLINESS

“Great is the mystery of godliness” (1 Tim. 3:16). This is the third term that we will consider. It is clear from this verse that godliness is God manifested in the flesh. When the church is in a time of degradation, we need to pay special heed to godliness.

Notice the sequence of the phrases in this verse: “Confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, / Justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world, / Taken up in glory.” Many Christian teachers have thought that this verse refers to Christ, but the sequence of these phrases does not bear this out. Christ was “taken up in glory” before He was “preached among the nations.” This verse refers more to the church than it does to Christ. *Taken up in glory* refers to the rapture of the church rather than to Christ’s ascension. Yes, Christ is the manifestation of God in the flesh, but so is the church. We are the church, but we are still in the flesh. When we meet together in the Spirit, God is manifested among us; this is the manifestation of God in the flesh. Just as

Christ the Head is the manifestation of God in the flesh, so also is His Body. If the whole church is gathered together in a proper way and an unbeliever comes in, “falling on his face, he will worship God, declaring that indeed God is among you” (1 Cor. 14:23-25). God’s presence is known whenever the church meets together properly.

Paul exhorted Timothy to pray for those “who are in high position, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all godliness and gravity” (1 Tim. 2:2). What evidence is there in our lives of godliness? This verse says “all godliness.” If we are godly, it will affect the choice of pictures we hang in our bedroom, the kind of clothes we wear, our hair style, and our conversation. It will make us clear about whether to go to the movies. The inward life of godliness has an outward expression; such a manifestation of godliness is a testimony and has an impact on those who meet us. Whatever we say, whatever we do, whatever we wear, there should be an impression of God manifested in us.

Another reference to godliness is found in 1 Timothy 4:7-8: “Exercise yourself unto godliness. For bodily exercise is profitable for a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the present life and of that which is to come.” There is some profit in physical exercise; this verse does not say that it profits nothing. Exercise benefits our health. However, when we consider sports, it is apparent that we are outside the field of health and into the realm of showing off how capable and skillful we are.

How can we exercise ourselves unto godliness? One way is to show the proper reverence when we are reading the Bible. Even if no one else is present, it is good to be properly dressed and to sit or kneel in a respectful way when we come to the Word of our heavenly Father.

Another way to exercise ourselves unto godliness is to be restricted in our talk. Nothing has more of an impact upon others than our way of talking. Even in the home our talk should be accurate, restrained, and free of gossip. Sometimes shouting in the meeting may be overstepping the line between godliness and looseness. What we say should give an impression of restraint.

Shopping is another area in which we can practice godliness. Even window-shopping can lead to indulgence in lust; many times we must turn our eyes away. What we buy shows others the kind of person we are.

Letter writing is also a way to exercise ourselves unto godliness. On many occasions I have rewritten a letter three, even four, times because when I read it over, I would find something not accurate or not helpful. By our restraint in passing on church news, for example, we can show our care for the edification of others.

HEALTHY WORDS

The last term for us to consider is *healthy words*, found in 1 Timothy 6:3. The term *healthy* is another word that recurs throughout the two Epistles to Timothy and in Titus as well (cf. 1 Tim. 1:10; 2 Tim. 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9, 13; 2:1-2, 8). In the church life we must discern the speaking to see whether it is healthy or damaging. We must not be misled by enticing words, however eloquent. *Healthy* means that the words minister life. We may not know very much, but our taste can distinguish what is sweet, what is bitter, what is poisonous, and what is healthy. We need to examine our own words too to see if they are healthy, ministering life to those who hear us, whether we are speaking on the phone or face-to-face.

In a time of degradation, then, we must be centered on God's economy and not be distracted by those who teach differently. As the pillar and base of the truth, we must know the truth and not be distracted by doctrines. We must exercise ourselves unto godliness. Finally, our conduct in the house of God includes discerning and receiving, as well as ministering "healthy words."

CHAPTER TWENTY

WALK IN CHRIST

“As therefore you have received the Christ, Jesus the Lord, walk in Him, having been rooted and being built up in Him, and being established in the faith even as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (Col. 2:6-7). Have you received Christ? If so, how did you receive Him? You opened to Him, repented and confessed your sins, and asked Him to come in. He came into your spirit (2 Tim. 4:22), not into your heart, though you may have sung that well-known chorus, “Into my heart.” From your spirit, the center of your being, Christ is spreading into the surrounding parts—your mind, emotion, will, and conscience—which make up your heart.

For this cause Paul prayed, “That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith” (Eph. 3:17). Christ is like a guest invited into your home. When He first comes, He stays in the living room (your spirit). After some time you may invite Him into the bedroom, the inner chamber (your heart), and ask Him to make Himself at home. Have you invited the Lord Jesus into the inner chamber of your heart yet? When Christ has spread into all the inward parts around our spirit, He will then have made His home in our heart. We will consider how to walk in Him after answering some questions.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: I feel as if I am living two lives, one at work and the other outside of my job. From the moment I walk into the office I am so busy that I seem to miss the Lord every day. How can I lay hold of Him in the midst of all that I have to do?

Answer: It is the devil’s subtlety to take some fact of our living to deceive us. His way is to tell a lie by speaking the truth. What he says is apparently true, but his intention is to lie to us. First, you should declare to him and to the whole universe that you will walk by one life, not by two.

Second, every day the first thing you should do is to take five, ten, or fifteen minutes to worship the Lord and to contact Him. Tell Him, “Lord, here is another day for me to live You. Be with me; sustain and strengthen me. Hold

me in Your hand. Even though I neglect You every day, You never forget me. I have no trust in my faithfulness; I put my trust solely in You.” Even during the day, whenever you have time, pray the same way: “Lord, be with me. I cannot make it to live You out on my own, but You can live Yourself out of me.”

Do not wonder how things will work out. We as Christians have too many considerations, stemming from our background and environment. Deny these considerations; they are just frustrations and distractions. Do not believe them. We believe only in the living God. Our trust is in Him. We do not make preparations and schedules as to what we should do to overcome some situation. We have no expectations and no plan, only the living Lord.

All day, starting from first thing in the morning, contact Him, asking Him to sustain you. Just see what happens. Do not worry about tomorrow. Do not be preoccupied in the meeting, thinking how wonderful the message is but what will you do when you get to the office tomorrow. Just live today. Do not borrow tomorrow; you do not have it. Every day is today; tomorrow never comes. The devil would have us worry about tomorrow. As you hear a message, just rejoice and praise the Lord. He is so simple, so real, and so living. If you ask, What about the next hour? I say there is no next hour. Every hour to us is the present one.

Question: I am new in the church and still very much under the influence of Christianity. When I was studying to be a preacher of the gospel in an organization, it was drilled into me that I had to have a burden for souls. I would feel guilty if I did not say something about the Lord to everyone I met on the street, or at least give him a tract. We have to fulfill the Great Commission, “Go therefore and disciple all the nations” (Matt. 28:19), but can I go without being sent (Rom. 10:14-15)?

Answer: Drop all these complications, even though they are based upon the Scriptures. Come back to the simplicity of Christ. Enjoy Him day by day. Live Him, grow Him, and produce Him. He will lead us on.

Let me give you my personal testimony. I was saved in 1925. I had a heart of love for the Lord and for His Word. After seven and a half years the Lord raised up a church in my hometown, mainly through me. I had no plan. The Lord sent people to me. News was spread about the meetings, and people

came and were attracted. They realized that Christ was there. In less than one year the number went from two to about one hundred.

Our leading from the Lord was to be His testimony in China. We had no intention to come to the Western world to spread His recovery throughout the whole world. However, when the time came, the Lord scattered us, and I was sent to this country. Is it not ironic that a Chinese from a heathen country should be sent by the Lord to this most advanced country where Christianity has held sway for so many years? This was surely not by my design. Yet the Lord's recovery has spread not only throughout the United States but also to Europe, South America, Africa, and Australasia.

This is a strong testimony that if we love the Lord, contact Him, live Him, and grow Him, He will spread Himself through us. We are branches of the vine, branching out the very Christ, not by our plans or activities but just by our living. This is the way of life.

Question: How can I know the Lord's leading in the matter of preaching the gospel? I often have the feeling when I am alone with someone that I should say something to him about the Lord, but on the other hand, I feel ridiculous approaching total strangers.

Answer: Here is another case of one of the Lord's seekers having become complicated either by Christianity or by himself. To get out of this entanglement, drop all your consideration. In a simple way contact the Lord and live Him day by day. It may be that as you spontaneously seek His leading, you will have a burden to say a word to someone concerning the Lord; if so, do it. Another time the Lord may bring someone to you. Then, just speak according to your inner sense. Do not analyze. Do not make a decision that from now on you will speak to a certain number of people every day. Do not decide to speak to someone at work about the Lord. Just abide in Him. The Lord may lead you to someone or may lead someone to you. You can then spontaneously say something. Be delivered from your endeavoring and striving. The Christian life is an easy yoke, a pleasant burden. Consider the clusters of grapes on a vine. Without any decision, schedule, or plan, these clusters come forth, according to the inner life of the branches. As the inner life grows, the clusters spontaneously appear.

Be at peace and rest in the Lord. Whatever comes to you as a problem, reject. The Lord does not send complications but only life, peace, and rest.

HOW TO WALK IN CHRIST

The verse we quoted (Col. 2:6) exhorts us to walk in Christ in the same way that we received Him. We need to be clear that Christ today is not just far away in the third heaven; He is now also the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45) residing in our spirit. First Corinthians 6:17 tells us further that “he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.” These two spirits—Christ, the life-giving Spirit, and our human spirit—are one spirit. To walk in Christ is to walk in this mingled spirit. It is a matter of heeding His life within us, not of receiving instruction on how to pray, how to preach the gospel, how to honor our parents, or how to submit to our husband or love our wife.

More than fifty years ago in far-off China the Lord granted us His gracious visitation to see that His real salvation is not a way but a living person. When He comes into us to be our life, He is everything else we need as well—holiness, righteousness, humility, love, kindness, patience, endurance, and faithfulness. The day we saw the vision—that everything we need is in this One—marked the end of all our ways. He is God’s way (cf. John 14:6).

There is no need for us to strive or endeavor. Walk in Christ. In Him are both God and man; in Him dwells all the fullness of God. Because this all-inclusive One is in our spirit, we can walk in Him.

A DAILY PATTERN

Every morning, as soon as we get up, we should turn to the Lord and say, “Lord, thank You for another day that I may live You. Remind me this whole day to reject myself, not to trust in myself, and not to live by myself. Strengthen me to live by You. Make this a day for me to live You out, taking You as my everything, abiding in You as a branch in the vine.” All during the day this should be our prayer. Do not spend time praying so much for your job, your children, or your being kept from car accidents. The Lord takes care of all things. Just concern yourself with this one matter of walking in Him.

Because it is so easy to slip out of Christ and revert to living in ourselves, doing things by ourselves, saying things in ourselves, or loving others by

ourselves, Paul exhorts us to work out our own salvation “with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). We need to be saved daily, even hourly, from anything outside of Christ. We must be in fear and trembling to work out our instant salvation, lest we say a word outside of Him, answer a question apart from Him, or react in our feelings rather than in Him.

THE WAY TO PREACH THE GOSPEL

The way to preach the gospel is to walk in Christ. Such a statement may seem abstract, because we are used to finding ways, or planning activities, to get things accomplished. Some of us may think that the way to preach the gospel is to use musical instruments or to have a quartet sing some gospel songs. There is also the way of eloquence, having a talented speaker give an entertaining message. It has even been said among us that the way to gain people is to go where they are; I have heard of some going to movies, bars, and ballet dances for the purpose of “catching fish.” All such proposals are ways. They are devoid of Christ.

To preach the gospel you must have Christ as your daily living. This living cannot fail to impress those who know you—your relatives, friends, classmates, colleagues, and others whom you see in the normal course of your day. It may be that during a year’s time, the Lord will move in the heart of one of them by means of some circumstance, and that one will be constrained to talk with you. With little effort on your part, perhaps just your suggestion that you pray together, that person will be saved. The next year there may be a colleague at the office who gets injured in a car accident; while he is hospitalized, he may recall your manner of life and send for you to come and talk with him. With few words, just a short prayer, he too may be saved. The following year still another may follow.

Because we live Christ, He is the way we preach the gospel. Do not have the opinion that this is a slow way to get the increase. If just one is saved per year through each of us, there will be a one hundred percent increase. Further, those who are saved in this way will become the remaining fruit. Such will not be the case with those who are brought in through the use of gimmicks; most of them will not stay.

Surely the Lord was referring to our manner of life when He said, “You shall be My witnesses” (Acts 1:8). We live as a witness, a testimony, to Him; this testimony will gradually bring others whom we know to know Him also.

This is not to say that the church should not have a regular gospel-preaching time. Every so often a Saturday night, for example, can be set aside for this. Then we can pray to seek the Lord’s leading as to whom we should bring. Each of us may then bring in one or two. This is the proper preaching of the gospel with Christ as the way.

THE WAY TO PRAY

Not only in preaching the gospel but in everything else as well, we have no way but Christ. We may never have learned how to pray, but because we know how to walk in Christ, we shall find that spontaneously, throughout the day, we are praying. Christ is our way to pray. Because we are one with Him, we walk in Him and find ourselves praying.

THE WAY TO BE HUMBLE

Learning how to be humble avails nothing. Any humility that you learn becomes your pride. You may think that you are the most humble one in your family, that all your brothers and sisters are proud and stubborn. This humility that you have developed is pride. The name for the proper humility is Christ. If you walk in Christ day after day, you will be humble without any consciousness of it. By walking in Him, He will become your humility, though you will not be aware of it.

THE WAY TO LOVE

Just as you should not try to be humble, so there is no point in your trying to love others. All your efforts to love your wife, to be submissive to your husband, to control your temper, and to be kind are in vain. Just walk in Christ, who is the life-giving Spirit dwelling in your spirit. When you arise in the morning, pray-read His Word and talk to Him. This will usher you into a walk with Him. Do not heed your emotions, your decisions, or what others are saying. Just walk in Christ, and you will find that He Himself is the love you need toward others.

THE EFFECT ON THE MEETINGS

If we begin our day with contacting the Lord, and continue walking in Him throughout the day, we will have rich experiences of Him to bring to the meetings. Then when there is a need to share a certain aspect of the experience of Christ, we will be able to give a testimony along that line. The riches we accumulate benefit the whole church.

The normal Christian life is to walk in Christ. By walking in Him we will be rooted and built up.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE LAW OF FREEDOM

“You are not under the law but under grace” (Rom. 6:14). Do you believe that grace makes you lawless? Such a teaching comes into the church in a time of degradation, when some will pervert “the grace of our God into licentiousness” (Jude 4). When the Scripture says that we are not under law, it is referring to the law given by Moses; it is plain that we are not under that law. Do you conclude from this that God has no law toward His people today? In the new covenant the Lord says, “I will impart My laws upon their hearts, and upon their mind I will inscribe them” (Heb. 10:16). It may have been possible under the old covenant to disregard the two tablets of stone containing the Ten Commandments, but with laws that have been written on our hearts we have no way to be rid of them or to neglect them.

Which do you think is more strict—the law of Moses or the law of the New Testament? The law written on our hearts is more binding by far. In James 1:25 and 2:12 this subjective law is called “the law of freedom.” Let us answer a few questions before we consider this law further.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: In the past the emphasis in the churches has been on Christ, the spirit, life, and the church. You have said that the aspect of truth has been somewhat neglected. Since Christ is the truth, how is it possible that we have neglected the truth?

Answer: We did have some measure of truth concerning Christ, the spirit, life, and the church. However, we did not stress, for example, the headship of Christ or the constitution of the church. Many truths in the Word have not been adequately covered; the saints were not sufficiently encouraged to study the Bible and to have all these truths infused into them. Now the churches need to help the saints to get into the depths of the Word by studying and pray-reading for the understanding of the truth of all the doctrines.

Question: In my early history with the Lord, I would sense when I sought His presence that He strengthened me and was abiding in me. In these

recent years it's been rare that I have had that sense. Should I seek such a feeling?

Answer: When you want to contact the Lord, it is easier not to wait for some sense within. If you wait, you open the door for distracting thoughts to come in and disturb you. Before you kneel to pray, or before you open the Bible, begin right away to speak. You can just say something simple, like "Lord, I praise You." After one or two sentences you will be ushered by your speaking into the presence of God.

We Christians must be a speaking people, addressing not only God but also angels, demons, and even the atmosphere. If we come into the meeting and just sit there without speaking, the atmosphere will be full of death. Speaking something from our spirit repels all the distractions and brings us into touch with the Lord.

Question: I am finding it hard to turn to the Word during the day. When I remember what you said about the killing element, I do not want to pick up the Bible for fear of being killed, so I just go off to lunch. I know that if I open to the Word I will also get the nourishment, but I sometimes feel too weak to do so. Maybe it is the legality of it that makes me resistant.

Answer: However busy we are, we always find time to eat. Why is this? It is because we recognize that eating is a necessity of life. We need this same realization regarding our spiritual eating. Pray for the Lord to help you read His Word every day, even two or three times a day. Where there is a will, there is a way. We just need the realization that taking in the Word is a life necessity. If we build up this habit, we will find that our Christian life will be transformed. Coming to the meetings is good; listening to the messages is good; but the reading, studying, and eating of the Bible is a life necessity. Trust the Lord that you may be enabled to do this in a regular way.

Question: Sometimes when I want to share something in the meeting, I am not sure if it is from my spirit or from my soul.

Answer: If you release it in the spirit, it is something in the spirit. If you keep it within you, it may become something in the soul. It is not necessary to analyze that way. It is better to exercise your spirit to release what you want to share than to keep it within.

Question: Is there any way to share the truth without getting into arguments?

Answer: Arguments lead nowhere. Especially with our relatives, we must avoid arguing about doctrine. If they raise a doctrinal point, we can steer away from it and give instead a testimony of our experience of Christ. Let them know how joyful our life is. Our relatives not only need such a verbal testimony from us; they also need to see such a testimony lived before them. This living has the strongest impact. We need much more experience of Christ daily. This will make our testimony brighter and will influence our relatives, as well as others, to take this way.

Question: What should we pray for? Last year in college I prayed nearly every day for fifteen people; it was an exhausting labor. The other brothers and sisters were praying for the same people, but none of them has been added.

Answer: The best way to pray is according to John 15:7: "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you." The way to pray is to abide in the Lord, remain in Him, and be one with Him. Then our praying will not be according to our preference but according to His Word. When we abide in Him and His words abide in us, we have His abiding word to pray about. Then, as we open to Him, He moves within us, and we pray whatever we sense within.

It is hard to tell you what to pray. Just contact the Lord and be one with Him. Once you have taken His words into you and are actually one with Him and He with you, there will be a consciousness deep within you. Pray according to that sense.

Many times, as we begin to utter the words of prayer, more of a sense will come. The inner sense becomes our prayer uttered in words. If you still have a burden to pray for many things, do not adjust yourself. Be simple, not bothered by any way. Go to the Lord, contact Him, and, as He leads you, utter the words according to your inner sense. If, at the same time, you still have a burden to pray for certain people, for certain situations, for the church, or for the Lord's recovery, just utter that burden. Do not analyze whether your burden was initiated by you or by the Lord. Be simple.

Pray until you have an inner restraint telling you not to pray for a certain matter. If you have no such restraint, feel free to pray according to your burden. Do not pick up something as your burden. Praying is just coming to the Lord and then uttering the prayer according to the sense He gives you.

A LAW OF BONDAGE

While the New Testament refers to the law of freedom, the Mosaic law was really a law of bondage. As soon as we are given a law, we find that we cannot keep it (see Rom. 7:7-9). A missionary in China preached to his cook that we are all sinners. When the cook protested that he was a good man and had never sinned, the missionary began to talk to him about a horse. The cook needed a new horse, and the missionary's description of the horse aroused in the cook longings to have such an excellent one. Thoughts about how he could get the horse for himself began to fill the cook's mind. On a subsequent occasion the missionary again broached the subject that we are all sinners. Again the cook denied that he had ever done anything sinful. The missionary then asked him what had been occupying his thoughts since their previous conversation. The cook replied, "Well, I have been thinking about that horse. It sounded like such a good one; I have been wondering how I could get it." The missionary then called to his attention what such thoughts indicated, and the cook was forced to admit that they were signs of covetousness. This, the missionary then pointed out, was a sin (Exo. 20:17). Who can keep the law of Moses? It is impossible; it is a law of bondage.

LAWS UPON OUR HEARTS

The New Testament law, written upon our hearts, frees us. "The law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death" (Rom. 8:2). We are not under the law of bondage but the law of freedom.

How does this law free us? Suppose that in the past you loved to go to the movies. Sometimes you would even lie to your mother, telling her that you were going to the library when actually you were sneaking off to the movies. Upon your return home, if she asked you what you had been studying in the library, you would invent a little story for her. Your love for the movies caused you to tell two lies, lies that one day will be judged by God. This may have happened many times. It indicates that you were under the bondage of movies.

How does this law of freedom operate to set you free? Before you were saved, you may have felt proud of yourself for getting away with such deceit. But once you are saved, your feelings are different. There will be something within bothering you; you will feel disturbed both for going to the movies and also for deceiving your mother. Even if you do not heed your new inner feelings, this law is patient. Time after time you will feel troubled when you go to the movies or lie to your mother. Eventually, you will be subdued by this bothering element within you. The law within thus becomes the law of freedom, freeing you from the bondage of movies.

Sometimes we testify to others that we have had peace since we became a Christian. Actually, instead of having peace, many times we are bothered. This bothering One is persistent. He may keep after us for several years until He finally subdues us. We cannot persuade Him to look at things our way. Sooner or later, in His patient, gentle way, He will win.

I know that many of you have been influenced to go to movies or to drink, under the guise of being freed. As your testimonies have shown, you may have seemed outwardly freed, but within there was a protest. Such a feeling shows the functioning of the law written upon your heart. No matter how much you say that you are freed from all bondage, you cannot be freed from the inner law written upon your heart. Whenever you do something against God and this living law within, you will have the sense that you are not right. It is only by regarding this sense that you are brought into freedom.

A STRICTER LAW

Before we were saved, we were lawless. But after we are saved, God's law is written on our hearts and we are "not without law to God but within law to Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21). The new law in the New Testament is called the law of freedom or the law of Christ.

This law is stricter than Moses'. It binds us even in minor points. It requires not only telling the truth but also being accurate. It will condemn us for feeling proud even when no one can see any evidence of pride.

This new law has far more commandments than ten. Let us mention just a few. Repent! Be baptized! Unceasingly pray! Rejoice! Be burning in spirit! Love one another! Be transformed by the renewing of the mind! Flee youthful

lusts! If you will turn the pages of your New Testament, you will find commandment after commandment.

We are told, “In nothing be anxious” (Phil. 4:6). How hard it is not to worry! This is especially true of parents in their concern for their children. I recall how my mother worried about her second daughter, my sister, who was teaching in another province, some eight hundred miles away. One morning my mother was nearly weeping. When I asked her what was the matter, she reproached me for not caring for my sister and pointed out that we had not heard from her for four weeks. The previous night she had dreamed that my sister was very ill. Though I tried to encourage her to eat breakfast and not pay any attention to a dream, she kept reproving me that I did not care about my sister. The more I tried to set her mind at rest, the more annoyed she became with me. Finally, she said, “What makes you so dull? Why don’t you go out and send a telegram for me?” Of course, I hurried to do her bidding. The return telegram came later that day, saying all was well.

You can see how prone we are to worry. But the Bible says, “In nothing be anxious.”

FREED BY BEING UNDER LAW

Christians are the most lawful people. In eating, drinking, wearing apparel, and lodging, we are lawful. In everything we are under the commandments of the New Testament. The more we keep the new law, the law of freedom, the more we will be truly freed, not unto lawlessness but from the bondage of doing sinful things.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

HOW TO CONDUCT OURSELVES IN THE HOUSE OF GOD (3)

There are two descriptions of the church found in 1 Timothy that are not found elsewhere in the Bible. Only in this Epistle is the church called “the church of the living God” and “the pillar and base of the truth” (3:15).

THE LIVING GOD

For us to conduct ourselves properly in the house of God, we need to take note that it is the church of the *living* God. God is called the living God several times in the Old Testament (Deut. 5:26; Josh. 3:10; 1 Sam. 17:26, 36; 2 Kings 19:4, 16; Psalms 42:2; 84:2; Isaiah 37:4, 17; Jeremiah 10:10; 23:36; Daniel 6:20, 26; Hosea 1:10). He is also referred to by this title in nine books of the New Testament (Matthew 16:16; 26:63; John 6:69; Acts 14:15; Romans 9:26; 2 Corinthians 3:3; 6:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 Timothy 3:15; 4:10; Hebrews 3:12; 9:14; 10:31; 12:22; Revelation 7:2). When Peter recognized who Christ was, he called Him “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” In Hebrews 3 we are exhorted to beware lest we fall away “from the living God,” and in chapter 9 we are told that the blood of Christ purifies “our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”

THE HOUSE AND THE PILLAR

In 1 Timothy 3:15 the church is also referred to as “the house of God.” The term *house* means “household” or “family,” as well as “the lodging place of the family.” Thus, in the Bible *the house of God* means both His family and His dwelling place, because God’s dwelling place is within His people, not in a physical building. *The house of God* is also used in 1 Peter 4:17 (“It is time for the judgment to begin from the house of God”) and in Hebrews 10:21 (“Having a great Priest over the house of God”).

The church is also called the pillar and base of the truth. The temple in the Old Testament had two pillars in front (1 Kings 7:15-22). Standing on their base, they bore the weight of the building. The apostle Paul considered that the church is not only a house in which the living God dwells but also a pillar standing upon its base bearing the truth.

Many Christians think of the church as merely a gathering of God's called ones. From the names given to the church in 1 Timothy we can see that the church is also a house where the living God dwells and a pillar that supports the truth (reality). Both a house and a pillar need to be built.

It will help us to know how to conduct ourselves in the house of God if we consider these two words, *living* and *truth*.

LIVING

For us to match our living God, we too must be living. Suppose you came into a house and found everything in disarray. The tables were turned upside down, dirty socks were scattered around, shoes were in the sink, and the chairs were knocked over. You concluded that the people were either dead or kidnapped, but when you checked in the bedroom, there they were in bed sick. Sickness or death is the only excuse for such a disorderly house.

How is the house of a healthy family? Everything is clean, neat, and orderly. If you entered such a house, you would be assured that the members of that household were living and healthy.

What signs of life should characterize the church of the living God? Consider how the living God affected the lives of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. When the evil power of darkness tried to force them to worship idols, they boldly declared to Nebuchadnezzar, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the blazing furnace of fire, and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods nor worship the golden image that you have set up" (Dan. 3:17-18). This same, living behavior also characterized Daniel when he was confronted with a den of lions because he prayed to his God. That is why the king called him the "servant of the living God" and proclaimed that "the God of Daniel...is the living God" (6:20, 26).

As the Lord's recovery spreads throughout this earth, the door is open for all sorts of people to enter. Paul warned the elders of the church in Ephesus, "After my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among you yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore watch" (Acts 20:29-31). This responsibility for watching to see that the house is kept in

order falls upon every one of us, young and old. The Lord is not only adding His life to us but also making us living. This phrase, *the church of the living God*, was used during a time of degradation in the church, just because most Christians were not living but sleeping. The Lord's recovery must not be like sleeping Christianity. Our God is living! We are His living children. In His house we must conduct ourselves in a living way. We must be on the alert to guard it from all evil.

TRUTH

Truth is contrasted to law in John 1:17. The law was given through Moses, but truth came through Jesus Christ. The Old Testament is divided into two parts, the law and the prophets (cf. Matt. 7:12; Rom. 3:21). What we find in the Old Testament can be likened to a photograph, or a picture, of the truth. It is as though I were to send you a photograph of myself before I came to visit. In the New Testament the truth, or the reality, came through Jesus Christ, who Himself told us, "I am...the reality" (John 14:6). The law was a shadow, but He is the reality.

Christ the Reality

For the church to be the pillar and base of the truth, it must bear Christ as the reality. Man in Genesis 1 is a shadow of the image of God; the reality of His image is Christ (Col. 1:15). All the offerings mentioned in Leviticus are types; the real offering is Christ (Heb. 10:11-12). The same is true of all the other positive things mentioned in the Old Testament; Christ is their reality. This is also the case with qualities like love and humility; their reality is Christ. The human expression of them is just a shadow. The church is the pillar to support Christ alone as the reality.

Beyond Doctrine

"Our Savior God...desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:3-4). It is not that God wants us acquainted with doctrines. Doctrines are like shells; the truth is the content. Behind the doctrine of foot-washing, for example, there is a truth. The truth is Christ Himself. If I wash my brother's feet by myself, in myself, it means nothing. I have been crucified with Christ and no longer live; Christ lives in me. Thus, when I come to wash my brother's feet, it is not I but Christ who is doing the

washing. I actually had this experience over forty years ago. I found that I could not wash another's feet; I had to have Christ as my life in order to do it.

For us to come to the knowledge of the truth, we cannot stay in doctrine. Even the doctrine of salvation comes short. My mother was baptized as a teenager, yet she was not saved even when I became a Christian. She raised all her children in Christianity, teaching us Bible stories and insisting that we attend Southern Baptist Sunday morning services. We were all in Christianity, knowing the doctrine but not being in the truth. One day my second sister lost her fiancé. In her grief she turned to the Lord and got saved. Then she prayed for me, and I too got saved. I began to love and study the Bible. This influenced my younger brother, who was fifteen; he began to read the Bible in English, and he too opened to the Lord. A few years later my mother got saved. We all turned from the doctrine of salvation to its reality.

The Need in a Time of Degradation

The two Epistles to Timothy contain eleven references to the truth (1 Tim. 2:4, 7; 3:15; 4:3; 6:5; 2 Tim. 2:15, 18, 25; 3:7-8; 4:4). Paul exhorted Timothy to cut straight the word of the truth. There were in Ephesus those who were deprived of the truth, who misaimed concerning the truth, who needed to repent unto the full knowledge of the truth, who opposed the truth, and who turned away their ear from the truth. This repeated attention is given to the matter of the truth because, when the apostle Paul wrote from prison in Rome, the church was degraded from reality to formal doctrines and vain teachings. His purpose in these two Epistles was to bring the church back to the reality.

MISAIMING CONCERNING THE TRUTH

Paul uses several descriptive terms that indicate the direction some at Ephesus were taking away from the truth. In 1 Timothy 1:6 he says, "From which things some, having misaimed, have turned aside to vain talking." Vain talking is just empty talk. Verse 7 continues, "Desiring to be teachers of the law." They turned from God's economy to the law, which, as we have said, is only a shadow. Verse 4 tells us, "Nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies." Verse 7 of chapter 4 says, "Profane and old-womanish myths refuse." In 5:13 we read, "They also learn to be idle, going around from house to house; and they are not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not." Instead of caring for the truth, they spent their

time gossiping with their neighbors. In 6:3-5 we have a clear contrast between what is healthy teaching and what is not: “If anyone teaches different things and does not consent to healthy words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the teaching which is according to godliness, he is blinded with pride, understanding nothing, but is diseased with questionings and contentions of words, out of which come envy, strife, slanders, evil suspicions, perpetual wranglings of men corrupted in mind and deprived of the truth, supposing godliness to be a means of gain.” Notice how the healthy words are opposed by those who are deprived of the truth. Those who promote strife and perpetual wranglings Paul describes as sick.

In the second Epistle Paul continues to warn against these unhealthy words: “Avoid profane, vain babblings, for they will advance to more ungodliness, and their word will spread like gangrene” (2:16-17). In verse 23 he further admonishes Timothy, “Foolish questionings and those arising from an untrained mind refuse, knowing that they beget contentions.”

From all these verses we can gather what the state of the church was at the end of the first century. There was empty talk. There were those who had turned back to the law, who were giving heed to myths and unending genealogies, and who were gossips and busybodies. There were questionings, strife, perverted wranglings, and worldly and vain talking.

CORRECTING AN UNHEALTHY CONDITION

It was to correct such a deplorable situation that Paul wrote these Epistles, in which he emphasizes so strongly the matter of the truth. Here are some of the descriptive terms he uses relating to the truth. Besides the healthy words and healthy teachings we discussed in chapter 19, Paul also speaks of the word of God (1 Tim. 4:5; 2 Tim. 2:9), the words of the faith (1 Tim. 4:6), the words of our Lord Jesus Christ (6:3), and the Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16). These positive terms are a reminder to us that, for the church to serve as the pillar and base of the truth, we must take in the Word of God.

Breathing Properly

Second Timothy 3:16 is the only reference in the whole Bible that tells us that all Scripture is God-breathed. This is a strange way of speaking. We do not think of our words as our breath. If we write a letter, we do not consider

that we breathed out the words. But Paul here introduces the concept that the divine word is God's breathing. The word in the Bible is more than an utterance; it is the breath of God.

What is the proper way to take in the Word of God? You may say that we must eat it. Yes, there is such a thought in the Scriptures. The Lord Jesus said, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out through the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Jeremiah also expressed that thought: "Your words were found and I ate them" (Jer. 15:16).

There is, however, an even more prevailing way to take in the Word. Since God breathes His word out, we may breathe it in. How can we do this? It is by prayer. Our spiritual breathing is our unceasing prayer. Eating and sleeping are for a while, but breathing is never ending throughout our life. "Unceasingly pray" (1 Thes. 5:17). This verse likens our prayer to breathing. We cannot inhale God's breath by exercising our mentality; we must inhale by praying.

Reading and Praying

This thought of mingling our reading of the Scriptures with prayer is what we call pray-reading. Though we introduced this term about ten years ago, the prayerful reading of the Word has been practiced by many saints of old. George Müller described his morning watch as a blending of reading the Word and praying over it. He called this way of praying over the Word the soul-nourishing way. (Of course, he was actually nourishing his spirit, but the Brethren did not know the distinction between soul and spirit.)

Reading the Word and praying must go hand in hand. The inspiration to pray spontaneously arises when we begin to read the Word. We need to cultivate this inspiration rather than try to interpret what we read.

Cleansing by Breathing

It is most beneficial to our spiritual health to inhale God's breath. Just as deep breathing brings fresh air into our lungs and expels the bad air, so our whole being can be cleansed by deep breathing God's breath. This is the highest hygiene. Inhaling the fresh air of God's Word will do more for us than

memorizing it. Memorizing is an exercise of our mentality; praying over the Word is an exercise of our spirit.

By taking in God's Word we receive the truth into our being. In this way we are built up as the pillar and base of the truth. By staying in this pure air and deep breathing, we will be kept from the noxious fumes of myths, vain talking, and perpetual wranglings.

THE IMPERATIVE WORD

In the church of the living God, the Lord expects His children to be living. These two Epistles contain many commands that Paul expected Timothy to act on. When the church is degraded, the satanic lie comes in to whisper, "You cannot make it; you are too weak." The children of the living God must denounce this lie and receive the imperative word. This is the conduct expected of us in the house of God. We will consider just a few of the commands given here. If you go over these Epistles carefully, you will find many more exhortations, indicating that the Lord requires us to exercise our initiative to "lay hold on the eternal life" (1 Tim. 6:12) and reject the subtle lie that we are weak.

Flee

In both of these Epistles Paul told Timothy to flee: "You, O man of God, flee these things, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, meekness" (1 Tim. 6:11). Timothy was to flee from the love of money and its attendant evils. He was to withdraw from those men of corrupt minds who were teaching differently for gain. He was to turn from one direction to another, fleeing evil things and pursuing righteousness and godliness. "Flee youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22). This second exhortation to flee what is evil and pursue what is pure shows what a high standard we must maintain. We must be pure in our thinking, pure in our word, pure in our way of looking at things, pure in our motives, pure in our heart, and even pure in our anger.

Be an Example

When Timothy received these Epistles from Paul, he was a young man, yet Paul exhorted him, “Let no one despise your youth, but be a pattern to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). There are many young people in the church life. Do not let anyone despise your youth; rather, be an example to others, not in looseness but in purity. In human society the church must present the highest standard of morality, ethics, and character. The church as a golden lampstand is a tower full of light, expressing the divine nature.

Keep the Commandment

“The profane and old-womanish myths refuse, and exercise yourself unto godliness” (v. 7). “Foolish questionings and those arising from an untrained mind refuse” (2 Tim. 2:23). “Fight the good fight of the faith” (1 Tim. 6:12). “Keep the commandment spotless, without reproach, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 14). Because we have the living Lord within, we are able to keep these commandments.

THE EMPOWERING GRACE

“God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power and of love and of sobermindedness” (2 Tim. 1:7). God has given us a spirit that empowers our will, strengthens our love, and sobers our mind. There is no excuse for us to be jellyfish.

Notice the conclusion of these Epistles: “The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you” (4:22). For the Lord Jesus to be with your spirit means that grace is with you. In that grace you are empowered: “You therefore, my child, be empowered in the grace which is in Christ Jesus” (2:1).

This empowering grace will make us living and strong to support the truth. The church has been going through a time when the truth has been undermined and even openly attacked. Perverse teachings have been allowed to spread throughout the recovery. Dear ones, what conduct is required of us in the church of the living God? As His living children, we must rise up to protest and reject these efforts to draw us away from God’s economy. What a strong testimony we must be for the truth, that all may see that the church is in very fact the pillar and base of the truth!

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE LIFE, THE REALITY, AND THE WAY

Christ is the focus of God's eternal purpose. In John 14:6 Jesus said, "I am the way and the reality and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me."

CHRIST OUR LIFE

To experience Christ as the way and as the reality, we must first experience Him as our life. If I were to ask you how Christ can be our life, you would perhaps be at a loss for words. I doubt that many Christians know the answer, but this is one of the truths that God has recovered and that He wants us to experience. For Christ to be our life we need to know some aspects of who He is.

The Word and the Lamb of God

In John 1 Christ is portrayed as the Word who was in the beginning. This Word, who was God Himself, became flesh. Christ, then, is God incarnate. Why did He become a man? Verse 29 says, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" For Christ to be our life, He first had to solve the problem of sin. Sin was separating us from God. This man as the Lamb of God was our Redeemer whose blood was shed on the cross for our sins. This truth of redemption is the common belief of Christians.

The Grain of Wheat

"Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (12:24). Unlike redemption, the significance of this picture of Christ as a grain of wheat is not understood by most Christians. The grain of wheat does not pertain to redemption, since a seed does not have blood. A seed contains life. The grain of wheat is for the imparting of life. While the shedding of blood was for redemption, the imparting of life is for reproduction. What is the result of the grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying? The seed sprouts and grows to produce many grains. Christ was the single grain of wheat that fell into the

ground and died. Then He sprouted in resurrection and became many grains. We are those many grains. What has become of the original grain? Not only is it within us, but it has also become all of us.

Dear ones, do you realize how precious is this truth of Christ as the grain of wheat? When I was saved, I repented of my sins, confessed to the Lord, and was cleansed by His blood. After I had been saved for a time, I began to wonder what more there was to the Christian life. Was Christ only the Lamb to take away my sins? The only answer I was given was that now that I was saved, I should try to lead a good Christian life. How far short of God's intention such instruction falls! The Lamb for redemption is the grain for reproducing. By death and resurrection this grain has borne much fruit.

Another Comforter

We need to see further who Christ is in order for us to experience Him as our life. In chapter 14 John records these words of Christ: "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever, even the Spirit of reality" (vv. 16-17). Christ Himself is the Comforter. The other Comforter to be sent is the Spirit of reality. This other Comforter is not distinct from Christ Himself. He is simply the reality of Christ, translating Christ from an empty term to a living person for us. Without "another Comforter" Christ would not be real to us.

A Life-giving Spirit

For Christ to become our life, He had to take two steps. The first step was the incarnation, when "the Word became flesh." The second step is described in 1 Corinthians 15:45: "The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit." The first "became" was God becoming a man to accomplish redemption; the second "became" was Christ becoming the Spirit so that He might reproduce Himself in us.

When did this last Adam become a life-giving Spirit? It was when He arose from the dead after spending three days and three nights in the tomb.

The Enriched Spirit

There is a troublesome verse in John (7:39) about the Spirit: "This He said concerning the Spirit, whom those who believed into Him were about to

receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.” Why does it say “the Spirit was not yet”? Even Genesis 1 says, “The Spirit of God was brooding upon the surface of the waters” (v. 2). If the Spirit was there thousands of years ago, why does the Scripture say “the Spirit was not yet”? For years this verse puzzled me. I did not find the answer until I read Andrew Murray’s *The Spirit of Christ*. Chapter 5 explains that at Pentecost the Spirit of the glorified Jesus came to communicate to us, not the life of God as such, but that life as it had been interwoven into human nature in the person of Christ Jesus. It was this Spirit with humanity as well as divinity that “was not” until the resurrection of Christ.

The Spirit

Second Corinthians 3:17 says, “The Lord is the Spirit.” What Spirit is being referred to? If you check J. N. Darby’s translation, you will see that he puts verses 7 through 16 in parentheses, indicating that the thought in verse 17 directly follows that in verse 6, which says, “The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” By putting these two verses together, we can see that the Lord is the Spirit who gives life. Here, then, is a confirmation that the Lord Jesus today is the life-giving Spirit.

One Spirit

“He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17). Sinners like us can be one spirit with the Lord! Do you have the liberty to participate in worldly entertainments when you are one spirit with Him? When I am speaking for the Lord, this assurance that I am one spirit with Him is the source of my authority. Our being one spirit with the Lord affects everything we do.

“In one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit” (12:13). By having been immersed into Christ we are positioned to drink of Him as the one Spirit. Nothing less than this inward and outward mingling of ourselves and Christ as the wonderful, all-inclusive Spirit constitutes the church life.

Christ can be our life because He has passed through death and resurrection and has become the Spirit.

CHRIST OUR REALITY

Now that we have considered how Christ is life to us, we will refer to 1 Corinthians to show how Christ can be the reality to us. In this one Epistle Christ is presented to the church as eighteen items.

Wisdom and Power

“Indeed Jews require signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1:22-24). The Jews, as a religious people, sought signs or miracles. The Greeks, as lovers of philosophy, sought wisdom. For signs power is needed, and for philosophy wisdom is necessary. Paul says here that to us who are called, Christ is both power and wisdom.

If you want to run a corporation, you need money and sound judgment. The capital, or money, is the power, and the sound judgment is the wisdom. Have you ever realized that your life is like a corporation and that Christ is both your capital and your wisdom? If you take your mentality as your capital, your firm will end up in bankruptcy. If you take your cleverness as your wisdom, you will come out short of what you need. Cleverness comes mainly from our human mentality, but wisdom is from the divine Spirit.

More is said about wisdom in verse 30: “Of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom to us from God: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” We were put into Christ by being baptized (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). The water of baptism signifies not only the death of Christ but also Christ Himself as the realm in which we have been placed. The very Christ into whom we were baptized became wisdom to us from God.

Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption

Christ is wisdom to us in righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Righteousness refers to God’s doings. To be righteous is to be right with God and with man. No human being can meet this standard. Consider how loose, rough, and lawless we were before we were saved. It is because we have Christ as wisdom that we have the way to be right with both God and man. The change that has taken place in our conduct before God and man is evidence that Christ is the reality of righteousness in our life.

Sanctification is holiness; it is God's nature. When this objective holiness becomes our subjective experience, it is sanctification. We are sanctified when we are separated unto God from everything that is not of Him.

We can use our attitude toward shopping as an illustration of the distinction between righteousness and sanctification. Before we were saved, if we could take something from the store without paying for it, we were pleased with ourselves for not getting caught. Such behavior is unrighteous. After we were saved, not only would we not steal, but even if we were given too much change, we would return it. This is an example of righteousness and means that we are experiencing Christ as the power and wisdom of God.

In the experience of sanctification, you may find when you go shopping that you have a sense of bothering within about the purchase you would like to make. There is no question about your paying for it, but you have a sense that it is worldly. You may drop it and consider another article. Still there is a restraining within. By the time you turn to consider the third possible purchase, you have had enough restraint and decide that this is what you are going to buy, that this is less worldly than either of the other two you considered. The Lord within stops talking, not because He approves but in order not to press you too far when you are so young. When you come to wear your new purchase, sometimes you are happy to put it on, but other times you wonder why you thought it was so attractive in the store. Then you wear it to a meeting and feel condemned the whole time. Eventually, you discard it. The next time you go shopping, you find that the appeal of those things has faded. In time you have no inclination to purchase worldly things. By experiences such as these Christ becomes the power and wisdom to us in sanctification.

How does Christ become redemption to us? When we believed in the Lord Jesus, we were redeemed. We were God's possession, God's inheritance, but in the fall we were lost. In redemption Christ bought us back for God. Although this redemption has been accomplished, it still needs to be applied. Our mind needs to be redeemed; so do our will and our emotion. We need to be redeemed from our natural, fallen ability, our eloquence, and our way of treating our neighbors.

It would be good to pray, "Lord, I need You as my power and wisdom to be righteous, holy, and redeemed. I do not want to remain in my natural, fallen state. I want to be fully in You, not in Adam. God has transferred me into You,

and I would like to abide there, redeemed from my way of thinking, my way of loving others, and my way of making a decision. Lord, I want to express You; redeem me from my expression and from my natural attitude.”

First Corinthians 1:30 also refers to the three stages of the Christian life. In the past, when we were sinful, Christ became our righteousness. Our present living is now sanctified through Christ. In the future, when Christ returns, our body will be redeemed. Christ, then, has taken care of these three stages of our Christian life, as well as these three aspects of our daily experience. Day by day He is the power and wisdom for us to be righteous, sanctified, and redeemed.

The Deep Things of God

“As it is written, ‘Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which have not come up in man’s heart; things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But to us God has revealed them through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God” (2:9-10). All the matters pertaining to human society are superficial. Worldlings may be familiar with material wealth, education, or science, but there is something deeper that we experience, something beyond the concept of man. Others can even sense that the joy and the strength we experience are deeper than what they know. We are a mystery to the world. In suffering we have a joy; in loss we have a gain. “The depths of God” that He has prepared for those who love Him are Christ Himself.

The Foundation

“Another foundation no one is able to lay besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (3:11). If you do not have Christ, your life has no foundation. He is not only the foundation of the church; without Him, you have no foundation for your personal life. Our daily living must be founded on a person. Christ is the reality of our life because He is our foundation.

Our Passover

“Our Passover, Christ, also has been sacrificed” (5:7). The passover reminds us that formerly we were under God’s condemnation but that God has

forgiven us, passed over us, through Christ (see Exo. 12:1-14). Christ as our Passover becomes our salvation and our forgiveness.

The Unleavened Bread

“So then let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5:8). In the Old Testament seven feasts were kept by the children of Israel (Lev. 23). The first was the Feast of the Passover, and the next was the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In that feast nothing leavened could be eaten. In Christ we enjoy a lifelong feast of unleavened bread. If we do not sense that we are feasting, it is because we have not gotten rid of the leaven. Leaven represents what is sinful and condemned by God. Once this is gone, our Christian life becomes a happy enjoyment.

The Lord’s table signifies the Passover feast and also reminds us of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Sin and condemnation are over. We are at the feast, enjoying Christ and hating sin.

Our Spiritual Food, Drink, and Rock

“Our fathers...all were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank of a spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ” (1 Cor. 10:1-4). Day by day our food is Christ; He is the manna. He is also the living water that flows out of the cleft rock. The rock symbolizes the source of our supply. Both the supply and the source of the supply are Christ. He is our dependable rock, always following us to be our supply. In Him we have food, drink, and an unfailing source of supply.

The Head

“I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ” (11:3). All too often the self is the head. But Christ is not only our life; He is also to be our Head. Unless we take Christ as our Head, we cannot properly take Him as our life. This affects our personal life, our family life, and the church life. His headship is a serious matter.

If we are asked for advice by a younger one, our fellowship must be under the headship of Christ. To tell the younger one what to do is to disregard the fact that Christ is his Head, not we. For him to know what to do is secondary; for him to realize that Christ is his Head is primary.

Our Head is the Lord Jesus. We are not our own head; neither is anyone else. Once we realize this, we are ready to know His will because we have given Him the right position. The sisters cannot take their husband as their head without first positioning themselves to take Christ as the Head. Only when He is the Head are we properly positioned in the presence of God. We lack the experience of Christ because we do not esteem Him as our Head. Before we decide to go somewhere or to buy a pair of shoes, we must check with Him. By coming under His headship we will experience Him as our reality.

The Body

“Even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ” (12:12). From this verse we can see that Christ is not only the Head but also the Body. In the new man there is no room for you or me; Christ is all in all (Col. 3:10-11).

The Firstfruits, the Second Man, the Last Adam, and the Life-giving Spirit

“Now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). Christ is the first. “The second man is out of heaven” (v. 47). Here He is second. “The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit” (v. 45). Here He is last. If He is A and B, He is also Z. Christ is everything.

How could this marvelous One, represented by all these items, be the reality of them to us? It is because He is the life-giving Spirit. By turning away from our mind, emotion, and will, we can encounter Him in our spirit. As He spreads into our inner being and makes His home there, He becomes our reality as well as our life, and we are no longer empty.

CHRIST OUR WAY

After we have experienced Christ as our life and enjoyed Him as our reality, this reality becomes our way. God's way with us is always a person. For us to contact God, the way is a person. The same is true of fellowshiping with the saints, serving God, living in the church life, preaching the gospel, shepherding the saints, becoming holy, or being redeemed. In our Christian life the way to do everything is a person.

The One who is the power and wisdom of God to us is Christ crucified (1:23-24). Paul refers to Him again as the crucified One in the second chapter: "I, when I came to you, brothers, came not according to excellence of speech or of wisdom, announcing to you the mystery of God. For I did not determine to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and this One crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling; and my speech and my proclamation were not in persuasive words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (vv. 1-4).

In preaching this crucified One, Paul held the attitude of himself being crucified. Rather than demonstrating a clever mind or eloquent words, he was with the Corinthians in weakness, fear, and much trembling. The way to preach is in demonstration of the Spirit, not in the exaltation of the natural man. The crucified Jesus is the way of all ministry.

Fulfilling All Righteousness

When the Lord Jesus began His ministry around the age of thirty, His first public act was to be baptized by John (Matt. 3:13-17). His ministry began with His being buried. He was holy, pure, and sinless, yet before He could touch God's ministry, (in figure) He had to die. John the Baptist did not realize this. He could see how sinners like the Pharisees and Sadducees needed to be baptized, but how could this One born of the Holy Spirit need baptism? "Jesus answered and said to him, Permit it for now, for it is fitting for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness" (v. 15). Dear ones, the highest righteousness is to be buried. After Christ had been buried and come up from the water, He entered into the enjoyment of the presence of God. Such is the meaning of the opened heavens, the descent of the Spirit like a dove, and the Father's voice. For the true enjoyment of God's presence, we must die and be buried.

A Life under the Shadow of the Cross

A careful study of the Gospels will reveal that the whole earthly life of the Lord Jesus was under the death of the cross. His baptism was the first step in a life of dying. Eventually, He went to the cross and physically died.

How to Die

In resurrection this One became the life-giving Spirit. The effectiveness of His death is in this very Spirit who now indwells us (see chapter 8). We do not die by committing suicide but by experiencing the dying One within. Hebrews 10:20 tells us that a new and living way has been initiated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh. When Jesus was crucified, the veil that separated man from God was rent from top to bottom. His being crucified opened the way and made Him the way. Whatever we seek to do or be in our Christian life, the way is to die with Christ.

I trust that through this chapter we have become clear that the One who is “the way and the reality and the life” is experienced by us first as our life, then as our reality, and last as our way. Such experiences are possible because in resurrection He became the life-giving Spirit, and as such He indwells us. Because we are one spirit with Him, whatever He is becomes ours and our reality. This reality then becomes our way to live in the presence of God.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

GOD AND HIS WORD

In the very first page of the Bible God is revealed in creation. How was His creative work carried out? There is no mention of the strength of His arm or the skill of His hand. Rather, “He spoke, and it was; / He commanded, and it stood” (Psa. 33:9). Nine times in Genesis 1 we have the words *And God said*. That is why the psalmist says, “By the word of Jehovah the heavens were made, / And all their host, by the breath of His mouth” (33:6). God’s work is accomplished and His power made manifest by His mouth.

The Lord Jesus exemplified this same principle in the Gospels. He healed people by His word, not by working. In the case of the centurion’s servant, the Lord’s word healed him even when he was in another place (Matt. 8:5-13). He also said, “He who hears My word...has eternal life” (John 5:24). We are saved not by the Lord’s working but by His speaking, by His word.

It is not easy to distinguish His word from God Himself. In fact, John 1:1 says, “The Word was God.” We may think that the language of John 1:1 is awkward. When I was young, I thought that John 1:1 should read, “In the beginning was God, and God was manifested as the Word.” But by saying, as John does, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” he is exalting the Word as the One who was there first before identifying that Word as God Himself.

In the Gospel of John, this book of life, the first vital point concerning life is the Word. When John describes the incarnation in 1:14, he does not say that *God* became flesh; he says, “The *Word* became flesh and tabernacled among us.” That God is called the Word is not a small thing. We cannot separate the Word from God.

Nor can we separate the Word from the Spirit. The Lord said, “The words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life” (6:63). If His words are spirit, and the Word is God, these three are one.

THE BIBLE

The whole Bible is the word of God (2 Tim. 3:16). Do not take any word other than the Bible as the word of God; otherwise, you can be led into heresy. Apart from the Bible, you have no sure word of God. Whatever is in the Bible, you may rest assured, is the word of God.

You cannot say from this that the Bible is God, even though the Bible is God's word, and the Word is God Himself. It would be superstitious to worship the Bible. Pointing your finger at a random verse and taking that verse as your guidance is superstitious. You need to exercise your spirit and your sober mind when you come to the Word, not your finger! In 1923 a brother who lived in the same county as Brother Nee tried to find the Lord's will by pointing to a verse on a page he opened to at random. The verse was Matthew 27:5, where Judas "went away and hanged himself"! This is not the way to honor the Word. Do not consider that the Bible is God in any material sense; this is a heresy.

But the Bible is more than a secular book. Your sense when you come to this book differs from what you feel when you handle a secular magazine. I have tried to pick up my Bible after having a disagreement with my wife. The sense was there right away that I should not touch that book, should not come to the Lord's presence, till I had first gone back to put matters right with my wife. Have you ever had such an experience? If you are stubborn and insist on opening the Word anyway, you get nothing from your reading. This book compels you to make restitution to your wife.

ITS RICHES

How rich is this book in which God has spoken! In it is Christ Himself. If you are asked by a learned professor where Christ is, do not reply that He is in the heavens; that is too far away. Do not say that He is in your spirit; that is too mysterious. The answer is that Christ is in the Bible. If the inquirer truly wants to meet Him, let him read John 1:1-29 over and over. He will surely find Him.

The Life-study messages are rich, but not one of them is as rich as the Bible. The writings of Confucius are of a high quality, with profound philosophical and ethical teachings, but they cannot compare with the Bible. I studied some of those writings when I was young, and I did appreciate them, but once I became familiar with them, there seemed to be not much more to them when

I went back to consider them further. The Bible, in contrast, is inexhaustible. We have put out over sixty-five messages on the Gospel of John, yet we could easily have another sixty-five messages without the well running dry. The more we read the Bible, the more riches we discover. After fifty-five years of loving this book, I am still plumbing its depths and enjoying its riches.

ITS CENTRAL THOUGHT

It is best if we come to this Word knowing what its central thought is. Whatever part of the Bible we are reading, we should be aware that the basic concept of this Holy Book is that God desires to work Himself into us. Nothing pleases God as much as being one with us. He wants to be us and wants us to be Him. He would like to be our life. Yes, we already have life, but our life is not the real life. It is just a vessel, an empty vessel, to contain God as our real life. God's desire is that we should be His vessel, containing Him, expressing Him, and living Him out.

Day by day I have the deep conviction within me that I should not live myself out. I am just a vessel with God as my life. In my speaking, if I do not contain, express, and convey Him to you, my words are just vanity. Before I speak, I pray, "Lord, I do not want to speak anything from myself. I want to speak only You. If You are not my speaking, whatever I speak is in vain." I do believe that in my speaking the Lord's word is spoken.

When we come to the Bible then, we must not think that we are coming just to the printed page. We need to realize that the Word, God, the Spirit, and the Bible are one. In coming to His Word, we come to Him. His intention is not to teach or correct us; it is rather to work Himself into us.

HOW REALIZED

As Nourishment

By what way does God work Himself into us? It is in the same way that we take food into us. By eating different forms of the animal and vegetable life, we get the essential elements we need to sustain our physical life. What we eat may be in the form of apples or cherries, beef or chicken. But it becomes part of us in the form of nutrients that our bodies can assimilate to keep us alive and healthy. What we eat does not stay in the form of an apple or a chicken; it

is digested as vitamins, minerals, protein, and other substances that our bodies need.

God Himself is the nourishment we need. Both the animal and vegetable life are used in the Bible to illustrate the riches of His nourishment. Jesus said to His disciples, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall by no means hunger, and he who believes into Me shall by no means ever thirst” (John 6:35). Here Christ likens Himself to barley and wheat. He is symbolized by the vegetable life.

In this same chapter (John 6) He is also described as being of the animal life: “The bread which I will give is My flesh, given for the life of the world...Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up in the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink” (vv. 51-55).

From such verses we can see that God would impart Himself into us as nourishment, that our spiritual being might be constituted. Mere instruction in the Christian life is not sufficient; we must have the genuine food.

By His Speaking

In addition to taking Him in as our nourishment, there is another way by which God becomes our constituent. It is by His speaking. In His speaking He breathes out whatever He is. He said, “I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall by no means walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (8:12). Christ is wrought into us as light when He speaks. In His speaking light is conveyed to us. When He said, “I am...the life” (14:6), life was wrapped up with His word. When His word comes and is received, the healing life comes into the receiver. Whenever we receive God’s word, we receive God Himself as well.

The opening words of Hebrews remind us that God has spoken. “God, having spoken of old in many portions and in many ways to the fathers in the prophets, has at the last of these days spoken to us in the Son” (1:1-2). In Old Testament times God spoke to the fathers in many portions and in many ways, but now in this New Testament age God has spoken in the Son. How we thank

Him that He is a speaking God, and that His speaking is on this earth, among men!

Just as the apostles spoke in the Son, so our speaking today is the Son's speaking because we are one with Him and members of His Body. We need to learn to differentiate between the ministry that speaks God into us and one that does not. Whenever we come to a meeting and listen to a proper speaking, God Himself is conveyed to us in that speaking. We may, on the other hand, listen to an eloquent sermon that stirs us up, but once it is over, we have the feeling that nothing remains with us and that we are still the same. A real ministry of God's speaking results in something of God getting into us. We may disagree with what is said or even reject it, but nonetheless the living God has been spoken into us.

SALVATION IN THE WORD

The gospel through which we were saved came from the Bible. It is by this same book that we are saved day by day. If we neglect this book, however wonderful our initial experience of salvation was, we will find that we are not properly saved.

The saints of old have given abundant testimony of how they were saved by the Word. Psalm 119:147 reads, "I anticipated the dawn and cried out; / I hoped in Your words." The psalmist is saying that he arose before dawn and cried out. All his future, all his living, was bound up with God's word. Without it, he had no hope.

Consider how much better off we are than the Old Testament saints. Moses did not have even the first five books of the Bible. David's Bible did not include the prophets. He had neither the sweet book of Isaiah, nor the mysterious Zechariah, nor the marvelous book of Daniel, nor the unveiling book of Ezekiel. We not only have all these; we have the Gospels, the Acts, the Epistles, and Revelation as well.

Do you realize what a precious heritage this is? I remember when I was newly saved how much I treasured the Bible. For me, nothing in the world could compare with it.

GOD ADDED TO US

Reading this Word will save you. Even if you take just ten minutes in the morning, you will find a supply there. If you lack patience, patience will be your portion. If you are short of love, those ten minutes will supply you with love. As you pray-read the Word, you will be cleansed. Because you are still on this earth living in your flesh, in your natural life, you become contaminated. Without realizing it, you will be cleansed by reading this Word, and God, the very essence of the Word, will be imparted to you. You will become a different person.

This nourishment will sustain us. While I speak, the food that I have eaten is upholding me. I may not have noticed what I was eating, and I may be unaware of the nutrients in the food I ate, but nonetheless that food is going into my bloodstream and supplying me with physical strength and energy. We may not understand the Word that we pray-read, but eventually we shall find that it has been light, life, and even the anointing to us.

If we summarize how this Word benefits us as it nourishes, waters, and sustains us, we can say that it adds God into us. We must not be distracted by teachings about healing or power. In this Word faith is ours, power and authority are ours, and healing is ours.

RICHS IN THE MEETINGS

The outcome of getting into the Word regularly will be a proper Christian life. Then as you come together with the saints, your meetings will display your daily walk. You are not coming together for a performance or to be entertained. You live Christ and feast on His word day by day. Then as you meet with the saints, if you have a hymn, you call it. If you have a prayer, you offer it. If you have a word, you utter it. If you have a message, you give it. The result will be the genuine church life, with the meetings enriched by prayers so full of life, by words so full of light, and by testimonies so full of help. How you meet does not depend on a form but on how you live. Surely you need more in your meetings than the candy of excitement and entertainment. Do not take any extraordinary way. Come back to the Bible and to the simplicity of cleaving to the tree of life. If you live according to His Word, when you meet together, you will experience His blessing.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

LIVING BY ANOTHER'S LIFE

From the time that I received the Lord, I realized that His life was in me. John 3:16 states clearly, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that everyone who believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life.” I knew that by believing in Him I had received eternal life. Yet I wondered how such a life could affect my daily living.

A BIRD OR A DOG?

Perhaps some of you have this same concern. You may have a wonderful time in the Word in the morning, yet throughout the day you may often feel condemned because of your loose talking on the phone or your irritability toward your family. In some ways you experience a bird's life, soaring in the open heavens, but in other ways you lead a dog's life, barking at your mother or at your children. One moment you are praying to the Lord, and the next moment you are venting your wrath on your family. Which are you, a bird or a dog?

For many years I longed to know how my living could correspond with the life I had received. I was saved in China, a land of idols and Confucius's philosophy. Many young college students, including Watchman Nee, were saved around that same time, in the 1920s. I do believe that the Lord granted us His gracious visitation as a result of the prayers of many saints, mostly in England. In 1900 the Boxer Rebellion had caused the martyrdom of many missionaries, mostly English; this episode constrained many to pray for China. Our salvation, no doubt, was one result of those prayers.

From our study of the Bible and our seeking of the Lord, we came to realize that our living should be different. We gathered scores of Christian books, seeking to find the way to live such a life. Not one book helped us. In fact, a number of years went by before we found the secret.

We noticed from the Gospel of John that our relationship with the Lord begins by believing in Him. “As many as received Him, to them He gave the

authority to become children of God, to those who believe into His name” (1:12). This first chapter shows that to believe in Him is to receive Him.

The last chapter, however, indicates that our relationship with Him is a matter of love: “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” (21:15). But loving Him is not the way by which we live this life we have received.

TWO PERSONS BUT ONE LIFE

The key is found in chapters 5, 6, and 7. It is that the life we have received is Another’s, yet it is not lived by Him but by us. The Lord Jesus demonstrated this way of living by taking the life of the Father. In 6:57 the Lord said, “As the living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me.” By comparing this verse with 5:26, “Just as the Father has life in Himself, so He gave to the Son to also have life in Himself,” we can see that though the life was the Father’s, the Father was not the One who lived it. His desire was that His life be lived out by the Son. This life involved two persons: it was the life of the first person, but it had to be lived by the second person. The Father was the Giver of this life, and the Son was the Receiver. There were two persons but one life to be lived.

AN ILLUSTRATION

Married life is somewhat like this. Two people are involved, the husband and the wife, but for a happy marriage, there can be only one life lived. If the wife lives her own life instead of living by her husband’s, their marriage will be miserable. This comparison of marriage with our relationship to the Lord is not superficial. Ephesians 5:23-32 tells us that Christ is the Husband and the church is the wife. Should the church have a living separate from the living of Christ?

Married life actually is a faulty illustration because there are two lives involved. The husband’s life cannot literally be his wife’s life; they each have a life of their own. But in the case of the Father and the Son, the two of Them truly had only one life. In the case of Christ and the church, also, there is only one life; what Christ has as life is what the church has as life.

However earnestly the wives try to be subject “to their husbands in everything,” and however sincerely the husbands try to love their wives “even

as Christ also loved the church,” their efforts will be in vain. This will be the case even if the wife follows the principle of taking her husband’s life as her own. The exhortations in Ephesians can only be carried out by both husband and wife taking the life of Another. The love and the submission are from the Lord. When they take Christ as their life, in the wife submission will come forth, and in the husband love will arise.

EXPRESSING SOMEONE CONCEALED

When we were saved, we were joined to Christ as one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). We are one with Him. Today Christ cannot be seen. He is concealed from the eyes of men, first in the heavens (Acts 3:20-21) and second in us (2 Cor. 13:5). While He was on earth, He followed the principle of living by a concealed life. John says, “No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (1:18). As the Son expressed that hidden life, so today we His disciples are charged to take His life as our living, thus making manifest His concealed life.

NOT A MATTER OF IMPROVING BEHAVIOR

When the disciples of Confucius try to follow their master’s teachings, all their efforts are directed at trying to improve their behavior so that it will conform to what Confucius said. This is our natural concept also, when we come to the Bible. Christians think that they must behave in an ethical, morally upright way. They study the Bible in order to find out what constitutes the proper Christian life. Then they strive to meet that standard.

All such efforts are nothing but a frustration to the way Christians should live. The proper Christian life is not related to ethics but to a person. No doubt Christian morality and ethics are the highest, but it is because they are Christ Himself. It is He who is love or humility or kindness. These traits are expressed when we live Him.

It is all too common to think that we should improve our behavior after we get saved, that we must try to act like the children of God rather than like the children of the devil. Better conduct is not God’s intention for us. Do you think the Son lived by the Father because His own life was not good enough? By no means! The Son simply wanted to fulfill the Father’s desire to be lived out by the Son. “I do not seek My own will but the will of Him who sent Me”

(5:30). The Son's commission was to express the Father, not to do anything else. "The living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father" (6:57). The Son took the Father's life not because of any sin or weakness or inadequacy on the Son's part but just to accomplish the Father's desire. He was sent not to establish an empire or to perform a great work. Even to say that Christ came to save sinners is only partly true. He came to live the Father. If the cross had not been the Father's will, if saving sinners had not been the Father's will, Christ would not have submitted to the cross. You remember His prayer in Gethsemane: "Not as I will, but as You will" (Matt. 26:39).

HIS LIFE BUT YOUR LIVING

As you go through the day, you need to realize that Christ and you have only one life, not yours but His. For this to be your experience, your own life has to be put aside. Then you two will have only one living, not His but yours, because His is concealed.

This is not easy to understand. Ask the Lord to make you clear. "Lord, thank You that You and I have one life. Show me how to take this life; show me how to put aside my life. Thank You, Lord, that the two of us have only one living; this is my living, not Yours. I thank You that the life is Yours. You should thank me that the living is mine!" If you keep praying this way, you will become clear that in the Christian life the Lord and you have only one life. In yourself you have your life; in Himself He has His. But in Him, in His life, you are both one. This one life is your living.

If we pray this way, we may sense that the Lord is pleased—pleased that He has a life for us and that we have a living for Him.

HOW TO PUT ASIDE OUR OWN LIFE

For us to experience the one life, our own life must be put aside. In specific terms, we must put aside both our will and our glory. The Lord said, "I do not seek My own will but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 5:30). In 7:17-18 He said, "If anyone resolves to do His will, he will know concerning the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of Him who sent Him, this One is true, and unrighteousness is not in Him." The Lord sought both

the will and the glory of the One who had sent Him. To put our will and glory aside is to deny the self.

All human beings are for their own will and their own glory. Why do we prefer to live by our own life? It is because within us we have a will concerning ourselves. The direction of this will is to promote our name, our popularity, our position. Our will within seeks to advance our glory without.

Self-promotion characterizes human society. Everyone wants to be somebody. Even in the church there are these aspirations to be someone. But the church annuls every one of us. I have heard the church people criticized as being a “bunch of dummies,” lacking any self-assertiveness. Is not this a testimony that the Lord is making us different from the world?

When we put down the will and the glory of the natural life, that life is finished.

HOW TO BE HELPED BY THE WORD

To get the most help from the Word, do not seek your own will and glory. If you are after a position for yourself, when you come to the Word, the help you receive will be fragmentary at best. Be content to be nobody. As long as you are somebody, you are taking yourself as life. The Lord Jesus' baptism at the beginning of His ministry was a declaration that He was terminated, that His natural life was under the cross, and that He would live the Father. It is when you choose such a life that the Word nourishes you. The Word is not for the sustaining of your natural life. The intent of the Word is not to instruct you. Do not try to do what is taught in the Bible. Just open to Him as you open His Word and receive Him through the Word as your supply.

THE HIGHEST COMMISSION

Are you satisfied to be a nobody? You can try the educational world if you would like to be somebody. Or there may be openings for you in the world of politics. But once you step through the door of the church, you are a nobody. Are you willing?

I would rather phrase the question in a positive way: Are you satisfied with the highest commission? The Lord Jesus turned from His own will and His own glory in order to take the Father's life and live Him. This same high

commission is yours: to take Christ as your life and to live Him. It is no more I but Christ who lives in me. This is both the Christian life and the church life. How far it surpasses the will and the glory of the self!

Let nothing distract you from this commission. Do not be concerned about worldliness. Do not think about weakness. Do not be burdened by your sins. The more you try to overcome worldliness, weakness, and sin, the more you will be victimized by them. If you take Christ as your life and live Him out, these and all the other negative things will flee away.

PRACTICING

In the everyday affairs of life, do not be pushed into doing things quickly. Do not reply, or even utter anything, in haste. Whatever the provocation, be steady. If a difficult situation arises with your wife, for example, do not be troubled. Just confer with the Lord within: “Lord, I do not do anything. I am one with You. You act in me. You answer my wife. I would not do anything apart from You.”

Having this attitude of taking the Lord as our life saves us from trying to obey the letter of the Bible. By constantly turning to Him and declaring that we are one with Him, we provide Him the opportunity to change us by metabolically carrying away the old and replacing it with the new. Such will be the effect of the nourishing Word we take in—not outward correction but inward change.

How privileged you are to have this other life! As you practice living by Christ, you will see how different you are from those in the world, who have only their own life. God has imparted His life to you. Now He wants you to live Him out as your living.

As the Son lived the Father by the Father’s life, so today we live the Son by the Son’s life. Let us thank Him that we two have one life and one living; the life is His, and the living is ours. This is the proper Christian life.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE TREE OF LIFE

In the opening chapters of the Bible the tree of life is presented to us. When we come to its closing chapters, again there is this tree. Why does it still prevail after so many pages, so much history, and so many centuries?

MAN IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

God had an eternal plan. For this purpose He created the heavens and the earth and countless other things. Then He formed a creature that differed from the animals, the plants, and the hosts of heaven. If you looked at him, there would be something about him that reminded you of God.

This man was placed in a garden planted especially for him. Of all the trees growing there, only two are mentioned by name. For many, many years this picture of man and two trees in a garden puzzled me. Why did the Lord God's first recorded word to His creature concern the matter of eating from these trees? "Of every tree of the garden you may eat freely, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, of it you shall not eat; for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:16-17).

If I had been God, I would surely have talked to Adam about my purpose. I would have told him that since I was his creator, he should worship me morning, noon, and evening. I would have taught him some melodies with which to praise me. Then I would have told him about the wife I would make for him, his counterpart. He would need to love her, and she would need to submit to him, in order that they might be a good example to all the future human couples. I would have told him about the generations to be born and the communities that would be raised up. For all these relationships he would need to develop a good character and show kindness, humility, and patience. But these opening chapters of Genesis are void of any such explanations and exhortations.

MAN, A DEPENDENT CREATURE

Very gradually over these past fifty years I have come to understand the meaning of this simple picture of man and two trees in a garden. The first crucial point is that man was not created independent. Because he had to eat, he was dependent upon others. If God had created Adam with a self-sustaining, unending life, he would not have needed to eat. But man could not live by himself in an isolated way, because he was designed to need food. He was destined to be dependent.

TWO SOURCES OF SUPPLY

The two trees represent two ways for man to turn to have his need met. The tree of life represents God. The other tree signifies Satan. God's supply is simple—life. Satan's supply is complicated—the knowledge of good and evil.

Notice that good does not belong to the category of life. Good pertains to knowledge, just as evil does. Both belong to Satan and issue in death. If you do not depend upon God, you are depending upon that second source. Do not think that you can depend upon knowledge or upon what is good. If you are not depending upon God, your trust is in something that has Satan as its source. However much you struggle to be independent, you are waging a losing battle against your destiny.

If you depend upon God, the issue is life; if Satan, it is death. The second crucial point, then, is that we have only God and Satan to choose between for the source of our supply.

EATING, NOT DOING

I have already commented on how different God's approach to Adam was from what mine would have been. God showed no interest in telling him what to do or how to behave. It is the human concept of religion that promotes doing—worship, good behavior, proper relationships with others. Religion presents man with a long list of dos and don'ts.

God's concern for man was that he choose the right food. All would go well as long as he ate properly. Death would result if he chose the wrong food. This concern implied that man could take God in as his life. Man was not given the divine life when he was created; rather, he was given a free will to choose that life, symbolized by the tree of life.

THE IDENTITY OF THE TREE OF LIFE

I used to wonder what the tree of life was. Peach and apple trees I knew, and pear trees I was familiar with, but what was the life tree? Eventually, I found some clues in the writings of John. At the end of Revelation the tree of life reappears: “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” (22:2). Does it puzzle you that a tree could grow on both banks of a river? Surely this tree is a vine, spreading along the banks.

We know who the true vine is from John 15:1. This is the very One who said, “I am...the life” (14:6) and “I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly” (10:10). The Lord Jesus Himself is surely the tree of life.

THE LORD JESUS AS LIFE

The tree of life declares that God offers Himself to man in an edible form. The Lord Jesus brought this same message to man about Himself.

Bread, Not a King

“I am the bread of life...This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, that anyone may eat of it and not die” (6:48, 50). Earlier in this chapter the Lord had miraculously fed the five thousand. The crowd then decided that they would forcibly make Him King. He slipped away and the next day came back and talked with them, not about reigning and lording it over them but about being a loaf of bread for them to eat and thus receive eternal life. Rather than externally control them, He wanted to be received into them and to become part of them.

The Author of Life

When Peter was preaching, he told the Israelites that they had killed the “Author of life” (Acts 3:15). The word translated “Author” could also be rendered “Inaugurator,” “Prince,” or “Pioneer.” However it is translated, we can surely infer that life has its source in Him.

Life Itself

John 1:4 tells us that “in Him was life.” Not only was this the case; He Himself was life (14:6) and came to bring us life (10:10). Furthermore, Paul describes Him as “Christ our life” (Col. 3:4). Life, then, is this person.

THE TREE OF LIFE IN REVELATION

Here is the first promise given to the overcomers: “To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7). The tree of life is here again offered to man. Due to the fall the tree of life was closed to him. Through the redemption of Christ, the way to touch the tree of life has been reopened (Heb. 10:19-20).

In the last chapter of Revelation there is the description of the tree of life growing on the two sides of the river (22:2). Because this tree grows in the river of water of life, the tree is no doubt included in the final invitation to man: “Let him who is thirsty come; let him who wills take the water of life freely” (v. 17). By taking the water of life, surely you will get the tree of life growing in it.

From verse 14 we can see that the believers who wash their robes have the right to enjoy the tree of life as their eternal portion in the holy city.

Finally, in verse 19 a solemn warning is given that anyone who takes away from the prophecy will lose his part in the tree of life and in the holy city. From these verses we may infer that the tree of life is one of the outstanding features of the eternal blessing.

GOD’S THOUGHT FOR MAN

Do not lose sight of God’s intention for man as represented by this tree: God wants you to take Him as your life. By eating of this tree, man would have the divine life. What you eat is taken into you and becomes part of you. The tree of life signifies the Author, the Originator, the Prince, of life—Jesus Christ, God Himself, as our life.

AN EDIBLE, DRINKABLE LIFE

The symbolism in Genesis of the tree of life finds its explanation and fulfillment in the Gospel of John. As Adam was offered the divine life if he would eat of the tree of life, so also, when Christ came, man was presented

with God's life and told that it could be received by eating. It was to make this point that the Lord Jesus in chapter 6 talked so much about Himself as "the true bread out of heaven" (v. 32). He said, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall by no means hunger, and he who believes into Me shall by no means ever thirst...For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes into Him should have eternal life...I am the living bread which came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever...He who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me" (vv. 35, 40, 51, 57). It is so clear that the way the Lord is to be received is by eating.

In the very next chapter He spoke further of Himself as the One who is drinkable as well as edible: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water" (7:37-38).

THE WAY TO EAT AND DRINK HIM

When I was still a child, I heard that Christ is the bread of life. I recall wondering even back then how to eat Him, but no one gave me even a hint. Then when I was about twenty, a renowned traveling preacher came to town. I still remember the message he gave on John 10:10 about the more abundant life. But he left me with no impression of how I could have such a life.

Christ is invisible, abstract, and mysterious. Even our physical life is mysterious and invisible. There is ample evidence that we are alive, but the life itself cannot be seen. Christ may be present with us and be in us, but we cannot see Him or touch Him in a physical way.

We need to be clear, furthermore, that this mysterious One is nothing other than God Himself. Do not think that besides Christ, there is God. Christ is God. Romans 9:5 describes Him as "the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever." Christ is also the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17) and the Word (John 1:14).

The many terms used to describe Christ help us to understand how we can take Him as our life. He is the tree of life, the bread of life, the water of life, the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2), and the word of life (Phil. 2:16). The tree of life indicates the source. The bread of life indicates that this life is edible, and the water of life indicates that it is drinkable. The Spirit of life refers to the Spirit

of God, and the word of life reminds us that this life can be found in the Bible, the Word of God.

Surely we can all testify that when we touch the word of the Bible in spirit, we find Christ. Wherever we turn in the Bible, Christ is there. This Christ in the word is our food. "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out through the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). To live on the words that proceed from God's mouth is to live by Christ, for He is the living Word out of the mouth of God.

Be sure you have a good spiritual breakfast every morning by prayerfully reading this book. You must put this ahead of every other duty or demand on your time. The way to eat Christ is to open to receive Him in His Word. Do this several times a day. You will be nourished, strengthened, comforted, and built up. The Bible is an inexhaustible mine of riches. The more you read it, the more you will value it.

How do we enjoy Christ as the water of life? He is not only the Word for us to eat but also the Spirit for us to drink. Spiritual drinking or breathing is praying. Mingle your reading of the Bible with prayer. Instead of making up prayers, repeat the words of the Scripture you read as your prayer. As you make pray-reading the Word your habit, you will be full of both food and water.

DOING EVERYTHING WITH CHRIST

In times past you may have tried to find out the Lord's will for your life. You may have been concerned to distinguish between right and wrong. You may have spent time praying about what you should do and should not do. Dear ones, drop this kind of attitude. It is in the realm of the Old Testament commandments.

Turn from that way to pay your full attention to Christ. If you are going to speak, do not ask, "Lord, is it Your will that I speak? Lord, what should I say?" Rather, pray in a simple way, "Lord, are You going to speak? I do not care for right and wrong, for speaking or not speaking. I only care that it is You who are speaking." If you are at an end regarding your wife, pray, "Lord, I am getting mad at my wife. Are You mad at her too?" He will not be; thus, the door will be closed on your anger.

Learn not to do anything without the Lord. Do everything with Him. In God's economy it is not a question of what to do and what not to do. The vital question is, who does it—you or He? Even love, if it springs from you, is not acceptable to God. Whether it is love or hate, it must be Christ who is loving or hating.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TREE OF LIFE

Why does the tree of life still appear in the closing book of the Bible? God wants to remind us that His intention for man will surely be realized. Man's disobedience caused only a temporary interruption. God's unchanging desire is to be received into His creature as food that the two may be one. His thought was not that man might behave decently and honor Him as the Creator with suitable worship. No! The tree was there declaring, "Here is God's life. Take this life into you and live by it."

When Christ came, once again God was presenting Himself to man in an edible form. "He who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me" (John 6:57). What we eat is assimilated by our bodies and becomes part of us. In a similar way, by receiving God's life into us, He becomes us and we become His expression.

We partake of the tree of life when we open to receive Christ in His Word. He will be our food and drink even in the New Jerusalem.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

EATING IN EXODUS

The marvelous picture of the man created in God's image was soon marred. Man fell, and by the end of Genesis he was "in a coffin in Egypt" (50:26). Instead of enjoying the tree of life, he was dead and in the world.

How grateful we are for Exodus! *Exodus* means "departure," and in this second book of the Bible we find the way to get out of the coffin and out of Egypt.

UNDER CONDEMNATION AND TYRANNY

How was man to escape from his sorry plight? In Egypt he was under God's condemnation and Pharaoh's tyranny. He had disobeyed God, and he had been enslaved by the Egyptians. What would be the means of his deliverance?

THE PASSOVER

To be released from God's condemnation and to be strengthened to leave Egypt, we need the Passover. First Corinthians 5:7 says that "our Passover, Christ, also has been sacrificed." The Passover was a feast in which the children of Israel ate roast lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. All three of these are a picture of Christ.

The Lamb

The Blood

The lamb was first killed, and then its blood was put on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which it was to be eaten (Exo. 12:6-7). God said, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (v. 13). The Israelites were sheltered by entering the blood-sprinkled house. Today we too have a free entry into the shelter through the redeeming blood of Christ and are under the covering of His blood. How we praise the Lord for the blood, which releases us from God's condemnation!

To be strengthened to leave Egypt the Israelites had to do more than sprinkle the blood over their door entrance. The house needed to be protected so that they could eat the lamb.

Notice the three parts of the lamb to be eaten: “Do not eat any of it raw or boiled at all with water, but roasted with fire—its head with its legs and with its inward parts” (v. 9). Too many Christians have an oversimplified Passover, consisting only of the blood. We surely appreciate the blood, which keeps us from God’s judgment when His smiting hand strikes Egypt. But once we have the blood, we must eat the lamb under this shelter. The Israelites were to “eat the flesh in that night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread with bitter herbs” (v. 8). Once they were full of this rich meal of lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs, they would be energized to march out of Egypt. This nourishing meal strengthens us to walk out from under the tyranny of Satan.

The Head

The first part of the lamb mentioned for eating was the head. This signifies that we need to eat Christ as our wisdom. When we eat the wise Christ, we can see the way out of Satan’s maze. The world is a maze, deceiving us with its false hopes and allurements. We are trapped in it until we receive Christ and eat Him as the wise head. Then we can see the way to slip out of its clutches and be delivered from its temptations. To walk out of the world, we need the wisdom of Christ; He has to be our wise nourishment.

The Legs

Eating the legs of the lamb is a reminder to us that we need to eat Christ in His walk on this earth. Eating the legs strengthens us to walk out of Egypt. Leaving Egypt required strong legs. The children of Israel did not pursue a direct route. They curved around before reaching the shores of the Red Sea. Then, when they looked behind, they found the Egyptians in hot pursuit. On either side of them were mountains. Any way of escape seemed completely cut off. How they needed the wisdom from eating the head of the lamb and the walking strength from eating its legs! This was the source of their strength for walking on dry land through the Red Sea, with its waters a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

The Inward Parts

The last part of the lamb the children of Israel were told to eat was its inward parts. The inward parts of Christ are His emotion, mind, will, and heart. We need to learn to read the four Gospels with a view to eating Christ in His wisdom, walk, and inward parts.

By eating Him in this way, He will be to us not only wisdom and strength to escape the snare of the world but also the patience, the long-suffering, and the strong will to sustain us.

Unleavened Bread

Lamb was not the only food eaten at the passover. Unleavened bread was one of the accompaniments. First Corinthians 5:8 says, “So then let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” Eating Christ as the unleavened bread keeps away all the sinful things, making us also unleavened, with nothing about us unclean in the eyes of God.

Bitter Herbs

“They shall eat it with unleavened bread with bitter herbs” (Exo. 12:8). This was the other accompaniment to the lamb, all together making a well-rounded meal. The effect of eating Christ as the bitter herbs is the bitter sense you have whenever you touch something sinful. If you go to a movie or criticize your mother-in-law or even think negatively about her, you will sense the bitter herbs working within you.

I believe that by now we are all clear that the way to get out of the coffin and out of Egypt is by eating. This is shown through the provision of the passover.

Even the manner of eating the passover shows how closely it was related to their imminent departure: “This is how you shall eat it: with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste. It is Jehovah’s passover” (v. 11). It was not a leisurely, relaxing meal. They were on the alert, one hand grasping their staff and the other the pieces of roast lamb to be eaten. Thus they partook of the passover, ready at a moment’s notice to make their exodus.

CELEBRATING

Once the children of Israel were out of Egypt and across the Red Sea, they praised the Lord by singing and even dancing: “Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to Jehovah and spoke, saying, I will sing to Jehovah, for He has triumphed gloriously...And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing” (15:1, 20). How was this glorious triumph accomplished? By the blood there was a complete redemption, and by the eating of the lamb, the unleavened bread, and the bitter herbs there was a perfect exodus. Thus have we too been redeemed from God’s condemnation and released from Satan’s tyranny.

Hallelujah for what the eating accomplishes!

EATING IN THE WILDERNESS

After the Israelites left Egypt, they were sustained in the wilderness for forty years. As the Jews many years later told the Lord, “Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, ‘He gave them bread out of heaven to eat’” (John 6:31; cf. Exo. 16:4, 15).

Bored with Manna

Manna was their only food day after day. Not surprisingly, they soon wearied of such a monotonous diet. Their thoughts went back to Egypt, and they complained to Moses: “We remember the fish which we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic; but now our appetite has gone; there is nothing at all but this manna to look at” (Num. 11:5-6).

These varied foods that came out of the water or out of the soil of Egypt were enjoyed not only by the Israelites and the Egyptians. Even you may have wearied of a constant diet of messages week after week and turned to the foods that Egypt had to offer. Rather than hearing about Christ and the church in message after message, some have promoted more entertaining meetings. Guitar playing, special singing, joking, and emotional stirrings are like leeks, onions, and garlic from Egypt’s soil. You may have enjoyed those meetings, but you must admit that there was no manna.

Refreshed and Enlightened

Now we have come back to the manna. Do not think that Christ is boring! We must learn how to cook Him in appetizing ways.

“When the layer of dew lifted, there upon the surface of the wilderness were fine round flakes, fine as the frost on the earth” (Exo. 16:14). With Christ there is the freshness of the dew. He is also as refreshing as the frost. In warm climates we miss the refreshing air that comes with frost. Such is Christ to us.

Verse 31 says that the manna was “like coriander seed, white; and its taste was like wafers made with honey.” Numbers 11:7 adds, “Its appearance like the appearance of bdellium.” *Appearance* literally means “eye.” By eating Christ as the manna, you have eyes to see clearly. Consider how much light you have received since you came into the church and began receiving Christ as the manna. The eyes on the manna have given you a clear view. The bdellium mentioned here is a pearl of wood resin. It is transparent. If you have kept enjoying this manna, you have had a clear sky, with no opaqueness or blindness. But if you have found in the meetings a lack of direction, the aimlessness may have come from eating the onions, leeks, and garlic of Egypt; the effect of that diet is to blind you.

“The people went about and gathered it and ground it between two millstones or beat it in a mortar; then they boiled it in pots and made cakes of it; and its taste was like the taste of cakes baked in oil” (v. 8). There were different ways of preparing the manna. We all have to experience Christ and then learn to serve the saints delicious courses of Him. In this way we eat the rich supply of manna.

Quails

“The children of Israel ate the manna forty years, until they came to inhabitable land; they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan” (Exo. 16:35). Manna was the food with which God supplied His people throughout their wilderness wanderings.

You probably remember the occasion when, because of their complaining, God sent quails for them to eat. In response to their cry, “Who shall give us meat to eat?” (Num. 11:4), “a wind went forth from Jehovah and brought

quails from the sea and let them fall beside the camp, about a day's journey on this side and a day's journey on the other side, all around the camp, and about two cubits above the surface of the earth" (v. 31). The quails were eaten in rebellion and provoked God's judgment: "While the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the anger of Jehovah was kindled against the people, and Jehovah struck the people with a very severe plague" (v. 33).

This incident has reminded me of these recent years in the recovery. After hearing so much about the need to have Christ wrought into us, some turned away from that, claiming that it was too hard to listen to, and encouraged the young people to be themselves rather than be transformed. To replace the manna with quails from the sea is rebellion. God's ordination is that we eat manna day after day.

THE TASK IN THE WILDERNESS

What occupied the children of Israel during those forty years? There was no industry. How did they spend their time when they were not traveling? They began their day before sunrise, gathering the manna. In addition to preparing and eating it, they first built the tabernacle and then carried it all during their journey.

Here is a clear picture of what we should eat, what we should be, and what we should do. Our diet is Christ. We should be those who eat Him. We should build up the church to be the dwelling place of God and then carry it as His testimony wherever we go.

The worldly-wise might have thought the Israelites were lazy and purposeless. Why did they not settle in one place and farm? Then they could grow onions, leeks, and garlic, instead of having only manna to eat. Why did they do nothing but build a tabernacle and then carry it around with them?

In our day we may be criticized for not going to the mission field, for not engaging in this or that Christian work, or for not caring about the gospel. Why is it that we keep meeting together and pay little attention to anything other than Christ and the church?

We do not want to follow the pattern set by Christianity. Rather, we would be like the Israelites of old, eating manna and caring for the tabernacle. If we

have such a testimony, souls will be won. Lovers of the Lord Jesus will be attracted.

Young people, are you satisfied with such a life? Your living is to eat Christ. Your work is to build the church with Christ. Your testimony is to carry the church with Christ. This is God's economy.

THE EXODUS ACCOMPLISHED

In the previous chapter on the tree of life, we pointed out that God's intention from the beginning was to be taken into man as food. In this chapter we have traced man's failure and the steps God took to recover man from death and the world. This triumphant exodus from condemnation and tyranny was brought about by the eating of the passover. Then for forty years in the wilderness God gave His people manna. By this nourishment the tabernacle was built and His testimony set up. The book of Exodus, then, again reminds us that God's intention for man is to be his life, received in the form of food. When man thus partakes of Him, God's habitation is built and His purpose realized.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

EATING IN THE GOOD LAND

“The manna ceased on that day, when they ate of the produce of the land; and there was no longer manna for the children of Israel, but they ate of the yield of the land of Canaan that year” (Josh. 5:12). Here is the third stage of eating in the life of God’s people.

The Christ we eat is first for our full salvation, as is depicted for us by the eating of the passover. Not only does the blood provide us with redemption and release from God’s condemnation, but also, by eating of the lamb, the unleavened bread, and the bitter herbs, we are energized to walk out of Satan’s territory and cross the Red Sea. Full salvation includes redemption, regeneration with the life and nature of God, and deliverance from the world. Are you enjoying this full salvation, or are you still lingering in Egypt?

In the second stage we have Christ to sustain us on our wilderness journey. The eating of the manna is not for our salvation but for the building of God’s dwelling place and the carrying on of God’s testimony. Here in the church life we are eating Christ for the building up of the house of God.

In the previous chapter we covered these two stages.

THE THIRD STAGE

In the Bible two is the number of testimony, not of completion. Our eating is not complete with just two stages. As 1 Thessalonians 5:23 says, for our whole sanctification we must be preserved in spirit *and* soul *and* body. While the eating in Egypt was good in that it strengthened us to make our exodus, the eating in the wilderness was better because the tabernacle resulted. Not until its erection did God’s glory descend from the heavens to fill the house for Him on earth.

To be in the third stage required that God’s people leave the wilderness, by crossing the Jordan River, and enter into Canaan, the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as an inheritance for their children. It represented the promised goal of God.

What then is this third stage? It is eating for the house of God to be settled on a solid foundation. Instead of a movable, portable tabernacle, there was a temple constructed on a firm, settled base. This construction could not be done in the wilderness. The temple was built in the good land, and it meant that the kingdom of God was established, expressing God and His authority.

These are the three stages of eating, and they form a history of our Christian experience. Just as God is triune and man is tripartite, so our spiritual eating has only these three stages. Our spiritual growth depends upon our eating. Are you still eating lamb and bitter herbs? Is manna your daily food? Manna is the food for wanderers, those still in the wilderness of the soul. Are you in the good land, enjoying the produce of Canaan in your spirit?

You may find it hard to be sure which stage you are in. You may feel that even in one day your experience can shift back and forth from the good land to Egypt or to the wilderness. However, if you have ever tasted the experience of being in the good land, declare by faith that that is where you are. Do not believe Satan's lie that you have slipped back.

A VARIETY

While manna was the only food provided for the children of Israel in the wilderness, the produce of the good land was varied. It was "a land of wheat and barley and vines and fig trees and pomegranates; a land of olive trees with oil and of honey; a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity" (Deut. 8:8-9). Not only was there this assortment of vegetables and fruits, but they had herds and flocks as well (12:6). It reminds me of what is offered in an American supermarket—the great variety of fruits, vegetables, and meats.

THE EATING OF THE COMMON PRODUCE

From chapters 12, 14, and 16 of Deuteronomy it is clear that there were two kinds of eating in the good land. All the increase, whether from the field or from their flocks and herds, had to be divided into two parts. Ninety percent of it was the portion that belonged to the Israelites and could be eaten within their gates (12:15). This we may call the common eating.

THE TOP PORTION

The other ten percent, the tithe, had restrictions upon where it could be eaten: “You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or of your new wine or of your fresh oil, nor the firstborn of your herd or of your flock,...but you shall eat them before Jehovah your God in the place which Jehovah your God will choose” (vv. 17-18).

Suppose, for example, I am an Israelite with a herd of cows. When one of them has its first calf, I am not free to kill it and make a feast for my family, even though the herd belongs to me. I must save it until the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, the fifteenth day of the seventh month. If this same cow has a second calf, though, we are free to fatten it up, kill it, and make a feast for all our relatives.

The firstborn calf, along with the firstlings of all my flocks and herds and the tithe of my produce, I must take to the place “where Jehovah your God will choose to cause His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I am commanding you, your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the heave offering of your hand” (v. 11). “On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall keep the feast of Jehovah seven days” (Lev. 23:39).

COMMON VERSUS SPECIAL ENJOYMENT

The common eating within the gates is a type of the common enjoyment of Christ. We can feast on Him at home alone or on the campus or even meeting with a few others. This enjoyment of Christ may be precious, but, as many of you can testify, our highest enjoyment of Christ occurs in the church meetings. It is only here that we enjoy the top portion of Christ. This is the place where He has chosen to set His name and build His habitation. However good your home meeting or little fellowship group may be, it is not where God dwells. The habitation of God today is the church, and Mount Zion is today’s church meeting, where the tithes and offerings are to be presented.

NOT IN EVERY PLACE

Eating Christ in the third stage involves not only His riches but also the matter of the oneness of God’s people. Once the children of Israel occupied the good land, it would have been easy for them to be separate from each other. What kept them in oneness was this requirement: “Be careful that you

do not offer up your burnt offerings in every place that you see; but in the place which Jehovah will choose in one of your tribes, there you shall offer up your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I am commanding you” (Deut. 12:13-14). All the males had to appear before the Lord three times a year in the place of His choosing (16:16) to celebrate the feasts with the rich produce of the land.

Suppose two neighbors had a disagreement and were no longer on speaking terms. Though most of the time they avoided each other, the day would come when they would both have to make the journey back to Jerusalem. By coming together on the highway to Zion, they could settle their differences and join the others in declaring, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is / For brothers to dwell in unity!” (Psa. 133:1). This was one of the Songs of Ascents that the Israelites chanted as they came together and ascended Mount Zion to present their offerings and to keep the feasts.

As we eat Christ, we will find that we are brought into oneness with all the saints. We may be unhappy with certain brothers or sisters and decide to discontinue attending the church meetings. We may say that God’s presence is everywhere and that we can enjoy Christ at home. But the extra portion of the enjoyment of Christ cannot be ours apart from the church meetings. If we try to have both the common and the particular portions of Christ in the place where we choose, the oneness is damaged. However disgruntled we may feel about things in the church, we must meet with the saints. The habitation of God is the church, not our little fellowship group. We must all meet in the place where God has chosen to cause His name to dwell.

LABOR

The produce of the good land did not rain down from heaven as the manna had done. The children of Israel had to till the soil, sow the seed, keep the ground watered, and get rid of damaging insects. Then when harvest time came, they had to reap the crop.

Christ is our good land. Day by day we must labor on Him. We begin with morning watch, tilling the ground and sowing Him as the seed. Sometimes we just water the crops and kill some snails. During the day we keep laboring on Him by experiencing, enjoying, and partaking of Him. We also snatch a few minutes now and then throughout the day to read a chapter in the Word.

By such faithful laboring, we gradually accumulate the rich experiences of Christ. Then we bring our surplus to the meetings. The Israelites had only three feasts yearly. We do not have to wait that long! We have at least three meetings a week, every one of them a feast, to which we may come, not empty-handed but laden with the experience of Christ: "They shall not appear before Jehovah empty-handed; each man shall give as he is able to give, according to the blessing of Jehovah your God, which He has given you" (Deut. 16:16-17).

WORSHIP

Of the five books of Moses, only Genesis gives no instruction on the way to worship. The other four cover in considerable detail the worship and service of God. The natural concept is that to worship God we must bow down, kneel, or prostrate ourselves. This was the custom of the nations surrounding Israel (Exo. 23:24). But the instruction given to the children of Israel was to bring their rich produce, offer it to God, and then eat it with one another in His presence and with Him. What they offered was both their food and God's. The eating in God's presence is worship.

The more we come together with our hands full of Christ, the more we offer Him to God and enjoy Him in the presence of God, the more we are worshipping Him. Our Father God desires the worship that is our eating of the Son. God is happy when we are in His presence enjoying His Son.

In John 4 the Lord Jesus linked worship to God with drinking of Him. After the Lord told the Samaritan woman, "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever" (v. 14), she turned the subject to the matter of worship. The Lord's reply was, "An hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father...An hour is coming, and it is now, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truthfulness, for the Father also seeks such to worship Him" (vv. 21, 23). Our spirit is Jerusalem, God's habitation (Eph. 2:22), and it is here that we worship God, not by prostrating ourselves before Him but by enjoying Christ as the reality. This drinking of Him is the real worship to God.

THE MEETINGS

We offer the Christ we have experienced in our daily walk whenever we come to the meetings. Do not think that musical instruments are a necessary part of our worship. Music is not the reality. The reality is found in our spirit, in the very Christ whom we have experienced. These experiences are the rich produce of the good land. It may be that sometimes our meetings will have no singing or even praying but only rich testimonies from our daily life. The bountiful produce will be heaped up before the Lord. The testimonies may be quite short, yet because they come from the riches in the spirit, they may be more than a testimony. What we say as a testimony may be in the form of a prayer or may be an offering of praise.

What form the meeting will take cannot be predicted. Each one may be different. Surely some meetings during the first century were like what we have described. We do not try to arrange different styles of meeting. How the meetings are comes out of how *we* are. We live a certain way, and we meet this same way. We do not come together to perform but to bring an overflow of the rich Christ we have been enjoying. It is thus that we eat Christ together in the presence of God.

How good it will be when all the churches are like this! Today we are still under the influence of degraded Christianity, with the singing of hymns and praying as part of our form of meeting. The Bible does not give us a ritual way to meet. No formal way is prescribed for our coming together. We should be like the children of Israel coming together in ancient times to the unique place, Jerusalem, with all the rich produce of the good land; that is to say, we come to the spirit, offering our rich experiences of Christ. Whether we sing is not at issue. We may spend a whole meeting only singing, if the Lord so leads. What concerns us is only that we meet in spirit and with the riches of Christ.

When we share our experiences, we should not do so in a scattered way. Because we all have such bountiful and varied experiences, what we say should follow the line of the one who preceded us. We cannot have a feast with an odd assortment of groceries that do not fit together.

If our meetings are full of such an attractive Christ, those who come will be convinced, subdued, and captured. It is not exciting meetings that gain others. Christ Himself is the attracting factor—not a Christ in doctrine but One whom we experience.

THE GOAL OF THE LORD'S RECOVERY

The third stage of eating is complicated. There is the common way of eating together within our gates of the riches of the good land. There is also the particular way of bringing our tithes to the chosen place to eat before the Lord in order to keep the oneness of God's people. Further, this stage of eating requires that we labor, not just gather what has fallen from heaven. Finally, we must worship the Father by bringing all the rich variety of the experiences of Christ to the meetings and presenting them to God and to His people.

This third stage is the one that accomplishes God's purpose. This is our goal, toward which we must aim, in the Lord's recovery. Thus the church life will be produced, God's kingdom established, and His temple solidly built up.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

EATING IN THE GOSPELS

One of the complaints brought against the Lord Jesus was, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2). This criticism of His eating with sinners drew forth the three parables in Luke 15. The publicans and sinners were the lowest class in Jewish society. The publicans were Jews who collected taxes from their countrymen for the Roman Empire. They were much despised for their disloyalty and dishonesty. Yet Jesus chose to feast with them and with those who were commonly called sinners. This eating declared that the Savior would not only save them but also spread a feast for them. Such behavior offended the Pharisees and scribes, who were part of high society in Jewish culture.

Who is eligible for God’s salvation? What standing do you take when you come for salvation? God does not offer salvation to Pharisees, kings, presidents, or even gentlemen. Salvation is only for those who come down and take the position of sinners.

THREE PARABLES

These three parables give us a threefold picture of God’s seeking of man, with the last one as the consummate one. The parable of the lost sheep tells how the shepherd leaves his ninety-nine sheep and goes in search of the one missing. This is a picture of the Son as the good Shepherd, accomplishing redemption for us. In the second parable the woman lights a lamp and sweeps her house in order to find her lost coin. We sinners, chosen by God, are the coin. We were God’s possession, but we got lost. The woman is the Holy Spirit, sent to enlighten the house, our inner chamber, in order to find us. The last parable, that of the prodigal son, brings in the Father, who received the returned sinner.

The Spirit’s enlightening work is based on the foundation of the Son’s redemption, just as the Father’s receiving of the repentant sinner is the fruit of the Spirit’s seeking.

As we pointed out in the previous chapter, it was not until the third stage of eating that the promised goal of God came into view. The two earlier stages were not complete without it. With these three parables, the same principle applies. Not until we come to the third parable do we see a complete salvation.

A REPENTANT SINNER

A son left his father, squandered his estate, and eventually found himself in the fields feeding hogs while he himself was starving. He returned to his father in repentance, saying, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son” (v. 21).

The father’s reception of his son illustrates the full salvation that is ours in Christ.

THE BEST ROBE

The prodigal son came home as a beggar, with bare feet and pathetic in every respect. Yet “while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and he ran and fell on his neck and kissed him affectionately” (v. 20). Interrupting the son’s confession that he had sinned and was no more worthy to be called a son, “the father said to his slaves, Bring out quickly the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet” (v. 22).

The way the father referred to this robe makes it seem likely that he had especially prepared it beforehand for the son to wear whenever he might return. By being covered with this robe, he was qualified to enter the father’s splendid home, no more a beggar but a justified son, matching his father in an outward way.

The best robe signifies Christ as our righteousness, covering us and justifying us in the eyes of God. But notice that the robe only takes care of the outward cover. It represents an objective righteousness; Christ is not within us at this point.

THE RING

The slaves were also told to put a ring on the son's hand. This is a picture of our being sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13; 4:30). The ring is like the Holy Spirit, given to us as a guarantee that we are the Father's possession.

THE SANDALS

The sandals put on the returning son's feet are not the same as the shoes referred to in Ephesians 6:15. In Ephesians the shoes are for standing and withstanding in battle, but in Luke 15 the sandals are for walking, for protecting the feet from the dust, dirt, and mud that come from contact with this earth.

THE FATTENED CALF

Do you think the son was satisfied with the best robe, the ring, and the sandals? Surely he appreciated looking so fine, but he had not returned home to replace his shabby clothes. Rather, it was because of his desperate hunger that his thoughts had turned homeward, and he had said, "How many of my father's hired servants abound in bread, but I am perishing here in famine! I will rise up and go to my father" (vv. 17-18). No outward apparel could fill his empty stomach. How glad he must have been to hear his father add, "Bring the fattened calf; slaughter it, and let us eat and be merry" (v. 23)! The father was not content either, until they could eat together and rejoice.

God's salvation is not only a matter of wearing but also of eating. Whatever kind of raiment we put on and however many times we wash ourselves, our inner being is not changed.

The fattened calf was not for wearing but for eating. Eating is the taking of something that is outside of you into you and then digesting it so that it becomes organically part of you. If you swallow a pearl, you cannot claim to have eaten it, because it cannot be digested by your body. The fattened calf, in contrast, can be eaten. It can be taken into your being and then assimilated by the body. The result is a metabolic change in you. What you eat changes you organically and metabolically. The terms *transformation*, *renewing*, and *sanctification* refer to this change, which comes about not by improving your outward appearance but by taking in the food the Father has provided.

A PICTURE OF GOD'S ECONOMY

Too many Christians do not realize how important their spiritual food is. Some seek the Lord for salvation or help in trouble. Their concept is to pray day and night until suddenly a miraculous experience befalls them. Then they expect a marvelous change. To hold such a thought is to be ignorant of God's economy, which is pictured for us so vividly in this parable.

Christ's death on the cross accomplished a threefold objective: the forgiveness of sins, the termination of the old man, and the release of the divine life. In resurrection He became the life-giving Spirit. When we heard the gospel, repented, and believed in Him, He, based upon His redemption and through the cleansing of His blood, entered into us as the life-giving Spirit. His righteousness covered us, qualifying us to be justified by God. The Spirit sealed us as God's possession. The gospel separated us from the world. But besides the robe, the ring, and the sandals, there is a fattened calf for us to enjoy!

Salvation

Romans 10:6-10 reminds us that we can find Christ not in heaven or in the abyss but nearby, in our mouth and in our heart. By confessing with our mouth, "Lord Jesus," we are saved. To open our mouth and pray in this way is to eat and be saved.

Joy

"Let us eat and be merry" (Luke 15:23). The joy came in the feasting on the fattened calf. Our salvation is one of eating. Christ is our fattened calf, our bread of life, to supply us and to bring us joy. In contrast to the robe, the ring, and the sandals, which are visible, the calf is eaten and disappears from sight. It is digested and assimilated to become part of the fibers of our being. Its effect on us is to strengthen, empower, sustain, support, comfort, and satisfy. Such is our subjective Savior to us. That is why eating brings joy.

Growth

You are not changed by power or magic. Your present height is probably over five feet, and your weight more than a hundred pounds. Were you born that size? Did you become that big by fasting for three days and then instantly

change from infant to adult? By no means. Your growth came about gradually by regular eating. You could not have grown by eating pearls or diamonds, because they are not food, and your body could not have digested them. *The fattened calf* is not an empty term. It is a picture that Christ satisfies us by being taken into us as food.

Day by day we cooperate with Him by opening to take Him in as we pray-read His Word. This is the way Christ is formed in us, makes His home in our hearts, and transforms us into His image from glory to glory. As you read the Word for nourishment, take only a small portion at a time. Do not try to swallow the fattened calf in one gulp! Four or five small meals a day is best for your gradual and steady spiritual growth.

Though the eating of Jesus is the focal point of the New Testament, it has been neglected by Christians. In 1958 the Lord began to recover this. In 1965 we had a series of messages in Los Angeles on the matter of eating. Right after that, the Lord gave us pray-reading. How rich the pray-reading of the Word was in 1968 and 1969! I hope the saints will come back to this nourishing way of taking in the Word and will thus eat of Jesus as the fattened calf.

THE PROTEST

The story of the prodigal son ends with the conversation between the father and the older son. What made the older son angry in the father's treatment of the returned prodigal? Notice that the complaint was not about the robe, the ring, or the sandals, but "You slaughtered for him the fattened calf" (v. 30). The outward gifts of the father did not cause the older son's resentment. It was the killing of the fattened calf that enraged him.

Just as the Pharisees and scribes murmured that the Lord was eating with sinners, so in our day religious people are offended when they hear of eating Jesus. The objective teachings they do not oppose, but the subjective experience of Christ as our food they reject.

INVITED TO A FEAST

There are other parables in the Gospels that also refer to eating. In Luke 14:16-24 there is the parable of the great dinner, where those who were invited made excuses. Eventually, the house was filled, not with them but with

the poor, the crippled, and even some who were compelled to attend. What a picture this is of how the chosen ones spurned the Lord's offer of Himself as a feast!

Matthew 22:1-14 recounts that a king prepared a wedding feast for his son. When everything was ready—the oxen and the fatted cattle killed—the invited ones again would not attend, and others were found in the crossroads and invited instead. One of the guests at the table was found not to have on a wedding garment and was cast into the outer darkness. The oxen and the fatted cattle refer to Christ, who was killed so that God's chosen people might enjoy Him as a feast. The Gentiles were sought in the crossroads after the Jews' rejection of Him. To enjoy the wedding feast requires not only the "best robe" but the wedding garment as well, a picture of Christ experienced as our subjective righteousness.

Notice how Christ portrays His coming, in both its first and second aspects, as a king's wedding feast for his son. Christ came so that His people might have their hunger satisfied by taking Him as their feast. That feast was opened to all when "those who were His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11). This feast in fullness will be enjoyed by the overcoming believers in the next age.

IN REMEMBRANCE OF HIM

When the Lord was about to leave His disciples and return to the Father, He gave them a way to remember Him: "He took a loaf and gave thanks, and He broke it and gave it to them, saying, This is My body which is being given for you; do this in remembrance of Me. And similarly the cup after they had dined, saying, This cup is the new covenant established in My blood, which is being poured out for you" (Luke 22:19-20). To remember the Lord, as we do from week to week at His table, is not a ritual but a partaking of Him. The proper remembrance of Him is not to recall what He is and what He has done but rather to take Him in. The Lord's table is a testimony of our daily living. We come together on the first day of the week to break bread and thus declare to the universe that we live by eating and drinking Christ.

Day by day we eat the heavenly food, the fatted calf, Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. It was He who said, "He who eats Me, he also shall live

because of Me” (John 6:57). We live by what we eat, and eventually we become what we eat.

How regrettable it is that in Christianity the meaning of the Lord’s table has been lost. It is referred to as the holy communion, and there is no understanding of the meaning of the bread and the cup. The table signifies that the worship of God is by eating and drinking Him, not by bowing before Him. When we eat and drink Him, He will have the worship.

GOD’S PROVISION

God’s economy is that His people should be an eating people. This was first symbolized by the tree of life, set in the garden for man to partake of. When man disobeyed and fell under Satan’s tyranny, God stepped in to redeem him by providing the passover for him to eat of and thus be strengthened to make his exodus from Satan’s domain. In the good land God’s people labored to bring forth the rich produce, one-tenth of which they reserved, along with the top portion, to eat before the Lord in their feasts. They were thus kept in oneness and sustained to build the temple for the expression of God’s authority.

In the Gospels eating again plays a prominent role. There is a fattened calf for the returning prodigal. There is a feast spread for God’s chosen people, who reject it and thus open the door for the Gentiles to partake of it. By these parables and also in His explicit word (John 6:35, 48-58), the Lord presented Himself as the true food given for the life of the world. This eating of Him is the true worship, symbolized by the remembrance of Him at His table.

I hope we are all persuaded that God’s primary concern for us is that we enjoy His Son as our food. This is the message of the Gospels.

CHAPTER THIRTY

EATING IN THE EPISTLES AND REVELATION

God is not interested in giving you instruction. He is not out to develop your personality. He does not care about your self-improvement program. He is not trying to make a better person out of you. Rather, He wants you to come to the dining table and feast. The dining table is the Bible. You need to come to it at least three times a day. By pray-reading this book you will be nourished by the rich Christ, and God will have a way to fulfill His purpose.

The matter of eating is alluded to many times in the Epistles and in Revelation. In these final books of the Bible we find the outcome of eating. From the previous chapters I believe you have seen that God would have us take Christ Himself as our life supply into our being. Now we shall consider what happens to us when we thus receive Him.

THE RESULT OF FEEDING ON CHRIST

God Expressed

The apostle Paul prayed, “That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith...that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:17, 19). The issue of our enjoying the riches of Christ is that we become His expression. When this unlimited One has been wrought into us so that He can make His home in our heart, fully possessing our mind, emotion, will, and conscience, we will be filled. To be filled means to have something added into us. When we are filled with the riches of Christ, the result is the expression of God.

God is not expressed by our good behavior, by our doctrinal knowledge, or by our self-improvement. His expression is solely the result of our receiving the riches of His Son by eating. This organic, subjective receiving results in Christ’s becoming part of us, similar to the way our digested and assimilated food becomes part of us.

When Paul said, “To me, to live is Christ,” he was describing the outcome of his day-by-day eating of Jesus. The result, then, of feeding on Christ is that God is expressed.

Renewed and Transformed

“Do not be fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind that you may prove what the will of God is” (Rom. 12:2). This verse gives us another result of our taking Christ into us as food: we are transformed. I like the word *transformed*. There is no religion that aims at transforming us. At best, religion’s goal is to develop or improve what we are. This is not the case with God’s salvation. He has no interest in helping us to be better behaved. His desire is to add something into us that formerly was not there. We were born with only a human life; when the divine life is added into our being, transformation can be accomplished.

The renewing and transforming can be likened to grafting. Paul uses grafting as an illustration of God’s salvation in Romans 11:17-24. We, the wild olive tree, were grafted into the cultivated olive tree.

Grafting is an organic mingling. This is what our Christian life is. Bible teachers have called it an exchanged life, but this is the wrong way to describe it. We do not hand our poor life over to Christ for Him to discard and have Him give us His life to treasure. No transformation would be involved if that were what happened. Rather, we have been grafted into Christ, and Christ has been grafted into us. We are being transformed, not only by Christ but also with Him.

“I GAVE YOU MILK TO DRINK”

In Paul’s writing concerning how he had cared for the Corinthian believers, he says, “I gave you milk to drink, not solid food” (1 Cor. 3:2). The way Paul took care of the Corinthians was not to teach them but to feed them. Yes, there are verses that mention teaching and learning, but there is this concept here that the believers need to be fed.

In verse 6 Paul says, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth.” Our need is growth, not an improvement in behavior. Where do the gold, silver, and precious stones, mentioned in verse 12, come from? Our

nature by birth is wood, grass, and stubble; that we are now in the nature and form of gold, silver, and precious stones indicates that we have been transformed.

We may feel like wood, grass, and stubble most of the time, but be strong in faith. We are in the process of transformation. Declare to Satan, “I am in the process of being transformed into gold, silver, and precious stones. Even if it takes a long time, my God is not worried about time. To Him a thousand years are as one day.” In the Lord’s recovery we have the planting and the watering. Be assured that the growth is coming. Be ready to welcome it.

BEHOLDING AND REFLECTING

Second Corinthians 3:18 gives us another picture of how this transformation comes about: “We all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit.” How are we all being transformed into the same image? We must first ask the Lord to remove any veils from us that we may behold Him openly. The thought in this verse is that we are a mirror, facing Christ. As we behold and reflect Him, we are transformed into His image. The more we behold and reflect Him, the more He comes into us and changes us, from one degree of glory to another. In this beholding, His element is being added to us, just as the grafted branch receives the life-juices from the better tree to which it has been grafted.

Stay in the church life to be part of the beholding and reflecting mirror and to be the grafted branch, absorbing the life supply that flows from the better tree. Over the years I have seen the saints being transformed from one degree of glory to another, even as from the Lord Spirit. Day by day the Lord has been adding Himself to us, and we are being transformed.

WHOLLY SANCTIFIED

“The God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thes. 5:23). God as the life-giving Spirit comes into the center of your being, your spirit, and begins to saturate you. This saturating sanctifies you. This twofold process gradually spreads outward into your

surrounding soul, and from there it encompasses even your body. When your body is sanctified, you are mature and ready to be raptured.

To be raptured is to be reaped. Christ, the heavenly Farmer, is coming to reap us. But first we must grow so that we are no longer so green and tender. To grow is to be saturated with the element of God. When we are fully sanctified, from the spirit through the soul and out to the body, we are ready to be reaped, for we will then be completely transformed into His image. The sanctifying and saturating are even now going on within us.

MILK AND SOLID FOOD

The thought in Hebrews 5:12-14 is similar to that in 1 Corinthians 3:2. The believers could only take milk, though it was time that they were ready for solid food.

In 1 Peter 2:2 the believers were told to long for the word the way an infant does for milk “in order that by it you may grow unto salvation.” For them to grow unto salvation was for them to be transformed from clay to living stones. The result of their getting the nourishing milk would be not only transformation but also building: “You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house” (v. 5). The result of our eating is that the church is built.

THE CULMINATION

Food for Overcomers

At the end of the Bible, the food that is offered to God’s people is the very food presented to man at the beginning: “To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7). Overcoming in these epistles to the churches at the end of the first century means allowing nothing in the frustrating, degraded environment of Christianity to keep us from eating. The reward to the overcomers is to eat of the Lord as the tree of life in the Paradise of God. This is an incentive for us to leave the knowledge and teachings of religion and return to enjoying Him.

In the epistle to the church in Pergamos the Lord promises the overcomers to eat of “the hidden manna” (v. 17). A portion of the manna, the food of the children of Israel in the wilderness, was preserved in a golden pot concealed

in the Ark (Exo. 16:32-34; Heb. 9:4). The hidden manna, signifying the hidden Christ, is a special portion reserved for those of His seekers who overcome the degradation of the worldly church. While the church goes the way of the world, these overcomers come forward to abide in the presence of God in the Holy of Holies, where they enjoy the hidden Christ as a special portion for their daily supply. May we all be among those who seek the Lord, overcome the degradation of the worldly church, and enjoy Him as a special portion today. Then in the coming kingdom He as the hidden manna will be a reward to us.

A further promise to the overcomers in Pergamos is, “To him I will give a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knows except him who receives it” (Rev. 2:17). By eating of the hidden manna we are transformed into a white stone for God’s building. Here again eating is linked to transformation and building.

The call to the overcomers in Laodicea is, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, then I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me” (3:20). To dine is to eat a full meal, not just a snack. This promise suggests the eating of the rich produce of the land of Canaan by the children of Israel. Christ is a rich meal to us.

The Lord in these closing epistles steps into the degraded situation of the churches and seeks to recover the proper eating of Himself as our food supply. His people have been distracted from taking Him in as their food to the teaching of doctrines for knowledge. Thus, He turns their focus to eating.

In Eternity

In the last chapter of the Bible the tree of life appears again: “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” (22:2). Even the final promise in the Bible concerns eating: “Blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have right to the tree of life and may enter by the gates into the city” (v. 14). The right to the tree of life means the enjoyment of Christ for eternity. It is the portion of those who keep their conduct clean through the cleansing of the blood of the Lamb.

EATING THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE

In these five chapters we have surveyed the subject of eating from Genesis to Revelation. In every stage of God's relationship with man—in the garden of Eden, in Egyptian bondage, in the wilderness wanderings, in the good land, when Christ was on earth, when the churches were being established, in the millennial kingdom, and in the New Jerusalem—He made provision for His people's eating.

This same concern about what we eat should mark us as Christians. Day by day we need to come to the Word and, by praying over what we read, take in the very Christ as our food. He Himself is our tree of life, our Passover, our manna, our good land, our fattened calf, and our heavenly food.

Only by taking Him into us can God's purpose be accomplished. God is expressed not by our good behavior but as an outcome of our assimilating the riches of His Son. It is by the intake of this food that we are transformed into His very image. He thus saturates and sanctifies us, cleansing us "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" (Eph. 5:26-27).

In the writings of Paul, Peter, and John the thought keeps recurring that God's people must be fed rather than given doctrinal knowledge. They first must desire milk and then go on to solid food. At the end, eating of the tree of life again comes into view, first as a reward for the overcoming believers during the millennium and then for the enjoyment of all God's people for eternity.

EATING THROUGHOUT THE DAY

May we be those who faithfully eat of this feast that God has so richly spread for us. The Bible is the means by which we feed on Christ. By our coming to this Word in a regular way and opening to Him, He will spread throughout our being until eventually our body too will be sanctified, and we will be raptured to His presence.

Eating is the way by which we are "filled unto all the fullness of God." We must not let anything distract us from routinely coming to the dining table of the Word several times a day to take in its rich nourishment. Then we will be transformed from vessels of clay to precious stones and be built up into His

habitation. “I commit you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up” (Acts 20:32).

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

THE HEAVENLY VISION

“Who are You, Lord?” (Acts 9:5). This question was asked by Saul of Tarsus when his journey to Damascus was interrupted by a light “beyond the brightness of the sun” (26:13) and by a voice saying “in the Hebrew dialect, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (v. 14). At the time of this encounter Saul was no heathen but rather a zealous, religious Jew. He was earnestly following the traditions of his forefathers, who had for generations worshipped God according to the Old Testament. As he later described himself, he was “beyond many contemporaries in my race, being more abundantly a zealot for the traditions of my fathers” (Gal. 1:14).

“THE SECT OF THE NAZARENES”

In Saul’s time something new arose in addition to the Jewish religion. Those who believed in this new way were referred to by their opposers as “the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5) because of Jesus of Nazareth. Saul was enraged at the claims of this “sect” and alarmed at the number of Jews who were being converted to it. He was determined to stamp it out. Both men and women who held such beliefs were arrested and dragged into prison.

A CONFRONTATION

Saul was en route to Damascus, authorized by the high priest to bring back to Jerusalem any he found who were “of the Way” so that they might be punished. While he was carrying out this self-assumed commission, he was suddenly confronted by that very Nazarene, calling to him by name from heaven. Saul’s reply was, “Who are You, Lord?” Someone who knew his name but whose name Saul did not know visited him from heaven, causing him to fall to the ground, trembling and astonished.

A CHANGE OF VIEW

To Saul the sky was opened. Heaven was opened. The heart of God was opened. From that time on, Saul began to see something not of or from the

earth but from the heavens. He referred to this seeing as “the heavenly vision” (26:19).

What a sharp contrast this was to Saul’s previous view of things! All his zealous concern for the Jews’ religion came from beneath, not from above. He had been brought up “at the feet of Gamaliel, according to the strictness of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God” (22:3). Yet those teachings and traditions were earthly. Never before had he heard a voice from heaven.

IN PURSUIT

Saul was a seeker of Christ. Before the journey to Damascus, his pursuit of Christ was negative. The heavenly voice asked, “Why are you persecuting Me?” The Greek word for *persecute* is the same as that translated “pursue” in Philippians 3:12 and 14. Before his heavenly encounter, Saul pursued Christ in hatred, with the intention of wiping Him out by destroying His followers. Afterward, though, he said, “I pursue toward the goal for the prize to which God in Christ Jesus has called me upward” (v. 14). His pursuit of Christ became one of love.

REPENTING

At what point in Saul’s journey to Damascus did he repent? It was when he changed his direction. His whole mentality was focused in one direction, but when the light shined upon him and he fell to the ground, his course was turned around. He repented.

While he still lay on the ground, he called on the name of the Lord. Why did he call this One Lord when he did not know who He was? He realized that that One calling him from the heavens must surely be the Lord. Saul, then, first repented and then was saved by calling on the name of the Lord.

The Lord has a way to make us change our direction. Saul of Tarsus was bold and aggressive, but he fell before the One whom he was pursuing in hatred. Suppose he had simply gotten up again, determined to continue on his way and disregard the voice from the heavens. If he had kept his eyes toward Damascus and refused to look heavenward, surely the Lord would have intervened in an even stronger way to compel him to desist. However determined we may be to press on in our own conviction, we cannot prevail

against this One who speaks from the heavens. Deep in my spirit is the prayer that the Lord will keep me from heading toward Damascus against His will.

WITHOUT SIGHT YET SEEING

When Saul fell to the ground, his eyes were opened. He thought he had clear vision before that. It was he who was leading others toward Damascus, but after he was smitten by the light from heaven, “*they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus*” (Acts 9:8). When he could no longer see where he was going, the heavenly seeing came to him.

It is a mercy if such blindness can come upon all of us. We are too clear about what we are doing and where we are going. We continue on our way, unaware that we are blind, smug in the assurance that we know everything.

“Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint” (Prov. 29:18). For all his self-assurance, Saul of Tarsus had no vision and no restraint. It took the voice from heaven to rescue him. What he called the heavenly vision is the central point of the divine revelation. Though Saul was so well versed in the Old Testament with its commandments and outward ordinances, he did not see its central point.

The same is true of many Christians. They may be familiar with the Bible, but they miss its central point, the heavenly vision. If we mean business with the Lord, such a vision will assuredly come to us. Until this happens, like Saul of Tarsus we are blind, though our physical eyes have sight.

A HEART FOR GOD’S DESIRE

Saul in his blindness was persecuting Christ, yet we must admit that he did have a heart for God.

Are we seeking after what is on God’s heart? The heart is the focus of the body. We may have an arm cut off or our eyes snatched out, but we can still live. Once our heart is taken out, though, we are finished. We can easily touch someone’s shoulder or nose or hand, but it is not easy to touch someone’s heart. The same is true of the Bible. We may have seen many of its teachings, but the focus of the divine revelation, like our heart, is not easily seen. It requires a heavenly vision.

It is all too common for Christians to be burdened with what is good and scriptural—like going to the mission field to convert the heathen, for example—yet miss God’s deepest desire.

As you are going on your journey, look to Him to make you fall to the ground and say, “Who are You, Lord?”

WHO HE IS

Who is this little man from Nazareth? From that day on the road to Damascus, Saul began to see who He is. As the years went by, Paul (no longer Saul) wrote many Epistles to unfold the significance of this One. “Jesus, whom you persecute,” is God incarnate. He is the Redeemer who took away our sins. In His death He terminated the old creation. He resurrected to be Head of the new creation. Today in ascension He is Christ the Lord, Head over all things to the church. Those who believe in Him become members of His Body.

THE CENTRAL POINT OF THE BIBLE

The central point of the Bible concerns the Triune God and His relationship with man. As Paul tells us, all the fullness was pleased to dwell in the Son (Col. 1:19). The Son is the embodiment of the Father’s fullness. If we receive the Son, we have the Father, who is embodied in the Son. Why is the Father in the Son? It is so that the Son may enter into us, and with Him the Father. In this way the Father will have a Body to be the fullness of the Son.

That Body is the church, which becomes the fullness of Christ by taking in His riches. As we eat of Christ and experience Him, we become the embodiment of His riches. To be His fullness is to be His expression.

Seeing this central point of the Bible will keep us from casting off restraint. Too many Christians have cast off restraint in their preoccupation with doctrinal matters or in their zeal to do things for God. The vision that we are part of His Body and that He is the Head will safeguard us from all such distractions.

Do not turn your eyes away to consider the way chairs should be arranged in the meetings, whether guitars should accompany your singing, or whether your meetings should be loud or quiet. If I propose that you should have more

guitars in your meetings, how will you answer me? Your reply must not be about guitars; you must answer me with Christ, or you lose the case. You must answer me with the heavenly vision.

CHRIST IN US

Formed

One aspect of this heavenly vision seen by Paul is that Christ has to be wrought into our being. Galatians 4:19 says, “My children, with whom I travail again in birth until Christ is formed in you.” It became the apostle’s deep longing that the believers might have Christ take shape in them.

Settling Down

The apostle prayed in Ephesians 3:17 “that Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith.” Have you ever thought that Christ needs you to provide a home for Him? He wants to settle down in your heart. You may think that heaven is a wonderful place to be, but Christ does not appreciate being there. He is homeless without you. He longs to make His home in your heart. The theologians may think that such a thought is too subjective, that your heart is too small to contain the great Christ, and that He is far off in the third heaven. Nevertheless, Paul prayed that Christ may make His home in your heart. This is the intimate relationship that should exist between Christ and you.

Magnified

“According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I will be put to shame, but with all boldness, as always, even now Christ will be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death” (Phil. 1:20). To be magnified is to be expressed in an enlarged way. It was the longing and expectation of Paul that Christ be so expressed in him.

For Him to be magnified in you is for Him to be shown without limitation. Your love or your humility is superficial and of short duration. According to Ephesians 3:18-19, Christ is the universal breadth, length, height, and depth. He is the dimension of the whole universe. There is no limit to His love. Your family can quickly exhaust all your virtues. Let this One with His

unsearchable, inexhaustible riches make His home in your heart. He is magnified by His riches being made known to all.

“TO LIVE IS CHRIST”

In Colossians 2:6-7 Paul tells us to walk in Christ, having been rooted and being built up in Him. He becomes the country in which we walk, the sphere in which we live, the soil in which we are rooted, and the foundation on which we are built up.

The heavenly vision is that this Christ must be wrought into us. When Paul said, “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19), he implied that he no longer had any regard for tradition or religious teachings. His only concern was the living, present Christ. That is why he could later say, “To me, to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21).

REPENTING OF GOOD BEHAVIOR

Once you see this, you will repent of many good things. Suppose, for example, you talk to a brother in a harsh way. Later, when you go to the Lord, you confess, “Lord, I am sorry I was so mean to my brother. Forgive me. From now on, help me to treat all the brothers right. Help me not to be so harsh.” Do you think that is the right way to pray? If you do, you have not seen the heavenly vision that Christ must live. It is not a matter of your being nice to others but of Christ being your life. Such a prayer itself needs to be repented of.

We want to live a good Christian life—studying the Bible, preaching the gospel, honoring our parents, being a good neighbor, not losing our temper, and being kind to everyone. I beg you, discard all these concepts! The vision we need to see is that Christ must be our life.

Have you ever repented of your good behavior? of your love? of your kindness? You must have, if you have seen the vision. God does not want you to be full of love but to be full of Christ. In our early Christian experience, our repentance is for bad things, but later we shall find that our repentance is mostly for good things. “Lord, forgive me for my kindness. Forgive me for all my virtues, void of Christ.” A Christian who is full of humility without Christ is a rebel. He is rebelling against the heavenly vision that Christ must be

everything to him. Your thinking, your emotion, your intention, your motive, your quickness or your slowness—all these must be Christ.

FULFILLING THE VISION

How far-reaching was the vision Paul was granted in answer to his question, “Who are You, Lord?” The revelation that came to him filled his writings; through them, under the heavenly enlightening, the same vision can be ours. This Jesus of Nazareth embodies the fullness of the Father. The church, the embodiment of the Son, takes in His riches and thus becomes His fullness. Christ Himself must be wrought into us and become our life.

We obey this vision by taking Him as our life, not allowing ourselves to be distracted by doctrines or striving after good behavior. All day long, throughout all our activities, we must maintain contact with this Christ. As we constantly talk to Him in prayer (1 Thes. 5:17), we will be spontaneously taking Him as our person and thus living according to the heavenly vision.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (2)

Question: When I open to the Lord in the morning and turn to the Word, I usually find it easy to pray and tell Him I love Him. But then doubts and extraneous thoughts will sometimes come in, and I do not seem to be able to go back and get into the Word with an open spirit. What should I do when this happens?

Answer: Do not do anything. The psalmist tells us to “be still” (Psa. 4:4; 46:10). Strength lies in being still and restful. Human beings, even the most slothful, are active, busily engaged in this or that. Even lazy people are busy being lazy. Before we were saved, we were busily engaged in worldly pursuits and entertainments. Afterward, we became busy in another way. Then we may have backslid and been busy in that realm. After being restored, we became busy in seeking holiness, victory, or spirituality.

All such busyness cuts off the way for the Lord to come in to work Himself into us. Consider how busy Saul of Tarsus was as he traveled that day toward Damascus. Out of his desire to serve the God of his fathers and to protect the law of Moses, he was scheming to wipe out those devilish followers of Jesus of Nazareth. As he was busily pursuing his concept of a godly life, the Lord came in and called a halt. Later, he spent a period of time in Arabia. By such seasons of enforced quiet the Lord reminded him to cease from his activities and just pray, leaving the work in the Lord’s hands.

Every seeking Christian needs such a balance. The Lord would put a stop sign on your busy street. The heavenly vision arrests you in whatever you are doing. You are left with nothing to do, because you realize that what you do in yourself is rebellion, even if it is seeking the Lord. God’s intention is to have Christ thoroughly worked into your being, but in your spiritual seeking, you have no concern about this. Your spiritual seeking is going in the opposite direction, only considering your intention.

I have spoken much about this matter of God’s intention in recent months because I am burdened that most of the saints in the Lord’s recovery do not see it. If they did, the recovery could not have gotten off the track the way it

did these past few years. The saints were deceived because the heavenly vision was not strong and clear. The vision not only extricates us from the world; it stops our spiritual seeking as well. When the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they were cut off from everything Egyptian and restricted to what was heavenly. After the leeks, garlic, and onions of Egypt, they now had nothing to eat but manna from the heavens. We must be on this same restricted diet today. Our one food is Christ; our one work, to build the tabernacle and carry it day by day.

Please do not feel that I have given you too profound an answer to a simple question. We all need to be stopped, even from our spiritual seeking, by this heavenly vision.

Question: Sometimes I find myself striving after some aspect of Christ I have heard about in a message instead of being content to keep feeding on the manna.

Answer: We need the church to sustain us. To keep enjoying and experiencing Christ, we need encouragement. If some among the children of Israel had proposed other ways to eat and live, that would have been rebellion. Is not this the state of Christianity today? In the eyes of man it may be doing many good works, but those very works, in God's eyes, are rebellion. Where can God find a people feeding on Christ and building up His dwelling place? He must have such a people, for His purpose to be fulfilled and for Him to have the ground to come back. Otherwise, He has nothing to come back to.

Question: How can we know if what we are doing to please God is from ourselves?

Answer: First of all, we must see that God wants only Christ, not our good works or our good behavior or even our spirituality. All the veils of our concepts must be taken away. Then we must unceasingly pray, breathing Christ in as the air, the pneuma. However well we eat, if we do not breathe the proper air into every part of our being, we will not have good health. Christ is likened to the water we drink, the food we eat, and the air we breathe. As we receive Him into us in all these ways, we are living by Him, and He is constituted into our being. What we do then pleases God because it comes from His life in us.

Question: In our daily living some of us have jobs that keep our minds occupied the whole day; others have work that does not require concentration. If our minds are free, should we exercise to memorize verses and pray?

Answer: By exercise and by practice we must learn to abide in the Lord. If we think in terms of turning back to the Lord, we are indicating that we do not abide in Him. However busy we are in our work, however concentrated we must be, we should still be abiding. This is not easy, for we were not born this way. But we have been reborn as branches of the vine. The vine today is the life-giving Spirit. Even while we keep using our mentality to do our work, we still can remain in the life-giving Spirit. Do not think that after you do your work you will come back to abide. There should be no need to return. Practice abiding. Begin in the morning by opening the Word. Memorizing Bible verses is good, but it is better to have that happen in a spontaneous way, while you are praying over them. As you pray-read, some sentences or verses will be impressed upon your mind, and these will be your daily nourishment, helping you to keep abiding. Coming to the Word throughout the day is like recharging your battery so that it does not run out of electricity. Do this at specific times during the day, besides constantly opening to the Lord in unceasing prayer, whether you are away at work or home tending to household duties.

It is not easy to explain how to enjoy Christ and how to take Him as our life. Mankind has been on the earth for thousands of years, yet the matter of diet is still being investigated. Some of the substances in our food are still unknown or not understood. I often consider how I can best help the saints in the matter of enjoying Christ. It is only since 1958 that we have been using this term. Now, enjoying Christ and practicing the church life—another term we introduced—have come into common usage. I believe that other Christians have also begun using these terms.

Question: How can we know what kind of testimonies are suitable for the meetings?

Answer: In the denominations the terms worship and service are used instead of meetings. They have a Sunday morning worship service and an evening service. It is in the recovery that the word meeting is used. The whole concept of Christian meetings, in denominational thinking, is off. If we

want to know what the proper meetings should be, we can consider the Old Testament type.

The Israelites gathered together seasonally, seven times a year. The main gatherings were three times a year: for the Passover, for the Feast of Weeks, and for the Feast of Tabernacles. Three times a year all the males had to appear before the Lord in the place of His choosing (Deut. 16:16). That place was Mount Zion, where the city of Jerusalem was built.

How did they gather? They first labored on the land until the harvest time arrived. Then they came together with the rich produce, not to kneel down, prostrate themselves, sing a hymn, or offer a prayer. Rather, they offered the top ten percent of their increase to God and then ate together what they had offered to God in His presence. What then was the nature of their coming together? They met to feast on the produce of the good land. Their eating together in the presence of God was their worship and their service.

For us today it is the same. We come together at certain times appointed by God. Before that we must labor on Christ, our good land, so that we have a harvest of experiences of Him. Daily we experience Him. These experiences become the surplus of His riches, which we bring to the meetings. No one is to appear before the Lord empty-handed (v. 16). We must be full of the rich experience of Christ. This Christ we then offer to God and enjoy Him together.

The testimonies are part of our enjoyment of Christ. We offer these experiences to God as food to satisfy Him and one another as well. The testimonies must come out of our daily walk. Our living is what determines how rich a meeting we will have.

Question: I experience Christ and I do like to be in the meetings, but sometimes I get tired of having so much preaching.

Answer: Let me say something further regarding the Old Testament type. In addition to the eating of the offering, there was always the teaching of the law. The feasts lasted seven days, and part of the time was spent hearing the teaching of the law, which corresponds to today's ministry.

If we met together only for praying, praising, and testifying the year round, with no ministry, we would be without the proper knowledge of God's

regulation and intention. The males of the children of Israel had to appear before God three times a year not only to feast but also to be educated and infused with the knowledge of God.

If we have five meetings a week, at least two should be for the ministry. This gives three meetings for all the saints to share. For the ministry, when the church is strong, there should be some local teachers, just as there were in Antioch (cf. Acts 13:1). If the church here had no one who could teach, how poor the church would be. Our meetings need the balance between the eating in fellowship by the offering of our experiences and the teaching. These two go together like husband and wife. Without the sharing, the church is a widower; without the teaching, a widow! It is the balance of these two that makes the church life normal.

Suppose that over these past five years the church had had no ministry. You just came together, sang some hymns, and had some sharing. I wonder if the church would still be here. If you say that you have had enough of the life messages and enough of the ministry, that they are all stored within you and that you have reached your capacity like a camel, then I would propose that we suspend the life supply for four years or so. What do you think would become of the church?

For an adequately balanced church we must have the eating as the wife and the ministry as the husband. This is included in the heavenly vision.

Question: I have been separated from my husband for two years, and when he comes to visit our two boys, I do not know how to handle the situation. Sometimes his worldly ways and plans harden my heart. Other times I feel sorrowful and want to pray for him, because he is really good with the boys.

Answer: It is very sorrowful to be separated and have two children, but I trust you can learn to take your environment from the Lord. I have never been in a situation like yours, but still I do have my problems. Possibly mine are deeper and heavier than yours. Do not think that my situation is so excellent and that everyone appreciates my ministry. If my sufferings are not greater than yours, at least they equal them. The Lord has a measure for all of us. According to the Bible, sufferings are not as bad as they seem; rather, they are a great blessing under a poor cloak. A favorable environment can be a good cloak to cheat us. The sufferings are the real dealings. Romans 8:28 reminds

us that, for those who love God, all things work together for good. Whatever our environment may be, it is under the Lord's sovereignty. I believe that the good is that we may gain more of Christ. Our circumstances open the way. Instead of thinking that you are suffering, change your concept and thank the Lord for your environment. It is a good opportunity for you to receive more of Him.

As to the outcome of your married life, just trust in the Lord. He knows. Give up your expectations. Be content with whatever the Lord has given you and rest assured that He has your situation in His hand. The Lord may after a while recover your marriage. I do not know, but He knows what you really need.

We all need to understand these principles. Take every circumstance from the Lord's hand, believing that it was ordered by Him. Day by day receive grace and be satisfied with whatever the day brings forth. Do not expect your situation to improve. With us no circumstance is bad; even the worst environment is good, because God causes all things to work together for our good. Take every occasion to experience the Lord, and you will gain more Christ.

Question: How can we be kept from repeating the mistakes of the past two years?

Answer: The primary safeguard is that you have no particular fellowship with certain ones. In your body every part is common to every other part. The blood circulates throughout the whole body, supplying every cell, not a special few. The sisters' fellowship must be in common with all the sisters. The brothers too must be common in their fellowship with one another. To have preferences for certain ones damages the Body. Be careful that your fellowship does not become friendship. You must regard all the brothers and sisters as equally lovable. This is what Paul meant when he wrote to the Philippians, "Make my joy full, that you think the same thing, having the same love" (Phil. 2:2). Having the same love means that your love for everyone is on the same level. You have no particular love for a few. You do not contact certain ones for the purpose of having special fellowship with them. Try to have just one level of fellowship, including all the saints equally.

Question: Since you encouraged us to eat the manna by regularly spending time in the morning with the Lord and His Word, I have been doing this, and it has had a real effect on my relationship with the Lord, though I have not sensed anything special. But how can I, practically speaking, keep this up during the day?

Answer: Just continue in the Word. In addition to your ten minutes in the morning, read a chapter at noontime and three chapters in the evening. Also, keep praying throughout the day, "Lord, take away any veils. Keep my whole being open to You." Do not try to analyze your situation. If you will eat the Word faithfully three times a day and keep opening to the Lord by praying unceasingly, coming to Him just as you are, you will find that your life will be changed and that when you come to the meetings you will not be empty-handed.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

GOD'S GOOD PLEASURE

What is the delight of God's heart? Or, to use the language of Ephesians, what is His "good pleasure" (1:5, 9)?

A GOD OF LIFE

Did you know that our God is emotional? A number of times we are told that He was pleased (1 Sam. 12:22; 1 Kings 3:10; Isa. 42:21; Heb. 13:16) or that He was angry (Deut. 1:37; 9:20; 1 Kings 11:9; 2 Kings 17:18). Emotion is a sign of life. A stone does not get angry. If you are living, your face will express emotion, for example, when you come to the meetings.

The Lord Jesus illustrated how emotional the Father is in the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. In fact, it is more accurate to call this the parable of the happy father. The son left his father for a distant country, but one day his hunger caused his thoughts to turn homeward, not so much toward his father as toward the riches in his father's house. "He rose up and came to his own father" (v. 20), prepared to say that he was no longer worthy to be called a son. Before he caught sight of his father, however, "while he was still a long way off, his father saw him." The father must have been watching for his errant son to return. Verse 20 is the only verse in the Bible that says God ran. He "was moved with compassion, and he ran and fell on his neck and kissed him affectionately." How emotional! I am sorry to say I have never so embraced any of my three sons. This indicates that I am short of life, not like God. Praise God that He is so emotional toward us all!

The father cut short the son's confession of unworthiness by telling the slaves to bring forth the robe, the ring, and the sandals for him to wear. Qualified by these outward things, the son was ready to feast on the fattened calf. The father said, "Let us eat and be merry" (v. 23). "And they began to be merry" (v. 24). Here is the merriment of God. Because He is full of life, God can be extremely happy or, by the same token, furiously angry.

A GOD OF PURPOSE

Our emotions come not only because we have life but also because we are purposeful. If we have no plans, we have no reason to feel joy or anger; we are indifferent about what happens. But if we have a strong purpose, we will be excited and delighted to see it realized. For the same reason, we will be angry if its fulfillment is frustrated.

Our God is a God of life and a God of purpose. He “predestinated us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (Eph. 1:5). He has made “known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself, unto the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ” (vv. 9-10). We were “predestinated according to the purpose of the One who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (v. 11).

From these verses we can see that the good pleasure of God is related to such great matters as His will, His purpose (used here in both the verbal and noun forms), a dispensation (or administration, or economy), and His counsel. All these great matters have God’s good pleasure as their source. It was because of His good pleasure that He had a will. According to that will, He made a plan (or purposed something). For this plan He took counsel with Himself. Then His economy emerged for an administration.

We have no way of knowing when this good pleasure began, but since our God is eternal, without beginning or ending, His good pleasure must also be eternal. It lies at the heart of the origin of the universe.

GOD BEING HAPPY WITH THE EARTH

God’s good pleasure was expressed first in the creation of the earth: “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? / ...When the morning stars sang together / And all the sons of God shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4, 7). I can find no hint in the Bible of a similar delight on the part of the angels and the morning stars when the heavens were created. Why was there this singing and shouting for joy when the foundations of the earth were laid?

To the scientists the earth is a small planet, not particularly outstanding in relation to the other heavenly bodies. To God, however, the earth is the most pleasant planet. Of course, it is also the one that gives Him the most trouble, but nonetheless His heart is for the earth. Do you love the earth? I surely do

not encourage you to love the world, for that belongs to Satan; but the earth is the Lord's, and we should love it.

A Misconception about Heaven

There is a common belief among Christians that the earth is a place of suffering, but that some day we shall go to a happy place called heaven. This concept came from Buddhism, which calls this happy place the Western heaven. It was Catholicism that introduced this pagan idea into Christianity.

God loves the earth. All His attention is focused on the earth, not on the heavens.

Ruling on Earth

God's kingdom will be set up on earth, not on any other planet (Matt. 6:10; Rev. 11:15). The eternal universe will be called the new heaven and the new earth (21:1). God's eternal kingdom will not be on the moon or on Mars. The earth is where His pleasure lies, even unto eternity.

GOD BEING HAPPY WITH MAN

If you read the first chapter of Genesis a few times, you will notice how often it says, "God saw that it was good" (e.g., vv. 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). As He was restoring the creation those first five days, God found that it was good. However, on the sixth day, the day that man was created, "God saw everything that He had made, and indeed, it was very good" (v. 31). If the earth is pleasant to God, man is more pleasant. God was so happy with the man He had created that He said "very good."

God does not say "very good" lightly. If He says only "good" on the day that I meet Him, I will be satisfied! For Him to say "very good" indicates that He felt emotional. There were plants and trees, fish and birds, beasts and cattle. As God saw man in the midst of the rest of His creation, His love toward man prompted Him to say "very good." Man is the delight of God's heart. God loves the earth because it was prepared for this man in whom He delights.

GOD BEING HAPPY WITH THE INCARNATION

As happened when the foundations of the earth were laid, the heavenly hosts rejoiced also at the incarnation. The angel of the Lord brought “good news of great joy” to the shepherds. “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army, praising God and saying, Glory in the highest places to God, and on earth peace among men of His good pleasure” (Luke 2:9-14).

What made God so pleased with the advent of the “Savior,...who is Christ the Lord” (v. 11)? Before the incarnation the earth was the earth, man was man, and God was God. But at this point God made Himself one with man. Jesus is the mingling of God and man. ““They shall call His name Emmanuel’ (which is translated, God with us)” (Matt. 1:23).

How regrettable it is that the glorious fact of the incarnation has been corrupted into the Christmas celebration. Christians, for the most part, have only the understanding that a Savior was born to them. That God has been brought into man and made one with man escapes them. When Jesus was living on this earth, He was a wonder. He was the great God mingled with His creature.

The Bible is silent, except for one occasion, concerning the first thirty years of the life of Jesus. He was called a carpenter (Mark 6:3). In those thirty years He did not do any great work. The lesson in this is that God has no interest in our works. If God wants anything done, He speaks, and it is done (Psa. 33:9). He does not need us to work for Him.

GOD BEING HAPPY WITH CHRIST’S BAPTISM

Christ began His public ministry by being baptized. On this occasion “the heavens were opened to Him...And behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I have found My delight” (Matt. 3:16-17). The word *delight* here is from the same root in Greek as *good pleasure* in Ephesians 1:5 and 9. The Father took pleasure in this One who turned Himself over to John the Baptist to be baptized. By receiving baptism He was symbolically receiving the cross. This is apparent from His questions to the sons of Zebedee much later: “Are you able to drink the cup which I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” (Mark 10:38). By *baptism* He meant His crucifixion.

In the eyes of God, then, the death of Christ was pleasant. God delights in the crucified Christ. From week to week as we have the Lord's table, we display this pleasant death to the universe (1 Cor. 11:26).

GOD BEING HAPPY WITH THE RESURRECTED CHRIST

When Christ was transfigured, "Behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I have found My delight. Hear Him!" (Matt. 17:5). The transfiguration was a foreshadowing of the resurrection. The changing of His form also typified His glorification. He asked the two on the road to Emmaus, "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and enter into His glory?" (Luke 24:26). We can see from this verse that entering into His glory was the same as His being resurrected. God took pleasure in the resurrection and glorification of His Son.

GOD BEING HAPPY WITH HIS SON REVEALED IN US

"It pleased God...to reveal His Son in me" (Gal. 1:15-16). God's good pleasure is wrapped up with us. There was joy in heaven the day we were saved because the Son of God was then revealed in us. This pleasure of God relates to all the other things that made God happy. If there had been no earth, how could Jesus have lived in Nazareth? Without the creation of man, how could there be Emmanuel, God with us? Without the earth and man, there could not have been the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of the Son of God. It was by His mingling with man that He became the Son of Man, instead of remaining as only the Son of God.

When He came into us, the meaning of the earth, of man, of the incarnation, of the crucifixion, and of the resurrection all became our portion. Where is Christ today? He is universal. He is both God and man. He is in the heavens and on the earth. We are one with Him. At one time we were ordinary people, insignificant sinners. But now there is something wonderful about us. It is hard for us to explain to others what we are, who we are, and even where we are! The Son revealed in us has brought us into the meaning of the earth, of man, and of the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected Lord.

GOD BEING HAPPY TO WORK IN US

“It is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Our life, the Christian life and the church life, is according to God’s good pleasure. The Christian life is a happy life. Many times the New Testament exhorts us to be happy. “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice” (4:4). We should be rejoicing day after day, not in ourselves but in the Lord. We are a people “singing and psalming with [our] heart to the Lord, giving thanks at all times for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to our God and Father (Eph. 5:19-20). Rather than having Thanksgiving Day once a year, we daily give thanks to God for everything, singing hymns to Him and even stirring up others by our sense of excitement.

We Christians should be an emotional people. When we are with others, they should sense something exciting about us. In those years at Elden hall in Los Angeles, our neighbors called us the “hallelujah people.” We were excited enough to be singing and praising the Lord even while we walked on the streets.

What makes us so happy? It is because we have the very God working within us both the willing and the working for His good pleasure. How do we know that we are living a life according to God’s good pleasure? It is because of our sense of happiness. When we are happy, we are registering God’s happiness within us. Our inward joy is an indication that we are living and walking according to His good pleasure.

GOD BEING HAPPY WITH OUR GLORIFICATION

The day will come when we will all be glorified. We will be with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration. In that day God will be beside Himself with excitement and will call Satan’s attention to us: “Satan, look at My children! My children are glorified!” Surely this thought is hinted at in Romans 8: “The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed upon us. For the anxious watching of the creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God...The creation itself will also be freed from the slavery of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans together and travails in pain together until now. And not only so, but we ourselves also, who have the

firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan in ourselves, eagerly awaiting sonship, the redemption of our body” (vv. 18-19, 21-23).

A PEOPLE TODAY FOR GOD’S GOOD PLEASURE

The recovery is for God to regain His good pleasure. Surely today’s Christianity is no source of joy to Him. We must be a people among whom God may have His good pleasure. It was for this that the earth was created. It was for this that man was created. It was for this that God became incarnated. It was for this that Jesus was crucified and resurrected. This was also the very purpose of our new birth.

We are now living and walking according to the pleasure of God. That pleasure will reach its climax on the day that we are glorified.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

LIVING A DIVINE LIFE— GOD'S GOOD PLEASURE

God has predestinated us human beings to be His sons (Eph. 1:5). This is according to His good pleasure. It is most pleasant to God that a group of human beings can be men of God.

A MAN OF GOD

To be called a man of God does not mean merely that one belongs to God but rather that he lives God. This term is used even in the Old Testament. It is applied to Moses several times (e.g., Psa. 90, title). Of course, he was not a man of God for the first forty years of his life, when he lived as the son of Pharaoh's daughter and became "educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22). Nor was he a man of God in the second forty years of his life, which he spent in the wilderness. By the time God called him at the age of eighty, he was just a country shepherd, all his power "in words and works" (v. 22) far behind him. He had already passed "seventy years" (Psa. 90:10); by his own evaluation his life was as good as finished.

It was during the last forty years of his life that Moses was a man of God. Because he was already at an end, he could live in resurrection, having God as the fuel to burn upon him. During those years of his ministry, Moses lived God. That is why Caleb could later refer to him as the man of God (Josh. 14:6). Deuteronomy 33 gives the "blessing with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the children of Israel before his death" (v. 1). Later on, in the time of Ezra, mention is again made "of Moses the man of God" (Ezra 3:2).

The most pleasant thing to God is to have some people on this earth who are living Him. This is His heart's desire. Even if you are young, God wants you to live Him before your family. Even if you live in a palatial home and have Pharaoh for your father, God still wants you to live Him there. Living Him means being one with Him. This is what makes you a man of God. It is not merely that you represent Him. God wants to be lived out of you. In your

speaking, He would speak. He would like the work that you do to be what He is doing. You are only a human being, but you can have a divine living.

THE SCRIPTURE AND THE MAN OF GOD

In the Epistles to Timothy the phrase *man of God* is used again. Paul wrote these Epistles when the church was in a state of degradation. In such a time “the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17). Would you like to be a man of God? The preceding verse tells us the way: “All Scripture is God-breathed” (v. 16). By breathing in God’s Word, spontaneously you will live God. Take ten minutes every morning to pray-read the Word. By breathing in His Word and eating of Him, you will become a man of God. Even if you are quite young, you can still live God. I do not mean that you will improve your behavior. I am talking about God Himself being expressed through you.

THE STANDARD PATTERN

The standard pattern of a man of God is not Moses but Jesus of Nazareth. He was surely a man: He had a mother, and He lived in a small town for thirty years. Then He came forth to minister for three and a half years. If you read through the four Gospels, you will see that there is not much mention of works that He did. Mostly He just lived and walked among His disciples.

However, He did not live out Himself. He explained His relation to the Father in this way: “As the living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me” (John 6:57). He also told the Jews, “Truly, truly, I say to you, The Son can do nothing from Himself except what He sees the Father doing, for whatever that One does, these things the Son also does in like manner” (5:19). He could say, “I can do nothing from Myself” (v. 30). In John 10:30 He went on to say, “I and the Father are one.”

Here was a man who lived out God. This is why the Father delighted in Him. However much you try to do for God, He will not be impressed. Simply live Him, and you will touch His heart.

LIVE HIM

I have stayed in many homes. Sometimes I have observed wives very busily doing one thing after another with the intention of serving their husbands. It was plain to me that the husbands were not pleased. I would have liked to say, “Wife, stop your doing. Just go and sit by your husband. Say whatever he says. Live him; do not do things for him.”

Consider how many Christians are busily doing things for God. Do you not realize that God is disgusted with your doing? He wants you to spend some time with Him, looking at Him and living Him out. “It is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Stop your foolish work. Be quiet and let God operate in you. Let Him work. This is what it means to live God.

If we want God to rejoice that He created the earth and that He created man, live Him. Then He will see His purpose being fulfilled. James 1:18 says, “He brought us forth by the word of truth, purposing that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.” We have been begotten by God. We may say that the incarnation is repeated with our regeneration. God initially became incarnate in Christ. Now whenever one is regenerated, the incarnation is repeated.

Peter tells us that we are “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). By our first birth we partake of human nature. Now that we have been begotten of God by the new birth, we partake of the divine nature. Our status is both human and divine. We are not merely sons of man but sons of God as well. Two thousand years ago in the Holy Land there was only one man like this. Now there are thousands. God the Father is operating or energizing in us both the willing and the working for His good pleasure. In eternity past He predestinated us unto sonship. Now He is working within us so that we may live Him.

TAKING CHRIST AS OUR HEAD

Since we have within us our own life as well as the divine life, how are we to live out the divine life? We can see from the life of Jesus that there must be a setting aside of our own life. He said, “I have come down from heaven not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38). This verse clearly indicates that the Lord Jesus had a will of His own but that He laid it aside.

In the marriage relationship there can be only one head. That is the origin of the universal custom for the bride to have her head covered at her wedding. The head covering is a declaration that the bride from then on is taking the husband as her head. If the wife refuses to keep her head covered in her married life, the result may well be separation or divorce.

Our Christian life is a married life. The Lord is our Head. Our own head must be kept covered. This means that we are to deny our own life. We are those with both a human life and a divine life. Since only one life can be lived, our natural life must be denied. The way to deny the self is to deny our will and our glory. The Lord Jesus said that He was not seeking His own glory but that of the One who had sent Him (7:18).

PEACE IN DENYING OUR WILL AND OUR GLORY

The key to a happy married life is for the wife to deny her own will and glory. If she will turn from her wishes and care only for her husband's will, if she will disregard her own glory and let all the glory go to him, the problems in the family will disappear. Do not think that I am introducing some concept to bring you sisters into bondage! Even the Lord Jesus set aside His own will and His own glory. Because of this, He brought peace.

This same principle applies in the church life. Problems arise when we seek our own will and glory. These two terms comprise the essence of our human life. Because we feel insignificant, whenever we get a little job, we want to be king over it. We get annoyed if anyone interferes with the way we do it. But there will be peace in the family and peace in the church if we have the grace to put aside our will and our glory. "Lord, make me willing to lay aside my will, as You did when You were on this earth. Grant me the grace to live on earth not seeking my own glory. Lord, be the grace within me that I may put aside my will and my glory."

NOT WILLING

To practice putting aside your will and your glory is not easy. You may feel that you are willing or at least willing to be made willing. But very soon a situation will arise, and you will see that you are not. Why is it that you have been seeking the Lord and meeting with the saints for so many years and yet have so little growth in life? It is because of your will and glory.

It would be helpful to pray-read these verses over and over: “Truly, truly, I say to you, The Son can do nothing from Himself except what He sees the Father doing, for whatever that One does, these things the Son also does in like manner...I can do nothing from Myself; as I hear, I judge, and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will but the will of Him who sent Me...I have come down from heaven not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me...He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory, but He who seeks the glory of Him who sent Him, this One is true, and unrighteousness is not in Him” (5:19, 30; 6:38; 7:18).

To overcome sin, self, and the world is not a problem. The reason you are defeated and have become so worldly and sinful is that you are so much in your will and your glory.

THE WAY

It is beyond our ability to lay aside our will and our glory, however willing we may think we are. Such a life can be lived only in resurrection. The Lord Himself is the resurrection (11:25). Only in Him can we have a life under the cross. As A. B. Simpson’s hymn says,

’Tis not hard to die with Christ
When His risen life we know.

(Hymns, #481)

This hymn came out of the author’s experience of Philippians 3:10: “To know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.” A. B. Simpson learned how to experience the death of Christ in His resurrection power. In ourselves we do not have such a power.

A CRUCIFIED LIFE IN RESURRECTION

Compare a stone with a grain of wheat. There is no life inside the stone. The seed, however, has something concealed in it. There is life inside. When the seed falls into the earth and dies, this very death stirs up the life power within. This illustration, which the Lord gave in John 12:24, is of a crucified life in resurrection.

The Father's pleasure is that we fall into the earth and die, i.e., that we live a crucified life. When we die, the inner power of life will be energized. Death ushers in the resurrection power. "Lord, open my eyes to see that my will and my glory have to be put aside. Then show me that You are the resurrection power within me. I praise You that I am not a lifeless stone. I am a grain of wheat. Within me You are the resurrection power. Lord, give me the vision that if I die, You live. I am here before You." The Lord will work in us the willingness. It does not come from ourselves.

In Luke 12:50 He said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I pressed until it is accomplished!" He was saying that until He entered into death, He was pressed, or restricted. Death released Him. In us the Lord Jesus again has a baptism to be baptized with. Our humanity is a restriction, just as the resurrection life in the Lord Jesus was restrained when He was in the flesh. The death of the cross broke the shell of the grain of wheat and released the inner resurrection life.

We need to be conformed to the death of Christ. This breaks the shell of our humanity so that the resurrection life may come forth. From this life comes "much fruit" (John 12:24). The saints will be edified, the church built up, and God's eternal purpose accomplished.

What is the good pleasure of God? He wants you to live a crucified life in resurrection. He wants you to enter into the death of Christ and remain there to be conformed to it. This will shatter every part of your humanity. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not out of us" (2 Cor. 4:7). The treasure is released when the earthen vessel is shattered.

"We who are alive are always being delivered unto death for Jesus' sake that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death operates in us, but life in you" (vv. 11-12). As this death works upon us, the life within goes to others. If you are a sinner, this life will save you. If you are a believer, this life will edify you.

What the Lord is seeking to recover is a crucified life in resurrection. May we all see that the resurrection power is waiting within us for a chance to be released. We must remain in the death of Christ and be conformed to it. This death will stir up and usher in the resurrection power. The result will be

nourishment, building up, and the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. This is the life that pleases God.

He longs for the life that He imparted into us at our new birth to be expressed. Where can God find on this earth those who are men of God? Who will lay aside the human life to express the divine life? It can only be those who deny their own will and their own glory, as the pattern of the Lord Jesus reveals. In ourselves there is no possibility of realizing this. That is why we must pray for Him to make us willing. He is working in us "the willing and the working for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). We were marked out to be His sons even before we were created. As we live this crucified life in resurrection, day by day His eternal purpose is being fulfilled. We are among those human beings who are learning to live a divine life.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST— GOD’S GOOD PLEASURE

The Lord Jesus told us that He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). The life that was in Him, contrary to the life that we were born with, is a life that cannot be terminated. The Jews foolishly sought to kill Him in order to be rid of Him (5:16, 18; 7:1), not realizing that death only released His life in multiplication. Satan’s strategy, in instigating the Jews to kill Jesus, backfired. Rather than terminating His life, death afforded it the opportunity to reproduce. Consider how many millions of people died from the time of Adam to the time of Christ. Though for them death meant the end, for Christ it meant the release and multiplication of His life (see Luke 12:50; John 12:24).

Before we consider how far-reaching the resurrection is, let us answer some questions.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: May I ask about the Lord’s table? It seems that we partake of it in a bold way, yet 1 Corinthians 11 says to examine ourselves lest we partake unworthily, not discerning the Lord’s body. What is the proper way to come to the Lord’s table?

Answer: Whenever we come to the Lord’s table, we first have to be clear that it really is the Lord’s table. If it does not signify the oneness of believers, it is rather a table of division. Some denominations will not allow you to partake of their “communion” unless you have been immersed by them. Since such a table does not comprise all believers, it is not the Lord’s table. To partake of it is to eat to your own judgment.

You also must examine whether you are sectarian. If you have a problem with any of the saints, you should not partake of the Lord’s table until you thoroughly deal with it. The context of those verses shows that we must beware of any divisiveness. If the table is divisive in its testimony, or if you yourself are divisive in your relationship to the saints, you must not partake. When there is no division—that is, when the table is the table of oneness and

when you have no problem with any member of the Body—you are free to partake.

Question: You have sometimes said that we should avoid friendship. What is the difference between a friend and one we are built with? How do we know whom to open up to when we need to fellowship about a matter?

Answer: Fellowship is a matter of the whole Body. Friendship is a matter of personal affection. Affection easily arises among human beings when we are together for a short time. This is typified by honey, which was forbidden in the meal offering (Lev. 2:11); what is needed is salt (v. 13), which kills personal affection. Salt typifies the killing of the cross of Christ. Do not allow affection to spring up and lead to friendship. Affection sooner or later leads to corruption. Friendship has its seat in our emotions; fellowship is in the spirit (Phil. 2:1).

For all these years that I have been in the Lord's recovery, I have had no friends. However intimate the fellowship may be between a brother and me, it does not become a friendship; no personal affection is involved.

Learn to turn from your friendship in the emotion to the fellowship in your spirit.

As for the matter of being built up, the real building is based upon growth, not upon physical or emotional nearness. A physical building stays put because it is lifeless, but we often move from place to place. If we are built in, wherever we go we will have no problem with the saints, up to the measure of our growth. The building is related to our growth. Reject any thought that it involves some "flow," attaching you to this one or that one.

Question: Why do some saints get baptized more than once?

Answer: How we are baptized is not a problem in the church life. As long as we believe in the Lord Jesus, we are saved and members of the Body. This qualifies us to be members of the church. Of course, the Word clearly says that after we believe, we are to be baptized. There is no profit in getting involved in further discussion than this.

Question: How do we deal with our vain, loose talk? If we repent of it, do we still have to give account of it on the judgment day?

Answer: If we see the vision that the Christian life is in our spirit, all vain talk will be over. When we turn to our spirit, there will be no gossip or other loose talk.

Whatever sin we commit, if we repent from our heart and ask for forgiveness, the blood cleanses, and we are not called to account for it at the judgment.

RESURRECTION LIFE AND ITS PRECIOUSNESS

You are probably aware that three Greek words are translated “life” in the New Testament. *Bios* denotes the life of our physical body; *psuche*, the soul or the soulish life; and *zoe*, the uncreated, eternal life, which we did not have until we received the Lord Jesus. The *zoe* life is in our spirit. The presence of these three kinds of life within us makes us complicated and is the source of conflicts. *Bios* may feel tired, but *psuche* may want to go to a concert to listen to music. Each expects the other to go along with its feeling. *Zoe* proposes that they cease their disagreement and go to the meeting instead; then *bios* will rest, and *psuche* will have satisfaction, not with music but with the Lord Jesus.

Zoe is not a condition or a thing but a person, Jesus Christ Himself. “He who has the Son has the life [Gk., *zoe*]” (1 John 5:12). This life is the resurrection life.

Resurrection, symbolized by frankincense (Lev. 2:15), is precious in the eyes of God. It is even sweeter than the cross, which ushers it in. It is dearer than the incarnation, which was such a pleasure to God because He thus became one with man. Resurrection gives God more pleasure than did the creation of man and of the earth, even though these were a delight to Him and are the object of His love.

In resurrection Christ is revealed to us. In resurrection God is now energizing us both to will and to do His good pleasure. In resurrection we will all be glorified and be the sons of God in manifestation. The ultimate consummation of resurrection will be the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and the new earth in eternity.

FROM FLESH TO SPIRIT

Let us see how the Gospel of John leads into resurrection. This Gospel opens by referring to God as the Word who was in the beginning. Then verse 14 tells us that “the Word became flesh.” John ushers us out of eternity, where the Word was, and into time, where the Word became flesh. This One, who dwelt among us, “full of grace and reality,” was the supreme attraction to His disciples for the three and a half years He was with them. Then He told them that He was going away (13:33; 14:2). What He really meant was that He would become something further. As the Word, He had become flesh. Now He was to become the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45).

John 3

Even as early as the third chapter of John, the thought begins to change from the flesh to the spirit. When Nicodemus came to converse with Him, the Lord’s reply was, “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (vv. 5-6). Nicodemus could interpret the need to be born again only in a physical way, but the Lord said that the one born of the Spirit is like the wind, making a sound but not visible. Notice this turn here from the physical to the spiritual.

John 6

Chapter 6 of John further points us to the Spirit. The Lord said that He was the living bread. “If anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread which I will give is My flesh, given for the life of the world” (v. 51). The Jews, like Nicodemus, took His words literally, in a physical sense, and could not figure out how this man could give them His flesh to eat. The Lord explained this “hard word” about eating His flesh and drinking His blood to His disciples in verse 63 by again turning them to the Spirit: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.” He meant that what He would give them to eat was not the meat of His physical body; that meat, “the flesh,” was of no avail. What was in store for them was Himself as the Spirit.

John 14

John 14 continues directing the disciples away from the flesh and toward the Spirit: “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that

He may be with you forever, even the Spirit of reality...you know Him, because He abides with you and shall be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you. Yet a little while and the world beholds Me no longer, but you behold Me; because I live, you also shall live. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you” (vv. 16-20). If you study these verses carefully, you will see that “another Comforter” is simply the Lord Himself coming back as the Spirit of reality. He said, “I am going to the Father” (v. 12) and then “I am coming to you” (v. 18). The One who was coming was the very One who was going away. Not only the Spirit of reality “shall be in you” (v. 17); in that day the disciples would know “that I am...in you” (v. 20). *The Spirit of reality* and *I* clearly refer to the same person.

Do you realize that the Spirit is the reality of Christ? When you have the Spirit, you have Christ. When you call on the name of the Lord Jesus, the Spirit comes. By calling “Lord Jesus,” you have the person of Jesus, who is the Spirit.

The Lord’s earthly life lasted thirty-three and a half years. After that period of time He was ready, by undergoing death and resurrection, to become the Spirit. The last Adam, the One who was the Word become flesh, in resurrection became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45).

John 20

On the evening of the very day He was resurrected, He came back to the disciples as the Spirit. Though the disciples had the doors shut for fear of the Jews, Jesus somehow appeared in their midst. In this new form He did not need to come in through the door. After talking with them and showing them His hands and His side, “He breathed into them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). Here is the last Adam in resurrection, as the life-giving Spirit being breathed into the disciples.

ALL-INCLUSIVE

The resurrection mentioned in the New Testament is this very resurrected One. He is both God and man. While He was on this earth, He lived in humanity by God. Then He entered into death. With Him man and all

creation passed through death. His death was all-inclusive. Likewise, He brought us all with Him into resurrection.

Noah and the ark typify this all-inclusive death and resurrection. Noah, his family, and all the creatures entered the ark, which represents Christ. The ark and all those who were inside then passed through the death waters. When the ark landed on the mountains of Ararat (Gen. 8:4), all those who were within also came to rest there. In typology this is Christ in resurrection. Not only did Christ enter into resurrection; all those included in Him—mankind and all creation—did also.

The resurrection into which Christ entered through death is the all-inclusive Spirit. These words may seem strange, but some verses may help to make the meaning clear. When the Lord spoke of “rivers of living water” flowing out of those who came to Him and drank, “this He said concerning the Spirit, whom those who believed into Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified” (John 7:37-39). We know that Jesus was glorified when He was resurrected. What Spirit is this that “was not yet” before the resurrection?

The anointing ointment described in Exodus 30:23-25 (see chapter 8) is a picture of this very Spirit. Before the death and resurrection of Christ, the Spirit of God was in type only the olive oil. But now the olive oil has four spices added to it, making it a compound ointment. What are these four spices that have been compounded into the Spirit of God? They represent the humanity, death, and resurrection of Christ. This enriched Spirit is the resurrection, the endless and indestructible life. Our life has an end, but the resurrection life is an endless life. This indestructible life is the all-inclusive Spirit, the Spirit of God compounded with the death, resurrection, and humanity of Christ. This compounded Spirit is the Lord Jesus today.

IN OUR SPIRIT

Where is this One who is the resurrection and the all-inclusive Spirit? Jesus Christ today is in our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22). Romans 8:16 says, “The Spirit...with our spirit.” The Spirit is not with our mind or with our heart but with our spirit. This very One, who is the endless, indestructible life, is in our spirit.

How can you identify your spirit? It is the part of you that is still there after you deduct your mind, your emotions, and your will. Suppose, for example, you are deciding whether to go to the meeting. Your mind says no; it is tired of meetings. Your emotions are not in favor of going either; they choose to go along with the mind. Your will is also in agreement with the mind and emotions that you should not go. Even your heart declares that it wants to rest and joins the others in voting to stay home. Now, if you deduct the feelings in your mind, emotions, will, and heart, you will sense that there is yet another part of you welling up to say that it would like to go and asking you to disregard the opinions of your mind, emotions, will, and heart. This is your spirit.

Here is another illustration. Suppose there is a brother whose ways do not appeal to you. Your emotions say, “I cannot stand him.” Your will says, “His manner is obnoxious.” Your mind says, “I have no use for such an illogical person.” Your heart says, “The less I see of him, the better.” But after you subtract all these negative reactions, there is still a part within that says, “There is something about him that I like. I cannot despise and disregard him.” Do you see how your spirit is distinct from your emotions, will, mind, and heart?

The Spirit with our spirit! Here is the Christian life—victory, sanctification, the Lord’s presence, and all that He is. Romans 8:4 tells us that we are not to walk according to flesh but according to spirit. The mind set on the spirit is life and peace (v. 6). When we walk according to this Spirit with our spirit, God is pleased.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

IN OUR SPIRIT—

GOD'S GOOD PLEASURE

Nothing is so neglected by Christians as their spirit. In fact, most Christians are unaware that they have one. How many know that this is where regeneration transpires?

Regeneration means having another life added to our natural life. It is not merely having our behavior changed or our being renewed; even Confucius taught the need for that. Regeneration is a new birth, bringing the eternal, uncreated life of God into us. It is accomplished by the Spirit of God in our spirit.

Our first birth is a marvel, but the second birth far exceeds it in wonder. Who designed the intricate structure of the eye? Who formed our two ears? We cannot fathom how God forms all the parts of our body in just nine months' time, so detailed and so well suited to their function. Yet as wonderful as our natural birth is, our second birth is much more wonderful.

Let us answer some questions before we continue the chapter.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: I come from a small locality and feel that I should have the habit of functioning in the meetings. But since we have been hearing how the meeting life must come out of our private life, I have had a problem about sharing because my private life is not that glorious. Sometimes I spend my time with the Lord, sleeping on my Bible. Then when I check in the meeting how my time with the Lord was, I feel as though if I say something, it will be empty.

Answer: Your habit of functioning in the meetings should be dropped. We should not function out of habit. The proper church life surely depends upon our proper daily living. Day by day we need to live and walk in our spirit. This will result in some experiences of Christ. Come to the meetings with the riches you have experienced of Christ. In the meeting stay in your spirit. Do not

decide to function or not to function. Do not think that you have to function according to your habit. As you stay in your spirit, when the time comes, the Spirit may impress you to function. Then you share in the spirit the riches you have experienced in your daily life. Our Christian life must be a walk in the spirit. The riches in the meetings are the outflow of this daily walk.

Question: In a certain meeting I was trying to sing a hymn with the saints, but the brother sitting next to me kept talking with me about the Lord. I found it very frustrating, because I was trying hard to be in the spirit and to get something out of the hymn. I struggled to will myself to stay in my spirit and to love this brother, but I could not keep it up. How do our mind, emotion, and will interact to get us into the spirit?

Answer: As long as you are endeavoring and thinking how to handle your situation, you are outside the spirit. If you are in your spirit, you will not be bothered by the interrupting brother. You will not even pay that much attention to the singing of the hymn. All your consideration of how to handle this brother is apart from the spirit. When you remain in your spirit, you become the most simple person. Neither the singing nor the bothering brother affect you. In spirit you just join what you should join. This is not to say that problems do not exist. But being in spirit is like being in heaven. The problems do not upset you. I know it is not easy in the beginning to exercise this way, but we need to keep practicing.

Question: How can we stay on the pathway of life when we come to the Word? I have been trying to do this and praying that the Lord will help me to experience life in His Word. But for so many years I came to the Bible for knowledge that even when I am in the midst of seeking the Lord, I find I have turned back to knowledge.

Answer: The most crucial matter is that you need a change in your concept. Yes, you formerly came to the Bible for knowledge, but now you must realize your need of the life supply. When you come to the Bible, do not analyze whether you are coming for knowledge or for life. If you analyze, you are for knowledge. Just come to the Bible for the life supply. Many times this supply comes through the proper knowledge. But do not begin to wonder what the proper knowledge is and how you can get it. Just have a change in your view of the Bible. You are coming for the supply of life. Then whether you read, pray-read, or study, the result will be that life is supplied to you.

Question: Is it accurate to say that the blood cleanses our soul? One of the hymns we sing refers to the “soul-cleansing blood.”

Answer: The redeeming blood cleanses us from any sin or defilement. It is probably better to avoid using this term in ordinary talk, though I would not say that it is wrong. The soul means the self. The blood does cleanse us from our sins, but we do not need to call it the “soul-cleansing” blood. In our writings we try to stay away from any questionable terminology. We do not condemn what others use, but we do not necessarily adopt their terms either.

Question: Could you give us a practical way to deal with our mind when we find we are distracted? I often find that my mind is somewhere else, particularly when I am in the meetings. How can I turn it back and be in my spirit?

Answer: Do not be discouraged that your efforts to stay in your spirit are a failure many times. When you first begin exercising to deduct the feelings in your mind, your will, and your emotions, you will find you are “adding” instead. Keep working on it. At first, you must exercise legally; this practice in the early stage is actually an “addition.” Eventually, however, when your “subtracting” becomes a habit, it will be spontaneous. Then you will have the real “subtraction.”

A SEED IN OUR SPIRIT

Once we are saved, we sense that something has happened deep within us. We are not the same as we were. Nonetheless, questions begin to arise: Why have we changed so little? Why is our mentality still so dark? How come our emotions are still impure? How is it that our heart is not really honest?

Regeneration means that a seed has been planted in our spirit. The divine, uncreated, eternal, unlimited life has been sown into our spirit. At first it does not occupy very much even of our spirit. For this reason we may go on in the same way as we did in the past. Even so, because of this seed we can never be the same.

PAYING ATTENTION TO OUR SPIRIT

Even those of us in the Lord’s recovery pay very little attention to our spirit. The best exercise in our Christian life is to call our being back to our spirit.

Thinking is a distraction; rather than heed your mentality, be tuned in to your spirit. Whenever Christians seek holiness or victory, they invariably fall short. Their morality may improve somewhat, but until they realize that the Christian life is a matter in the spirit, where the life of God is realized and enjoyed, they will not succeed in living victoriously.

On a recent trip to the Northwest I was staying in a couple's home. They put me in the best room. Everything was fine, except that when it got dark, I could not find the switch to turn on the light. I groped about here and there, but my efforts to locate the switch were all in vain. Finally, I had to ask. The switch turned out to be hidden behind the mirror on the dresser. It never would have occurred to me to look there.

Is not this a picture of Christians, striving to be victorious but groping in the dark because they do not know where the switch is?

DISREGARDING OUR MIND

We may realize that the spirit is the switch, but throughout our daily life we use our mind, not our spirit. Even while we are sitting in the meeting, our mind may be on other things. Or we may be listening to the message with our mind, checking out the Scripture references and trying to determine if what is being said is right. The outcome of exercising our mind is that invariably questions arise.

Without the exercise of our spirit our experience of Christ will be meager. We are off, even though we are not back in the world or into sin. We may be near but off, even as a lamp may be quite near the plug but not receiving any electric current because it is not plugged in.

God would have us turn away from the considerations in our mind and exercise to touch Him, to taste Him, and to find out His will. For us to have such exercise is well pleasing to Him. It is by this very means that we pray without ceasing.

WISDOM AND REVELATION IN OUR SPIRIT

There are riches in our spirit for us to tap. Paul prayed that we might have "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him" (Eph. 1:17). We should ask the Lord to make our regenerated spirit a spirit of wisdom. If

we do, before too long we will find that in our relationship with our parents and others, we are speaking and behaving wisely rather than in our former foolish way. Even others will notice our wisdom. There will not be trickery or cunning wiles but a spirit of wisdom.

We need a spirit of both wisdom and revelation. With revelation the whole universe, both physical and spiritual, is clear to us. When we were unsaved, we were in a dark cell, enclosed by thick walls. But now that we are saved, we should be in a transparent, glass room. Our vision should be as clear as when we are in a car; no matter which direction we look, the see-through glass gives us an unobscured view.

The living creatures in Revelation 4:6 are “full of eyes in front and behind.” Our eyes let the light into us. We need to be full of eyes so that we have a clear view. This clear view is the spirit of revelation.

To understand the view, we need a spirit of wisdom in addition to a spirit of revelation. With our eyes we may be able to see the words on the printed page, but without understanding we will not grasp their meaning.

This may be the case when we read the Bible. We read the words, but the meaning is hidden from us. If we keep praying for a spirit of wisdom and revelation, we will find that the words of the Bible open up to us, and that whenever we read its pages, we have some measure of understanding.

PRAYING

God’s good pleasure is that we walk in this mingled spirit. But this is not our habit. To accustom ourselves to doing this, we need to keep turning to the Lord in prayer during the day. “Lord, make my regenerated spirit one of wisdom and transparency. When I look at the church or at the saints, make everything transparent. When I read the Bible, make every page clear.”

Do not trust in your cleverness. However sharp your mind is, it is too low and small for you to put your confidence in it. If you are involved in a car accident, your cleverness may tell you to drive away quickly, but this is not the voice of wisdom in your spirit.

Pray for this wisdom. Pray that God may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation.

REVELATION ON THE CHURCH

Paul tells us that God has revealed the mystery of Christ to us in spirit (Eph. 3:4-5). In Ephesians it is the church that is referred to as the mystery of Christ. Christ is the mystery of God (Col. 2:2), since God is embodied in Him. Because Christ is realized in the church, the church is the mystery of Christ. Without a revelation in our spirit, we cannot know the church. There are countless Christians to whom the church remains a mystery; they do not know how to look to the Lord through their spirit. The mystery is revealed only in spirit.

A PURE HEART AND SINGLE MOTIVE

Our heart is like an envelope, containing the spirit (1 Pet. 3:4). To have a transparent spirit to see God's revelation, we must have our heart thoroughly dealt with. "Lord, purify my heart. Not only cleanse it, but purify it from any covering. Make my motive single, that my only concern may be to see You, to see Your recovery, and to see the mystery."

Without a pure heart and a single motive, our view of things is foggy. Our vision of the church may be like a rainbow, disappearing from sight after a while. The problem with seeing is not in our spirit. The problem has to do with the "envelope" in which our spirit is wrapped. Our heart may not be pure; we may be motivated by hidden desires for rank or status.

Pray that the Lord may do this purifying work in you. Then you will be steady in seeing the revelation. The mystery of Christ, which is the church, will be revealed to your spirit.

SUBTRACTING

Christians are not secular, worldly people. As children of God and members of Christ, we must learn to "subtract" how we feel in our mind, emotion, will, and heart and take care of our spirit. When we are all set to quarrel with a brother, do these four subtractions. The wish to quarrel will be gone, and the spirit will come out. We should not be people in our mind, emotion, or will. Our mind may be shrewd, but subtract it. Our emotions may be strong, but do not live in them. Our will may be set, but turn from it.

Whatever confronts us—things great or small, good or bad, right or wrong—we need to be in our spirit. Remain there. “Abide in Me” (John 15:4). This wonderful “Me” is right in our spirit. We must abide in Him. Stay there. If you have moved out, move back in.

GOD BEING PLEASED

God is happy when He sees that we remain in our spirit. Our spirit is our hope. It is our home. It is our country. There is no place else that we should be. Hallelujah for this wonderful home in which we can stay! If we want to please the Lord, we must be sure that He always finds us here.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

STRENGTHENED INTO THE INNER MAN— GOD’S GOOD PLEASURE

As human beings, made up of body, soul, and spirit, we need to understand more about our person. The body is not our person but a vessel containing it. The spirit is not our person either but an organ through which God may be contacted. It is the soul that is our person. In order for us to adequately know our spirit, we must first distinguish these different parts of which we are comprised.

THE SOUL

In referring to people, the Bible calls them souls. “All the souls who came forth from the loins of Jacob were seventy souls” (Exo. 1:5, lit.) means that there were seventy people. “There were added on that day about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41) means there were three thousand more persons with them. Every person is a soul. From this we may infer that the soul is the person. When the rich man in Luke 16 died, his body was buried, but his person still existed in Hades (vv. 22-31).

Our human life, the self, is in the soul. The body is the seat of bios, the physical life. Psuche, our person, is in our soul.

A CHANGE AT REGENERATION

When we are regenerated, this relationship between the soul as our person and the spirit as the organ, by which we contact God, changes. With the divine life coming into our spirit, another person is within us. Our existence becomes complicated, because the natural person in our soul is not in agreement with the person in our spirit. In a way regeneration is like getting married. When you are single, you make all the decisions according to your preference. But once you have a husband, he may want the window open when you want it shut, or he may want you to go out with him when you want to stay home. This same complication, of two persons with conflicting ways, arises in us as Christians.

Our soul is the natural man. Our spirit, regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, is the inner man. It is this second person, the inner man, that is the object of God's good pleasure. In actuality, this person is Jesus Christ, mingled with you. He is God's delight. The person in your soul is offensive and displeasing to God, but the One in your spirit is a sweet fragrance to Him.

This mingling of the Holy Spirit with the human spirit is a mingling of divinity with humanity. The life that has come into us is divine and eternal.

COPING WITH TWO PERSONS

How shall we take care of these two lives? Is the person in the soul to be nourished and beautified? The Bible calls him our old man and says that he has been crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6). What we must do with this first person is to disregard him. In the words of the Lord Jesus, "If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24). To take up the cross means to stay there, where Christ has put us. Declare to the old man in the soul that he is on the cross. Then deny him by disregarding him.

Does this mean that the soul is nullified? The natural life in our soul has been crucified, but the functions of the soul still remain and are still useful. Our soul still thinks and decides, loves and hates. It is not our mind, emotion, and will that have been crucified but rather the old man in the soul. What has happened is that the soul is no longer the person but an organ. Now the spirit is the person, no longer only an organ.

In our daily experience we find that part of the time we are persons in the soul and other times our person is in the spirit. While we are attending the meeting, we may be a person in the spirit, listening to God's Word, praying, and worshipping. But after we get home, something our spouse does may annoy us, and again we become persons in our soul. Our irritation may last most of the night, making us sleepless. When we get up the next morning, we say to the Lord, "Forgive me, Lord, for my failure last night. Cleanse me by Your blood." Once again we enjoy the Lord's presence and become a person in the spirit.

TRAVELING

God wants us to be persons in the spirit. The soul's use is as an organ; it is not to be our person. Many, many times in the course of the day, however, we travel back and forth from spirit to soul and from soul to spirit. Our soul needs to be exhorted, "Soul, formerly you were my person, but now you are simply an organ. I do not regard you as my person. My real person is the inner man, my spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit with the Lord Jesus."

Ask the Lord to help you practice. "Lord, thank You that I have a new person. I am not that old man. My regenerated spirit, indwelt by You, is my new person. Help me to walk, live, act, and speak in the spirit, no longer in the soul. I want to live by the inner man."

This kind of prayer may be new to us. It is far more common to pray for the Lord to help us submit to our husband or to love our wife, that we might obey His Word. But praying in an ethical way like this results in even less submission and love than before.

Rejoice in this new person within you. He submits to the headship. In Him is the love for your wife. This person is the very Lord Himself mingling with your spirit.

What we have said thus far is a preparation for us to understand Ephesians 3:16: "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man." For many years I have been considering this verse. It is not easy to understand.

"STRENGTHENED"

When the apostle prayed that God the Father would grant us to be strengthened, he was praying for our precise need. We are weak. Our need is to be made strong.

"ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GLORY"

This phrase, though we can easily read the words, is hard to understand. We are to be strengthened according to a standard. That standard is the extent of the riches of God's glory. The strengthening is not only according to the degree of God's glory but even to the riches of His glory. What do these profound words mean?

Glory is God manifested. If we pray that we may be strengthened into our inner man, the result will be that we are full of God's expression. When God is expressed, there is glory. The riches of His glory are the divine virtues—namely, love, life, light, holiness, and righteousness. These riches of God's expression will be seen in us. Others will sense the glory of God upon us. This is the meaning of God's strengthening us according to the riches of His glory.

“WITH POWER”

The Greek word for *power* here is related to the English words *dynamo* and *dynamic*. The power referred to is like a generator; it means a tremendous force. This is the very power that sufficed to raise Christ from the dead, uplift Him to the third heaven, and seat Him there far above all (1:19-21). It is with this same power that God the Father would strengthen us. What a mighty power there is within our spirit!

“THROUGH HIS SPIRIT”

It is through the Spirit of God that we are strengthened with power.

“INTO THE INNER MAN”

This phrase, especially the word *into*, troubled me for years. Why did Paul use the word *into* rather than *in*? No doubt he chose the word *into* intentionally. Gradually through experience I began to understand the thought behind the words.

When we are weak, we are outside the inner man. We are in our mind, emotion, will, or heart. If we are considering how inadequate the elders are or how insubordinate the sisters are, we may be assured that we are in the mind. Whatever we are thinking will lead to trouble. Flee from the mind! Escape to the spirit! We are weak when we are in our mind.

The mind is the highway on which the brothers drive. Most sisters, in contrast, are in their emotions. They consider why this or that sister does not pay any attention to them, or why the elders respect another sister more than them. There are also a few brothers and sisters who stay in their will. Their aspiration is to be better than all the others in the church. They resolve not to

criticize the elders, even though they feel that the elders are not doing a good job.

These descriptions give us a picture of the general condition of a local church: most brothers in their mind, most sisters in their emotion, and a few brothers and sisters in their will. What a weak condition! That is why Paul prayed that God the Father would grant us to be strengthened into the inner man.

THE WAY TO BE STRENGTHENED

Exhorting or admonishing the saints does not help to bring them into the inner man. Telling the brothers and sisters not to gossip, for example, seems to lead to more gossip. The best way to be drawn into your inner man is to pray. Forget your situation. Do not consider your condition. Do not be concerned about your gossiping tongue. Pray! “Lord, I need You. I want to breathe You in. Impart Yourself into the depths of my being. I long to see You. Meet me as I pray-read Your Word. Add more and more of Yourself to me.”

If you spend some time praying this way, you will find that you are transferred from your mind, emotion, will, or even your heart, and into your spirit. The interest in gossiping will be gone. You will be strengthened through the Spirit of God with power.

The Father longs to see us live this way. His good pleasure is that we be strengthened into the inner man according to the riches of His glory. Morality and ethical virtue cannot compare with the expression of the divine life through us. It is not a matter of staying away from department stores or from places of worldly entertainment because we do not love the world anymore. That attitude is too shallow. What we do is the outcome of our being strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man.

FILLED

When we are thus strengthened, Christ will make His home in our heart, and we will be filled unto all the fullness of God (3:17, 19). This is the church life. By being filled with God’s riches, we become the expression of those riches. We are strengthened into our inner man, Christ makes His home in our heart, and we are filled even to the extent of the full expression of God.

Do not think such a living is beyond us. If this were not possible, it would not be mentioned in the Word. This is the normal church life, fully expressing the Triune God. The Lord's recovery is not for doctrines or for outward practices. It is for the experience of being strengthened into our inner man, that Christ may occupy our whole being until eventually we are filled with God unto His full expression. Do not be discouraged about the elders. Do not worry about the condition of the church. Do not talk about this brother or that sister. Pray, "Father, thank You for my regenerated spirit where Christ dwells. Do strengthen me according to the riches of Your glory, through Your powerful Spirit, into my inner man. Spread out from my spirit and settle also in my heart. Make Your home in my whole inward being, that I may be filled with You, unto Your full expression."

BUILT TOGETHER

When the Lord wholly occupies us, we are one with all believers. This oneness is the meaning of being built together. "Being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone; in whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit" (2:20-22). Being close to certain saints is not what is meant by being built together. It is when we are fully one with the Lord and saturated with Him that we are also one with all other believers.

DISPOSITIONAL HINDRANCES

The building comes as the element of Christ increases in us. Suppose you go to Japan and meet a Japanese brother there. You will sense a kinship with him because you both have the life-giving Spirit, even if only in an initial way, connecting you. But if you spend some length of time together, you will begin to feel uneasy. He does not express his feelings, and you cannot tell if he is happy or annoyed. You speak so openly, but he is inscrutable. The American disposition differs from the Japanese.

However, the same problem of disposition arises in a brothers' house where all are Americans. They have the initial relationship through the life-giving Spirit, but friction arises even in the matter of washing dishes because each brother has his own disposition. Even though they are growing as they attend the meetings week by week, their disposition does not change.

Your disposition will faithfully cling to you year after year! God's economy is not to change your disposition but to fill you with Christ. As He increases in you, you will gradually change. Little by little you will be saturated with Him, and your own disposition will be swallowed up.

THE INCREASE OF CHRIST

This organic, inward change, which is called sanctification and transformation, makes us one with other saints wherever we go. When this is the case, we are built up. Please be clear that building among the saints is not intimacy, friendship, or affection. It is purely the increase of Christ in all of us.

You must grow. For Christ to increase, you must remain in, or return to, your spirit, where He is. Do not try to improve yourself. Practice staying in your spirit. If you walk out, come back quickly. Especially work on this at home. It is easy to be in spirit in the meetings or when you are with more spiritual ones. The test comes when you are alone with your spouse. This is the easiest time to indulge your self.

May the Father strengthen us all into the inner man, that Christ may make His home in our hearts, and that we may be built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit. This is His good pleasure.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

WORSHIPPING IN SPIRIT— GOD’S GOOD PLEASURE

The New Testament reveals that when we were regenerated, a great change took place in our constitution. The main part of a natural man by birth is the soul. The soul not only has the parts of mind, emotion, and will but also is the person. At regeneration the person shifts from the soul to the spirit.

Strictly speaking, we should no longer be a soul. We should only use its parts. I would not say that we should be a spirit, but at least we can say that we must consider our spirit as our person. This is not to say that our spirit is no longer an organ.

THE SPIRIT AS AN ORGAN

In John 4:23 and 24 we are told that God is to be worshipped in spirit. The word *in* may be considered as an instrumental preposition and can therefore be translated “with.” We worship with our spirit. This indicates that our spirit serves as an organ. We see with our eyes, hear with our ears, and worship with our spirit. When we say we worship *in* spirit, we mean that we worship in the realm of the spirit. When we say we worship *with* our spirit, we mean that the spirit is the part of our being by which we worship. The spirit then has become not only the new person, the inner man, but also the new organ with which we worship God.

SERVICE AND WORSHIP

The word *worship* in Greek implies also the thought of service. Romans 1:9 reads, “God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son.” The word *serve* in this verse is translated “worship” in some other versions. Whether we say worship or serve, the meaning is the same. Our worship is our service to God; our service to Him is also our worship. When we worship Him, we serve Him; when we serve Him, we worship Him.

THE HUMAN SPIRIT, NOT THE HOLY SPIRIT

The human spirit, as the organ by which we worship or serve God, is largely unknown among Christians. When they come across the word *spirit*, they understand it as the Holy Spirit.

Brother Nee wrote a book entitled *The Breaking of the Outer Man and the Release of the Spirit*. Christians who read this title may think that what is meant is the release of the Holy Spirit. If you read the book, however, you will see how Brother Nee stresses that he is referring to the human spirit, not to the Holy Spirit.

Many Christians have a very light regard for the human spirit. In Christian theology there is a school of dichotomy, which teaches that man has two parts, not three. They consider that *soul* and *spirit* are synonyms.

This kind of belief affects the way the Bible has been translated. The Chinese version, though it is a good translation, in many verses renders the word *spirit* as “heart-spirit.” Such a rendering shows that the scholars lacked a clear vision concerning the human spirit. What is *heart-spirit*? This is an odd term! Though the scholars knew the language, they did not know the spirit so well. They realized that the word *pneuma* in John 4:24 does not refer to the Holy Spirit but to some organ of our being. Thinking that the Chinese mentality would misunderstand *spirit*, they added another word, making it *heart-spirit*. They thought that the heart and the human spirit are the same.

THE FOCUS OF GOD’S ECONOMY

God’s New Testament economy is focused on our human spirit and is carried out by the divine Spirit and the human spirit being mingled together. First Corinthians 6:17 states, “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.”

Paul says, “To me, to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21). Who is Christ? Is He not God? Who is “me”? It is Saul of Tarsus, a mere man. How could a man live God? We do not understand very well, but we can enjoy what the Word says by eating it. When the Word says that we are joined to Him in one spirit, we reply, “Hallelujah! I am a man, but I have a spirit! I am one spirit with the Lord!”

Does this mean that we are lowering God down to man’s level? Are we lifting up man to God’s level? The answer to both questions is yes! God has

become incarnate. “The Word became flesh” (John 1:14). *Flesh* is a negative term for man. It was not until after the fall that man was called the flesh (see Gen. 6:3). Since the incarnation was after the fall, the Word became flesh, that is, became a man under the fall. God was lowered to the level of fallen man. His being lowered lifts us to the level of God. This traffic of coming down and going up results in a mingling. Whether the mingling occurs on the low level or on the high level, I do not know, but I do know that there is a mingling. More than this I do not need to know.

THE EFFECTS OF DISREGARDING OUR SPIRIT

In this mingled spirit God’s economy can be carried out. Christians often talk of the Holy Spirit in strange ways, but concerning the human spirit, they are blind. How about us? We may have been enlightened, but we are not absolute concerning our spirit. In the church life we still exercise our mind. We still give too much room to our emotions, especially the sisters. We do not adequately appreciate and use our spirit. If questions arise in the church life, sisters react emotionally. Words will not subdue them, but tears will. With the brothers the problem is with their big head and their turning eyes. While they are listening to a message, they are thinking, “Yes, but...” Most brothers are too logical, and most sisters are too illogical. Besides the problems of emotion and logic, there is also the matter of the strong will. The stubborn ones do not care what is said or how many tears the sisters shed. Their only concern is their stubborn will.

These three problems do not wait for a time of turmoil to appear. Even in the prayer meeting or in the Lord’s table meeting, some brothers are exercising their mind, some sisters are exercising their emotions, and some strong-willed ones are thinking how much they know and how little the elders know.

Disregarding our spirit in this way annuls our worship. When we come to the meetings, and in our daily life as well, we must learn to use our mind, our emotion, and our will as utensils. Just as we use a key to open the door and then put the key back in our pocket and forget about it, so when we need to use our emotions, our mind, or our will, we use them temporarily, but we do not remain in them. We remain in our spirit. When we hear gossip being spoken, we exercise our spirit. When we come to the meetings, even the more

we forget about our mind, emotions, and will and come wholly and absolutely in our spirit.

THE MEANING OF WORSHIPPING IN SPIRIT

To worship in spirit is to worship in oneness. When the Lord talked to the Samaritan woman, she was exposed as a sinner. She therefore turned the subject from the matter of husbands to the matter of worship. She changed the topic of conversation from an ugly shameful subject to the marvelous, wonderful one of worship. “Jesus said to her, You have well said, I do not have a husband, for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband” (John 4:17-18). The woman’s reply was, “Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men must worship” (v. 20). The Lord’s reply was that the age had changed. Formerly, to worship God, people had to go to God’s chosen center, Jerusalem, Mount Zion. Now the hour was changing. It was a new age because Christ had come. The worship was no longer to be on this mountain or in Jerusalem but in spirit (vv. 21-24).

This spirit in which we worship God is the fulfillment of Jerusalem. In Deuteronomy 12, 14, 15, and 16 the Lord again and again charged the children of Israel that when they entered the good land, they should not worship Him in the place of their preference. They must come to the appointed place with their tithes and the top portion of the produce of the good land. They must come to the place where God would set His name and where His habitation would be.

ONENESS IN JERUSALEM

For centuries that unique center, Jerusalem, kept the children of Israel in oneness. The males were required to appear there before the Lord three times a year; otherwise, they would be cut off.

Suppose I lived in those days and had a quarrel with my neighbor about his barking dog. I would tell him the dog had kept me awake all night. Did not God say, through Moses, that we should love our neighbor as ourself? Did he not care that I could not get any sleep all night? The result of the quarrel was that we stopped talking to each other. Two months went by. It was now the seventh month; the Feast of Tabernacles was coming up. Both my neighbor

and I had to go, or we would be stoned to death. We both went, he along one lane and I along another. When we reached the foothill of Mount Zion, there was only one way. We had to go up together, singing the Songs of Ascents. How could we sing, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is / For brothers to dwell in unity!" (Psa. 133:1) when we were still not at peace with each other? I was the older one. My heart was softened. I greeted him, saying, "Hi, brother. I still love you."

ONENESS IN THE CHURCH LIFE

Do you see how this unique center forces us to be one? This is the worship in Jerusalem. In the New Testament the worship is in spirit. We know this because Ephesians 2:22 says that God's dwelling place today is in our spirit. Our spirit is the center where we worship God. The children of Israel were divided into many groups, but whenever they came to Jerusalem, they were one. The same is true of us. When we are in our emotions, in our mind, or in our will, we are divided. Not only can the emotional sisters not be one with the strong-minded brothers; these same brothers cannot be one with each other.

Suppose there is a service-group meeting. If you do not go in your spirit, be prepared for arguing. Within ten minutes you will all be expressing your concepts, even if you are only discussing the best time to meet. The problem is not with your heart; you all love the Lord and have a heart for the church. The problem is with your head. You cannot be one with others in your mind.

The best way to come together to serve in oneness is to avoid talk. Pray instead. When we were in Elden hall in Los Angeles in 1965 to 1967, the serving brothers could not work together. When they met, they began to discuss. (They called it fellowship!) The more they "fellowshipped," the more opinions they had. Then they would begin to argue. In 1966 pray-reading came in, and then in 1968 calling on the name of the Lord came in. After that there was no more "fellowship." When the service groups met, they would pray-read and call on the name of the Lord. This brought them all into one spirit. That was the end of their opinions. Where did they become one? In the spirit. Where are Christians divided? In their mentality.

If we do not keep ourselves in the spirit but indulge in using our mind, we shall soon be divided. All of us in the recovery must be on the alert. We must

have a holy fear of our opinions. Paul told the divisive Corinthians that they should be attuned in the same opinion (1 Cor. 1:10). How can we be attuned in one opinion? It is only by exercising our spirit. If I do not remain in my spirit, I can give you several opinions. We all are opinionated. As long as we are living, we have opinions. While we are listening to a message, we may be thinking about what the speaker is wearing or why some brother's hair is cut a certain way. Our opinions are always critical of others. What shall we do about these critical opinions? Let us turn to our spirit; just a little turn, and all criticisms stop.

If you try to eliminate the opinions of the saints by teaching or admonishing, that very teaching is an opinion. It does not help to try to adjust others. Do not make comments about how they dress. Your business is to turn to your spirit. Do not talk about the Scripture verses that you interpret differently. The best church is the one where opinions are not heard, and everyone practices turning to the spirit.

Many times we are unaware that we are criticizing. We may ask a simple question right after the meeting, like, "How was the meeting this morning?" Such a question unlocks the door to opinion. The reply will be, "Oh, the message was all right, but..." There is always a "but." We must learn to answer such questions with "Praise the Lord!" It is not safe to express any opinion. Whether the meeting is living or dead, have no idea. Exercise not to discuss how it is. It is not easy to stay out of our mind or our emotions and remain in our spirit. In this place there is no vain talk, no unnecessary fellowship, and no opinions. Rather, there is prayer, singing, and praising.

JOY IN THE SPIRIT

In the church life we should all "be filled in spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and psalming with your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:18-19). "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16). We are to be filled not only with the riches of God but with the word of God. The living word will so fill us that we will be singing, praising, and psalming. Rather than exercising the mind or giving room to the emotions, our whole being will be filled with joy in the spirit.

This is the right church life. It can only be in our spirit. It is easy to walk out of our spirit without even realizing it. We may have departed quite far away, yet not know it. But once we discover that we are away, we should return quickly.

RECOVERING THE USE OF THE SPIRIT

It is not possible to overstress this matter of the spirit. If we take away from the New Testament these two spirits, the divine and the human, the New Testament becomes empty. Yet Christians pay inaccurate attention to the Holy Spirit and nearly neglect the human spirit. Now is the time when the Lord will recover not only the proper realization of the Holy Spirit but also the full use of our human spirit.

The most pleasant thing in the eyes of God today is that we remain in our spirit. May we not want to say anything apart from our spirit. May we not want to go anywhere or do anything without being in our spirit. All day long “in spirit” should govern us and direct all our activities. If we speak, think, move, and act in spirit, we are victorious, holy, and spiritual. We will be pleasant not only to ourselves but to God and others as well. Such a daily life is a good pleasure to God. A Christian life and a church life that are in spirit are what please Him.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

THE FATHER'S LIFE AND THE SON'S LIVING

Though most Christians know that the subject of the Gospel of John is life, few know how to take such a life. Yes, it is correct to say that believing in Christ is the way to take this life, but how can we live out such a life? Since my youth, when I received the Lord, I knew that He was my life, yet I kept wondering how I could live by His life. How could it be practical to me in my daily living?

YOUR LIFE VERSUS YOUR LIVING

No doubt you too have this same question. You realize you have eternal life, the very life of God, yet your living is another story. How about your temper? your sulkiness? your gossiping? your loose life? your light, joking words? Are these the living of the divine life? According to the inner life, you are a certain person, but according to your living, you are another. These two stories are with you all day long. The ten minutes you spend in the Word every morning are wonderful, but what about the rest of the time? Part of the day you experience a bird's life, soaring and free. But you have also the experience of a dog's life, barking on the earth, even though your barking may be only in a whisper.

Why is it that we have a bird's life yet have a dog's living? Our living does not correspond with our life. I was saved over fifty years ago, when I was in my late teens. China at that time was a heathen country, full of the teachings of Confucius and the idols of Buddhism. Yet in that heathen country the Lord granted His gracious visitation not only to me but also to many other seeking college students. I believe this visitation was the answer to the prayers of many saints in England who prayed for China after the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, when many foreign missionaries were killed. The Lord came in around 1920 and saved many of us college students. We loved the Lord, and we loved the Bible. Yet we were desperately in need of help. The missionaries were able to help in the gospel, but they did not know how to live Christ. From searching the Word and seeking the Lord, we knew we needed a living to match the life within us. We collected many spiritual books, but even in them we could not find the way.

After a number of years we found out that in the Gospel of John there is first the believing in Jesus as the Son of God and then the loving of Him. In 1:12 there is the matter of believing. To believe is to receive the Son of God. In 21:15-17 the matter of loving is raised. “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was asked three times. To receive this life, we must believe in the Son of God, but to live the life that we have received, we must love.

THE SECRET OF LIVING OUT THIS LIFE

Neither believing nor loving, however, is the secret of living out the life that we have received. The key is found in John 5, 6, and 7. The principle is that this life of someone has to be lived out by another. Only in these three chapters is it clear that the life is the Father’s, yet He does not live this life out. His desire is to have the Son live it out. The life is the Father’s, but the living is the Son’s. John 6:57 says, “As the living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me.” Then 5:26 says, “Just as the Father has life in Himself, so He gave to the Son to also have life in Himself.” By considering these two verses together, you can see that the life was the Father’s, yet He wanted the Son to live it out. This life involves two persons; it is the life of the first, but it is lived by the second. The two have one life with one living. The matter of living does not pertain to the Father but to the Son. Yet the life is not the Son’s but the Father’s.

TWO PERSONS BUT ONE LIFE LIVED

Does 5:26 mean that the Father has the life and lives, while the Son also has the life but with a separate living? How many persons are mentioned here? There are two; one is the Giver, and the other is the Receiver. How many livings? Only one. How there could be two persons but only one living is too mysterious for us to understand; all we know is what the Bible says.

AN ILLUSTRATION

I have seen a few marriages that demonstrate this principle. In such cases, the husband and wife have only one living. Though two people are involved, the wife’s living is her husband’s. When there are two livings in married life, the result is separation and divorce. Do you and your spouse have only one living?

Marriage is not only a human living arrangement but also a picture of the divine relationship. Christ is the Husband, and the church is the wife, as Ephesians 5 makes plain. Should the church, the wife of Christ, have a living separate from Him?

The key to married life is not found in Ephesians 5 but in John 5, 6, and 7. Too many Christians study the black and white instructions in Ephesians 5 without ever getting the secret of such a wonderful life. When a couple has only one life and one living, that is heaven.

Perhaps I may illustrate with my own marriage. Most of the time there is harmony in our home, with one life and one living. Sometimes, however, my wife lives her life and I live mine. One cause of trouble between us is her concern for my health. I am very fond of American desserts, but she thinks they are bad for my health. Sometimes some older sisters will bring a cake to the house. My wife tries to hide this from me, but on some occasions I can hear the talking when I am working in my study. Later, I ask her where the cake is, only to find out that she has already passed it on to our grandchildren. Here you can see that there are two lives and two livings.

It is a mystery how the Father and Son can have one life and one living. The life is the Father's, and the living is the Son's. The Son's living is by the Father's life. "The living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father...The Son can do nothing from Himself except what He sees the Father doing...I can do nothing from Myself...If anyone resolves to do His will, he will know...whether I speak from Myself. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory, but He who seeks the glory of Him who sent Him, this One is true" (6:57; 5:19, 30; 7:17-18). The speaking and the doing of the Son—that is, His whole living—was the Father's. Because He lived the Father's life, His living was the living of the Father.

THE SHORTCOMING OF SPIRITUAL BOOKS

What I am sharing with you is the fruit of what I have learned and experienced these many years. As I have said, in the early years we collected many spiritual books concerning the way to have a holy, victorious life. We read them and attempted to practice what they taught. Actually, those books did not help us very much.

On the matter of overcoming sin, for example, most writers referred us to Romans 6. You must die, they said, because once you die, you are free from sin. When we tried to practice this, however, we could not find the way to die. Eventually, we concluded that reckoning was the answer. As A. B. Simpson's hymn says,

There's a little word that the Lord has giv'n
For our help in the hour of need:
Let us reckon ourselves to be dead to sin,
To be dead and dead indeed.

Let us reckon, reckon, reckon,
Let us reckon, rather than feel;
Let us be true to the reck'ning,
And He will make it real.

(Hymns, #692)

I did a lot of reckoning and discovered that if I did not reckon, sin was somewhat dormant. The more I reckoned, however, the more alive sin became in me. That way did not work, nor did most of the other ways recommended by the Christian writers.

Eventually, we discovered that the way is Christ (John 14:6). The way to overcome sin is Christ. The way to die is Christ; when you take Him, you die. The way to holiness is Christ. The way to pray is Christ. The way to study the Bible is Christ. The way to love your wife or submit to your husband is Christ. He is the way.

JOINED TO THE LORD

When we are saved, we are joined to Christ (1 Cor. 6:17). Salvation is not merely to be rescued from hell; it is primarily to be joined to the Lord as one spirit. We are one with Christ. Consequently, His life becomes our life.

Christ today is hidden. He does not live Himself out. No one on the whole earth can see Him directly. Where is He? Christ has two concealments, one in heaven and the other on earth. We are His earthly concealment. When Christ was on earth, the Father was hidden; the Son lived the Father out. Today the

principle is the same. The Son is hidden. We are charged to live Him out. The life is the Son's, and the living is ours.

To realize this is a help when you touch the Word. Give up your concept that Christ wants to teach you and correct you. The central thought in the Bible is that Christ must be your life and you must live Him out as your living. You may ask, "Don't I have my own life?" Yes, you do, but that life is not the real life. It is a life of form, not of reality; it is a container, not the content. Your life is a container to hold Christ as your life. He wants to be the content of your life. This is the concept you must bring to your reading of the Bible. If you come to the Word for teaching, you are behaving like a disciple of Confucius, not like a believer in Christ. Come to the Bible for more supply of this life. Every morning, when you turn to the Bible, do not look for teachings. This natural concept is in our blood. When we read other books, we are looking for knowledge. Drop this thought when you turn to the Word. You are coming to it for nourishment, not for instruction.

"LIVE BECAUSE OF ME"

The daily walk of a Christian is not a matter of morality or ethics. It is the living of this divine life. "As the living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me" (John 6:57). To live because of Him means that He is your life. He is within you as your life, and He has to be without as your living. Though He is one person and you are another, He wants you to be one with Him. Human culture, whether Western or Eastern, has developed a code of ethics to uplift morality. We have all been raised under this influence. Our natural concept when reading the Bible is to find out how we should behave ethically. This concept is a frustration to the proper Christian life. Though the Christian life undoubtedly represents the highest ethics, it is not concerned with ethics. Our morality, humility, love, and kindness are the highest because they are Christ Himself. In our dictionary there is only one word, *Christ*, and one footnote, *the church*. It is Christ who is our love or humility or kindness. We live Him. He is our everything. This I say partly from what I have read but mostly from my experience.

Let us come back to the illustration of the cake. When I found out that my wife had given away the cake brought for me, years ago I would be annoyed and ready to say some angry words to her. But within I would be checked,

“Who is this who is angry—you or Christ? Those angry words about to come out are yours, not Mine. Remember the message you gave last weekend on not living by yourself? Who is chasing after this cake? Is it Christ or you?” I would feel so ashamed, I would not have the boldness to say the Lord’s name or to pray. I could not and would not pray. I would just go on strike! After many such experiences, I learned. Now, by His mercy, however many cakes are concealed from me, I can smile and say, “Praise the Lord!” Because that is what He says, I say it too. I live Him. He does not want that much American dessert. I am one with Him. He is my life, and I am His living.

You may sing, “Amen the Word of God,” but suppose the Lord says, “No more cake for you! All the cakes that come are for your grandchildren.” Will you still say Amen? Saying Amen is not what matters; He wants you to be one with Him. This is what Paul testifies of in Galatians 2:20. It was no longer Paul who was living, but Christ who lived in him. The Lord said in John 14:19-20, “Because I live, you also shall live. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” Christ and we live together, having only one life and one living.

You need to come to the Word several times daily in order to receive the supply of Christ. Do not use the Word the way many Christians do when they have a Bible study. Suppose there is a Bible study class every week, and one week the topic is Ephesians 5. The Bible teacher charges the husbands in accordance with the Scriptures to love their wives. Then he charges the wives to submit to their husbands. After the class a quarrel develops between a husband and wife, each accusing the other of not fulfilling the exhortations they heard.

Such is the effect of teaching. There is no life supply. The Bible teacher has made the Bible the tree of the knowledge of good and evil instead of the tree of life. It is better to pray when we come to the Word, “Lord, supply me. I come to Your Word to receive nourishment. I am not interested in knowledge or instruction. I care only for Your supply.” Do not try by yourself to do the things that are taught in the Bible. I realize that this sounds strange, but I know what I am talking about. Come to the Word with a sincere heart and an open spirit, to receive the Lord Himself through the Word as your supply. The best teachings do not come from the black and white pages, but from the real nourishment. The nourishment of life will teach you.

NOT TEACHING BUT TRANSFORMATION

This kind of teaching through being nourished transforms you. It seems to be a correction, but actually it is transformation. The Word as the life supply metabolically changes you, carrying away the old and replacing it with the new. This change is organic, not lifeless.

PRACTICING

To practice living out this life, do not do or say things quickly. If your spouse gives you a hard time, do not be troubled. Be steady. Check with the Lord. “Lord, You act in me. I would not do anything. I am one with You. You be the One to answer for me.” Do not be pushed into reacting hastily. If you will practice this secret, you will see how different we are from worldly people. They have only their own life, but we have the life of Christ. This makes us a special people. We are privileged to have Christ as our life. Now He wants us to live Him and to have Him as our living. That is why I said that we should not try in ourselves to keep the word of the Bible. That is the wrong way. Just be one with the Lord. Hold the attitude that you are one with the Lord and that He is your life. This is the secret of how to take the life revealed in the Gospel of John.

CHAPTER FORTY

TWO PERSONS WITH ONE LIFE AND ONE LIVING

It is difficult to explain our Christian life. For many years I have considered what the nature of the Christian life is and how it can be described. Is it a human or a divine life? In the previous chapter we likened it to marriage. However, in marriage the wife does not have her husband's life; thus, this illustration is faulty. The Father and the Son had only one life. The same is true of Christ and the church. What Christ has as life is the life of the church.

The ethical relationships described in Ephesians 5 and 6 cannot be worked out in ourselves. We cannot carry out these relationships by our natural life. We may have thought before that we could, but actually it is beyond our ability. Does this mean that whatever the Bible tells us to do is in vain? No, but we cannot fulfill its exhortations in and of ourselves. The love in Ephesians 5, for example, does not come from us. It is from the Lord. Christ has to be our life.

SOME WRONG CONCEPTS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Many Christians are still under the natural concept that now that they are Christians, they must improve their behavior. This concept of seeking to live the way God's children should live must be dropped.

The basic revelation in the Bible is that you must take Christ as your life. You are to do this not because you are evil or weak or defeated. Christ took the Father's life not because His own life was weak but in order to fulfill the Father's desire. "I do not seek My own will but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 5:30). This was His commission. It may sound like Christian teaching to say that you need another life because your own life is inadequate, but actually such a teaching is religious. Even if you have the best life, God does not want it. Even if you can put Satan under your feet, God is not interested. God wants Christ to be lived out by you.

THE WAY CHRIST LIVED

“As the living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me” (6:57). How many times we have read or recited this verse! Notice that there is no mention of weakness, sin, or better behavior. There is simply the desire of the living Father to live in the Son. Why did this living Father send the Son? It was not to establish an empire but to live Him. To live because of the Father was the Father’s commission. Jesus did not accomplish any impressive work. He merely lived a life to express the Father.

So he who eats Me tells us that the Lord wants to be eaten by us. I did not see this until 1958, some thirty-three years after I was saved. In the spring of 1958 I gave three consecutive conferences in Taipei on the eating of Jesus. The messages were new and fresh. After the first meeting, a brother who was a professor came to me, protesting that to use the words *eat Jesus* was too barbarous and uncultured. My reply was that this term was not initiated by me but by Jesus. It was He who said “he who eats Me.” I told the brother to drop his cultural mentality and come back to the pure Word. The Lord’s concern is for our eating of Him, not for the dictates of culture.

Your life must be Christ, and Christ must be your life. To try to improve your behavior is of no avail. Live Christ. The Son came not to live Himself but to live the Father. Jesus came, not primarily to save sinners but to fulfill the Father’s commission. It was for this purpose that He went to the cross. If the cross had not been the Father’s will, Christ would not have accepted it. You remember His prayer in Gethsemane, “Not as I will, but as You will” (Matt. 26:39). He came not to seek His own will but the will of Him who sent Him. That He went to the cross to save sinners was to do the Father’s will.

The Son did not live another life of His own. Though He and the Father were two persons, They had only one life and one living. The same should be true of us. Though we and the Lord are two, we should not have two lives, nor should we have two livings. The one life that we both have is His, but the living is ours. Our living must be by His life, expressing Him, not ourselves.

THE NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

What, then, is the Christian life? It is a life involving two persons, but these two persons have only one life and one living. The life is His, and the living is ours. All day long we must be in the reality of this life. This means we must

deny our own life. It is our life that must be put aside so that we might live His. The living must be ours, however, because He is concealed, not only in the heavens but also within us.

Go to the Lord to pray about this: “Thank You, Lord, that we two—You in me and I in You—have but one life. Show me this life. Grant me the grace to realize this life and to take this life by putting aside my own life. Thank You also, Lord, that You and I can have just one living, not Yours but mine.” Keep praying this way day after day till you become clear. Do not esteem human culture and ethics. Do not respect moral, natural concepts. Drop your religious ideas. Pick up the Bible with a purged mentality and read it by prayer and the exercise of your spirit. Then you will become clear about what the Christian life is. You will come to the deep realization that you and Christ do not have two lives but one and that your own life must be set aside.

PUTTING ASIDE YOUR OWN LIFE

You can put your life aside by putting aside your own will and your own glory. The One sent by the Father told us that He did not seek His own will (John 5:30) or His own glory (8:50). If you put your will and your glory aside, you will be denying yourself. Your will is within; your glory, without. Every human being is for these two things. Why do you like to live by yourself? It is that you may carry out your will for your glory. From my own experience I have learned that the difficulty in putting aside my life lies in my will. The “I” has its center in the will, which is within. Without is personal glory, which includes position, rank, display, and popularity. Not only in worldly society is everyone for his own glory; even in the church we all like to be somebody. I heard of a Christian group that claimed to make somebody out of everybody. In the church, however, you are made a nobody. The church annuls everyone. If you want to be somebody, do not come to the church. The aspiration to be somebody may be called self-exaltation. It is the glory of the natural life. When you put down the will of the natural life and lay aside its glory, the natural life is finished.

When the Lord Jesus said that He did not seek His own will or His own glory, He was declaring that He was simply taking the Father as His life, that He was fulfilling the Father’s commission by seeking only the Father’s will and the Father’s glory.

BEING HELPED BY THE WORD

If you have this same attitude of laying aside your will and your glory, you will find that you have the best way of coming to the Word. Otherwise, the help you receive from the Word will be fragmentary. Thorough help from the Word will be yours only if you do not seek your own will and your own glory. Seek Christ as your life and live Him out.

As long as you are somebody, you are taking yourself as life. Only when you are willing to be nobody will you take the Lord Jesus as your life. On the first day that the Lord began His ministry, He went to John the Baptist to be buried. From that day the man Jesus lived a terminated life. All He had to do was to live the Father. His whole life from that first day was under the cross. He lived a crucified life. If you read the four Gospels again in this light, you will see how new they become.

We need to live a crucified life, one in which our will and glory are constantly annulled, making us nobodies. Then Jesus Christ becomes our life, and we live Him. This is the Christian life. It is for this life that we need to come to the Word. The Word does not nourish the natural life. But when you live Christ, the Word nourishes you in His life.

CONTENT TO BE NOBODY

Some have expressed the opinion that those who are in the church are just “a bunch of dummies.” Perhaps it is more accurate to say that we are nobodies. You may have a doctoral degree, but in the church you are nobody. In the secular world you may have status, but in the church you are nobody. If you want to be somebody, the church is the wrong door for you to enter. In the political circle or the educational world you may have rank, but once you step through the door of the church, be prepared to be nobody.

Are you willing? For myself, I can testify that I have no desire to be anybody. I am happy to be despised, belittled, criticized, and opposed. What a liberation to be content to be nobody! Here is life and peace.

SATISFIED WITH THE HIGHEST COMMISSION

The Son of God came with the divine commission to seek the Father’s will and glory. We Christians are to live the same way. “Lord, thank You. I have

the highest commission, that of living You out. How good it is that You are my life! What a privilege that I can take You and live You out! How I thank You!" Is not this life higher than having even three Ph.D.'s?

Young people, are you satisfied to be nobody? Rather, are you satisfied with the highest commission, that of taking Christ as your life and living Him? What a commission!

This is the Christian life and also the church life. It is no more I but Christ who lives in me. "Thank You, Lord, that You and I have one life and one living. The life is Yours; the living, mine. Hallelujah that I can have one life and one living with You!"

NOT WORRYING ABOUT NEGATIVE THINGS

Do not be concerned about worldliness. Do not be troubled about your weakness. Do not be preoccupied with sins. When Christ is lived out, all these negative things will flee away. The more you try to deal with your sin, overcome the world, or gain the victory over your weakness, the more you will be troubled by these very things. You are not commissioned to overcome sin, weakness, or the world. Your commission is to live Christ out. When you see this vision and you are such a person, the Bible is for you. It will nourish and supply this life.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

THE REVELATION OF LIFE

AND THE WAY TO TAKE CHRIST AS LIFE

Even though we know that the Bible is a book of life and that Christ is life, to some extent we are still short of the revelation of life.

A SURVEY OF LIFE IN THE BIBLE

Why is it that the Bible begins and ends with the tree of life? After creating man, God put him in a garden in which was the tree of life. From this picture it is clear that the man created in God's own image did not have the life signified by that tree. We can also see that it was God's intention for man to have that life rather than only his human life.

There are several kinds of life mentioned in the Bible. Besides the divine life and the human life, there are also the animal life and the plant life. God's life is the highest, and the plant life is the lowest. Further, within us as human beings there are three kinds of life. The physical life is called *bios* (Gk.); the psychological life, *psuche*; and the divine, eternal life, *zoe*. God created us with the *bios* life for our body and the *psuche* life for our soul. When a person dies, it is the *bios* that ceases; the *psuche* lives on.

God did not put the divine life into man when he was created. Rather, He gave man a free will in order that he might choose the divine life, symbolized by the tree of life. As we know, man did not so choose.

Then the Lord Jesus came. In the Gospel of John He is described as the Word and as God, and then we are told, "In Him was life" (1:1, 4). I used to wonder what the tree of life was. I was familiar with lots of different trees, but the tree of life I did not know. In time I came to realize that the tree of life is the Lord Jesus. John 1 mentions life but not the tree. But when you come to John 15, there is the tree. It is a vine tree. A grapevine is not useful in providing lumber for building, nor is it good for burning. It is only good for life. By bringing John 1 and John 15 together, we have the tree of life, the Lord Jesus Himself. He said, "I am...the life...I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly" (14:6; 10:10). He also told us that He is the

bread of life (6:35) and has the water of life (4:14). The bread of life is good for eating, the water of life for drinking.

Christ is also called the Author of life (Acts 3:15). The word translated “Author” could also be translated “Originator” or “Prince.” However we translate it, it indicates that life pertains to Him.

In the Epistles there is the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2), the word of life (Phil. 2:16), and Christ our life (Col. 3:4).

From all these verses we can see that life is a person, not a condition. Suppose in a meeting people are jumping up and shouting. Would this be an indication that they are full of life? If so, there is more life at a ball game because more shouting and jumping go on there. Jumping is not life, though life may jump. Jumping is a condition; life is a person, Christ our life.

At the end of the Bible the first promise to the overcomers is, “To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7). Here the tree of life comes into view again. Then the picture in the last chapter includes the tree of life. In the holy city there is a river flowing out of the throne of God; on either side of the banks of the river is the tree of life. I used to wonder how a tree could grow on two banks, but once I realized that this tree is a vine, I could see how it would spread to both sides. This tree grows in the water of life. When you get into the water, you get the tree. Thus, the last invitation in the Bible is, “Let him who is thirsty come; let him who wills take the water of life freely” (22:17). The one who takes the water of life will surely have the tree of life also, because the tree is included in the water. There is the implication that it grows in the water of life.

A LACK OF ADEQUATE REVELATION OF LIFE

Though many of us have heard about the matter of life in the Bible, we nonetheless do not see it adequately. Let me illustrate.

Suppose I go home and knock at the door for my wife to let me in. When she does not open it fast enough to suit me, I knock again hard. Then the door opens, and she says, “Why do you have to bang on the door?” I reply, “What takes you so long to get here and open it?” Then I go in and sit down to eat the dinner she has prepared for me. While I am eating, I am regretting, thinking

how poor I am. I told others to live Christ and to walk in life, yet look how I behaved. The food is sweet, but the feeling is bitter. I must apologize, confess to my wife, and ask for forgiveness. I am reluctant, because after so much teaching of others to walk in life, I do not have the face to admit my shortcoming. Nevertheless, I do make confession and then add, “I hope from now on I will never behave that way again.”

Do you think my word never to “behave that way again” is right or wrong? To express that kind of wish shows that I am short of the revelation of life. It indicates that I am still trying to improve my behavior, that I am not taking Christ as life, and that I do not have the real intention to take Him as my life.

GOD’S CONCERN FOR LIFE, NOT BEHAVIOR

We need revelation to see that God is not concerned about how we behave. Whether you hate your wife or love her, whether you are proud or humble, are not what matters. God wants you to take Him as your life.

Notice that when God created Adam and placed him in a garden before a tree, He did not command Adam to worship Him, to love his wife and be a good husband, or to behave nicely and be a good father to the children they would have. If we were God, we would no doubt have given Adam many such exhortations. We would have also added some negative commands—that Adam must not be hateful or be proud or kill his wife or smite his children. Our Genesis 2 would have been much longer!

God’s only command to Adam was regarding eating. If Adam ate of the wrong tree, death would be the result; if he ate of the right tree, life—the eternal, divine life—would be his. What we eat becomes part of us. The food we eat is assimilated to become our very being. We are composed of the chickens, cows, and other foods we have eaten. In that garden stood the tree of life, signifying the Prince, Originator, Author of life, Jesus Christ, the very God, as our life. Had Adam taken of that tree, he surely would have taken God into him; God would have been in him. This very thought is in the New Testament, in the Gospel of John, when the Lord Jesus said that He would be in us and we in Him (14:20). How is He to be in us? We must receive Him, as signified by eating and drinking. He is the bread of life (6:35). “He who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me” (v. 57). He is also the One who has the water of life. “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who

believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water” (7:37-38). The Lord Jesus likened our receiving Him to eating and drinking. When we eat and drink, something is taken into us.

READING OUR CONCEPTS INTO THE BIBLE

When we come to the Bible, however, we miss this concept that God desires to come into us to be our life. Genesis 2 clearly implies this. But we pass over this concept and pay attention to what the Scripture says about love, submission, kindness, or humility. In effect, we each have our own version of the Bible. Brother Nee once told us that everyone’s Bible is according to himself. Though there is only one Bible, in the hands of Christians it becomes many. Our Bible reflects us; it says what we want it to say. If we are slow, when we read the Bible, we overlook the portions that mention being quick. If we are husbands, we overlook the verse about husbands loving their wives and pay attention to, “Wives, be subject to your own husbands as to the Lord” (Eph. 5:22). The wives, for their part, slight the verses on submission and notice the verse that says, “Husbands, love your wives” (v. 25). Throughout the whole Bible runs the theme of life. But because we do not have this concept in us, we do not notice it. Instead of reading something from the Bible into us, we read into the Bible what is already in us. That is why we find submission, love, humility, and kindness there. That is why we see good behavior and correction in its pages.

We need a revelation of life. Then we will realize that whether we love or hate, it is still from ourselves. In a way, love is worse, because then we expose ourselves; when we hate, we try to hide it. The same is true with humility and pride. It makes no difference whether we are proud or humble. God wants us to live Christ, not humility or pride. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I, but Christ who lives in me. This is God’s desire and intention.

If I see this, I will speak to my wife differently after I lose my temper with her for not opening the door fast enough. Rather than promise not to behave that poorly again, I will say, “Dear, I feel ashamed. I did not live Christ. Pray for me, that I may have the grace, in things great and small, to live Him. Whether I am humble or proud before you, there is no Christ. Pray for me. I do look to Him that I may live Him in every situation.” This is what God wants. By living Christ the tree of life gets into us.

REPENTING FOR OUR GOOD BEHAVIOR

In the early days of my Christian life I repented many times for my sins, weaknesses, and failures. Now, however, most of my repentance is for being short of Christ. A number of times after I have been with the brothers and treated them in a courteous, humble way, I have gone to the Lord to repent: “Lord, forgive me. I was humble, but I was short of You. The brothers appreciated me and thought I was nice, but I did not minister any Christ to them. Forgive me, Lord, that I did not live You.”

Have you ever repented that you are short of Christ? You love others, but there is no Christ. You behave properly, but there is no Christ. You may have repented for not honoring your parents or for other wrongdoing, but you need a higher repentance. You need to repent of your goodness or of the humility you have practiced outside of Christ. You may have been born humble. You live out your humility, but you have not lived out Christ; you are short of Him.

The church life is not a life of good behavior. The church is the Body of Christ, not the body of love, humility, or patience. Because we are His Body, what we are must be Christ. My physical body expresses only me. The Body of Christ must express only Him. The love in the church must be Christ. The same is true of every other virtue.

To see this is to have a revelation of life. This vision will make you hate your love. You will reject your patience. You will condemn your humility. This is not to say that you will be hateful, impatient, and proud. No, it means that you will live only Christ. You will not know love or patience or anything else. You will know only Christ and the church. Once you have seen life, you will hate what is good but not life. Many men love their wives, but it is not Christ who is the love. Our love must be Christ.

If you are truly seeking after the Lord, the day will come when you will see that what God desires is not your doing, your behavior, or your virtues, but Christ. Christ is to be your living, your daily walk, your everything.

One day, after I had been saved a number of years, Brother Nee asked me, “What is patience?” I did not know how to answer. Finally, he said, “Patience is Christ.” Patience is Christ. It sounded like a foreign language. I knew what patience was, but I did not know how to answer his question. Then when he

said that patience is Christ, I could not understand. I was not educated that way.

In these years, however, since 1962, I have ministered along this line many times. I have learned that many in the churches do not have this revelation. They may have some knowledge about it, but knowledge does not affect you. As Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint." A vision controls, but knowledge does not. It is not enough to know that Christ is life. You need to see this as a vision that governs your life.

HOW TO TAKE CHRIST AS LIFE

When I was young, I heard it said that Christ is the bread of life. At that time I did have Christ within. I remember wondering: if He is the bread of life, how do I eat Him? But nobody told me. Then several years later a renowned traveling preacher came to town and gave a message on John 10:10. I remember the subject well, on how Christ came that we may have life and may have it abundantly. But I was left with no impression as to how to take Him as life.

Even our physical life is mysterious, not to mention taking Christ as life. Though I am obviously alive and full of life, my life itself cannot be seen or touched. This is even more true of Christ. He is invisible, yet real. He is concrete, yet abstract. He is present with us, yet mysterious. If He is the bread of life, how do we eat Him? If He has the water of life, how do we drink it?

We need to realize that Christ is nothing less than God Himself. Do not think that besides Christ there is God. Christ is God. This is beyond our understanding, but do not be bothered by the teaching regarding the Trinity. The Bible clearly says that Christ is God (John 1:1; Rom. 9:5). Christ is also the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17; 1 Cor. 6:17). Furthermore, He is the Word (John 1:14). For us to take Christ as our life, we must realize that Christ is mysterious, that He is God, that He is the Spirit, and that He is the Word.

In the Scriptures we have the terms *tree of life*, *bread of life*, *water of life*, *Spirit of life*, and *word of life*. Why are so many terms needed to describe Christ as life? It is to help us understand this abstract, mysterious One. The tree of life indicates the source of life; the bread of life, that this life is edible;

the water of life, that it is drinkable; the Spirit of life, that life is just the Spirit of God; and the word of life, where that life is to be found.

To find this invisible One who is the Spirit, we have a book called the Bible, the Word of God. The Bible itself is not Christ or the Spirit, but the word of the Bible is the Spirit and is Christ and is God. We say this because in our experience when we touch the Word, we touch the Spirit, Christ, and God. To find Christ we cannot go to the heavens. If we say that He is in our spirit, others will say that they cannot get into our spirit to see Him. But we can find Him in the Word. If we are asked where Christ is, we can reply that He is in John 1:1-18. We can tell the inquirer that if he will read these verses over and over and open himself, he will find Christ. Try preaching the gospel in this way.

For ourselves we can testify that Christ is not only in John 1 but in every chapter of the Bible. This One in the Word is our food. "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out through the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Every word that proceeds out through the mouth of God conveys Christ. Christ is the real living Word out of the mouth of God.

TAKING IN THE RICH WORD

Every morning we need to have two breakfasts. I do not need to exhort you to have your physical breakfast, but I surely would encourage you to set aside time first thing in the morning to have your spiritual breakfast by reading the Word.

You may say that you are too busy, that you go to school or to work too early, that you have young children, or that you have to get your husband off to work. These are just excuses. The more you excuse yourself, the more excuses you have. For many years I would go into my study in the morning and find on my desk a pile of letters or manuscripts or other things requiring my attention. It was a temptation to take care of the work. Now, however, by His mercy and grace I have learned to ignore the work on my desk and first turn to the Word.

Take ten minutes to eat a few verses. Do not eat too much. Do not read the Bible in a haphazard way. Ask the Lord what book you should read. If it is Romans, read it through consecutively, a few verses a day. Do not skip over

what does not appeal to you. You may not like the last part of chapter 1, but read it anyway. It will preserve and inoculate you. After you have gone through Romans, the Lord may constrain you to read through 1 Corinthians. Before too long you will find that there is a difference in your life. Because Christ is in the Word, when you take in the Word, you are taking Him in. This rich nourishment will make you grow.

Nothing can compare with the riches in the Bible. I appreciate the Life-study messages, but not one is as rich as the Bible. The writings of Confucius are good in ethics, but they lack the riches of life found in the Bible. However many times I reread its pages, there is always something new. It is an inexhaustible book. Just one word can help you in a general way, in a negative way, and in a positive way. I have had this book in my hand for over fifty years, and scarcely a day has gone by when I have not read it. I have never gotten tired or bored with it. The more you read it, the better. Nothing will nourish, strengthen, comfort, and edify you like the Bible.

Every morning, then, have a good spiritual breakfast. Then at noon take another five to ten minutes to turn to the Word. In the evening spend a little more time to read two or three chapters. You will never regret doing this. It is the way to eat Christ.

DRINKING OF THE SPIRIT

Besides being the Word for you to eat, Christ is also the Spirit for you to drink. To drink, spiritually speaking, is to breathe. To breathe is to pray. By praying you breathe. By breathing you drink. Mingle your reading of the Bible, then, with praying. In your ten minutes in the morning, read your verses, then reread them with prayer. There is no need to compose a prayer. Simply pray the words of the verses. Repeat them as your prayer. Use the text of the Bible as your prayer book. If you are reading in John 1, you can say, "In the beginning. Thank You, Lord, You were there in the beginning. In the beginning was the Word. Lord, You were the Word and You were in the beginning." By pray-reading in this way you will be eating and drinking. To eat without drinking is dry. Our reading needs to be mingled with our praying. After you pray and read, read and pray, you will be full of food and water. You will have taken in Christ Himself.

PAYING ATTENTION TO CHRIST

It may have been your former practice to seek the Lord's will, to find out what is right or wrong, and what you should or should not do. Do not follow that way any longer. Simply keep your whole being turned to Christ. Do not ask, "Lord, should I stay here or go?" or "Lord, what shall I speak?" Pray rather in a simple way, "Lord, are You staying here, or are You leaving? Lord, are You going to speak? I am not interested in whether this is right or wrong, whether I should speak or not speak. I only want to know, is this You?" If your wife offends you, check with the Lord: "Lord, I am annoyed with my wife. Are You mad at her too?" The Lord will say, "No, I am not annoyed with her." Since the Lord is not annoyed, there is nothing for you to do.

DOING EVERYTHING WITH HIM

Learn not to do anything without the Lord. Do everything with Him. In God's economy it is not a matter of what to do and what not to do. The question is, who is doing it, you or He? Even when it comes to loving others, your love is not acceptable to God. It must be Christ who loves. Whatever you are doing, keep checking with the Lord: "Lord, is this You or me?" Do not be concerned about the world, Satan, your sins, your weaknesses, and your mistakes. Keep your whole attention centered on Christ: "Lord, apart from You I would not do anything. I would not even say a word to my wife. I would not hate people; neither would I love them. I would do nothing without You. Apart from You I am jobless; I have no life to live; I am through."

We have tried other ways. We read and practiced what Christian books advocated as the way to victory or holiness. The books were of little help; the ways did not work well. Eventually, we found out that Christ is the only way that really works. When you do everything in Him and with Him, the flesh, sin, and worldliness will flee away.

"Lord, grant me the grace that day by day this matter of doing everything with You may not be a mere teaching. I want it to be my moment-by-moment practice. All day long I would not live apart from You. I want to do everything with You and in You." If you will practice this daily and hourly, you will find that Christ will be your life practically. Apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5), but we can do all things in Him who empowers us (Phil. 4:13). This is the Christian life.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

THE VITAL POSITION OF GOD'S WORD IN HIS ECONOMY

God is a God of purpose. In order to carry out His purpose, He has a way, or an economy. God's economy, that is, His way of achieving His eternal purpose, is to dispense Himself into His chosen people. We are among those chosen by God for His purpose. Let us consider the place of God's Word in His economy.

THE BIBLE ALONE

In order to realize the importance of God's Word in His economy, we must understand that among the various religions on the earth, no book except the Bible can be called the Word of God. No religion has the Word of God. Yes, the Muslims have the Koran, but that is largely an imitation of the Old Testament and a little part of the New Testament. As for the writings of Hinduism and Buddhism, those writings are simply devilish.

On the whole earth the Bible stands alone as the Word of God. It is logical and full of wisdom. It is practical, clear, inspiring, and transparent. It is the word spoken by God and was ordained by Him to be put into a readable, understandable form.

GRASPING THE ABSTRACT

Because God is abstract and mysterious, it is hard to understand Him. Catholicism introduced images in an attempt to help people understand what would otherwise be hard to grasp. But God has not given us figures, like images or idols. What He has given is the Word. Although He is mysterious, He makes Himself clear in His Word. Yes, the Spirit is mysterious and hard to grasp, but we have the Word, which is solid, readable, and understandable. The black and white word is also accurate; it leaves little room for argument.

Suppose that since Pentecost there had been no Bible among the human race. What would there be on earth today? You may say, "Don't we have the Spirit?" Yes we do, but without the Bible the Spirit would be a delusion. The period when the Bible was locked up by the Catholic Church was the darkest

age in human history. Martin Luther not only recovered justification by faith; he unlocked and released the Bible. Four hundred years ago the Bible became a freed book. It is the Word of God that has kept the things of God on the earth. Satan today subtly tries to keep people from the Bible. Christians may have a Bible on their bookshelf at home, or once a week they may have it in their hands, but when they open its pages, they see very little light. Most Christians today are in darkness because they do not read and understand the Word.

The Triune God is revealed in the Word. He has created the universe. He has been incarnated and has passed through thirty-three and a half years of human living. The all-inclusive death of Christ, His resurrection, and His ascension have all been accomplished. Our God has passed through all these things. There is nothing left undone. In eternity past our God was without creation and without incarnation, but now the universe has been created. Even more, the very Creator has entered into His creatures through incarnation. He has experienced human living, He has been to the cross and died there, He has entered into resurrection, and He has even ascended to the heavens. Now He has returned to the earth as the Spirit who gives life. This is the very God whom we worship and whom we have received.

But these matters are abstract; how can we grasp them? The Lord knows our situation. Therefore, He has spoken and has had His word written down. Now this book is in our hand.

A SEED

The Bible illustrates that the word of God is like a seed (Matt. 13:23). Within a seed there is a life concealed. A seed appears to be merely something physical, but inside is something abstract and mysterious. The life cannot be seen, but if that seed is sown into the earth, it will sprout, blossom, and bring forth fruit. This growth is the expression of the life of the seed. The word in the Bible is like a seed, conveying God Himself as life to you. Sow this word into yourself, and after a while, life will spring up within you. It will grow, blossom, and bear fruit.

What is the position of God's Word in His economy? It is the embodiment of God. Where is God today? He is in the word. When we preach the gospel, we preach the word. In Ephesians 1:13 it is called "the word of the truth, the

gospel of your salvation.” The gospel of our salvation is the word of the truth. Within the word is God Himself with His salvation.

Now that you are saved, you must day by day contact God. You cannot do this by closing your eyes and meditating. If you try meditating, you will find that you are off on a journey around the world. To meet God, open the Bible. God is there. It is not superstitious to say this. God is in the word. The Lord Jesus said, “The words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life” (John 6:63). It is not too much to say that a seed is life, because the life is within it. In the same way, we may say that the word of the Bible is spirit, because within the word, the substance or essence is God Himself who is Spirit. To come to the Word is to come to God Himself.

FINDING GOD IN THE WORD

If you do not open yourself and exercise your spirit, however, your coming to the Word may be in vain. You should not read the Bible as though it were a newspaper. God, even so, is merciful, and many times people have opened the Bible with no intention of finding God. He nonetheless has met them.

Before he was saved, one of my co-workers considered Christianity as a foolish, Western religion. He was a member of a political party and a leading young man in his district. In his thought China already had Confucius’s teaching; it did not need a foreign religion from the West. One day he went into a Buddhist temple. For some strange reason, there on the table for worship was a large opened Bible. Who had put it there he did not know, but he recognized it as the Bible of that Western religion, which he despised. Being curious, he wanted to see what the book said. It was opened to Psalm 1. He read it and was most surprised. How could that Western religion have something better than Confucius? He stole the Bible from the temple and took it home with him.

One day, having some leisure time, he thought to himself, “Let me take a look at that Bible.” As he was reading it, he met God, or rather, God met him. He realized that he was a sinner, though always before he had been self-righteous. Although he had never heard the gospel or been to any Christian meeting, he repented, weeping and even rolling on the ground.

That young man was thoroughly saved and eventually became one of our co-workers. Here is a case of someone who was saved simply through the Word. Wherever the Word is, if the environment is conducive, life comes out. This is to say that the Spirit comes out. The Spirit in the word springs up in life.

The Bible is where we can touch God. How do you know that God became a man, that Jesus as God lived on this earth in human flesh, that He died on the cross for you, that you have been crucified with Christ, and that you have been seated with Him in the heavenlies? All this you know because the Bible says so. If you reject the Bible, that is like throwing away God and all His accomplishments, including redemption, salvation, and life.

BEING FILLED BY THE WORD

Keep coming to the Word. Even if you read it more than a hundred times, you will not be bored. Each time it has a fresh supply for you. This is the place to touch God. The Pentecostalists may say that you can experience Him by speaking in tongues. I tried that way for a year and a half but did not get much result. From my experience I would say that the best way to be filled in spirit is to get into the Word. You may feel like a flat tire, but the Bible is the pump. It will fill you with pneuma. Fasting will not fill you; I have seen people try that. The more they fasted, the flatter they were.

If you “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,” the result will be “singing with grace in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:16). The parallel passage in Ephesians 5:18-19 tells us, “Be filled in spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and psalming with your heart to the Lord.” The word that fills you becomes the Spirit.

“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him” (John 14:23). To have the Triune God abide with you, you need to keep His word. It is His word also that is the truth that sanctifies us (17:17).

I encourage you all to read the Word three times a day. If you have been reading it for ten minutes every morning, I am sure you have found how rich it is and that ten minutes is not sufficient. Dear saints, get into the Word. You will see what a difference it makes.

As you read, pray. Pray in a very living way, using what you read as your prayer. In this way you will take the word into you and receive a life supply. Its riches will satisfy you not just day by day but year after year as well. All the rich help is here in the Word. Christians all too often are looking for outside help; they want others to come and help them. But all the riches are right in the Word; this is the place to turn for help. Do not expect magical results, though; just come regularly three times a day, and you will receive the supply that you need.

PREACHING AND TEACHING THE WORD

We have tried different ways of getting an increase, but they have not been successful. The best way is to preach and teach the Word. Have you ever tried teaching your parents for an hour? You have to be prepared to say something reasonable, perhaps like this:

“Dad, you are older and have had more experience than I have had. Can you tell me what the purpose of human life is?” Then, because you are so familiar with the Word and have it always in your pocket, you can tell him what the Bible declares is man’s purpose. He may be impressed and ask you where you learned that. Then you can say, “From the Bible, Dad. Ephesians 1 and 3.”

Another time you may say to your parents, “Dad and Mom, did you know that there are three wills in the universe?” When they ask, “What three wills?” you can tell them about the divine will, the satanic will, and the human will. Even if they oppose you, they may find your talk so interesting that they will listen. Whether they will buy your cargo is up to them, but you have to try to sell it. Present it in an “attractive brochure,” not too short. An hour’s speaking is about right.

You need to do this on the campus too. If you try to get people to call on the Lord, if you tell them that Christianity is all wrong, or if you say that the Lord’s recovery is the only thing that matters, people will think that you are mentally off. You need to learn to teach others in an attractive way.

A MEETING FOR TEACHING AND PREACHING

First of all, you must study the Word. Then it would be good for the churches to have a training meeting, a “teaching and preaching” meeting

where people can hear the truths of the Bible in an atmosphere of preaching. If this is held on the Lord's Day mornings, relatives and friends can be invited, and eventually others also will be encouraged to come. This meeting is not for the shallow gospel but for the broadened gospel, covering a span from eternity to eternity. Such a meeting will be a place where your acquaintances can come and hear the truth. I believe that this way is based upon the principles in the New Testament. The apostles in the book of Acts just preached and taught the Word.

How does this differ from what Christianity practices? First of all, their sermons often do not give the real truth from the Bible. Second, they usually have hired, professional preachers, teaching the laymen. Third, their teachings are all too often without much reality.

Our intention is not to have two or three brothers do all the preaching. All of us must be the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. It is not too much to say that we must all be apostles. *Apostle* does not refer to a position; it simply means "sent one." "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21). The Lord was speaking to all the disciples when He said this, not only the apostles. Every believer, then, should be a sent one. If you go to your parents to speak for God to them, you are a sent one. Then, when you speak for God to them, you become His spokesman or prophet. What is it that you speak? It is the good tidings. This makes you an evangelist as well. When some people receive the gospel and become believers, you take care of them. This means that you are a shepherd too. You may even shepherd your parents, if they receive the word you spoke to them as an evangelist and as a prophet when you were God's sent one. Finally, you may teach them from Genesis 2 about the tree of life and the woman built up from Adam's rib. If you are all faithful like this, within a few years the whole town may be turned to Christ.

Let us love the Lord and come to Him to fellowship with Him by reading His Word and praying. Day by day live this way. You will have experiences of Him and also learn the teachings with the enlightenment. Then gather for the church meetings. In this meeting not just a few leading ones should speak. The elders take the lead. You must all do what the elders do. Whatever they speak, you speak. You follow and learn from them. Such meetings will be attractive, convincing, and subduing. In this way you will get the proper knowledge and enlightenment.

This will lead to increase. Among your neighbors and friends there will be some who will see your way of living. They will notice that you have the truth and know how to speak, preach, and teach. Behind the scenes pray for a few of them. God will answer your prayer; He will move according to the tracks that you have laid for Him in prayer. He is the way. There is no need to arrange and organize some program. In the Lord's recovery all that we need is the Triune God and the Bible. We can take Him in through the Bible, and we can pray. This is the way we live.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: We have many dear friends in Christianity or in the world, and when we first came into the church, we damaged many of them by sharing in a wrong way. As you say, we need to pray and go to the Word, but I still would like some practical help as to what to do for these whom we have damaged.

Answer: The best way to heal this situation is to pray for the ones whom you damaged. Do not initiate anything. Contact the Lord and follow Him. As you do so, you will know His mind. He may lead you to go to some of them not only to become reconciled but also to say a word about God's economy to them. If the Lord leads, you go. If not, do not go.

Do not feel that because you did some damage, you must try to set matters right. Do not initiate anything with that in mind. Simply follow the Lord's leading. Do not go to others with the intention of correcting some damage you may have caused. To do so is to play politics. If you go, you do so because you are led of the Lord. You have no choice but to be one with Him. You do not care for the result but simply follow Him because you are one with Him.

This should be your attitude regardless of how many you have damaged. All the past is under the blood and is gone. Now is a new day. As the Lord moves, you move. What He does, you do. You are one with Him. The past is over. The future you do not know. You have only today. We Christians do not live in tomorrow or in yesterday. We have only today.

Question: There are two schools of thought on preaching the gospel. One is to be burdened, pray, and go as the Lord leads. The other is to "be ready in season and out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2). Could you say something about this?

Answer: These two are one. If you keep contacting the Lord, you will find that you are preaching all the time. But if you neglect contacting the Lord and take up the exhortation to be ready in season and out of season, you will be keeping a regulation. This would be religious; that is, you would be doing something for God without Christ's leading. When we keep contacting the Lord and live with Him, we will spontaneously preach the gospel. The Lord said, "He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit" (John 15:5). If you abide, surely you will bear fruit. If you do not bear fruit, it means that you are not abiding. Yet if you try to bear fruit without abiding, that is your doing and becomes religious.

God's economy is a matter of life. You may compare it to the physical body. For a person to breathe, he has to be living. If you try to breathe yet you do not have life, you are seeking to fulfill a requirement. But when you are living, you breathe unconsciously, regardless of what you are doing. You may be busy and not notice that you are breathing, but nonetheless the breathing goes on. In the same way, if you abide in the Lord (have life), you will bear fruit (breathe).

There is no point in talking about someone's physical problems if he is no longer alive. Doctors prescribe medication based upon the fact of your being alive. Once you are dead, they can do nothing to help you. Medication has no effect if you are dead. Surgery too would be useless. Many times a surgeon will not operate if the patient is weak. Even if the surgery was well done, without the support of the patient's life, it would be in vain.

Life is what matters in the church life too. Christianity may maneuver, arrange, and organize, but in the Lord's recovery we have seen that where there is life, there is no need for so many plans and schedules. The body does not plan what it will do and say during the day. As long as it is alive, all its members function spontaneously in a good coordination. In our life with the Lord, we contact Him by reading His Word and praying and by being one with Him all day long. We do not need to anticipate anything or regulate ourselves. Let us simply live Christ the way the branches abide in the vine.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

SOME BASIC ITEMS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The Gospel of John occupies a special place in God's revelation. It is a book much loved by Christians. I myself have been studying it since 1925. In this chapter I would like us to consider some of the key verses in order that we might realize the particular characteristic of this book.

Notice the simple words with which it opens: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (1:1). Even a young child can read these words, yet who can understand them? What was the beginning? Why does it say that the Word, rather than God, was in the beginning?

John opens with the Word. Then at the end of the book there is the breath: "When He had said this, He breathed into them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit" (20:22). Between the opening verse on the Word and the final item of the breath, many matters are covered.

INCARNATION

God is here, for "the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (1:1). Life is also here, for "In Him was life" (v. 4). Flesh is here, for "the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us" (v. 14). *Flesh* here means man. In fact, as Genesis 6:3 indicates, *flesh* means fallen man.

There are two great events that transpired in the history of the universe. The first was creation. Before creation there was nothing but God Himself. When the time came, God brought all things into existence. But God was apart from all the things that He created. He was not in the sun or moon, nor was He in the trees or animals. He created them, but He was outside of them.

With the second great event, however, the story is different. This was the incarnation, when God became flesh. The incarnation was not to bring the universe into existence out of nothing; rather, it was to bring God into the existing man.

There was a man by the name of Jesus with whom was God. From the time that this One lived on earth, God was no longer outside His creatures. He had entered into man. Jesus is both God and man. He is a God-man.

FULLNESS

Another matter covered in John is fullness. “Of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace” (1:16). *Fullness* means everything that God is. It includes all the divine attributes, all the human virtues, and all the supplies for life. God is rich and full. Out of this fullness we have all received. Have you received something of God? It is one thing to learn something of God, but another to receive something of Him. How much have you received? Grace upon grace. Your receiving has not ended yet. Day by day you continue to receive out of His fullness.

DRINKING AND WORSHIP

In John 4 there is the water that springs up. If you drink this water, it will spring up into eternal life. The water pertains to the Spirit. The drinking in verse 14 is the worshipping in verse 24. You drink by worshipping. The water in verse 14 is the Spirit in verse 24. To drink the water is to take in the Spirit.

THE BREAD OF LIFE

In chapter 6 there is the bread of life. With the bread there is the eating (vv. 35, 50, 57). There is the water for drinking and the bread for eating. The bread of life is in the Spirit. “It is the Spirit who gives life;...the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life” (v. 63). Here is the life-giving Spirit and also the words that are spirit.

RIVERS OF LIVING WATER

In John 7:37-39 the matter of drinking is mentioned again. Instead of just a fountain springing up, there are rivers. When the water flowing from the spring becomes a river, the riches of the water can be seen. When many rivers converge, there is a flood. As you enjoy the Lord, you will flow rivers of water. There will be a river of love, another of humility, another of light, and another of kindness. When you first begin coming to the church meetings, you flow just a small river, but in time the rivers will become a flood. When you open your mouth, the whole meeting will be flooded by you. Eventually, the church

meetings will become an ocean as we all express the riches of Christ: “I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly” (10:10).

THE TRIUNE GOD DISPENSED INTO US

John 14:17 says, “The Spirit of reality...abides with you and shall be in you.” Verse 20 goes on to say, “In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” This means that the Triune God has dispensed Himself into us and that now we are in Him. Verse 23 says further, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him.” These profound words say that the Father and the Lord Jesus will not simply come to visit us but will actually come to live in us and settle down. The text implies not only that we will become the abode of the Triune God but also that He will be our abode. The word *abode* here is mutual. We will be His abiding place, and He will be ours.

Here is the divine dispensation, in a different realm entirely from religion, ethics, or morality. It is not only salvation, according to our poor understanding, but the Triune God working Himself into our being, making us His abode, and making Himself our abode.

ABIDING

When the Lord Jesus in the next chapter told His disciples, “Abide in Me...I am the vine; you are the branches” (15:4-5), He was simply continuing the thought of the mutual abiding from the previous chapter. This One abiding in us is Jesus Christ, whose very name is Wonderful (Isa. 9:6). He is the very God and the very man. Could you imagine that it is possible to abide in God? Herein is the best enjoyment. I can testify this to you after fifty-four years of experience. Is it not marvelous that even now we are abiding in God? How poor is the thought that someday we are going to heaven! Right now God is abiding in us.

If you think it is too mysterious that God abides in you, notice John 15:7: “You abide in Me and My words abide in you.” This you can understand. The word of the Bible abides in you. This is solid and tangible.

BREATHING

Then we come to the last point that we mentioned, that of the Lord's breathing into His disciples. By breathing the Spirit into the disciples, the Lord imparted Himself as life into them.

DRINKING, EATING, AND BREATHING

If we consider these various items covered in John, we realize how vital they are for our existence. Without drinking, eating, and breathing we could not live.

These three means for our physical existence were all used by the Lord Jesus to illustrate how we may take Him. He is our water, more refreshing than the best earthly drink. We must drink Him.

He is our bread. We must eat Him. Bread is not merely to be looked at. Its purpose is to be eaten. This living bread must be eaten. Do not think that to say this is uncultured and wild. He said Himself that we must eat Him.

He is our breath, imparting Himself as life to us. We must breathe Him.

This enjoyment of Jesus is God's economy. It is this that He would recover among His people. Jesus is the living water, the living bread, and the living breath. We must drink Him, eat Him, and breathe Him.

THE WAY TO TAKE CHRIST IN

There are two ways by which we may drink, eat, and breathe Jesus. These are the Word and the Spirit. "It is the Spirit who gives life;...the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (6:63). This verse mentions both words and Spirit. The very Word revealed in John 1:1 eventually became the Spirit. It is this Spirit who is the water, the bread, and the breath.

John 20:22 can read, "Receive the Holy Pneuma." The Greek word *pneuma* may be translated either as "spirit" or as "breath." It is equally correct to say, "Receive the Holy Spirit" or "Receive the Holy Breath." The Spirit today is our breath. This breath is Jesus, the incarnate Word who went to the cross, entered into resurrection, and ascended to the heavens. He then returned to us as the life-giving Spirit.

We have the Word outside us and the Spirit inside us. Day by day we must come to the Word not only with our mind but also with our heart and spirit. As we open the Bible, we must open our whole being. We must read not only with our understanding but also with prayer. The Bible is not an ordinary book. In this holy Word there is life, the Spirit, God, and Jesus Christ. These are all contained in the Word and are conveyed to us as we open ourselves and pray. This prayerful reading of the Word is the eating, drinking, and breathing in of the Lord.

How would you answer if someone asked you where God is? Do not say that God is in the heavens. Heaven is too far away. How could one get there to find Him? God, you must tell him, is in the Bible. Where is Christ? He also is in the Word. Where is the Spirit? Where is life? The answer to these two questions is also “in the Word.”

THE WORD AS A SEED

If you plant a little stone or a piece of rock in the soil, nothing will come up, even if you wait for twenty years. On the other hand, if you sow a tiny seed into the soil, in just a matter of days it will sprout. This sprouting proves that the seed contains life.

Where is life to be found? It is found in a seed. Did you know that the word of God in the Bible is a seed? “Having been regenerated not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, through the living and abiding word of God” (1 Pet. 1:23). The word in the Bible is a seed, conveying life. What, then, is the soil? Our heart is the soil. We must open our heart to receive the word just as the soil must be opened to receive the seed. What is the water? The Spirit is the water. When we come to the Bible and open ourselves, the very seed of the word gets into us. The more we pray, breathing the air, the more the Spirit as the water is added to us. The air of prayer mingled with the water of the Spirit produces the dew. Much dew becomes a river.

This is the Christian life. There is a seed planted in the soil of our heart and watered by the Spirit. It sprouts and grows until the blossom appears and the fruit comes. Christ can be the water, the bread of life, and the breath because He is the life-giving Spirit. He is the Spirit compounded with divinity, humanity, human living, the death of the cross, resurrection, and ascension.

All these are wrapped up in this life-giving Spirit, and you can find Him in the Bible.

SPENDING TIME IN THE WORD

Spend time with this book. Besides your ten minutes in the morning, take a few more minutes at noon and a few more in the evening. As you open this book, open yourself also. Read, understand, and pray. As you pray, you are drinking the water, eating the food, and breathing the air. You will grow. The more you take Christ into you in this way, the more Christ you will have growing in you. You will become another person. Do not expect quick results; growth takes time. It does not come about from a few concentrated days of praying and fasting and then having something fall upon you from the heavens. Take time to water the little seed of life sown into the soil of your heart. Not only will you grow; the church will also grow and be built up in this way. In the church meetings Christ will come forth in the teaching, the preaching, and the testifying. Such riches in the church life will convince and attract new ones.

REGULAR GROWTH

Do not be concerned about how much you understand of what you read. What matters is that you faithfully open the Word, open yourself, and read and pray. This is not a once-for-all procedure. It is not like being born but like breathing. Growth, like breathing, is continual, day by day and even minute by minute. You will grow by coming regularly to the Word. Carry a pocket version of the Word with you. Wherever you are, when you have a few minutes, open it and read a chapter or so; then pray over what you have read. There is little need for you to pray about your grades at school or for your business to be successful or for guidance when you go shopping. Simply pray the Word. In this way you will receive and enjoy God Himself.

PRAYING THE WORD

What do you think makes you healthy and strong? It is by eating, drinking, and breathing. When it gets close to mealtime, you probably feel weak; you need to eat to regain your energy. The same is true spiritually. You are weak if you have not been eating, drinking, and breathing Christ in the Word. In fact, it is a mercy that you are still here. Do not try to run the race without food,

drink, and air any longer. Come to the Word. Open to the Lord. Speak to Him the words you read. "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. Lord, thank You, You are the Word. You became flesh. Thank You that You tabernacled among us. Among us! Amen. Full of grace. Hallelujah, grace! Grace and reality. Amen, grace and reality! Of His fullness we have all received. We have all received. We have received, Lord, and we are receiving even now. Praise the Lord!" Does praying the Word in this way seem like foolishness to you? I tell you, it is the way to eat, drink, and breathe Christ. This is how we can live Christ rather than living morality or ethics. Read and pray the Word.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

THE WIDE SCOPE OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

God became a man with the intention that man might receive Him, that He might become man's life, and that man might be one to express Him. This is the message of the Gospel of John.

I hope you do not have the shallow concept of the gospel that is so prevalent today. The common teaching is that we were pitiful sinners on the way to hell but that God loved us and sent His Son to be our Redeemer. The Son died on the cross, was resurrected from the dead, and is now in heaven. We must believe in Him in order to be saved. Then someday we will go to heaven and have a good time for eternity. If this is your view of the gospel, you are missing the mark.

THE GOOD NEWS

The word *gospel* means “good news” or “glad tidings.” The New Testament gospel is that God one day became man, the man Jesus. He lived on this earth for thirty-three and a half years. Consider what a restriction it was to the infinite God to be confined in man for so many years. He lived in a poor carpenter's home in a despised town. After thirty years He came out to minister, not in a vast country but in the Holy Land, a narrow tract of land only three hundred by one hundred miles in size. God lived in a small country, in a small town, and in a small home.

When He was thirty-three, He went to the cross. There He terminated the old generation, the old creation, and the old man. He abolished death. He took away all natural differences. When He entered into death, He conquered and subdued it. In other words, He conquered the power of darkness, the despot Satan. He entered into death and then emerged from it in resurrection.

Flesh and Spirit

It was at this point that He became the life-giving Spirit. The Bible uses the word *became* twice in reference to this wonderful person who actually was God. He “became flesh” (John 1:14) and walked here on earth. Then He

“became a life-giving Spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45). As God, He became flesh; as flesh, He became the life-giving Spirit. The interval of time between the two “becames” was about thirty-four years.

Creation and Incarnation

In eternity past, before Genesis 1, there was only God Himself. Then He created the universe, bringing it into being out of nothing. When He spoke, “Let there be...,” there was. How long the time was between creation and incarnation the Bible does not tell us. But we do need to be aware that God first accomplished creation out of nothing and then passed through incarnation, through which He became one with His creature man.

A Model Life

The human life that Jesus lived on this earth is beyond our understanding. He set up a model of the life that God wants. God does not want moral, ethical, or religious living. The four Gospels display a life of God mingled with man, a life expressing God. This model life is called the reality (John 1:17; Eph. 4:21). It is the reality of God manifested in humanity.

All Things Accomplished

After He had set up this pattern, Christ went through death and resurrection to become the Spirit in order that He might enter into us. It is only as the Spirit that He can be received into us. After resurrection He ascended into the heavens to assume His position. There as a man He was enthroned, crowned, and made Lord and Head of all. This very One came down on the day of Pentecost and is still with us.

All God’s intention has already been realized. There is nothing that has not been accomplished. When were we reborn? It was when Jesus was resurrected. When were we crucified? It was when Jesus was crucified. When were the local churches brought forth? It was not when we began to meet around the Lord’s table but when Jesus was resurrected from the dead. In His resurrection and ascension the church has been produced, and we have been brought to the heavens.

Not only has this One accomplished all God’s purpose; He Himself includes His accomplishments. The incarnation is in Him. The human living as a

pattern is in Him. Death, resurrection, and ascension are in Him. The life-giving Spirit is in Him. He is a composition of whatever He has accomplished. His accomplishments are components of Him.

When we receive this Christ into us, we receive creation, incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension into us. He is an all-inclusive drink. To drink of Him as the life-giving Spirit is to drink of the processed Triune God.

Such is the scope of the gospel. It extends from eternity past to eternity future.

THE FOCUS OF THE GOSPEL

All things have been accomplished. Our need is to experience this, not to try to accomplish things ourselves. The focus of the gospel is that God comes into us to be everything. We need to experience what He has become, all that He has done, and all that He is.

Suppose that as your father I prepare everything you need. I grow fruits and vegetables for you. I raise cows, lambs, and chickens so that you will have meat. You do not need to produce the crops or raise the animals. Your job is simply to enjoy all the things I have prepared for you. I can prepare them, but I cannot enjoy them for you. That you must do.

This is an inadequate illustration of what the Triune God in the Son and as the Spirit has done. He has accomplished everything needful, and it is now available to us in Him. Our part is to receive, enjoy, and experience. This is the focus of the Gospel of John.

John 1:11-12 says, “He came to His own, yet those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those who believe into His name.” The earlier verses tell us how this One came. He came as God, as life, and as light. Verse 14 adds that He came in the flesh and as a tabernacle and that He was full of grace and reality. He came!

He came with an expectation that His people would receive Him. But they did not. On His side it was a matter of coming; on our side it is a matter of

receiving. He has not only come but has also accomplished all things by His coming. Now it is up to us to receive Him.

Have you received Him? To what extent? In what way? “Of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace” (v. 16). How much have you received of His fullness? It is vaster than an ocean, but you may have received only four ounces. Paul mentions these limitless dimensions of Christ in Ephesians 3:18-19. His fullness is eternally wide. The concept of the hymn writer is too small: “And to an ocean fullness, / His mercy doth expand” (*Hymns*, #206). His fullness far exceeds any global measurement. An ocean is a poor comparison! Who can measure the breadth and length and height and depth of the fullness we received? And we received grace upon grace.

THE WAY TO RECEIVE OF HIS FULLNESS

His fullness comes to us in two ways: by the Word and by the Spirit. We can liken this to electricity with its two wires, the antenna and the ground wire. The Spirit is the antenna, and the Word is the ground wire. These are the two lines that convey the heavenly electricity, which is Christ Himself, the life-giving Spirit. He is brought into the house, our being, by means of these two wires, the Spirit and the Word.

If you read the Gospel of John carefully, you will notice that at the beginning Christ is presented as the Word; then toward the end He becomes the Spirit (20:22). As the Word, He is the ground wire; He came down to us. As the Spirit, He is the antenna. These two, the Word and the Spirit, are brought together in John 6:63: “The words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.” When the antenna and the ground wire become one, the electricity comes. When the Word and the Spirit are intertwined, Christ is conveyed into us.

How can we receive Christ? We must read the Word and touch the Spirit. Then we have both the antenna and the ground wire. This brings the heavenly electricity. With the Word as the ground wire and the Spirit as the antenna, all the riches of Christ will be transmitted to us.

This receiving is not once for all. It began when we believed in the Lord Jesus, receiving Him as our Savior. It should continue all day long, every day, along these two wires. I trust that by our considering the Gospel of John

together in this way, your appetite for the Word has been stirred up. Several times every day come to the Word. Pray over it. Understand and receive it. Read it and love it.

STUDYING THE WORD

I hope that we will eventually have the whole New Testament in the Recovery Version. For the present you can study the books that we have already finished. If you will use them, they will save you much time and effort. It has taken a great deal of research and many hours to compile them. We have checked interlinear translations, lexicons, concordances, and many other translations. By using the Recovery Version of the books we have completed, you will get all the benefit of our efforts. It will save you from studying too much on your own; studying is sometimes a frustration to the Spirit.

Especially read John, Romans, Hebrews, Ephesians, Colossians, and Revelation. Leave Matthew aside at first; that is a hard book. Besides your morning reading of a few verses, spend some other time to delve into these books. One way to study them is to notice the key words. In John, for example, pay attention to the word *came*. Then consider the word *receive*. Our receiving will last even to eternity, because we will still have the water of life to drink and the tree of life to eat.

AN ORGANIC RECEIVING

How do we receive this Triune God? It is first by believing into Him, then by drinking, eating, and breathing Him. Drinking and eating are the best ways to receive, but the fastest way is by breathing. These are the three means of receiving what is organic. To accept something that is handed to you is not an organic receiving. But drinking, eating, and breathing are; they cause a metabolic change.

You must read the Word. You cannot drink without something to drink. You cannot eat without food. You cannot breathe if there is no air. The water, the food, and even the air are all in the Word. Come to the Word at least three times a day. You must build up this habit. As you get older, you will be grateful that you did.

MEETING TOGETHER

The Word will make you grow and experience the riches of Christ. Then you will be impelled into the church life. The word *ekklesia*, which we translate “church,” means “a called-out congregation.” Without meeting together or congregating, there can be no church life. The more meetings we have, the better.

Our coming together is not just with ourselves. We come with Christ, with the growth in life, and with the experience of the riches of Christ. This will make our meetings living. Merely to shout “Praise the Lord!” may not help the meeting. From the Old Testament we can see that when the children of Israel gathered together, they brought a rich surplus of the produce of the good land. No one could appear there empty-handed (Deut. 16:16). It was not sufficient simply to shout. Of course, they did come singing the psalms of blessing, but singing was not the main factor. They had to bring a surplus of their produce.

For us this means that we come to the meetings with the riches of Christ. How full our meeting will be depends on how much we have experienced Him. Our experience of Christ is dependent upon our daily eating of the Word. The Word is our source. Eating of it regularly is basic. Our Christian life and the church life both stem from our being in the Word. If we practice this in a thorough way, every one of us will be a shining light. When we meet together, the church will be strong.

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

A LIVING PERSON, NOT ANY SUBSTITUTE

Scripture Reading: John 1:1, 4, 14; 6:63; 14:23; 15:7; 2 Cor. 3:17-18

Christ is the Head, and the church is His Body. Together they are one person. The Bible, from its first page to its last, reveals this person. The head and the body are not two separate entities. When the Lord said, “I am the vine; you are the branches” (John 15:5), He was saying that He and we are one living item. The stem and the branches are included in each other. The meaning of this oneness of the vine and the branches is the focus of the entire divine revelation in the Bible.

THE LESSON OF HISTORY

Human history has already passed through six thousand years. This is not a short time. All of history testifies to one thing. That one thing is the need of Christ. Why, for example, was religion invented? It was because man lacked Christ. He was short of God.

Genesis 4 makes this quite plain. When Cain was driven out of the presence of God and thus lost God, he and his descendants began to invent things (vv. 16, 20-22). Jubal, for example, “was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe” (v. 21). The invention of music includes entertainment, like dancing, singing, and sports. Why is it that people are so attracted to nightclubs, concerts, and such? It is because they lack Christ.

For us God is our entertainment. He is our joy. He is our enjoyment. The Lord is our song. Moses said, “Jah is my strength and song” (Exo. 15:2).

Another invention arising out of mankind’s loss of God was cattle-raising (Gen. 4:20). Jabal was a nomad, dwelling in tents. Because the land would not yield its strength to him, he was forced to be a wanderer and to keep cattle in order to make a living.

The making of weaponry was yet another invention to fill the loss of God (v. 22). Modern weapons may be more highly developed, but their beginning was soon after Cain “went forth from the presence of Jehovah” (v. 16).

In Genesis 11 another invention was brought in, that of religion. At Babel idol worship was introduced. All idols are a replacement of God. If you have God, you do not need idols. God wants man to have only Himself, a living person.

Another replacement for God is ethics. Even one thousand years before Christ was born, the Chinese people had the ethical teachings of Confucius. Ethics may be desirable from society’s point of view, but such teachings are simply one more invention to fill the shortage in mankind.

The jars of humanity are empty because God has been lost. All these inventions are attempts to fill that void.

Are you an empty jar? I am no longer empty because I am filled with Christ. I have no need of religion; I have a living person. I have no need of ethics; I have the living Christ.

HIGHER THAN ETHICS

This is not to say that we are unethical. If we are given too much change when we buy something, we return the extra amount. If we visit someone, we do not step over the threshold until we are first invited in; otherwise, we would be intruding. Such behavior is higher than ethics. The Lord said that our righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, or we are not qualified for the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 5:20). What we have is higher than ethics. We have a person. To live ethically is merely a performance. Our stability, honesty, and faithfulness are not part of a code of ethics. They are Christ.

A TROUBLESOME INKPOT

This does not mean that I am naturally a good person. When I was a teenager, I was working for a large company. One day the place caught on fire, and everything was in confusion. An inkpot on the manager’s desk attracted my attention. Amidst all the turmoil of moving things, I picked it up and slipped it into my pocket.

After I got saved and began to seek after the Lord, the trouble began! I would tell the Lord Jesus that I loved Him, but He seemed to say, “What about the inkpot?” When I closed my eyes to pray—inkpot! When I tried to read the Bible—inkpot! When I went to bed at night and tried to sleep—inkpot! I told myself that I must resolve this matter of the inkpot. I looked all over to see if I could find it, but I could not seem to locate it anywhere. After much prayer I found a way. I sensed within that what I could do would be to take the manager the money to pay for the inkpot. I was happy. I figured out how much it was worth and took the money with me to the manager.

On the way there I stopped to buy a calendar with beautiful pictures. (It was New Year’s time.) Then I went on to the manager’s office. He said, “My, we haven’t seen each other for a long time. What brought you to see me?” He had always considered me a fine young man. My face turned red. The Lord had told me I must not use polished words but confess directly. I answered him, “I came here because I stole from you.” I told him the story, then added, “Now here is the money for the inkpot. I am sorry I cannot return the inkpot, but I think this money will more than cover its cost.” He said, “No, no, no! An inkpot is a small thing. I don’t want your money.” I begged him to take it, telling him I would have no peace if he refused. Then he noticed the calendar and asked, “What is this?” I did not want to talk about the calendar, but I told him what it was. Then he said, “I don’t want your money, but I do like this calendar. I’ll take this instead of the money.” I did not like his proposal—I wanted the calendar!—but the Lord said that I should go along with what he said. I agreed, thanked him, and left.

To tell the truth, I was not happy. Yes, the inkpot problem was gone, but so was my beautiful calendar. On the way home, though, I met another acquaintance. He greeted me and then asked, “How would you like this calendar?” It was another calendar. I was so happy I wanted to jump.

THE PERSON PRESENTED IN THE WORD

We were not good people before we were saved. At that time we did not have Christ. But now we have this living person. We have no need of religion or ethics. Regrettably, we as Christians are still under the influence of today’s religious and ethical concepts. These concepts frustrate our seeing this living person, even when we come to the Bible. We must drop all such

preoccupations and pray, “Lord, I come to You through Your Word. The Bible is Your word. I drop my concepts. I want only You.”

What a person is presented to us in this book! He was the Word. He was God. He became flesh. In Him was life, and this life was the light of men. Does this sound like religion or ethics? When I was young, I used to wonder how He could be both God and the Word and how I could take Him as my life. Over the years I have found out that this One is not only the Word but also the Spirit. “The Lord is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17). Then, from John 6:63 we can see that the words of the Lord are also spirit. He is one person, called the Lord, the Word, and the Spirit. These three are one. The Lord is also life (14:6), as are the Lord’s words and the Spirit (6:63; Rom. 8:10). The Lord, the Word, the Spirit, and life are four in one.

THE WORD AND THE SPIRIT

We have the Word. The Bible is the word of God. For two thousand years among the human race, there has been this Word, saving us from confusion, mixture, and darkness. Without it we would have been deluded and led astray. We have this book, which we can read and understand.

We also have the Spirit. Suppose that all these years we had only had the Word in letter, without the Spirit. We would have been in deadness, even though we might not have been misled.

Hallelujah! We have the Word without and the Spirit within. Both are the Lord. Whatever is organic has two aspects. As a human being, for example, we have a physical body without and a human life within. Another example would be a little seed. There is an outward shell and an inward life. You may figure that if there is life, the shell is unnecessary; but without the shell the life would be gone. If, on the other hand, you sow an empty shell into the earth, it will not grow.

The Word is the shell. Without the Spirit it is empty. How wonderful that we have both the Word and the Spirit! Actually, the shell and the life are inseparable. If we open a seed to take out the life, there will be nothing there. Similarly, if we cut someone open to find his life, the life will be gone. Without the Spirit, the Word is lifeless. Without the Word, the Spirit is abstract and intangible. We must have both.

FINDING GOD IN THE WORD

When we come to the Word, we are not coming to the letter. We must have the deep realization that we are coming to God. We must pray, “Lord, You are in Your word. You are in Your word, and You are the Word as well as the Spirit.” Where is God? Yes, He is in the third heaven. Yes, He is within us. These statements are true, but they are not solid. Solidly speaking, God is in the word. In the word are also life, love, and light. To receive God, Christ, the Spirit, life, light, and love, we must come to the Word. We must not turn aside from the Word and pray for something to fall upon us from the heavens; this is not the biblical way.

The biblical way is to take the word into you. Then you will be filled. The word is the embodiment of the Triune God, of Christ, of the Spirit, and of all the divine virtues.

THE WRONG WAY TO USE THE WORD

Christians have the Bible, but many use it only when they go to their weekly “worship service.” The rest of the time it sits on the shelf.

There are other Christians who use the Bible like a science textbook. They think that they need to know Greek to understand it. They research words like *logos* and *theos* and try to figure out the real meaning. If only they had a theological education, it would be such a help! What is the result of this mental approach? “The letter kills” (2 Cor. 3:6). This is the wrong way to touch the Word.

THE RIGHT WAY TO COME TO THE WORD

When we come to the Word, we need to open four layers of our being. To begin with, we must open our eyes. If they are shut, we cannot read. Then we must open our mind in order to understand what we are reading. But reading and understanding are not enough. We must open our heart to receive what we read. Last, we must open our spirit to realize what we have received.

The way to be helped by the Word, then, is to read, understand, receive, and realize. This requires our opening of our eyes, mind, heart, and spirit. The Bible is not a simple book. Reading it profitably involves all four layers of our being.

To open these four parts takes an effort. Yes, keeping our eyes open to read is simple. Our mind, however, is another matter. As soon as we sit down to read the Word, our mind takes off on a 747! We must call it back and insist that it concentrate. To open our mind means simply to concentrate on what we are reading. If we do this, we will uncover what is hidden in the Word.

As to opening our heart, we do this by loving the Lord. We may open our mind and pray-read the Word in a superficial way, but if we do not love the Lord, we are drawn off by thoughts of other things we love. When our time in the Word seems dry and lifeless, it may be that our heart is not open to Him to give Him our love.

The way to open our spirit, the deepest layer, is by genuine prayer. Once our eyes see, our mind understands, and our heart receives, we can pray the Word into us. Then the Word will become our life supply, bringing to us God, Christ, the Spirit, and all the divine virtues.

A REPLACEMENT

The result of our opening to the Lord in this fourfold way is that this living One replaces religion, ethics, and our natural virtues. When He comes, all that is not of Him must go.

This is the reason it is so urgent that we come to the Word. With the reading, the understanding, the receiving, and the realizing, the Word becomes ours. It will grow and be formed in us. The Lord is both the Word and the Spirit. The Word also is the Spirit. Thus it is that in the Word we find the Lord, the Spirit, and life.

Time after time come to this Word, each time opening your eyes, your mind, your heart, and your spirit. Then you will be not only reading but also understanding, receiving, and realizing. You will grow, and the church will be built up by this way of life. All the substitutes for Christ will be replaced with Himself.

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

THE PERFECTING OF THE SAINTS (1)

Scripture Reading: Eph. 3:8; 4:7, 11-12, 16; John 20:19, 21; Acts 6:4, 7

Whenever the children of God gather together, it is a time when God can speak. In the Old Testament God spoke from within the tent of meeting. Without a meeting of God's children He would not speak. God's oracle comes to the congregation of His people. This was true not only at the time of Moses and Aaron but also when the children of God gathered together in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. When we gather together seeking Him, we are an audience for His speaking. And God Himself is in His speaking. The invisible, mysterious God is manifested in His word. As I speak, it is another opportunity for God to visit us in His speaking.

In the years since the recovery began, it has passed through many marvelous and also terrible things. But whatever storms have come, the Lord's recovery is still here. Once the Lord has built the church, it is unshakable and prevailing. Yet I believe that from today the Lord will give us a new beginning. I do not mean a new movement. It is still the old, even ancient, move of the Lord, but with a new beginning.

ALL BELIEVERS QUALIFIED

This new beginning came from one of the messages given during the Ephesians training. While I was speaking that day on Ephesians 4:11, the light came. "He Himself gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as shepherds and teachers." I saw that all the real believers can and must be like the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers.

Some humble ones may wonder how they could ever be like the apostles. They may feel that it cannot possibly be so. Bible teachers, hearing this, might think that such a statement goes too far. But it does not go too far.

The light that came to me is based on Ephesians 3:8, where Paul says that he is "less than the least of all saints." We consider the apostle Paul a giant

and therefore qualified to be an apostle. In this verse though, Paul says that he is less than the least of all saints. If we feel that we are the least of all the saints, Paul says that he is less than we are. If we believe Paul's word in chapter 1 that God the Father has chosen us before the foundation of the world (v. 4), we must also believe what he says in 3:8, that he is less than the least of all saints and therefore less than we.

If Paul, who was less than the least of all saints, could be an apostle, how much more can you be one! "To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (4:7). Are you included in this verse? Surely each one of us is included. Notice also that the verb is in past tense—*was* given. Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

"He Himself gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as shepherds and teachers" (v. 11). Are you included in this verse? No, you are not. But do not think that you are through. You are in verse 12: "For the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ." You are one of the saints to be perfected. Every believer is a saint.

Are those in verse 11—the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers—greater than the saints in verse 12? Here we can answer both yes and no. Yes: The apostles and other gifted ones are greater, because they perfect the saints. It must be the greater who perfect the lesser. No: The saints must be greater than the apostles and the other gifted ones because Paul, who was an apostle, said that he was less than the least of all saints. Even the smallest saint is greater than he. From verses 11 and 12 we would think that the gifted ones are greater, but from 3:8 it appears that the saints are greater than the gifted apostle Paul. From these seeming contradictions we may conclude that all of us, whether saints or gifted ones, are about the same. We are all members of the Body. Paul was a member, and so are we.

Notice, then, that you are in 4:7 but not in verse 11; you are also in verse 12. Verse 16 reads, "Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love." Surely you are in this verse. *All the Body* includes

you. You may not be one of the joints of the supply, but you are at least one of the many parts.

THE WORK OF PERFECTING

What is the perfecting work that the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers are doing? It is to perfect the saints to do the same work as they themselves are doing. A basketball coach trains the players to play basketball as he does. If the perfecters fly like angels, they must not perfect the saints to creep like snakes. The fliers must perfect all those under them to fly also. The young ones must fly even higher than their perfecters. The outcome of this perfecting work is that all the saints become apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers.

You may not be an apostle yet, but you should have the boldness to say, “I am an apostle-to-be.” I am presenting to you what is in the Bible. We wear the tinted glasses of Christianity when we come to the Bible. Ministers and pastors are esteemed above ordinary believers. Seeing this causes us to think that the gifted ones in Ephesians 4:11 are special ones and that we are insignificant nobodies. Even among us today there is the concept that the apostle is above the elder and that the elder is higher than the other saints. When we come to the Bible, we bring this concept and insert it into the Bible. Because we do not come to find out the revelation from the Bible, there is no light.

ALL ON ONE LEVEL

We say that among us there is no clergy or laity. Yet we rank some above others. If we say that the gifted ones in Ephesians 4:11 are higher, then we are making ourselves lower. This means that there are two levels, and a hierarchy exists. How can we have only one level? This will be the case when the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers have perfected the other saints to be the same as they are. The perfecting will uplift the saints to be all on one level.

Suppose that among the five hundred or so who are in this meeting, only fourteen are apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. All the rest are humble, claiming not to know anything or to be able to do anything. The fourteen are then the clergy; the rest are nobodies. This is

Christianity's fallen situation. The normal condition would be for the fourteen not to remain in a special rank but day by day to uplift all the others, perfecting them until all of them are on the same level.

It may sound humble to say that you do not know anything and cannot do anything, but you have to be practical. You have to grow and be trained and practice until you are an apostle, a prophet, an evangelist, and a shepherd and teacher.

OVERLAPPING GIFTS

Do you believe that these categories of people are all distinct from each other? Can the prophet be an evangelist? Can the evangelist be an apostle? Consider the example of the apostle Paul.

No doubt he was an apostle. Was he not also a prophet? In his Epistles he prophesies how the Lord Jesus will return. Does this not prove that he was a prophet? As for being an evangelist, he surely preached the gospel far more than others. How about his being a shepherd? He says he was like a nourishing mother, cherishing the churches (1 Thes. 2:7). Surely he was a shepherd, with all the churches on his heart. Last, he was also a teacher.

Suppose that two of you are burdened to go to a village in Alaska. You leave your locality and go to an Eskimo village as sent ones. When you arrive, you begin speaking to those you meet. You speak Jesus, God, redemption, salvation, regeneration, and life. When you preach the gospel, some Eskimos believe in the Lord and are baptized. They become a little church there. As you care for them and shepherd them, you will share with them about God's economy, His eternal purpose, and His dispensation. Do you see how the two of you are apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers? Then eventually some of the Eskimo believers will be perfected. They will do the same thing as the two of you have done. They may either work in their village or be burdened to go, for example, to Moscow. In either case they would be the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers.

SENT ONES

Every one of you can be all these four kinds of persons. Do not think that this is too much. In your religious concept an apostle might mean a

prominent leader, but the Greek meaning of the word is “sent one.” If, for example, I send you to get my briefcase, you are my apostle. In John 20:19 through 21, “Jesus came and stood in the midst and said to them, Peace be to you...The disciples therefore rejoiced at seeing the Lord. Then Jesus said to them again, Peace be to you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” This passage says that the disciples (not the apostles) were assembled together, rejoiced when they saw the Lord, and were told by the Lord, “I also send you” (v. 21). The Lord Jesus was the Father’s sent One, coming to us as the Apostle (Heb. 3:1). He was the first New Testament Apostle. Now we are His sent ones, going to others as apostles.

How did the Father send the Lord Jesus? He sent Him by going with Him. If you are constrained by the Lord, after praying, to say a word for Him to your mother, the Lord would say to you, “I send you as the Father sent Me. When you go to your mother, I will be with you. Go and express Me, as I expressed the Father. Express Me and speak for Me.” To the Lord, then, you are a sent one; to your mother, you are an apostle. You may feel burdened, after contacting the Lord through prayer, to go to your relatives, classmates, or neighbors. Go to them with Him and to express Him.

BEING NORMAL

I hope I have persuaded you that we can all be these gifted ones. They are not a special class. If you have not been perfected up to this standard, you are abnormal. Every normal Christian must be one sent by God. Do not say that you are still a student and therefore cannot be an apostle. God needs teenage prophets! You can be sent to your classmates by God. Preach the gospel to them. Then care for the new believers. Teach them about the three wills in the universe and about God’s economy.

If all of you are like this, a revival will spread throughout the earth. There is no need of a movement. There is no need for you to be ordained. You have already been ordained and chosen to be a sent one. Do you care about this? If so, go to the Lord and say, “Lord, I am here. I present myself to You. Send me.” The Lord will say, “I have already sent you. Go!” You must go to your relatives, friends, classmates, or even people you encounter on the street. You must speak persuasively to them. Preach the gospel and convince them.

BEING PERFECTED

You not only can but you also must be an apostle, a prophet, an evangelist, and a shepherd and teacher. For this to come about, you must read the Word. Acts 6:7 says, “The word of God grew.” For the word of God to grow, there must be a period of learning, experiencing, and being dealt with. This is not an overnight matter. It requires the work of the leading apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. What they do you also need to do. They take the lead, setting up the pattern. You follow. If they speak of God’s economy, that is what you speak. You say what they say, and do what they do. They are the lead sheep in the flock. If they turn right, the rest of you turn right. They do not do one thing and have you do something else.

You cannot speak the Word if you do not know it. You will be making a fool of yourself if you try to help others and you do not even know where Genesis is. God’s way is the way of the Word. It is not a miraculous or mushrooming growth based on gimmicks. Acts 6:4 says, “We will continue steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the word.” God’s way is by life. Day by day read the Word and pray. Match whatever you read by prayer. Pray in order to digest the Word. Then it will get into you. Once this happens, the word becomes the Spirit. With the Spirit, you have life, understanding, and utterance. Then you can be sent. The matter of being a gifted one is wholly wrapped up with the Word. Even if you are young, come to the Word regularly and pray-read it. Be mingled with the divine Word and the life-giving Spirit day after day. If you do this, within a very few years you will be ready to be sent and to be God’s spokesman, speaking for Him and speaking Him forth. You will preach the gospel and shepherd new ones, teaching them how to go on.

This was how the church life was in the beginning. Today we have a degraded situation, full of deadness. We must come back and let the Lord give us a new beginning.

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

THE PERFECTING OF THE SAINTS (2)

Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:11-12; Acts 5:42; 1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17; 1 Cor. 12:29;
14:31; Acts 6:1-5

SATURATED WITH THE WORD

All of us can and must be among the gifted persons listed in Ephesians 4:11. The key to your becoming an apostle, a prophet, an evangelist, and a shepherd and teacher is the Word. If you take very little of the Word into you, you will not be much of a gifted person. But if your being is saturated with the living essence of God's Word, not merely with the knowledge of it, you will surely be His sent one. How much you take the Word into you and let it mingle with your inward parts determines the extent to which you can be God's spokesman. When you become the embodiment of God's Word, you spontaneously are one of His sent ones, speaking for Him and shepherding others. You do not need any official title or appointment or position. Those are outward and count for nothing. But if you are filled and saturated with God's living word, you are surely God's apostle sent to this world and speaking for Him, and you are surely the shepherd caring for His people and teaching them God's economy.

This is what God expects you to be. Do not say that you are not qualified. You have been chosen, saved, regenerated, and called by God. He is now working in you, saturating you with the Word. It is your duty to go to the Word, even in a legal way, morning and evening and during the day as well. Even if you can take only ten minutes each time, you will see how much benefit you receive.

Thou art the Word with God's fullness in Thee,
Thou too the Spirit that God my life be;
Thee in the Word I enjoy as my food,
Thou in the Spirit art water to me.

Now to enjoy Thee I come to Thy Word,
On Thee to feed till my hunger is o'er.

Now in my spirit I turn unto Thee,
Of Thee to drink till I'm thirsty no more.

(Hymns, #811)

All the churches, both in the United States and abroad, have been making this turn to the Word. I encourage you to continue to do this increasingly.

A TEACHING AND PREACHING MEETING

“Every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and announcing the gospel of Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42). The early saints were a teaching and preaching people. In homes and in the temple they taught and preached. Today’s situation is quite similar to what prevailed in Jerusalem in the time of the book of Acts. Then there was a strong background in Judaism. Now here in the United States there is a strong background in Christianity, including Catholicism. To meet this situation there needs to be a place and time set, known to all the people in the city, where the Word of God is taught in an atmosphere of preaching. In Anaheim we have already begun to do this on Lord’s Day mornings at 10:45. There is Bible teaching, but it is not in dead letters; it is delivered as gospel preaching. We teach the living word and preach the high, all-inclusive gospel.

Many of the young saints lack the proper knowledge of the gospel. What, for instance, is the difference between redemption, salvation, justification, and reconciliation? What is the difference between being saved by the death of Jesus and being saved by the life of Christ? There is more to the gospel than telling people that they are lost and bound for hell, but God loves them and Jesus died to save them; if they believe in Him, they will be saved and go to heaven. Consider the Gospel of John. This whole book is the gospel. It tells us of the Word being God and becoming flesh; of the vine, the husbandman, and the branches; and of the Lord’s deep, rich prayer in chapter 17. Even that mysterious prayer is part of the gospel. Have you ever realized that the gospel is so comprehensive? It is not only others who lack knowledge; even we ourselves are short.

A Shining Lampstand

Because of insufficient knowledge, both secular society and the so-called Christian churches are in darkness. In every place where the church is, that church must be a shining lampstand, shining forth the light of the truth of God's Word. The churches can be such by having a preaching-teaching meeting regularly. We can then advertise the meeting by word of mouth, telling our relatives, neighbors, classmates, colleagues, friends, and acquaintances. Such a meeting, with an hour-long, attractively given message, will bring in a good increase, not from among the drifters but from those we know. The word will spread that there is such a place with the shining of the truth, and seekers will be attracted. In this way the whole church becomes a lampstand, with all of us as lights shining together.

Laboring to Get a Message

If you are to have such a meeting, all of you must get into the Word. This is not the work of only two or three. Then the leading ones must be desperate to get a proper message for each Lord's Day. It must be convincing and logical to the listeners. At first there may not be many new ones, but if you continue this way for a period of time, they will come. You cannot preach the same thing every time, like "Jesus can satisfy your hunger." People will be turned away by such repetition. Every meeting must be full of truth, logical, and convincing. It must be able to subdue all the differing opinions. The burden for the meeting must be on the whole church, not just a few.

It is not easy to take the lead. First Timothy 3:2 tells us that one of the qualifications of an elder is that he be skillful in teaching, "apt to teach." He must enjoy teaching and teach well. The elders are not the teachers in Ephesians 4:11, but they nonetheless must be skillful in teaching. First Timothy 5:17 says further regarding the elders, "Let the elders who take the lead well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in word and teaching." This verse says that the elders should be supported with the material supply, especially those who labor in the word. When their time is fully occupied in taking care of the church, they will have no way to make a living. Thus, I encourage all the elders to go to the Lord desperately each week to get a message for the preaching-teaching meeting. Do not take this matter lightly.

When Brother Nee was a young man, he picked up a burden to preach the gospel. Every Saturday he would fast for the whole day while he prepared. He

would kneel, reading the Bible, praying about his burden, and preparing a convincing message. Then the next morning he would deliver a logical, well-reasoned message. This is an example of how the elders must labor in the Word.

The Value to the City and the Church

This meeting is not only for the church but for the whole city as well. Every church that practices this will be a lampstand shining over the darkness. It will acquire a name as a place that knows the truth and can teach the Word. New ones will be added. Our own young people will be taught too. After perhaps four years of hearing such messages, all the saints will be ready to graduate. However, those who take the lead must not consider themselves professors. They are merely laborers, taking the lead for others to follow and help.

This kind of meeting will really be in the nature of a training. Week after week, as we listen to the speaking on the Word, we will be learning. At the same time, we will be spontaneously trained. Then we can set up a small class in our home. Eventually, instead of just a few teaching and preaching, the whole church will be qualified. Besides the Lord's Day meeting, there can be several home meetings, with classes for our neighbors and friends, where many of the saints can teach and preach the truth. This kind of preaching is the most prevailing. It will surely bring in the new ones and reap other benefits as well. It will lead to a real knowledge of the living word, to the growth in life, to the experience of Christ, to the shepherding of others, and to the building up of the young ones.

If the churches feel burdened, they can begin to have a preaching-teaching meeting, as we have suggested here. To make a success of this, the whole church needs to get into the Word with much prayer. If you read the Bible without prayer, you will be in the dead letter. You should spend twice as much time in prayer as you do in reading the Bible. Every church needs to be characterized by reading the Word and by praying. This is not to say that you need to come together to do this. Rather, individually the saints should be praying and reading the Word. On this earth we are the ones who pray, read the Word, and digest it. All the saints must know the Word, have life, have the Spirit, and have an impact through praying.

NOT SEEKING OUTSIDE HELP

In the past too often the churches have called on those from other places to come and help them. This indicates a weakness on the part of the responsible ones. Why would you not labor on the Word yourselves and contact the Lord directly, instead of sending out a Macedonian call, "Come over...and help us" (Acts 16:9). It may seem humble to say that your church is weak and needs help, but is this wide-open door the best way to get help? What was the result of all the calls that went out for help? Eventually, one came who was not weak, and the churches were deceived. You must learn the lesson from this. Be strong. Do not look to Anaheim or to Brother So-and-so for help. Call the heavens and contact the Lord directly. Even if you feel weak, do not admit it. Be empowered. To be proud is ugly and sinful, but to be strong is necessary. You are not in need of outside help. Even if it is offered, you should seriously consider whether to take it. How much real outside help have you gotten these past few years? The supposed help that you have received has only further weakened, even poisoned, you. You opened the door to this because you thought you were weak.

A housewife with five children may feel unable to cope with her situation. She keeps asking one neighbor after another to come and teach her how to manage and show her how to cook for her household. No one has time to be of help until one day a woman comes and offers to cook for her, saying she will be glad to help her out. When the family eats the meal the woman has prepared, they all get sick. She has poisoned it. Is that the kind of help you want?

Do not open your door without investigating any offer of help. Be sure that the one who offers is qualified. Check his status and background.

FELLOWSHIP AMONG THE CHURCHES

This is not to say that you do not need the other churches and should try to go on in an independent way. You must keep the door of fellowship open to all the churches, even while you keep the door of weakness shut to offers of "help." It would be a strengthening to the churches here if the leading ones could come together perhaps once a month. Every so often the churches in the area could also come together for a joint Lord's table meeting. Such mutual fellowship will increase the life supply in the churches.

Be clear, though, that every local church is responsible for itself. One church must not come under the jurisdiction of another. A larger or stronger church has no authority over a smaller, weaker one. All the churches, whatever their size or condition, are on the same level, yet the churches should mutually nourish and strengthen each other. In this way we practice the local church life and also have the Body life. This is why we are here in the Lord's recovery.

It would be good also for the leading ones to consider having a practical training, perhaps on a weekly or biweekly basis. They need to have some experience and training first, in order to have something to teach all the saints. Then the churches can come together on a weekday evening for practical training. In this way the churches will be further built up.

THE CHURCH SERVICE

In the past we used to have "service groups," taking care of the practical work that needed to be done, like mowing the grass and arranging the chairs. This use of the word *service* is not quite accurate in the biblical sense. The word *service* in Greek is the same as that translated "ministry." What is the New Testament ministry or service? It is to be sent to others, to speak for God, to preach the gospel, and to shepherd and teach others.

How then should we regard the practical matters that need to be taken care of? It is the duty of all of us to take care of these matters. We do not have one group who are evangelists and another group who take care of cleaning the hall. All of us are to be perfected as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. All of us also are to take care of the work that needs to be done, even though strictly speaking this is not the service. No one should think that his status is too high to clean the restroom.

As to functioning in the meetings, this is included in the work of the prophets, evangelists, and teachers and shepherds.

"ARE ALL PROPHETS?...YOU CAN ALL PROPHECY"

For many years I could not reconcile two verses in 1 Corinthians. In 12:29 it says, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all have works of power?" Obviously, the answer is no. But then 14:31 states, "You can all

prophecy one by one that all may learn and all may be encouraged.” Why did Paul tell us in one chapter that not all are prophets and then two chapters later say that all may prophecy?

It was only recently that I saw that what Paul was saying was that not all are leading prophets. In a flock of sheep, for example, there are only two or three leaders. The rest are not leaders, but they follow what their leaders do. Not all are prophets in the sense of being leading ones, but all can follow the example of the leading ones to prophecy.

In Jerusalem several were selected to serve meals (Acts 6:1-5). Two of them were Philip and Stephen. Some Bible teachers are of the opinion that the choice of these two was a mistake, because Stephen was an eloquent speaker (ch. 7), and Philip was an evangelist (21:8). How could these two have been asked to wait on tables? I believe these examples tell us that all those who wait on tables can be good speakers! All those who arrange chairs can be evangelists. The ones who clean the restrooms may be leading evangelists. When the apostle comes, he can help mow the lawn. The proper service, then, is to be an apostle, a prophet, an evangelist, and a shepherd and teacher. The practical work is not the service, but we all take care of it.

May the Lord bring us into the practicality of this word.

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

A HISTORY OF THE WORD OF GOD

Scripture Reading: John 1:1, 14; 1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; John 6:63; 2 Cor. 3:6

Let us trace together the history of the Word of God.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament is made up of thirty-nine books. The first five, which are called the Pentateuch, were written by Moses, as we know. Other books were gradually added. Then, after the return from the Babylonian captivity, further books, like Daniel, Nehemiah, Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi were written. Although the date cannot be accurately fixed, from either the fourth or third century B.C. all thirty-nine books were generally recognized by the Jews as their sacred writings. Sometimes, however, the books were grouped together to make a total of twenty-two. In the time of Christ the Old Testament was called the law (John 12:34) and the Scripture (10:35).

THE NEW TESTAMENT

The central focus of the Old Testament is the prophecy and the types of Christ. Then Christ Himself came and lived on this earth for thirty-three and a half years. His life was actually a speaking, expressing God Himself as the reality to mankind. His living was more than a model or pattern; it spoke forth God to man. In a sense He was held in the flesh for those years, waiting to be processed from the flesh into another form. After His death by crucifixion He was processed into resurrection. As God, He had taken the step of incarnation to become flesh and was confined in this form until released by crucifixion. Once He was ushered into resurrection, He took a further step and became the life-giving Spirit. The Lord Jesus Christ, as the life-giving Spirit, includes God and divinity; man and humanity; the mingling of these two in incarnation; a pattern of the uplifted human living that can satisfy God's eternal purpose; His precious, all-inclusive death; and His mysterious, all-transcending resurrection and ascension. This One represents God, man, and all His accomplishments.

Although He is so great, He is as available as the air that we breathe. When we take Him into us, we receive God, the proper humanity, the proper human living, the incarnation, the all-inclusive death, the wonderful resurrection, and the transcendent ascension. By breathing Him in, all His accomplishments become our reality.

It is the New Testament that reveals this to us, though for all these centuries the vision has not been as clear as it is today. How could we know these marvelous truths if the four Gospels had not been written and printed? Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John present a composite picture of this wonderful One, each written from a different side or angle. Without all four, our picture of Him would be incomplete.

The New Testament continues with Acts. In this book we have the record of how Christ was preached, propagated, and reproduced. Without Acts, how could we know that this wonderful person has been propagated into humanity and become the churches?

Without the Epistles from Romans to Jude, how could we know that the churches are His Body, His expression? How could we know how the Christian life and the church life should be?

In Revelation we have the completing of the revelation of Christ and the church. Without this final book, we would not know that the churches today are the lampstands and tomorrow are the New Jerusalem, expressing Him in full.

UNDERSTANDING THE WORD

Without the Word all these things would exist, but they would not be understandable or available to our faculties. God made us not only to drink of the Spirit; He made us with a wonderful mind to understand and grasp, and then to convey to our spirit what the mind understands, so that we might drink of it. He also gave us two eyes so that we could read and a voice so that we could speak. Under God's sovereignty man has invented writing and printing; this was so that He might reach us. God is abstract and invisible. For us to know Him He arranged the invention of language and designed us to comprehend it. What God has spoken through the centuries has been written

down in the Bible. This book is the very embodiment of God, of all that He is and all that He has accomplished. We can read, understand, and accept it.

Every day when we come to this Word, we use our eyes to read it, our mind to understand it, our heart to appreciate it, and our spirit to receive and realize it. The result is that we receive God, Jesus Christ, the Spirit, life, light, love, kindness, humility, and patience, that is, all the divine and human virtues found in Him. Eventually, we ourselves become the embodiment of God, just like the Bible.

THE DECLINE IN THE SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORD

Soon after the books of the New Testament had been completed and the apostles had passed from the scene, a new group arose, known as the church fathers. They initiated the study of Christology and became ensnared in debates. The person of Christ is beyond the understanding of our limited mentality. Unresolvable argument was the result of these mental efforts to categorize Him.

The debate on the person of Christ persisted from the end of the first century to the beginning of the fourth. Finally, the emperor Constantine took a hand in the situation. Ambitious to unite all the different factions that made up the Roman Empire, he called a convention at Nicaea to settle these theological debates. This Roman Caesar asserted his authority to end the fighting and to see that a creed was drawn up. In A.D. 325 the Nicene Creed was formed by this council over which Constantine presided.

It was not until A.D. 397, however, that the twenty-seven books of the New Testament were formally recognized by a council that met in Carthage, North Africa. Before this date, seven books of the New Testament, including Hebrews and Revelation, were in question. You can see how incomplete a creed would be with seven of the New Testament books not even regarded as authoritative. The seven Spirits spoken of in Revelation (4:5), for example, are not mentioned in the Nicene Creed.

THE BIBLE HIDDEN

It was around this time that Catholicism developed. By the end of the sixth century, the Roman Catholic Church and the papacy prevailed. They exercised their authority to forbid the common people to read the Bible, claiming that laymen could not understand it rightly. The result was that the Bible was locked up from the common people, with only the clergy being allowed to study it, and even then only according to the official interpretation.

These ten centuries, when the Bible was hidden, are called the Dark Ages. Without the Word of God shining, mankind was in darkness.

THE BIBLE UNLOCKED

When the Reformation came, under Martin Luther, justification by faith was recovered. The Bible also was unlocked. This was the time when the printing press was invented, thus making the Bible more available. It no longer had to be copied by hand. Thousands of copies came into the hands of the laymen.

Still, however, the Bible was not open. People were free to read it, but they could not understand much of it.

THE BIBLE OPENED

The Bible was opened some three centuries later in the hands of the Plymouth Brethren, under the leadership of J. N. Darby and others. It was the Brethren who came to understand the Old Testament typology and prophecies. They studied, for example, the image in Daniel 2, and by comparing it with history, learned that after the head of gold represented by Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon came the shoulders of Media and Persia. They identified the bronze abdomen as Greece under Alexander the Great. They saw that the two iron legs were the eastern and western branches of the Roman Empire. They realized that the ten toes corresponded to the ten horns of the beast.

THE BRETHREN ENSNARED BY DOCTRINES

But alas! the Brethren fell into the snare of the subtle one. Yes, they opened up the Bible for us, but they fell into the trap of knowledge in letters. They came to care more for the doctrines than for the truth. How, for example, should the Lord's table be held? With leavened or unleavened bread? With

grape juice or wine? With one cup or many? With small pieces of bread or just one loaf? Should it be held morning or evening? Who can participate? Who should distribute the bread and the cup?

All these considerations have no end. They are in the realm of doctrine. They waste time, divide the saints, and create concepts. This is surely not the purpose of the Lord's table. What is the truth regarding the Lord's table? It is the Head and the Body and Christ's death and resurrection. Let us care for these, not for the doctrines regarding the practice.

The same snare accompanied the matter of baptism. Should the water be hot or cold? Fresh water or salt water? Sprinkling or immersion? How many times to immerse? In whose name? All these arguments, arising from the study of doctrines, served only to divide. We must care for the truth of baptism. Baptism means that we are buried, terminated and then resurrected and put into the Triune God.

Do you see the subtle devices of the enemy? First, the Bible was locked; then it was released but not opened. Then it was opened but very much in a doctrinal way. The scholars who researched the Bible fell into the subtle one's trap, turning unawares from the realm of truth to that of doctrines.

THE BIBLE FRESHLY OPENED

The Lord was forced to turn from the sullied soil of the Western world and go to a heathen land, China. From 1922 He raised up a group of young people. We studied the writings of the church fathers and the spiritual writings from the second century down to the present century. We read the histories and the biographies. The Lord gave us understanding and discernment; the revelation came. We realized that we were standing on the shoulders of all those who had gone before. The Lord showed us what was right and wrong, what was lacking or superfluous.

Now we are here. Whatever we minister is the result of the past two thousand years of church history. We give credit to all those who have preceded us. But by His mercy the Lord has shown us the proper way to open up the Word, not being deficient and not going to excess. I have been studying this book nearly every day since 1925, more than fifty years. I was helped by Brother Nee, and we were helped by many teachers and expositors from the

past. I believe that what we put into print is the proper way to understand the Word. It is not too little or too much.

The Lord is now moving in the churches to bring us all back to His Word. Studying the Word is not a simple matter. Either you will be short, or the enemy will push you too far. You could then repeat the history of the Brethren, with their exhausting, divisive, opinion-creating doctrines.

A HELP TO UNDERSTANDING THE WORD

You can be saved from these snares by the books we have made available to you. If you use the Recovery Version with the footnotes and the Life-study messages, you will save much time and be kept on the right track. These are not necessary when you are doing your daily reading of three chapters in the Old Testament and one in the New. But when you are reading for nourishment or planning to study, use the Recovery Version.

We have done the studying for you. Many times I have spent a whole day researching a single word. In spite of my having studied for so many years, there are still cases when I have to delve into the meaning of a certain word. I check the concordance, the lexicons, and the expository books. I look up how the word is translated in the forty or more English versions. There are many interpretations of the same word. It requires much prayer and much discernment to make a final decision as to how to translate that word in our Recovery Version. You can see how much labor is involved.

When you want to study Romans, for example, you simply use the Recovery Version along with the footnotes and Life-studies. This will save you time and keep you from being sidetracked. It will probably be another five years before we finish all the New Testament books. Meanwhile, study the ones we have already printed.

USING YOUR SPARE TIME TO READ THE MINISTRY BOOKS

I was happy to hear that some of you have a plan of study. In addition to reading through the Bible every year and studying it with the help of the Recovery Version and Life-study messages, I would encourage you to read the books written by Brother Nee, read the back issues of *The Stream* magazine,

and read the other books that we have published. This is a good program for the young people to follow.

Build up a habit of reading. Be sure that you have all the ministry books in your home. Whenever you have a few minutes, pick up one of the books and read. The English is quite simple, so you can read quite a few pages in a short time. There is no need to study these books; even going over them quickly will benefit you. The same is true of the Life-study messages. Simply read them in a smooth, flowing way; studying them may even be a frustration. As you take a few, spare minutes throughout the day to read even a few pages in a quick way, light will come. This reading is your entertainment; it is far better for you than television.

Everyone of us must be taught and trained to be a spokesman for God. Then we will all be His sent ones, prophesying, evangelizing, and shepherding and teaching. The Lord's recovery is to deliver us from the clergy-laity system, hierarchy and rank, and all the other traditions of today's Christianity. Pray about this. Make it your goal to be fresh in this heavenly vision.

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

THE ALL-INCLUSIVE GOSPEL

Scripture Reading: John 1:1, 4, 11, 16; 4:14; 5:24; 6:57, 63; 7:37-38; 14:16, 23; 15:1, 3-5, 7-8; 17:1, 17; 20:22; 2 Cor. 3:17; Rev. 19:13

I would like to preach the gospel to you, as it is given in the Gospel of John.

OUR SHALLOW UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL

Our general understanding of the gospel is too limited. Yes, the gospel does include the matter of sin, for 1:29 tells us, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” This verse implies Christ’s death, for that was the means by which He took away our sins. We may infer from 19:30 and 34 also that dealing with sin is included in the gospel.

The love of God is also included in this gospel, as we well know from 3:16: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that everyone who believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life.”

We were pitiful sinners, but the Son of God loved us and died on the cross for our sins. If we believe in Him, we are saved, and when we die, we will go to heaven. This is what we usually consider the gospel, but I must tell you that the concept of going to heaven is not to be found in the Gospel of John. Yes, this thought may be hinted at in other verses, but going to heaven, to tell the truth, is not the main item of the gospel.

JOHN’S GOSPEL

In the twenty-one chapters of John we have the gospel. If we begin with the first verse, we can see clearly that the first item is not sin: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Verse 4 says further, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” Have you ever regarded this as the gospel? Consider John 15: “I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman...I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit...You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and I set you that you should go forth and bear fruit and that your

fruit should remain” (vv. 1, 5, 16). These verses too are part of the gospel. John 17, the deepest, highest prayer of the Lord Jesus, is also part of the gospel: “These things Jesus spoke, and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You...Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (vv. 1, 17). We have considered passages like this as deeper truths for the edification of the saints, not as part of the gospel to be preached to unbelievers.

We surely need a new view of the gospel. You may say that these passages we have referred to are too difficult for unbelievers to grasp. You may think that even those who have been in the church life a long time do not really understand them. If this is your opinion, you are deceived. It may be that the saints, even the elders, find such verses hard to comprehend, but that is because your eyes are clouded, and you already have the concept that these matters are too profound to be understood. You are deceived because of your prejudice.

Our idea of how to preach the gospel is to tell sinners things that they can easily follow. We tell them that they are sinners, and then we apply the point by saying that they have stolen from others. We warn them about the eternal fire burning in hell and urge them to choose heaven, where the streets are of gold, a wonderful tree grows, a river flows, and there are mansions. This kind of preaching appeals to our natural concept. If this is our approach, we have no need to depend on the Spirit.

BELIEVING BECAUSE OF THE SPIRIT

If, however, we preach the biblical gospel, as found in John, we are surely constrained to put our trust in the Spirit. “Lord, if You do not open people’s eyes, if You as the life-giving Spirit do not work deep within their hearts, no one will follow; even I will not understand.” The result will be that many will understand and believe. The truth is that we do not believe because we understand. When we hear the gospel, we have no choice but to believe. It was foolish to believe, but we could not help it. When unbelievers hear about the Word that was in the beginning, the Word that was with God and that was God, they will believe and find themselves praising God. They will praise Him for this One called the Word; they do not know who He is, but they believe He is God.

PREACHING JOHN'S GOSPEL

Try preaching what you know others cannot understand. Will you be foolish enough to do this? Will you practice on your parents? Do not preach about nuclear science. Preach from the Gospel of John. Tell your relatives, "So-and-so, I would like to tell you that the Lord Jesus is a vine. I am one of the branches. You are not one yet, but I hope that after we talk together, you will be." Believe me, you will find a response. That one will say, "Oh, I would like to be a branch like you. How does it happen?"

Then what will you say? How will you proceed? I hope you will not start telling him that he is a sinner and needs to confess the things he has stolen, and then that he needs to pray for the Lord Jesus to come into his heart. Of course, if the Holy Spirit so leads you, that is all right. But many times that is simply your routine way of handling people. You need to answer according to the instant leading you have for each time, not according to the method you have devised.

The Holy Spirit may lead you to answer like this: "Look at John 1:16. It says, 'Of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.' So-and-so, you have to receive something of the Lord. This is the way for you to become a branch." Do not think he will not understand. If you follow the Spirit and the Spirit works with you, he will understand. Your preaching of the gospel must no longer be natural, superficial, shallow, and low.

Receiving

Have you yourself received of the fullness of Christ? Surely you will answer yes. But how much have you received? Christ is universally wide. An ocean is too small a measure to use in describing His fullness. His dimensions are those of the universe. Who can measure their breadth, length, height, and depth? Have you received only a drop, or a cup, or a pitcherful of His fullness?

Your receiving must continue daily, hourly, and minute by minute. The fullness of Christ is so vast that your receiving cannot be once for all; it must be grace upon grace.

Abiding

Are you abiding in Christ right now? While you are in the meeting, it is easy to abide, but were you abiding this morning at the breakfast table? When you return home after the meeting, are you still abiding? I would like to help you abide by preaching the gospel of abiding to you.

The Lord said, “Abide in Me and I in you” (15:4). Then in verse 7 He said, “If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you.” Is the Lord abiding in you? Do you have His words abiding in you? I am preaching the gospel to you! Christ, the infinite God, is the vine. You and I are His branches. We are branches of the infinite God. We can abide in Him, and He can abide in us, making us one with Him. Hallelujah for the gospel! We are the branches of Christ. Even among us in the Lord’s recovery, very few have entered into this gospel.

Drinking

The gospel also includes this verse: “He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water” (7:38). The Lord Jesus invited all those who were thirsty to come to Him and drink (v. 37). Rivers of living water should flow from you. How many rivers do you have flowing out of your inner being? Do you have a river of peace? of love? of power? of holiness? of humility? of kindness? If you sense a lack of rivers flowing from you, it indicates that you are not drinking sufficiently. You need to drink more of Him.

Christ Our Home

Part of the gospel is also found in John 14:23: “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him.” Do you love the Lord? Do you keep His word? Do you have Him coming to you and making His abode with you? The thought here is mutual: we become His abode, and He becomes ours. You have an abode; you are not homeless. Who is your home? Christ!

I wish I could preach the gospel of John to you in every meeting for a year. I think I would not even be finished after a year.

ENJOYING THE RICH GOSPEL

How can we constantly enjoy this profound, rich gospel? We can find out right in this Gospel of John.

The Word and the Spirit

Notice how many times the Word is mentioned. In chapter 1 the Word was in the beginning and was God. In chapter 15 the words of Christ are to abide in us; His word has cleansed us. We are to love Him and keep His word (14:23). Those who hear His word have eternal life (5:24). The Father's word is the truth that sanctifies (17:17).

Reference is also made again and again to the Spirit. "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (6:63). "He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever, even the Spirit of reality...you know Him, because He abides with you and shall be in you" (14:16-17).

The Word and the Spirit are crucial matters. For too long we have neglected them. We may come to the meetings, but we have not given our attention to the Word. We may pray, but we have not sufficiently regarded the Spirit. We must come back to care for both the Word and the Spirit.

The New Testament makes it clear that today the Lord is both the Word and the Spirit. "The Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17). "His name is called the Word of God" (Rev. 19:13). The Word is also the Spirit (cf. John 6:63). These three are one. All three are also life. The Lord, the Word, and the Spirit are all life. Thus, all these four are one.

The Word today is also the Bible in our hand. Outside us we have the Word. Within us is this Spirit. These two, the Spirit and the Word, are the two wires that transmit the heavenly electricity from the power plant into the building.

Open up the Bible. Open your eyes to read it. Understand it and love it. Combine this with praying. In this way you will be mingling the Word with the Spirit, thus transmitting Christ into you. You will be receiving of His fullness, grace upon grace.

Practice going to the Word throughout the day, snatching a few minutes here and there. It is in the Bible that you meet God, Christ, and the Spirit. Here is life, light, and love. Learn to open your whole being when you turn to

the Word. Open your eyes to see, your mind to understand, your heart to love, and your spirit to pray and realize. This practice will bring you the Word with the Spirit. The result of thus sowing the seed into the soil is that life will spring up. Life will come forth from you.

Drinking, Eating, and Breathing

We have not exhausted this gospel. Every line and every word of the book of John is part of the rich gospel. Just consider two short clauses. John 1:11 says, “He came,” and 1:16 says, “We have all received.” The matter of His coming is an important part of the gospel. He came by way of incarnation. His coming has been accomplished. What about our receiving? It is a continual matter. We receive by eating, drinking, and breathing. This is the way we receive Christ into us. It is an organic, metabolic matter, different from the way we would receive a book that was handed to us. Such an organic receiving strengthens, transforms, and changes us.

Drinking, eating, and breathing, as the way to receive Christ into us, are all covered in the Gospel of John. Drinking is mentioned in 4:14: “Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever.” John 7:37 says further, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.” Eating is covered in chapter 6; for example, verse 57 says, “He who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me.” Then breathing comes up in 20:22, where “He breathed into them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit.”

If we take Christ into us by these means, we will be receiving of the fullness of this all-inclusive One. We need to be filled with this gospel. If we equip and arm ourselves with it, we will all be able to teach and preach and even live out this gospel. Then the church life will be strong.

STRENGTHENING THE CHURCH LIFE

In the matter of taking care of the church life, it is easy to be concerned with the kind of meeting we should have. I would like to remind you that a particular kind of meeting in itself will not strengthen the church life. If we feel that the church meetings are weak, it is not that the way of meeting is wrong. The lack is with the drinking, eating, and breathing of the Lord Jesus, as revealed in the Gospel of John. Let us come back to this book and learn to

drink adequately, to eat richly, and to breathe prevailingly. Then the church will be strong and shining.

CHAPTER FIFTY

LIVING BY CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:27; 2:16-17; 3:4, 10-11; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21a

THE HEART OF THE BIBLE

Of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, four may be considered as its heart. The heart is crucial. You may lose a finger or even your nose and still survive, but without your heart you are finished. What books in the New Testament would you say are the most vital? Over these many years I have worn out several Bibles through using them so much. Even so, the pages of many of the books were not worn out. But the pages of four books in those Bibles soon showed signs of wear. Even the Bible I am using now has these same pages well worn. If you check the Bibles of seeking Christians, I believe you will find these very pages also worn.

These books are Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. They are really the heart of the whole Bible, not just of the New Testament. Their theme is Christ and the church.

Galatians reveals that Christ stands in opposition to religion, even the Jewish religion, which was set up according to the commandments and ordinances given by God. Christ is on one side, and the Jewish religion and its law are on the other. Surely the Jewish religion was the highest; no heathen religion could compare with it. Yet Christ stands against it.

Christ versus Greek philosophy is the message of Colossians. When Colossians was written, the Mediterranean world was ruled by Rome. Roman politics and law prevailed. What attracted people of that day were the Jewish religion and Greek philosophy. Even in today's modern Western culture, these three components prevail: Roman politics and government, the Hebrew religion, and Greek philosophy. The philosophy dealt with in Colossians was Gnosticism, which included, besides Greek philosophy, elements of Egyptian, Babylonian, and Persian philosophies.

Religion and philosophy are culture's highest inventions. Without them mankind would be wild, barbaric. Men would be like the Scythians (3:11), who were considered the most barbaric of people, lacking any semblance of religion or philosophy. Human culture rests largely on these two things. Because of them the fallen race is kept under constraint and has a good appearance. But these two books make clear that Christ stands against both religion and philosophy. However good these are, they are no match for Christ. He is far above them.

The message of Philippians is, "To me, to live is Christ" (1:21). This Christ, who stands in opposition to the highest human attainments, is our life. We are not religious people or philosophical people; we are Christians, "Christ people." A Christian has Christ within and lives Him out.

The result of this Christ living in us, as opposed to religion and philosophy, is the church, the theme of Ephesians. The church is Christ, opposing religion and philosophy and being lived out of His people. This Christ within and among His people is God revealed, the heart of the divine revelation.

THE NEED TO LIVE CHRIST

In these recent months the churches have been brought back to the Word and to prayer. I believe also that the churches are seeking to live Christ, a life that builds up the church. We thank the Lord for this. The messages that have been given on the book of Philippians have greatly helped the churches. The same is true of the messages given in the trainings on Ephesians. Yet not too long ago the Lord rebuked me. He pointed out what a lack there is of Christ in the churches. Christ is not practically lived out in the church life. As I knelt there before Him, I took the lead to confess my shortage of Christ. May the Lord reveal to us how we lack the practical living by Christ. I was not rebuked for raw sins or worldliness; by His mercy and grace I can testify that these things do not touch me. But the Lord said, "You may not be worldly or immoral, but how much Christ do you live?" I had to confess that it is very little.

I believe that most of you also can say that you do not easily fall into rough sins or worldliness. Such things have little appeal for you. But in your daily walk, how much of Christ has been wrought into you? Your policy is to behave properly. You feel condemned if you tell a lie, for example. But do you ever

feel condemned that you have not lived Christ? If you act properly, you have no sense of condemnation. This indicates that unknowingly you are paying attention to ethics and morality, caring for human virtues.

NOT GOOD BEHAVIOR

Occasionally, I take a look at my diary. A number of times I have recorded that I did not do well in something or that I was wrong or that I was mistaken. But rarely does an entry say, “Today I was short of Christ.” Does not this indicate how much I cared for good behavior?

Our attention is on virtuous behavior. When we are proud, we regret that we lack humility. But when we treat others kindly, we may be short of Christ. We may be prompted by our natural love. We are in naturalness. It is possible for us to live a life that expresses the human virtues, like kindness and consideration of others, but to live by Christ is foreign to us.

Why is it so hard for us to live out Christ? Even back in 1970 we heard many messages on Christ being our life and on taking Him as our person. Those messages were well received by the saints, and a number of hymns were written on taking Christ as our person. But the messages have become a faded memory, and we are left with only the doctrine and some hymns.

PRESERVED IN CHRIST BY PRAYER

Many times you have had the experience, while praying, of praying yourself into the spirit. At these times you were taking Christ as your person. At such times of prayer, when you were one with the Lord, taking Him as your life, you wanted to linger with Him, even to be raptured. But once that time was over, it seemed that you immediately slipped back into yourself.

It is because of this that the Word tells us to pray unceasingly (1 Thes. 5:17). Unceasing prayer is the only way for us to be preserved in Christ. I have tried other ways, like exercising faith, but from experience I can tell you that without praying we are outside of Christ; with prayer we are in Him.

THREE BASIC MATTERS

During these sixteen or so years that I have been in the United States, I have sought to impress you with three basic matters. I long for them to be wrought into your being.

The Life-giving Spirit

Our God today is the life-giving Spirit. First Corinthians 15:45 is an important verse in the Bible. Who is the last Adam? It is Christ, the very God who created all things; who became incarnate, confined in a carpenter's home in Nazareth for thirty years and then ministering for three and a half years; who entered into death and then into resurrection. In resurrection this One became a life-giving Spirit.

Now our God is no more just God, Elohim. He is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Not only so, but the Father, the Son, and the Spirit have become a life-giving Spirit. It is in this form that God reaches us. Colossians 1:27 speaks of "this mystery...which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." How could Christ be in us if God had not become a life-giving Spirit? If "Christ in you" is a fact, not just a motto, He must be the life-giving Spirit.

The life-giving Spirit is the reaching stage of the Triune God. As the Father He cannot reach us. Even as the Son He can only reach us outwardly. But as the Spirit He can enter into us. Most Christians have no understanding or appreciation of this. Even we in the recovery, who have heard so many messages on this very subject, have very little realization in our daily walk that our God today is a processed God. The processed God is now within us as the life-giving Spirit. This is not only a fact but also a key factor in our Christian life.

A Regenerated Spirit

God created us with a spirit, but this spirit was deadened. Then God came in and regenerated it with His divine life. We are not animals without a spirit, nor are we only humans with a deadened spirit. We are those whose spirit has been regenerated with the element of the divine life. This is the second factor in our Christian life.

Your enlivened spirit is not merely a *fact* for you to believe. It may be a fact, for example, that you have a large bank account. But nonetheless you may be

walking the streets as a beggar. When your bank account becomes a *factor* in your daily living, you will begin to write checks and draw upon the money you have. Is it only a fact to you that your God is a processed God and is now the life-giving Spirit in your spirit? Is it only a fact to you that your spirit is no longer deadened but rather regenerated with the divine life? These facts are hardly known among general Christians. But for you in the Lord's recovery, who know the facts, they still affect you very little. Otherwise, you would be writing checks and enjoying your riches!

Walking according to the Spirit

If you read through your Bible, going on from the Old Testament through to the end of the New Testament, you will see that the Lord's ultimate charge to you is not that you follow laws or teachings but that you walk according to the spirit (Rom. 8:4). The word translated "spirit" in Romans 8:4, and in several other verses in Romans 8, presents a problem to translators. It is hard to decide whether to regard *spirit* as referring to the Holy Spirit and capitalize it or to consider that it is the human spirit and not capitalize it. The spirit here refers to the mingled spirit, our spirit mingled with the Holy Spirit. We need another size letter to denote this, neither a capital letter nor a small one. These two spirits, the divine and the human, have become one (1 Cor. 6:17; 2 Tim. 4:22; 2 Cor. 3:17).

Walking according to this mingled spirit is the third factor in our Christian life. To walk means to live, to act, or to have one's being. We must live and act and have our being not according to the Ten Commandments or the so-called Sermon on the Mount or some doctrines but according to the mingled spirit.

Practice walking this way. Every day, from morning till evening, cease from your doing and seek to constantly remain in this mingled spirit.

MORALITY VERSUS THE MINGLED SPIRIT

In 1933 I began to make a clearance of my past. I made restitution to people whom I had wronged. Once that was over, I made up my mind never to do wrong again. This I tried to keep up for about two and a half years. It was hard not to be wrong! I remember sharing a room with a brother during a retreat. As hard as I tried, I found myself doing one thing after another that offended him. I spilled some water on his bed and apologized. Then I said

something not accurate, and I had to confess that to him. Then I felt my apology was insincere. I seemed to be continually under condemnation.

Now, however, it is no longer my aim to not make mistakes. Every day, early in the morning, my first prayer is, “Lord, grant me the mercy that I may live Your life. I want to be one with You in spirit. May I have my whole being in the mingled spirit.” The result has been that a number of times I have had to confess to the Lord, “I have not done this according to the spirit...What I said to the elders was not according to the spirit.” There may have been nothing outwardly wrong, but nonetheless it was not according to the spirit.

We are used to living according to our natural life. We are under the influence of morality. If we lie, we feel condemned. But if we do or say something without Christ, we have no sense of condemnation. We may not do wrong, but in God’s eyes we lack Christ in our doing or in our speaking.

THE ULTIMATE COMMANDMENT

Actually, to lack Christ is sin. The consummate commandment in the whole Bible is that we walk according to spirit. Is it not a sin to break this commandment? We may have done many moral, virtuous things but without Christ. It is this failure that weakens the church life. A normal, rich church life is evident only when Christ is lived out by us.

Let us practice living by Christ and taking Him as our life and person. Whether we are at home with our family or at work or at school, in all our contacts and in all our living, let us have every part of our being according to the spirit. To allow Christ to thus live Himself out from within us is the Christian life. Then it will be our experience that we have been crucified with Christ and that it is no longer I but Christ who lives in me (Gal. 2:20). We will be able to say truthfully, “To me, to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21).

Walking according to the spirit is the building factor of the church life. It will make the churches rich and glorious. Live by Him.

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

TAKING CHRIST AS LIFE

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:27; 2:2, 15-17; 3:4, 10-11, 16; Eph. 6:16-18; John 6:63; 16:8-9

GOD'S ECONOMY

In the universe there are three parties—God, man, and Satan. Satan, under God's sovereignty, is the negative party. The other two parties, God and man, should be identical. But when man fell, he took a direction other than God's. This was the beginning of the discrepancy between God's economy and man's concepts.

The matter of God's economy is foreign to most Christians. This term *economy*, anglicized from the Greek, is not easy to define. The meaning in Greek is "a dispensing," or "an administration for dispensing." God's economy is to dispense Himself into His chosen people. That God would dispense Himself into man, and that certain ones would be the recipients of His dispensing, was not a decision made in response to conditions that were going on in time. It was not accidental, nor was it determined by circumstances. Rather, it was purposed by Him in eternity past and pertains also to eternity future.

This matter of God's economy is made abundantly clear in the four books that form the heart of the New Testament—Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. I hope you will prize these books, even unto the New Jerusalem! In Ephesians, for example, the Greek word is used in 1:10 and 3:9, where it is translated "economy," and in 3:2, where it is translated "stewardship." In Colossians 1:25 it is also translated "stewardship."

ORGANIC

God dispenses Himself into us organically. The life He imparts to us is not like a set of dentures, which may be worn year after year without ever becoming part of us. His dispensing is more like the grafting of one piece of

skin on another. The two pieces grow together and within a short time cannot be separated. They have become organically joined and share a common life.

God is life. Life is organic. The Bible tells us that God created man in His image (Gen. 1:26). Man was created in God's image so that He and man could be organically one. It is not like the kind of oneness formed by putting several volumes of a book next to each other. It is rather the growing together of two like entities. You may argue that the divine life and the human life are not like entities. There is some truth to this: one is human, and the other is divine. But for man to be in God's image means that the function of both lives is the same.

Our relationship to God is likened to grafting in Romans 11:17, 19, 23, and 24. We are the branches grafted into the olive tree. Two pieces of dry wood cannot be grafted together; they would have to be joined inorganically by a carpenter. Only a living branch and a living tree can be grafted together. Grafting is an organic process.

The Christian life is a hybrid life; that is, it is the product, or result, of the blending of two different lives. We were born human, but in our second birth we were born of God (John 1:13). By the new birth the divine life has been imparted into us. As sons of God, we are divine dignitaries! It is not a small thing for anyone to harm us. We are divinely human and humanly divine. Our life has been grafted into God. He is working Himself into us organically.

John 15 clearly pictures this organic relationship. The vine and the branches are not united by a carpenter's hammer. The branches are not like dentures artificially held in place. We are the branches of God, organically one with Him. We are part of God, just as my arm is part of me. Some may say that this is heretical teaching; such ones are in darkness. If we are in the light, we will see and rejoice that as the branches of Christ, we are part of Him organically; we are organically joined to God. This is His economy.

THE SOURCE OF OUR CONCEPTS

However, we have our own ideas. Where have all our concepts come from? We are buried in the deep, dark tomb of our concepts.

The Fall

Our concepts are first the result of the fall. God's intention was that the man He had created should partake of the tree of life. This was to be man's life supply. God warned man not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; if he did, he would surely die (Gen. 2:17). Man disobeyed and thus fell. He rejected the tree of life and chose the tree of knowledge. This tree of knowledge became a tomb, where man today is still buried.

Culture

Culture arose after the fall. Genesis 4:17-24 describes its beginnings in the inventions that were made. Culture is not from the tree of life. Its source is the tomb of knowledge. Our concepts are rooted in our culture. Some are based on our national origins. Some are from the past; others are modern.

Religion, Philosophy, and Ethics

Religion, philosophy, and ethics have all influenced our concepts. Religion, especially Judaism, appeals to the Jewish mentality. To the Greeks, philosophy is what matters. To the Chinese, ethical behavior is all-important. In fact, all of us have the desire for good behavior deeply rooted in our concepts. The concepts we have taken from religion, philosophy, and ethics are a hindrance to our initial receiving of the Lord and then to our living by Him.

Human Virtues

Within all human beings there is the thought of being virtuous. We like to be thought of as kind and generous. We like to have a reputation for being mild mannered and patient. We like to give the impression that we are pleasant and gracious. Wherever I have been—in many different parts of the world—I have found this same aspiration in people.

Spiritual Aspirations

The spiritual seeking of Christians is in this same realm. First they seek for salvation; then they strive for victory over sin, the world, and the flesh. The only interest of such Christians is in being spiritual.

A BURIAL TOMB

These are the seven layers of the tomb in which we are buried: the fall, culture, religion, philosophy, ethics, individual virtues, and spiritual seeking. The reason it is hard for us to live by Christ is that most of us still remain in this tomb. We have no condemnation for the good things of our culture. We respect religion. We admire philosophical thought. We justify ethics. We appreciate human virtues. We are impressed by people with a spiritual air about them, who are seeking to live a holy life; we do not realize that while they are caring for their spirituality and personal holiness but disregarding the church, they are still buried in the tomb of concepts.

NO PLACE FOR OUR CONCEPTS

In God's economy there is no place for religion or ethical behavior or human virtues. God's concern is only for Christ. He wants Christ expressed in us, not human virtues. But the thought of living by Christ does not have much meaning for us. We have no idea, or very little idea, of what it means.

Consider these verses in John 16 about the Holy Spirit: "When He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and concerning righteousness and concerning judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe into Me" (vv. 8-9). The Holy Spirit will convict the world concerning sin. How sinful the world is! There is robbery, murder, and fornication. Surely, the world will be convicted for this. But, no. The Lord said the conviction for sin is "because they do not believe into Me." In the New Testament economy the first commandment given by God is that we believe in the Lord Jesus. To break this commandment is sin. Those who perish do so not because of committing robbery or fornication but because of unbelief.

The universe is God's, not ours. He is the Administrator. To disobey His commandment that we believe in His Son is rebellion. Whether we are a gentleman or a bank robber, God's commandment is that we believe in His Son. In Moses' time there were ten commandments, but now there is only one. To refuse to believe in the Son is the sin for which mankind will perish.

Many Jewish people think that they are worshipping God. They do their best to live by the Ten Commandments. But they do not know that in the New Testament economy, God has given a new, different commandment. Because they will not believe in Christ, they are guilty of rebellion.

After we are saved, God gives us another commandment: walk according to the spirit. But instead of heeding this basic commandment, we pay attention to the exhortations that suit our natural mentality. We try to love our wives or submit to our husbands, but exhortations like these are not basic.

If we are not saved, God's commandment is that we believe in His Son. Once we are saved, He commands that we walk according to the spirit. We can all experience that by our believing in the Lord Jesus we inherit all things. Holiness, victory, spirituality, and every spiritual blessing become ours.

Seek Christ. Do not seek spirituality. To seek anything other than Him is to miss God's economy. Paul wrote to the Galatians because they had been distracted from Christ by the Jewish religion. He wrote to the Colossians because they had been distracted from Christ by Gnosticism, including Jewish and heathen philosophies.

CHRIST BEING A MYSTERY

Christ is presented to the Colossians as a mystery. Colossians 1:27 refers to "this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." A mystery is a secret. Christ is the secret of the gospel. Strange as it may sound, the gospel is not merely for salvation. The gospel is for Christ. He is its center and reality. When we receive the gospel, we of course participate in God's salvation, but that is only an issue; it is not basic. Christ Himself is what is basic to the gospel.

In Colossians 2:2 Christ is called the mystery of God. God Himself is a mystery. Christ is the mystery of this mystery. He is the secret of this mystery. Then in verses 16 and 17 Paul goes on to point out how the Colossians had been influenced by the Judaizers in their eating, drinking, feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths. All these things—whether daily, yearly, monthly, or weekly—"are a shadow of the things to come." The light may cause a table, for example, to cast a shadow, but that shadow is not the body of the table. Paul says that their practices under the Levitical law were all shadows, "but the body is of Christ." How sad for the Colossians to miss the body and care for shadows!

Christ is the body. In other words, Christ is the real food, the real drink, the real Sabbath, the real new moon, and the real feast. He is the reality of everything positive.

CHRIST BEING ALL AND IN ALL

In Colossians 3:4 Christ is called “our life.” This mystery of God, the body of all positive things, is to be our life. In the new man “there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all” (v. 11). In the new man there is no room for you or me. Christ is all; He is each one of us. The only person in the new man is Christ.

THE WORD OF CHRIST

How can we contact Christ? In this book of Colossians Paul does not deal with the matter of the Spirit. After revealing Christ as the mystery of God, as the body of all positive things, and as all in all to the new man, Paul exhorts the Colossians, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (3:16). The thought in this verse is that the word of Christ should have a house, or dwelling place, in us, “in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God.”

We must take in the word of Christ but not as knowledge. Christ said in John 6:63, “The words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.” We must take this word in as life.

We must also take the Word in “by means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit” (Eph. 6:18).

God wants you to take Him as your life. He wants you to live by Him. Forget your culture, your philosophy, your ethics, and your spiritual seeking. Live by Christ. When you see this as a vision, you will condemn even your best virtues. You will fear your virtues more than your sins. You will realize that expressing your virtues is a rebellion against God’s administration. You will not sanction anything but Christ. You will have no way but this narrow way of Christ.

This is the testimony, Christ Himself. Spending time in the Word is not the testimony. Nor is fellowship. Even the church life without Christ is not the testimony. Only Christ living in us and lived out of us is the testimony.

CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

HOW TO ABIDE IN CHRIST

Scripture Reading: John 1:12-13; 3:5-6; 4:24; 6:63; 14:17-20, 23; 15:1, 4-5, 7-8; 20:22

RECEIVING CHRIST

The Gospel of John, especially in the verses given above, answers the question of how to abide in Christ. In 1:12-13 there is the matter of receiving Him: “As many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those who believe into His name, who were begotten...of God.” Have you received Him? Sometimes doubts come in after we are saved. Suppose, however, I ask you where you got your Bible. You will have no trouble telling me exactly where and how and when you received it. With the matter of receiving Christ, it may be more difficult to give a clear answer. John 1:12 can resolve this uncertainty for you. Receiving Him means believing into His name. When did you receive Christ? It was when you believed into His name. How did you receive Him? It was also by believing into His name.

BEING BORN FROM ABOVE

Verse 13 goes on to say that we were born of God. This is not a human birth, making us a certain nationality. Those who have never experienced the new birth find such a term incomprehensible. Even many Christians are not thoroughly clear about the divine birth. We all need to see that besides our first birth into the kingdom of men, we have had another birth into the kingdom of God.

In regeneration we were born of God with the divine life and nature. In John 3 the matter of the new birth comes up again. The Greek term is properly rendered “born anew” or “born from above,” not “born again.” We have not only had an earthly birth; we have also been born from the heavens.

TWO SPIRITS

John 3:6 says, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” This birth from above involves two spirits, the divine and the human. The new birth is by the divine Spirit in our human spirit. In this birth two spirits meet.

In John 4 there is another matter involving the two spirits. Verse 24 says, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truthfulness.” The proper worship is to worship the Spirit in our spirit.

SEEKING AN ANSWER

Our topic in this chapter is “How to Abide in Christ.” It is this book of John that gives us the key. While chapter 15 is the central chapter on this, the surrounding chapters are all related to it. For many years I did not realize this. As a young man seeking after the Lord, I surely loved the word in John 15 on abiding. But I kept wondering how to do it.

THE KEY FOUND IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Our efforts to abide in Christ seemed always to end in failure. Because of such frustration, we were compelled to spend more time in the Gospel of John. In order to uncover the secret of abiding, which is revealed in the middle of this book, we thought that we should follow the principle of studying the whole book thoroughly. This we did.

To abide in Christ, then, begins with the divine birth in chapter 1. Chapter 3 goes on to tell us that this birth from above involves two spirits. The worship in John 4, of the Spirit by the human spirit, also involves the two spirits.

In 6:63 John proceeds from the two spirits to the word. “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.” Abiding is not merely a matter of the Spirit; the word is also involved. The Greek here is the instant, practical, present word of the Lord.

In chapter 14 the Lord and His disciples were together when suddenly He told them that He was going away. He told them not to be sad, that by His leaving, another Comforter could come. He was implying that however wonderful His presence with them was, He could only be among them, not within them. But when the other Comforter came, He “shall be in you” (v. 17).

This other Comforter would be none other than Himself as the Spirit of reality. That is why He said in the next verse, “I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you” (v. 18). As the Spirit He could be not only with them but also in them: “In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you” (v. 20).

Notice 14:23: “Jesus answered and said to him, If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him.” This word *abode* is the noun form of *abide*. The Father and Son will come to the one who loves Them not only for a visit but to make an abode. This abode is mutual. They will abide in him, and he will abide in Them. The abiding in chapter 15 comes from the abode, or mutual abiding place, in 14:23.

I trust you are beginning to see that to understand the matter of abiding in Christ, you need the whole Gospel of John.

CHRIST IN ANOTHER FORM

Chapter 1 tells us that Christ as God took on human form (v. 14), but when we meet Him at the end of the Gospel, He has another form, that of the Spirit. In the evening of the day He was resurrected, He came to where the disciples were meeting and stood in their midst (20:19). How did He get into the room when the doors were shut? No one opened the door for Him, but suddenly He was there. He talked to the disciples, showed them His hands and side, and even breathed into them, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (vv. 20-22). In so doing He was breathing Himself into them as the life-giving Spirit. By inhaling the holy breath (*spirit* and *breath* are the same word in the Greek), the disciples were receiving Christ as the Spirit into them. After this meeting with the disciples, there is no record in John that the Lord left. From this point on, He was in them, no longer just among them. He had fulfilled His promise to return as the Comforter and abide in them.

How can we be branches in the vine? How can we abide in Him and have Him abide in us? For many years I could not figure this out, until one day I saw that as the life-giving Spirit He had entered into my spirit, just to be one with me. I am one with Him not in my mind, emotion, or will but in my spirit.

Today the Lord is no more only Jesus in the flesh. He is now the life-giving Spirit. Concerning His exaltation, He is at the Father's right hand as Lord of all (Acts 2:32-36). But concerning His indwelling, He is within us as the life-giving Spirit. Because He is in our spirit, we are one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). This one spirit is the vine. These two spirits are one in the divine life and one in the divine nature.

If you see this, there is only one more thing I need to mention, and that is how to abide in Him. There is no need for you to do anything except abide.

THE ABSENCE OF FEELING

I would like to tell you the secret of abiding. This is based upon my experience, not on the black and white pages of the Bible. Matters concerning life are not characterized by feeling. If you have a stomachache, you know something is wrong. If you have a pain in the chest, you need to see a doctor. When you are in good health, however, you are not conscious of any particular feeling. The same is true when you are abiding. As soon as you are not abiding in Christ, you are aware of it. If you criticize a brother, you know deep within that you are not abiding. Even in a small matter, like smiling a little, you may sense that you are not abiding. You may say yes to a question and sense that your answer was a political one, spoken apart from the abiding.

When you find yourself in a difficult situation, do not react. If you feel that you are not abiding in Christ, do not say anything. If your wife starts an argument with you and you feel that you are not abiding, do not answer or even look at her. Do not even pray. Let her keep talking. Do not say, "Praise the Lord!" That would be coming from your flesh and would only further aggravate her. Practicing not to do anything is the negative secret of abiding in the Lord.

If you feel drawn to love something apart from the abiding, refrain from loving it, and instead pray, "Lord, I turn away from whatever does not come from my abiding in You."

By this divine birth two spirits have been joined into one. The divine part within has the desire to worship the Father; the divine Spirit would worship by your human spirit. This divine part also loves and appreciates the words

spoken by the Lord, His instant practical speaking. This divine part further tells you that the Father and the Son are making an abode with you and that you are abiding in Him. Whenever you sense within that you are not abiding, say, “Lord, forgive me and cleanse me. I do not want to be out of the abiding. I want to stay in You all the time.”

In this abiding we pray without ceasing. Our prayer while we are abiding is simply our spontaneous trust in the Lord.

SIGNS OF ABIDING

How many of you will practice this? Those who do will find that they are in practice one with the Lord. They are one in the mingled spirit. At times they will not say even a word. They will not take any action. They will not express an opinion. They simply remain in the spirit that involves the two spirits. In this abiding they have holiness; victory over sin, the world, Satan, the flesh, and the self; spirituality; the actuality of being a member of the Body of Christ; the normal Christian life; and the proper church life. No problem remains, for they are one with the Son of God, who has conquered all the negative things. Instead of striving, they enjoy what He has accomplished. Their unceasing prayer is the expression of their constant trust in this living One who is now one spirit with them.

This should be the experience of all of us. I have tried various ways in the past to overcome sin and be victorious. Now we have learned that the secret of all the “hows” is in the abiding.

When we abide in this mingled spirit, every spiritual blessing is ours, because it is wrapped up in this dear One. In Him, this all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, is the processed God, the uplifted humanity, the all-inclusive death and resurrection, redemption, and ascension. Let us abide in Him and enjoy His all-inclusiveness.

LOVE AND VISION

To believe in the Lord is adequate for us to have the divine birth, but to enjoy the divine birth by abiding, we need to love Him. The Gospel of John first tells us to believe into Him, then to love Him. “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and

make an abode with him” (14:23). This making of the mutual abode depends upon a constant love on our part. On His side the love is always there.

Keep this vision always before you. Do not allow any veil to cover your eyes. Do not be sidetracked by the enemy. Do not say that you cannot stand a certain brother, that the church life is not so good in your locality, or that the recovery has gone downhill these past years. Any such remark will keep you out of the abiding. One complaint can cut your lifeline. To criticize or murmur is like slashing your wrists. Your life will ebb away. It is not for you to evaluate whether the church is high or low or whether the brothers are spiritual or fleshly. Your business is to abide in Him. If the church is really poor, by your abiding it will be uplifted and enriched. The remedy for the church comes from the abiding.

Stay in this divine place, involving the two spirits. Worship here. Receive the instant word of the Lord. As you live in Him and He dwells in you, there is a mutual abode. In this place you are holy. Your Christ will be no longer merely doctrinal. He will be your experience all the time. You will be able to testify that you are one with Him and He with you, even that you are abiding in this oneness.

I believe we have all experienced abiding in this way. The problem has been that we have not made it a constant matter. Now we must come to the place of constant abiding. The whole world will be under our feet. We will not utter a vain word. Whatever we are will be Christ. Whatever we do will be Christ. Whatever we say will be Christ. “To me, to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21) will be our testimony. Galatians 2:20 will be true of us—that we have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer we who live, but it is Christ who lives in us. It will be hard to distinguish whether this is He or we. We and He are one. This is the abiding. The Lord’s recovery needs this. There is the need of this abiding life so that the church life may be enriched.

CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

HOW TO LIVE BY CHRIST

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:17; 2 Tim. 4:22; Rom. 8:16, 2, 4, 6; Gal. 5:16, 25; John 6:57; 5:19a, 30

POSSIBLE!

To live by Christ is possible. Yet many Christians do not know this reality. Although the term *to live by Christ* sounds familiar to us because of our having heard it so much, it is nonetheless a great matter. How can we live by another? Humanly speaking, there is no possibility for a wife, for example, to live by her husband, or for a husband to live by his wife. The husband has his own life, and the wife has hers. There are two sets of emotions involved and two wills. In spite of this impossibility for two human beings, Christians can live by another life. To live by Christ means to live Christ. It is possible!

Galatians 2:20 is an oft-quoted verse: “I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” When it is true in our experience that it is “not I but Christ” who is living in us, then there are two persons living together but having only one life and one living.

How could there be only one living? Let us again use married life as an example. Even to decide how to spend a day together takes some negotiations. The husband may want to stay home, but the wife may want to go shopping. The husband may have to do some persuading to get his wife to stay home with him. It is hard for two persons to have only one living.

ONE LIFE AND ONE LIVING

To live by Christ means that the Christian and Christ have one life and one living. John 6:57 says, “As the living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me.” The words *because of* can also be translated “by.” The Father sent the Son, and the

Son was now living by the Father, so the one who ate the Son would also live by the Son.

The Father and the Son are two persons, yet They had but one life and one living. The Father was the life of the Son, and the Son was the living of the Father. *Life* refers to the inner substance, *living* to the outward expression. The Father was the living substance within, and the Son was the living expression of the Father.

John 14:10 says, “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works.” There was One on this earth who lived the life of another: the Son lived the Father’s life. The Son lived because the Father was living.

“NO LONGER...BUT”

Grafting illustrates these two lives. We were the wild olive branches, but we have been grafted into the best tree (Rom. 11:17, 24). We have not exchanged our poor life for a better one. Nor has our life been terminated, and only His is left. Yes, Galatians 2:20 says that we are crucified with Christ, but this termination is not final. Crucifixion is the threshold of resurrection. Crucifixion is followed by “no longer...but.” Where does this leave us? In the tomb or in resurrection? Dead or living? We live but not we. The words may sound illogical, but Christ and His members know the secret.

“NOTHING FROM HIMSELF”

When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He was a person of strong character. He had a distinct personality. His will was strong. His emotions were strong enough that He could weep. His mind was clear and sober. His words were eloquent. Yet this striking person said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, The Son can do nothing from Himself except what He sees the Father doing, for whatever that One does, these things the Son also does in like manner...I can do nothing from Myself” (John 5:19, 30). The Son lived by another person’s life. His own person was not His life. This One of such strong character did not live by Himself. He lived by the Father; He lived the Father. It was in this way that the Son expressed the Father. The Father’s life was revealed in the Son’s living.

GOD'S ONLY CONCERN

This is the principle that should govern our living also. We may have a strong character, but we must live by Him, not by ourselves. After I was saved, I began to seek after holiness. Because I am a quick person, I would easily lose my temper. I hated my hot temper and wanted desperately to be victorious over it. Now I have come to realize that God's intention is not for me to be victorious or spiritual. His intention is that I live Christ. My problem was not that I was defeated, natural, and unholy. It was that I was short of Christ. In Christ victory over everything is mine. Holiness and practical spirituality are mine.

God, even from eternity past, never had the concept of gaining a group of "holy" people. God is not concerned about your "holiness." If He wanted to, He could cure you of your temper without any effort on your part or on His.

What God wants is to have a people living by Christ so that they may be Christ's expression. There is a full picture of this in the Old Testament type of the tabernacle with the Ark. In the wilderness over two million Israelites went from place to place, carrying the tabernacle. They would reach a certain point and then encamp around that tabernacle. Day after day this was all that they did. They were victorious over their enemies. They had God with them in the pillar of fire by night and in the pillar of cloud by day. The tabernacle was God's testimony. When the children of Israel were right with the tabernacle, all went well. When they neglected it, they were carnal, worldly, and defeated.

Today all too many Christians are ignorant of this testimony. God wants us to live by another's life. He wants Christ to be our life, our love, our kindness, our righteousness, and our holiness. He does not want us to aspire after any thing; in Christ is all we need.

CHANGING OUR CONCEPTS

Yet you are concerned about losing your temper. You keep regretting that you have not kept your marriage vow to love your wife or to submit to your husband. How you need your concepts changed! For you to live is Christ, not spirituality. For you to live is Christ, not love for your wife or submission to your husband. Stop trying to be even-tempered. God does not care about your being delivered from your temper. A statue never loses its temper, however

much it is insulted. Do you think that God wants you to be like that? God wants you to be full of Christ. Even if you are a very hot-tempered person, you can still live Christ. What we need is what God wants—Christ. God wants Christ to be lived out of us.

There's a Man in the glory
Whose Life is for me.
His peace is abiding;
How patient is He!
He's joyful and radiant,
Expecting to see
His Life in the glory
Lived out in me.

(Hymns, #505)

God wants a people corporately living Christ. This vision, which was made so clear during the first ten years of the recovery in this country, must be recovered. May we all re-see the vision.

THE WAY PREPARED

God did many things to make it possible for us to live Christ. He had to create the heavens, the earth, and man. Then He Himself had to become incarnate. The infinite God lived in humanity for thirty-three and a half years. Then one day He went to the cross. God in the flesh entered into death by crucifixion. After death He entered into resurrection, ascension, enthronement, and glorification. Now our God has become the life-giving Spirit. He is ready to enter into all those who open up to believe in Him. “O God, I am a sinner. O Lord Jesus, You are My Savior. You died on the cross for me.” Whoever opens himself to this extent will have this life-giving One enter into his inmost part, his spirit. God comes into us with all His involvements and all His virtues.

His involvements include eternity, creation, incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, with the enthronement and the crowning. He is our God, our Redeemer, our Savior, our Lord, our Master, and our Father. He is the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit. His virtues include life, light, love, grace, truth, holiness, righteousness, victory, and humility.

This life-giving Spirit is in our spirit. The two spirits are mingled, making us one spirit with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17). In ourselves we are sinful and insignificant. We are nobodies in a vast universe. Yet we are one spirit with the Lord. This profound fact should be a factor affecting our living. Christ today is both in the heavens and in us, just as electricity is in the power plant and also in the building. He is prevailing in us because He is in the “power plant” of the heavens.

This is the message you need to tell people. You are the Lord’s spokesman to tell others that He is living, real, available, and within us. Have you ever told your parents this? You are silent and passive because you do not pray. Christ is living. Pray to Him. If you pray even for a half hour, you will see what happens. The motor within will start up.

“The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16). What a wonder that the divine Spirit is one with our human spirit!

WALKING ACCORDING TO SPIRIT

How can we live by Christ? It is simply by walking according to this mingled spirit that is within us (v. 4).

In Our Relationships with Others

Let me illustrate. Suppose two brothers come to me after they have had a disagreement. They tell me their story and want me to settle the problem. I can handle them in two ways. I can listen to them, trying to discern which one is right. I watch their eyes and their facial expressions to be sure they are not lying. If this is my way of dealing with people, I am living by myself; this is a human way. The other way is to listen while inwardly I am praying, “Lord, I would live by You. I have been crucified with You. Now You live in me. What would You say to these brothers? What do You realize concerning them? What would You do with them?” This constant, inward turning to the Lord is what is meant by praying unceasingly. Not only so, but I have my natural discernment, by which I could read their hearts. But I further say to the Lord, “Lord, I do not want to live by myself. I want to go by what You feel, what You discern, what You see. I want to say what You would say to them.”

Suppose, further, that while the brothers are talking to me, my temper is aroused by what they say. I am about to rebuke them, but I sense that I am not abiding in Christ. In this situation I do not do or say anything. Rather, within I pray, “Lord, forgive me. My natural man has come to the surface. Lord, cover me. Be my person. Be my life.”

After I have been listening to these two brothers in an attitude of prayer and oneness with the Lord, He will lead me to say a word to them. What it would be, I do not know. The Lord is living and flexible. Whatever He would say through me will be either light shining over them or life supplied to them within. The result will be that both of them are enlightened, nourished, and supplied with life.

In Our Family Life

Let us take another example. You come home from work exhausted after an eight-hour day. Your wife has been home taking care of all the children; she too is worn out. The stage is set for friction. If you walk in the door and do not say anything, she will be offended. She will want to know why you are so calm or what you are afraid of. If you walk in and say, “Praise the Lord!” that will offend her too. How come you had such a good day while she has been home suffering?

On the other hand, she on her part may be wondering how to greet you when you get home. She does not know if you will be in a good mood or depressed. This is a common situation we face all the time as human beings. How do we as Christians handle it? She should say, “Lord, thank You that You are with me. When my husband gets home, You have to be the One who meets him. Be the One who lives in me. I do not want to live myself. I want to live Your life. I want to express You in my living.”

There is no need to figure out how you will meet your husband or wife at the end of the day. Practice, rather, to live Christ. I have been doing so for many years. To tell the truth, it is not easy. We are buried under the layers of our culture, religion, and spiritual seeking. We must turn away from these distractions, no longer caring for religion, philosophy, ethics, and human virtues.

HELPED BY A GOOD ATMOSPHERE

Why do we need to fellowship with the Lord? Why do we need to have fellowship with the saints? Why do we need to come to the meetings? Why do we need to have the church life? All these things prepare a good environment for us to live Christ. If we want plants to grow, for example, they must have the proper soil, water, and light. With the right atmosphere, the plants will flourish. For our growth in Christ, for our help in living Christ, we need Bible reading, prayer, fellowship, and the meetings. With these providing the atmosphere, we are encouraged to remain in the spirit, contacting the Lord.

THROUGHOUT THE DAY

As you converse with Him and are open, prepared, and available, He will work in you, speaking and reacting. He will be living through you and expressing Himself through you. You and He, He and you, will have one life and one living. You will take Him as your life, and He will have you for His living. He is your life within; you are His living without.

This kind of life should not be occasional or accidental. This must be our regular life from morning until evening. Remain in Him. Do not be distracted by the mood of those around you. Keep focused on Him, conversing with Him. This is the Christian life.

THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES

Remember well that the basic revelation of the Scriptures is the Triune God dispensing Himself into the tripartite man so that He may be man's life and that man may be His living as His corporate expression. This is the vine and the branches revealed in John 15.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

CHRIST, THE MYSTERY OF GOD

Scripture Reading: Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 5:32; Col. 2:2-3, 9; 1:27; Eph. 3:3-4, 9; 1 Cor. 15:45b; Rom. 8:4, 6

In the writings of Paul the word *mystery* often recurs. In Romans 16:25-26 he says, “The mystery, which has been kept in silence in the times of the ages...has now been manifested, and through the prophetic writings, according to the command of the eternal God, has been made known to all the Gentiles for the obedience of faith.” There is a mystery, then, hidden in times past but now, according to the command of the eternal God, made known to man. This passage does not tell us much else about the mystery.

Ephesians and Colossians further expand the meaning of this mystery. Ephesians 5:32 says, “This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church.” There are two parties to this mystery: Christ and the church. Then Paul prayed that the Colossians might fully understand and know “the mystery of God, Christ, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden” (Col. 2:2-3). The mystery concerning Christ, then, is the mystery of God. Ephesians 3 has three references to the word *mystery*: “By revelation the mystery was made known to me, as I have written previously in brief, by which, in reading it, you can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ...to enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things” (vv. 3-4, 9). By putting these passages in Colossians and Ephesians together, we can see that the mystery has two aspects. There is the mystery of God, which is Christ, and there is the mystery of Christ, which is the church. Christ and the church, then, are the mystery.

EXPLAINING THE UNIVERSE

A mystery is something hidden, hard to understand, or difficult to explain. Thoughtful people have always wondered what the meaning of the universe is. Why do the heavens exist? Why is there an earth? Why are there plants and animals and so many other things? Why are we here? What is the meaning of human life?

Philosophers and teachers have put out a great many books dealing with this mystery in an attempt to explain the universe and the meaning of life. They have done a poor job. The mystery is still hidden from them.

Scientists, too, have labored to grasp the nature of the universe and the reason for life. Their mentality is exhausted in trying to comprehend the universe, yet they still have discovered very little.

EXPLAINING MAN

You are also a mystery. Can you believe that there is no meaning to your existence? If there is none, why do you have such a good mentality? Why do you have so many faculties, like two eyes and two ears? Surely your life has meaning. You do not exist merely to get dressed or to fill up on hamburgers! The reason for man's existence still baffles the philosophers.

THE MYSTERY ONCE HIDDEN NOW REVEALED

The mystery of the universe, Paul tells us, has been hidden "throughout the ages" (v. 9) and was not made known "in other generations" (v. 5). This means that it was hidden from eternity (the ages) and from the earlier generations of time. Even the angels did not know. Nor did Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, or even the wise Solomon. Isaiah and the other prophets were in ignorance of this mystery too, as was John the Baptist. This mystery was hidden in God Himself. He alone knew about it.

It is not insignificant that today this mystery has been made known. We know about it from the Bible. Yet sad to say, even many Christian teachers and scholars do not see this mystery, in spite of their having read through the Bible perhaps several times. It is possible to see the black and white letters without seeing the mystery. Paul uses a variety of terms to convey what this mystery, now revealed, is. He refers to it as *economy*, *dispensation*, *purpose*, *will*, and *pleasure*.

THE EMBODIMENT OF GOD

To say that Christ is the mystery of God is to say that He is God's definition and explanation. God is unknown, but Christ is His expression and embodiment. Yes, Christ is God; He is also God's description and embodiment. Apart from Him we cannot find God. This is the problem of our

Jewish friends. They put Christ aside yet insist that they have God. They do not have God, because He can only be realized in Christ.

THE TRINITY BEING A MYSTERY

The Trinity has been a puzzle to Christian scholars since the first century. Even in the first chapter of Genesis we find the Trinity hinted at. The word *God* in Hebrew is plural in number, not singular. Then in verse 26 the three pronouns referring to God are plural: “Let *Us* make man in *Our* image, according to *Our* likeness.” How could the one God refer to Himself as “Us”? Why does He use a plural possessive *Our*? This problem has bothered the scholars for centuries.

The Threefold Name

Let us come to the New Testament. One day after His resurrection, just before He ascended to the heavens, the Lord Jesus met with His disciples on a mountain in Galilee. There He charged them to go and “disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). Notice that the three are here, yet *name* is singular. There is something of a mystery about this name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Father and the Son

Even earlier the Lord was talking with His disciples on one occasion and told them that He would be going away. This news troubled them. In answer to Thomas’s question, Jesus said, “I am the way and the reality and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). At this point Philip asked that they be shown the Father; the disciples would be satisfied if the Lord would do this for them. The Lord replied, in effect, “What do you mean, ‘Show us the Father’? I have been with you for three years or so. Why do you ask to see the Father?” Then He said, “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works” (v. 10).

Notice, however, that the Lord did not say that He is the Father. In the past when I read John 14, sometimes I would ask the Lord, “Lord, why did You not just plainly say, ‘I am the Father’?” His reply to Philip seems so roundabout. If

He had directly said that He was the Father, it would have prevented much theological debating all these centuries. But the Lord is not that simple. Neither is the Trinity that simple.

Suppose some say, “Brother Lee, show us Witness Lee. Then we will be satisfied.” I would reply, “What? I have been speaking to you all this time, and you still want me to show you Witness Lee! Don’t you know that Brother Lee is in Witness Lee, and Witness Lee is in Brother Lee? When you see the one, you see the other.” I would not come out and say that Brother Lee is Witness Lee. To do so would mean that I could be easily explained!

The Spirit and the Son

Later on in this same chapter, the Lord said, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter...the Spirit of reality” (vv. 16-17). Yet in the very next verse He said that He Himself was coming (v. 18). One verse indicates that it is the Spirit who was coming, and the next verse declares that the Lord was coming.

This confusing way of talking continues with regard to who it is who would be in the disciples. Verse 17 says that the Spirit of reality “shall be in you,” whereas in verse 20 the Lord said, “In that day you shall know that I am...in you.” The Spirit’s indwelling the disciples meant the Lord’s indwelling of them. Yet the Lord did not openly say that He was the Spirit or that the Spirit was simply Himself. He chose to talk in this mysterious way, making us wonder whether there are two in us, the Spirit and Himself, or only one.

PAUL’S REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY

Paul, the great apostle who received the revelation concerning this mystery, refers to Christ in the flesh as the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45). Our forefather Adam was the first Adam. The last Adam, Paul says, became a life-giving Spirit. In the same book he says, “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit” (6:17). He further tells Timothy, “The Lord be with your spirit” (2 Tim. 4:22). From these verses it is clear that the Lord must be the Spirit and also that we must have a spirit. Otherwise, how could we be one spirit with Him, and how could He be with our spirit?

“Christ in you” (Col. 1:27) is another word of Paul’s. Is he speaking figuratively? How could we possibly contain Christ? However mysterious it sounds, it is a fact that Christ is in us; we can testify to this mysterious reality. He is like the electricity that makes the lamps give light; we cannot explain how it works, but we experience its benefits.

In Galatians 2:20 Paul goes a step further. “I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” Christ is not only within us; He is living in us. Paul is describing his experience. Can we also testify that Christ lives in us? Does having Christ live in us seem like a strange way of talking, or is this our reality?

GOD REACHING MAN

God had no way to reach us except through Christ. Christ as the Spirit is the reaching of God to us. God first passed through creation; before then He was not the Creator but only God. By creating the world and all the things in it, He took a step to reach us. Then at a certain time He took a further step, the incarnation. By this means He became one with one of His creatures, man. That is why He was called Emmanuel, meaning “God with us” (Matt. 1:23); God the Creator became a man. He lived in a carpenter’s humble home for thirty years. Then He came forth to minister, passing through the villages in Galilee and Judea. As a man He tasted all the aspects of human life. Then through the cross He entered into death. That wonderful death terminated all the things of the old creation. He descended into the lower parts of the earth. After three days He emerged from death and entered into resurrection. At this point He was transfigured. From being a man in the flesh, He became the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). With all these experiences He ascended into the heavens, where He was crowned, enthroned, and glorified. God gave Him the highest name and made Him not only Lord but also Head over all things.

His story is still not over. On the day of Pentecost He descended from that throne. He reached us, God’s chosen people and the believers in Christ. He has entered into us and is now one with us. He indwells us. Such is Jesus Christ, the mystery of God.

TWO COMMANDMENTS

In the New Testament we are not given ten commandments. To those who are under the New Testament economy, God's word is that they believe in His Son. Not to believe is disobedience and rebellion against God. To perish there is no need to rob a bank, commit fornication, or tell lies. It is sufficient to refuse to believe in Jesus Christ. Even if you are a model human being, living a highly ethical life, if you will not believe in the Lord Jesus, you will perish. God's only command to those who are not saved is that they believe in His Son.

After we are saved, this same principle holds true. God is not interested in our doing. He has one commandment for us. What He wants is that we live Christ. Yet if we think back on the number of times we have repented, we will realize that our repentance has mostly been over our failure to be loving, humble, or honest. Do we repent for our failure to live Christ? For all too many of us, this is not in our concept. We are ethics-centered, not Christ-centered. As Christians, we should be "Christ-men," but from our way of living, perhaps we could more accurately be called "moral men"!

HINDRANCES TO LIVING BY CHRIST

You may feel that for years you have heard of living by Christ. You may have a heart to do so. In fact, you may have tried and tried again to live Him. Yet your efforts have been unsuccessful and you have given up. Why is it that you have not succeeded?

It is because we are buried in a seven-layered tomb! The first layer is the fall of man. The second layer is our natural life. After man was created, he fell; because of the fall, he has his natural life with its own inclinations and intentions. The third layer, and the thickest, is human culture. To live by the culture into which we were born comes naturally, but to live Christ seems like a strange notion to us. The fourth layer is religion, which also affects all mankind. Whether we are very set in our religion, like the Muslims, or consider ourselves atheists, we nonetheless are religious. The fifth layer is ethics or morality. The concept of morality is embedded deep in our being. To be pleasant and considerate of others is needed in human society, but in order to live Christ we must be above ethical considerations. The sixth layer of our tomb is our virtues, closely related to ethics. What we esteem as virtues, others may not agree with. We may appreciate patience, but others may regard quickness as a virtue. We may like humility, but others may think

ambition is desirable. Whatever our virtues, they are a layer of the tomb in which we are buried. The last layer of the tomb is spiritual seeking. To seek holiness, victory, and spirituality can be a layer of the tomb that buries us from the living Christ.

PRAYER AND VISION

To get out from under these seven layers of the tomb requires prayer. Yet how shall we pray? We may resolve to live Christ and then begin our day by praying, “Lord, help me to love my wife today.” To have such an attitude is a help to human society, but it is altogether a frustration to our living Christ. Even if we pray, “Lord, we want to have the best church life,” this praying too is a frustration. To make up our mind to love our wife or to improve the church life or to achieve anything prevents us from living by Christ.

Do not pray for this and that. Simply pray that you may be infused with Christ and by Him. Pray by contacting Him. Then, as each day goes by, without your intending to do or be anything, you will live and move and have your being in the Spirit. Spontaneously you will fulfill His commandment: “Walk by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16). Christ will be lived out of you. Your whole being will be set on your spirit (Rom. 8:6). With your mind set on your spirit, there will be the living by Christ. This is what God wants.

To live by Christ is the crucial focus of God’s economy. The New Testament centers on the fact that the all-inclusive Christ as the processed God is now dwelling in our spirit. We are one spirit with Him. All He wants us to do is to live Him. We may try to have an impressive church life, but if we are devoid of this living by Christ, the recovery is still empty. The content of the recovery is this very living by Christ, this Christ who is the all-inclusive Spirit and the mystery of God.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

THE CHURCH, THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Gal. 1:15a, 16a; 2:20a; 4:19; Col. 1:27; 3:4a, 11; Phil. 1:20b-21a; Eph. 3:17a, 19b; 1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:8-11, 6, 4

Without God there is no explanation for the universe. Where did the heavens come from? Where did the earth come from? How did man get here? The answer to all such questions is God.

The mystery of the universe is God. The mystery of God, the Scripture tells us, is Christ (Col. 2:2). The mystery of Christ, we are further told, is the church (Eph. 3:4, 6). Actually, these are simply three stages of one mystery. God is to be found in Christ. Christ is to be found in the church. The church, then, is the mystery of Christ, who in turn is the mystery of God, who Himself is the mystery of the universe.

EXPERIENCING THE MYSTERY

Of all the New Testament writers, the apostle Paul speaks most clearly about this mystery. His words are bold yet honest. He speaks from experience. Notice how the Scriptures we have listed above deal with experience rather than doctrine: “It pleased God...to reveal His Son in me” (Gal. 1:15a, 16a). “Christ...lives in me” (2:20a). “Christ is formed in you” (4:19). “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). “Christ our life” (3:4a). “Christ will be magnified in my body...To me, to live is Christ” (Phil 1:20b, 21a). “Christ may make His home in your hearts...that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:17a, 19b). “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17).

All these words are clear, yet when you consider them carefully, you will realize that they convey a mystery. For example, are you really one spirit with the Lord Jesus? Can you declare, as Paul did, “To me, to live is Christ”? How could even Paul say this? He was Saul of Tarsus. For him to make such a statement, there must have been some fact, some experience, backing his word. Furthermore, how could Christ be magnified, that is, expressed and enlarged, in your body? How could your inner being become a home for Christ? We are speaking of a mystery.

When Christ came, He told people that He was God (John 5:17-18; 10:30, 33). God had always been a mystery. Now a little Nazarene stood before His fellow men and said that He was God. No wonder the Jews could not believe. Was He truly God? He surely was. He was the reality of God, God expressed and embodied.

After entering into death, resurrection, and ascension, He descended to reach His believers and make them one with Himself. That is why one of His believers could declare, “To me, to live is Christ.” One day a man from Nazareth had declared that He was God. Now here was a man by the name of Saul of Tarsus, declaring that to him, to live was Christ.

It is no wonder that the Jews told the Lord that He was blaspheming to say that He was God. We too have been accused of blaspheming for saying that to us, to live is Christ. In ancient times it was the religious Jews who condemned the Lord Jesus for blasphemy. In our day it is also the religious ones who condemn us. In both cases it is because they do not see the mystery.

You may be told that you are a saint like Theresa or that you are an angel. People will not protest if they hear that. But if you say, “To me, to live is Christ,” they will object that you are going too far, that you are saying something blasphemous, or that you are asking to be worshipped.

It is not blasphemy to say that we are one spirit with the Lord Jesus. It is a fact. It is a shame if for us, to live is a “saint,” or for us, to live is an angel. God wants us to live Christ. He has enough “holy” people and enough angels.

He has enough Texans and enough Chinese. He wants His chosen people, wherever they are from, to live Christ, not their culture or their virtues.

THE FOCUS OF THE BIBLE

What God wants is a person, not some thing. This person is beyond our understanding. He is the infinite, eternal God. He is the Creator. Yet He became flesh. He lived on this earth. He passed through death, subdued it, and entered into resurrection. Then He became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). As such, He has entered into us and now lives in our spirit. Once He has entered us, He will never leave. He not only stays but wants to settle down.

He wants to make His home in all the inner chambers of our heart—our mind, our emotion, and our will.

This is the heart of the Bible. You may forget the story of Enoch, for example, but do not forget this focal point. If I lose an ear, I can still live, but if my heart is removed, I am through. Too many Christians today are dealing with the little finger or even a fingernail of the little finger. They argue about whether the nail is square or triangular, they write books to prove that it is half round and half square, but the heart they disregard. The Lord's recovery is to bring us back to the heart. Do not argue about the ten toes. Come back to the heart: God, the mystery of the universe; Christ, the mystery of God; the church, the mystery of Christ; and we His people, living Him.

THE KEY TO SEEING THE VISION

Do you want this vision to be clear to you? Pray. But do not focus your prayer on things, persons, or situations. Give yourself to pray over these verses. You may pray, "Lord, it pleased You to reveal Christ in me. This was a pleasure to God. God was pleased. God was pleased not to teach me but to reveal. Reveal! Reveal His Son, not Theresa, not an angel, but His Son. In me, not in my mind, but in me." If you will pray-read in this way, you will become excited. You will realize that you are no ordinary person. You will want to declare to the universe that you have Christ in you. You will become Christ-conscious and Christ-centered. Your pride in being an American, a Texan, or a Scot will fade away. It pleased God to reveal *His Son* in you!

By pray-reading all the verses we have listed at the beginning of the chapter, your mind and even your whole being will be set on the spirit. You will be saturated with a view of Christ as the mystery of God. You will realize that Christ is in you as your life. Do not wonder how you can be rid of the seven layers that keep you in the tomb. As you read and pray, they will all drop off with no further effort on your part.

While you are praying, the understanding will come. As you digest and assimilate these verses, you will enjoy their riches. Although their words are clear, they convey a mystery. How could Christ make His home in your heart? How could you be filled unto all the fullness of God? As you pray, you will realize that *unto all the fullness of God* means "resulting in the proper church life." All the fullness of God is the Body of Christ, the church, the fullness of

the One who fills all in all (Eph. 1:23). When Christ makes His home in your heart, then, the result will be the proper church life.

Take Colossians 3:11 for another example. Here it says that in the new man “there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all.” As you pray over this verse, your view of the church will become clear. The church is the new man, not an organization but the Body of Christ, an organism. In this new man Christ is all and in all. The church is Christ, being all—that is, being you, me, and every other believer—and being in all, that is, being in every one of us.

Pray yourself into these verses and pray them into you. Then you will see that what God wants is Christ, not the Christ of knowledge and doctrine but the Christ of experience. This Christ must be mingled with you. He must saturate you with all that He is. Once you have this view, it kills ethics, religion, human culture, natural virtues, and even your spiritual seeking. In this vision only Christ survives.

Even though nearly two thousand years have gone by, the Lord Jesus still does not have what He is after. There may be millions of Christians, but few pay attention to this focus of the biblical revelation. Will you stir up yourself to get into this focus? Will you lay other things aside and deal with the Lord about these verses? “Lord, reveal this matter in Galatians 1:15a and 16a to me. I know this is serious, but I do not fully grasp it. Infuse me with what it means.” Pray this way over all these verses until they are a part of your being. Then you will realize how pitiful the situation among Christians is. You will see that they are off, caring for minor matters and neglecting the heart. May we be those who see the focus of the Bible.

THE TRINITY AND MAN

Notice these verses in Romans 8: “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Yet if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not of Him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you” (vv. 8-11).

The names used for God in this passage deserve our attention. First, it says that those who are in the flesh cannot please God. *God* is the term used in verse 8. Verse 9, however, says that the Spirit of God dwells in you and that one must have the Spirit of Christ to be of Him. God is God the Father, and the Spirit of God is God the Spirit. *The Spirit of Christ* is interchangeable with *the Spirit of God*. Verse 10 says that Christ is in you. The Spirit of Christ is therefore Christ Himself. Whether He is called God, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, or Christ, all these terms used here clearly indicate that God's dispensing of Himself into man is related to His being triune.

In verse 11 the Trinity is referred to again: "He who raised Christ from the dead" is God, whose Spirit dwells in you. Christ, who was raised from the dead, is the Son. *He who raised Christ* is another reference to God, who will also "give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you."

The Trinity—God, Christ, and the Spirit—is for giving life to you. First, He gives life to your spirit (v. 10) and eventually life to your body (v. 11). In the middle is the mind, which, if set on the spirit, is life and peace (v. 6). The spirit is life, the mind is life, and even the body is life. The Triune God dispenses Himself as life into the tripartite man.

Can you see the need for the Trinity? God must be the Father, the Son, and the Spirit for the dispensing of Himself into man. He first comes into the center, our spirit; then spreads into our mind; and eventually saturates our body, the circumference.

ACCORDING TO SPIRIT

Romans 8:4 tells us "that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit." The spirit here is our regenerated spirit, now indwelt by Christ as the all-inclusive Spirit. Here in our spirit we are one spirit with Him, mingled with Him.

Stop your preoccupation with loving your wife or submitting to your husband or being kind and patient. Simplify your Christian life by walking according to spirit. Pray and trust and wait on the Lord. Tell Him, "Lord, I am tired of making up my mind to do things. I want to stop all my doing. I trust in You. I wait on You. I want to live and move and have my being according to

the spirit.” Do not try to walk according to some verse in the Bible, attempting to obey what it says without walking according to spirit.

The result of walking according to spirit will be that Christ is expressed. You will find it true that to you, to live is Christ. Whether your circumstances are peaceful or troublesome, do not be disturbed. Let it suffice that any circumstances are good for you to live Christ and for Him to be magnified in your body.

This is the Christian life according to the universal mystery.

THE CHURCH LIFE

The mystery of Christ is the church. We as members of the church must live according to the spirit. This living is not individualistic. The more we live Christ, the more we are aware that we are in the Body. As Colossians 3:11 tells us, in this new man there is no room for the natural man with his national characteristics. What is the church life? It is Christ being all of us and being in all of us. Living by Christ spontaneously issues in the church life.

Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3:19 is “that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God.” The result of your being filled will be the fullness of God, that is, the proper and living church life.

The key point is to walk according to the spirit. Yet to do this you need a clear view concerning Christ and the church. This vision will come to you only through prayer. Pray-read these verses. Forget about praying for your personal concerns and your anxieties. God will take care of all these other matters. Pray regarding this one matter. Pray-read these verses until you see that Christ is the mystery of God and that the church is the mystery of Christ. Then you will realize that Christ is the all-inclusive One—the infinite, eternal God, the Creator, the incarnated One, the crucified One, the resurrected One who has become the life-giving Spirit, and the One in ascension who has entered into your being and is now indwelling your spirit and making you one spirit with Him. All things have been accomplished by Him.

If we have our being according to this one spirit, we will live out Christ. The church life will be the outcome. There will be the church as the new man with Christ as the content. Then the church will indeed be the fullness of God.

CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

CHRIST

IN THE FOUR FOCAL BOOKS

Scripture Reading: Gal. 1:13-16a; 2:20a; 4:19; Col. 2:2, 6-9; 3:4, 11; Phil. 1:19-21a; 3:7-8; Eph. 3:8-11, 17a, 19b

These four books that are arranged together in our New Testament—Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians—are the heart of God's revelation. They tell us that Christ and the church are the focal point of the divine revelation. The apostle Paul, through whom this mystery has been revealed, tells us that until the New Testament economy this mystery was hidden in God (Eph. 1:9).

What is it that hinders our seeing this mystery, even though it has been fully revealed?

GALATIANS

The first hindrance is religion, which is what Paul deals with in Galatians. When the Lord Jesus came, there was among the Jewish people a religion, not pagan but one formed and established according to God's word. The basic element of the Jewish religion was the law, which was given by God. In addition, there were the traditions made by man. This religion, with its God-given law and its man-made traditions, was the strongest opponent to the Lord Jesus and His ministry.

Later, when the apostles went forth to preach the gospel, most of their opposition came from these same Jewish religionists, not from the heathen. It was in order to preserve the traditions inherited from their fathers and the law given by God that these Judaizers tried their hardest to resist the evangelists and the gospel they preached.

Snatched out of Religion

One of their number, an aggressive, offensive young man named Saul of Tarsus, was heading one day for Damascus, intending to bring the disciples of

Jesus who were there back to Jerusalem to be punished. Such was his intention, and he was proceeding on his way to carry it out. Yes, he did have the freedom to make up his mind to do this, but to bring it about was not up to him. His mission was interrupted by a heavenly Visitor. Falling on the ground, Saul addressed this One from the heavens as Lord: "Who are You, Lord?" (Acts 9:5). The answer was, "I am Jesus, whom you persecute." Saul thought that he was persecuting the disciples of Jesus; now he found out that he had been persecuting Jesus Himself.

On that day something happened to Saul not only outwardly but also inwardly. Outwardly, he was knocked down and blinded by the brightness of the light. But from Galatians 1 we can see that something happened inwardly as well. He tells us, "I persecuted the church of God excessively and ravaged it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many contemporaries in my race, being more abundantly a zealot for the traditions of my fathers" (vv. 13-14). He was doing well in his religious zeal, and then God came in. "It pleased God," he tells us, "to reveal His Son in me" (vv. 15-16). Inwardly, a vision was imparted to him.

Christ versus Religion

What was the vision? It was Christ versus religion. Religion is the highest invention of human culture. Yet Christ stands in opposition to it. Christ is against the law and against tradition. He has nothing to do with religion. Through all these centuries since then, this battle between Christ and religion has been going on. Religion hates Christ. If you hold on to your religion, you miss Christ. If you cherish Christ, religion hates you.

Saul of Tarsus was snatched out of religion by Christ. While he was surpassing his contemporaries in religious zeal, Christ not only laid hold of him but also imparted His life to him.

Revealed, Living, Formed

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul speaks of his experience of having the Son revealed to him. Then in 2:20 he tells how he experienced Christ living in him: "I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." Christ was revealed to him and then was living in him. A further development is indicated in 4:19, where he says, "My children, with

whom I travail again in birth until Christ is formed in you.” Christ was already formed in him but not in the Galatians. It is not adequate, then, to have Christ revealed in us and living in us. He must also be formed in us.

Romans 9 tells us that we are vessels made by God (vv. 20-23). We human beings were made to be containers of Christ. We are like a glove, designed to contain a hand. For a hand to be formed in the glove, the thumb and the fingers must be fitted into the glove exactly. Two fingers of the glove must not dangle empty. Has the Christ who has come into us been formed in us?

Our Own Commandments

Perhaps some of you have not yet been snatched out of religion. I am sure that you are not trying to keep the law of Moses, but you may well have your own laws. You may have made up more than ten commandments that you are trying to keep. You try to be a gentleman. You try to suppress your bad temper. You try to love your wife. Are you still expecting to keep these laws? Do you think that you have a way to do this? You pray for God’s help that He would so enable you, yet He does not seem to come in. Still you hold on to your laws.

What about the more recent commandments that you have been trying to keep? You have been getting up early to spend time in the Word and in prayer. You have been reading three chapters in the Old Testament and one in the New. You have been setting aside several times a day to pray. Do you think it is good to keep these laws? Well, you may say that I was the one who proposed these to you. Whether it is good to keep these laws I will not venture to say, but if you are to experience Christ revealed in you, living in you, and formed in you, you must be snatched out of whatever laws you are trying to keep.

To say this may make the elders anxious lest the young people become loose and will no longer rise early for morning watch! After the law, however, comes Christ. Now we come to Christ.

The message of Galatians, the first of these four books, is that we must be out of religion in order to have Christ revealed, living, and formed in us. He is apart from religion, law, and tradition.

COLOSSIANS

Let us take the last of the four books next. Paul gives this warning to the Colossians: “Beware that no one carries you off as spoil through his philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ” (2:8). Not too long after the churches were established, various “isms” put in their appearance. When Paul refers to philosophy and the elements of the world, he means especially Gnosticism, mysticism, and asceticism. Gnosticism was a compilation of Jewish and heathen (Egyptian, Babylonian, and Greek) philosophical thought. Mysticism was also a philosophical belief with some mysterious elements in it. Asceticism was the severe treatment of the body. All these “isms” invaded the church and subtly began to replace Christ.

Christ versus Philosophy

Paul wrote to declare that Christ stood in opposition to the Jewish religion, to Gnosticism, to mysticism, and to asceticism. He told the Colossians that Christ has nothing in common with philosophy, that He cannot be compared to mysticism, and that asceticism has nothing to do with Him.

The Peerless Christ

Paul says that Christ is incomparable. He is in a class apart. Who is Christ? He is the mystery of God. He is the embodiment of all the fullness of the Godhead. Who or what can be ranked with Him? This peerless One is our life. He is within us a mystery, the hope of glory. He is the component of the new man, the church. In the church there is no room for anyone but Him. In this new creation all others are excluded, both “Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man” (3:11). In this new man Christ is all and in all; that is, He is every member and He is in every member. Can anything or anyone be compared with such a Christ?

To value any other thing above Him is to be buried in a seven-layered tomb. These seven layers are implied in the religion, law, tradition, and philosophy that Paul condemns so strongly. We need to be snatched out of the fall, the natural life, culture, religion, ethics, morality, virtues, and spiritual seeking. They are burying us, even those of us who are Christians. We must be freed from these layers in which we are wrapped.

Frustrations to Experiencing Christ

From Galatians we know that to live Christ has nothing to do with religion. From Colossians we know that to live Christ is entirely apart from philosophy. These two matters, religion and philosophy, are highly esteemed in society and are closely related to each other. Both are enemies of Christ. Both are frustrations to our experiencing Christ.

Do you realize that you must be out of religion, out of philosophy, and out of culture? This is not a doctrine for you to understand but a reality for you to experience. If you still consider yourself as an American, you are still in your culture. The Bible says there is no room in the new man for any nationality, whether American, Chinese, or German. All the national and cultural distinctions have been buried. Now your status is Christ. He is all.

I trust that we have all gotten the message of these two books. We, as those who are living Christ, have nothing to do with religion, the law, its traditions, and regulations; nor have we anything to do with philosophy and culture.

PHILIPPIANS

Philippians again brings up the matter of religion. Paul describes himself as “circumcised the eighth day; of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, persecuting the church; as to the righteousness which is in the law, become blameless” (3:5-6). The word translated “persecuting” here is the same as the word *pursuing*. Before Paul was snatched out of religion, he was pursuing Christ in a negative way. After he got saved, his pursuit of Christ was positive.

Because Paul, in his pursuit of Christ, rejected religion, this book tells of sufferings, afflictions, and trials that came to him (1:12-13). Are troubles desirable? In nature they are not, but in function they are. The difficulties became golden opportunities for Paul not only to live Christ but also to magnify Him. Whether he lived or died mattered little. What concerned this follower of Christ was to live Him and to magnify Him in his body. He wanted Christ to be expressed through him.

In speaking of his suffering, Paul says, “I know that for me this will turn out to salvation through your petition and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of

Jesus Christ” (v. 19). The all-inclusive Spirit renders us the bountiful supply, while the suffering turns out to be a salvation for us. By this bountiful supply Paul magnified Christ and lived Him out (vv. 20-21).

EPHESIANS

Ephesians deals with the issue of a life that lives Christ.

God Dispensed

This book tells us that the church is the Body of Christ and that it is the fullness of Him who fills all in all (1:22-23). How could the church possibly be His fullness? It is by the unsearchable riches of Christ dispensed into all the members who live Christ out. The more we live Christ out, the more His riches will be dispensed into our being. In the very next verse after the unsearchable riches of Christ are mentioned, the economy of the mystery is mentioned (3:8-9). The mystery, therefore, is the economy of the Triune God: the Father as the source, the Son as the course, and the Spirit as the flow.

The Outcome

The outcome of the economy of the Triune God into His chosen people is the church (v. 10), which is to display God’s wisdom “according to the eternal purpose” (v. 11).

Have you noticed the sequence in these four verses (vv. 8-11)? The unsearchable riches of Christ in verse 8 are the economy of the mystery in verse 9. The issue is the church in verse 10, which is according to God’s eternal purpose in verse 11.

God’s Eternal Purpose Realized

Practically speaking, God’s eternal purpose is realized by our participating in Christ’s riches. This we do by taking Christ as our life and as our person. If He is our life and our person, we can say that He lives in us and makes His home in us (v. 17). We have nothing in common with religion, law, and “isms.” Our only concern is to take Christ as our life and our person. As we do this day after day, we enjoy all His riches. This enjoyment is the economy of the mystery.

Organic Relatedness

This way of living issues in the church. The church is not a group of people with the Christian faith who come together to sing hymns. The church is a Body. My body is not just a few bones stuck together and covered with skin, then dressed in some clothing. To claim that that is my body is an insult. My body is made up of organs, which are organically interrelated. A group of Christians singing hymns together do not necessarily have any organic relatedness. Some Christians could perhaps be likened to a set of dentures, placed in the body but not part of it.

Is our relationship to the Body of Christ like that of a set of dentures? No. We are growing together organically, not placed together by organization. When those of different nationalities are put together, the relationship is not easy. In the church we have many different nationalities and backgrounds. Nonetheless, we can all grow together.

Nourishment for Growth

What makes us grow? It is by getting the proper nourishment. If a little piece of flesh is taken from one part of our body and grafted onto another, within a few days the graft will become part of the flesh in the new location. Yet without nourishment that little piece could not grow together with the body. Both are organic, but they need nourishment.

Our nourishment is the unsearchable riches of Christ. As we live by Him and He is magnified in our body, we will all grow together as His Body. Thus, we must learn to participate in Christ. If all we have is in the realm of knowledge, the result will be dissension. If, on the other hand, we enjoy Christ as our food and drink, His unsearchable riches will make us grow, and the church will be the result.

The Church Life

It was for this that Paul prayed in Ephesians 3. He bowed his knees unto the Father “that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man, that Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith...that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God” (vv. 14-19). The Father strengthens us through the

Spirit that the Son may make His home in our hearts, that we may be filled unto all the fullness of God. This is the church.

If we look around us at Christians today, we can see how much attention is focused on knowledge and how little is focused on the experiential enjoyment of the riches of Christ. This is why there is so little church life, in spite of the multitudes of Christians.

Some of us have been Christians for years. With whom have we been growing together? If we live Christ, the issue is the church life. If we find that we are still individualistic, it is an indication that our experience of Christ is not genuine. The experience of Christ is not for individuals but for the corporate Body. Our enjoyment of Christ must result in the corporate church life.

Only Christ

May we all be so clear that Christ stands against religion, philosophy, and culture. We must care only for Him. When the thought comes to us that we must be loving or pleasant, we must reject it. We must say no to all such considerations and have regard only for Christ, this all-inclusive Spirit who is in our spirit.

We should pray, “Lord, thank You that I have been crucified with You. You are against religion, philosophy, and culture. I have nothing to do with them either, because I have been crucified with You. Now I am one spirit with You. I want to care only for You. I would keep contacting You and walking in You. I want to converse with You and be one with You all the time.”

If we keep praying and practicing this, our mind will be set on the spirit. The life supply will be infused into our being and become our nourishment. We will grow and even grow together. We will be able to say, “To me, to live is Christ. It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.”

CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN

THE GOOD LAND AND THE SPIRIT

Scripture Reading: Gal. 3:14; 4:6; 5:16-18, 25; 6:18; Eph. 1:13, 17; 2:18-22; 3:5, 16-17a; 4:4, 23, 30; 5:18; 6:17-18a; Phil. 1:19-20; 2:1; Col. 3:16; 1 Cor. 5:7; 10:4; Col. 1:12; 2:6; 3:11; Eph. 3:8

There may be a bountiful spread on the dining table, a sampling of the riches of America. It is another matter, however, for those riches to be realized by us in our being. The same is true with regard to our enjoyment of Christ as the good land. The key to experiencing Him is to be found in the two spirits, which are mentioned in most of the verses given above.

THE BLESSING OF ABRAHAM

Galatians 3:14 tells us, “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.” In the New Testament economy the promise that God gave to Abraham has come to us through Jesus Christ. What is this blessing that was promised to Abraham? It is the Spirit, as this verse clearly tells us.

But, you may ask, was it not the good land that was promised to Abraham? Yes, Abraham was surely promised the good land (Gen. 12:7; 13:15, 17; 15:18; 17:8). This promise was repeated to his son Isaac (26:3) and to his grandson Jacob (28:13; 35:12). However, in Galatians 3 Paul interprets the good land as the blessing of the Spirit. The Old Testament promise was of the good land, but in the New Testament fulfillment the promise becomes the Spirit. Have you ever realized that the Spirit whom you have received is the good land?

“Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father!” (4:6). The Spirit sent by God is the blessing promised to Abraham for his descendants. We today in Jesus Christ are by faith the descendants of Abraham and the heirs of God’s promise (3:29). We may say, then, that the good land has been sent to us. What need is there for us to go to the Holy Land for a sightseeing tour? The good land is within us. This is where we are walking and living.

There is a further inference of the Spirit as the good land in Galatians 5:25: “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” The good land was the type of the all-inclusive Christ, and Christ in His resurrection became the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b). This Spirit has been dispensed into our spirit. Here we receive life by Him, and we are to walk by Him. (See also Galatians 6:18, where we find that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with our spirit.)

THE TWO SPIRITS IN EPHESIANS 1

Ephesians speaks further of the Spirit and our spirit. In 1:13 we are told, “You were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise.” Earlier, chapter 1 says that God has blessed us, or spoken well of us. The Spirit’s sealing us is the reaching stage of God’s well-speaking of us. When a paper, for example, has a seal stamped upon it, this indicates that the paper has been reached by the seal. The Triune God is rich, but God did not reach us as the Father. Nor did He ultimately reach us as the Son. Yes, the Son came to us, but He did not come into us. It was the Spirit who entered into us. The Triune God reaches us as the Spirit. The Father, Son, and Spirit all reach us in the sealing of the Spirit.

A seal is fixed and lasting. Now that God has reached you, He remains with you and will never leave. When a seal has been affixed to a paper, the two cannot be separated; they become one. Do you realize that the Triune God has reached you in the Spirit and made Himself one with you?

The seal of the Spirit is also the good land. Corporations use a seal, which may vary in size, to authenticate their documents. What is the size of our seal? It is the size of the good land. No one can take the good land away from us because it seals us, making us one with God and Him one with us.

In Ephesians 1:17 Paul prays “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him.” *Spirit* in this verse refers to the human spirit. On the one hand, the Spirit is within us, yet on the other hand, our spirit needs to be enlightened. We need a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we may realize this sealing Spirit, who is the good land.

I have no doubt that you are saved. But, sorry to say, I do not have the confidence that you realize what you have received with your salvation. You have received the blessing promised to Abraham. This blessing is the good land; it is Christ as the Spirit, who has sealed you. For this to be real to you, you need the spirit of wisdom and revelation for which Paul prayed. Are you living in the good land? If you are, you are living in your spirit, enjoying the Spirit as the good land.

THE TWO SPIRITS IN EPHESIANS 2

“Through Him we both have access in one Spirit unto the Father” (2:18). Even this short verse speaks of the Trinity. *Through Him* means through the Son; but until we add *in one Spirit*, our access is somewhat theoretical. When we are in the Spirit, we are in the presence of the Father to enjoy all the riches.

Verses 21 and 22 go on to tell us that in Christ “all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.” How big is our spirit? It must be big enough to contain God’s habitation. When we build a meeting hall, we need to have a good-sized lot. The lot where God’s habitation is, our spirit, is universally spacious. All of us together are one lot, for God has only one habitation; we are not separate small lots.

THE TWO SPIRITS IN EPHESIANS 3

The mystery “has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in spirit” (3:5). The revelation came to them not in their mentality but in their spirit.

Paul prays that the Father “would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man” (v. 16). When we listen to a message, it has the effect of strengthening our whole being into the inner man. The inner man is the regenerated spirit, where the Spirit of God dwells. During the day we may find it easy to gossip or feel discouraged, but after a meeting we have no use for gossip, and the discouragement is gone. This is because our being has been brought into the inner man, where the good land, with the riches of Christ, is.

The result of our being thus strengthened is that Christ makes His home in our hearts through faith (v. 17). When the Spirit works and our spirit, the inner man, responds, Christ settles down in our heart, becoming our enjoyment. By enjoying this settled Christ as the riches of the good land, we are “filled unto all the fullness of God” (v. 19).

THE TWO SPIRITS IN EPHESIANS 4

Ephesians 4 also refers to both the Holy Spirit and the human spirit.

In verse 4, where it says, “One Body and one Spirit,” the reference is to the Holy Spirit. *One Body* implies one habitation; *one Spirit* means the one Spirit in all our spirits.

Verse 23, “That you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,” indicates that our mind is now occupied and saturated by the Spirit. The nations walk “in the vanity of their mind” (v. 17), preoccupied with worldly entertainment. Our mind, in contrast, is being renewed from the old creation to the new so that our mind is a mind of the spirit.

In Ephesians 4:30 we are exhorted to not “grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed unto the day of redemption.” This sealing Spirit, who is the good land to us, will not leave us, but we should not grieve Him.

THE FILLED SPIRIT IN EPHESIANS 5

“Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissoluteness, but be filled in spirit” (5:18). To be drunk is to have our body filled with wine. Rather than this, we are to have our spirit filled with God, with the riches of Christ. Our spirit must be filled.

THE TWO SPIRITS IN EPHESIANS 6

“Receive the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which Spirit is the word of God” (6:17). According to the Greek grammar, the word *which* in this verse refers to *Spirit*, not to *sword*. The Spirit, then, is the word of God. This corresponds with the Lord’s word in John 6:63: “The words which I have spoken to you are spirit.” There is a sense, then, in which the Word is the Spirit and the Spirit is the Word.

You may feel that much of what we have covered in this chapter about the Spirit is too abstract. When we speak of the Word, however, you have something down to earth that you can grasp. The Lord today is the Spirit; He is also embodied in His Word. The Lord, the Spirit, and the Word are all one. We need all three, because it is through the Word and the Spirit that the Lord is realized by us.

If the Lord Jesus were not the Spirit, we could not realize Him. Nor could we realize Him if we did not have a spirit. As the Spirit, He indwells and mingles with our spirit, making us both one. Yet the matter of the Spirit is mysterious.

It is the Word that makes these abstractions real to us. Whenever we come to the Bible with a proper spirit—reading, praying, and receiving it—this Word getting into us becomes the Spirit. What we read and receive is the Word; what comes into us is the Spirit. As long as we receive the Word into our spirit, it becomes spirit and life. If we take the Word only into our mind, however, it is merely a thought or some knowledge.

How can we be sure that we are receiving the Word into our spirit? The next verse, Ephesians 6:18, gives us the way: “By means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit.” We must pray but not for our affairs. Pray to receive the Word as the Spirit. Day by day, unceasingly, use the Word to pray for the Spirit. Such prayer will make the mystery real to you in your life.

THE TWO SPIRITS IN PHILIPPIANS

The Spirit of Jesus Christ

Paul told the Philippians that whatever sufferings or persecutions he underwent, “I know that for me this will turn out to salvation through your petition and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (1:19). Notice the term that is used for the Spirit here. Paul said that his afflictions would become a salvation to him by the bountiful supply of the Spirit, but not the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Jesus or the Spirit of Christ. It was by the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Who is Jesus Christ? He is the processed God. He passed through creation, incarnation, human life, and death. He entered into resurrection and ascension. *The processed God* as a term is not found in the Bible; nor is the word *Trinity*. But the facts are clearly stated in the Bible.

What is the bountiful supply of this Spirit? It is the realization of the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph. 3:8). The riches are objective, but they are experienced subjectively as this supply. It was because of this Spirit's supplying, supporting, and sustaining him that Paul could say, "Christ will be magnified in my body" (Phil. 1:20).

Fellowship in Spirit

Besides the bountiful supply of the Spirit, there is also the need for the fellowship of spirit (2:1). Our spirit is necessary for taking in the supply that God has made available. The Spirit supplies the food, and our spirit supplies the mouth and the stomach. Day by day we exercise our spirit to fellowship with Him and with one another. Such vertical and horizontal fellowship is the eating. In my speaking I am eating; in your listening you are eating. When the meeting is over, we all feel full. This is the fellowship, the enjoyment of the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

THE WORD IN COLOSSIANS

In Colossians the stress is not on the Spirit but on the word. Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." The parallel verse in Ephesians 5:18 says, "Be filled in spirit." One says the word; the other, the spirit. The result of both is the same: singing, speaking, and praising the Lord. The word of Christ in Colossians 3:16 is the Spirit. Letting the word dwell in us richly equals letting the Spirit fill us.

THE PRACTICAL ENJOYMENT OF CHRIST

How are we to experience this Christ, the One who as the Spirit is the rich land to us? How does He bountifully supply us? The key is found in the two spirits, which are one (1 Cor. 6:17). In our spirit is this very One who Himself has become the Spirit.

Stay in this mingled spirit. Return whenever you find you are away.

How can you remain in, or return to, this mingled spirit? It is by praying and by reading the Word. Do not allow yourself to be distracted by your circumstances. All other things are contrary to Christ. Christ is contrary to all other things. Pray to contact Him. Pray by reading the Word. These two things will keep you in the spirit. Then you will taste and experience Christ. He will be whatever you need, whether it is light, strength, wisdom, or victory. Do not seek these things themselves. Seek the living person.

This will give the Lord the opportunity to fulfill His word: “I will build My church” (Matt. 16:18). This building is accomplished by the believers remaining in the mingled spirit. Then the Body of Christ can be built up. In the mingled spirit is the mystery of God and of Christ. Here are His riches and the Spirit’s bountiful supply. Here is the good land where we should walk.

THE CORINTHIAN ENJOYMENT OF CHRIST

There are two passages in 1 Corinthians that indicate that the church in Corinth was only in the initial stage of the enjoyment of Christ: “Purge out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened; for our Passover, Christ, also has been sacrificed...And all drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank of a spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ” (5:7; 10:4).

The children of Israel were in Egypt when they enjoyed the passover lamb and in the wilderness when their thirst was quenched by the living water that flowed out of the rock that followed them. To enjoy Christ as the Passover pertains to salvation and the exodus from the world. Christ as the rock supplying living water is for the beginning period of the Christian life.

The church in Corinth was in this elementary stage. It was characterized by worldliness and wanderings in the soul. Thus, their enjoyment of Christ was not mature.

THE MATURE ENJOYMENT OF CHRIST

When we come to the writings of Paul to the Colossians and the Ephesians, however, we find that their enjoyment of Christ was as the good land. This is the mature stage.

Colossians 1:12 says, “Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you for a share of the allotted portion of the saints in the light.” What the apostle Paul had in mind here was the good land, which was allotted to the twelve tribes of Israel when they entered it. Our portion means the part of the good land allotted to us.

Christ in Colossians is no longer merely the Passover or the manna but rather the final portion of God’s chosen people, that is, the good land. Colossians 2:6 bears this out: “As therefore you have received the Christ, Jesus the Lord, walk in Him.” We could not walk in the passover lamb or in the manna, but Christ as the good land is spacious and rich. Our lot is a rich land that produces many passover lambs and many grains, as well as oil and wine.

Christ in this book is “all and in all” (3:11). Such a description does not fit the passover lamb or the manna; only the good land can be described in such an inclusive way.

The same is true of *the unsearchable riches of Christ*, a term found in the book of Ephesians (3:8). The passover lamb and the manna cannot be considered as unsearchably rich. Christ’s unsearchable riches are surely the rich produce of the good land.

PRESSING ON

Would you say that the churches today are in 1 Corinthians? Are we enjoying Christ as the Passover, yet still in Egypt? Or we may have made our exodus from Egypt and are now in the wilderness, receiving revelation, building the tabernacle, and feasting on manna. Surely it is good to have the tabernacle as God’s building, yet the tabernacle lacked solidity; it was portable with no foundation. There was no stone, only wood, in its construction. The wilderness had no supply for building the temple. Neither manna nor the living water could be used for building material. Only in the good land were there materials suitable for the temple’s construction. Are we wandering in the wilderness of the soul, enjoying manna from heaven and water from the rock and carrying a floating church life with no solid foundation?

Or, are the churches today in Colossians and Ephesians? Are we walking about in a spacious land, full of unsearchable riches? Is the church life built up, as solid as the temple?

We hesitate to evaluate the churches from this standpoint, but at least we may say that we are on the way to the good land and are not satisfied to remain in the tabernacle church life. Within us there is a hunger and thirst for something higher in the church life than we have yet experienced. The dissatisfaction that we sense is really not ours but the Lord's. He within us is aspiring to have the temple church life in the good land. He would have us out of Corinth and into Ephesus, out of the wilderness and into the good land, out of the soul and into the spirit.

During this interim stage, let us go on. We are well able to enter the good land and possess it. Our way is by means of the Ark with the tabernacle. Without the Ark and the tabernacle the children of Israel could not have succeeded in entering the good land. Before they crossed the Jordan River, the Ark preceded them and stayed in the riverbed until all of them had crossed over (Josh. 3:14-17). By virtue of the Ark and the tabernacle they entered the good land.

In one way we are happy to be in the church life; in another, we long for something richer. We must go on by virtue of what we have. We do have the Ark in the tabernacle church life. By this we can enter a higher level, the good land, where the temple can be built up. May we together press on toward this.

CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT

TWO LIVES GRAFTED INTO ONE

Scripture Reading: Rom. 6:5, 8; 7:4; 9:21, 23-24; 11:17, 24; 12:5

THE CREATOR AND THE CREATURE

The relationship between God and man is a mystery. The common concept is that God is the Creator, and man is the creature. God is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. He has created all things. Therefore, man as a small, finite being must worship, revere, and fear Him. Since He is all-powerful and human beings are weak and frail, man must trust and depend on Him. Whenever man is in trials and sufferings, he calls on the heavens for help. This reaching after God is inherent in man. This view of man's relation to God may be scriptural, but it is superficial.

A DEEPER RELATIONSHIP

What the Bible reveals as the ultimate relationship between God and us is far deeper than that of Creator and creature. The nature of this relationship is beyond human concept. It is that God and we may have a union in life. The divine life and the human life join together to become one life.

There is a picture of this in nature. I believe we are all aware that the physical things in the world are signs of spiritual realities. The Lord Jesus again and again used common things as illustrations of spiritual matters.

In the plant kingdom a branch that is not doing very well may be cut off the parent tree and attached to a healthier, more productive tree. This procedure, known as grafting, illustrates the union between God and us. A. B. Simpson's hymn, "I am crucified with Christ," refers to this in the third stanza:

This the secret nature hideth,
Harvest grows from buried grain;
A poor tree with better grafted,
Richer, sweeter life doth gain.

(Hymns, #482)

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM ROMANS

Grafting

The thought expressed in this hymn comes from Romans 11: “You, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in...and became a fellow partaker of the root of fatness of the olive tree...You were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree and were grafted contrary to nature into the cultivated olive tree” (vv. 17, 24). We were the poor, small, wild olive branches, grafted into the cultivated, superior olive tree, and are now enjoying the rich nourishment from the root.

The branch that is grafted is not identical to the tree to which it is attached. If they were identical, there would be no need of grafting. It is a branch from a problem tree that is grafted to a tree having some superior quality. The consequence is that the good tree subdues the inferior branch.

Such is the real nature of the Christian life. The Lord Jesus as the true vine is the superior tree. One day by faith through grace you were grafted into Him. Do not despise this grafting. It means that you no longer have just one life. Your life is now from two lives that have been grafted into one. As you enjoy the root of the fatness of this cultivated olive tree, your poorer life is subdued, and you begin to flourish.

The relationship that the Bible reveals between God and us must extend beyond that of Creator and creature until it reaches a union in life.

Marriage

Grafting is one picture of this union between God and us. Another illustration is given in Romans 7, where we are considered a wife and the Lord Jesus, the Husband: “So then, my brothers, you also have been made dead to the law through the body of Christ so that you might be joined to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit to God” (v. 4). As the wife, we had a former husband, our old man. When the Lord Jesus died on the cross, our old husband was crucified with Him, thus making us a widow. Shortly thereafter, however, we remarried, this time to the Lord Jesus.

Let us consider further the matter of marriage as an example of our relationship with Christ. The first marriage was between Adam and Eve. Adam, you will remember, was created by God from the dust of the ground.

Then God breathed into him the breath of life, and he became a living soul (Gen. 2:7). Eve, however, came into existence differently. God caused Adam to fall asleep, then took a rib out of his side and built a woman (vv. 21-22). Adam and this woman became one. Their union was a union in life. Eve came out of Adam, and so did her life. Both of them shared one life.

The New Testament applies this example to Christ and the church (Eph. 5:31-32). We came out of Christ; His life becomes our life, and we and He become one. This again is a union in life.

Container and Content

In Romans 9 Paul likens us to vessels formed by God (vv. 21, 23). These vessels are to have God Himself as their content, thus making them vessels unto honor, full of riches and glory. God is our inward content; we are His outward expression. The content and the container are one; here again is a union.

Head and Body

A further illustration is given in Romans 12, where we are depicted as the Body of Christ (v. 5). We are united to Him, just as the body and the head are one entity.

THE GRAFTED BRANCH RETAINING ITS OWN LIFE

Notice that this grafted life, pictured for us in these different ways, is not an exchanged life. The inferior branch has not given up its poor life in order to get the richer life of the tree to which it is grafted. No. The branch still retains its same essential characteristics, but its life is uplifted and transformed by being grafted to the better life.

What are the results of the grafting? When the fatness of the better tree supplies the grafted branch, all the negative things are taken away. Then the original function of that branch is restored and strengthened. The fruit is still what it was before the grafting, but the problem factors have been overcome. We are the problem branches that God has grafted to Christ. The fatness of His life comes into us, carrying away all the poor elements in us. He uplifts the original function that God had for us, strengthening and enriching it.

Then naturally and spontaneously, our whole being is saturated and transformed, and a marvelous fruit comes forth.

I have been concerned to share with the saints this matter of the grafted life because it has been of great help to me. For many years I groped and searched for the way to experience what the Bible tells us. We followed others to teach that we must exchange our poor life for the good life of the Lord Jesus. We also tried to practice reckoning as the way to be free from sinning. We taught that since we are prone to sin, we have to see that we are already dead and then reckon on that fact. The result of reckoning was discouragement. Before we tried to reckon, we were dormant. But once we started to reckon, not only did we find that we were not dead; we were more alive than before.

Only gradually did we come to see that Romans is not talking about an exchanged life or a reckoning method. This grafted life means that whatever lack we have, as long as we are grafted into the precious tree of the Lord Jesus, His excellent life will come into us.

THE TIME OF THE GRAFTING

When did this grafting occur? It was at the time we believed and were baptized. Romans 6:3 says, “Are you ignorant that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?” When we were baptized, we were baptized into the Lord Jesus in spirit and were identified with Him. The life within Him came into us.

GROWING TOGETHER WITH HIM

Romans 6:5 goes on to say, “If we have grown together with Him in the likeness of His death, indeed we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection.”

The words *have grown together with Him* in the Greek imply an organic union. The meaning is quite rich. It can be likened to a skin graft. The surgeon may cut a piece of flesh from a patient’s leg and attach it to his arm. After a few days the skin taken from the leg will grow together with the flesh of the arm; they will be organically joined to each other. Life growth will occur.

This is the very kind of union meant in Romans 6:5. We have been grafted to the Lord Jesus and are now supplied by His life and His riches. A growth is

taking place as we are enjoying Him. This union is not like two dead pieces of wood put together; however closely they may be placed to each other, there is no growing together. There must be a living branch grafted into a living tree for there to be not only a joining but also an organic growing together, with the branch enjoying the riches of the life of the better tree.

The Chinese version translates *grown together with Him* as “identified with Him.” This is quite good, but we need to include the thought of being joined and growing together with Him. Both the joining and the growth are essential for a successful graft. If the two pieces of flesh do not grow together after a graft, within a few days the grafted skin will decay. The joining together must bring the growth; then the two lives become one.

THE CUTTING

When a branch is grafted, both it and the tree must be cut. Just binding them together will not join them organically. Both must be cut and then grafted together at the site of the cut. When the two wounds kiss each other, the graft can take, and there will be the growth.

When was the Lord Jesus cut? It was on the cross. The wound of the Lord Jesus is waiting for sinners. His side has been pierced; the blood shed.

When is the sinner cut? He too has been cut on the cross. He experiences this cutting when he repents and receives the Lord.

We had a co-worker from the northeast of China who, before his conversion, was arrogantly opposed to Christianity. One day he went into a temple and noticed an open Bible on the table in front of the idols. His curiosity was aroused, and he began to read Psalm 1. Its words quite impressed him, and he decided to take the Bible home and read it. He did so. The more he read, the more the light shined. Convicted of his sins, he wept, beat his breast, and rolled on the floor in repentance.

Was this repentance not a cutting? He was a branch being cut. Then when he called on the Lord to save him, he was grafted to this One who had already been cut. At the site where the wound of the sinner met the wound of the Lord Jesus, they were grafted together. The Lord began to live and grow in this newly grafted branch to supply him.

GRAFTING AND GROWING

When Paul says, “We have grown together with Him in the likeness of His death,” he is saying that in the place where we were cut, we were grafted into the Lord. This grafting is the growing. We are not first grafted and then begin to grow. Rather, we have been grafted into Him in the likeness of His death and have grown together with Him all at the same time.

IN DEATH AND IN RESURRECTION

Notice the two aspects of grafting and growing together in Romans 6:5: “If we have grown together with Him in the likeness of His death, indeed we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection.” The first aspect is in the likeness of His death and refers to our being grafted into Him. The second is in the likeness of His resurrection and refers to His coming into us to grow in us. This second aspect is resurrection.

The initial grafting is related to the Lord’s death. He is the true vine. When He was crucified, He was thoroughly cut. Now His cut wound is waiting for the repentant sinners, and He as the life-giving Spirit moves in us, searching our inner being, enlightening us so that we repent. Our grief and tears are the cut we receive. We have no choice but to believe in the Lord and ask Him to save us: “O Lord, thank You that You died for me. Thank You for shedding Your blood for me. Thank You, Lord, for saving me.” This is the time when we are grafted into Him and grow together with Him in the likeness of His death.

Once we are thus grafted into Him, His resurrection life comes into us and removes all the negative elements within. His life becomes ours in resurrection. He uplifts the original functions given us at creation and enriches, strengthens, and even saturates our whole being. This new life is a life of two lives grafted into one. In this union are victory, life, light, power, and all the other divine attributes. All these are ours not by an exchange, not by reckoning, but by being grafted into Him.

This concept of the divine life and the human life being grafted into one is foreign to human thought. Because of this, when we come to read the Bible, we miss it. I trust that now we have all been deeply impressed that as saved ones, the life we live is that of two lives grafted into one. By the Lord’s grace we have repented, and through repentance and believing we have been

grafted into the divine life. In this grafting we grow together with Him. Then in resurrection His life grows in us. The divine life is in us, supplying us. This is the Christian life.

CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE

TWO SPIRITS JOINED AS ONE

Scripture Reading: Gen. 1:26a; 2:7; Zech. 12:1b; John 3:6; 7:39; 14:17; 1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:17; 1 Cor. 6:17; 2 Tim. 4:22a; Rom. 8:2, 16, 4; 1 Thes. 5:17, 19; Eph. 6:18

LIMITED BY OUR NATURAL CONCEPTS

When we read the Bible, it is easy for us to understand and even experience those things that fit our natural concept. If, for example, we read about how our environment perfects us, how tribulations make us patient, we can easily accept such a thought and apply it in our living.

It is another matter, however, when we come to the matter of God and man being organically mingled, as in grafting. We may feel we understand that we need to live such a grafted life, but when it actually comes down to our everyday experience, the truth is that we have not touched even the border of such a life.

In a recent meeting when the saints were sharing their experiences, I noticed that one after another testified that tribulation pressed them to experience the Lord. Some felt persecuted at home; others, at work. As I listened, I thought how easy it is to know tribulation, but how hard to know life. Yes, tribulation forces us to contact the Lord, but what is the result of contacting the Lord?

You may protest that it was I who taught you to accept your circumstances as the arrangement of the Lord. It is true that I preached a good number of messages telling you that all things work together for good, according to Romans 8:28. However, since 1961 I have been preaching mainly about the Spirit. How much of this have you taken in? The persecution of the environment we can easily comprehend, but the matter of the Spirit eludes us.

Consider the previous chapter on the grafted life. You may have been impressed while you were reading it, but before too long, you began to consider in your mind. You remembered learning that in grafting, the better branch is grafted to an inferior tree. Why did the chapter say that the poorer branch is grafted to a good tree? All your inspiration about the Lord and you being grafted into one life fades away, and your mind continues its thoughts: Romans 11 is talking about the nations being grafted to the nation of Israel; it is not about our being grafted to the Lord Jesus. By all this activity in your mind, the message is made void.

What Romans 11 says is that the wild olive branch has been grafted to the good olive tree, and that its root is supporting the wild branch. The Bible is contrary to your thought. The Lord Jesus is not the good branch grafted into the inferior tree. In that case, we would be upholding Him, instead of He upholding us. The thought is that we as the inferior branches are grafted into Him. He is the true vine, but we as the branches have not grown naturally on His vine. We have been grafted into it.

Romans 11 primarily refers to the natural Israel. However, Christ is joined to Israel, and He is the true Israel (see Isa. 49:1-4). All Israelites can become the real Israel by being grafted into Him. Hence, this olive tree in Romans 11 may also refer to Christ. All true believers among both Jews and Gentiles are grafted to this olive tree so that it includes Christ and all His believers.

“INTO...”

In John 3:36 we are told, “He who believes into the Son has eternal life.” We believe *into* the Son. The same Greek preposition is used in Romans 6:3: “Baptized into Christ Jesus.” We were put *into* the Lord Jesus, just as we were put *into* the water at baptism. The step of being baptized into Him takes the one foot of believing and the other foot of being baptized. We believe into Him and are baptized into Him.

What does baptism mean? It does not refer to life but rather to death. “All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death” (v. 3). The death of the Lord Jesus left Him with a wound. At the site of this wound we are baptized into Him, are grafted into Him, and grow together with Him. By being baptized into His death, we are grafted into Him. This grafting is a union and a growth. The joining activates the growth process.

The life-juice of the tree gets into the grafted branch, and it begins to grow in resurrection.

THE SIMILARITY BETWEEN GOD AND MAN

For two trees to be grafted, there must be a close similarity between them. A banana tree cannot be grafted to a grapevine. The same is true with a skin graft. If the skin to be used in a graft is foreign to the body, the body will reject it.

How then can our human life be grafted to God's life? It is because the two lives are to some extent similar. Man was made in God's image and according to His likeness (Gen. 1:26). But, you may ask, how can God have an image when He does not have any form? Idols are images because they have a form, but what is God's image?

Some explain *image* as meaning the inner attributes, with the term *likeness* denoting the outward form. However, I would explain *image* as referring to one's expression, whereas *likeness* refers to one's stance. If I stand with my hand raised in a salute, my image is my expression, but my likeness is that of a soldier. If I jump and leap on the platform, my image is still my expression, but my likeness is that of a hart.

When God created man in the beginning, He created man with His image, or expression, or face. Then He also made man according to His likeness, that is, according to His stature; for this He used the dust of the ground.

You may ask how God could have a physical form. This is a difficult question. There is, however, an instance of God's appearing in the form of a body before the Lord's coming to earth in the incarnation. In Genesis 18 Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent one hot summer day, when three men approached. Two were apparently angels (v. 22), but one was clearly Jehovah the Lord (v. 13). He came as a real person. He ate the meal Abraham prepared for Him, after having His feet washed. He talked with Abraham in an ordinary way, not like the Creator issuing decrees from a heavenly throne. As He was going on His way, Abraham accompanied Him a little distance. This closeness constrained God to open to him and reveal what He would do, as one would share with a friend. Is this God in Genesis 18 a man? Who is this Jehovah? He is surely the same as the Lord Jesus in the

New Testament. This is beyond theology's ability to explain, but we can see from this passage that man has a body after God's likeness.

At the time of creation, God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life (2:7). The Hebrew word translated "breath" in this verse is translated "spirit" in Proverbs 20:27: "The spirit of man is the lamp of Jehovah, / Searching all the innermost parts of the inner being." The breath of life in Genesis 2 becomes the spirit of man in Proverbs 20. The human spirit is the breath of life from God that enters into man and becomes his spirit.

The spirit may well be what Confucius was referring to when he said that there is a bright virtue within man. His thought was that this bright virtue needed to be developed and further brightened. The Bible, however, shows us that this spirit needs to be regenerated. In man's spirit, which was formed from God's breathing into man the breath of life, there is not the Spirit of God. Therefore, the spirit must receive another life by being "born of the Spirit" of God (John 3:6).

The spirit of man is his most precious part. It is what distinguishes him from animals. Once this breath of life got into man's nostrils, he became a living soul, with a personality that in reality is in the image of God. Man's emotions, desires, and intelligence correspond with God's. God has such feelings as love; He has desires; and He has thoughts, wisdom, and intelligence. In a sense we are a photograph of God. The photograph is not God Himself, but it is His image.

It is foolish to accept Darwin's theory that man evolved from lower animals. All the plants and animals created by God in Genesis 1 were designed to reproduce according to their kind (vv. 11-12, 21, 24-25). But when it came to the creation of man, instead of saying, "According to his kind," it says, "According to Our likeness" (v. 26). Man is not in the category of animals. He is a picture of God. God created man like Himself.

We are not God any more than a picture of the president is the president. However, we must not demean ourselves. If we see that we are God's image, we will realize that we are vessels of honor prepared unto glory.

MAN CREATED TO BE JOINED TO GOD

Why did God make us so similar to Himself? It was so that one day man might be grafted into God.

In Zechariah 12:1 the Lord is described as the One “who stretches forth the heavens and lays the foundations of the earth and forms the spirit of man within him.” Notice how the heavens, the earth, and the spirit of man are put together as the three important things in the universe. The heavens are for the earth: without sunshine, water, and air, all of which come from the heavens, the living things on the earth could not exist. The earth is for man: without the provisions that come from the earth, man could not exist. What is man for? Man is for God. When Zechariah refers here to the creation of man, he does not mention the body but rather the spirit. To have man, God first stretched forth the heavens, then laid the foundations of the earth; then He formed “the spirit of man within him.” When all the physical things in the universe were ready and could provide man with a suitable environment, God put man on the scene. He formed the spirit of man to be a container for Himself. Our spirit is the organ by which we contact God.

Notice this series: the heavens, the earth, the spirit of man. In the whole universe these are the three most important matters. Treasure your spirit. It is as significant as the heavens and the earth. Zechariah could have enumerated countless other items created by God, but only these three are listed together, because these are directly related to God. All these were created so that God might obtain a group of people to express Him.

We are vessels of honor and glory because we contain God. A diamond ring is usually kept in an attractive velvet box. Because the ring is so precious, it needs a beautiful container. The box is honorable and glorious because of the diamond ring it contains. We in ourselves may be only a box, but within us is God Himself. Do you realize what a treasure you have in this earthen vessel? Does it not excite you to have such a precious diamond in your possession? The value of this diamond cannot be measured in carats. No scale can weigh it. It is limitless and immeasurable. God Himself is your marvelous, glorious content.

Within this man, who was created in the image of God, is a receiver, like a radio; this is his spirit. Once this receiver is turned on, God comes in. Man is not only close to God but similar to Him as well.

GOD PROCESSED TO BE JOINED TO MAN

Although man from his creation was designed to receive God, God at that time was not ready to be received into man. Not until some four thousand years later did God initiate the process by which He could be joined to man. Do not think that four thousand years is a long time. In God's eyes it is like four days (cf. Psa. 90:4).

God came in human form not in a majestic way but in a humble way. He passed through the womb of Mary and through the manger. He escaped to Egypt. Then He went to Galilee, where He grew up in a carpenter's home in the village of Nazareth. He spent thirty years there, working as a carpenter, known to those around Him as Jesus. Yet this One, the child born to us, also has as His name Mighty God (Isa. 9:6).

Then He came forth to minister for three and a half years. He was persecuted and rejected by His own people. Finally, the time drew near, and He talked to His disciples, explaining to them that He would be going to the cross, where He would pass through death. By this means He would not only redeem them; He would also change His form. No longer would He be restricted by His physical body from entering into them. No longer would they be in one place and He in another. No longer would He be only *with* them; He would actually be *in* them. After His death and resurrection He as the last Adam would become the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b).

"The Spirit," John tells us in 7:39, "was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified." This term, *the Spirit*, is significant. The Spirit of God is mentioned numerous times in the Old Testament, yet "the Spirit was not yet." When the Lord Jesus emerged from death and was resurrected, He was glorified. Not until this happened was there "the Spirit."

The Spirit of God is like a glass of plain water. When we add various ingredients to it, like tea and honey, it becomes a refreshing drink. Before these are added, the water is there, but the drink "is not yet." What are the ingredients added to the Spirit of God? Before the Lord's death and resurrection there was only God in the Spirit of God. But through the incarnation the Lord Jesus put on humanity. In resurrection this humanity was brought into the Spirit. His death was also an element that was added to

the Spirit of God. This death was precious and lovable, not like the death of the first Adam. It encompasses redemption; the termination of the past; and the dealing with the self, with the old man, and with all the other negative things. There is salt in this drink also, added not only for improving the flavor but also to kill germs. Besides death, in the Spirit are found also resurrection, ascension, glorification, enthronement, dominion, and power.

In essence *the Spirit* is the Triune God—Father, Son, and Spirit—as the all-inclusive Spirit. This is the ultimate expression of the Triune God.

With this understanding of *the Spirit*, verses like those in Romans 8 about the Spirit should be clear to you. Whenever you come across this term, *the Spirit*, in your reading of the New Testament, remember that it refers to the Triune God passing through a long process and thus becoming the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit.

GOD AND MAN JOINED

Man is ready, because of his having been created with a spirit, to be joined to God. God, now that He has been through the process we have described, is ready to be joined to man. Romans 10:8 tells us that He is as near as our mouth. He is like the air; we simply breathe, and the air comes into us.

As soon as you confess that you need Him, He will come in. You may say only, “O Lord,” very softly, and you will breathe Him in. Many can testify that something happened inside when they said “O Lord.”

This is how the two spirits are joined and the two lives are grafted into one. “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17).

Christians do not grasp this matter of the mingled spirit. I spoke this here in Taipei in 1961; even some of the hymns we sang tonight were written at that time. Yet now, eighteen years later, I listen to your testimonies and hear nothing about these two spirits becoming one. Your testimonies still concern how you are pressed by your environment. What is the reason for your trying circumstances? We must be broken, you say. No. God does not want you whole *or* broken. He does not want *you*. What He is after is this Spirit. He wants *the Spirit*. He wants the Spirit to be lived out from you.

VIRTUES SUBSTITUTED FOR CHRIST

Why do we neglect this clear truth in the Bible and instead focus our attention on humility, for example? We read some passages in the Bible and then begin to walk with our shoulders stooped over. This meekness is short-lived. If we are deprived of our sleep, that will be the end of our meekness. It is like a monkey taught to eat in the Western way. Many years ago I saw a monkey in the zoo being trained to eat a meal with a knife and fork. After the trainer finished the lesson, the monkey tossed away the knife and fork and resumed eating in monkey fashion. So it is with our humility; the most it can last is a day or two.

When the sisters read Ephesians, they come across the term *in Christ* again and again. Nothing gets through to them, however, until they come to Ephesians 5: “Husbands, love your wives” (v. 25). Then they begin to consider whether their husbands love them and whether the elders really love their wives. After applying the Scriptures to others, they turn back to apply it to themselves: “Wives, be subject to your own husbands as to the Lord” (v. 22). They remember how many times they have made up their minds to submit and have failed. They repent, with tears, and confess to the Lord that they cannot make it. They reread Ephesians, then again try and fail to submit to their husbands. Finally, they have a talk with the elders and tell them that the Bible does not work.

We do not notice that the very same chapter of Ephesians says, “Be filled in spirit” (v. 18). We know Romans 8:28 about all things working together for good, but Romans 8:4, about walking according to spirit, we cannot quite grasp.

How much of our day are we living Christ? Even in the recovery there are probably very few of us who live Christ at all. Those who do are living Him for only a small portion of their day. The rest of us live in our flesh. We may or may not lose our temper, but we are not living Christ. There are Chinese philosophers, like Wang Yang-ming, whose standard of morality exceeds that of most Christians. But even if we can come up to his standard, God is not interested. God wants the Spirit, not our good conduct.

He has created us in His own image and likeness, not in the image of the virtues. We are not only His picture. When He comes into us, we are part of

Him, grafted into Him, having His life, and being one spirit with Him. He has no need of our virtues.

CHRIST REPLACING THE SUBSTITUTES

Do not draw a wrong conclusion when I say that God does not want our virtues. In previous chapters I have said that God does not want our culture. This is not to say that we must begin to act like barbarians. The point is that our culture or our virtues are substitutes for Christ. Once we have Him, we no longer need those substitutes. But if society had no culture, how could it be maintained? How could family life hold together? Our children must be raised according to cultural standards; they have not grown sufficiently to experience Christ. Meanwhile, they must be kept in the sheepfold of the law until Christ comes (John 10; Gal. 3:24-25).

For those of us who are older, Christ has come. Why should we ride in a horse-drawn cart when we can take a 747 jet to our destination? There is no longer any reason for us to remain in the fold. We have no need of the substitutes. We can live directly in the Spirit. Such living is different from the law, from culture, from ethics, and from morality. Before we have the Spirit, we need culture and morality; we need the rules and regulations of society. But what God wants is that we live out the Spirit.

When we live out the Spirit, the result will exceed the law and the ethical virtues. It surpasses the bright virtue mentioned by Confucius. This Spirit is God Himself.

CHAPTER SIXTY

THE TRIUNE GOD SATURATING THE TRIPARTITE MAN

Scripture Reading: Rom. 8:2a, 9-10, 6b, 11

SPIRIT AND LIFE

The relationship between God and man, as we have seen in the two previous chapters, is a matter of life and the spirit. Both life and the spirit are mysterious. Actually, according to the New Testament revelation, these two are one. In John 6:63 the Lord Jesus said that the words He spoke “are spirit and are life.” The spirit is life, and life is the spirit.

Our human life and our human spirit are closely related. When man was formed, God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Gen. 2:7). The word *breath* here is the same as the word for *spirit*. In both Hebrew and Greek, the word *spirit* may mean “spirit,” “breath,” or “wind.” In fact, in Ezekiel 37 the one Hebrew word is translated “Spirit” in verse 1 and “wind” and “breath” in verse 9. *Spirit*, *breath*, and *wind* refer to three aspects. When the wind is weakened, it is the breath, and then it becomes the spirit. We do not enjoy the strong wind of a typhoon; we prefer the gentle breeze, which is the breath. It is our breath that keeps us alive; when our breathing stops, our life is over.

In Romans 8:2 the words *spirit* and *life* are brought together: “The law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death.” Life and spirit are one. The term *Spirit of life* indicates that the Spirit is the source, and life is the current or flow that comes from the Spirit. Life is of the Spirit and issues from the Spirit. The Spirit is the substance and the source of life. When we refer to the electric current, we are talking about the electricity. It is electricity when it is constant; it is an electric current when it is moving. Similarly, when the Spirit is activated, it becomes life; without movement it is the Spirit. Apart from an electric current, there is no electricity. The movement of the electricity is the current; the current is the very electricity itself.

Apart from the Spirit, there is no other life. When did the Spirit become activated and come into you as life? It was when you confessed your sins, repented, and received the Lord Jesus. It was then that you were grafted to the Lord, and His Spirit flowed into you. Within you, He should be flowing as life to you all the time.

ACTIVATING THE SPIRIT

Electricity has been installed in this building, but if you do not turn on the switch, the function of the electricity will not be manifested. If you want the heat or the air-conditioning or the lights, you must activate the electricity by turning on the switch. Then it will be hot or cold or bright. With too many Christians today, the Spirit within is not activated.

Is the Spirit within you activated? It may be moving when you are in a meeting, but how about when you are at dinner with your family? How about when you are chatting with your friends? How about when you are criticizing your daughter-in-law or your mother-in-law? How about when you are gossiping? How about when you are exchanging words with your spouse?

How much of the day is the Spirit in you switched on? You may love the Lord and seek Him, you may pay a price to follow Him, and you may even serve Him full time. But the question still remains: how much of your time is the Spirit turned on? If we turn off the switch in the building, what is the use of talking about how dark it is in the room?

You have asked me to have meetings with you about how to govern the church or how to serve the Lord. Whenever I hear a question about “how to,” my head whirls. Why? If you do not turn on the switch, what is the sense of studying how to make the lights shine or how to cool the building? If you do not know how to touch the Spirit, it is a waste of time to talk about how to be an elder. The great problem throughout the whole world today is the energy source. If this problem is not solved, it is useless to work on problems in transportation or industry. Without sufficient energy the other problems cannot be dealt with. As soon as you find the energy source, you will have light, heat, or air-conditioning.

When I heard that there was a young people’s meeting arranged for me to speak at, I told the brothers, “No, let old and young both come.” I have only

one subject to talk about, whether to the young or the old: touch the Spirit. If you are an unbeliever, I tell you, once you touch the Spirit by repenting, confessing, and asking the Lord to save you, you are saved. If you have had fifty years of spiritual history, I tell you, touch the Spirit. If you are weary of turning on the switch and do not want to do it anymore, you will be in darkness. Every day you must turn on the switch. If you stop, you are about to die.

THE SCRIPTURES VERSUS LIFE

Your need is to turn on the switch, not study. “You search the Scriptures,” the Lord Jesus told the religious Jews, “Yet you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:39-40). They spent time studying and searching the Scriptures from Genesis to Malachi, but they would not come to the One who could give them life. You may study the books on electricity, but if you do not want to turn on the switch, what is the use?

I have no understanding of how electricity works, but I turn on the switch, and the lights go on at once. I enjoy the brightness so much that I do not want to turn the lights off. Let them keep shining. I can also turn on the switch and get air-conditioning in the summer and heat when the temperature is cold. Heat, cooling, and lights all depend on my using the switch.

If you study the Bible every day without touching the switch, what is the use? Your spirit must touch the Spirit. These two spirits must mingle as one. The Triune God has passed through a long process to become the life-giving Spirit dwelling in your spirit. Do you really believe 1 Corinthians 6:17: “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit”? I know you believe John 3:16. You must also believe 1 Corinthians 6:17. If you are one spirit with the Lord, you have the switch. Open your spirit. Do not exercise your mind. Whether you are young or old, sister or brother—whoever you are—if you turn on the switch, you enjoy the light. If the switch is off, you may be an elder or a worker and be in darkness and death.

The Spirit within us needs to be activated. Then it becomes life. We have already seen in the previous chapters that our life is the life that results from two lives grafted into one, and that our spirit is the spirit that issues from two spirits mingled as one. In this chapter we want to consider how this spirit moves and acts.

THE TRIUNE GOD IN ROMANS 8

The Spirit that we are referring to is *the* Spirit; that is, it is the Triune God who has been processed and has become the life-giving Spirit. This Triune God saturates the tripartite man. Look at Romans 8:9, and you will see the reference to the Triune God: “You are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Yet if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not of Him.” Notice that God, Christ, and the Spirit are all mentioned here. Yet this verse is not making a doctrinal statement; it is dealing with our experience. Contrary to the way Christianity presents it, the Trinity is not a doctrine for us to subscribe to. We need God to be triune in order that we may experience Him. God, Christ, and the Spirit are all for our experience.

Erroneous Concepts of the Trinity

The traditional explanation of the Trinity is grossly inadequate and borders on tritheism. When the Spirit of God is joined with us, God is not left behind, nor does Christ remain on the throne. This is the impression that Christianity gives. They think of the Father as one person, sending the Son, another person, to accomplish redemption, after which the Son sends the Spirit, yet another person. The Spirit, in traditional thinking, comes into the believers, while the Father and Son are left on the throne. When believers pray, they are taught to bow before the Father and pray in the name of the Son. To split the Godhead into these separate persons is not the revelation of the Bible but the doctrine of the Nicene Creed.

When I was in Rome, I saw two paintings in the Vatican. One was of an old, bearded man sitting down, with a young son standing at his side, and a dove flying overhead. This picture, we were told, represented the three persons in the Trinity. There was another painting right next to it, similar to it, with an old man sitting, a young man standing, and a dove flying above; however, this one also had a young woman standing there. Here were four persons, with Mary included. Should we not battle against such teachings until there is no place for them?

Three in One

John 14 clearly says that the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son (vv. 10, 11). To see the Son is to see the Father. When the Son speaks, it is the Father who is working. The two are inseparable. The Bible goes on to say that the Son, after death and resurrection, became the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b). The Son, in whom is the Father, has become the Spirit. Thus, the Triune God can come into the sinner. With the Spirit comes the Son; when the Son comes, the Father comes as well.

The term *triune* means “three in one.” From one side there are three; but from the other side They are one, because They cannot be separated.

Notice the three terms Paul uses in Romans 8:9 and 10. He says that *the Spirit of God* dwells in you, that without *the Spirit of Christ* you are not of Him, and that *Christ* is in you. Why does Paul use three terms to refer to the same One? It is because this One has three aspects: the aspects of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit.

THE TRIPARTITE MAN IN ROMANS 8

Not only is God triune; man is tripartite. We human beings are spirit, soul, and body. We were created in this way so that we could be organically grafted to God and so that the two spirits, His and ours, could be joined together.

Romans 8:10 says, “If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness.” When the Triune God enters into you, His divine life is dispensed into you and makes your spirit life. Your spirit is life. Here is a reference to your spirit.

Then verse 6 says, “The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace.” The mind is the main part of the soul. Thus, the mind is sometimes used in the Bible to represent the soul. In verse 10 we saw that the spirit is life. Here in verse 6 the mind, representing the soul, is also life. When we set the mind on the spirit, the life and the spirit will be infused into our mind, making it also life.

Verse 11 mentions our mortal bodies: “If the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you.”

In just these few verses we have the tripartite man—spirit, soul, and body—and the Triune God. It is only in these last few years, even since we completed the *Life-study of Romans*, that I have seen the Triune God and the tripartite man in Romans 8. For Him to become our life, He first enters our spirit, making it life. Then our soul is made life by the mind being set on the spirit. Last, our mortal bodies are made life. The divine life thus saturates our whole being.

SATURATED WITH GOD

Hymns #501 says, “Thy Spirit will me saturate, / Every part will God permeate.” Our relationship with God should reach to this extent. Our whole being must be saturated with Him. We should not be content with outwardly worshipping Him, loving Him, fearing Him, and doing things to please Him. This mysterious God has passed through a process: creation, incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension. Now He has returned as the Spirit to enter all who believe in Him. Such is our God and our Savior.

He does not want us to worship Him from afar. He does not want us to stand in awe of Him. Nor does He want us to perform certain duties to please Him. What He wants is that we open the deepest part of our being to Him and call on His name. Then His Spirit comes into us, making our deadened spirit life. From there He spreads out. As we set our mind on the spirit, the soul too is saturated with Him. It also becomes life. From the soul, life spreads also to our mortal body. The resurrection life saturates it. When every part of us is saturated with this all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, we are in the union that God wants.

God has no use for the religious forms of worship. He does not want us to bow, kneel, or prostrate ourselves before Him. What He wants are those who have a contrite heart and will open themselves to Him, receiving Him as their life, light, power, and even their living. The worship He wants is this union. If we give Him the opportunity to be in union with us, this is worship. To allow Him to be joined with us is what pleases Him most.

This is the true nature of the Christian life. For most Christians, however, Christianity has become a religion. The talk about bearing the cross, for example, is similar to what Buddhism and Hinduism teach. The talk about living uprightly sounds like the ethics of Confucius, entirely apart from God.

The way God wants us to live exceeds human ethics or morality, because it is Christ Himself lived out from us.

THE SHORTCOMING OF NATURAL VIRTUES

Let us take the example of marriage. At the wedding ceremony the groom promises to love his wife, and the bride vows to submit to her husband. Not too many days after the wedding, however, trouble arises between this new couple. Their personalities are not compatible. The groom may be an even-tempered person, but the slowness of his wife nonetheless provokes him beyond measure. The bride, on her part, cannot stand this speedy man she has married. It seems she has no way to keep up with him. Whatever they vowed at their wedding ceremony is gone. Loving and submitting—those promises have to be thrown away.

In time there is some easing of the problem. Perhaps a talk with someone helps. Perhaps they hear a message that inspires them. They resolve to work out their problems. Yes, the groom thinks, I am too fast; I should be more sympathetic toward my wife. The bride too resolves that she will try harder to catch up with her husband; after all, he is her head. These renewed efforts on the part of the groom to be loving and the wife to be submissive cause a great deal of suffering.

Suppose they succeed. The husband does find enough love for his wife, and the wife manages to submit to her husband. God does not want that. He does not want a love or a submission that is apart from Christ.

THE SOURCE OF OUR LIVING

Frankly, Ephesians 5:22-25 troubled me for years. From my experience it seemed to me that this word did not work. It says to love, or to submit, but this is beyond our power. If this is what God requires of us, why does He not enable us to do so? I kept studying this passage, trying to find the answer.

I saw that I was taking the verses out of context. Earlier it tells us to “be filled in spirit” (v. 18). The love or the submission comes from the filled spirit. There is no sense ordering the light bulbs to give light if we do not turn on the switch. Unless the electricity goes into the light bulbs, they cannot give light. Light is not a matter of their behaving; it is the expression of the electricity.

Loving your wife is not a matter of your proper behavior. It should be Christ expressed, His life flowing out. Submitting to your husband is not within your capacity; there is no sense looking within to find the submission. Christ Himself is the real submission. When you are filled with Him, what will come out toward your husband is submission.

The same is true of other virtues, like gentleness and patience. Consider how quickly your patience is exhausted. Notice how soon your gentleness disappears. Meekness is beyond your best efforts. How are you going to measure up to all these standards?

TOUCHING HIM BY CALLING ON HIS NAME

The answer to all your shortcomings is to live out Christ. You must cease trying to love or to submit, to be gentle or to be meek. Admit that you are unable and stop trying. Simply live out Christ. Call on His name. This is not something for just the young people to do. The older sisters need to say, “O Lord Jesus!” too. The brothers, whatever their position in society, must also say, “O Lord Jesus!” You need Him. If your situation does not allow you to call on Him loudly, you can say His name softly over and over. You will feel different inside. Because He is the true and living God, when you call on His name, you touch the Spirit. The Spirit contains the person of the Lord Jesus. Jesus is the name, and the Spirit is the person. Keep breathing Him in, in this way. Do not think that you have heard such a message before. You still need to breathe. Do not feel that it is embarrassing and uncultured to call on His name. It is not by being in an impressive-looking church building and acting in a dignified, solemn way that you will touch the Lord. In such places it is hard to say, “O Lord Jesus!” Whoever you are and whatever your position, be assured that you need Him. You need Him. Call on His name. The effect this will have on you is not merely psychological. If it were, then whatever name you say should give the same effect. Try saying, “O Socrates,” and you will see how vain it is. It is only when you call, “O Lord Jesus,” that you touch the Spirit.

STUDYING VERSUS EATING

For too many years we have exercised our mind to understand spiritual matters. We have searched the Scriptures, but we have not come to the Lord for life. The Jews had only thirty-nine books to study, but we have the

additional twenty-seven in the New Testament. Then, since the time of the Reformation, countless books have been written. We have been inspired by the life of Madame Guyon and tried to be like her. We have read the writings of Zinzendorf about the Moravian brothers. We have studied the writings of the Brethren. Brother Nee's writings are available to us. We have hundreds of Life-study messages. What has been the result of studying all these writings? Because we have not come to the Lord for life, the result has been differing opinions. We measure the church by what we have studied and conclude that things are not the way they should be.

Let me tell you that you are the first one who is not the way you should be. You are not breathing freely. Your spirit is plugged up. The problem is not whether things are being done correctly. It is not a matter of knowing who is doing well and who is not. The problem is a lack of the Spirit. You will not gain any life from merely understanding the Bible. Life is Christ Himself. Life is the Spirit. You must come to the Lord. I do not mean for you not to study the Bible, not to read spiritual books, and not to read the Life-study messages. But you must come to such reading the way you come to a meal.

When you read a Life-study message, you should eat and drink it. The food may not always suit your taste. You may tire of the same cooking after many years. But whether you enjoy it or not, you need the nourishment. If you do not eat and sleep properly, you will not have any energy. Sometimes you may be given too much to eat. Overeating is not good for your health either, but this is not the problem with most of you. Most of you are undernourished. You approach things in an analytical way, trying to look into this and check out that. If you go on in this way, you will end up in a coffin. Whenever you are trying to figure out who is right and who is wrong, you are eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Sometimes I do not enjoy the food that I am served. But whether it tastes good or not, I eat it because I know it is nourishing. I am like a car with a long way to go. If it does not have a full tank of gasoline, how can it get to its destination?

If you really love the Lord and are seeking after Him, turn away from your studying and your efforts to figure out what is right and wrong. Eat and drink. Praise the Lord that the Triune God has passed through this lengthy process and is now in the realm of ascension, waiting for us to contact Him. He is the

Spirit. Look away from doctrines and praise Him that you also have a spirit. Your spirit is as important as the heavens and the earth. God formed your spirit so that you could contact His Spirit. These two spirits mingle as one. Live out this spirit that comes from the two spirits joined as one. Let nothing else bother you.

THE SPIRIT, NOT DOCTRINE

The matters of right and wrong cannot be settled. Someday they will pass away. Nor do arguments over doctrine lead anywhere except to death. We may talk about the ground of the church, but if we do not live in the Spirit, while we are preaching about oneness, we will not be one. When we live in the Spirit, instead of doctrine we will have oneness. We know there is one God, one Lord, one Spirit, and one Body. By living in this Spirit, we are living in the Body and standing on the ground of oneness. But we do not hold this as our doctrine. We simply live in this Spirit. I have seen too much. As soon as doctrinal matters come up, everyone is divided. Whenever we are in the realm of doctrine, there are problems.

A SUMMARY

God is Spirit and life. He has passed through a process and is now ready for us to receive Him. Praise the Lord that we have done so! His Spirit and ours are joined as one. Every moment we live in this Spirit. His divine life makes our spirit life. Then our soul becomes life by the spreading of His life, until finally our body is also life by His saturating of us. Here is what God wants: the Spirit saturating our whole being until every part is Christ. Morality and ethics cannot compare with this. When man lives himself, even the best of his living is only copper. When we live Christ, our living is gold, shining bright.

CHAPTER SIXTY-ONE

REGENERATION, SANCTIFICATION, TRANSFORMATION, CONFORMATION, AND GLORIFICATION

Scripture Reading: Rom. 8:15-16; 15:16; 12:2a; 8:29-30; 10:12; 8:4, 14

The matter of God's relationship with man is deep and mysterious. The grafting of the divine life and the human life into one portrays the most intimate of relationships.

THE UNION OF GOD AND MAN

In human society the relationship between husband and wife is the closest. But the grafting together of two lives is still closer. When a branch is grafted to a tree, these two from that point on share a common life. That such a picture could illustrate God's relationship with man is beyond human thought. Our thought is that God is high and lofty. He is to be revered as the Creator and worshipped as the Lord of all. On our side, we feel far off, small, and low; surely God and we can have nothing in common.

GOD'S PREPARATORY WORK

But God had the intention to become one life with us. To accomplish this He made preparations. Man's creation was part of this preparation. He designed man so that His life could be joined with man's life. He created man in His image and according to His likeness. He breathed the breath of life into him, thus creating a spirit in him.

This spirit is the organ for receiving God. It gives us a spiritual sense. "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit" (John 4:24). For us to contact anything, we must use the proper organ. We have our five sense organs by which we can know the physical, material world. For seeing we must use our eyes. If we are blind, however beautiful a scene is before us, we will not be able to realize it. To perceive scent, we must use our nose. If we have a cold and a stuffy nose, we will not be aware of a sweet fragrance, even

though others insist that they can smell it. Similarly, our spirit is the organ by which we can contact God. Those who say that there is no God are not using their spirit. Because they do not use the proper organ, to them God does not exist. They are not using the spiritual sense by which they could substantiate Him.

Such is the wonderful way in which we were made. We have God's image, His likeness, and a spirit with which to contact Him. Thus God prepared man to be joined to Himself.

God also had to prepare Himself for this union. Finally, He was ready. He had passed through creation, incarnation, the thirty-three and a half years of human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Now He descended as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit.

TUNING IN TO GOD

Both parties are now ready. All that remains to be done is for us to turn back to Him and repent. He is waiting for us to call on Him: "O Lord, I believe in You. I want You. Without You life is vanity. Without You I am empty." When we pray this way, this marvelous Spirit will gladly enter our spirit and make us one with Him. We are like a radio with a receiver inside. When we turn on the radio and adjust the dial, we receive the sound waves and can hear the radio program. The sound waves are in the air, but we do not hear them until we tune in to them. Our spirit is the receiver; rather than exercise our mind or our emotions, we can exercise our spirit and contact God.

All of us at one time or another have sensed that there must be a God. Deep within we have had an assurance that there is a Lord in this universe. We may not have expressed it in words, but we have had such a sense. The source of this sense is our spirit; to impart such a feeling is one of its functions. We may not have heeded it. We may have been busy with our plans for the future. We may have given ourselves to a career or made schemes to make money. We may have told ourselves that things about God are too abstract and incomprehensible; we should be practical.

You may be a student, working hard on your lessons. But one day you push the books aside. Why am I studying? What is the meaning of life? What does the future hold for me? These questions come not from your mind but from

the deepest part of your being. You reject them, refusing to be superstitious. You turn back to your books, resolving anew to finish your schooling, to get a degree, and then go abroad for even further study. Then you will be able to marry a well-educated person. You keep your mind and your hands busy.

This is the story of all of us. Finally, a day came when we refused to pay attention to the dictates of our mind. We had a longing to walk according to our spirit. In spirit we repented, we believed, and we called on the name of the Lord. Then this all-inclusive life-giving Spirit entered into us, making the two spirits one and the two lives one. This Spirit is life. When He moves in us, our spirit becomes life. This divine life unites with our created life, making both one.

GOD'S LONGING TO BE JOINED TO MAN

Do not think that God wants you to bow before Him, as though He were an idol. He does not want you to think of Him as being on a lofty throne. He wants to get off His throne and be in you. Even if you live in a most humble abode, He wants to be there too, because you are there. He wants to be in you. He is tired of being in heaven.

Do not think I am going too far. Isaiah 66:1-2 says, "Thus says Jehovah, / Heaven is My throne, / And the earth the footstool for My feet. / Where then is the house that you will build for Me, / And where is the place of My rest? / For all these things My hand has made, / And so all these things have come into being, declares Jehovah. / But to this kind of man will I look, to him who is poor / And of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word."

In these verses the Lord indicated that He has been sitting on His throne and seems to be tired of it. He has been putting His feet on the footstool and has had enough of that. Where, He asks, is the place for Him to rest? He answers His own question by saying that He finds His home in those who are poor and of a contrite spirit. He desires to rest in man rather than remain in heaven. His rest comes when He is in those who are poor and of a contrite spirit.

TRADITIONAL WORSHIP VERSUS WORSHIP IN SPIRIT

Those who worship idols do so by bowing down before them. But idols are false gods, made of clay or wood or at best gold. They are not Spirit. Our God, in contrast to them, is Spirit; He can come into us. Do not treat God like an idol by bowing down before Him; that is not the way He wants to be worshipped. Suppose there is a delicious drink on the table, containing all the ingredients it needs to taste just right. Instead of drinking it, you bow before it and pay homage to it. The glass would say, "Foolish one! Why are you kneeling there? If you leave me on the table, we both suffer. Stand up! Pick me up and drink me! Drink me!"

This is the relationship that God wants. I know you find this hard to believe because of the way you have been brought up. I was raised in a Christian family and taught to worship in a traditional way. I might run around and be noisy outside a church building, but once I stepped inside, I would be reverent. I would walk in slowly and quietly. I would sit down, bow my head, and pray. Such is the so-called worship. I practiced that from my boyhood until I was almost twenty. But I never touched God.

One day, however, I heard a gospel message. While I was walking home that afternoon, that message was working in me. I was not bowing before God, but right then I took that "glass" and drank it.

Do you think I am talking wildly to say that I drank God? Consider the conversation the Lord Jesus had with the Samaritan woman in John 4. He sat by the well, waiting for that thirsty woman to come. She was the one whose thirst needed to be quenched; the Lord asked her to give Him a drink just to make her aware of this. Everyone who wants to drink of the Lord Jesus has to deal with the matter of sin. When the Samaritan woman asked Him for the water, He raised this issue by telling her to come back with her husband. The mention of a husband touched the sinful life she was leading; if she wanted to drink the living water, she had to confess her sins. Her reply was to switch the subject to the matter of worship. Then the Lord told her that the real worship to God was to worship Him as the Spirit in our spirit (v. 24).

Do you see that the Lord Jesus was there at that well for her to drink of Him? He told her, "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever" (v. 14). This water was simply Himself. He was there before her as a drink. Why would she talk to Him about worship? He was no longer on the throne in heaven. Now He was on earth, offering Himself to her

not to be worshipped but to be taken into her as a drink. John 4:14 and 24 strongly show us that to drink of Christ as the living water is the real worship to God as the Spirit in our spirit.

ASSIMILATING GOD

However much we “worship” God, He is still God, and we are still ourselves. What He wants is that we receive Him; to drink Him is to receive Him. God is not satisfied with an outward relationship. When we drink Him, He is assimilated into us, just like our food. If we eat a stone, we will not be able to digest it, because it is not organic. But when we take something nourishing into us, it is organically assimilated.

So it is with the Lord Jesus. When we receive Him, He becomes part of us in an organic way. He is Spirit and life, and we can assimilate Him. After we have eaten our food and it has been digested and assimilated, even a surgeon cannot remove it from us. After we receive the Lord, we may want to get rid of Him. We may resolve not to believe in Him any longer. But it is too late. He has been assimilated into us and is part of our very being. There is no way for us to expel Him.

The idea of worshipping God in silence and awe is not to be found in the Bible. His people are to shout for joy (Psa. 5:11; 132:9, 16; Isa. 12:6). They are to sing (Psa. 30:4, 12; 98:4-5; Isa. 12:5) and praise Him (2 Chron. 5:13; Psa. 135:1-3; 150:1-6). When we shout for joy and praise with singing, we are eating and drinking Him. The more we do this, the more He is assimilated into us and the more we are joined to Him in one spirit.

Our relationship with God, then, is organic. It is a union of spirit and of life. We are one spirit and one life with Him.

This life relationship between God and us has five great functions, or processes. Of course, our human life has its functions too. If we are ill, for example, the doctor may perform surgery. But nothing he could do would be of any help if we were dead. It is only because we have life that the techniques the doctor applies can restore us to health. This life in our physical body carries on its functions and thus sustains us.

REGENERATION

The first function of the divine life is to regenerate us. When this life comes into us, we are born again and receive “a spirit of sonship in which we cry, Abba, Father!” (Rom. 8:15). This spirit of sonship is the Spirit of life mingling within our spirit and making us sons. It then becomes quite natural to call God our Father.

Someone once went to Brother Nee to ask how he could be sure that he was truly a son of God. Brother Nee asked him if he was married. Yes, he was. “What did you call your father-in-law the first time you met him?” was the next question. “Well,” the brother replied, “I forced myself to call him Dad, but it felt very awkward.” Brother Nee then asked, “How do you feel at home when you call your own father Dad? Does that seem awkward to you?” “No,” was the reply. “That is sweet to me.” Brother Nee then pointed out to him that the awkward feeling when he called his father-in-law Dad was evidence that he was not born of his father-in-law. The tender feeling he had in saying “Dad” to his own father was proof that he had indeed been born of him. “How do you feel,” Brother Nee then asked, “when you call God Father?” “That is also sweet to me,” was the brother’s response. “This is an evidence that you are saved and a son of God,” Brother Nee told him.

Romans 8:15 has the two terms, *Abba* and *Father*; not only *Abba* but also *Father*. This is doubly sweet. Because we have been regenerated, it is natural to us to call God Father, Abba Father. “The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God” (v. 16). Before we were born again, we were not God’s children. We were only creatures, higher perhaps than dogs or cats but still not His children. We were created by Him and had His image and likeness, but we nonetheless did not have His life. Now—praise Him!—we have been regenerated. The spirit of sonship has entered into us to become our life. We are no longer only His creatures but His children with His life in us.

SANCTIFICATION

There have been erroneous teachings concerning sanctification. In Catholicism only special “holy” people are called saints, meaning “sanctified ones.” But this second step, the function which follows regeneration, means the increase of God’s element in us.

Consider the behavior of those who are of the world, those you see at work or at school or among your relatives. Their way of living is blind. They follow whatever others do. If it is convenient to tell a lie, they have no hesitation about doing so; if they might be caught, then they do not. There is little difference among them.

What characterizes those in the world should not characterize us who have the Lord's life within. There should be a separation. This is not to say that we should wear a sign saying that we are Christians and different from others. Nor should we try to give the impression that we are superior to others.

Sanctification does not refer to any such artificial distinction. It is simply the adding of God to us, as day by day we open to Him. From the time we are saved and His Spirit comes into us, there should be a continual increase of His life, making us different from those around us. This change can be observed by our parents or teachers; they will see that we are not the way we used to be. We do not need a label saying we are separated from the world. There is an inward work going on, something growing up and living out of us, that makes us different from others. We are being "sanctified in the Holy Spirit" (15:16).

What we are talking about is not moral improvement but a renewing in life. We are not laboring to be better behaved. The change others see comes because we have a life and a spirit within that produces this fruit.

Suppose there is a tree that seems dead. There is no foliage, and the branches are dry and brittle. The root, though, is still intact. You begin to supply fertilizer and water to it. In time signs of life appear. Some tender buds sprout. The trees around it may be withered and lifeless, but this one is showing evidence of life by its newness and freshness. There is life in this tree; that is what makes it different from the other ones.

Sanctification is the adding of God's element into us, making us different from others.

TRANSFORMATION

The third process is the metabolic change that takes place in us. As God's element is being added into us, the old elements are flushed out and replaced.

In our physical body the process of metabolism never ceases. It regulates the assimilation of our food, the discharge of the dead cells, and their replacement with healthy, new ones.

When the Scripture tells us, “Be transformed” (Rom. 12:2), it does not mean that we should try to make ourselves different in an outward way. If my metabolism is poor, I may look pale and ill. The answer does not lie in using artificial coloring so that I seem healthy. What I need is nourishing food, adequate rest, and proper exercise. Then, after a few months, my skin color will improve as a result of the metabolic changes that have taken place.

As Christians, we do not care for outward pretension. The transformation that we experience happens metabolically as God’s element is added to us. We are being inwardly transformed, not outwardly improved.

The work in a mortuary is to make dead people look well. The pallid skin is masked with rosy coloring. Some messages in Christianity in effect do the work of a mortician. The object is to make lifeless ones look healthy. What a contrast this is to the Lord’s way! He cleanses away all that is false. He puts His life into us so that we can be changed in our very being. He provides us with nourishing food and rest. Transformation is the result.

On our part, we need to be sure to get the proper nourishment. Without eating, the metabolic process cannot operate properly. It is as we nourish the divine life in us that we are transformed.

CONFORMATION

After we have been regenerated, the life of God works within us to make us different from those of the world. As we are thus sanctified, we are changed metabolically. This transformation can be likened to a caterpillar changing into a butterfly. The result of our being transformed is that there is a new form. It is to this that Romans 8:29 refers, when it says that we were “predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers.”

By transformation we are conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus. Not only is there the life within; outwardly, we have the form of the Son. Notice that He is called the Firstborn here, not the only Begotten. Through death and

resurrection He became the Firstborn, with the human nature as well as the divine nature in Him. We will become like this firstborn Son of God.

Conformation is the work that God is doing today. He is not satisfied to have us only regenerated. He wants us to be conformed to the image of His Son. To accomplish this we need life. Teachings may improve us outwardly, but they do not transform us. The grafted branch is sanctified, transformed, and conformed by the life supply it receives from the tree to which it is grafted. The fruit that results from the grafting indicates maturity.

GLORIFICATION

The life within us spreads from our inner part to our soul and eventually to our body. Glorification is when it is manifested in our body. Someday this life will permeate our whole being, and we will be glorified (v. 30).

LETTING THIS LIFE MOVE FREELY WITHIN

If we want the divine life in us to accomplish God's goal, we need to give it a free way. How can we cooperate?

Calling

Romans 10:12 tells us that "the same Lord is Lord of all and rich to all who call upon Him." For the Lord's life to increase in us, we need to call on the name of the Lord. If our environment allows, we can call loudly, "O Lord Jesus!" If we would be disturbing others, we can simply call His name softly.

Calling on the Lord corresponds to breathing. We are told that it is most healthful to exercise to the extent of having to breathe deeply. When we exercise to breathe deeply the name of the Lord, we are kept healthy.

Living according to Spirit

We must "not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit" (8:4). We have a spirit within us. We are to walk according to that spirit, not according to our feelings, opinions, or teachings. Choosing to walk according to the spirit will save us from quarreling with our spouse, from feeling unhappy toward our parents, from losing our temper, from gossiping, and from living in our vain imaginations.

Praying Every Moment

To walk according to the spirit, you must pray continually. Do not focus your prayer on various items and on different people. Pray to contact the Lord and to breathe Him in. Pray without ceasing (1 Thes. 5:17). All the time you are at home, keep praying. You must pray as spontaneously as you breathe. Christ is our life (Col. 3:4). To be detached from life means certain death. Your relationship with the Lord cannot afford any interruption.

It is most frustrating to lose our temper, yet humans are prone to do this. We hate the damage it does to our relationships, yet, try as we will, we keep failing. It is only when we touch the Lord, praying without ceasing, that we are kept from losing our temper. Constant prayer will keep us walking in the spirit. As the element of Christ increases through prayer, we will no longer even discuss those matters that lead to argument.

Gradually, in our lives there will be nothing but Christ. Victory or defeat will be gone. Losing our temper or not losing our temper will not be an issue. Only Christ will matter. For this we must keep contacting the Lord and breathing Him in. Then we will experience His constant supply.

In this way the life we have received in regeneration will increase. We will be sanctified, transformed from within, and conformed to the image of the Son. When we are finally matured, His life will saturate our bodies and break forth in glorification.

CHAPTER SIXTY-TWO

LIVING CHRIST

Scripture Reading: John 6:57; 16:9; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21a

The central revelation of the Bible is Christ as our life for the completion of God's purpose. It is God's eternal plan to have a body of people to manifest Him. For God to be expressed through man, He must enter into him and live within him. This God, who thus becomes our life, is Christ, who is the Spirit.

MAN CREATED TO EXPRESS AND CONTAIN GOD

The first chapter of the Bible tells us that God created man in His own image and according to His likeness (Gen. 1:26). There are two reasons why man was created in this way. The first is that he might be able to express God. Suppose I take a picture of you, but it turns out to look like a tiger. Such a picture cannot express you, because it does not look like you. For man to be able to express God, he had to be made in God's image and likeness. The second reason is that God might one day be able to enter into man. The container must be shaped like its content. For a glove to contain a hand, the glove must be shaped like a hand, with a thumb and four fingers. When a glove is a good fit, the hand feels comfortable in it. When God enters into man, He feels as comfortable as that hand in the glove. He feels that He is where He belongs.

In the creation of man God used two materials: one, visible and of the earth; the other, spiritual. Man's body was formed from the dust of the ground (2:7); this physical part was not living. Then God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." In Hebrew the word *breath* is the same as the word translated "spirit" in Proverbs 20:27. The breath of life, although it could not be seen, was living. When it came into man, man became a living soul. He then had an outward body, a soul within, and a spirit within that soul.

RECEIVING GOD BY EATING

The spirit is the organ by which man can receive God. Man was created in God's image, yet he did not contain God. In Genesis 1 and 2, man was an empty vessel. God placed him in a garden and called his attention to the tree of life. This tree signified God Himself as life. God wanted man to receive Him; the way for man to do this was to eat of the tree of life.

Right at the beginning of the Bible, it is plain to see that God is received into man like food. When we eat, the food is broken down metabolically and assimilated by all the cells of our body, thus becoming part of us. When we eat Christ, we become Christ. To speak of eating God is offensive to some Christians; to say that God becomes part of us, in their view is heretical. But it was the Lord Jesus Himself who said, "He who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me" (John 6:57). Paul could declare, "To me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). His very living was Christ.

ONLY ONE COMMANDMENT FOR UNBELIEVERS

In the Old Testament there were ten commandments. In the New Testament, however, there are only two. The first is that we must repent and believe in the Lord Jesus. John 16:9 says, "Concerning sin, because they do not believe into Me." For unbelievers the one sin for which they will be judged by God is that of not believing in the Lord Jesus. Whether their behavior is good or bad is inconsequential. The kind, honest people and the thieves and liars will end up in hell together, if they do not believe in the Lord Jesus. The sin for which they will be condemned is that of rejecting Him.

ONLY ONE COMMANDMENT FOR BELIEVERS

The second commandment is for the believers: live Christ. You may not consider that this is a serious matter. I realized many years ago that it was a sin not to live Christ, but my sense was not very strong. It was last year that this conviction came upon me. One day, while I was away for a few days of rest, I was waiting before the Lord. He seemed to say, "So often you confess your sins." This was true. Whenever an evil thought came to me or I had a wrong attitude or I said something wrong, I would confess. It was as routine for me to do this as for me to wash my hands. "Let Me ask you," the Lord said further, "have you ever confessed to Me the one sin, that you have not lived Christ?" I said, "Lord, forgive me. Not many times have I confessed this sin."

INFREQUENTLY LIVING CHRIST

From that day on, I discovered that there is no end to confessing this sin. How much I lacked living by Christ! In a twenty-four-hour day, how much of the time was I living Christ? Taking out eight hours for sleep, I figured that perhaps not more than two hours a day did I live Christ. The remaining fourteen hours I was not doing wrong, but neither was I living Christ.

How did I live Christ in those two hours? It was mainly when I was in prayer. At the beginning I would not be living Christ. I would be in my mind. But by praying I would come into my spirit and live Christ. The more I prayed, the more I would live Him. Afterward, I might be talking with my wife. I would be in spirit, but after we talked for five minutes, she would ask me a question. I would reply not unpleasantly, but that question caused me to be in my mind. All the time I was answering it, I was not living Christ. I was not blaming her or even feeling angry, but I was not living Christ.

As the day went on, I would sense that I was off. Although I had not done anything wrong, I had not lived Christ. I confessed, "Lord, I have not lived You. I have not been in spirit. I have been living myself. O Lord, forgive this sin of mine. I am untrustworthy. Do keep reminding me that I am one spirit with You. I do not want to have anything outside the spirit." I would be restored and again be living Him. But a telephone call might come, and again I might be drawn out of the spirit. Even without a telephone call, I might simply drift away and find that I was not living Him.

There may be nothing wrong with the way you are living, but you may still be living apart from Christ. You may be living your morality. You may be living your own reasoning. You may be living the doctrines in the Bible. A couple may not argue, but their love may still not be in the spirit. For this they do not condemn themselves; in their eyes there is nothing sinful. A brother may feel that what he is doing is quite all right; another brother even told him he was right. He goes ahead, doing it according to his reasoning. These are just examples to show you how little you live Christ. I doubt that even the best of you live Christ more than five percent of the time. The rest of the time you may not have been arguing, but neither were you living Christ.

TWO TREES

God offered Himself to man as the tree of life, but man was deceived. He chose to eat of another tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:6). Everything that is not God belongs to that other tree. It is not just the evil that pertains to this tree; it is also the good. Your doctrine belongs to that tree; so do your reasoning, your humility, your pride, and your morality. Both stealing and giving away all your money have their source in this tree. You may argue with your wife, or you may love her so much that you never argue with her; both are from the same tree.

CONFORMING TO AN OUTWARD STANDARD

Yes, you have changed since you came into the church life. You used to be coarse and vulgar. Your wife had a fiery temper. But as you observed the more refined ways of the rest of those in the church, you gradually changed. I am sorry to say that you were conformed to the image of the church, not to the image of God's Son. Your change was not the result of partaking of the tree of life. You may seem less rough now and look neater in your appearance. Your wife has her temper under control. Your in-laws tell others how much you both have changed since you came into the church life. Others may be impressed with your milder ways, but both your coarseness and your gentleness are from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They are not Christ.

When I look at your faces, I can see that you do not look like the unbelievers. Before you came into the church life, you may have painted your face like the women in the world. But when you noticed that the sisters did not wear makeup, you stopped wearing it too. Now your appearance conforms to what the others look like.

I used to be pleased when I saw how new ones changed after they came into the church. The long hair would be cut, the beard shaved off. I thought it was the result of life. But I came to see that it was only the outward appearance that changed; the disposition remained the same. If these new ones had truly been transformed, their whole disposition would have been different. They were not transformed; only their customs changed. They were being conformed to the local church. The length of their hair was still being determined by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

PLEASING GOD

God is not interested in your changing outwardly. He does not ask you to wear your hair long or short. He is not trying to make you loving instead of hateful or humble instead of proud. God's eternal purpose is to have Christ in you. The only thing that pleases Him is that you live Christ.

There is only one tree of life. All the things we do that do not come from life are from that other tree. To the tree of the knowledge of good and evil belong religion, doctrine, evil, and goodness. Whatever is not of life is of that other tree. According to man's thinking, you should be honest, moral, and humble. God's concern, however, is not with your behavior. It is His intention that moment by moment you live out the Christ within. Do not live according to the thoughts in your mind, your knowledge, your doctrine, or your outward circumstances. Live in your spirit, in fellowship with Christ, and according to the Spirit. This is what satisfies God.

THE NEED OF THE CHURCH

The church today lacks this living by Christ. Our way is right. The ground of the church is correct. On this proper ground, however, we must have the content of the Spirit. We must be filled with God. We must not be satisfied to be on the right track and to have the proper ground. There must be a practical, real testimony of living out the Spirit. We must be constantly in fellowship with Him, praying all the time, so that we have the boldness to say, "To me, to live is Christ."

THE APPLICATION

You have learned that you must live by Christ. However, are you in this reality? Are you living Christ every day? For this to be your experience, you must pray. Moreover, your prayers must not be for things or for people. If you pray only for things, you cannot pray unceasingly; you will run out of things to pray for. Your prayer must be a contacting of the Lord. To fellowship with Him in unceasing prayer is our spiritual breath, the means by which we breathe Him in.

It is not enough to love the Lord. To love the Lord is one thing; to live out Christ is another. I believe that most of you love the Lord; otherwise, you would not be here. However, the question is whether you live Christ. God is

not satisfied with your merely loving Him. Because you love Him, you must not live by yourself.

Over the years, young people have often come to me for help with their problems. I used to be full of answers for them. When someone wanted advice, I would give him point-by-point instructions. If a brother asked how he should handle his wife, I would give him some commandments to follow. Whatever the problem, I would have an answer. This kind of advice, I came to realize, is of no real help.

Now, if you come to me with a problem, I have no suggestions. I have no solutions to propose. All I can tell you is that moment by moment you must fellowship with Christ. How you should talk with your wife I cannot say. All I know is that you must be constantly breathing Christ in. While you are with your wife, you must keep communing with the Lord: "Lord, You are my life. I am one spirit with You. You are in my spirit." Breathe Him in, in this way.

You do not need a method. Simply fellowship with the Lord. Keep telling Him that you are one with Him, that He is within you as your life, and that He is one with you. Wherever you are and whatever you are doing, pray unceasingly to contact Him within. When this becomes your way of living, you will be out of the realm of religion and doctrine. You will be in spirit living Christ. This is what God wants.

CHAPTER SIXTY-THREE

LIVING CHRIST ONLY

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:6, 8; Gal. 5:4; John 5:39-40

THE TREE OF LIFE

God's purpose is to work Christ into us. Christ is God's very embodiment. To have Christ within us is to have God as life within us. As the first two chapters of Genesis reveal, man was created to be God's vessel, containing God Himself as life. Man, however, fell by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Had man partaken of the tree of life, he would have received life in its simplicity and purity.

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

The tree of knowledge, in contrast, is complicated. Knowledge, good, and evil all pertain to this tree. Knowledge and good are commendable, even necessary, in the eyes of society. Of course, evil is to be rejected.

From childhood we have lived by knowledge. We have pursued it since kindergarten, right through elementary school, high school, and college. Even a university degree is not sufficient; we must go on for an advanced degree. Perhaps even a doctor's degree will not satisfy us; we still continue our study and research. Knowledge, we are assured, is our future. Without knowledge, we would be of a lower class of people. Human society lives by knowledge.

The good is also prized by society. We appreciate high ethical standards. The Oriental peoples especially esteem humility. We take pride in giving in to others and consider that this is the highest virtue of humanity. We are pleased to offer others our seat while we stand. We greet each other by bowing low. The Westerners seem to us less civilized. They sit down without a thought as to where others will sit. They stand straight and look directly at each other when they meet. They keep whatever is theirs; it would not occur to them to offer it to someone else. The Oriental culture is surely superior to the Western!

The Oriental peoples are more deeply into the knowledge of good and evil. This can be seen by their more highly developed culture.

THE BASIS OF SOCIETY

Human society is formed of these three elements: knowledge, good, and evil. These three are in the same category, although society condemns only the evil. In essence, culture is the development of knowledge and of the good. Its constituents are science, philosophy, religion, and law.

The universities may offer a great number of courses, but all of them are promoting one of these four constituents of culture. Any country that is strong in science, philosophy, religion, and law is strong. Imagine a country where these are lacking. Science and philosophy lead to advances in knowledge. Religion defines what is good and sets up a moral code. Law restrains man from his evil, wild desires. A country without these four would be full of robbers; its people would be like beasts.

THE PRINCIPLES THAT GOVERN US

Science, philosophy, religion, and law are all substitutes for Christ. Are you living by Christ day by day? You have been saved. Christ is within you. Yet very little of the time do you live Him. You may touch Him occasionally when you pray, and you may live Him part of the time when you are in the meetings. Most of the time that you are in the meetings, however, you are thinking about how poor the elders are, how the brothers do not measure up to the standard, and how the sisters are disappointing. You disagree with this, and you condemn that. Instead of living Christ, you sit there criticizing and judging. You are in the realm of knowledge.

We may pride ourselves on our culture. What can compare with our Chinese ethics! We will forbear even if we are stabbed in the heart. We graciously give in, in every situation. In addition to this national heritage, we have been raised in a Christian family and brought up in a local church. We have a knowledge of the Bible and its teachings. Why do we act the way we do? We are governed by our knowledge or scientific understanding. Why do we refrain from certain actions? It is against our ethical philosophy or against the code we have observed in the local church. Why do we humbly give way to others? First, it is because we are Chinese; second, it is because we are

members of a local church. There are certain things we do and do not do in order to keep our qualifications and be proper.

Why do you not go to the movies? You may tell me that none of them are any good. You are an educated person. Movies do not appeal to you. Only uneducated, country people could enjoy that kind of entertainment. Perhaps you say that after you got saved, you felt uneasy when you went to the movies, and for that reason you stopped attending. It may well be that Christ within was restricting you at the beginning. How about now? Do you stay away from the movies because of the tradition of the local church? Do you feel condemned if you violate a local church custom? Are you trying to live up to your reputation of being a good brother? Can any of you say that what you do or do not do is because of Christ living in you? that you are not living philosophy, religion, or ethics? that you are only living Christ?

Sometimes a sister would like to argue with her husband. But she considers and realizes that it is better not to argue. Perhaps the children are present, and she does not want them to listen to an argument; or, there may be some young people around, and she would not want to set a poor example for them. Even if no one else is present, she may refrain from arguing because she is considered a good sister in the church. Occasionally, she may not argue because of Christ within her, but this is her least frequent reason. Most of the time, instead of living Christ, she is living her children or the young people or her reputation in the church. The brothers are no different.

The elders sometimes get themselves into trouble by making decisions too quickly. You have observed that going too fast leads to problems. Some more experienced ones also advise you that, as an elder, you must learn to be cautious. They tell you that if you give quick answers, you will offend people. When others come for help, it is best to tell them you cannot answer right away; you will have to pray over the matter first. Is this living Christ? It is living by wisdom, not by Christ.

REPLACEMENTS FOR CHRIST

The Bible

Many Christians use the Bible as a substitute for Christ. The Lord Jesus told the Jewish religionists that they searched the Scriptures but would not come

to Him for life (John 5:39-40). The Bible is a testimony to Him, but apart from Him there is no life in the letter of the Word. Because they would not go to Him for life, their search of the Scriptures was only in the dead letter.

In our day many are like those Jews of old. Students of theology read and study the Scriptures, yet many fail to touch the Christ who is in the Spirit and in the word. Many ordinary Christians, too, faithfully read the Bible, yet they will not come to the One of whom it speaks. They are using the Bible as a replacement for Christ.

The Law

The law of Moses was given by God. When Christ came, the Jews quoted from the law and would not receive Him; it was their substitute for Him. The believers in Galatia received Christ but then went back to embrace the law. Paul wrote the book of Galatians to rescue them from its snare. He reminded them that they were in Christ and had all His riches and grace as their portion. With such abundant blessing, how could they go back to Judaism? To do that was to cut themselves off from Christ. They were like a branch grafted into Christ, receiving the riches of the life of the tree. To turn back to the law was to disqualify themselves from their position in Christ and to be brought to nothing. It meant that they had fallen from grace (5:4). Yes, the law was God-given, but its use was only temporary. Once Christ came, the law was to be put aside. They must remain in Christ and not turn back to the law.

You may feel that you are not trying to keep the law, so what I am saying does not apply to you. Do you not, however, have your own laws? Especially those with a strong will have a set of laws they determine to keep. You have certain things you do and will not do. You behave properly. You consider yourself normal with a strong will, a clear mind, and proper emotions. Your life consists of your self-made regulations. These laws, as well as the law in the Bible, become a substitute for Christ.

The Gifts

Rather than living by Christ, some people cherish tongue-speaking or the gift of healing or some other gift. These gifts become a replacement of Christ.

Culture

Every nation has its culture. The book of Colossians deals with the problems that arose in the church in Colossae over the matter of culture. The believers there in Asia Minor were part Jews and part Greeks. Instead of living by Christ, they were living according to their religious ordinances or their Greek philosophy. Paul admonished them, “As therefore you have received the Christ, Jesus the Lord, walk in Him” (2:6). Walk in Him. Do not follow the elements of the world and the tradition of men (v. 8). Do not have regard for philosophy; that is simply part of the elements of the world. Philosophy does not deserve your admiration; it is small and rudimentary. These intrusions of philosophy and tradition into the church in Colossae even in the early days caused damage to the church because such aspects of culture were replacing Christ.

We have a wide assortment of people in the church. There are Chinese, Japanese, Indonesians, Filipinos, and Malaysians. We also have some here from Singapore and Thailand. I would ask you, do you live by Christ or by the culture in which you have been raised? Many of you are overseas Chinese. Do you live by the Chinese culture or by the culture of the country where you are? You may be a Chinese living by the Filipino culture, or by the Indonesian, Malaysian, or Thai cultures. Your overseas Chinese culture has been influenced by the native cultures. What you live by is this mixed culture, not by Christ.

Yes, occasionally Christ within directs you, but most hours of the day you are governed by something else. You are saved and have Christ within, but in actuality you are a Filipino Chinese or a Japanese or an Indonesian. You live according to science, philosophy, local church custom, and the ethics of your culture. You may protest that you love the Lord and are living the church life; why do I use the term *local church custom*? If you consider quietly, however, you will realize that you are not living Christ. You are living something else, whether you call it the church life or local church custom. Unconsciously, you are living your culture.

The culture you live, moreover, is partly of your own creation. You have developed your own outlook on life. You have your own religion and philosophy. All these are distinct from everyone else's. When you come to a crisis, you depend on this “superior” culture to carry you through. You Japanese brothers, for example, are all saved. You have the same Christ and the same Bible. You sing the same hymns and shout the same slogans. Yet not

more than one hour of the day do you live Christ, forgetting yourself, forgetting Japanese culture, and forgetting each other. This may happen when you are praying or exercising your spirit in the meetings. The rest of the time you are living your self-imposed standards.

The same is true of those from the island of Mindanao or from Indonesia. Their life is ordered and controlled by the principles they have set up. They are critical of others who do not live up to their standard. They are pleased with how well they themselves abide by those standards.

The young sisters may have a high goal before them. They act properly and are grateful to the Lord for saving them and placing them in the church. But they feel they must do this and take care of that. This means they are setting up their own culture, instead of living Christ.

Some people are bothered by sin. To us sin may not be an issue. But the knowledge of science and philosophy, the practice of religion, and the influence of culture are still with us. It is by these that we live. We are not living Christ.

THE MEANING OF WALKING IN CHRIST

“As therefore you have received the Christ, Jesus the Lord, walk in Him” (v. 6). We are not to live in the self or in religion or in the law. We are in Christ, and we are to walk in Him. We must not let the traditions of men take us away from Him. Let religion go. Let the law go. Let culture go. Stay in Christ. He is above culture, philosophy, and religion. Live Him.

Who is this One? He is the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit. Do not think of Him as far off on the throne above. As the Spirit, He mingles with your spirit, making you one with Him. Stay in the Spirit. Let the Spirit be in control. When you are in spirit, you live Christ. Let Him be in charge, rather than your culture.

You have heard messages like this before but have quickly forgotten. Before you know it, you will once again be back in your culture, living according to local church custom. You will be considering how to get along with others. You will try to think up pleasant words to say to smooth over a situation.

Remember that whenever you are not in your spirit, you are not living Christ but something else.

Christ is the Spirit, giving life. Outside of Him there are countless things we take as substitutes. All such substitutes are other than He. Even the study of the Bible is not Christ. Only the Spirit is Christ. We must be in that Spirit, mingled with Him. To live Christ is to live in the Spirit. Care only for this one matter: be in spirit, live in spirit, walk in spirit, pray in spirit, and fellowship in spirit. Let other things go. Simply live Christ.

CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR

WALKING ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT

Scripture Reading: Rom. 8:4, 6b, 14; Gal. 5:25; Rev. 22:14, 17; Eph. 6:18;
Rev. 1:10a; 1 Thes. 5:17, 19

THE ULTIMATE REVELATION OF THE BIBLE

After incarnation God Himself lived on earth for thirty-three and a half years. He then went to the cross and passed through death. He was resurrected and became the life-giving Spirit. This life-giving Spirit is the ultimate expression of the Triune God. Today the Spirit as the Lord is on the throne and is also moving on earth, waiting for man to receive Him. Whoever repents, calls upon the Lord, and believes in Him will receive this wonderful Spirit and be mingled with Him as one. This mingling of man with the Triune God is the mystery of mysteries in the universe.

QUALIFIED

In resurrection this One is complete and qualified in every way. He is the Creator. He is the Redeemer. He is both God and man; thus, He has both divinity and humanity. By virtue of His having passed through death and entered into resurrection, He has within Him both the power of death and of resurrection. He has the ascension glory, the authority, and the power. He is on the throne, with both the kingdom and the glory belonging to Him. All the power of the universe is embodied in Him. We rightly call Him all-inclusive.

When you receive Him, this very Spirit comes into you, making you one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). This One, with the power of resurrection, is in your spirit. What a joyous fact it is that we are one with this all-inclusive Christ! In Him are all the riches—humanity, divinity, power, life, holiness, and glory. They are for us now, not sometime in the future.

What is our part? It is simply to walk according to this Spirit. To do this is not religion, ethics, morality, or culture. What a glorious salvation! To walk according to this all-inclusive Spirit is the essence of the whole Bible. All

sixty-six books, whatever they seemingly cover, have this as their ultimate direction; they were written for this end result.

If you are invited to someone's home for a meal, the kitchen will be a very busy place. The vegetables have to be washed and cut. The meat has to be sliced and seasoned. There may be water boiling on the stove. The oil must be heated for the things that are fried. If you look into the kitchen, you will see how much activity is going on and how messy everything appears. There may be smoke and steam in the air from the cooking. Eventually, however, a meal of delicious food will be placed before you for your enjoyment.

This kitchen activity may be likened to the process that God went through in order to be a delicious meal for us. He created the world. He became incarnate. He passed through human living. Then He entered and passed through death. Bidding death farewell, He entered into resurrection. At this point the meal was ready. When we repent and believe in the Lord Jesus, this delicious dish becomes our portion. All He would have us do is enjoy this Spirit as our portion.

This Spirit is both the breath of life and the tree of life in Genesis 2. The tree of life is simply the processed Triune God, who has become the Spirit and is now before you to eat and enjoy. After you receive Him, you are to eat of Him and enjoy Him.

THE DEMANDS OF THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

Religion, culture, and morality all make demands. They tell you what to do. To ask "What should I do?" is to partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. To partake of the tree of life is to eat and drink without asking any questions. The marriage vows are a case in point. The bridegroom promises to love his wife unto death. The bride, in turn, vows to obey her husband, never turning back. The pastor exhorts them to be true to their vows, as the Scripture teaches. Do these exhortations and vows belong to the tree of life or to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

Demands that are put upon you are from the tree of knowledge. Those who instruct you in how to behave are eating from that tree. When you are invited to a feast, you go there to eat, not to keep regulations. God's only desire is that you eat of the tree of life, not do this or that. The Bible ends with one call and

one promise: “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” (Rev. 22:17). The call is to come and drink of the water of life. The promise is in verse 14: “Blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have right to the tree of life and may enter by the gates into the city.” Those whose robes are washed in the blood of the Lamb may come to eat of the tree of life.

After I was saved, I came to love the Lord. I began to pursue Him. I wanted to be an overcomer. What I had to work on the hardest was my temper. Nothing bothered me so much as my quick temper. Although I dearly loved my mother, when my temper got the upper hand, I would say things to her that I would afterwards deeply regret. Because of my longing to overcome my temper, I bought a good number of books on the subject of how to overcome or the way to be holy. When I first read them, they seemed to make sense. When I tried to put them into practice, however, I found that they did not give much real help. Only later did I come to realize that books of that type only teach their readers to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

THE SUPPLY OF THE TREE OF LIFE

What does the Bible teach? The Lord Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly...I am the bread of life...He who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me” (John 10:10; 6:48, 57). He did not come as a teacher. He did not come as a pastor to give you scriptural advice about how to get along with your spouse. He came as bread for you to eat. Eat Him. Do not ask Him what you should do.

But this is a hard word. You cannot take in the matter of eating Him. You want to learn how to deal with your wife. What method should you use? What would be the proper psychology? To use your mind to work out your problems is to eat of the tree of knowledge. The tree of life does not need to be analyzed and understood; it is simply to be eaten.

Many Christians admire the eloquence of their pastor. They enjoy his weekly sermon. Sometimes he talks of heaven; other times, of earth. He talks about the future and about the past. His audience finds his words stimulating, inspiring, and challenging. They think they are receiving sound guidance for their daily path.

Alas! They are feasting on the tree of knowledge. The Lord wants to be eaten, but we refuse. When we read the Bible or hear a preacher, we pay attention and try to learn. The tree of life, however, is for eating, not for understanding. In John 6 the Lord called Himself the true bread out of heaven (v. 32); the bread of God who gives life to the world (v. 33); the bread of life (v. 35); and the living bread (v. 51). He is to be eaten.

We long to have advice. Formerly, I would easily give suggestions when various ones came to me with problems. What I was really doing was teaching them to eat of the tree of knowledge. Now, if you check with any young people who have come to me for help, they will all tell you I had no advice to give them except to eat the Lord. Nonetheless, you still want to know what to do, what course you should follow, what method you should use. You are probably thinking, “Yes, it is all very well to eat the Lord. But when my husband loses his temper with me next time, how shall I handle the situation? What method will alleviate matters? How shall I react?” When you ask questions like that, you turn back to the tree of knowledge.

A WALK ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT

Rather than imagining what might happen later, stay in fellowship with the Lord. “Lord, You are the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit. You are living in my spirit. You and I have become one spirit. I would just abide here in my spirit with You.” Go home in peace. Do not wonder what you will do if such-and-such happens. Simply follow the Spirit. There is no reason to ask anyone what you should do. Praise the Lord that He is within you and that you are one spirit with Him. Keep talking to Him in this way. When you get home, if your husband confronts you at the door and asks, “Where have you been? Why do you not take care of the house?” do not react. Keep saying, “Lord, I am one spirit with You. You are the life-giving Spirit.” He may say, “Oh, you are so spiritual! Is the Lord in your spirit and not in mine?” Just keep thanking the Lord that He is within you, giving life to you. If your husband then proposes, “How about fixing something for us to eat?” keep walking according to the Spirit. I believe the Spirit will constrain you to go into the kitchen and cook for him. As you are working there, say, “Lord, You are the life-giving Spirit within my spirit. Hallelujah!”

If you will live in this way, you will be walking according to the Spirit. You do not need to know what the standard is for a good husband or wife. You do

not need to think about honoring your parents. You do not need to consider how to love people or how not to lose your temper. All your being is toward this One who is the life-giving Spirit indwelling your spirit.

This is a glorious way to live. Practice it. You will be out of the realm of religion, morality, and the law. There will be only Christ. You will be in the good of God's intention. It is His heart's desire to live in you as your life and your person. What I am proposing is not superstition or empty doctrine. Surely you have already had some experience of this. Think back to a time when you prayed yourself into the spirit. It made you forget heaven and earth. You and the Lord were one, and it seemed there was nothing else. "O Lord! O Lord! It is so good to be here with You!"

LIVING IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF PRAYER

This spirit of prayer must be the realm in which we live. Bring this atmosphere into your daily life. Pray without ceasing. This does not mean to keep praying for all different matters all the time. To pray without ceasing means to breathe in the Lord and enjoy Him constantly. It means to stay in the realm of the Spirit where the Lord is with you and you are with Him. Do not quench this Spirit.

If you are willing to practice this, the element of the Lord will increase in you from day to day. A sanctifying process will take place. Things that others do will no longer appeal to you. What you formerly enjoyed you will no longer have any interest in doing. Your smart remarks will not be forthcoming. Your taste in clothing will be different. These changes will be the result of the Lord's increase in you, not of an effort at outward conformity. Because you are one spirit with the Lord and walk according to this spirit, the result will be that you are transformed and made holy. Without any intention you will be an overcomer.

Pray daily: "Lord, I love You. Attract me, that I may love You more. Rekindle my love for You this very day. Every day I want my love for You to be fresh and sweet. Come and make Your home in my heart. You are the One I desire."

To thus declare your love for the Lord and to invite Him to make His home in your heart is not an insignificant matter. Suppose you expressed your love

to someone of your acquaintance and your longing that that one come and live with you. How deeply moved that person would be! This One whom you are inviting is the Lord of heaven, the Creator, the incarnated, crucified One who is now the Spirit. In Him are the power of resurrection and the riches of ascension.

He is pleased to come when you invite Him. He Himself said, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him” (John 14:23). The Father and Son will live in you.

Is this mere fanciful talk? Is the Lord Jesus real? Is it true that He now is the all-inclusive Spirit? Praise the Lord, it is real! When you say, “Lord, I am here. Come and live in me,” He will come. You will enjoy His presence, sweetness, comfort, and supply from within. This will be your experience, even though you cannot describe it precisely. Unbelievers will wonder what kind of person you are and what makes you that way.

IN SPIRIT

In the last book of the Bible there was one who said, “I was in spirit on the Lord’s Day” (Rev. 1:10). May this be true of all of us. “Lord, make me one who is in spirit. May all my days on earth be the Lord’s day. I want to be one who is in spirit.” With all of us so exercised to be in spirit, enjoying God and man mingled together, we have the church life today. Tomorrow we will have the New Jerusalem. This is the eternal purpose of God, His heart’s desire, and His greatest pleasure.

Nothing pleases Him more than your being one spirit with Him and walking according to that spirit. Do you love the Lord? Then enjoy this mingling with Him. Do not worry about the criticisms of others. Do not have rules to follow. Do not have secondary considerations. Simply love Him, walk in spirit, be mingled with Him, and fellowship with Him in spirit: “Lord, I love You. You and I have become one spirit. I am living in You. You are living in me. I want my walk to be in You and according to the spirit.” Here is overcoming life, light, power, riches, spirituality, holiness—the church life.

Do you see how different it is to walk in spirit than to be in religion? The Triune God has become the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit. He is now living in

your spirit so that He and you are one mingled spirit. In this one spirit pray, fellowship with Him, and be joined with Him. Walk according to this one spirit.

CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE

GOD'S MYSTERY AND GOD'S ECONOMY

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:2b, 9; Heb. 1:3a; John 1:1, 14, 18; Col. 1:25-27; 2 Cor. 3:17; Rev. 1:4; 4:5; 5:6

GOD EXPLAINED AND EXPRESSED

The Bible says that Christ is the mystery of God (Col. 2:2). If we want to know God, we must know Christ. God is true and living, but He is mysterious. Christ explains Him. This He does not only by His words but mostly by His very person. "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18). Man cannot see God, but there is One who declares Him. He is God's expression.

In Hebrews 1:3 He is called the effulgence of God's glory and the impress of His substance. Electricity cannot be seen, but when the lights shine, we can see its glory. God is like the invisible electricity; Christ is His shining forth, the effulgence of His glory. God has an eternal essence, which is not material but spiritual. It is because the Lord Jesus expresses this essence, God's very substance, that He is the mystery of God. All the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him (Col. 2:9). Where He is, there God is, for He Himself is God.

The first chapter of the Gospel of John goes into this matter also. The Word was in the beginning, the Word was with God, and the Word was God (v. 1). How could the Word be God? How could the Word become flesh (v. 14)? In our mentality the Word is one thing, God is something else, and the flesh is another thing. John tells us that these three are one. "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16, KJV). When the Word became flesh, God was manifested in the flesh. This is the Lord Jesus, the mystery of God.

We all need to be brought "unto the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ" (Col. 2:2). Have you seen God? Your answer should be, "I have seen Christ!" God is in Christ, and Christ is God. Apart from Christ, you cannot find God. To have Christ is to have God. To belong to God is to belong to Christ. With God there is a mystery, but with Christ the mystery is revealed.

God has been revealed. We can contact Him. We can fellowship with Him. We can walk with Him. We are even one spirit with Him, because we are one spirit with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17). We have God because we have Christ, who is the mystery of God.

GOD'S ECONOMY

The word *economy* means an arrangement for getting things done. Young people make studying their economy. Cooking is the economy of a cook. Businessmen operate under an economy; that is, they have a way of doing things in order to accomplish their ends. Only those who are idle have no economy. Since our God neither slumbers nor sleeps (Psa. 121:4), surely He has an economy.

What is God's economy? Christ! Laboring in the kitchen may be the cook's economy. She may be hard at work, preparing meat, vegetables, fish, and bean curd. What is God doing in His kitchen? He is preparing Christ. Every dish that He turns out for our enjoyment is simply Christ. I am not speaking nonsense. The Lord Jesus told us that He is the bread of life (John 6:48). When we break the bread, we are touching His body. Colossians 2:16-17 says that eating, drinking, feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths are all "a shadow of the things to come, but the body is of Christ." Bean curd is a shadow; the body of the bean curd is Christ. He is the most nutritious food, much better than bean curd. When you are thirsty, you like to have a refreshing drink. Have you not had the experience of calling on the Lord when you feel dry within, and finding yourself refreshed? The material drink is only a shadow of Christ as the real drink.

For more than thirty years I have been speaking on the tree of life, on the enjoyment of God through eating and drinking Him, and on Christ as God's economy. It seems that we still do not have a thorough understanding, and therefore our experience is limited. My own experience also seems inadequate. God's economy is mysterious, rich, and profound. It is the focus of the whole Bible. Even at the end of the Bible there is the promise of the tree of life to those who wash their robes (Rev. 22:14) and a call to the thirsty to come and drink of the water of life (v. 17). In this final chapter of the Word, eating of the tree of life and drinking of the water of life are again brought into view.

COMPLETING THE WORD OF GOD

Paul tells us that his ministry was to complete the word of God (Col. 1:25). Without his Epistles God's word is not complete. There were the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, the four Gospels, and the Acts. The Old Testament foretold the coming of Christ, the Gospels presented Him to us, and the Acts spoke further of Him. But Christ is so great that there was much more to be said of Him. The stewardship given to Paul concerned "the mystery which has been hidden from the ages and from the generations but now has been manifested to His saints; to whom God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:26-27). The hidden mystery is Christ in you; without Christ in us, God's revelation would not be complete. It would be like making a shirt and having it all finished except for the collar; when Paul came, he added the collar!

We cannot exhaust who Christ is. In the Old Testament, in the Gospels, and in the Acts we find that He is God, the Word of God, man, flesh, the Lamb of God, the Redeemer, the rock, the Shepherd, the Savior, the Physician, the Prophet, the King, the High Priest, the door, the way, the green pasture, righteousness, light, power, life, and peace. He is far more than these, as these parts of the Bible indicate. Not until we come to the writings of Paul, however, are we made clear that this all-inclusive Christ is in us.

THE INCOMPLETENESS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament does not cover this. Genesis 3 says that the seed of the woman will bruise the serpent's head (v. 15). Christ is that seed. Christ is also the seed of Abraham, in whom all the nations of the earth shall be blessed (22:18). In Isaiah 9:6 He is the child born to us, and the Son given. The government is upon His shoulder. He is called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, and Prince of Peace. In Haggai 2:7 He is referred to as the Desire of all the nations. Malachi 4:2 calls Him the Sun of righteousness with healing in His wings; that is, there is healing in His rays.

This is a sampling of many references to Christ in the Old Testament, but none says that Christ is within us.

THE INCOMPLETENESS OF THE GOSPELS

The light in the Gospels is more specific, telling us of this dear Christ who has come. He is the son of David and the son of Abraham, born of the virgin Mary. He was the Word from the beginning. This Word was God and became flesh. We cannot see clearly, however, that this Christ who has come will come into us and be our person. John hints at this, but the Lord's words seemed to bewilder the disciples: "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter,...the Spirit of reality,...He abides with you and shall be in you" (John 14:16-17). When the Lord Jesus was with them, He could not be in them. But on the day of resurrection they would experience the Spirit of reality and know that they were in Him and He in them.

This is apparently all that He could say to them. Had He spoken further, they would only have been confused. They had to wait for that day; then they would know. "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you" (v. 20). It was unto this end that He prayed in John 17, "As You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us" (v. 21). Do you think Peter and the other disciples understood these words that the Lord prayed? What does it mean to be one in the Father and in the Son?

The explanation came with Paul. Again and again in his writings, the term *in Christ* appears; again and again he told the believers that Christ was in them. It was his commission to complete the word of God by making the saints clear that Christ was in them.

"CHRIST IN YOU"

In my early Christian years I loved the Lord, but I was not taught about Christ being in me. Instead, I was given considerable instruction in prophecy. I learned the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2 and of the four beasts in Daniel 7. With all my studying and instruction, however, I was never taught "this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). Words cannot express what a revelation it was to me when I realized this mystery. Christ in *me*!

Even today some Christians oppose this. During my recent visit to Taipei, I was speaking from Romans that we are vessels having God Himself as our content (9:23). I later heard that a traveling evangelist who was listening protested, asking how such a big God could possibly fit into such a small container as man. How pitiful that a preacher could be so ignorant! Does the

Bible from which he preaches not say that Christ is in us? Is the Lord Jesus not bigger than we? The Bible clearly states that this big Christ is contained in us small human beings.

Of course, we cannot explain how this could be. It is a mystery. Even in the natural realm there are many things for which we have no explanation. We know the facts but not the whys. We can utilize electricity, for example, but why it works as it does we do not know. How the great God can fit into His small creature is a puzzle, but we know that this is the case because the Bible tells us so. I have spent many years mining the Bible to dig out its riches, seeking to find the answers.

A young married sister once interrupted my speaking in a meeting to ask how we could abide in the Lord and the Lord abide in us. I told her to hold her question, that I would come to it later. I then continued my speaking on this matter of Christ as the all-inclusive Spirit. The word *spirit* in Greek, I said, is the same as the word for *air*. To say that the Lord is the Spirit of life is to say that He is the breath of life. I then addressed myself to her: “Sister, you are now abiding in the air, and the air is abiding in you. Otherwise, you would not be alive. Because the Lord Jesus is the breath of life, we are in Him just as we are in the fresh air. The air that is in us is like the Lord Himself in us.”

The Lord Jesus can be in us because in resurrection He became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Were He not the Spirit, He could not abide in us. “The Lord is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17).

THE SPIRIT IN REVELATION

There are some mysterious verses in Revelation about the Spirit. In 1:4 John greets the seven churches which are in Asia: “Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is coming, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne.” Who or what are these seven Spirits? They are the seven lamps of fire burning before the throne (4:5). They are the seven eyes of the Lamb (5:6).

These seven Spirits are surely the one Spirit, the Holy Spirit. How then can there be seven? When the book of Revelation was written, the churches were degraded and in darkness. With the churches in such a low condition, the Spirit needed to be intensified sevenfold. The lampstand in the tabernacle had

seven lamps (Exo. 25:37). The amount of light we need from a lamp depends on how dark it is. We may have a lamp at home with a three-way bulb. If we are reading, we may turn it on all the way so as to get the most light. On the other hand, if it is early evening, we may get enough light turning it only once. In Revelation the churches were too weak and too dark; the light was not enough. It needed to be intensified. This intensified light is the seven Spirits.

The traditional view of the Trinity breaks down when confronted with the seven Spirits and the seven eyes of the Lamb. If the Godhead is categorized into three separate and distinct persons, what can we do with this description of the Spirit of God in Revelation? Christ, the second person, is the Lamb, but His seven eyes are the seven Spirits, the third person. The Holy Spirit here is the eyes of Christ. Can we think of a person's eyes as other than himself? If we are hit in the eye, have we ourselves not been hit? Are we one person and our eyes another? Theology's explanation of the Trinity comes from mental exercise; it cannot stand the test of practical experience. In our experience the Holy Spirit is indeed the eyes of Christ.

THE SEVEN SPIRITS FOR TODAY

Is the age today not dark? Is it not degraded? What we need is the seven Spirits. Christ today is not only the Spirit but the seven Spirits. These seven Spirits are the seven eyes of Christ, walking among the churches.

The Christ in you has seven eyes. He is watching and shining in you. However troublesome the doctrine sounds, in your experience you are surely aware of His eyes upon you. The more you love the Lord, the more you sense His searching of you, and the clearer the vision is. From whatever angle you try to avoid His searching gaze, those seven eyes do not miss anything. A light word, some impulsive greediness, or some covetousness—all bring the seven eyes to focus on you. Wherever you go, you cannot escape.

CHRIST DISPENSED INTO US

The Christ whom God has dispensed into us is salvation and life. He is not a doctrine or a religion. He is the living, life-giving One with seven eyes, watching and penetrating our being. The result is that we become transparent. This indicates that Christ has been worked into us.

To God Christ is His mystery; to us Christ is God's economy. God's dispensing is still going on. Whether we are praying at home, attending morning watch, pray-reading, or fellowshiping with each other, God is dispensing Himself into us. Even when we deal with our sins by repenting and confessing, God is dispensing. The Christ He dispenses is not just the Spirit but the seven Spirits.

Praise the Lord that we are in His economy! Christ, the mystery of God and the economy of God, is being dispensed into us.

CHAPTER SIXTY-SIX

HOW THE LORD BECAME THE SPIRIT

Scripture Reading: John 1:14; 7:39; 1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:17a; Rom. 8:16;
Phil. 1:19b; Exo. 30:22-26

MISTRANSLATION DUE TO MISUNDERSTANDING

In the New Testament there is a term that has been largely overlooked by biblical scholars and ordinary readers as well. That term is *the Spirit*. A number of times in the original Greek the definite article is used with the word *Spirit*. Sometimes *the* is translated literally, but other times it is blurred over. In the Chinese version 2 Corinthians 3:17, for example, is correctly rendered, “The Lord is the Spirit.” However, quite often instead of translating *the Spirit* literally, the word *Holy* is added, along with three dots to indicate that the word was not in the original. This was done with Romans 8:16, for example; *the Spirit Himself* is rendered “Holy Spirit” in the Chinese.

This same verse has another inaccurately rendered word in the Chinese version. Rather than saying “with our spirit,” as it is in Greek, the rendering is “with our heart.” The scholars who did the Chinese translations were well versed in Greek and Hebrew. There were seven translators, most of them British and American, assisted by well-qualified Chinese scholars. Generally speaking, the translation is an excellent one. The literary style and the sentence structure leave little to be desired. What the translators lacked, however, was an accurate knowledge of spiritual things. It would be a serious error, physiologically speaking, if we used *heart* when we were referring to the lungs. In referring to our psychological makeup, it is no less important to differentiate between our spirit and our heart.

This distinction between the spirit and the heart is clear in the Old Testament. Ezekiel 36:26 says, “I will also give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you.” The heart and the spirit are clearly two different entities. We should not use the two terms interchangeably.

In John 4:24 the Chinese translation again shows the lack of spiritual understanding on the part of the translators. Instead of going along with the

Greek and saying that God is to be worshipped “in spirit,” the Chinese version has *heart-spirit*. The Greek word for spirit is *pneuma*; for heart, it is *cardia*. We need to maintain the scriptural distinction in their usage.

Over thirty years ago, one day in Shanghai I sat down with Brother Nee and asked, “Brother Nee, what is heart-spirit?” He replied, “Heart-spirit! There is no such thing any more than there can be a heart-lung. The heart is the heart, the spirit is the spirit, and the lung is the lung. These are all separate organs. They cannot be mixed up.”

Please be assured that the New Testament books we have translated are not an effort to alter the meaning of the original. Our object is to make the translation as accurate as possible. It takes a great deal of research and consideration to select the right words. We have in hand over forty different English translations of the Bible. Before we decide how to translate a certain word, we check the different ways it has been translated already. Many differing opinions are revealed by the various translations. We also have numerous reference books, such as lexicons, concordances, and word studies, that help us arrive at our translation. We further study the usage of the word in question. How was the word used in ancient times? What is its modern usage? How is it used elsewhere in the New Testament? To all these considerations we add our understanding of spiritual matters. Then we make our decision as to how the word will be translated.

EXPERIENCED WORKERS VERSUS LANGUAGE THEORISTS

Accurate translation requires more than a knowledge of the two languages in question. There must be an understanding as well. Suppose, for example, you have a doctorate in language. You are asked to translate a manual for a computer you have never seen before. You read the manual and understand all the words, but you still have no idea how to make the computer work. The technical terms mean nothing to you. You need the help of the one who is experienced in operating the machine. He may not be very familiar with the manual, but he knows the machine. If you and he work together, you can come up with quite an accurate translation of the manual.

Those seven Western scholars are like the one asked to translate the manual. Their educational background, both in the biblical languages and in

Chinese, was superior. Their Chinese assistants were also scholars in their own right. In spite of such rich literary knowledge, however, they did not know “the machine” they were working with.

We are the simple workers. Though lacking their background, we have been operating this machine for more than fifty years. When we looked at the “manual” they put out, even while appreciating their scholarship, we laughed at some of their renderings. From our experience we knew that Romans 8:16, for example, must refer to the spirit, not the heart. We were forced to track down the meaning of the original. This meant learning a little Greek. We began to check the reference works too and found out that the Greek word in Romans 8:16 is *pneuma*. Then we looked up the word *heart*, as in 2 Corinthians 3:15: “A veil lies on their heart.” We found out that this word is *cardia*. It is inadmissible to translate these two different words as though they mean the same thing. In scholarly background and literary style we cannot match those who did the Chinese version, but by the Lord’s grace, as far as experience is concerned, we have been touching this machine for many years and are more or less familiar with how it works.

JOHN 7:39

Another example of a problem verse is John 7:39: “This He said concerning the Spirit, whom those who believed into Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.” The Chinese translation of this verse again adds *Holy* before the word *Spirit* and, like the King James Version, has “was not yet given.”

At the time of the incarnation, the angel told Mary that the Holy Spirit would come upon her (Luke 1:35; cf. Matt. 1:20). If the Holy Spirit came upon Mary, why thirty-three years later was the Holy Spirit “not yet”? Again, the translators of the Chinese Bible betrayed their inadequate understanding of the Spirit; because of their unfamiliarity with the machine, they misunderstood the manual and therefore mistranslated some of the terms. Christ was speaking of *the* Spirit; it was *the* Spirit who was not yet, because the Lord had not yet been resurrected.

To some of you these words may sound strange. Are not the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit three in one? What does the term *the Spirit* mean? Am I adding a fourth one to the Trinity? Or, am I saying that there were only two in

the Trinity until the resurrection? By no means! Thirty years ago we saw this light concerning the Spirit. We saw that when the Lord Jesus arose from the dead, He became the Spirit. The Scripture clearly tells us that the last Adam, who is the Lord Jesus, became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Surely this Spirit cannot be one thing and the Holy Spirit another.

For many years I was groping to come to an understanding of this matter of the Spirit and particularly of John 7:39. To change the translation of the Bible because we do not understand it is inexcusable. Even with the correct translation, however, I still was not clear. The Bible is God's revelation; it is to be expected that we would find some parts hard to grasp. To know the Bible only from a literary or linguistic point of view is to remain in ignorance of its true content. For many things in the Bible, we need God's enlightening. Rather than lean to our own understanding, we must seek to experience what the Word says. Year after year I would keep asking the Lord, What is this matter of the Spirit? Why does the Word say, "The Spirit was not yet"?

THE ANOINTING OINTMENT

Finally, I realized that we have a clear picture of this distinction between the Spirit and the Spirit of God in the Old Testament. To comprehend an abstract term like *the Spirit* is not easy, but by means of this picture I was greatly helped.

Spices Added to the Oil

I came in my reading to Exodus 30, where Moses was commanded to make an oil of holy ointment (vv. 22-26). The ointment, I read, was made of a hin of olive oil with four spices added to it. Oil, as I had known for many years, is a type of the Holy Spirit (Psa. 45:7; Isa. 61:1). When the four spices were mingled with the oil, it became a compound ointment, no longer plain oil. We could say that before the spices were blended in, the ointment "was not yet"; there was only the olive oil. It dawned on me that here was a picture of how the Spirit of God became the Spirit. How excited I was to see this! Before the Lord's death and resurrection, the oil of the Spirit of God lacked the myrrh of Christ's death and the cinnamon of its sweetness; it lacked the calamus of His resurrection and the cassia of its sweet flavor. When the Lord in resurrection became the Spirit, these elements of death and resurrection were added to the

Spirit of God. Do you see how much richer this ointment is than the plain olive oil?

Believers throughout the generations have been deprived of an adequate understanding of the Lord as the Spirit, of the Holy Spirit, and of the Spirit of God. The Father and the Son, it was generally believed, were persons. Until over a century ago, however, the Spirit was commonly regarded as only a power or an instrument or an influence, rather than a person. In Romans 8:16 and 26 the King James Version has “the Spirit itself” rather than “the Spirit Himself.” To translate this pronoun as neuter is an indication that the translators did not regard the Spirit as a person.

After the Lord’s resurrection, the Spirit of God became *the* Spirit. Besides being referred to as the Holy Spirit, new terms are used from this point on: *a life-giving Spirit* (1 Cor. 15:45), *the Spirit of Jesus* (Acts 16:7), *the Spirit of Christ* (Rom. 8:9), and *the Spirit of Jesus Christ* (Phil. 1:19). The Spirit of God, or the Holy Spirit, today is the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the One who was incarnate, who died, and who was resurrected.

A Bountiful Supply

This enriched Spirit, Philippians 1:19 tells us, has a supply. The word *supply* in Greek is difficult to translate; it is more accurate to render it “bountiful supply.” In ancient times the Greeks had singing groups, whose leader was required to furnish the singers with whatever they might need, whether food, drink, clothing, or musical instruments. From him came “the bountiful supply.” When Paul wrote this word, he was in a Roman prison. He said that he would be saved through the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Whatever he needed, this Spirit would supply.

Let us go back to the anointing ointment. One of its spices was myrrh, which denotes the death of Christ. Cinnamon, another of the spices, refers to the fragrance of that death. Calamus, the third spice, is a reed that grows out of muddy places. It typifies the Lord’s resurrection. Cassia, the last spice, belongs to the same family as cinnamon and speaks of the fragrance of the resurrection. In ancient times it was used as a repellent, especially for snakes. In the resurrection there is no place for Satan, the old serpent; he and his demons are repelled.

This ointment, with all its spices, is to be our bountiful supply in our daily life. In it are found patience, humility, love, wisdom, and holiness. The sweetness of the spices will chase away all the demons.

The Measure of the Spices

Notice the amounts and proportions of the spices: myrrh, five hundred shekels; cinnamon, two hundred fifty shekels; calamus, two hundred fifty shekels; and cassia, five hundred shekels.

If we combine the middle two measures, we have three units of five hundred shekels. This is a picture of the Trinity, with the second One split on the cross. Four, the number of the spices, is the number of man. The three of the Trinity and the four of man are mingled together, making the number seven, an *addition* of God and man in time (as, for example, the seven churches in Revelation). In eternity the mingling of God and man is represented by the number twelve, the *multiplication* of three and four. This is the number repeatedly used for the New Jerusalem (twelve gates, twelve foundations, twelve fruits).

THE LORD BECOMING THE SPIRIT

In the Old Testament there was only the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Jehovah. *The Holy Spirit* as a divine title is not used until the Lord Jesus became flesh (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:20). In Psalm 51:11 and Isaiah 63:10 and 11, the three places in the Old Testament where the King James Version has “Holy Spirit,” the translation should be “the Spirit of Your holiness” and “His Spirit of holiness.”

God was alone in eternity. Then “in the beginning” He created. In the fullness of time He became incarnate. After His thirty-three and a half years of human living, He was crucified and buried. Three days later He was raised from the dead and ascended to the heavens, where He was crowned with glory and honor, made Lord and Christ, and became the Head. After all this came the day of Pentecost, when He descended and entered into man. Those who were thus regenerated formed a corporate entity, the church.

God was no longer alone. He was now one with man. The lengthy process that God went through paved the way for Him and man to be one. Every step

was needed. Without creation, man would not have existed. Without the incarnation, man could not have been saved and brought back to God. Without the years of human living, God in Jesus of Nazareth would not have tasted the common lot of man. Without the cross, He would not have solved the problem of sin and terminated the old creation. Without the resurrection, He would not have become Head of the new creation and the life-giving Spirit. Without the ascension, He would not have received the glory, lordship, and headship. All these were the necessary steps for Him and man to be one.

When He descended as *the Spirit*, in Him were God, man, human living, death, the sweetness of that death, resurrection with its fragrance and its power, ascension, glorification, enthronement, lordship, and headship. This enriched Spirit is called the Spirit of Jesus, mainly referring to Him in His humanity (Acts 16:7), and the Spirit of Christ, mainly referring to Him in resurrection (Rom. 8:9-11), and then the Spirit of Jesus Christ as the all-inclusive Spirit (Phil. 1:19).

The Spirit is no longer only olive oil but a compound Spirit, a compound ointment, anointing us (1 John 2:27). The anointing is the moving of the ointment. This rich Spirit, incorporating both divinity and an uplifted humanity as well as all the experiences of Christ, is now our portion. This is the Spirit who is with our spirit. The two spirits become one. The outcome is a corporate man, the new man, the church, enjoying this bountiful supply.

CHAPTER SIXTY-SEVEN

THE LIFE SUPPLY

OF THE ALL-INCLUSIVE SPIRIT

Scripture Reading: Rom. 8:2, 9-11; Phil. 1:19b; 2 Cor. 3:6b

What kind of relationship does God want us to have with Him? Some people reject the idea of God or at least choose to ignore Him; they want nothing to do with Him. Others, perhaps out of fear, want to know what they should do to please Him and how they should worship Him. Our human concept tells us that we must do good if we want to please Him. In a superficial way the Bible seems to lend support to such concepts. It tells us that we should worship and fear God, that we should do His will, and that we should do our best to please Him.

Such a relationship to God fits our natural concept. For the most part, the religious instruction we have received, even in Christianity, reinforces this innate desire we have to fear, love, and serve the Supreme Being.

The true intent of God as revealed in the Bible, however, far exceeds what man has conceived. It is so profound that without light from God we cannot grasp it. God wants to be in man, to work Himself into man, and to be man's life to such an extent that He becomes man and man becomes one with Him.

Although at times we may see a little glimmer of light regarding God's desire, our daily living remains unaffected. We go on trying to love God, to fear Him, and to please Him. We give little consideration as to how we can let God be our life and how we can be one with Him.

THE INCARNATION

When God partook of human form (Phil. 2:7), that is, when "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14), His name was called Jesus. He lived as a simple carpenter in a humble home. There was no majesty about Him. He had "no attracting form" (Isa. 53:2). Think of it! The infinite God became a finite being, living and working on this earth for thirty years. Jesus of Nazareth was the

one man who was in union with God. Within was God; without was man. God lived in man, and man lived out God.

When the Bible describes the life of this One, there is little mention of His keeping outward forms of worship. Rather, His life is described as being intertwined with the Father's: "As the living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father...Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works" (John 6:57; 14:10). The Father and the Son were one. The Father was in the Son as the Son's life, and the Son lived out the Father. They were two persons with one life, that of the Father, and one living, that of the Son.

Such a relationship with God is not in man's concept. But this union of God and man is not only for Jesus of Nazareth. In Jesus there was God. God wants you also to have Him within. God was the life of Jesus Christ. God wants to be your life also. Jesus lived out God. You are also to live Him out.

Can you say that when you live, God lives? that God is your life? that you are God's living? that God lives in you? that for you to live is God? Paul had the boldness to say, "To me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). Surely it is true to say that Christ lives in you and that He is your life. This is the plain word of the Bible.

OUR NATURAL THOUGHT

When we study the Bible, however, instead of seeing this plain word, we see only verses like this: "You shall love Jehovah your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5). We see that God is to be worshipped and feared. We see that we must labor for Him and that we must pay the price to live for Him. Words like these stand out to us when we find them in the Scripture, because we already have such concepts within us naturally. We take from the Bible what is already in our thought, rather than open to take the Word itself into us.

When a wife reads Ephesians, for example, she does not learn much about the church or Christ or the Spirit or life. The only verse she takes note of is Ephesians 5:25. Because she is already preoccupied with the thought that her husband has to love her, she thinks the Bible is a wonderful book because of

this one verse it contains. The husband, on his part, finds Ephesians 5:22, “Wives, be subject to your own husbands as to the Lord.” This is the only verse that stands out to him.

The important things in the Bible pass us by, because they are not in our natural thought. “To me, to live is Christ” does not attract much attention. Matters concerning the spirit, though we may have heard many messages on the topic, simply go in one ear and out the other. They mean very little to us. We go on in our natural way, trying to behave properly and please God, figuring that this was what the message was about anyway.

MAN’S SPIRIT

I beg you to notice how important the human spirit is. The eternal God one day created man. Zechariah 12:1 says of Him that He “stretches forth the heavens and lays the foundations of the earth and forms the spirit of man within him.” The spirit within man is small, but the Bible ranks it with the heavens and the earth. The three most significant things in God’s creation are the heavens, the earth, and the human spirit. The heavens are for the earth, and the earth is for man. This man has a spirit in order that he may receive God. Without the spirit, the heavens and the earth are meaningless. Have you ever praised God that you have a spirit, a spirit that is as significant as the heavens and the earth?

TWO SPIRITS JOINED

At the time of the creation, however, God could not enter into man’s spirit. God first had to become flesh, live as a man on this earth, and then go to the cross. In His death He redeemed us from our sins and terminated the old creation. He died, was buried, and arose from the dead. In incarnation He had become flesh; now in resurrection He, the last Adam, became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). As such, He can be joined with our spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). When we turned to Him in repentance, sought His forgiveness, and opened to receive Him, He came into our spirit. We were regenerated. “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). We have a spirit that has been born of this Spirit, who is also called “the Spirit of life” (Rom. 8:2).

When He enters into us, He imparts life. This life is God’s own life, eternal and uncreated, a life of death and resurrection. Let us focus all our attention

on this life. We must turn away from the fringes and come back to the center, to this all-inclusive Spirit, who supplies life to us. We are off center when our concern is how to worship God, how to love or submit to our spouse, how to be an overcomer, or how to live a spiritual life.

RECEIVING THE SPIRIT

How is this life supplied to us? To help our understanding, the Bible uses physical things to symbolize what is spiritual. Eating and drinking symbolize our receiving the Spirit. The Lord said, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37-38). The next verse explains that He was speaking about the Spirit, “whom those who believed into Him were about to receive.” To receive the Spirit is like drinking water.

To enjoy the Spirit is like eating food. When we eat properly, our body is nourished, and we have the energy to carry on. Even without understanding how it happens, we know that the food we eat somehow is digested and assimilated and supplies us with strength. The spiritual nourishment that we take in does the same thing for our spirit (6:57, 63).

THE RICHES IN THE SPIRIT

How rich is this Spirit we have received! There is both the element of God and the element of man. When Jesus lived on this earth, His humanity was of the highest quality. His character was without flaw. This humanity, in passing through death and resurrection, became yet more uplifted. Now in the Spirit there is this uplifted human nature as well as the divine nature. There is also the power of endurance. All His earthly life the Lord suffered persecution, yet He endured. Now this endurance is in the Spirit. Here also is the power of crucifixion. The death of Jesus Christ terminated sin and Satan. It bruised the devil’s head. It overcame the gates of Hades. It meant the end of the world and the end of Satan’s kingdom. Everything of the old creation was terminated in that death, which is now in the Spirit. Resurrection is also included in the Spirit, along with the power of resurrection, its life, its fragrance, and its riches. Here also are ascension, glorification, enthronement, dominion, lordship, and headship.

What we think of as life is poor. Consider how rich is this life spoken of in the Bible. The Spirit of life gives us life (2 Cor. 3:6b), a life which includes all we have mentioned and more. As we fellowship with the Lord, the Spirit operates in us spontaneously and causes us to experience all these elements. We can sense the element of God within us. When we are at prayer and in fellowship with the Lord, we feel that there is something within us that exceeds man's measure. We sense that somehow we surpass others, including the angels.

An Uplifted Humanity

Every saved one has experienced this sense at one time or other. If you think back, you will remember some occasion when you prayed and prayed until you reached holy ground. You felt you were greater than the president, higher than any earthly king. You were experiencing the divine nature, God in you. Such prayer affects your thinking. It clarifies your mind. Beforehand, you were foolish and confused, unable to differentiate between up and down. You could not figure out where you were headed. But that time when you prayed through, your thinking became clear. Your will and your emotions also came into line. Your stubborn insistence gave way, yet you did not become a jellyfish with no backbone. Your will was firm, but the willfulness was gone. Your emotions, usually so varying and unreliable, became steady. There was no more the irrational love toward what should not be loved, nor the groundless dislike of what should be appealing. Your whole character was uplifted with your mind clear, your will firm, and your emotions proper. Can you not recall having had such an experience?

Teenage girls spend much of their time daydreaming. They often have a hard time concentrating. Sometimes they are stubborn, but other times they are easily swayed. They can cry with little or no provocation. When they spend time to pray adequately, however, they are filled with the Spirit. Then the humanity they exhibit is of the highest caliber. They are able to give their attention to what needs to be done, their will becomes resolute, and their emotions are stable. If they have not had such an experience, their praying has not been thorough enough. When they succeed in praying through, they will find that in them there is not only God but also the proper humanity.

Consider the kind of person you were before you were saved. You lived in your imaginations, letting your thoughts wander at will. When something

favorable happened to you, you were so happy you could not sleep. When a hardship came your way, you were so miserable you wanted to die. When you got mad, your rage knew no bounds. You were like someone playing the piano, but playing only the high notes.

Now that you are saved, you are not the same. When you pray earnestly and thoroughly until you touch God, you find an uplifted humanity within you. Your thoughts no longer zoom from the heights of the heavens to the depths of the seas. When you are happy, there is moderation in your joy. Even when you weep, there is a limit that you do not exceed. You may still lose your temper, but there is a restraint that keeps you from going too far. As you remain in fellowship with the Lord, your “piano playing” produces lovely music. When the notes should be high, they are high. When they should be low and soft, you play accordingly. The wildness and the imbalance are no longer heard.

The humanity of Jesus has stabilized you. Jesus of Nazareth had the highest humanity. After He passed through death and resurrection, the element of His humanity entered into the Spirit. This is the very Spirit that came into you when you received the Lord. His character is now your character. In the indwelling Spirit there is humanity as well as divinity. By Him you become a proper man.

One who is filled with the Spirit can be firm and strong, even to the point of martyrdom. The threat of death does not terrify him. His will can be more steadfast than the mountains. However much stress he encounters, his inner supply is not exhausted. This is the humanity of Jesus Christ, experienced and expressed when one is filled with the Spirit.

Death with Christ

When I was a young Christian, I loved the Lord. I tried hard to overcome my shortcomings. From reading certain spiritual books, I learned that I had been crucified with Christ and that this was the key to my being victorious over my weaknesses. My little mind, however, could not figure out how I could have been crucified with Him, when He died in Israel and I was in China thousands of miles away. And how could I have died with Him when I was not born until two thousand years later? How could there be a relationship of any kind between His death and mine?

In my reading I eventually came across a book saying that we must reckon ourselves dead, as Romans 6 teaches. This seemed logical to me. Since two and two are four, I reckon on that fact when I do calculations. A message I heard also encouraged me to reckon. The Chinese are all supposedly the descendants of Huang Ti. If someone had killed him before he had any sons, the Chinese would all have died in him. By the same principle, the preacher said, we could reckon that when Christ died, we died.

Impressed with this logic, I began to reckon. I also taught others to reckon. What I discovered was that before I started reckoning, my evil self was dormant. Whenever I reckoned, it became active. The more I reckoned it dead, the more alive it was. No doubt many of you have also gone through this experience of trying to reckon yourself dead and finding that it does not work.

Before 1937 Brother Nee also preached this message of reckoning to us. He had A. B. Simpson's hymn, "Let us reckon, reckon, reckon" (*Hymns*, #692), included in our Chinese hymnal. After 1937, however, Brother Nee saw something further regarding Romans 6. He told us that this chapter declares the fact, but that it cannot be the experience. Only when we go on to Romans 8, he said, could we experience what it is to die with Christ. Death with Christ can only be experienced in the Spirit. I surely said Amen when I heard that.

When we are filled with the Spirit, the effectiveness of the death of Christ is our experience. If we keep praying until we are in the Spirit, we will find the killing. There is no need to reckon. We have all experienced that when we are filled with the Spirit, our bad temper, our wrong attitude, our feeling of jealousy, and our opinions are all killed.

This effective praying is the way to take nourishment into us. Just as eating the proper food helps destroy the germs in our body that make us ill, so when we are filled with the Spirit, the effectiveness of the death of Christ kills all the negative things in us.

Resurrection

In the Spirit is also the power of resurrection. When you pray until you are filled by the Spirit, you will sense that you are free and in the ascendancy. Oppression will be gone. Life and the power of life will comfort and heal you, bringing you into peace and quietness. Sometimes you will even feel that you

are soaring in the heavens, far above all. Others may quarrel and be dissenting, but you are in resurrection. As you further pray, you will find that Satan and all the demons are under your feet.

Other Riches

As you pray and are filled with the Spirit, you will sense that all authority is yours. You will be reigning in life. Then there will be the kingdom. Simultaneously, overcoming, sanctification, and spirituality are also yours.

OURS THROUGH PRAYER

To enjoy all these riches in the Spirit, spend time before the Lord. Pray with your spirit, opening your whole being to Him. Praise Him, behold Him, fellowship with Him, and let Him fill you. Pray whatever He leads you to pray; do not exert your mind. If He leads you to confess, confess. If He leads you to repent, repent. If He leads you to weep, weep. If He leads you to be joyful, be joyful. Simply pray according to His leading. Then you will be filled with the Spirit, and He will be your constant supply. Practice this all the time, every day.

Confucius taught that there is a bright virtue within us. He no doubt meant the conscience. His teaching was that through “great learning” we could develop this virtue and thus attain the ultimate goodness. In man’s concept this may be a noble idea. This is not, however, what we are doing. The conscience is only a third of our spirit. We want to have our entire spirit filled with the Spirit. Rather than developing the bright virtue, we are having the Spirit added into our spirit. How marvelous this is! Our spirit and the Spirit become one. How much higher it is to have this rich Spirit within our spirit! How much more this does for us than the great learning to develop the bright virtue! We are in graduate school! The great learning is only kindergarten!

How blessed we are! The bountiful supply of the all-inclusive Spirit is our portion. May we all keep turning to our spirit and let our natural concepts go. Then the Spirit will supply us day by day. As we taste His riches, we will enjoy Christ as our life, and we will be His living. Then we can say, “Christ lives in me. To me, to live is Christ.”

CHAPTER SIXTY-EIGHT

GOD'S LAMPSTAND AND HIS LAMPS

Scripture Reading: Exo. 25:31a, 37a; Zech. 4:2; Rev. 1:12b, 20b; Prov. 20:27; Rev. 4:5b; 1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:4, 6; Eph. 6:18; 1 Thes. 5:17, 19

A SYMBOL OF GOD'S TESTIMONY

The testimony of God is that He enters into man to be man's life and even his disposition. God in us is our life, and outwardly we are God's living.

Because spiritual matters like this are abstract, the Bible uses symbols to portray them. The lampstand in the tabernacle symbolizes the testimony of God. Exodus 25:31-37 gives us a description of how it was to be made. Only one lampstand was to be made, and it was to be entirely of gold. This one lampstand, however, was to have seven lamps. Looked at from the bottom, the lampstand is one. From the top, however, it appears to be seven because of the seven lamps.

The meaning of this lampstand is rich and profound. It symbolizes the very Triune God.

GOLDEN IN NATURE

Gold typifies the divine nature. The substance of this lampstand remains constant and unchanged, for gold does not rust or tarnish. The pure gold of the lampstand, then, typifies God's nature, which is simply God Himself.

A LAMPSTAND IN FORM

This pure gold is not shapeless. It has a form, which denotes its function. A table, for example, has a form, which speaks of its use; we can use it to write on or to eat from. If it had a different shape, it would not serve the same purpose. In what form is this lampstand? This form is the second person of the Godhead, the Son: "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18). The Son is the form, or manifestation, of the Father.

How can this lampstand represent the form of God, who is invisible and has no form? Second Corinthians 4:4 tells us clearly that Christ is the image of God. God created man in His own image (Gen. 1:27). Colossians 1:15 describes Christ as “the image of the invisible God.” It is certainly true to say that God has His image.

THE SPIRIT IN EXPRESSION

The seven lamps of the lampstand signify the seven Spirits of God (Rev. 4:5). This is a reference to the third of the Trinity, for the seven Spirits are simply the Spirit of God. The shining of the Spirit is God expressed.

The lampstand portrays God in His substance (the Father), embodiment (the Son), and expression (the Spirit).

This lampstand, representing the Triune God, is His testimony. Because the church is His testimony, it also is the golden lampstand (1:20). It is common to think of the church as a religious gathering, but this is a most inadequate way to regard it. To consider the church as a group of sinners, saved and cleansed by the blood, and then meeting together, is also too low a concept. Yes, we are an assembly in the sense that we do come together for meetings. But in reality the church is a lampstand.

THE SHAPING OF THE LAMPSTAND

Gold Added to Us

How did this lampstand come about? We have not only been cleansed by the precious blood; we have also been regenerated. This new birth implies that there is another life and therefore a father is involved. Because we have been born again, we have a life that has its source in the Father. Outwardly, we have been cleansed; inwardly, we have been regenerated. Now God is our Father. It follows naturally that we have His nature, just as every son bears his father's nature. John 1:11-12 says that those who receive Christ are born of God. We are called “partakers of the divine nature” in 2 Peter 1:4. Pure gold has come into us!

From Clay to Gold

By our first birth we are men of clay, formed of the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7). “The first man is out of the earth, earthy” (1 Cor. 15:47). When we die, we return to the dust: “Dust you are, / And to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19).

Before we were regenerated, we were men of clay. One day, however, we got saved, and God came into us. Now, instead of being men of clay, we are men of gold.

Look at yourself. There is gold in you. Because God is your Father, you have His substance and nature. But do you have the form of the Son? To have the shape of the Son means that there has been some transformation in you. “We all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18). How much of the Lord’s image do you have? This depends on the amount of transformation that you have experienced. Yes, you have gold within, but it is surrounded by the clay and has not yet taken shape. In your living, does the clay come out or the gold?

The Need for Christ to Be Formed in Us

We are in the church. The church, however, is a golden lampstand. It is not made of clay. Since we are part gold and part clay, we are partly the church and partly not the church. We are in the process. The golden lampstand is buried in the clay. Christ is yet to be formed in us (Gal. 4:19). He has been revealed in us (1:16) and lives in us (2:20). Now the gold within needs to take shape. We know there is something shiny and weighty inside us; this substance must be formed into the lampstand. Because of this gold, we hesitate to say that we are not the lampstand. Yet there is so much clay still clinging to us that we wonder if we can be considered the lampstand. When we are in this mixed condition, can we call ourselves the church?

The church is the practical expression of the Triune God. The Father enters into man to be his nature. The Son is in man transforming him to be the form. Then the Spirit in man expresses God. Thus, the church is depicted as a golden lampstand (Rev. 1:20b).

THE LAMPSTAND IN EXODUS, ZECHARIAH, AND REVELATION

There are three phases to the golden lampstand. The first is in Exodus in the tabernacle, where it represents the Triune God (25:31-37). The second is in Zechariah, where it represents the children of Israel who are in the position of receiving grace (4:2). Those who thus receive grace are His testimony. The last is in the New Testament, where the golden lampstand is the church (Rev. 1:12, 20). This testimony declares that the substance of the Father has been wrought into the believers, the shape of the Son has also been constituted into them, and the expression of the Spirit is realized through them.

THE SEARCHING LAMP

How will the gold in us take shape? There is no question regarding our having the gold within us. Our question concerns transformation, not regeneration. How can we be transformed into His image from glory to glory?

The answer lies with the Spirit. The church as the lampstand has seven lamps, which are God's seven Spirits. God is Spirit (John 4:24). More than this, we are told in Proverbs 20:27, "The spirit of man is the lamp of Jehovah." Within us, we have two lamps, the Spirit of God and our human spirit. Inside our little lamp is a stronger lamp. Before we were saved, our spirit was a broken lamp. After we repented, the lamp was restored and began to give forth light. Day by day as we prayed, the shining increased. With regeneration this lamp also had another lamp come into it. This was the Spirit of God. It is because of these two lamps that there is so much shining within us. The two become one, for "he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17).

Man's spirit, Proverbs 20:27 goes on to say, searches all the innermost parts of the inner being, or as Darby's footnote says, "all the chambers of the soul." In your soul are various chambers, or rooms. The spirit is searching the chamber of your emotions and of your mind and of your will.

Although we all have the pure gold in us, the inward parts of our soul may not be open. When we pray, we are afraid to open our emotion, for example, to the Lord. After we reach a certain point in our praying, we close up because we are unwilling to open some inner chamber to Him. We may faithfully attend all the meetings, read the Word, and spend time in prayer. Yet there is a door within that is locked. We are aware of this, yet we tell the Lord that there is no way to open that door, even though we love Him and have paid a price in other ways.

The sisters' way of getting around such a problem is to shed tears. Because they have learned to win out by crying, they try this same tactic on the Lord. The brothers, on their part, react with stubbornness: "No, Lord. I cannot open that part to You. You just have to forgive me." Whatever way we try, we cannot subdue the Lord. He will not force us, however. He will wait. Meanwhile, in that chamber of our soul we are not being transformed into His image.

OPENING THE INNER CHAMBERS

To have our spirit regenerated is simple. We confess our sins and receive the Lord. Then we have the Spirit of God within. To be transformed in our soul, however, is not easy. It needs the lamp of the Lord to search all the inner chambers. There are very few who have opened all their inner chambers to Him.

You may love the Lord, and you may pray regularly for your children and your grandchildren. Yet in your soul are two chambers that you reserve for yourself. You keep the Lord locked out of there.

Many Christians are unaware that they have a spirit. They live in the soul. Without the spirit, however, the soul is dark. It needs the lamp of the Lord. A lamp is for use in darkness. Because man has fallen, he is in darkness. Thus, he is corrupt. Because the spirit has lost its function, he has no light. He must repent, that is, turn his being to his spirit.

Before you heard the gospel, you did all kinds of evil things. You utterly neglected your spirit and fully gave yourself to satisfy your soul. You lived according to your emotion, mind, and will. When you heeded the call to repent, however, you turned and experienced the light shining in the spirit. You were saved and regenerated.

Now that you are saved, how are you living? Do you pay attention to your spirit or still live according to the soul? The only way to have light is to walk according to the spirit (Rom. 8:4). That light searches the inward parts of your soul. If you are not in your spirit, you cannot see your true condition. You quarrel with others, certain that you are in the right and unaware that you are in darkness.

LIGHT AND LIFE

It is through prayer that you can be turned to your spirit. When you pray, you pray yourself into the spirit. Your quarreling leaves you in darkness, but after some time you calm down and begin to pray a little. Then comes the shining. You see how wrong your arguing was. You realize that your thought was wrong, that you had a poor attitude, and that what you said should not have been said. The more you pray, the more you are in your spirit, where the light shines.

Both the spirit of man and the Spirit of God are lamps, shining and enlightening our inward parts. As our spirit shines, the Spirit of God intensifies the shining sevenfold, until we find we have no place to hide.

Where this light shines, there the life supply goes. Little by little, chamber by chamber, we are transformed into the Lord's image. The gold in us takes shape. Christ is formed in us. For us, to live is Christ. In all of us this shining, supplying, and transforming is going on, making us the golden lampstand. Then we are truly the church, the practical expression of God, and His testimony. The Father is in us, the Son has taken form, and the Spirit expresses this reality.

BY MEANS OF ALL PRAYER

We can liken this golden lampstand to a complicated piece of machinery. Without a certain small screw, the machinery will not operate. The screw for this golden lampstand is that we must be in our spirit. Prayer is the key to our being able to stay in spirit: "By means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit and watching unto this in all perseverance and petition" (Eph. 6:18). "Unceasingly pray" (1 Thes. 5:17), because as soon as we stop praying, we leave our spirit. All around are things to distract us. We must keep our eyes shut and be in prayer.

Sometimes we have to go shopping. If we really have a need to buy something, when we go into the department store, we must pay no attention to all the alluring things on display. It takes an effort, but we must stay in prayer so that we buy only what we came for. God keeps calling us back to our spirit.

I remember in 1933 when I lived in Shanghai, I had to go from one end of town to the other for a meeting. In those days it was an hour's ride by electric car. The streets were bustling with activity, and gaudy signs tried to catch the eye. Before I left, I spent time praying for the meeting that night. However, by the time I reached the meeting hall after that car ride, my spirit was gone because of all the distracting things I had seen. I learned a lesson from that experience. Afterward, whenever I took the electric car, I would sit there with my eyes closed, praying, refusing to be enticed by the scenes outside. Then when my ride was over, I would still be conscious of the spirit with me. When I went into the meetings, the spirit would come forth.

With so much to turn you away, it is not easy to remain in spirit. That is why you must heed this exhortation to pray *at every time* in spirit. Pray with all prayer and petition. Watch unto this in all perseverance. "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thes. 5:19). Walk according to spirit. Set your mind on the spirit (Rom. 8:6).

Then you will be kept in life. The two lamps inside you will be shining brightly. All your inner chambers will be transformed into the image of the Lord. Not only will you have the pure gold; it will take shape, and there will be the expression. The crucial point is that you must remain in, or turn back to, your spirit. Then there will be a golden lampstand, the church, the practical expression of the Triune God.

CHAPTER SIXTY-NINE

THE CHURCH BECOMING THE LAMPSTAND OF GOD

Scripture Reading: Exo. 25:31a, 37a; Zech. 4:2; Rev. 1:12b, 20b; Prov. 20:27; Rev. 4:5b

THE SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF GOD

The main revelation of the Bible is the relationship between God and man. What this relationship should be also occupies very much of human thought. When man thinks of God, he thinks in terms of worshipping, fearing, and perhaps loving Him. God, in man's concept, is far off in the heavens, dwelling in unapproachable majesty; the best mere man can do is to offer Him worship and try to please Him.

This natural concept is that man's relationship with God is objective. Religion also promotes such a concept, whether that religion is Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. Verses from the Bible can be used to support this idea of a God to be worshipped and revered from afar.

If we penetrate the heart of the Bible, however, we will see that man's relationship with God is to be a subjective one. God wants to come into us and become our life and nature. Then He wants us to become His living. Colossians 3:4 says, "Christ our life." Galatians 2:20 says, "It is Christ who lives in me." Philippians 1:21 says, "To me, to live is Christ." Since Christ is God, Paul was saying that for him, to live was God.

God is our life. We are the living of God. God lives within us. To us to live is God. These four sentences are the center of the New Testament. If they are not our daily experience, we are not up to the standard.

When we speak of the subjective experience of God, we are touching something hard to grasp. How can it possibly be that God becomes our life, that we become His living, that He lives within us, and that for us, to live is God?

A SYMBOL

To help our understanding, the Bible uses pictures. Words alone are not so clear. It is hard to visualize a person's looks, for example, by reading a description of him; a photograph, on the other hand, shows what the person looks like, even if no words are used.

What Old Testament picture prefigures how the Lord Jesus shed His blood for us so that God might pass over us in His judgment and might become our life and be taken into us as food? As you probably all know, it is the passover lamb in Exodus 12. What Old Testament type shows us that to be in the Lord Jesus is to be saved through the waters of God's judgment? Even those in the children's meeting know that the answer is Noah's ark.

Can you think of a picture that shows us that God is our life, that we are the living of God, that He lives within us, and that for us to live is God? There is such a picture. For over fifty years, however, I did not realize that such was the meaning of this picture.

There is the illustration in John 15, where the Lord Jesus told us that He is the vine and we are the branches. We are to abide in Him, and He will abide in us. To some extent this picture shows us that He lives in us and that for us to live is Christ. However, this picture is more like a sketch than a photograph.

A most comprehensive picture is the golden lampstand, which is first mentioned in Exodus 25. There, it stood in the tabernacle as a testimony for God. Zechariah 4 is the second mention. There the lampstand represented the true Israelites, who were also God's testimony. The final mention, in Revelation 1, portrays the church as the golden lampstand and as the testimony of God.

You may have too shallow an understanding of what God's testimony is. Do not think that standing up to speak for God makes you His testimony; that your good works, done to glorify Him, make you His testimony; that honoring your parents or not arguing with others means that you have a testimony of Him. These outward things are far beneath what His testimony is.

God's testimony is a golden lampstand. It means that God comes into us to be our life and to cause us to become His living. He lives within us, and we live Him out.

THE MEANING OF THE LAMPSTAND

The design of the lampstand is most meaningful. Though the lampstand is but one, there are six branches with seven lamps. In all man's history, this design has never been improved. In the thirty-five hundred years since Moses described this pattern, no one has been able to produce a better design. The Jews often make use of drawings of this lampstand; they make minor variations in the style of it, but no one has been able to improve it. Architects vary the designs they make of buildings. Clothing fashions go back and forth from one style to another. This lampstand, however, was designed by God. What He fashions cannot be improved. Who can alter the pattern of man's face or improve the form of his body?

The lampstand signifies the Triune God. In typology gold represents the divine nature. Like gold, God's nature does not change or decay. That this lampstand was made of gold tells us that it represents God's nature.

This gold was not in a formless lump. It was structured into a form that bespoke its function. The shape of the gold, a lampstand, symbolizes the image of God. Who is God's image? Christ is called "the image of God" in 2 Corinthians 4:4. As the Son of God's love, He is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). Therefore, the image, or form, of the lampstand signifies Christ. "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18).

What are the seven lamps? About this we cannot be clear until we come to Revelation. There we are plainly told that the seven lamps are the seven Spirits of God (4:5). The seven Spirits are simply the Holy Spirit of God. These lamps are the expression, or manifestation, of God.

The Father is signified by the gold, the element of which the lamp was made. The Son is signified by the form of the lampstand. The Spirit is the expression, as indicated by the seven lamps. Now do you agree that the golden lampstand is a picture of the Triune God?

By the time we come to Revelation, the church has become the lampstand. This means that the church is the expression of the Triune God. Each local church is a golden lampstand. What first signified the Triune God now depicts the church.

By nature, however, we are not made of gold. God formed man from the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7). When our physical body is chemically analyzed, it is found to have the same constituents as the soil. At death, man returns to the dust from which he was taken (3:19).

How can we, who are men of dust or clay, become a golden lampstand? When we were regenerated, we were born of God. Not only were our sins washed away by the precious blood; there was also within us the element of the Father, just as a new baby has the life and nature of his father. Now there is gold, the element of God, in us.

THE SHAPING OF THE GOLD

Nonetheless, this gold needs to be formed. Paul travailed for the Galatians “until Christ is formed in you” (Gal. 4:19). It was not enough for Christ to be revealed in them (1:16) or even to be living in them (2:20). The gold had to take shape.

Before the gold within us takes shape, can we say that we are the church? According to locality, we are surely the church. How else could we describe ourselves? Yet according to what we are, we may not look like the church.

Even this morning you may have been quarreling at home. When you recall that, you find it hard to declare that you are the church. Nevertheless, in the midst of this quarreling by the man of clay, there was still gold within you.

We are truly the church. In spite of our appearance of clay outside, inside is the element of gold.

TRANSFORMED BY THE SHINING OF THE LAMPS

Our need now is transformation. “We all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18). To be transformed into the Lord’s image is from the Lord Spirit. The final

expression of the golden lampstand is the seven lamps, which are the seven Spirits of God.

Our own spirit is also the lamp of God (Prov. 20:27). These two spirits, ours and God's, have been mingled. Within our little lamp there is now also another lamp of greater intensity.

The function of a lamp is to shine. According to J. N. Darby's footnote, Proverbs 20:27 can be rendered, "Man's spirit is the lamp of Jehovah, searching all the chambers of the soul." Before we were saved, our spirit was dead; the light of the lamp was extinguished. All our movements were under the direction of the soul. Our thinking and our doing were according to our whims. One day, however, the light of the gospel shined into us, and the lamp of greater intensity was placed in us. The spirit's function revived. We repented and confessed our sins, enlightened by the conscience within our spirit. With our spirit enlivened and the lamp of God's Spirit added to our spirit, it became very bright within.

The light now searches all the inward parts of the soul. Under its twofold shining, we can see that the thoughts we were so sure of are wrong; that we loved what we should hate, and hated what we should love; that our joys and sorrows were for the wrong things; and that our intentions and decisions were wrong. Under the intensity of this light, we confess and repent to the Lord.

RESISTING THE LIGHT

Usually, however, there are some areas within us that resist the penetration of the light. When the Lord shines on some aspect of our emotions, the sisters may weep before Him, but they will not open this door to His searching gaze. When the Lord shines on the brothers' dislike for a certain brother, they may argue and protest, but they stubbornly shut the door of their will to the Lord's reproach. We may admit to the Lord our shortcomings, but we tell Him that He must forgive us, that our weakness is to blame, that such is the way He made us, or that others are at fault. Why does He not change the others? Why does He always pick on us?

When you close the door to the Lord in this way, you cannot be transformed. Year after year you read the Bible, pray, and go to the meetings, but you refuse to change your old ways. You will not allow the Lord to touch your

feelings, your thoughts, or your possessions. You may pray, but what matters is what you say, not what God says. You may shed tears before the Lord, but you will not open the door of your emotions to Him.

If you allow this blockage to continue, the enlightenment will cease. You may still faithfully read your Bible. You may find it easy to pray. You may keep attending the meetings regularly. The tendency to cry may be gone. Outwardly, you seem to be at peace. Inwardly, however, your growth has been arrested. God's way of transforming is through enlightening. Wherever the light shines, life is supplied to that place. By rejecting the light, you are rejecting the supply of life.

OPENING TO THE LORD

Who experiences the greatest amount of transformation? It is the one who is absolutely open to the Lord.

“Lord, I am fully open to You. I want to keep opening to You. My whole being is open—my heart, my mind, my will, and my emotions. Keep shining. Search me thoroughly. Enlighten and enliven me. I will accept it fully.” In this way, the light will penetrate into every area, and life simultaneously will be supplied to you. The man of clay will be transformed into the image of Christ. As the gold is thus formed in you, there will be the seven Spirits shining forth and manifesting God.

Such is the church in reality. The golden lampstand is not only the Triune God; it also is the church, His manifestation. That the church may express the Triune God is what He is working to accomplish on earth.

May we all be open to Him to receive His enlightening and to let His life supply us. Then we will be transformed and bear the image of Christ. As we are enlightened by the lamps within us, we will become the golden lampstand in reality in our locality, manifesting the Triune God. Then He will have His testimony.

CHAPTER SEVENTY

THE SPIRIT—GOD’S ULTIMATE EXPRESSION

Scripture Reading: Zech. 3:9; 4:2, 6, 10a; Rev. 1:4, 20b; 4:5b; 5:6; 22:17a

SEVEN GOLDEN LAMPSTANDS

The last book of the Bible opens with a vision of seven golden lampstands. As we are told, the lampstands are seven churches (Rev. 1:20).

Why is the church a golden lampstand? Very few see this mystery. As we said in previous chapters, the golden lampstand first symbolizes the Triune God. It speaks of His nature, form, and expression. The Father is the nature, the Son is the image, and the Spirit is the expression. For the church to be represented by this very same symbol indicates that the church is the expression of the Triune God. Ultimately, the church is one with God.

From the standpoint of experience, how does the Triune God come into us and then become the church? Since our regeneration, we have had the nature of God, the pure gold, inside us. But for this gold to take the shape of the lampstand requires that we be transformed.

TRANSFORMED, NOT REFORMED

I am not talking about being reformed. Transformation is a matter of life. It involves a metabolic change. A mortician has to apply artificial coloring to the face of a dead person in order to disguise the pallor of the lips and the skin. The corpse lies in his coffin, still lifeless, but his appearance is much improved. The best reformation can do is to superficially change the outward appearance.

Transformation, in contrast, produces change from within. If you are sickly and pallid, you need to begin eating properly and getting enough fresh air and exercise. After a time the proper diet and exercise will cause a metabolic change in your appearance. Without any false color being added to your skin, your complexion will be vibrant with good health.

The Scripture speaks of being transformed in 2 Corinthians 3:18: “We all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit.” Romans 12:2 also tells us not to be “fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind.” Transformation refers to a metabolic change brought about by another element being added to us and becoming part of us.

Without this additional element, which is God Himself, we cannot be transformed. The best we can hope for is an improved appearance, while we still remain our old self. God has no interest in improving us outwardly. His economy is first to regenerate us by adding His very nature to us. This higher element then begins to uplift our original element and gradually eliminates the negative things of that original condition.

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

When the Holy Spirit comes into man, He brings with Him the element of divinity. This element effects a change in man. This change is usually called the work of the Spirit. He is not merely reforming man. As those who have studied chemistry know, there cannot be a chemical reaction without a new element being added, no matter how much effort is made to uplift the original constituents.

It is pitiful that so many Christians regard the work of the Spirit as a work of reformation. They ask God for His Spirit to help them to be more loving and to fulfill their duties. They consider themselves as poor and weak, in need of the power of the Holy Spirit to strengthen them. The thought of God as the all-powerful One, answering the prayers of poor, frail human beings by strengthening them to meet their obligations, is a natural religious concept.

Such a concept is not the revelation of the Bible. When the Holy Spirit comes, He brings God into you. God Himself becomes the source within you. He becomes your life, bringing about a subjective, organic change. He is not helping you in an external way. The end result is that you become God-men, not good men. You are not merely full of virtues but full of God. You are not here to express virtues but to express God.

We were born men of clay. When the Holy Spirit comes, He begins to change us into men of gold. He also shapes the gold within us until it is in the form of a lampstand. This lampstand is the church.

THE WAY OF GOD'S SALVATION

Perhaps you do not grasp what I mean. Let us take as an example a young sister, saved two or three years ago. Because her family has indulged her, she is selfish and bad-tempered. After being saved, she begins to feel that she must stop behaving so inconsiderately of others. She prays, "Lord, keep me from losing my temper. Do not let me act in such a spoiled way." Usually, her prayer is not answered. Occasionally, however, it seems to work.

Let me assure you that if such a prayer is answered, it is answered only temporarily. To pray this way is wrong. God is not trying to reform us so that we are better behaved. He wants to add Himself to us and be our life. He wants to be our very substance, just as the food we take in becomes part of us. We do not gain strength by having a cow help us! Our energy does not come from riding on a bull! The animal must be slaughtered and some of it must be eaten by us. Within a few hours the beef we have eaten is assimilated, and we find that we are strengthened to carry on. It is not the strength of the cow that is sustaining us. Rather, the element of the cow has come into our blood. It has become part of us.

Such an illustration of the food we eat is to point us to Christ. We are not imitating Him or asking for His help. Rather, we take Him in daily. As we digest and assimilate Him, we are changed into His image.

If this young sister we have mentioned feeds upon Christ daily and opens to let Him be her life element, gradually and spontaneously her ugly manner will disappear, as the new element is metabolically added to her. This is what transformation is. This is the way of God's salvation.

Transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit. To listen to preaching is not sufficient. The word of the preaching brings the Spirit to you. God comes with the Spirit. By His coming into you, you will have such a change. The outcome of this transformation is the golden lampstand.

A PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Verse 4 of chapter 2 says, “Jehovah God made earth and heaven.” Here are two different names for one person. Other names for God are introduced as the Bible continues, but we will skip over to the Gospel of Matthew, which says, “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ” (1:1). Do you think Jesus Christ and Jehovah are two separate persons? No! The revelation in the Bible is progressive. First there is mention of God, then Jehovah, and then Jesus Christ.

The revelation continues. In Acts 2:2-4 the Holy Spirit came and filled all the disciples gathered together. In the Epistles we read, “The Lord is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17). Then, in the final book, there are seven churches and seven Spirits before His throne (Rev. 1:4). These seven Spirits are the seven lamps of fire burning before the throne (4:5). The seven lamps, in turn, are the seven eyes of the Lamb (5:6). Then in the last chapter, “the Spirit and the bride say, Come!” (22:17).

Now you have had a survey of the whole Bible. In Genesis God is introduced, but in Revelation there are the Spirit and the bride. These are not different persons. In the beginning He was God. Then the name Jehovah comes in. After that He became Jesus Christ. Then He became the Spirit. Ultimately, He is the Spirit and the bride. The Spirit is the ultimate expression of God.

In your daily fellowship with God, who is the God that you contact? Is He the God in Genesis 1 or the Spirit in Revelation 22? Today the God you experience is the Spirit. The God in Genesis 1 was far away in the heavens. Now He is the Spirit within you and is one with the bride.

How did God after incarnation become the Spirit? After living on earth for thirty-three and a half years, He went to the cross and there redeemed us from our sins and terminated the old creation. He was buried and after three days arose from the dead. In resurrection the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). The last Adam is the man Jesus, God become flesh. In resurrection He took the second step, by which He became the Spirit.

The Lord, as the last Adam, became the Spirit after incarnation by passing through death and resurrection. Besides being the Spirit, He is also the seven Spirits (Rev. 4:5); that is, He has been intensified sevenfold. This is the Spirit who is within us. This is the God who is within us.

Are you in Genesis, in Matthew, or in Revelation? I would surely answer that I am in the book of Revelation. I would not like to stay in Romans or even in Ephesians. I am in Revelation. I am part of the golden lampstand. I am enjoying the seven Spirits, the seven lamps, and the seven eyes (5:6).

THE POSSESSING SPIRIT

How do we who are men of clay become men of gold? As we pray, repent, and confess to the Lord, the Spirit, this intensified Spirit, fills us. If we do not pray, or if we do not open to repent and confess our sins when we pray, there is no way for us to be transformed. The more we open in our praying, the more we will be filled with this sevenfold Spirit.

This Spirit is like a lamp, shining in us. He ruthlessly exposes us. Because we do not fully open to Him, however, His work is not accomplished all at once. As we open a little, He comes in. The next day we may open the door to another room, but just a small crack. The Lord will put His foot in, and we tell Him that is enough. Then His shoulder may follow. Sometimes we argue with Him. Sometimes He argues with us. Sometimes He simply stays there knocking on one of the doors. Eventually, we cannot help but open to Him. We are not all that pleased for Him to be there, because we no longer feel as comfortable in that room as we did before He came in. Little by little, as we pray and confess, the Lord goes from room to room. For some the time is longer, for others shorter, but it takes a few years. Even then we are not entirely possessed by Him.

We who are saved and love the Lord must be fully occupied by Him. The Lord will not become impatient. To Him a thousand years are like a day. If we refuse to let Him in today, He will try again tomorrow. If He cannot gain an entrance this year, He will be back again next year. Even if we hold out during this age, in the next age He will come again. Sooner or later He will occupy us fully. Years ago I decided I would like to have this matter settled quickly. It is pointless to bargain with Him. I told Him to take over as fast as He could. Nonetheless, it is God's way to occupy us little by little.

The Lord may come to enlighten you. After two or three weeks you decide you have had enough. You quit. No more praying. No more meetings. That is the end. But after a few weeks you begin to think of the Lord again. You find yourself talking to Him. You find yourself going to a meeting. As you sit there,

inside you the tears begin to flow. Afterward, when you get home, you kneel by your bed and pour out your heart to Him.

What makes you have an experience like that? Why should you suffer that kind of torment? What folly! What is this mysterious constraint within you? It is inexplicable, yet somehow you have been restored to the Lord. You attend the Lord's table meeting and enjoy its sweetness. A few days pass by, and you find the Lord again knocking at the door of that very room you will not open. You answer, "Lord! Here You are again! You had better forget about this room." Such is our story.

I can describe these experiences to you because I have passed along this road. Over the course of fifty years, one after another, the rooms have been given to the Lord. This is the Lord's work within us as the sevenfold Spirit. He daily enlightens us and exposes our weaknesses. Even unintentionally and unwillingly we find ourselves confessing to Him.

Once a weakness is touched by the Lord, it is no longer the same. After Jacob's thigh was touched by the Lord, he walked with a limp (Gen. 32:24-31). You used to go into a violent rage when you got angry. Now you may still lose your temper, but it has lost its vigor. Your temper is crippled. You want to flare up, but the fire will not come. Because your temper has been touched by the Lord, your rage can no longer go out of bounds.

The same thing befalls your idle talk. You would go from house to house, talking about whether Sister So-and-so was pregnant, whether Brother So-and-so was engaged, and whether that family came from East or West Malaysia. There came a time when you prayed, however, and the seven lamps shined. Why were you such a busybody? Why not preach the gospel instead of gossiping? The reproaching of those seven Spirits shining within crippled your idle talk. The next time you visit your sister-in-law, your tongue is silent. You can only ask how she is. When she begins to tell you the latest news about the neighbors, you have a sinking feeling inside. She asks what is wrong, and you do not know what to say. Your gossiping tongue has been crippled.

One after another our weaknesses are touched until they are lame. The Lord still shines until in time our weaknesses are gone.

TRANSFUSED BY THE SEVEN EYES

These seven Spirits are also the seven eyes. Eyes speak of transfusion and transmission. As we look at someone, we infuse what we are into him. When we are in prayer, we sometimes sense the Lord's eyes upon us. He is infusing us with Himself, changing what we are by adding His substance to us. After our time of prayer we are not the same as before. Not only has His light shined on us; He has also transfused His element into us. We have had an "injection" of the divine life. Day by day it increases.

Without your realizing it, you are being transformed. Not only is there gold within you; you are becoming pure gold. The gold is taking the form of the stature of Christ. Then when you meet together, you are a golden lampstand. The Holy Spirit is released and able to shine forth.

THE SPIRIT AND THE BRIDE

Now you can see why the seven Spirits are not only the ultimate expression of God but also the ultimate expression of the church. If a lamp has no light bulb, it has no ultimate expression. The lampstand's ultimate expression is the bright shining of its seven lamps. The church in each locality can be such a lampstand, shining in the darkness, because all of you individually are being transformed. The element of gold is increasing in you, resulting in your expressing God Himself.

The golden lampstand is God Himself and also the church. This reality is accomplished by the seven Spirits, which are the Spirit. In the end the Spirit and the bride become one entity. This is what the church is. This is the final objective toward which God is aiming. This is the work of the Spirit in us. By these seven Spirits, seven lamps, and seven eyes, all that God is will be shined into us. By this transfusion of Himself, we will be metabolically changed to become the golden lampstand in reality.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-ONE

THE SPIRIT OF MAN

Scripture Reading: Zech. 12:1; Gen. 2:7; Prov. 20:27

AN OVERLOOKED PART OF MAN

The matter of man's spirit is a most neglected subject. Even among Christians there is an inadequate understanding and appreciation of the human spirit.

After a conference in Hong Kong in 1954, a Brethren preacher who had attended came to talk with me. He had enjoyed the conference, he said, but could not quite agree with everything that was said. The distinction I had made between *spirit* and *soul* he would not accept. Man, in his view, has only two parts: a material, physical body and a psychological, invisible soul. *Spirit* and *soul*, he felt, were interchangeable terms.

I pointed him to 1 Thessalonians 5:23: "May your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." If *spirit* and *soul* referred to the same part of us, there would have been no need for Paul to put the conjunction *and* between them. It seems as if Paul deliberately wanted to make a distinction between these two parts, lest anyone think they were the same.

This preacher refused to be convinced, maintaining that the two were the same in spite of this clear verse. All I could say further was, "Brother, if you do not believe the word of the Bible, and insist on holding on to your concepts, there is nothing more for us to talk about. I choose to walk in the way of the Bible. You can keep walking in the way of your concepts."

As I mentioned in a previous chapter, confusion as to the difference between *soul* and *spirit* is partly due to the inaccurate translation of *pneuma* and *cardia* into Chinese. Romans 1:9, for example, reads, "God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son." The Chinese rendering says, "...whom I serve with my heart." The Greek word *pneuma* means "air," "spirit," and "wind"; it cannot be translated "heart."

It is because of the confounding of these terms and the creation of the term *heart-spirit* by the translators of the Chinese Bible that the readers of the Chinese version are for the most part unaware of the significance of the spirit.

In the world today it seems that no one pays attention to the spirit. As soon as a child is born, his mother takes care to see that he is fed, bathed, clothed, and kept comfortable. All these needs for food, clothing, and lodging concern mostly the body. As the child grows, he goes to school, where they cater to his mind. Some people continue this educational process until their hair turns white. The shops take care mainly of the needs of the body or offer things for sale that appeal to the emotions. Thus, mankind seeks to supply the needs of the body and the soul, totally unaware that one-third of man's being is neglected.

You may say that a shop that sells Bibles is caring for man's spirit. Truly, the Bible is for the spirit. However, the salesman is probably ignorant of the spirit. Furthermore, all too often the Bible is used for knowledge. In seminaries and Bible colleges, the study of the Bible has become a matter of research, of debate, or of justification for religious concepts. Both the secular world and the religious world largely disregard the spirit.

TERMINOLOGY OR EXPERIENCE?

You may be tired of hearing me speak so much about the spirit. You may be of the opinion that this is my only topic. You may wonder how much I know of various doctrines. Why has this been my pet subject for thirty years? If you will excuse me for saying so, I could easily teach courses on prophecy and typology. I am all too familiar with them. I no longer have any interest in these subjects, however. It is only the matter of the spirit that burdens me. The more I speak on this, the heavier my burden becomes.

After having heard or read so many of my messages on the spirit, you are probably familiar with the terminology. How much time, however, do you actually spend in the spirit? Not including your eight hours of sleep, how many of the remaining hours of the day do you live in the spirit? I ask myself this question also. Within me I am sometimes rebuked by the Lord that with all my speaking about the spirit, much of the time I do not remain there myself.

THE EFFORT REQUIRED

In order to live in the other parts of your being, no effort is required. It is natural to be in your flesh and to be loose, doing as you will in a careless way. To stay in your mind with all its considerations and analyses is a comfortable place to be, especially for the brothers. To live in your emotions and react according to their dictates is common, especially for the sisters. It may be that when you pray, you are in the spirit. Most of the time you spend in prayer, however, you may still be in your emotions, weeping, or in your mind, figuring things out. You may exercise your spirit when you come to the meetings, but usually your calling on the Lord sounds hollow because your daily life is not spent in the spirit.

Even though we are in the churches of the Lord's recovery, we too neglect our spirit. Once again I would like to try to persuade you of its importance.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SPIRIT

Man can be likened to a radio. The Spirit of God is like the heavenly radio waves. The spirit in man is like the radio receiver. Many "radios" do not function because their owners do not use their spirit. People are unable to contact God because the receiver within them is out of order.

I would remind you again how much importance God gives to the spirit. Zechariah 12:1 tells us that the Lord "stretches forth the heavens and lays the foundations of the earth and forms the spirit of man within him." Here are the important things in the universe—the heavens, the earth, and the spirit of man. The verse does not even say *man*, but rather *the spirit of man*. You bathe regularly to make sure your body is clean, but this verse focuses on the spirit, not the body. Do you care about your spirit being clean? God's concern is for the spirit, but man's attention is devoted to the body. The body is just clay; it is the spirit that is precious.

For Receiving God

The heavens are for the earth. Without them the earth cannot exist. The earth is for man. Without it man cannot survive. Man has a spirit, which is for God. God wants man to receive Him; that is why he was created. If man had

only a body, he would not be able to receive God who is Spirit. By creating a spirit in man, God made man with a part that corresponds to Himself.

Genesis 2:7 reads, “Jehovah God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.” This verse indicates that man has three parts. His physical part was made from the dust of the ground. Then the breath of life that was breathed into him became his spirit. When the body and the spirit came together, there was the soul. The body is for man’s survival. The spirit is for him to contact God. The soul is for man’s self-expression. Of these three, the most important is the spirit, which came from the breath of life.

For Searching Man’s Inner Being

“The spirit of man,” Proverbs 20:27 tells us, “is the lamp of Jehovah, / Searching all the innermost parts of the inner being.” The word *spirit* in this verse is the same Hebrew word as that translated “breath” in Genesis 2:7. The breath of life that God breathed into man became man’s spirit. Although this spirit is distinct from God, it is close to Him in nature. Thus, the spirit can receive God and also work for Him. It is a lamp, searching man’s inward parts.

For Inwardly Governing Man

Care for your spirit. All the inner chambers of your soul must be controlled by the spirit. Every country needs a central governing body. What is the central government in you? Sorry, I do not believe it is your spirit.

When the brothers come together, the central government is in control because they begin by praying. The first few minutes of talk continue the atmosphere of prayer. But before too many minutes have gone by, the central government collapses. One brother expresses his opinions. Another says that the first is unfamiliar with the situation and therefore does not know how to handle it properly. The first brother then wants to know what makes the second think he is so well qualified. Is it right to heed your spirit when you pray, but disregard it when you talk to your brothers? Should it be your opinions that control you?

If you are older, your opinions may not be so manifested. You have been in the church life so long that your rough edges have been chipped off. Outwardly, you are smooth and agreeable. Inwardly, however, you are unwilling and dissatisfied. Dissatisfaction may be your central government.

In the central government of the sisters, emotion holds the posts of president, prime minister, and chief of staff. The spirit is useful when they pray, but when they are angry, they feel they must give vent to their emotions. Later, they will repent, but at the time they give way to their temper.

The central government of some saints is quick action. Without regard for the spirit, they make decisions, take action, and get things done, the quicker the better.

It seems that only when we pray is our spirit given its normal place. As soon as we finish praying, we in effect say, "Goodbye, spirit. Now that my praying is over, I do not need you any longer. I want to take care of things myself in my way." This kind of attitude makes us like the unbelievers. Neither they nor we are living by the spirit.

Even the Lord has no way to control you. You may say, "Is not God almighty? He should control me so that I do not lose my temper." God controls you in your spirit. If you do not contact Him, He cannot control you. The Lord is like electricity. If the current cannot get through to the outlet, you may have the lamp plugged in, but the light will not go on when you turn the switch.

RESTRAINED BY THE SPIRIT

What is it like to let the spirit be our central government? We will find our thoughts restricted. We will not dare to utter our opinion. Words will not come out of our mouth so lightly. Our pride will be smitten. We will sense a restraint or a constraint in even the smallest things we do.

When you were out of the spirit, you felt free to live as you wanted. You may have hated others, told lies, or stolen. Your actions may have been wild. The Bible says of those who utterly disregarded their spirit, the part of their being closest to God, that "God gave them up" (Rom. 1:28). Those in this world who have turned away from God, God has let go. After you are saved, however,

God would have you turn to your spirit. That is the place where He is, the place where He may be contacted. God wants to bring you under His strict control, in big things and in small, even in your words.

TURNING AND RETURNING

“O Lord, preserve me in the spirit.” It is here that you enjoy the presence of God and are one with Him. Do not be concerned about your problems. Do not shed tears over them. Do not argue. Do not focus on your troubles. Whatever your situation, however provoking your circumstances, turn to your spirit.

If your wife aggravates you, do not be drawn out by her. The more you look at her, the angrier you will feel. The more you listen to her words, the more you will feel like exploding. Return to your spirit. Call upon the name of the Lord. Say, “Lord! Lord, save me! Preserve me in the spirit.” This is the secret of overcoming and of holiness.

May the Lord show us the importance of this spirit that He formed within man. It came from God as the breath of life and is very close to Him. By means of this organ we can contact Him, and God can search all the parts of our inner being. Let us make this spirit our home and stay there. By remaining here we will meet God and enjoy Him.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-TWO

THE PRACTICAL EXPRESSION OF THE PROCESSED TRIUNE GOD

Scripture Reading: Gen. 1:26-27; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Isa. 9:6; John 14:9; Eph. 4:6; John 1:1

THE TRINITY

The Spirit, we have said, is the ultimate expression of God. Such a statement touches the doctrine of the Trinity, one of the most mysterious doctrines in the Bible and one that has caused endless debate. The Bible reveals to us that God is three and yet also one. This is what the term *triune* means.

Yet we cannot liken the Trinity to three persons forming a corporation. God is not corporate. The many saints comprise one Body, but it is not consistent with the truth to say that the three persons of the Godhead form one body. For several years now we have tried to avoid using the word *persons* in referring to God. *Three persons* too easily conveys the thought of three Gods.

ONE GOD

God is one. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament make this abundantly clear. Isaiah 45:5 says, “I am Jehovah and there is no one else; / Besides Me there is no God.” First Corinthians 8:4 says, “There is no God but one.” In the whole universe there is only the one true God, and this God is one, not divided into three.

FATHER, SON, AND SPIRIT

There is another side, however, that the Bible presents. Notice how God speaks in Genesis 1:26: “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.” Why does God here refer to Himself as plural? Verse 27 says, “God created man in His own image.” Here God is referred to as singular. Is God singular or plural? He is triune, both three and one. Verse 27 indicates that He is singular, but the number included in *Us* and *Our* is not clear until we

come to Matthew 28:19. This verse says, “Go therefore and disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” This word was spoken to the disciples after the Lord was resurrected. This verse indicates to us that God is triune; notice, however, that *name* is singular. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are three, but the name is one.

There are several other indications of the Trinity in the New Testament. 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.”

Ephesians shows that God is triune. In 3:14, 16, and 17 Paul says he bowed his knees to the *Father*, that we would be strengthened through His *Spirit* into the inner man, that *Christ* may make His home in our hearts. In 4:4-6 we have one Spirit, one Lord, and one God and Father of all. The Triune God can also be seen in Ephesians 1:11-13 and 2:18.

THE CONTROVERSY

Because the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity contains both the aspect of one and the aspect of three, there have been disputes concerning it over centuries. Furthermore, the truth of the Bible cannot be comprehended by man’s limited mentality.

Suppose two blind men touch someone’s head. The first finds that there are seven openings in it. The second checks the head only from the back; he declares that it has no openings. They argue, accusing each other of lying. Who is right? Both are, because a head has both a front and a back. Neither of them has the complete picture; they are arguing out of blindness.

Theologians have treated the matter of the Trinity in much the same way. Some argue from the side of the oneness of God’s being. Others argue from the side of the three persons. This battle continues even today. Those who take an extreme view in favor of the side of one may fall into the heresy of modalism. Extremists on the side of the three are called tritheists. We must be careful not to overemphasize one side or the other, lest we fall into error.

Tritheism

Several years ago a brother in Hong Kong opposed my saying that Christ is the Spirit. One day he came to visit me at home, and we talked together about this. I asked him, “Brother, how many Gods do you believe in?” Without hesitation he replied, “Three. The Father is a God, the Son is a God, and the Spirit is a God.” Isn’t this unbelievable! Yet many Christians really believe in three Gods. They do not dare to express their belief openly, because it is contrary to the Scriptures, but in their way of thinking of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, They are three Gods. Part of the fault for this erroneous concept lies with the use of the term *persons* for the Godhead. Because of the limitations of language, we sometimes have to use this term, but if we overemphasize the concept of three persons, we may be led into tritheism.

Modalism

Modalism is another heresy, resulting from taking an extreme position. Its leading exponent was Sabellius, who claimed that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit were not eternally coexistent. In modalistic thinking, the three are merely three successive manifestations of the Divine Being or three temporary modes of His activity. Passages like Isaiah 9:6, where the Son is called the eternal Father, and John 14:9, where the Lord said, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father,” are used to support modalism’s position.

Just as tritheism pushed the matter of the three persons too far and ended up with three Gods, so modalism pushed the oneness of the Godhead too far and taught that when the Son came, the Father was over, and when the Spirit came, the Son was over. We cannot accept this teaching.

The Scriptures clearly tell us that all three eternally coexist. John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The Word is the Son. He was present in eternity with God the Father and was God. In John 17:5 the Lord prayed concerning the glory He had shared with the Father before the world was. Therefore, both the Father and the Son are coeternal. That the Spirit also is eternal is clear from Hebrews 9:14, where He is called “the eternal Spirit.” It was this Triune God who said in Genesis 1:26, “Let *Us* make man in *Our* image, according to *Our* likeness.” All three were there before man’s creation.

Both tritheism and modalism have tried to explain the mystery of the Trinity and have gone too far. One went to the North Pole and the other to the

South! According to what we understand of the Scriptures, we have taken a position in the middle.

THE NICENE CREED

Many of you are familiar with the Nicene Creed. Those who have tritheistic leanings (even though they would not admit that they do) for the most part subscribe to this creed. You need to be aware of the background from which the creed came. In A.D. 325 the Emperor Constantine convened a council at Nicaea to resolve the theological questions that were causing disputations. Constantine's efforts were directed toward unifying the many diverse peoples and cultures that comprised the Roman Empire. The Council of Nicaea was part of this effort. After hearing the arguments presented at the Council by the various factions, Constantine, who was presiding, proposed the position to be taken. These beliefs were embodied in the Nicene Creed, which both Catholicism and most Protestant denominations endorse.

Strange to say, at the time when this pagan Emperor was decreeing what beliefs Christians should hold, there were seven books of the Bible that were not even officially recognized as canonical. Hebrews and Revelation were two of these. Not until A.D. 397 did a council in Carthage, North Africa, decide that these and five other books should also be considered as part of the Bible. Thus, the light from these books—like the seven Spirits, for example, which are only mentioned in Revelation—did not enter into the statement that the Council of Nicaea drew up about the Trinity.

THE PERSON OF THE SPIRIT

The saints throughout the past centuries have been ignorant as to the human spirit and the Spirit of God as well. In the seventeenth century, when the King James Version was done, the translators considered the Spirit as a power, not as a person. Thus, in Romans 8, twice we find the term *the Spirit itself* (vv. 16, 26). It was in the last century that the Brethren realized this error and saw that the Spirit is a person, like the Father and the Son. Yet the Brethren did not pay much attention to the importance of the seven Spirits, nor did they have any idea that these Spirits are the ultimate expression of God.

A PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

From these glimpses into the past we can see that the revelation of the Bible is progressive. The same is true with regard to the recovery of the Bible. Martin Luther's revelation was only to a certain point. Gradually, more and more has been uncovered and recovered. Our vision today is the most far-reaching, because we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before. Edison is regarded as the father of electricity, but what we know today about electricity goes far beyond Edison's knowledge. The recovery of the truth, like the advances in science, builds upon the past.

Martin Luther was focused on the early chapters of Romans and Galatians. Today we are at the beginning of Revelation. We are at least in chapter 1, for we as the local churches are the golden lampstands. If we were to discuss this with someone in the denominations, however, he would probably wonder what on earth we were talking about. Why are those in the denominations ignorant of the golden lampstands? It is because, for the most part, they are still in the first part of Romans.

The Jews believe the Bible, but their belief stops with Malachi. They know God as God and as Jehovah. In the New Testament we have Jesus Christ. The name Jesus means "Jehovah the Savior" or "Jehovah our salvation." But the Jews reject Jesus Christ. Christians, however, all believe in God, Jehovah, and Jesus Christ; but when it comes to the Spirit, not all believe that the Holy Spirit is God. We believe that Christ is the Spirit; He is both Jehovah and the Spirit. We also believe in the seven Spirits, who are the ultimate expression of God. God is Jehovah. Jehovah is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Spirit. The Spirit is the seven Spirits.

Does your belief in God go only as far as Genesis? If so, perhaps you should meet with the Jews in the synagogue! If you believe that Jesus Christ is God but that He is not the Spirit, you are still in the Gospels. This is the extent of what many in the denominations believe about God. We in the church today, however, believe in the seven Spirits. We do not believe in only a portion of the Bible. We believe it from Genesis to Revelation.

I would encourage you to read the books we have written on the matter of the Triune God. These books have been written only after a thorough study of the Bible and also after much research into the historic teachings of the great scholars in Christianity. We have not lightly or arbitrarily taken a position on any truth. We do not incline toward the right or toward the left. We have

avoided extremes. I believe the truth in our midst is most accurate and balanced. We recognize that in the Triune God there is the aspect of the three, yet we are not tritheists. We acknowledge that the Triune God has also the aspect of the one, yet we cannot accept modalism. Throughout the centuries orthodox Bible scholars have all recognized that God is three and also one, yet He is not three Gods, nor did He exist in three different modes. He is triune, three in one.

THE SPIRIT AND THE BRIDE

The seven Spirits, as we have said, are the ultimate expression of God, Jehovah, Jesus Christ, and the Spirit. These seven Spirits are being wrought into the church so that it becomes one with the Triune God. Thus, both the Triune God and the church are portrayed by a golden lampstand. The ultimate expression of both is the seven lamps.

These seven lamps shining from the lampstand symbolize the testimony of God. This testimony is God Himself. At the end of the Bible, when the Spirit and the bride together say, "Come!" (Rev. 22:17), the two have become one in reality.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-THREE

TO BE A PERSON IN SPIRIT

Scripture Reading: Rom. 8:4, 6, 14; Eph. 6:18; 1 Thes. 5:17, 19; Rev. 1:10a

GOD'S DESIRE FOR US

God intends to work Himself into us to be both our life and our nature. He wants us to live Him out. In order to accomplish this intention, God created a spirit within man. Then He Himself became flesh and went through death and resurrection, at which point He became the life-giving Spirit. Before the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, this life-giving Spirit, who is known in the New Testament as *the* Spirit, “was not yet” (John 7:39).

When we repent and believe in the Lord, our conscience, which is within our spirit, has effectively functioned. We confess our sins and are cleansed by the Lord's precious blood. Our spirit is regenerated, and *the* Spirit comes to dwell in our spirit so that the two become one. “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17). How glorious it is that we sinners, after being cleansed by the precious blood, can be one spirit with God!

LIVING BY THE FLESH

Now He wants us to live in this spirit. The Scripture tells us that there are “those who are according to the flesh” and “those who are according to the spirit” (Rom. 8:5). To walk according to the flesh means to carry out whatever the flesh desires. A fleshly person eats whatever he wants and drinks whatever appeals to him. Even if what he does is illegal or harmful or sinful, he is not concerned. He shamelessly indulges his flesh and answers to no one.

LIVING BY THE EMOTION

Besides this kind of person who walks in the lusts of the flesh, there is the natural man, who lives according to the soul (1 Cor. 2:14). A sister, for example, may live by her emotions. When she expresses her opinion, it is not well reasoned; it is simply how she feels. Sometimes she is excited and happy; other times she is depressed and tearful. To live by the emotions is not evil

like living according to the flesh. But even though she may not be engaging in sinful things, there will be times when she loses her temper. Then she is close to being in the lust of the flesh. Her face turns livid, her self-control vanishes, and the angry words spill out unchecked. Afterward, she will feel ashamed and remorseful.

LIVING BY THE MIND

A brother, on the other hand, usually lives by his mind. He is less inclined to be bad-tempered. When he participates in a conversation, his words are carefully chosen. His position on different matters is well thought out so that he gives the impression of being intelligent, reasonable, and even wise.

We all naturally admire this type of person. He is living by the mind, but he impresses us more than the one who lives by her emotions. Both, however, are living according to the soul, and in our thinking we rank them higher than those who live according to the flesh, indulging themselves without restraint.

What God wants, of course, is that man live according to the spirit. Those who do are the highest class of humanity.

Because the Lord today is the Spirit living in our spirit, for us to live according to the spirit is to live according to Him. When we live by the spirit, the Lord is living out from us, because we are one with Him in spirit. When we live according to the flesh, we cannot touch Him. When we live by the soul, the Lord cannot live out from us; we are simply living by ourselves. Whenever we live by the spirit, however, we experience Him.

If you ask me where the Lord is, I will tell you that He is within your spirit. Do not think of Him as being far away in heaven. Do not look around for Him. He is within you. The Lord Jesus is with your spirit. How precious and glorious this is!

LIVING BY THE BIBLE

All of you who are saved, and especially who are in the Lord's recovery, must live according to the spirit. You must not live according to anything else. You may wonder about living according to the Bible. Usually, your efforts to follow the Bible come from the mind. If you want to know what your relationship to your wife should be, you read the Bible passages that deal with

that subject. You find out that you must love your wife. Ephesians 5:25 says so. Then you purpose in yourself to love her. You have understood the Bible according to your mind, and you now attempt to fulfill it by your will. What kind of living is this? It is the living of the soul. It is not evil living, but nonetheless it is not according to the spirit. Your intention is good. Before you were saved, you had little love for your wife. She had too much to say, was always criticizing how you did things, and kept checking up on your whereabouts. Or, your wife may have been overbearing in her love for you. She may have closely supervised everything you wore, carefully watched that you took your vitamin pills, and seen to it that you did not stay up too late. During your honeymoon you could stand it, but afterward, it became unbearable. You came to hate her and her nagging ways.

Your dislike of her was a matter of the soul. Now that you are saved, you read your Bible regularly and try hard to obey what it says. Thus, you are trying to love your wife. This love is in your soul, just as your hatred was in your soul. Dear brother, you must live according to the spirit. If you love your wife, it must be because you are living according to the spirit. Your wife may keep on nagging you, but you continue to live according to the spirit.

By living in the spirit you will find that you are living in the heavens, because your spirit is linked to heaven. The spirit is the Holy of Holies. In this place nothing can disturb you. This realm is unchanging, whatever the outward circumstances are.

If you live in the soul, you will change with your circumstances. When the weather is sunny, you will be cheerful. When the sky is overcast, you will be sad.

LIVING BY THE SPIRIT

How can we be those who live according to the spirit?

Slow Down!

For one thing, we must not act or react in haste. Even if we are about to lose our temper, we must slow down. The first time our wife provokes us, we may be able to exercise patience. By the third time, however, all our patience is gone, and we are ready to explode. This is the point when we must tell Satan

to hold off for a minute or two; we need that little extra time before we give vent to our anger. In other areas of our living also, we must not act hastily. This applies to our talking, to the look we give others, and to the opinion we express.

Why is it important for us to slow down? We are used to living in the soul. It is natural for us to be there. Our parents and our education have encouraged us to live according to the soul. Now that we are saved, the Lord wants us to be a people living according to the spirit. We have little hope of changing, however, unless we slow down these spontaneous reactions and ways of looking at things. If we are fast, the likelihood is that we are in the soul. If we are slow, we give ourselves the opportunity to turn to the spirit.

Use this little time you give yourself by slowing down, to pray. By praying, you enter into the spirit. There you will have a different view of the situation. If your wife aggravates you, your soul is filled with dislike for her. When you are viewing her from the spirit, however, you may praise the Lord for giving you such a desirable wife. In all these human relationships, the view from the soul is one thing, and the view from the spirit is another. When you are in the soul, you are in trouble and will offend the Lord. If you turn to your spirit, however, you will immediately be preserved and will enjoy the Lord's presence.

When you go shopping, something may catch your eye, and you may feel free to buy it. But if you will restrain your impulse and turn to your spirit, you may find after praying a little that the article has lost its appeal and that your intention to buy it is gone. It looked one way to the soul but another way to the spirit.

A brother may come to talk to you about a certain matter. As you are listening, you may feel negative about what he is saying. Inwardly, however, you remind yourself to turn to the spirit. As you remain in your spirit praying, your view of what he is saying may completely change.

Many times when you are in your soul, you want to do something or go somewhere. Once you turn to your spirit, however, the urge is gone.

Do you want to live according to the soul or according to the spirit?

It is difficult to stay all the time in the spirit. Before we realize it, we have slipped out. Suppose a brother comes to fellowship with me. At first I am watchful to remain in my spirit. I listen in spirit, and what I say in reply comes from the spirit. We both are greatly enjoying the fellowship together. Then in a moment of joy I fall back into my soul; unconsciously I have slipped out of my spirit.

We easily slip into our soul because it is right next to the spirit. The soul is where our person is. God has saved us and moved us to our spirit. Although we recognize this, we still like to live in the soul. We are like a girl who is newly married. She loves her husband, but she still likes to go back to her old home. While she is at work, she secretly slips over to her mother's for a visit.

The Lord wants a people who live according to the spirit. This is not to say that He wants us to do the right thing and refrain from doing what is wrong. If we live by the soul, no matter what good thing we do, it counts for nothing. God has set us in our spirit and is causing us more and more to live there. We can do this first of all by not being in a hurry.

Set the Mind on the Spirit!

“The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6). The second help to staying in our spirit is to set the mind on the spirit. Our mind represents us. Where we put our mind is where we are. Just as I can put my Bible here on this table, so we can place our mind on the table of our spirit, where the Lord is. That spirit is always available for our mind to be put there.

It is an exercise for us to do this. First, we must slow down. Then, we must set our mind on the spirit. Immediately, the Lord will emerge. When our mind is set on the spirit, there is life and peace.

We Christians are not here simply to be moral people. We are here to live the Lord out. Today He is the Spirit and is within us. He wants us to live according to our indwelt spirit. In our living throughout the day, in things great and small, we must react slowly, and we must set our mind on the spirit.

Pray!

Then we will touch the Lord, and immediately we must pray. There is no need to go into our room and shut the door. If we are driving, we do not need to pull over to the side of the road and stop. If we are working in the office, we do not have to drop what we are doing. As soon as we set our mind on the spirit, we can pray. As we drive or as we work, we can pray spontaneously, we can call upon the Lord, and we can breathe Him in.

Gird Up the Loins of Your Mind!

If we slow down, set our mind on the spirit, and pray, we will experience the reality of being one spirit with the Lord. We will not be affected by outward circumstances. Whether we are praised or rebuked will make no difference. If our wife is angry, we will not be provoked. When we are well liked by others, we are unmoved. If they spurn us, it makes no difference. We are in spirit and therefore one with the Lord. Naturally and spontaneously we live Him out.

This is not difficult. All it requires is exercise. To be a person in spirit is within the reach of every brother and sister. The problem is that we are in the habit of living naturally and are unwilling to make the effort to slow down, to set our mind on the spirit, and to pray.

We must be like soldiers in battle. We must gird up our loins (1 Pet. 1:13). When we do things in a natural way, we have our belts loosened. We cannot be casual, waiting for fate to decide what happens. As soon as we wake up in the morning, we must gird up our loins by turning to the Lord. By thus readying ourselves for battle, we take the ground away from Satan.

Are you willing to live in your spirit? If not, there is no way. If you are, it is simple to slow down before you react, to set your mind on the spirit, and to pray. It is not so much a matter of understanding; it is rather like eating or breathing. Everyone can do it, even without knowing why or how.

We are still under the influence of religion. We prefer to live in our mind. It is difficult to make this change to our spirit. That is why we have to keep on reading and listening to message after message. It is all too easy to listen from a doctrinal point of view and then to argue about what we think is wrong. Let us cease our concern about doctrines. Simply say, "Lord, I praise You that I have a spirit within. I thank You that You are the Spirit and that You have

come into my spirit. You are one spirit with me. All that You want of me is that I live according to the spirit. I would set my mind on the spirit and be watchful to stay there with You.”

If you want to consider the matter of the church, as long as you are in your mind, the problems are endless and cannot be resolved. What about the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, or the Methodists? Should there not be a pastor? Why do you not have all the chairs face the front? Why do some people keep their eyes open when they pray? Are you the only ones who are the church? Are there not saved ones in the denominations?

Years ago I would try to answer questions like these. I found out that as soon as one question was answered, two more would pop up. There simply is no end to the questions that arise when we are in the mind. Now I no longer answer such questions directly. I remind the inquirer that he needs to come to his spirit, not stay in his mind. In spirit he can call on the Lord’s name. Then he will be clear. The problem will no longer be there. In spirit he will receive revelation.

This turning to the spirit is the way to take care of all your everyday problems. If you need direction as to which way to go, talking to others will not make you clear. You will just get more befuddled. Simply turn to your spirit and pray, “O Lord! O Lord! Which way shall I take?” Then you will be clear in spirit. By setting your mind on the spirit and praying, you are one with the Lord and can be assured that the sense in your spirit is from Him. “The mind set on the spirit is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6).

THE BIBLE

The Word exhorts us to walk according to the spirit (v. 4). The Bible first serves to develop our spirit. As we read its pages, especially as we pray-read it in spirit, our spirit is nourished and developed. Second, the Bible corrects and preserves us lest we veer from the spirit. Since the spirit is abstract, we may misinterpret our inner sense. Thus, we need the Bible as a standard. Suppose, for example, we have the feeling that we should beat our wife. Since such a feeling is contrary to what the Bible says, we can be sure that the feeling we have is wrong. Some brothers may be praying about wearing their hair long, to give another example. Their sense may be that it is all right. First

Corinthians 11:14, however, says that man should not have long hair. This is the Bible preserving us from being led off from the spirit.

Our living and our activities must not be according to the dead letter of the Bible, however, but according to the living spirit.

CONSTANT EXERCISE

To remain in spirit, you must pray. If you neglect to pray constantly, you will find yourself out of the spirit. By constant exercise you will become a person in spirit. In the last book of the Bible, John said he that “was in spirit on the Lord’s Day” (Rev. 1:10). You must also be one who is in spirit. Do not desire the praise of others for your good living. Most people who seem good to us are in their soul. Do not aspire to be a good person in your soul. You need to be in spirit when you speak, when you express your attitudes, when you love others, and even when you hate. All your daily living should be in spirit.

Then when you go to the meetings, you will be full of the Spirit. You may pray, or testify, or read a verse. Whatever you do, the spirit will be released. Do not think that shouting releases your spirit. If you are not daily exercising the spirit in your living, there can be no content of the spirit in your shouting; you are only making noise. If you are saturated with the Spirit, however, when you open your mouth, your words will have the weight of the Spirit. You may shout spontaneously, but you should not shout purposely. You may say, “Lord, I praise and worship You. You are the Lord.” If you are filled in spirit because your daily living has been in spirit, your words will release life. If not, your words will sound empty; they will lack the anointing and the riches of the Spirit. If your shouting has an empty ring to it, you need to practice the proper exercise of the spirit during the whole day, not living by your soul or your flesh.

If you practice what I have suggested, you will experience the Lord’s leading, presence, and anointing. He will permeate and saturate you. Then when you preach the gospel, the spirit will be there. When you fellowship with others, when you visit them in their homes, and when you are in the meetings, the spirit will come forth.

The result of the Lord’s changing us from men of flesh into men of gold is a lampstand in reality. The seven Spirits have a way paved for them to be

released from the local churches. The one lampstand with seven lamps can send forth God. This is what the testimony of the lampstand should be in each locality. The church, the golden lampstand, expresses the Triune God.

The key is to live according to the spirit. Set your mind on the spirit. “Unceasingly pray” (1 Thes. 5:17). Watch “unto this in all perseverance” (Eph. 6:18). “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thes. 5:19). Then you will be one spirit with the Lord.

The fullness of God dwells in Thee;
Thou dost manifest God’s glory;
In flesh Thou hast redemption wrought;
As Spirit, oneness with me sought.

All things of the Father are Thine;
All Thou art in Spirit is mine;
The Spirit makes Thee real to me,
That Thou experienced might be.

The Spirit of life causes Thee
By Thy Word to transfer to me.
Thy Spirit touched, Thy word received,
Thy life in me is thus conceived.

In spirit while gazing on Thee,
As a glass reflecting Thy glory,
Like to Thyself transformed I’ll be,
That Thou might be expressed thru me.

Thy Spirit will me saturate,
Every part will God permeate,
Deliv’ring me from the old man,
With all saints building for His plan.

Hymns, #501

CHAPTER SEVENTY-FOUR

THE TESTIMONY OF THE GOLDEN LAMPSTAND

Scripture Reading: Exo. 25:31a, 37a; Zech. 4:2, 6, 10b; 3:9; Rev. 1:12b,
20b; 4:5; 5:6

GOD BECOMING OUR LIFE

The Bible is a precious yet mysterious book. Not only does it reveal God to us; it also speaks thoroughly about the relationship between God and man. In its pages we are told that God created man and that man must worship, love, and fear Him. God, we are also told, became our Savior by delivering us from our sins and from perdition. Most mysteriously, the Bible also reveals that this Creator and Redeemer is Spirit, and as such, He wants to come into us to be our life.

This last point is the hardest for us to grasp. Yes, we know that He is to be worshipped and obeyed as the Creator and to be believed in as our Savior and Redeemer, but to comprehend that He wants to enter into us to be our life and even our person is not easy.

We do have a life of our own. This life, however, is really only a picture of the true life, just as a photograph resembles us but does not have our life. The real life is God Himself entering into us. God created man in His image (Gen. 1:26-27) for the very purpose of entering into him. Man is God's vessel (Rom. 9:21-23); God wants to be man's content. Just as a glove is empty and meaningless unless a hand becomes its content, so human life is also empty unless man has God within him.

When we receive the Lord, He becomes our content and our life. We become one with Him. He is the life in us, and we are His living without. He lives within us, and for us, "to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17).

This relationship that we have with Him is hard to express in words. Thus, in the Bible there are many types, or pictures, to convey the meaning of what

would otherwise be abstract. The golden lampstand in Exodus 25:31-37 is one of these types.

THE LAMPSTAND AS A TYPE

In the Bible the golden lampstand has three stages. The first stage is in Exodus, the lampstand in the tabernacle. The second is in Zechariah (4:2-10), where God considers His people Israel as a lampstand. The last is in Revelation (1:12, 20), where the church is symbolized as a lampstand. God's people, whether the true Israelites or the true believers, should be a golden lampstand.

Symbolizing the Triune God

This golden lampstand has more to it than its outward appearance. Otherwise, it would not shine. Its inner content is what makes it shine. In actuality the lampstand is a portrayal of the Triune God. The doctrine of the Trinity is not specifically described in the Bible, but that God is triune is made quite clear to us.

Our God is one; He is also three. He is the unique God, but He is also Father, Son, and Spirit. We must be careful in our choice of terms here. To say that God exists in three persons is misleading. It is better to avoid the word *persons* and simply say that He is three in one. This is what *triune* means; it is of Latin origin, *tri* meaning "three" and *une* meaning "one." There is the aspect of the one and also of the three.

On the one hand, the Bible, in both the Old and the New Testaments, tells us clearly that God is one. Psalm 86:10 says, "You alone are God." Isaiah 45:5 says, "I am Jehovah and there is no one else; / Besides Me there is no God." First Corinthians 8:4 tells us, "There is no God but one." On the other hand, there is clear mention of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).

Words cannot satisfactorily explain the mystery of the Trinity, yet the lampstand does give us a picture of it. It was to be made all of one piece of pure gold (Exo. 25:36). There was only one lampstand for the tabernacle, yet there were seven lamps. Viewed as a whole, the lampstand was one; from the

top, however, one could clearly see seven lamps. It was a seven-in-one lampstand.

The lampstand was made of a talent of pure gold. This means it weighed about a hundred pounds. The substance or essence of the lampstand was gold. Gold typifies the nature of God. Unlike iron, it will not rust or change chemically, no matter where it is put. God's nature is constant, unchanging, eternal. The gold denotes God the Father as the essence and source.

The gold was made into a prescribed form, which indicated its function. This form is Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15). When God created man, He created him in His image (Gen. 1:26). Since Christ is God's image, man was created according to Christ. In one sense God does not have a physical form, but in another sense He does have an expression of His image. Christ, the beloved Son, is the image of the invisible God. What function does this form denote? He expresses God. "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18).

Another characteristic of this lampstand is its seven lamps. These, the Bible clearly tells us, are the seven Spirits of God (Rev. 4:5), which are simply the Spirit of God Himself.

The golden lampstand symbolizes the Triune God expressed. Its essence is the Father, its form is the Son, and its expression is the Spirit. In this first stage the lampstand represents Christ. When He was on earth, the nature of God, the Father, was in Him. So was the Father's image, because the Lord Jesus thoroughly manifested Him. As He mingled among men, Christ was also the seven lamps shining forth. Jesus Christ is the expression of the Triune God. God was in Him, was upon Him, and was His very essence. Apart from Him, no one can find God.

Symbolizing the True Israelites

In the second stage Israel is the lampstand (Zech. 4:2, 6, 10b). Israel is both individual and corporate. The individual Israelite is Christ. The corporate Israel, God's chosen people, should be like Him, the true Prince of God. (This is the meaning of the name Israel.)

It was Jacob who was given the name Israel (Gen. 32:28). In his early years he surely was not a prince of God. He was a thief. God spent more than a hundred years working on Jacob, until he was transformed from a thief into a prince of God.

Jacob first stole from his brother Esau. Then he stole from his father. When he had to escape for his life, God spoke to him in a dream. Jacob's vow in response to God was still in the principle of grasping something for himself (28:20-22).

When he lived with his uncle Laban, he still connived to get what he could for himself. Laban, of course, tricked him in return by forcing him to take Leah when Rachel was the one he wanted to marry. But then he continued his scheming way by manipulating Laban's flocks so that all the increase would be his.

God's hand was on Jacob year after year. One thing after another was taken from him, till he was stripped of everything he valued. His beloved wife Rachel died. His favorite son was apparently killed by wild beasts. All that was left was Benjamin. Then even Benjamin was taken from him. In the end Jacob stopped struggling and surrendered. God had transformed him from Jacob the thief to Israel the prince of God.

Such people, who have been transformed into princes, are the true Israelites, standing as a golden lampstand. This is the second stage.

Symbolizing the Church

In the New Testament we come to the final picture of the golden lampstand. After God saves us, He begins the work of transformation within us so that we may become a golden lampstand. Christ, who is the Head of the church, is an individual golden lampstand; the church, His Body, should correspondingly form a corporate golden lampstand.

Is this what we are? As a church in a locality, are we truly a golden lampstand? We are surely not that by nature, for we were formed from the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7), not of gold. "The first man is out of the earth, earthy" (1 Cor. 15:47). When we die, we return to the dust from which we were taken (Gen. 3:19).

Nonetheless, we do have gold within us. God Himself is within us, because we have been born of Him (John 1:12-13). As His children, we have His life and nature. From our earthly parents we have our human nature, but through regeneration we have become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). Yes, we do have the gold of God's life in us, but the question is, how much?

A glass may contain just a drop of water, or it may be overflowing its brim. Perhaps you have believed in the Lord. You pray to Him occasionally, but most of the time you are content to live without contacting Him. You come to the meetings only when someone brings you. Can there be any overflow from you? Does the gold have a way to increase and be formed in you? On the other hand, you may be another kind of Christian. Others can testify of you that when they talk with you, the water is always flowing over the brim. The gold in you has increased and is apparent to others.

GOLD VERSUS CLAY

Is the church in your locality a lampstand of gold, or is it only clay? You probably will have to answer that it is part clay and part gold. You were born of dust, or clay, and you grow up to be a man of clay. For you to be transformed from a man of clay to a man of gold is not easy and requires time. If you had been born pure gold, the forming of the golden lampstand would have been simple. The church in your locality becomes a golden lampstand as all of you are transformed from clay to gold.

How does this come about? To remain a man of clay does not require stealing or scheming like Jacob. If we live by our natural being, even though we do not commit outward sin, we are only clay. God, the gold in us, is in our spirit. We are to live by our spirit. We are not to love or hate by our natural being. We may recognize pride as coming from ourselves, but it is also quite possible for our humility to be from the self. We must not appreciate a love or humility that is of clay. The point is not whether we love or hate but whether our love or hatred comes from the self or from the spirit.

You may remember how you vowed on your wedding day to love your wife or to submit to your husband. I am sure you discovered even before your honeymoon was over that you could not fulfill your promise. It is the same story for almost everyone. Even if you do find that you are able to love your wife or submit to your husband, that love or submission is of clay. The Bible

tells us that Christ lives in us (Gal. 2:20) and that to us, to live is Christ (Phil. 1:21). As Christ lives in us and as we live Him, spontaneously we will find love arising toward our wife or submission toward our husband. This love or submission is of gold, not clay.

How much of your daily living is gold, and how much is clay? This is the question that should concern you. Do not ask about love or hate, pride or humility. To think in those terms is to be in the realm of religion. What you need to ask is whether the love or humility is of gold or of clay. You may have a nice way about you and be well liked by others. But is your pleasant manner from the earth or from the gold? Probably it is a mixture of the two.

IN THE MEETINGS AND AT HOME

When we are with the elders or in the meetings, we are in fear and trembling lest we display the clay. We pray and seek to exercise our spirit. But when we go home, how do we treat our wife? It is all too easy to become loose, to not pray, and to no longer be watchful. Our spirit seems to evaporate. If our wife says a word that offends us, we harshly cut her off, telling her that she does not know what she is talking about or that she should mind her own business. Is this gold or clay? It is hard for the husbands to be golden in dealing with their wives.

The same holds true for the sisters. In the meetings they gird up their loins and exercise to have a strong and living spirit. They seem to be all spirit. What happens to the spirit, though, when they get home? If the husband wants to know why she has gotten home so late, the sister is quick to answer that it is not late, why does he say it is late? The spirit is gone.

If this is the way we are as soon as we get home from the meetings, I suspect that what we display in the meetings is not the genuine spirit. It is a pretense or a performance. Our real spirit cannot evaporate. It is necessary for us always to exercise to stay in spirit and to speak from the spirit. Many times it is best not to give an answer when our spouse says a critical word to us. Simply say to the Lord, "I am one spirit with You. To me, to live is You."

Marriage tests whether the gold we have is real or false. Many young people, before they are married, give the appearance of gold. Once they marry, however, it seems as though all the gold is swept away. Whether we are really

living by the spirit has to be tested by our home life. Our spouse knows best whether we are truly gold or only clay. If at home there is only clay, how can the church be a lampstand of gold? We need more of God's element to be added to us.

A GOLDEN LAMPSTAND IN REALITY

In Revelation, the last book of the Bible, the Spirit is called the seven Spirits (4:5). This is not to say that there are seven individual Spirits. The meaning is that the Spirit at the end of the age is sevenfold intensified. It is like a lamp with a three-way light bulb. If we do not need very much light, we can turn the switch just once. If it is very dark, however, we can turn the switch three times and get the maximum amount of light. In Revelation the Spirit has been intensified not three times but seven.

The church as the golden lampstand shines forth this sevenfold light. When all the clay is gone, and we have been fully transformed into gold, the Spirit of God will shine forth from within and among us with a sevenfold brightness. This golden lampstand will then truly express the Triune God and be His testimony. He will have been fully wrought into us. Not only will His life be in us, but His Spirit will saturate our whole being so that every part within us is simply Himself.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-FIVE

GOD'S TWOFOLD LAMPS

Scripture Reading: Zech. 12:1b; Prov. 20:27; John 3:6; 2 Tim. 4:22a; 1 Cor. 6:17; Gal. 5:25; Rom. 8:4, 6; Rev. 1:10a

GOD AND MAN BECOMING ONE

The Bible reveals that the relationship God desires to have with man is that He and man become one. It is not simply that the two are united together. Rather, it is a oneness in which He becomes us and we become Him. He is our life, and we are His living.

This relationship is an organic one. If I make a table and glue or screw the legs to the top, the relationship between the legs and the top is not organic; there is no living connection. Nor are false teeth organically part of us, even though they may look just like our natural teeth; the false teeth are lifeless.

GRAFTED TOGETHER

Grafting illustrates the organic relationship between God and man. God is not only the Creator to be worshipped or the Savior to be believed in and followed. He comes into us to be our life. Even many preachers do not have a clear understanding of this organic union. They do not realize that “he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17). God and man are not pasted together like two pieces of paper; nor are they welded together like two pieces of metal. Because God and man are both spirit, when the two spirits touch, they join and grow together.

When a branch from one tree is grafted to another, the life from the second tree flows into the branch, and the two become one, sharing the same life. Similarly, with a skin graft, a piece of skin from one part of the body is affixed to another part. This joining produces an organic activity that results in the two growing together and becoming one. If two similar living things have a wound cut in them, when they are brought together at the site of the wounds, there is a flow of life between them, and they can become organically one. This wonderful life process illustrates the relationship between God and us.

Have you been grafted into God? I know that you worship Him as the only true God. I know that you have believed in the Lord Jesus as your Savior. But my question is, have you been grafted into Him? Your being joined to Him is not like holding hands. You would never grow together with Him by holding His hand. Nor is your relationship to Him like that of two sticks tied together. Grafting requires the life-juice from the cut tree to flow into the cut branch; or, in the case of a skin graft, the cells from both parts begin to “fellowship” together and then grow together.

This word *grow*, which describes an organic process, is used in the New Testament in reference to our relationship with the Lord (see Rom. 6:5; 1 Pet. 2:2). When God is added to us, He grows with us, like living tissue that is added to the body. He is not like false teeth set next to our regular teeth. God is Spirit (John 4:24). He created a spirit in man (Zech. 12:1). It is most precious that we have a spirit, because this is the means by which we are joined to God. The two spirits can become one and grow together.

OUR SPIRIT

We are like a small transistor radio. Within, there is a receiver. Without this receiver, the radio would be useless. The receiver must function properly, and it must be tuned in to the right station. Then it can transmit the radio waves to us as music. Some young people walk along the street with their radio next to their ear, listening to music that may be coming from far away. Are they only imagining that they hear music? Can real music really be coming out of the air? They are hearing real music because their receiver is tuned in to the radio waves in the air.

Our receiver is our spirit. If it is functioning properly and is tuned in to the right station, we can receive the heavenly waves. Without a spirit we are as useless as a radio without a receiver.

In God’s eyes, the spirit is as great as the heavens and the earth. They are ranked together in Zechariah 12:1, where the Lord is described as the One who “stretches forth the heavens and lays the foundations of the earth and forms the spirit of man within him.” Man is the highest of all the created beings. Because of his spirit, he is as important as the heavens and as the earth.

Do you think the heavens are more important than your spirit? Many religions stress the heavens as man's ultimate destination. God, however, is not all that satisfied with the heavens. In Isaiah 66 He describes the heavens as His throne and the earth as His footstool. Then He goes on to ask, "Where is the place of My rest? / For all these things My hand has made, / And so all these things have come into being, declares Jehovah. / But to this kind of man will I look, to him who is poor / And of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word" (vv. 1-2). God's resting place is not in heaven but in the spirit of one who is poor and of a contrite spirit. You may want to go to heaven, but God wants to enter into your spirit. The most heaven can be is God's throne. It cannot be His resting place.

The heavens exist for the earth. Without the rain, sunshine, and air of heaven the things on earth could not survive. As we know from space exploration, there is no air on the moon. It is a lifeless, desolate place, where not even germs can exist. The earth, in contrast, is full of life because of the supply from the heavens. The meat we eat is available because the heavens sustain the life of the cattle, sheep, and chickens. The vegetables and grains that supply us with nourishment also owe their existence to the water, sunlight, and air from heaven.

Heaven sustains the earth that it may, in turn, sustain man. Plants, animals, water, air, and sunshine are all for the purpose of providing for man's need.

What makes man so important that he is the focal point of the creation of the heavens and the earth? It is that man has a spirit created by God so that God could become one with him. God has no interest in becoming one with cows. The angels are not for this either. Only man has a vessel within that can receive and contain God.

If you think about this in a scientific, scholarly way, you will tell me it is superstitious to talk of a God who cannot be seen or touched. Where is He, you will want to know. Let me say, the question is not whether God exists; it is whether the receiver in you is functioning. You cannot know God if your receiver is out of order, any more than you can hear the music that is in the air if your radio receiver is not working. The more you use your mind to analyze God, the farther away He seems to be. Turn away from your mind, and take care of your conscience, which is part of your spirit. If you give heed to your conscience, you will repent and confess your sins. This is the way to

adjust your receiver and let in the heavenly music. Your spirit will touch God, and He will come in.

Formerly, our spirit was without life. When God comes in, our spirit becomes alive and has another life added to it. This life is God Himself. He as the Spirit mingles with our spirit, and the two spirits become one.

GOD PROGRESSIVELY REVEALED

God is revealed in the Bible in a progressive way. The different names for Him are gradually introduced, each indicating something further about Him. In Genesis 1:1 He is called God, and we are told that He created the heavens and the earth. In Genesis 2 the title *Jehovah* is added, and we are told that “Jehovah God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul” (v. 7).

When we come to the New Testament, we have Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:1). Do not think that God, Jehovah, and Jesus Christ refer to three different Gods. These are all names for the one God. The word *Jesus* simply means “Jehovah is salvation.” Jesus Christ is not distinct from the Jehovah of the Old Testament. Throughout the Gospels He is usually called Jesus. In Acts the Spirit descended (2:1-4). This term, *the Spirit*, is used over and over again in the Epistles (e.g., Rom. 8:5; Gal. 3:2-3; Eph. 4:3; 1 Tim. 4:1; 1 John 3:24). Then in Revelation there are the seven Spirits (4:5; 5:6), and finally, in the last chapter, the Spirit and the bride (22:17).

Be assured that all these terms refer to the one God. Do you believe in this one God, as revealed throughout the Bible? If your God is only God and Jehovah, you are in the same position as the Jews. Most Christians claim to believe in all sixty-six books of the Bible, but as far as their practical living goes, their experience does not reach to Romans 8. Concerning the Spirit, they have not much understanding or experience.

The Lord Jesus today is more than the Savior, the One who shed His blood to cleanse us from our sins. After His resurrection, as the last Adam He became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). The last Adam is simply the incarnated Jesus Christ, who was crucified for us, was buried, and then in resurrection became a life-giving Spirit. Second Corinthians 3:17 states, “The Lord is the Spirit.” That *Lord* here is referring to Christ, not God, is clear from

the context. Verse 14 says that the veil is done away with in Christ. Verse 16 continues that when the heart “turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.” Obviously, *Christ* and *Lord* are interchangeable here. A few verses farther on, in 4:5, there is another confirmation: “We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord.”

To say that Christ is the Spirit offends some Christians; it seems to them we are mixing up two of the persons of the Trinity. We have no obligation to support the traditional explanation of the Trinity. Our interest and our concern are with what the Bible reveals. Martin Luther in his day defied the traditions of Catholicism when he saw the light regarding justification by faith. Now that truth has been recovered. The Catholic Church, however, still rejects it. When we were in Switzerland last year, we saw a carving of a woman, representing the Roman Catholic Church, who was kicking away two men, Luther and Calvin.

Christianity today has a traditional theology that conflicts with the light in the Word. We have no choice as to which we will accept. The Bible clearly tells us that God took the step of becoming flesh (John 1:1, 14). He was called Jesus. He shed His blood on the cross to redeem us. When He arose from the dead, He took the second step and became the life-giving Spirit. He became flesh to accomplish redemption for us. He became the Spirit to impart life into us. Second Timothy 4:22 says, “The Lord be with your spirit.” He can be with our spirit because He also is Spirit.

The general view is that the Lord Jesus has ascended into heaven and is now sitting on the throne. He has sent the Holy Spirit down to us to represent Him. Such an explanation is based upon one aspect of the divine revelation but disregards all the verses that clearly say that Christ is in us (e.g., Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:27; 2 Cor. 13:5). To say that it is the Holy Spirit representing Christ in us is a complicated explanation to support this shortsighted belief, which leans heavily on the side of God being three and is weak on the side of God being one.

Christ and the Spirit are like electricity. The source of the electricity is the power plant where it is produced. This electricity is the very electricity that comes into the meeting hall, transmitted as the electric current. The electric power we use in the meeting hall is not a representative of the electricity in the power plant. The Lord Jesus is the Spirit; He is both in the heavens and in

us. This is the simple, clear teaching of the Scripture; we do not distort it to fit traditional beliefs.

At the beginning of the Bible God is revealed as the Creator and later as Jehovah. Then He became our Redeemer by passing through incarnation, death, and resurrection. Now He is the life-giving Spirit, with all the experiences through which He passed incorporated into Him. This all-inclusive Spirit, the processed Triune God, is now in our spirit. The two spirits are mingled as one.

THE INWARD SHINING

Man's spirit is the lamp of Jehovah, searching all the innermost parts of the inner being (Prov. 20:27). The Spirit of God is also God's lamp (Rev. 4:5); in fact, there is a sevenfold intensity to His shining. This is the meaning of the *seven lamps of fire...which are the seven Spirits of God*. Man's spirit and God's Spirit are both lamps, together enlightening the inward parts.

There are some people who live according to the flesh. Their only concern is the pleasure of the moment. They may drink, dance, or take drugs with no consideration except their own gratification. Such people are generally held in low esteem.

Others live according to their soul. They are elated when things go well for them but depressed when their circumstances are not favorable. Sometimes they are pleasant toward their associates, but other times they are critical or even hateful. They may be in a genial mood, or they may be in a fit of rage. These people are not well thought of by others either.

There are others who also live according to their soul but are highly regarded by those who know them. Rather than being changeable like the weather, they act rationally and think ahead as to what course of action they will take. Their behavior is controlled by their thoughts.

These three kinds of people include almost everyone. There are very few who live according to the spirit. You were in one of these three categories until one day when you heard the gospel. The Spirit of God touched your conscience, which is part of the spirit. Your spirit was activated, leading you to repent and confess your sins. Your spirit is now a lamp indwelt by the Spirit

of God, who is also a lamp. The spirit wants to enlighten every part of your soul. By responding to the spirit's shining, you will be walking "according to the spirit" (Rom. 8:4).

Sometimes when God wants to shine in us, we will not open to Him. This is why, after we have been praying for a while, we sometimes have nothing more to say. When we use our spirit to pray, it functions as a shining lamp, searching all the parts of our soul. It may shine on our thoughts, but we refuse to have the Lord probe there. We may not say, "No, Lord! Don't touch there!" but that is what we mean. The spirit may shine on our emotions, especially the sisters', but we close up, sometimes even weeping, begging the Lord not to touch that area. The same thing may happen with our will, especially the brothers'; if we close our will, the spirit cannot fulfill its function of shining. When we close the doors to the Lord's shining, we no longer have any words to pray.

When we pray properly, using our spirit, there is a lamp shining. If we sense it shining on our thoughts, we can say, "Lord, I open my mind to You. Shine in me. Expose my thoughts." In His light we confess our sins. When He shines on our emotions, we can open and confess what He reveals to be wrong. Then He will shine on our will, and we can open this room also to Him. As we open all these chambers one by one, the spirit will shine, and we will confess our sins. We can keep praying for a long time. The more we pray, the more we are enlightened. Our inward parts will all be thoroughly searched by the Lord. After such a time of prayer, we will feel bright and transparent, filled with God. This is one aspect of the lamp—our spirit shining within.

SEVEN LAMPS SHINING

The other aspect is that of the seven Spirits. The Spirit of God today is the seven lamps shining on us in an intensified way. Many of us have experienced this intensified shining, far stronger than a simple prick of the conscience, condemning a wrong thought or wrong motive. What did not bother us in the past we can no longer do. If we open our mouth to tell a joke, the seven Spirits shine, and our sentence is cut off in midair. If we begin to make some critical comments about a certain sister, the seven Spirits shine, and our words fail. Even when we are off just a little, the Spirit is there as the light shining.

These seven Spirits are also the seven eyes (Rev. 5:6), watching and transfusing us with God. When we look at others, we infuse what is in us into them. As the seven Spirits shine, the seven eyes transmit God into us. It is by this means that the element of God in us is increased.

We are men of clay, but day by day the gold in us increases. This gold is living and flowing, as we can see from Zechariah 4:12, where we are told that the two golden spouts empty the gold from themselves. The gold is not a solid mass but in a liquid state so that it can flow out. God is this gold that is flowing out of us. Formerly, what flowed out of us was the bitter water of gossip, criticism, and foolish talking. Now out of us flows gold. The clay is decreasing as we are more and more transformed.

ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT

For the gold in you to increase, you must learn to walk according to the spirit (cf. Gal. 5:25). Again and again during the day you must turn to the spirit. “The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6). If a problem arises with your spouse, or if a brother complains that your work is not satisfactory, do not reply in haste. A quick answer will open the door to Satan. Instead of replying, pray. Set your mind on the spirit. Call on the Lord. Then the words that come forth from your mouth will come from the spirit rather than from Satan. The Lord will be your wisdom, and gold will flow out instead of bitter water. You will sense from the Spirit of the Lord what you should say; in your speaking, He will be speaking.

Our greatest problem, as those whose spirits have been enlivened, is that we do not live according to the spirit. We live according to our mind or our knowledge or what the Bible teaches. To live according to the spirit, we must pray without ceasing (1 Thes. 5:17). All day long we must maintain a spirit of prayer. In every situation that arises, we should pause before answering or reacting. If we take a moment to renew our touch with the Lord, then we have the opportunity to respond to the situation in spirit instead of in our natural way.

Ephesians 6:18 reminds us of the importance of prayer. “By means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit and watching unto this in all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints.” We need to have “all

prayer...praying at every time in spirit...watching...in all perseverance.” This is the way to preserve ourselves in the spirit.

As we thus become one spirit with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17), He will become our living. We will become men of gold, and the whole church will be a golden lampstand, expressing the Triune God. We will live and walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:25) and have our mind set on the spirit. By the mingling of these two spirits, we can be watchful to keep ourselves in the spirit of prayer. Then what we live out will be “no longer I...but...Christ” (2:20). To us, to live will be Christ (Phil. 1:21). This is the normal way for us to live. It is by this means that the church will become a golden lampstand.