Truth Messages



Witness Lee

LIVING STREAM MINISTRY

TRUTH MESSAGES

by Witness Lee

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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 includes eleven messages given during weekly ministry meetings in Anaheim, California, on September 29 through December 16, 1978. The companion volumes, *Life Messages,* volume 1, and *Life Messages,* volume 2, are a collection of messages from conferences held in twenty-four cities in the United States, Canada, and Southeast Asia.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PILLAR AND BASE OF THE TRUTH

TWO ASPECTS OF THE CHURCH

In the two Epistles to Timothy there are a number of unusual expressions not found elsewhere in the New Testament. First Timothy 3:15 says, "I write that you may 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." In this verse two aspects of the church are covered: the church as the house of the living God and the church as the pillar and base of the truth. According to this verse, the church is the house not of the holy God, the righteous God, or the almighty God, but of the living God. The living God is full of life. If the church is to be the house of the living God, it must be full of life; it must be a house of life. The church is also the pillar and base of the truth. The house is full of life, and the pillar bears the truth. If we are serious about knowing how to behave in the church, we must know that the church is the house of the living God and the pillar of the truth.

Throughout the years of the Lord's recovery in this country, the church has been a testimony of life. We thank the Lord that the churches in His recovery are full of life. Although the churches are a house of life, there has been a shortage in regard to the pillar in front of the house. At the front of the temple in the Old Testament were two pillars signifying strength. Without the pillars the temple would not have given the impression of strength. Houses with pillars always convey such an impression. The church should be not only a house full of life but also a pillar of truth. My burden in this chapter is to emphasize the fact that the church must have these two aspects, the aspect of life and the aspect of truth.

According to God's economy, everything has two aspects. If the church has only the aspect of life, the church is not complete. For example, if I had just one leg, it would be rather difficult for me to stand up, much less to walk. But with two legs I can stand and walk normally.

THE NEED TO EMPHASIZE THE TRUTH

From the time the Lord's recovery came to this country, we have laid great stress on life. For example, the one hundred twenty messages of the *Life-study of Genesis* are all concerned with life. However, we have not adequately emphasized the truth. I take the responsibility for this. Now we need to emphasize truth as well as life.

TRUTH AS THE SHINING OF THE LIGHT

It is significant that in 1 and 2 Timothy life is not mentioned nearly as often as truth. Truth is spoken of again and again (1 Tim. 2:4; 3:15; 4:3; 6:5; 2 Tim. 2:15, 18; 3:8; 4:4). The reason for this is that these Epistles were written during a time of degradation. When the church is degraded, there is darkness; and when there is darkness, there is the need for the truth. Truth is the expression of light, just as grace is the expression of love. Whenever light shines, we receive truth. Light shines in darkness. In 1 and 2 Timothy, two books dealing with degradation, truth is mentioned often because during a period of darkness there is the need for the shining of the light, the expression of the light.

Truth is the shining of light. Wherever there is light, there is God, for God is light (1 John 1:5). When the light shines upon us, it becomes the truth. In Romans 8 Paul encourages us to walk according to the spirit, but in John's second and third Epistles, also written in a time of degradation, John speaks of walking in the truth. Although in his other writings John emphasizes life, in these two Epistles he speaks much about the truth. For example, in 3 John 4 he says, "I have no greater joy than these things, that I hear that my children are walking in the truth." Whenever we are in a time of degradation and darkness, we need the shining of the light so that we may know how to walk in the proper way.

PRESERVED BY THE FOUNDATION OF LIFE

We have pointed out that 1 Timothy 3:15 reveals two aspects of the church—the house of life and the pillar of the truth. During the past sixteen years of the Lord's recovery, we have devoted our full attention to the aspect of life, paying little attention to the pillar of the truth. For this reason it was possible for certain evil ones to creep in to undermine the recovery. From the first half of 1974, an undermining work has been going on. What deception

there has been! Nevertheless, the Lord's recovery has been preserved because in the past the foundation of life was laid. Because of this foundation, many who had been deceived could quickly turn back to life. If they did not have the foundation of life within them, I do not think they could have turned so fast. Those intent on overthrowing the recovery regard this foundation as the Elden-hall influence. Praise the Lord for the Elden influence! How I appreciate it and love it!

It seems that for a period of time we were carried away to Babylon. This took place in a very subtle way. But now we have been brought back. Hallelujah! We have not been liberated, but we are genuinely free. In less than two months the Lord turned the situation and set us free. Do you know what brought us back from our captivity? It was the foundation of life that had been firmly laid in the past. The enemy touched this foundation, but he could not shake it. Instead, he injured himself. Because in city after city there is the foundation of life, the enemy's attempt to undermine the churches has not been successful. The churches have been preserved by the foundation of life.

EVERY CHURCH A POLICE STATION AND EVERY SAINT A POLICEMAN

However, because we did not have the pillar of truth, evil things were allowed to creep in. It seemed that there were no police stations and no policemen. Because there was no safeguard of the truth, thieves had an opportunity to steal and to cheat. Now we realize that every local church must be a police station and that every saint must be a policeman. If during the past four and a half years the churches had been police stations and the saints had been policemen, there would have been no way for the thieves to enter in.

Many have been reluctant to act as policemen for fear they might cause trouble. Suppose a robber comes into a bank. On the one hand, he steals the money, but on the other hand, he claims to be one with the bank and to be for the bank. Certainly the bank manager should call the police. But if he does not call the police for fear of causing turmoil, the robber will steal everything. If someone claims to be for the ministry and yet goes about stealing and deceiving, we need to fulfill our function as policemen by checking him out according to the truth. But because we have been short of the truth and short in the practice of the truth, we have not done so. We have paid a big price to learn that we are short of the truth.

Yes, the foundation of life has been laid, but the pillar of the truth has not yet been built up. Therefore, I am burdened to give a number of messages on the truth. If we have both the foundation of life and the pillar of the truth, no evil thing or evil person will be able to creep into the churches. Instead, all such ones and such things will be examined according to the truth.

Suppose a number of brothers come from other places to a certain locality to deal with the situation in the church there. Any saint who knows the truth and who practices the truth should rise up and say, "Stop! This is a hierarchy. What right do you brothers have to come here and carry on like this? Who gave you this authority? This is human organization. If you claim that Brother Lee has sent you, I'll call him on the telephone to find out if that is true. And if it is, I'll rebuke him for not acting according to the truth. I have received his ministry for years, but I will not receive it this time if it is not according to the truth." Even if the apostle Paul were to speak against the truth of the New Testament, we should reject him. We must be faithful to practice the truth. If we see evil deeds but do not function as policemen, then we are not practicing the truth. For the Lord's recovery we must have not only life but also truth. We all need to be impressed with the absolute importance of the truth.

THE FULL KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH

First Timothy 2:4 says, "Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth." God desires all men to have two things: salvation and the full knowledge of the truth. In the past we took care of salvation, but we neglected the full knowledge of the truth. Notice that, according to the Greek, this verse does not say that men should come simply to the knowledge of the truth, but to the full knowledge of the truth.

The last part of 1 Timothy 4:3 speaks of "those who believe and have full knowledge of the truth." Here we see believing, which refers to salvation, and fully knowing the truth. To have the full knowledge of the truth is to fully know the truth. To know the truth in this way is a safeguard.

DEPRIVED OF THE TRUTH

In 1 Timothy 6:5 Paul says, "Perpetual wranglings of men corrupted in mind and deprived of the truth." Those whose minds are corrupted are deprived, destitute, of the truth. They do not care for the truth. Some have

actually said that the later they sleep in the morning, the more spiritual they are. This kind of statement could be uttered only by one who is destitute of the truth. Others have said that the best way to have a solid time on the Lord's Day morning is to sleep late. Some have even told the young people that since they cannot conquer their flesh, they should let it do whatever it desires. Anyone who can accept such statements is short of the knowledge of the truth.

Someone has even said that we should care only for the Spirit, not for principles. How subtle! Anyone who knows the truth realizes that this means to accept only the Spirit and to reject the Bible, for all the principles are derived from the Bible. It is very dangerous to have only the Spirit but not the principles of the Word.

Perhaps you have heard some say that they would drink my spirit but not take my word. If the saints in the Lord's recovery had the full knowledge of the truth, they would never accept this kind of word, a word that is an utter falsehood spoken by those deprived of the truth. During the last few years there has been a dreadful shortage among us of the practice of the truth. If we all had practiced the truth, certain sayings and practices would have been questioned a long time ago. We need to learn the truth; we must not be a people destitute of the truth.

MISAIMING CONCERNING THE TRUTH

After speaking of "cutting straight the word of the truth" and avoiding "profane, vain babblings," Paul mentions those who "concerning the truth have misaimed" (2 Tim. 2:15-18). Paul likens the word of these people to gangrene, a disease that eats away at the flesh (v. 17).

OPPOSING THE TRUTH

During a time of degradation some will even resist the truth: "In the manner that Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these also oppose the truth; men corrupted in mind, disapproved concerning the faith" (3:8). Today such a situation exists.

TURNING FROM THE TRUTH

"The time will come when they will not tolerate the healthy teaching; but according to their own lusts they will heap up to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and they will turn away their ear from the truth and will be turned aside to myths" (4:3-4). In these verses Paul warns that during degradation some will turn away their ear from the truth to teachings that please their itching ears. They may enjoy listening to messages that are full of evil entertainment but contain nothing of the truth.

WALKING IN THE TRUTH

We have pointed out that in his second and third Epistles John emphasizes the importance of the truth. In 2 John 1 and 2 the apostle John speaks of loving in truthfulness, of knowing the truth, of the truth abiding in us, and of the truth being with us forever. In his third Epistle he again speaks of loving in truthfulness and especially of walking in the truth, saying that he has "no greater joy than these things, that I hear that my children are walking in the truth" (v. 4). The emphasis on the truth in these Epistles indicates that they were written during a time of degradation when many had gone astray from the truth. Nevertheless, there were still a number who were walking in the truth.

In times of darkness we need to walk in the light (1 John 1:7). We have pointed out that truth always comes from the light, for it actually is the shining of the light. Today we need the truth, the shining of the light.

TWO FUNCTIONS OF THE TRUTH

Now we need to see two functions of the truth. The first is found in John 8:32, which says, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." The first function of the truth is to set us free. To be deprived of the truth is to be in bondage, in slavery, but to know the truth is to be released from slavery, to be freed. The second function of the truth is seen in John 17:17, which says, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." On the one hand, the truth sets us free; on the other hand, it sanctifies us. It causes us to be saturated with the element of God. It is a very significant matter to have the truth, for it frees us from all negative things and saturates us with the divine element. The more truth we have, the more we are released from bondage and the more we are saturated with the element of God. Eventually, the truth will cause us to

be thoroughly sanctified and transformed. Hallelujah for the functions of the truth! How we need the truth in these days!

CHAPTER TWO

THE DEFINITION OF THE TRUTH

In this chapter we will devote our attention to the definition of the truth. As we all recognize, truth is the opposite of falsehood. Many also regard truth as meaning certain true, reliable principles, such as the principle that honesty is the best policy. After speaking recently on the subject of the truth, I was approached by a learned man who said that truth referred to principles. As an illustration, he said that John 3:16 is a standing principle. This understanding of truth is worldly, an altogether natural concept different from the understanding of truth presented in the Bible. If we would know the meaning of truth in the Bible, we need to get into the depths of the Word.

THE WORD, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIGHT

In John 8:12 the Lord Jesus said, "I am the light of the world," and in 14:6 He said, "I am...the truth" (KJV). John 17:17 tells us that the Lord's word is also the truth. According to the Bible, the Lord is the light, the truth, and the Word. The Word, which is also the truth, gives light, for in the Word there is light. Therefore, the Word, the light, and the truth are one.

John 1:14 speaks of the Word becoming flesh and tabernacling among us full of "grace and truth," and verse 17 speaks of the law being given through Moses, but "grace and truth" coming through Jesus Christ (KJV). When we believe in the Lord Jesus, we receive grace and truth. In his first Epistle, John says that God is love and that God is light (4:16; 1:5). When God comes to us, we receive grace; but when we go to God, He is love. Grace is the realization and expression of love. Love is the source, and grace is the expression. Likewise, truth is the realization and expression of light. Light is the source, and truth is the expression. The expression of light is the shining of the light. When light is concealed from us, it is merely light, but when it shines upon us, it becomes truth.

TRUTH—THE SHINING OF THE LIGHT

Many Christians think that the word *truth* in the Bible denotes doctrine. But if we change *truth* in the Gospel of John into *doctrine,* it sounds absurd.

Let us take several examples. “The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us...full of grace and doctrine.” “Grace and doctrine came through Jesus Christ.” “I am the way and the doctrine and the life.” “You shall know the doctrine, and the doctrine shall set you free.” “Sanctify them in the doctrine; Your word is doctrine.” “When He, the Spirit of doctrine, comes.” How absurd! *Truth* does not denote doctrine. It first means the shining of the light, the expression of the light. In other words, truth is light expressed. God never comes to us without shining upon us. When God comes to us as light and shines, we immediately have the sense of truth, of reality.

A VISION TELEVISED INTO OUR BEING

Television is a very good illustration of this. Suppose there is a parade in Washington, D.C. Without television you could not be on the West Coast and receive a vision of the parade. Although you could read about the parade the next day in a newspaper, the newspaper account would not make the parade real to you. Many Christians today use the Bible like a newspaper, but they do not have the vision of what is written in the Word.

For example, the pastors of the Lutheran Church in China believed strongly in justification by faith, and they trained others to preach and teach this doctrine. However, some of these very pastors were not themselves justified by faith, and consequently they were not saved. One such pastor was a man named Ai. Although he fought for the truth of justification by faith, he was an opium smuggler. He had the doctrine of justification by faith, that is, the newspaper account of it, but he did not have the reality. He had never received justification by faith through believing in the Lord’s redeeming blood. One day this pastor heard a Norwegian missionary named Miss Monsen preach on regeneration. Miss Monsen preached not merely the doctrine of regeneration but the reality of regeneration. After her message she greeted Pastor Ai at the gate and asked him if he had been regenerated. He angrily asserted that he had. But Miss Monsen replied that by the tone of his voice and by the expression on his face, she knew that he had not truly been regenerated. Pastor Ai was insulted by having such a word spoken to him in the presence of members of his congregation. That night, filled with hatred for this Norwegian missionary, he plotted to kill her. As he was making his evil plans, the Holy Spirit said to him, “See how evil you are!” The Holy Spirit worked upon him, and he repented with tears, even rolling on the floor as he made confession to the Lord. That night Pastor Ai did not have merely a

newspaper account of regeneration; he saw a vision of regeneration by means of the heavenly television. The vision was televised into him, and he was regenerated. The next morning he was happy, and he praised the Lord. In the meeting he stood up to give a testimony of his experience. Through that one testimony, given by a pastor who had been an opium smuggler, hundreds of students turned to the Lord.

Through the experience of Pastor Ai we can see what truth is. Many preachers give messages that are nothing more than newspaper reports. Such messages do not convey the heavenly vision. But thank the Lord for the speaking that televises a vision to us! The vision that is televised into our being is the truth, the reality. In the New Testament truth denotes this kind of heavenly television. Truth is not merely a report, not simply words written in the Bible; it is a heavenly, spiritual vision televised into our being. We all need to learn to differentiate the speaking that gives merely a news report from the speaking that televises a vision into us. Most of the sermons preached in the so-called churches today are like newspaper reports. Because many preachers use the Bible like a newspaper, there is very little of the heavenly vision.

Every vision is a reality. Suppose a meeting of the church in Anaheim is televised to Taipei. The saints in Taipei would not receive a news report; they would see a vision of what is taking place in our meeting. In God's economy there are many visions. For example, when Christ died on the cross, He shed His blood for us. If this is merely a doctrine to us, we cannot be saved. But as soon as the reality of the death of Christ is televised into our being and we see it as a vision, we are saved. When I was a child, I was taught that Christ died on the cross for my sins and that He shed His blood for me. This was nothing more than a doctrine to me until I was nineteen; then the heavenly vision of Christ's death was televised into me. At that time I could see Christ dying on the cross for me, shedding His blood for my sins. When I saw this, I wept, I worshipped, and I thanked the Lord. That experience was the vision, the truth. We all have had experiences similar to this.

Take the example of Christ as our holiness. Perhaps you have heard many messages about holiness, but as far as you are concerned, these messages are only news reports. Therefore, you have the knowledge of holiness but not the vision of holiness. But one day, perhaps during morning watch, you have a vision of Christ being holiness to you, and the vision of holiness is televised into your spirit. Because we all need to see the heavenly vision, in Ephesians 1

Paul prayed that we would have a spirit of wisdom and revelation. Actually, such a spirit is simply the vision televised into our being by the Spirit.

HEAVENLY LIGHT SHINING ON THE WRITTEN WORD

The difference between a newspaper and television is that with the newspaper there is no light, only printed letters, but with television light and electricity are required. Through light and electricity the vision is televised into us.

Now we can understand that, in the Bible, truth refers to the shining of the light. The Bible contains many doctrines. However, when light from the Father in the heavens shines upon the words in the Bible, these words immediately become truth to us. First we have the doctrine in printed letters, and then the heavenly light shines upon the words of the Bible to show us the truth. Many read the verses about Christ dying for sinners merely as a newspaper report; they have nothing more than a doctrine about the death of Christ. But when, by the mercy of God, the light shines on these verses, they see the truth of Christ's death and are saved. Once they had the doctrine; now they have the vision and the reality.

Reality is the realization of what is real. The way to have such a realization of spiritual things is by heavenly television. Therefore, truth in the Bible can be compared to today's television.

There are a great many facts in the Bible. However, it is not adequate merely to read about these facts. By reading you receive doctrine, information, or news. Along with this, you need the heavenly light to shine upon the facts. When the light shines, the doctrine is immediately changed into truth. In this way you realize the real thing, the reality. Therefore, to know the truth we first need the facts and then the light that televises the vision of the facts into our being.

According to the Bible, the Spirit is called the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of reality (John 14:17). The Spirit of reality is the heavenly electricity by which spiritual things are televised into our being. The Bible also says that the Lord's word is truth (17:17). All the spiritual facts are contained in the Word and conveyed by it. Christ is our holiness, Christ died for our sins, Christ is our life, the church is the Body of Christ, Christ is the Head of the church—all

these are facts contained in the Bible. However, without the enlightenment from the divine electricity, these facts are mere doctrines. But when the Spirit shines upon these facts recorded and conveyed in the Bible, they become truth, reality.

Christ, His person, His redemptive work, and all His accomplishments are facts contained in and conveyed by the Word. The Spirit seeks the opportunity to shine upon the Word. When He does so, we receive the truth. In knowing the truth, we thus have the facts, the Word, and the Spirit. The incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension have all been accomplished. The wonderful Christ who is God and man is now the life-giving Spirit. These are facts, and not even Satan can deny them. We have not only the facts but the fact-conveying Word. Furthermore, we have the Spirit. If we have the Word without the Spirit, we will not have the vision. This means that we will not have the truth, because the truth comes only when the Spirit shines. If we read the Word without the shining of the Spirit, we may have doctrine or news reports but not the truth, the reality, or the vision. Thank the Lord that the shining Spirit is always within us. Whenever we open ourselves to Him, the light shines. As the light shines on the Word, certain things stand out and make a deep impression upon us. This is the truth, the vision transmitted by the heavenly television.

THE SHORTAGE OF THE TRUTH

In the last chapter I pointed out that among us the foundation of life has been firmly laid. This foundation is unshakable. However, we have been short of the light of the truth. Doctrinally speaking, we have all had knowledge concerning the headship of Christ, hierarchy, the ground of the church, and the constitution of the church. But what we had was mainly the newspaper report, not the televised vision. Thus, when a hierarchy was strongly formed and began to assume its evil power in certain places, hardly anyone was aware of it. If we had been under the televised vision concerning hierarchy and concerning the headship of Christ, someone would have immediately spoken out against this, pointing out that such a hierarchy is an insult to the headship of Christ. Because there was such a lack of the vision, there was no practice of the truth. Instead of the shining of the light, there was thick darkness.

PRACTICING THE TRUTH

Although by the Lord's mercy we have had the foundation of life, we have not had the adequate shining of the light. This made it possible for someone to claim that he had been charged to administrate all the churches. But such an administrator is a pope, and we have no such thing in the Lord's recovery. Throughout the years that the Lord's recovery has been in this country, I have always been cautious regarding the exercise of authority. According to the truth, every local church has its own jurisdiction and administration. No church or person can administrate the affairs of all the churches. Nevertheless, someone void of the truth claimed to be the administrator over all the churches. The fact that so many could receive his word shows either that they did not know the truth or that they were not practicing it.

We must not accept anything contrary to the truth, no matter who says it. Even if the apostle Paul were to speak differently from the truth in the New Testament, we should refuse to accept his word. Rather, we should say, "Paul, when you wrote the Epistles, you were right with God. But now that you are speaking something different, you are like the Peter who was rebuked by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 16." We should not allow anyone, not even the apostle Paul, to deceive us. Because we have been lacking in the shining of the light, the undermining of the ministry became more and more evident, and an attempt was made to change the nature of the Lord's recovery. While this was going on, if a brother had stood up for the truth, he would have been a hero in practicing the truth. From now on, every church in the Lord's recovery must be the pillar and base of the truth. Furthermore, every church must be a police station, and every saint must be an active, functioning policeman, knowing the truth and practicing the truth.

Suppose a certain brother, much used of the Lord in His recovery, stands up in a meeting and demands that the saints worship him. Immediately, someone, even a teenage sister, should tell him to stop speaking and say, "We cannot receive this man's evil speaking because he is making himself an idol and asking us to worship him. In the past he has been a help to the Lord's recovery, but now his speaking is the speaking of Satan. I love the Lord, I love the recovery, and I love this brother. But I am under the shining of the heavenly light, and I have received the truth that we must not worship anyone, even the one who has helped us the most. Such a thing is not according to the truth but according to the falsehood of Satan."

ARMED WITH THE TRUTH

The church in the Lord's recovery must be full of life and strong in the truth. The church as the pillar is composed of all of us. Therefore, even the young sisters must know the truth. This is the reason that I encourage everyone, especially the young people, to get into the Word. All the divine facts are contained in the Word and conveyed to us through the Word. When the Spirit shines upon the Word, we have the heavenly television. The light shines upon the facts in the Word, and we know the truth. Then we should always be ready to rise up and practice the truth. From now on, the whole church must be armed with the truth. If we are all under the heavenly television regarding matters such as the constitution of the church, the headship of Christ, and hierarchy, the church will be strong. It will be not only a house of life but also a pillar of truth.

THE BASE OF THE TRUTH

In 1 Timothy 3:15 the apostle Paul says that the church is not only the pillar of the truth but also the base of the truth. A pillar, which is a standing column, needs a solid base. The Greek word for *base* in this verse actually means a bulwark, a solid structure that upholds the pillar. As the pillar of the truth, the church must also have a solid base, a strong bulwark. A bulwark affords protection and defense, especially during a time of war. The church must be so solid in the truth that it will be a bulwark of the truth during times of fighting. This bulwark should be so solid that nothing, not even the "bombs" of the enemy, can shake it. The pillar rests upon such a bulwark. In order to be the pillar and base of the truth, we all must be solid, strong, clear, and rich in the truth. Every local church must be a solid bulwark and a high pillar. In every locality the pillar must be built up higher and higher to testify the truth to the whole universe.

TRUTH BEING THE SPIRIT

Although the apostle John was absolutely for life and the Spirit, in his last two Epistles he did not emphasize life and the Spirit; instead, he emphasized the truth. In 2 John 1 he speaks of loving in truthfulness and knowing the truth. In the next verse he says, "For the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever." If you compare these verses with John 14:16 and 17, you will see that truth is the Spirit. John 14:16 and 17 say that the Spirit of

truth will be in us and that He will abide with us forever (KJV). Then 2 John 2 says that the truth abides in us and will be with us forever. Therefore, the truth is actually the Spirit. Hence, 1 John 5:6 says, “The Spirit is truth” (KJV).

THE SPIRIT AND THE BIBLE

We must have both the Spirit and the Bible. Without the Bible the Spirit cannot be the truth. We need to get into the Word so that we may have not only the Spirit but also the Spirit of truth. Eventually, this Spirit of truth is the truth itself.

In 3 John 4 the apostle John says, “I have no greater joy than these things, that I hear that my children are walking in the truth.” In Galatians 5:16, however, Paul tells us to walk by the Spirit. Actually, walking in the truth and walking by the Spirit are one. When we walk by the Spirit, we are walking in the truth; and when we walk in the truth, we are walking by the Spirit. Never try to separate the Spirit from the truth, for these two are one.

Remember, apart from the Bible, the Spirit can be only the Spirit. Only when the Spirit is one with the Bible is the Spirit the Spirit of truth. How we thank the Lord that in His economy He has given us both the Spirit and the Word! Together these two constitute the Spirit of truth that sets us free and sanctifies us.

CHAPTER THREE

LEADERSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

The New Testament reveals clearly that when the church is degraded, we need to walk not only by the Spirit but also in the truth. The last two Epistles of John were written after degradation had come into the church life. John lived longer than the other apostles, and these Epistles were written near the end of his life, much later than 1 and 2 Timothy. At that time the church had already sunk deeply into degradation. It is significant that in these Epistles John does not mention the Spirit. However, he speaks of the truth again and again. For example, he says, "The elder to the chosen lady and to her children, whom I love in truthfulness, and not only I but also all those who know the truth, for the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever" (2 John 1-2). In verse 2 John specifically mentions the truth abiding in us. This shows the importance of truth during a time of degradation. Then John goes on to say, "I rejoiced greatly at the brothers' coming and testifying to your steadfastness in the truth, even as you walk in truth. I have no greater joy than these things, that I hear that my children are walking in the truth" (3 John 3-4). Especially when the church is degraded, we need to walk in the truth. During times of degradation, there is nothing but darkness. Thus, there is the urgent need for light. If we walk in darkness, we may be injured. You could very easily get hurt if you walk on an unlighted street at night. The Bible reveals that truth is of crucial importance during the degradation of the church. We need to know the truth and to walk in the truth.

In 1 and 2 Timothy the apostle Paul began to emphasize the truth. Although truth is mentioned frequently in these Epistles, the Spirit is rarely mentioned. As we have pointed out, in 2 and 3 John the Spirit is not mentioned at all, although the other writings of the apostle John reveal that he was absolutely for life and the Spirit.

Recently, some have said that we should only drink the Spirit and not take the word of the ministry. One person has even suggested that eventually some may no longer use the Bible. This is the subtlety of the enemy. In times of darkness and degradation we need the Word to shine forth with the truth. The

truth must be our guide. However, those who have been deceived are saying that we should not take the principles of the Word. This means that they do not receive the truth, and it exposes the fact that they are not in the way of the truth but in the way of darkness.

CUTTING STRAIGHT THE WORD OF THE TRUTH

In 2 Timothy 2:15 Paul issued a charge: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, an unashamed workman, cutting straight the word of the truth." Every Bible student pays attention to this verse. When I was young, the Brethren teachers stressed the importance of cutting straight the word of the truth. Paul charged Timothy in this way because the truth regarding any matter is not found all in one place in the Bible. Rather, it is found throughout various books of the Bible, with a part in one place and another part in a different place. In His wisdom the Lord reveals the truth in this way. Perhaps He did this so that those who are careless will have difficulty knowing the truth. To know the truth we must be diligent. Hence, Paul charged Timothy to "be diligent."

Some say that we should not be strict or legal in studying the Word. They insist that we should read the Bible only when we are inspired by the Spirit to do so. This is like saying that there is no need to eat three meals a day but a need to eat only when the Spirit inspires us. This means that if there is no inspiration, we should not eat. Paul, on the contrary, charges us to be diligent. If we are truly diligent to present ourselves approved to God, then when we read the Word, we will find the truth revealed in one place after another, like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. We need to put all these pieces together in order to see the picture, the vision. According to Isaiah 28:13, the word of the Lord is "rule upon rule, rule upon rule; / Line upon line, line upon line; / Here a little, there a little." This means that we find the truth a little at a time.

In reading the Bible and in knowing the truth, I am very aggressive, more aggressive and more diligent than I was years ago. Because I am so diligent to get into the depths of the Word, sometimes my wife must call me several times before I come to breakfast. The Word is like an inexhaustible gold mine; I am always finding something new in it. We all need to be diligent to get into the Word.

Paul's charge about cutting straight the word of the truth was spoken to Timothy, a young co-worker, one who had been commissioned by Paul to help the churches. If you would be such a servant of the Lord, you need to be diligent to present yourself approved to God in knowing the truth and in cutting straight the word of the truth. The first qualification of one commissioned to help the churches is the proper knowledge of the word of the truth. No doubt, the cutting straight of the word of the truth is not only for our personal understanding of the Bible but also for teaching others. We need to learn how to put all the puzzle pieces together in order to make a clear picture for others to see. Many Christians have read through the Bible without seeing the picture. They have the pieces but no way to put them together. We all need to get into the Word, find the pieces, and put them together so that others may see the picture. This is to cut straight the word of the truth.

THE LORD'S CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP

In this chapter we need to cut straight the word concerning leadership in the New Testament economy. The meaning of leadership in the Bible is completely different from our natural concept. What the Lord said about leadership in Matthew 20:20-28 and 23:8, 10, and 11 shatters the human thought of leadership. According to the natural, human concept, a leader is higher than others. But in these chapters the Lord said that whoever wants to be great among His people must be a slave. Thus, the Lord's concept of leadership is the opposite of the natural concept. Yes, there is a need for leaders among the Lord's children today. These leaders, however, need to realize that, in God's New Testament economy, leadership means slavery. If you would be a leader among the Lord's children, you must be a slave.

If we are genuine and honest, we will admit that we love leadership but not slavery. Such is the human heart. Even the young sisters like to be leaders. If they cannot be number one, or at least be number two, they are disappointed. Do not bring the natural concept of leadership into your reading of the Bible. In the Bible, I repeat, leadership means slavery. If you are truly a slave among the Lord's people, you must be willing to clean the restroom, vacuum the floor, arrange the chairs, and serve as an usher. How different this is from the worldly view of leadership! In the Lord's recovery we should not ask for the janitor when we see the need for cleaning. Rather, we should all serve as janitors. Let us drop our natural concept of leadership and return to the pure Word.

CHRIST, THE ONE LEADER

According to God's economy, there is just one leader among His people—the Lord Jesus Christ: "Neither be called instructors, because One is your Instructor, the Christ" (Matt. 23:10). Anyone who considers me the leader in the Lord's recovery is not practicing the truth. If anyone asks you who is the leader in the church, you need to say that the leader is Christ. To answer in this way indicates that we know the truth and practice the truth. If someone claims that Witness Lee is the leader, you need to tell him, "Witness Lee is our slave."

The Catholic Church claims that Peter was appointed by Christ to be the unique leader. The New Testament, however, reveals otherwise. Yes, in the Gospels and the first part of Acts Peter is first, and his name is mentioned first. But Galatians 2:9 says, "Perceiving the grace given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars." Here Peter (Cephas) is mentioned not first but second. When Peter stood up with the eleven on the day of Pentecost, he was as strong as a lion. However, in Galatians 2 he was cowardly, for when the brothers came from James, Peter refused to eat with the Gentiles. Prior to that time, he practiced the truth concerning eating with Gentile believers according to the vision he received in Acts 10. But when the brothers came from James, he no longer practiced the truth in this matter. When Paul saw that Peter and the others did not walk in a straightforward way in relation to the truth of the gospel, he rebuked Peter before them all (Gal. 2:14). Through his weakness Peter was damaging the truth of the gospel, the truth that both the Gentile believers and the Jewish believers are the same. This indicates that in Galatians 2 Peter's spiritual capacity had diminished. Peter was not backslidden, but his spiritual capacity was less than that of James. For this reason, in Galatians 2:9 the name of James is mentioned before the name of Peter. Furthermore, the fact that brothers came "from James" indicates that James represented the church in Jerusalem.

Another indication that James, and not Peter, represented the church in Jerusalem is seen in Acts 21:17 and 18: "When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers welcomed us gladly. And on the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present." Here we are told that Paul and his co-workers went not to Peter but to James, for all the elders, including Peter, were in James's home. James was the one who represented the church in that city.

A further indication of this is seen in the conference held in Acts 15. In this conference of apostles and elders, Peter spoke first and then Paul. In a conference the leading one does not speak first but last. The final word in this conference was given by James, as indicated by these words: "When they finished speaking, James answered, saying, Men, brothers, listen to me" (v. 13). Then in verse 19 James gave his decision: "Therefore I judge that we do not harass those from the Gentiles who are turning to God." When we put all these verses together, we see that Peter was not the unique leader in the New Testament. When Catholics claim that Peter was such a leader, we need to know how to cut straight the word regarding this so that we can present a clear picture to them.

LEADERSHIP DEPENDING ON SPIRITUAL CAPACITY

In God's New Testament economy the leadership among His children is not official, permanent, or organizational. Rather, leadership depends upon spiritual capacity. The one with the greatest capacity is the leader. At one time that capacity may be with a certain brother, but at another time it may be with a different brother. On the day of Pentecost the greatest capacity was with Peter, but in Acts 15 it was with James.

The relationship between Barnabas and Paul further illustrates this principle. Acts 13:2 says, "As they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Here we see that Barnabas is named before Paul (Saul). But when they were on their mission, Paul spontaneously took the lead (v. 9) because he had the greater spiritual capacity. It was Barnabas who brought Paul to Antioch, and as long as they were in Antioch, he took the lead. But Barnabas did not argue with Paul when Paul took the lead on the mission. Barnabas did not say, "Paul, stand back. Don't forget that my name was mentioned first when we were called. Why are you taking the lead?" Because Barnabas realized that Paul's capacity was greater than his, he did not argue with him over taking the lead.

All these cases prove that the leadership among God's children today should not be official, permanent, or organizational. On the contrary, it depends always upon spiritual capacity. God ordained it this way in order to set aside the human concept of leadership. In the Old Testament the kings succeeded one another. There were never three or four kings at the same time.

But in the New Testament the Lord appointed not one apostle but twelve. Later, He added others, such as Paul, Barnabas, and Timothy. I believe that there were many apostles. If not, in 2 Corinthians 11:13 how could there be false apostles? Moreover, in every local church there are always a number of elders. The plurality in the eldership indicates that actually there is no fixed leadership in the church.

PRACTICING THE TRUTH CONCERNING LEADERSHIP

The reason I mention this matter now is that during the past few years someone presumed to be the leader of the Lord's recovery not only in this country but throughout the world. If the saints had been clear about the truth concerning leadership and had practiced the truth, no one would have accepted such a claim. If we are clear about the truth and practice the truth, from now on no one will dare say that he is the leader.

To consider me the leader in the Lord's recovery is to not be clear about the real situation; it is against the practice of the truth. During the years I have been with you, I have never assumed to be the leader. I have not given orders either to the churches or to the saints concerning what they should do. On the contrary, many times elders of various churches have begged me to tell them what to do. I always told them to go to the Lord in prayer and let Him lead them. There is no organized leadership in the Lord's recovery. When we left the denominations long ago, we mainly left the hierarchy, the organization. We all must hate hierarchy and never accept it in any form. Nevertheless, during the past few years, a hierarchy began to creep in and assume leadership. Because so many were in darkness and did not practice the truth, this was tolerated. Now we must all know the truth regarding this matter. We must be under the shining of the light and full of truth.

Suppose someone claims to be appointed the leader in the recovery. We should not take his word; instead, we should go to the one who is said to have appointed him. If a janitor who works in the White House claims that the president has given him an order concerning you, do not take the janitor's word for it. Instead, contact the president and ask him about it. You should not follow the janitor's order simply because he comes in the name of the president. If you take the janitor's word blindly, you cannot help but be deceived, for you are in darkness and are short of the truth. You should never

do anything or believe anything because the claim is made that a certain brother says so. What matters is what the Lord says and what the Bible teaches, not what a brother says. How we must learn the truth and practice the truth concerning this!

I was with Brother Nee for years. We never considered him the official leader, and he never regarded himself in this way. Whenever someone thought of Brother Nee as the leader and came to him for instructions, Brother Nee would never say a word. Only when a person came to him for fellowship would he open himself to share something. He never assumed that he was the official leader. Likewise, I do not regard myself as the official leader in the Lord's recovery today.

ONE HEAD

The New Testament reveals that all the children of God are one Body. Although there are many members, there is just one Head. However, according to our natural concept, there are many subheads. We regard the shoulders, the arms, the hands, and the fingers as subheads. Nevertheless, there is one head who gives orders to all the members directly, not through subheads. In the Lord's recovery there is no organization; there is just one organism, the Body. Therefore, there are no subheads of any kind. Do not regard the arms or the shoulders as subheads. The Body has one unique Head—Christ. If our vision concerning the leadership is clear, no one will be able to deceive us. Once again I say that although the foundation of life has solidly been laid among us, there is still the need for the Lord to raise up the pillar of the truth upon the bulwark of the truth. Once this pillar has been raised up, nothing contrary to the truth will be able to creep into the church life.

THE NEED TO LEARN THE TRUTH

Young people, you do not realize how much hope and expectation I have for you. We do not know how long it will be before the Lord comes back. There is a need for all of us, especially the young people, to learn the truth and to practice it. It is not sufficient merely to seek the Lord, to love the Lord, and to grow in life. We also need to learn the truth. There may be a time when all of us will need to rise up for the sake of the truth.

Even the young sisters must know the truth and practice it. Recently, some sisters were poisoned and distracted from the Lord's recovery. If they had been helped to know the truth, they all would have been preserved. These sisters were very good in life, but they were deceived because they were short of the truth. They did not have the shining of the light. Light is with God the Father. When this light shines upon us, it becomes the truth. Therefore, when we are under this shining, we walk in the light and in the truth. However, when there is no shining of the light, we are in darkness. If we all learn the truth, none of us will ever be drugged or deceived.

OBEYING THE LEADING ONES

We have seen one aspect of the truth concerning leadership, the aspect that in God's New Testament economy there is no official, permanent leadership. Now we need to consider another aspect. Hebrews 13:17 says, "Obey the ones leading you and submit to them, for they watch over your souls as those who will render an account, that they may do this with joy and not groaning; for this would be unprofitable to you." We all need to obey the leading ones. This does not mean that the elders exercise authority over us; it means that as those who are older and more experienced, they take the lead, and we need to follow them. To obey means to follow.

Regarding elders, Peter says, "Nor as lording it over your allotments but by becoming patterns of the flock" (1 Pet. 5:3). The elders are to take the lead by being patterns, not by lording it over the saints. If the elders see that the floor has not been vacuumed, they should not sit on the throne and summon the servants to vacuum it for them. Instead, they should take the lead to vacuum the floor and thereby set an example for others to follow.

Although the elders should not lord it over God's flock, Peter does say, "Younger men, be subject to elders" (v. 5). Moreover, there are times when the older ones need to submit to the younger ones. As Peter says, "All of you gird yourselves with humility toward one another" (v. 5). Thus, not only the young ones submit to the older ones, but all, including the older ones, submit to one another in humility. What a beautiful picture this is! It is absolutely different from the natural concept of leadership in the fallen mentality. The leadership in the church is not that of Nimrod, who built the city of Babel. Rather, it is a leadership that builds up the Body.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE APOSTLES

Finally, we need to say a word about apostles. Do apostles have authority? According to my knowledge of the New Testament, the apostles have no authority in themselves to control the churches. Only the word ministered by them has authority. If the churches and the saints go on according to the Word, according to God's oracle, the apostles have no authority to touch the churches. But if a church goes astray or is misled, then the apostles have the obligation and responsibility to deal with the situation according to God's word, which has authority. Therefore, Paul says, "What do you want? Should I come to you with a rod or in love and a spirit of meekness?" (1 Cor. 4:21). He also told them that he was present in spirit to deal with the sinful one among them and to cast him out (5:3-5). The authority of apostles is spiritual and is in their ministry of the word. They have no authority in position to interfere with the church affairs.

Among the children of God in today's New Testament economy, there is actually no leadership in the natural sense. There is no official, permanent, organizational leader among the apostles. The same is true regarding the elders in a local church. Furthermore, all the churches are on the same level; there is no unifying organization. Likewise, all the regions, districts, and areas of the work are on the same level. Therefore, all the apostles, all the local churches, all the elders, and all the regions of the work are on the same level. There is no organization, no hierarchy, and no official, permanent leader. Rather, we all respect and honor the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we see this, we will be cutting straight the word of the truth concerning leadership among God's people today.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MINISTRY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

In this chapter we will consider the truth concerning the ministry in the New Testament economy.

ONE MINISTRY

In the eyes of the Lord there is just one ministry in the New Testament age. Speaking of the need of a replacement for Judas, Peter said that Judas "was numbered among us and was allotted his portion of this ministry" (Acts 1:17). The twelve apostles were all in "this ministry." This indicates that there is one unique ministry in the New Testament. Years ago, I did not see this. But because of the controversy regarding receiving the ministry of others, I have spent time to study the pure Word regarding this matter. My eyes have been opened to see that the twelve apostles were all in "this ministry." Therefore, when the apostles prayed about a replacement for Judas, they asked the Lord to show them whom He had chosen to "take the place of this ministry" (v. 25).

Some may argue that "this ministry" is limited to the twelve apostles. But Ephesians 4:11 and 12 say, "He Himself gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as shepherds and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ." Verse 11 is related to the whole period of time from the apostles until the Lord's second coming. In God's New Testament economy there are many apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. Throughout the centuries there have been thousands of them. Nevertheless, all of them have been given for the perfecting of the saints to the work of the ministry. Notice that verse 12 does not say "the work of the ministries" but "the work of the ministry." Although there are thousands of gifted persons, all are for the work of the one ministry.

During the New Testament age God's unique intention is to build up the Body. God created the universe, formed man, and accomplished redemption all for this. For this one purpose, God has one ministry. God does not have

two operations in this New Testament age; He has one operation with one ministry.

The ministry in the New Testament economy is a corporate ministry, a ministry that includes thousands of gifted people. Therefore, in 2 Corinthians 4:1 Paul says, “Having this ministry.” Paul does not say, “I have this ministry” or “We have these ministries”; he says, “Having this ministry.” Paul, his co-workers, and the other apostles all had this ministry, the one ministry in the New Testament.

In 2 Corinthians 3:6 Paul says that God “made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant.” The ministry is the service; all the ministers are the serving ones carrying out this service. The many ministers do not have many services but one service, one ministry.

I like Paul’s word in 1 Timothy 1:12: “I give thanks to Him who empowers me, Christ Jesus our Lord, that He has counted me faithful, appointing me to the ministry.” In this verse Paul does not say, “He appointed me to my ministry”; he says that the Lord appointed him to the one unique, corporate New Testament ministry. We all need to praise the Lord that by His mercy and grace He has appointed us to the corporate ministry that builds up the Body of Christ.

PERSONAL MINISTRY AND CORPORATE MINISTRY

Although these verses reveal that the ministry in the New Testament is corporate, certain other verses seem to indicate that the ministry is personal. In Acts 20:24 Paul says, “I consider my life of no account as if precious to myself, in order that I may finish my course and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus to solemnly testify of the gospel of the grace of God.” This verse refers to Paul’s personal ministry because Paul speaks of the ministry which he had received from the Lord. Hence, the ministry in this verse is the personal ministry.

Acts 21:19 definitely and clearly refers to Paul’s personal ministry: “Having greeted them, he related one by one the things which God did among the Gentiles through his ministry.” Other verses that seem to refer to personal ministry are 2 Timothy 4:5 and Colossians 4:17. In 2 Timothy 4:5 Paul

charged Timothy, “Fully accomplish your ministry,” apparently encouraging him to fulfill his personal ministry. Colossians 4:17 says, “Say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you fulfill it.” This evidently points to Archippus’s personal ministry.

In considering the verses that speak of personal ministry, we need to realize that all the believers are members of the one Body. As a whole, the Body has one corporate ministry, not many ministries. Although there are many functions in the Body, the ministry in the Body is one. For example, when I speak, my whole body speaks: my eyes, nose, ears, arms, fingers, legs, and feet are all involved. Therefore, my speaking is my body’s ministry. This ministry is corporate. However, each part of my body also has its own ministry. The mouth speaks, the hands make gestures, and the feet render support. But when the ministries of all the members are added together, they total the unique ministry of the body. This example indicates that the many ministries of the members of the Body are not separate ministries but part of one corporate ministry.

The New Testament ministry is uniquely one and corporate. But because this ministry is the service of the Body of Christ and because the Body has many members, every member has its own ministry. Thus, according to the members, there are many ministries; however, according to the Body as a whole, there is just one ministry. Your ministry should not be separate from the corporate ministry. The Body has a corporate ministry, and all the members of the Body have their individual ministries. As we have seen, all the ministries of the members added together equal the corporate ministry.

THE MINISTRIES IN THE DENOMINATIONS

Regarding this matter of the ministry, we need to be clear both about the truth in the Bible and about the situation of today’s Christianity. Originally, during the time of the apostles, there was one Body with one ministry. But due to the degradation of the church, the divisions and denominations came into existence. Now every division has its own so-called ministry. The Baptists, the Presbyterians, the Lutherans, the Episcopalians, and the Pentecostals all have their own ministries. The ministers, pastors, and preachers in the various denominations are working to build up the denominations, not the Body. Because each is building up his own denomination, he cannot work together with others.

We can have nothing to do with the denominations. In the Lord's recovery we are for the recovery of Christ as life and everything to us for the building up of the church. For the fulfillment of God's purpose in His recovery, we need to go back to the beginning, back to the pure Word. In the New Testament there is one unique ministry. From the time of the apostles until now, this ministry has not been terminated. I believe that we are the continuation of this ministry. I am happy to say that I am in this ministry, that I am part of this ministry. We are in the unique ministry according to the New Testament economy.

NOT RECEIVING MINISTRIES THAT DAMAGE THE BODY

At the time of the apostles there were no denominations. Because of the degradation of the church and the existence of many divisions, there apparently are now many ministries. Can we in the Lord's recovery, who share in the unique ministry, the continuation of the ministry of the apostles, accept the ministries of the denominations and divisions? No, we cannot. If we accept them, the recovery will be damaged. The proper ministry, the ministry according to God's New Testament economy, is for the building up of the Body of Christ, but the other ministries are for the building up of the denominations. Because this is the case, we cannot receive the ministries that build up the denominations.

When I was in Taiwan, some denominational missionaries told me that they appreciated the work of my ministry and that they wanted to invite me to speak to their people and to help them. They also suggested that I invite them to speak to us. How would you reply to such a suggestion? The correct way to answer is to say that Brother Lee and his co-workers have been commissioned by the Lord to build up the Body of Christ. However, those in the denominations are building up the denominations. We are not burdened to do this. Rather, our burden is to continue the ministry in the New Testament for the building up of the Body. Because the ministries of those in the denominations are for the building up of the denominations, we cannot invite them to speak to us. If we were to give place to such ministries, the Body would be damaged. This is the reason we cannot receive those ministries. We admit that there is something genuine in them, but as a whole their goal is to

build up the denominations. This is a frustration and an opposition to the building up of the Body.

Regarding this matter of the ministry, we need the Lord's shining. We need to go to the Lord and open ourselves to Him. If we do this, the light will shine upon this teaching concerning the ministry, and the teaching will become the truth, the reality, to us. From the time the Lord made me clear about this matter many years ago, I have never been distracted from it, because the shining of the light is so bright. The light shines upon all my steps; therefore, I cannot help the denominations. Furthermore, we cannot invite those in the denominations to speak to us and thereby cause damage to the Lord's recovery. Because the ministries of those in the denominations are for a purpose other than God's eternal purpose to build up the Body of Christ, we cannot cooperate with them. We can neither help them nor receive help from them. Some may think that we are narrow-minded for taking this stand. Actually, we are not narrow-minded. However, the light regarding the ministry is shining upon us; we cannot deny that we have seen it. Because of this light, we cannot change in this matter.

SPEAKING THE SAME THING FROM DIFFERENT ANGLES

Some have said that the Lord's recovery is a one-man show, that here there is room only for the ministry of Witness Lee, not for the ministry of anyone else. This is absolutely false. This is not my intention nor is it my practice. In the Lord's recovery I do not like to see one brother ministering all the time. For example, during the summer training in 1964 and 1965 I invited a certain brother to share with me in the ministry. Eventually, he gave up the recovery; but we did not give him up. We have also invited other brothers to participate in the ministry. Our intention is to have a good number of brothers ministering. However, all who share in the ministry need to minister the same thing.

When I say that we all should minister the same thing, I mean that we should speak the same thing according to the way of the New Testament. The four Gospels speak the same thing, but they speak the same thing from different angles. We cannot deny that there are differences between Matthew and Mark or between Luke and John. Matthew wrote from the angle of the kingship; Mark, from the angle of service; Luke, from the angle of redemption through the proper humanity; and John, from the angle of Christ's deity. In

the Gospels we have four biographies of one person; one person is viewed from different angles. I hope that many will be raised up to speak the same thing from different angles. This one thing is the recovery of Christ as life and everything to us for the building up of the local churches.

Some criticize the brothers by saying that they are nothing but tape recordings of Witness Lee. This is not true. I hope that in the coming years many of the young people will speak of Christ for the building up of the Body. I have no intention of being the only one to minister. On the contrary, I expect the Lord to raise up many more to carry on the unique ministry. We all have a part in this ministry, which is one ministry with different functions, different angles, and different aspects. You have your part, and I have mine. When we have all the functions and aspects, we have the ministry of the Body.

Some who have left the recovery accuse us of not accepting their ministry. But their ministry is a ministry of undermining and damaging the Lord's recovery. How can we possibly accept the ministries of those whose intention has been to undermine the Lord's recovery and to overthrow the basic matters of life, including the cross? I say this not out of any personal feeling but out of a concern for the truth. I have no personal enmity whatever toward these ones; however, I cannot accept their "ministry," which tears down rather than builds up.

We need to be clear about the truth regarding the ministry, about the situation of today's Christianity, and about our practice. Our practice is according to the truth in the New Testament. We are glad to see different brothers share various aspects or angles concerning Christ as life for the building up of the church in His riches. I recognize that I am very limited. Nevertheless, by the Lord's mercy, I am doing what I should do. Now I expect that others will minister the same thing from different angles. I certainly do not want anyone to copy me, and I do not want to be surrounded by "yes men." What an insult to say that the brothers are "yes men"! I repeat, many brothers need to stand up to minister concerning Christ for the building up of the Body. How wonderful it would be if many did this!

THE BLESSING OF SPEAKING THE SAME THING

When I was a young man, I loved the Bible very much, and I spent as much time as I could studying it. The last thing I did before going to sleep at night

was read a portion of the Word, and the first thing I did upon waking in the morning was read another portion. For seven and a half years I was under the Brethren teachers, who taught me how to interpret the parables, prophecies, and types. How I loved their teaching! Eventually, I met Brother Nee, and through him I came to know life, the Spirit, Christ for my experience, the church, and the Lord's recovery. All these things became truth to me and caused my entire Christian being to be revolutionized. After a church had been raised up in northern China through my ministry, I visited Brother Nee in Shanghai and stayed with him for a period of months. At the end of that time, he told me that he and the co-workers felt that I should come with my family to Shanghai and work there with them. From that time onward, my speaking was always in the line of Brother Nee's ministry. I knew that he had been raised up by the Lord to bring in the recovery and that I had to be one with him in the ministry. Therefore, I preached whatever he preached, although not like a tape recorder. I was absolutely one with him, and I spoke the same thing as he. I have no regrets about this because it has been the cause of great blessing to me and to the churches.

We need to be clear that we are not following a man or imitating anyone. However, we are ministering the same thing from different angles and in different aspects. By doing this the riches are manifest; yet we have a glorious oneness. This is the one ministry, which encompasses many ministries. We all are ministering Christ as life and as everything for the building up of the local churches. This is the Lord's recovery, this is our commission, this is our burden, and this is our ministry. How blessed we are to have a part in this ministry!

CHAPTER FIVE

TRUTH SANCTIFYING FOR ONENESS

Truth occupies a prominent place in the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John is not only a book of life but also a book of truth. John 1:4 says, "In Him was life," and verse 14 says that He was "full of grace and truth" (KJV). Furthermore, John 1:17 says, "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (KJV). In John 14:6 the Lord Jesus declared, "I am...the truth" (KJV). This Gospel reveals that the compound Spirit, the Spirit which was "not yet" (7:39) before the Lord was crucified and resurrected, is the Spirit of truth (14:17, KJV). Regarding the Father's word, the Lord Jesus said, "Your word is truth" (17:17). Therefore, the Lord Jesus is the truth, the Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and the Father's word is truth.

TWO FUNCTIONS OF THE TRUTH

The Gospel of John reveals two functions of the truth. The first is to set us free. John 8:32 says, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." In John 17:17 the Lord Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth." Therefore, according to the Gospel of John, the functions of the truth are to set us free and to sanctify us.

John 17 indicates that truth, sanctification, and oneness are interrelated. Here we have the Father's word, which is the truth that sanctifies us. Hence, verse 17 puts together truth and sanctification, for sanctification issues from the truth. When the truth works within us, the result is sanctification. This sanctification through the truth is for oneness. Verses 17 through 23 of chapter 17 cover truth, sanctification, and oneness. Truth sanctifies, and sanctification issues in oneness.

TRUTH BEING THE REALITY OF THE TRIUNE GOD

The truth that sanctifies us for oneness involves the Lord Jesus, the Spirit of reality, and the word of the Father. Therefore, all three of the Triune God are related to the truth. The Lord Jesus, the Son, is the truth; the Spirit is the Spirit of truth; and the Father's word is truth. In the New Testament, especially in the Gospel of John, *truth* does not mean doctrine; it means the

reality of the Triune God. We may have known that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all related to life, but we may have never seen that all three of the Triune God are related also to the truth.

We have pointed out that the Father's word is truth. Because the Father's word is His expression, and because His word is truth, truth is the expression of the Father.

The whole Bible is the word of God. We need to be deeply impressed with the fact that the Bible is not merely a book but a word that expresses God. Whenever we come to the Bible, we should have the consciousness that we are coming to God's expression, to God expressed. Every time I come to the Word, I have the sense deep within that I am coming to God Himself, and not to a hidden God or a concealed God, but to the God who is expressed. By means of the Bible I can meet with God, talk to Him, and listen to Him. We all need to have such a conviction whenever we come to the Bible.

Christ, the Son, is also the truth. This is somewhat easy to understand because the Father's word is the Son, who is the expression of God. Many Christian teachers have rightly said that the Bible is the written Word and that the Son is the living Word. I agree with this. The Bible is the word without, and the Son is the word within. But these two, the outer word and the inner word, are one.

All this is realized through God the Spirit. We have pointed out that in the Gospel of John the Spirit is the Spirit of truth. The Father is embodied in the Son, and the Son is realized as the Spirit of reality. The Spirit is the realization of the Son as the embodiment of the Father. Therefore, the Spirit is the reality. The Spirit is also the word. John 6:63 says that the Lord's word is spirit, and Ephesians 6:17 says that the Spirit is the word. Hallelujah, we have the Word without and the Spirit within!

Whenever we come to the Word with an open heart and an open spirit, we immediately touch both the Word and the Spirit as the truth. I can testify that every time I open my heart and spirit as I come to the Bible, I meet God. Through this one act, I touch both the Word and the Spirit, both the written Word and the living Word. Two or three times every day we need to come to the Word. It is rather difficult to come to the Lord as the Spirit apart from the Word. Although it certainly can be done, we do need the Word. What a

wonderful instrument the Word is for contacting the Lord! When we are disappointed or depressed, feeling empty within, we can open ourselves and come to the Word. After reading for a while, something within us rises up, and we enjoy the presence of the Lord. This is the experience of the truth, the reality. It is the Triune God in His word being imparted into our being. This is the truth.

The Father is embodied in the Son, the Son is realized as the Spirit, and the Spirit is one with the word. When we touch the Word, we also touch the Spirit. Then something is infused into our inner being. Whatever is infused into us in this way is the truth. Although this involves the acquisition of biblical knowledge, there is something living inside this knowledge. This is the Triune God realized by us and transfused into us through the word. This is not merely the word. It is the word mingled and saturated with the Triune God and infused into our being. This is the truth that sets us free and sanctifies us.

SANCTIFIED BY THE TRUTH

We cannot sanctify ourselves. The more we try to be sanctified, the more involved we become with things that are common. But when the word mingled with the essence of the Triune God is imparted into us as the truth, this truth sanctifies us. We have all experienced this. By contacting the written Word that is mingled with the living Word, something is transfused into us and works in us all day long.

Suppose the young people touch the Word with the Spirit in morning watch and then go to school. Throughout the day at school this word of truth will work within them to separate them and make them different from their classmates in their behavior, actions, work, thoughts, and feelings. Something is working within them to sanctify them, to make them holy.

By taking the Word in this way, we have the clear conviction that something of the Lord has been wrought into us. This is not the mere knowledge of the Bible or of things concerning the Lord. It is the reality of the Triune God living, moving, working, and separating us. This makes us different from the worldly people. I can tell by the faces of the young people that they are graced by the Lord's presence. What a blessing! Every morning we can touch the living Word and have the divine reality infused into our being. In this way the Triune God is transfused into us.

This transfusion of the element of God frees us from such negative things as temper, jealousy, hatred, and pride. It sets us free from every kind of falsehood. This is real liberation, real freedom. As we are being set free, we are also sanctified, separated, made holy to God, not only positionally but also dispositionally. We become one with God because His very essence is being wrought into us. This is what it means to be sanctified by the word of truth.

COMING TO THE WORD DAILY

Daily we need to practice coming to the Word in this way. Like breathing, we cannot do this once for all; rather, it must be a continual exercise. We need to be sanctified unceasingly every minute of the day. This is the reason we need to come to the Word every morning and, if possible, at other times as well. When the word is mingled with the living Spirit in our spirit, we are sanctified with the essence of God.

Throughout the years I have been in this country, I have not been burdened to teach you what to do or what not to do. I have no trust in mere teachings because, according to my own experience, they do not accomplish very much. Our crucial need is to have the Triune God infused into us through the Word. This infusion works to sanctify us and transform us. To take the Word in this way is not a religious practice or ordinance. It is to experience the living Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—being wrought into us through the living Word. By contacting the Word in this way, God is added into us day by day. As a result, we are permeated with God and made one with Him.

SANCTIFICATION RESULTING IN ONENESS BY DEALING WITH THE FACTORS OF DIVISION

Sanctification through the word of truth results in oneness. The sanctifying word, the sanctifying Spirit, the sanctifying life, and the sanctifying God are all one. Therefore, if we are being sanctified, we can be nothing else but one. We are one spontaneously because all the factors of division are taken away.

Worldliness

The first of these factors is worldliness. As long as you love the world in a certain aspect, that aspect of worldliness becomes a cause of division. It

separates you from the brothers and sisters. Anyone who is worldly is through with oneness. Such worldliness is like a wolf.

Ambition

Another cause of division is ambition. Ambition is like a gopher that works underground in a hidden way to cause damage. Ambition undermines from within. We all must admit that we are ambitious. What can kill our ambition? Rebuking does not avail. The more you rebuke someone, the more you arouse his ambition. I can testify from experience, however, that when we contact the Lord through the Word and allow Him to infuse Himself into us, the truth thus imparted into our being kills our ambition. There is no other way for ambition to be rooted out of us. Day by day the sanctifying truth kills the element of ambition within us. The germ of ambition is in our blood and needs the sanctifying truth as an "antibiotic" to kill it. If our ambition is not killed, there can be no genuine oneness.

I thank the Lord that we brothers are one, not because we have the same disposition or because we have made a certain agreement. Rather, we are one because our ambition is being killed. The hidden "gopher" of ambition needs to be exterminated by the sanctifying word. If we desire to have the genuine oneness in the church life, we need the sanctifying truth to deal with our ambition.

In John 17:17-23 we see that sanctification issues in the genuine oneness because this sanctification keeps us in the Triune God. Verse 21 says, "That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us." In order to be one we need to be in the "Us," that is, in the Triune God. The only way to be in the Triune God is by the sanctifying truth that deals with all the factors of division. By being kept in the Triune God, we are one. But whenever we are out of the Triune God, we are divided immediately.

Self-exaltation

A third cause of division is self-exaltation, which usually accompanies ambition. Some people, however, are ambitious but do not seem to exalt themselves. Others are ambitious and are consumed with the desire to have preeminence and to be exalted. Such self-exaltation is like a serpent; it causes

division among the saints. Therefore, in order to keep the genuine oneness, we must learn not to exalt ourselves.

If you are an elder or a leading one, you should not boast about this. Do not claim that you are somebody. It is better to be nobody. Recently, I heard that a certain Christian group has a slogan that in their fellowship they make everybody somebody. The church, on the contrary, makes everybody nobody. If you want to be somebody, you should not come to the church, for this is not the place for you. Instead, you should go to that group that claims to make everybody somebody. In the Lord's recovery everyone is brought low. But praise the Lord, we are willing to be nobody and to exalt Christ, who has the universal preeminence! Christ is the only Somebody. We like to be nobodies, because by being nobodies, we are truly one.

During the past months I have told the elders at least a few times that I like to be despised, attacked, criticized, and defamed. I do not want to publish any books with the intention of making myself famous. I do not even care now to print any more refutals of the false accusations made against us. Some have encouraged me to publish a book refuting that slanderous book called *The God-Men*. But when I brought this matter to the Lord, the Lord said, "Don't do anything. Let them oppose you. You should simply live a crucified life. The victory is not with outward fame; it is with the crucified life. Let others defame you, criticize you, and oppose you. It is enough that I am with you and that you live a crucified life." Here in the crucified life self-exaltation is defeated. Hallelujah, in God's economy the preeminence belongs to Christ alone! It pleases the Father to give Him the first place in all things (Col. 1:18).

I thank the Lord that the vast majority of the saints are willing to be nobodies so that we can have the genuine oneness. During the past fifty years we have encountered opposition and rebellion. However, most of the saints in the Lord's recovery have been faithful. Only a small percentage have caused trouble. But even the trouble caused by them has been a help to us. How we thank the Lord for the sanctifying truth that defeats worldliness, ambition, and self-exaltation!

Opinions and Concepts

The fourth factor of division is opinion and concept. Opinion is like a scorpion. We should not hold to our own opinion but simply pursue the

Lord's goal: the recovery of Christ as life and as everything for the building up of the church. Those who have been with me throughout the years can testify that I do not insist on anything except Christ as life and as everything to us for the church. We should all be for this, not for our opinions and concepts regarding other things.

The four factors of division—worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, and opinion—can be dealt with only by the sanctifying truth. Do you think that if you contact the Lord every morning, touch the living Word, and have the divine reality infused into your being, you will still be divisive? I do not believe it. As we contact the Lord in this way, the factors of division are overcome. What I am sharing here is not a mere teaching; it is my own experience.

When the factors of division in us are put to death by the sanctifying truth, we are brought into the genuine oneness, for sanctification keeps us in the Triune God. Only by being in the Triune God do we have the genuine oneness. Christians today are divided by worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, and opinions and concepts. It is impossible for worldly Christians, ambitious Christians, self-exalting Christians, or opinionated Christians to be one. The Lord's recovery, on the contrary, is based upon the genuine oneness, which we can have only by being sanctified through the word of truth. This is clearly revealed in the Gospel of John. When worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, and opinion are dealt with by the sanctifying word of truth, we are kept in the Triune God and we have genuine oneness.

MAINTAINING THE GENUINE ONENESS

The fact that the Lord cares for the genuine oneness among His people is seen by the rather negative record in Matthew 18:15-17. According to these verses, if a brother sins, we are to reprove him. But if he does not hear us, we should take one or two witnesses. If he still refuses to hear, we should bring the matter to the church. Then if he is not willing to hear the church, he should be regarded as a Gentile and a tax collector. To be considered by the church a Gentile and a tax collector means to be outside the fellowship of the church. Those who are rebellious or disobedient to the church are to be viewed by the church as outside the fellowship. This is necessary to maintain the genuine oneness among God's people.

KEEPING A WATCHFUL EYE ON THOSE WHO CAUSE DIVISIONS

Romans 16:17 says, “Now I exhort you, brothers, to mark those who make divisions and causes of stumbling contrary to the teaching which you have learned, and turn away from them.” Recently, there have been some among us who have made divisions and causes of stumbling contrary to the teaching which we have learned. We need to keep a watchful eye on such persons. Whenever we see them causing division, we must turn away from them. Although this is not pleasant, it is necessary to preserve the health of the Body. In order for the Body to be healthy, it must be kept from all the factors of division.

Some divisive ones have said that if we turn away from them, we are not the church and do not have the oneness. They have been undermining the Lord’s recovery and causing divisions; nevertheless, they expect the church to include them. But we must be bold to declare that we cannot tolerate division. We cannot permit divisive ones to remain in the fellowship of the church. Do not think that the church should include those who cause division. Yes, the church includes all the believers but not those who cause division.

After speaking about those who make divisions and causes of stumbling, Paul says, “Such men do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own stomach, and through smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (v. 18). The Greek word translated “stomach” refers to the belly or the entire abdominal cavity; it is a derivative of the word meaning “hollow.” Those who make divisions have a gap, a hollow space, within them. In their greed and ambition they desire to fill this empty spot. They do not serve the Lord or care for the Lord’s recovery. Instead, they care only to fill the hollowness within them. They do not care for the saints, for the churches, for the recovery, or for the Lord’s testimony. We, however, are slaves of the Lord and are here only for the Lord’s recovery. Nevertheless, there have recently been some among us who did not care for the recovery or for the churches but only for filling the gap in their own inward being.

Romans 16:18 says that those who serve their own stomach, not the Lord Christ, deceive the hearts of the simple through smooth words and flattering speech. In these days many simple ones have been deceived by flattering words and promises.

REFUSING THE FACTIOUS ONE

Titus 3:10-11 is another portion of the Word dealing with divisive ones. Verse 10 says, “A factious man, after a first and second admonition, refuse.” A factious man is one who causes divisions. Such a person is to be refused, rejected, after a first and second admonition. To refuse here means to avoid, to reject.

Verse 11 says, “Knowing that such a one is perverted and is sinning, though he is condemned by his own self.” This indicates that the conscience of the factious ones is not completely dead. Rather, their conscience convicts them that they are wrong, that they are acting against God. Deep within, they know that they are divisive. Hence, they are self-condemned.

Romans 16 and Titus 3 exactly fit today’s situation. Because we cannot tolerate division, we need to keep a watchful eye on those who are divisive and refuse those who are factious.

In 1 Corinthians 5 we see the casting out of a sinful one. The church simply cannot tolerate such a sinful one as described in this chapter.

These four portions of the Word confirm the fact that the church must keep its sanctified position. The church cannot tolerate anything divisive or defiling. How we thank the Lord for the sanctifying word, the sanctifying Spirit, the sanctifying God, and the sanctifying truth! The word of truth is continually dealing with the factors of division within us. Worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, and opinions and concepts are being put to death so that we can maintain the genuine oneness. May we all see this, exercise ourselves in prayer concerning it, experience it, and practice it.

CHAPTER SIX

MOVING INTO GOD

TO BE SANCTIFIED FOR ONENESS

In order to have the genuine oneness, we need to be separated from worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, and opinions and concepts. In the past not many of us realized that we need to be sanctified to have the genuine oneness. Sanctification has a great deal to do with oneness.

In this chapter we will again consider chapters 14 through 17 of the Gospel of John. Although Christians have read these chapters again and again, not many know the real meaning of them. Chapters 14 through 16 are the last words of the Lord Jesus to His disciples before His betrayal and crucifixion. After uttering the words recorded in these chapters, He offered the prayer found in chapter 17. This prayer is actually a conclusion to His speaking in the previous three chapters.

A PLACE IN THE HOUSE OF GOD

In John 14:2 the Lord Jesus said, "In My Father's house are many abodes; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you." If you read this verse in the light of the whole New Testament, you will see that the house here refers to the church, not to the so-called heavenly mansions. In chapter 2 of John the house refers first to the temple and second to the body of the Lord Jesus. Just as the temple was the house of God, so the Lord's physical body was the house of God when the Lord was on earth. After Christ's resurrection His physical body became the mystical Body, which is the house of God today. This mystical Body, the Body of Christ, is the church. When the Lord Jesus was about to die, He told His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them in the house of God. This means that He was about to prepare a place for us in the church. Therefore, in the beginning of this section of the Gospel of John, the Lord said clearly that His going was for the purpose of accomplishing one thing: to prepare a place for us in the house of God, the church, and to pave the way for us to be brought into this place.

IN THE FATHER AND IN THE GLORY

John 14:3 says, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will receive you to Myself, so that where I am you also may be.” The Lord was in the Father, and He wanted His disciples to be in the Father also. In this verse the Lord seemed to be saying, “I am in the Father, but you are not. By My crucifixion and resurrection I will bring you into the Father. Then where I am, you will be also.” The Lord prayed for this very thing in John 17:24: “Father, concerning that which You have given Me, I desire that they also may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory, which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.” According to this verse, eventually we will be not only in the Father but also in the glory. First the Lord brings us into the Father and then into the glory.

MOVING OUT OF OURSELVES BY BEING SANCTIFIED

When we are with the Lord in the Father and in the glory, we are one. But when we are in ourselves, we cannot be one with others. In ourselves we are one only with ourselves, not with anyone else. If we desire to be one with others, we need to move out of the self and into God the Father. No one can make this move for us; we are responsible to do it ourselves. When we move out of ourselves and into the Father and into the Father’s glory, we are one and are even perfected into one.

The way to make this move is by being sanctified. To be sanctified is to make the move out of ourselves and into the Father. If we remain in ourselves, we are not sanctified, and thus we cannot be one with others. In ourselves we have worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, and opinion. It is impossible for us to eradicate these things from our being. Do you realize that the world is actually yourself? The same is true of ambition, self-exaltation, and opinions and concepts. This is the reason we cannot escape from these four things if we stay in the self. Paul told the Corinthians that among them there was jealousy and strife (1 Cor. 3:3). These are some of the characteristics of those who are in the self. The church life, however, is a building, and the real building is the genuine oneness. In this genuine oneness there is no room for worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, or opinion.

How can we remove these four things from us? In ourselves, it is impossible. There is no way for us to eliminate them. As fallen people, we are constituted with worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, and opinion. Even little children know how to exalt themselves; at an early age they also become ambitious. Furthermore, children do not need to be taught worldliness, for they are worldly by nature. As long as we are alive, we are subject to worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, and opinion. Although some of us are gentle and meek because of our natural disposition, this does not mean that we are not ambitious or opinionated. With some, ambition is expressed in an outward way and is quite obvious, whereas with others, ambition is a hidden matter concealed in the heart. But everyone is ambitious; ambition is a constituent of our being.

The Lord Jesus knows our problem. In John 15:5 He said, "Apart from Me you can do nothing." He is the vine, and we are the branches. We must remain in Him, that is, abide in Him. To remain in Christ as the vine means that we move out of ourselves and into Him. Since the Lord is in the Father, we also may be in the Father by being in Him. In John 17:21 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." This is the oneness in the Triune God. In order to be in the Triune God, we must move out of ourselves. John 17:22-23a says, "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." When we move out of ourselves and remain in the Triune God, Christ lives in us. In this way we are perfected into one.

Only by our being sanctified can we abide in Christ and can Christ live in us. Again I say, to be sanctified is to move out of ourselves and into the Triune God and to allow Christ to live in us. According to chapters 14 through 17 of John, this is the proper concept of sanctification. The more we are sanctified, the more we are out of ourselves and in the Triune God.

SANCTIFICATION BY THE WORD AND THE SPIRIT

This sanctification takes place by the word, which is truth, and by the Spirit, which is the Spirit of truth. In these four chapters of John the word and the Spirit are mentioned again and again. Actually, the word and the Spirit are one. I thank the Lord that so many of us have come back to the Word and are getting into the Word every day. As we come to the Word every morning,

outwardly we touch the Word, but inwardly the Spirit touches us. By the word and by the Spirit, both of which are the reality, we are sanctified.

To be sanctified is not merely to be separated from the world; it is to move out of ourselves and into the Triune God. If you check with your experience, you will see that the more you touch the Word and the more the Spirit touches you, the more you move out of yourself. You move from one dwelling place, the self, to another dwelling place, the Triune God. Every day we need to make this move. If we do not move out of ourselves, we are wrong; for in the self there is worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, and opinion.

LEARNING TO DEAL WITH OUR OPINIONS

We may apply this to the practical situation in the church life. Now is the time for the church in Anaheim as well as for all the other churches to be built. In order for the church to be built, we need to come together for the church service. Regarding this, the leading ones are quite cautious because they do not want the saints to be offended. Do you know what causes the saints to be offended? It is the self with its ambition and self-exaltation. Suppose you are troubled because someone else is made a leader instead of you. If you are troubled in this way because of your ambition, you should get into the Word right away and allow the Spirit to touch you. Then you will be able to move out of yourself and declare, “Angels and demons, I do not care who the leader is. I will not remain in myself. Instead, I will move out of myself into the Triune God and remain in Him.”

In the service of the church the most damaging element is not ambition or self-exaltation; it is opinion. Apparently, opinion is not as ugly as self-exaltation. We may express our opinion in a meek and humble way. Nevertheless, in the service of the church the first lesson we need to learn is to say, “I don’t know.” If you say that you already know what to do in the church service, it indicates that you have an opinion. But if you say, “I don’t know,” it reveals that you are willing to serve but do not know how to serve. How wonderful it would be if we all could say, “I don’t know”!

In 1928, at the beginning of the work in Shanghai, a certain brother who had been a postmaster became a co-worker. Not knowing what to do when he was first invited to a particular place to work for the Lord, he asked Brother Nee for advice. Brother Nee replied, “Simply learn to say, ‘I don’t know.’ If

you say this whenever people ask you something, you will be the best co-worker." However, it is very difficult for us to say this. When we come to the service of the church, we all have the assurance that we know something. Nevertheless, our need is to learn to say, "I don't know."

We learn to do this only by moving out of ourselves. If we remain in ourselves, we will always think that we know a great deal. But if we move out of ourselves into the Triune God and remain in Him, we will regard ourselves as knowing nothing. To know nothing means to have no opinion. When we are in the Triune God, we have no opinions.

The Lord's disciples afford us a good example of moving out of the self and into the Triune God. Before the Lord's resurrection the disciples stayed in themselves and were very opinionated. Peter, Martha, and even Mary had opinions. But in Acts 2 we see that the disciples had lost their opinions. In the Gospels they were in themselves, but in the Acts they had moved out of the self and into the Triune God. A big move took place between the Gospels and the Acts. Although an important work began in Acts 2, there were no conferences or discussions about it. When people are opinionated, they need conferences and discussions. But in Acts 2 there was no such need.

Not many Christians know how to be free from opinions. When we come together to serve with the saints, we all must learn to have no opinions. How can we be without opinions? It is not by adjusting ourselves or by improving our behavior. It is by moving out of ourselves and into the Triune God. This is a deeper understanding of sanctification. Once we are out of ourselves, we are separated from worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, and opinion. Then we are separated not only unto God but also into God.

ONE IN THE TRIUNE GOD

When we are in the Triune God, we are one. When we are in ourselves, however, we are divided. Outward teachings concerning oneness do not make us one. The more today's Christians talk about oneness, the more divided they are. Like the Corinthians, they are still in themselves; hence, they are through with the genuine oneness.

We have pointed out that in John 14 the Lord Jesus said that He was going to prepare a place for us. This place is God the Father Himself, and the way

there is the Lord Jesus. In John 14:6 the Lord said, “I am the way and the reality and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.” Christ, the Son, is the way, and the Father is the place. Although unbelievers can lodge only in themselves, we have a choice between dwelling in ourselves and dwelling in the Triune God. We do not need to remain in ourselves; we can move into the Triune God. A place has been prepared for us, and a choice is presented to us. The Lord said that after He prepared a place for us in the Father’s house, He would come to receive us into that place. Therefore, where He is, we may be also. The Lord is in the Father, and He desires that we too be in the Father. Now that the place has been prepared for us in the Father, we can move into Him by being sanctified through the truth. This involves both the Word and the Spirit. If we continually touch the Word and allow the Spirit to touch us day by day, we will be sanctified; that is, we will move out of ourselves, our old lodging place, and into the Triune God, our new lodging place. By making this move, worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, and opinion are left behind.

PERFECTED INTO ONE

John 17:23 says, “I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one.” Not only have we moved into the Triune God, but the Lord is also in us. His being in us is a matter of living. We move out of ourselves in order to be in the Triune God. When we are in the Triune God, Christ can live in us. When we remain in the Triune God and when Christ lives in us, we are perfected into one.

If we come together for the church service in ourselves, it will be impossible for us to be one. In order to serve in oneness, we must move out of ourselves. We serve by moving into the Triune God. However, as we move out of ourselves and into the Triune God, we need to let Christ live in us. His living in us perfects us into one. By moving out of ourselves and into the Triune God, we have oneness. However, this is not yet the perfected oneness. Only when Christ lives in us do we sense the reality of the genuine oneness. The more the Lord lives in us, the more His living perfects us with others into the genuine oneness.

Genuine oneness is not merely a matter of meeting together. To have the genuine oneness, we must first move out of ourselves and into the Triune God; second, we must allow the Lord to live in us. Then we are not only one but

also perfected into one. Here in this genuine oneness there is no worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, or opinions. Instead, there is just the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

REAL BUILDING

This perfected oneness is the real building. In 1954 I first began to speak of the building. I told the saints in Manila that they had to know who was above them, under them, and beside them. Later, I learned by experience that this concept of building is not accurate, for it applies only to a building with lifeless material that does not move from place to place, not to us as living ones who may move from one city to another. I asked the Lord to show me what the practical building was. Gradually, mainly from Ephesians 4, I saw that real building is the proper growth in life. When we grow in life normally, we get out of ourselves and into the Triune God, and Christ lives in us. When this is our experience, we have the genuine oneness, and we are perfected into one. When we are perfected into one, there is no problem with building. Wherever we go, we are one with the saints. But if we remain in ourselves, we will have problems no matter where we may be.

Real oneness is not merely relatedness, nor is it merely coordination. It is the growth in life. To grow in life means that we move out of ourselves and into the Triune God and allow Christ to live in us. If we move into the Triune God and allow Christ to live in us, we can be one with the saints in any locality. If you have problems in the church, do not blame your environment or the saints. Instead, blame yourself for not moving out of yourself and into the Triune God and for not allowing Christ to live in you.

ONE IN THE FATHER'S GLORY

In John 17:22 the Lord Jesus said, "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, even as We are one." The glory which the Father has given the Son is the sonship with the Father's life and divine nature (5:26) to express the Father in His fullness (1:18; 14:9; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:3). The Son has given this glory to His believers so that they also may have the sonship with the Father's life and divine nature (John 17:2; 2 Pet. 1:4) to express the Father in the Son in His fullness (John 1:16). This is the glory which the Father gave to the Son and which the Son has given to us. In such a glory there is no worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, or opinion. Instead,

there is the Father's life and nature for His expression in His fullness. Here in the glory we have the genuine oneness.

Through His death and resurrection the Lord prepared a place for us in the Father and opened the way for us to come into this place. After His resurrection He began to bring us into the Father, that is, to move us out of ourselves and into the Father. Furthermore, He lives in us to bring us into the glory, which is the expression of the Father. Here in the glory we live by the Father's life and by His nature to express the Father in His fullness. In this glory there is room for nothing but the Father's life and nature for His expression. This is where the Lord Jesus is today and where we should be also. Here in the Father's glory we have the genuine oneness.

In the past we did not see the truth concerning oneness in as deep a way as we see it today. If we allow the Spirit of reality to work this truth, this reality, into our being, we will have the genuine oneness, a oneness where there is no worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, or opinion but only the Father's life, nature, and holiness for us to express Him. This is the truth of oneness through sanctification. We all need to experience this sanctification through the Word and the Spirit so that we may enter into the Father and into His glory.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ONENESS VERSUS EVIL

I have the burden to give another message on the genuine oneness revealed in John 17. In order to know what oneness is, we need to consider the situation at Babel in Genesis 11. Originally, God created one man. He created man not in an individualistic way but in a corporate way, for God's intention was not to have many men individualistically but to have many men as part of a corporate man. Therefore, in the creation of mankind there was oneness. But this oneness was broken at Babel. Before Babel there was just one race; but after Babel mankind was divided, and the many races came into existence. On the day of Pentecost the many races of divided mankind came together as one, not in creation but in God's full redemption. Hence, at Pentecost at least three thousand one hundred and twenty people were one, and there was a practical answer to the Lord's prayer in John 17. In John 17:20 the Lord prayed not only for the disciples with Him at that time but for all who would believe in Him through their word. In Acts 2 at least three thousand people were saved through the word of the Lord's disciples, and they were truly one.

THE TWO BABELS

In the Bible there are two Babels, two Babylons, one in the Old Testament and another in the New Testament. In a sense both the Old Testament and the New Testament end with Babylon. The first Babel caused division among mankind; the second Babel has also caused division. After the departure of the apostles, the second Babel emerged in the second century as a cause of division. According to church history, the result of the second Babel was the same in nature as the first. With the first Babel the languages were confounded, and the nations came into existence; with the second Babel the denominations came into being.

THE SATANIC SYSTEM

It was with the first Babel that the God-created earth along with mankind fully became Satan's systematized world. Before Genesis 11 the world as a satanic system had not yet come into existence in its fullness. When the Lord spoke of the world in John 17, He was referring to this satanic system. In

verses 14 through 18 the Lord mentioned the world eight times. This is the satanic system with Satan as the evil within it.

In verse 15 the Lord prayed, "I do not ask that You would take them out of the world, but that You would keep them out of the hands of the evil one." The word *one* in this verse is in italics, indicating that it is not in the Greek; hence, the literal rendering of the Greek here is "the evil." Most translators agree that the evil here is a personified evil. It is not a thing but a person. Satan has become the personified evil in the world. Now in the world there is someone called "the evil." This evil is the essence, the basic factor, of the satanic system. This evil is Satan who is himself the personified evil in his satanic system. In the eyes of God, the whole world today is the evil. In verses 14 through 19 there is the implication that Satan is one with the world. Satan is the evil, and the world is also evil. They are one entity.

THE WORLD AND THE EVIL

Verse 15 indicates that the evil and the world are synonymous. In this verse the Lord prayed not that the Father would take us out of the world but that He would keep us from the evil one. First the Lord speaks of the world and then, using a synonymous term, of the evil. This reveals that the world and the evil are virtually identical. The world is the evil, and the evil is the world. Although we cannot say that Satan is the world, we can say that Satan is the evil and that the world also is the evil.

THE EVIL OF DIVISION

The major symptom of the sickness in the satanic system is division. In the world today there is no oneness. On the contrary, there is division everywhere—among the nations, in the family, in the schools, in business, and in politics. Every society is filled with division. The whole world is ill with the disease of division. This divisiveness is the evil in the world. According to Genesis 11, at Babel division and confusion came in. We see the same on earth today. Every nation and every people are divided. This is the evil in Satan's system.

This evil has crept into Christianity and has produced denominationalism. Division is therefore the evil in today's Christianity, just as it is the evil in the world. By this we see that Christianity has become an intimate and faithful

follower of the world. Eventually, in the book of Revelation so-called Christianity is named Babylon the Great. By following the world with its evil of division, it has become "great."

This evil is constituted mainly of worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, and concepts and opinions. The entire world is the evil, and within this evil there are ambition, self-exaltation, and concepts and opinions. All division comes from ambition, self-exaltation, and concepts. If these three things were removed from the world, the world would no longer be Babel, and there would no longer be divisions.

CONCEPT—THE ENTHRONEMENT OF SELF-EXALTATION

Our concept is the expression and enthronement of our self-exaltation. Concept is the enthronement of the self exalted as a little king. We should never regard a concept as an insignificant matter. Even the sisters of high-school age enthrone themselves as queens whenever they express their concepts. To kill our concepts therefore is to dethrone the self. The whole world is divided by concepts; hence, concepts are the factors of division.

Self-exaltation comes from ambition. We all are ambitious and self-exalting. The only difference among us in this matter is degree. Ambition is in our very blood. Self-exaltation issues from our ambition and is embodied in our concepts. When our concepts are expressed, the result is division. This is the evil in John 17. The evil is the world with its ambition, self-exaltation, and concepts, all of which produce division.

WHAT THE WORLD REALLY IS

We Christians often talk about the world, but we may not always realize what we are talking about. Worldliness does not involve only superficial matters such as buying a certain style of clothing at a department store. This understanding of the world is very shallow. The world is constituted of ambition, self-exaltation, and concepts. When these three things result in division, the world becomes the evil. Perhaps you have never before realized that the world includes your ambition, your self-exaltation, and your concepts. In his translation of the New Testament, Wuest uses the term *Pernicious One* with respect to Satan, denoting that which is poisonous and damaging.

The entire world, including Christianity, is pernicious; it is full of the poison of ambition, self-exaltation, and concepts and opinions.

Throughout the centuries Christians have been divided by concepts. These concepts come from self-exaltation, which in turn issues from ambition. In the eyes of God the world is constituted of ambition, self-exaltation, and concepts. We need to delve into John 17 to find out what the world really is. The world is not merely certain modern fashions; it is ambition producing the self-exaltation that culminates in concepts. This brings about division, which is the evil, the pernicious thing on earth today.

NO AMBITION IN THE TRIUNE GOD

Because this pernicious poison is still in us, we need to see how to extract it. In the previous chapter we saw that we need to move out of ourselves and into the Triune God. In order to be one, we need to be saved from worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, and concepts. No matter how gentle or meek we may be, in ourselves we are still ambitious. But when we move out of ourselves and into the Triune God, into the "Us" (John 17:21), our ambition is swallowed up. In the Triune God there is no room for ambition. In the universe there is just one place where there is no ambition, and that place is the Triune God. To the Triune God ambition is a foreign element. According to my experience, I can testify that the only way to be free from ambition is to move out of ourselves and into the Triune God. The Lord's word in verse 21 implies dealing with ambition by being in the Triune God.

During the past several months I have been very exercised regarding the genuine oneness. I began to research the Word again concerning this matter. The first thing I saw was the matter of worldliness in John 17:14-19. Then I realized that ambition is implied in verse 21, in the Lord's word about being "in Us." I saw that we need to move out of ourselves and into the Triune God. Here in the Triune God there is room for us, but there is no room for our ambition.

NO SELF-EXALTATION IN THE FATHER'S GLORY

John 17:22 says, "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, even as We are one." *The glory* in this verse refers to the expression of the Father, to the sonship with the Father's life and nature

to express the Father in His fullness. This glory is not only for the future; it is with us today. When we express the Father in His life and nature with all His fullness, we are in the glory. In this glory there is no possibility of self-exaltation. Self-exaltation is versus the Father's glory, the Father's expression. When we express the Father, we do not exalt ourselves. Self-exaltation and the glory of the Father are in two different realms. Self-exaltation is in the realm of the self, and the expression of the Father is in the realm of His kingdom. In the Father's kingdom there is no self-exaltation.

Today's Christianity is filled with human exaltation. As a result, there is none of the divine glory, no expression of the Father. We need to pray, "Lord, have mercy on us. In Your church we cannot tolerate self-exaltation. Lord, we want to express You, not ourselves. In the church we want to see the expression of the Father. We don't want any man to be exalted."

Just as verse 21 implies the matter of ambition, verse 22 implies the matter of self-exaltation. Self-exaltation is like a ferocious beast that is crouching as it awaits an opportunity to attack us. In recent years there has been such a crouching self-exaltation among us. This self-exaltation has caused division. Wherever a certain self-exalting one went, there was no peace. The peace in many local churches was shattered by this self-exaltation. This even divided elders in some churches from each other so that a certain one alone could be exalted. This is the opposite of the oneness in John 17, a oneness that is versus evil. Praise the Lord for clearing up the situation! Now we can proclaim that we are no longer in the evil, but we are in the pure and genuine oneness. We are in the Triune God, where there is no ambition; and we are in the glorious expression of the Father, where there is no self-exaltation. Now only one person—the Lord Jesus—is on the throne to express the Father. Although we reject self-exaltation, we believe in our co-enthronement with our King to express our Father in His glory. Here we enjoy the sonship in the Father's life and nature with His fullness. What an enjoyment we have!

There is no need for us to strive, endeavor, maneuver, or manipulate. We are not "wolves" or "donkeys"; we are "lambs" and "doves" who enjoy being in the Triune God and in the glory of the Father. Because there are no "wolves" or "donkeys" among us, we can have the genuine oneness. Whenever someone exalts himself, his "wolf" nature is exposed. Self-exaltation has nothing to do with the nature of a lamb or a dove. Praise the Lord that we are "lambs" and "doves"! In these days I am very happy to be a little one. How sweet it is to be

small! We all need to have a new appreciation for smallness. Are you willing to be small for the church life? In our smallness there is the expression of the Father's glory.

NO OPINIONS WHEN CHRIST LIVES IN US

Verse 23 says, "I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one." This verse refers to Christ living in us (Gal. 2:20). When Christ lives in us, we have no concepts or opinions.

Ambition is implied in John 17:21; self-exaltation, in verse 22; and concepts and opinions, in verse 23. In ourselves it is impossible for us to be free from concepts and opinions. The source of friction in married life is our opinion. If a married sister would not express her opinion to her husband, there would be no arguments. Separations and divorces are caused by opinions. Likewise, Christians are divided today because of concepts and opinions. Only when Christ lives in us is it possible for us to have no opinions. When Christ lives in us, our opinions and concepts are put to death.

In the Triune God there is no ambition, in the glory of the Father there is no self-exaltation, and in the place where Christ lives and reigns there are no opinions and concepts. In this realm ambition is swallowed up, self-exaltation disappears, and concepts and opinions are killed. Here there is no evil; instead, there is the genuine oneness. Now we can see that the genuine oneness is versus evil. We need a oneness that is so genuine, real, and pure.

EXPERIENCING THE GENUINE ONENESS

In order to have this oneness, we need to move out of ourselves and into the Triune God. We also need to express the Father's glory and allow Christ to live in us. Then we will have the genuine oneness, which is versus evil. But if we remain in ourselves, we will have the ambition that issues in the self-exaltation which is enthroned in our concepts. The result is division. Where there is such division, the church becomes the world. When the evil is present, we can scarcely see the church. What we see is mainly the evil. This is why we have recently been saying that we must purge out the leprosy. The leprosy is this evil constituted of ambition, self-exaltation, and concepts.

If we would purge out the evil, the leprosy, we must do more than repent. Repentance is good, but as far as this evil is concerned, it is too superficial. In addition to repentance, we need to move out of ourselves and into the Triune God and remain in Him for the expression of the Father's glory. We need to allow this glory to swallow up our self-exaltation so that Christ can live in us. When Christ lives in us, all our concepts will be put to death. Then, instead of evil, we will have the genuine oneness.

This oneness is what the Lord desires; it is the well-pleasing will of God (Rom. 12:2). It is also the real building. The building is possible only in the Triune God, and it is prevailing only when Christ lives in us. Hallelujah, now we are in the Triune God, and we are allowing Christ to live in us! Now we can express the glory of the Father and experience the genuine oneness. May we all bring this word to the Lord in prayer.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ONE WHERE THE SON IS

Chapters 14 through 17 form a distinct section of the Gospel of John. In this portion of the Word, the Lord first gave a message to His disciples and then offered the prayer recorded in chapter 17. At the beginning of this section we have the subject of the Lord's last words to His disciples before His crucifixion: "If I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will receive you to Myself, so that where I am you also may be" (14:3). Here the Lord revealed His intention to bring His disciples to the place where He Himself was.

THE PLACE AND THE WAY

The place where the Lord is actually is not a place; it is a person. In John 14:4 the Lord said, "Where I am going you know the way." Thomas replied that they did not know where the Lord was going, and he asked how they could know the way (v. 5). Then the Lord said to him, "I am the way" (v. 6). This indicates that the way is a person, Christ Himself. The Lord also said to Thomas, "No one comes to the Father except through Me." This reveals that the place is the Father. Therefore, the way is a person, and the place is also a person. Not many Christians have seen this. The way is the Son; and the destination, the place to which the way leads, is the Father.

Although the Son is the way, He can be the way only through crucifixion and resurrection. An uncrucified Christ could not be the way. As a whole, the New Testament reveals that Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead to become the way for us to enter into the Father. By Him as our way we can be in the Father, just as He is in the Father.

IN THE FATHER
AND IN THE GLORY OF THE FATHER

In chapters 14 and 17 of John there are two *where*'s. The first, which we have already considered, is in 14:3, and the second is in 17:24. In this verse the Lord prayed, "Father, concerning that which You have given Me, I desire that they also may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory, which You have given Me." The *where* in 14:3 refers to the Father, but

the *where* in 17:24 refers to the glory of the Father. The Son is first in the Father and then in the Father's glory. The glory of the Father is the Father Himself expressed; hence, glory is the expression of the Father.

THE FATHER GLORIFIED IN THE SON'S GLORIFICATION

The Gospel of John speaks of the glorification of the Father in the glorification of the Son (13:31-32; 17:1). At the beginning of His prayer in chapter 17, the Lord prayed, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You" (v. 1). This is the subject of the Lord's prayer in this chapter. The Son was God incarnated in the flesh, and His flesh was a tabernacle for God's dwelling on earth (1:14). His divine element was confined in His humanity, just as God's shekinah glory was concealed within the tabernacle. Once, on the Mount of Transfiguration, His divine element was released from within His flesh and expressed in glory, as seen by the three disciples (Matt. 17:1-3). But it was concealed again in His flesh. Before this prayer He had predicted that He would be glorified and that the Father would be glorified in Him (John 12:23; 13:31-32). Now He was going to pass through death so that the concealing shell of His humanity might be broken for His divine element, His divine life, to be released. He was also to be resurrected so that His humanity might be uplifted into the divine element and that His divine element might be expressed so that His entire being, both divinity and humanity, might be glorified. Thus the Father would be glorified in Him.

When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He was in the Father, but, in a sense, He was not in the Father's glory. John 7:39 says, "Jesus had not yet been glorified." John 12:16 also indicates that Jesus was not yet in the Father's glory: "These things His disciples did not understand at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him." When the Lord was crucified and resurrected, He was glorified (Luke 24:26). This means that after His resurrection, Christ was not only in the Father but also in the Father's glory.

To be in the Father is to have the life and nature of the Father and to be one with Him in that life and nature. Glory, however, does not refer to life and nature; it refers to expression. Therefore, when we are in the Father, we have the Father's life and nature; but when we are in the Father's glory, we express the Father. We have pointed out that, in a sense, prior to His death and

resurrection, the Lord Jesus was not in the glory of the Father. However, in another sense, on occasion He was in the Father's glory, as He was on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-3). During that time on the mountain, Peter, James, and John beheld the Lord's glory. Furthermore, glory was evident both when the Lord fed the multitude and when He raised Lazarus from the dead. What people saw in Him at such times was the expression of the Father. After His resurrection Christ was always in the glory of the Father. In every sense Christ today is both in the Father and in the Father's glory.

We need to ask ourselves whether or not we are in the Father and in the Father's glory. Although we may have the confidence to say that we are in the Father, we may not have the boldness to say that we are in His glory.

GOD'S INTENTION

Many Christians think that the place spoken of in John 14:3 is the heavenly mansion. But if we consider this verse in its context, we will see that this place is the Father, not the heavenly mansion. We were born in Adam, not in the Father. However, it is a basic concept in the New Testament that God's intention is to put us into Himself through the death and resurrection of Christ. The fact that Christ's death and resurrection have opened the new and living way for us to enter into the presence of God is revealed in Hebrews 10. To enter into God's presence is to enter into God, for the Holy of Holies is actually God Himself.

When the Lord Jesus was speaking to His disciples the night before He was crucified, His disciples had not yet been brought into the Father, although they had been following the Lord for three and a half years. At that time, only the Lord Himself was in the Father. However, the Lord told the disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them and to cut the way into that place so that they could be in the Father where He was. The highest definition of God's salvation is that to be saved is to be brought by God into Himself. When we repented to God and believed in the Lord Jesus, we were brought into God the Father, although we might not have realized this at the time. According to the context of John 14, this is God's highest intention. Through the crucified and resurrected Christ, God has brought us into Himself.

ONE IN THE FATHER

AND IN HIS EXPRESSION

Entering into the Father is for oneness. Today many Christians are talking about oneness or unity. There is a difference between unity and oneness. We are not united, but we are one. For example, although the fluorescent lamps in the meeting hall are not united, they are one in the electricity and in the shining of the light. In a similar way, we are not united, but we are one in the indwelling Spirit. The indwelling Spirit is our oneness. We are not united to express God; however, we are one in God's expression, just as these fluorescent lamps are one in the shining of light. We are one in the Father and in His expression. Outside the Father and His expression there is no place for us to be one. Therefore, in order to have the genuine oneness, we must be brought into the Father.

Ephesians 4 tells us to keep the oneness of the Spirit. The way to keep the oneness is to remain in the Father. In ourselves we are separated from one another. But as long as we remain in the Father, we are in the oneness.

PERFECTED INTO ONE

In His prayer in John 17 the Lord did not pray that the disciples would be brought into the Father, for He assumed that they were in the Father already. By being in the Father the disciples had the genuine oneness, but they still needed to be perfected in this oneness. The reason you may not have the boldness to say that you are in the glory of the Father is that you have not yet been perfected into one. To be perfected into one means to be rescued from worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, and opinions and concepts.

John 17:23 is a difficult verse to understand: "I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one." As you read this verse, you may wonder what "I in them" and "You in Me" have to do with being perfected into one. Here the Lord does not say, "You in Me, and I in them." This seems more logical than saying, "I in them, and You in Me," for then the Father would be working in the Son, who would in turn be working in the believers to perfect them into one. But looking at this verse according to our experience, I believe it means that while Christ is working in us, the Father is working in Him. In other words, while the Son moves in us, the Father moves in Him. This twofold movement causes us to be perfected. "I in them"—this means that the Son is living and moving in us. "You in Me"—this means that the Father is

living and moving in the Son. By this twofold living and moving, we are perfected into one.

Recently, in one of the meetings in Anaheim, the saints were praying and sharing about the renewing of the mind. In order for our mind to be renewed, we must drop our concepts and opinions. However, in ourselves it is difficult to drop our opinions. The more we try to forsake our opinions, the more opinions we have. Actually, every thought is an opinion. None of us can stop thinking; we think even in our sleep. Even a little child has opinions. When the Son lives and moves in us with the Father living and moving in Him, we are rescued from opinions and are thereby perfected. Genuine oneness does not come from being taught or from holding certain doctrinal concepts. Real oneness comes from the Son living and moving in us with the Father living and moving in Him. Through this twofold living and moving we are perfected into one, and we express the Father.

LOSING THE ONENESS

It is a matter of great significance to be one where the Son is. None of the fallen people are in the Father; they are in themselves. Because they are not in the Father, they are not in the expression of God. On the contrary, they are in worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, and concepts and opinions. In the previous chapter we pointed out that the world is constituted of ambition, self-exaltation, and concepts, not merely of such superficial things as fashion and entertainment. The fallen people are altogether in themselves and in the world. In a sense, not even all those who have truly been saved are actually in the Father, for many still live in themselves, expressing worldliness, self-exaltation, ambition, and concepts. These four things are in the very fiber of our being. Even among the Christians who seek the Lord, not many are truly living in the Father and in the Father's glory. As a result, the genuine oneness is lost.

We all need to have a proper understanding of oneness. It is possible for us to meet together and still not be in the genuine oneness. We have true oneness only by living in the Father and in His glory.

Many Christians speak about the oneness in John 17 with no real understanding of what they are talking about. To a certain extent, this may be our situation also. The oneness in John 17 is not a matter of gathering, union,

or organization. The oneness here is the living in the Father and in His glory. Such a living rescues us from worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, and concepts.

Often we break the oneness unconsciously, perhaps even by our way of speaking. Our talk may be worldly, filled with ambition, self-exaltation, and concepts. Thus, in our speaking we may not be in the expression of the Father. Those who live in the Father's glory can sense this. Because the unbelievers live in themselves and in the world, they do not have oneness. Instead, they have Babel, that is, confusion with division. However, even seeking Christians, including us, may also be in Babel. We may have the correct terminology and we may know that the Lord's recovery is the recovery of the genuine oneness, but we may not actually have this oneness. If we are still in ourselves, not in the expression of the Father, the oneness is damaged.

As the indwelling Christ lives and moves within us with the Father living and moving in Him, we are rescued from our ambition, self-exaltation, and concepts. Sometimes when I am with the leading ones, I have the impression that they are too quick to express their opinion or to make decisions. This indicates that they have not been perfected into one. If we have been perfected, we will not be bold in expressing our opinions or in making decisions. We would be restrained by the indwelling Christ, and we would spontaneously check whether what we are about to say is of Christ or of the self. This is the perfecting. If all the leading ones are perfected in this way, there will be no dissension among them.

BROUGHT INTO THE FATHER'S GLORY

The Lord's prayer in John 17 reveals that we need to be brought onward from being just in the Father to being in the Father's glory. According to the book of Acts, it is possible to be brought into the glory of the Father within a very short period of time. In the Gospels the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, asked the Lord to give them a high position in the kingdom (Mark 10:35-41). The fact that the other ten disciples became indignant with them over this indicates that all twelve were competing for position. Therefore, among the disciples there was worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, and concepts. In the book of Acts, however, the situation is altogether different. In Acts 1 the one hundred and twenty prayed in one accord (v. 14). Thus, on the day of Pentecost they were not only in the Father but also in the Father's glory.

At that time there was no worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, or concepts. Instead, there was only the expression of the Father. The genuine oneness had been perfected among them.

ONENESS PREVAILING WHERE THE SON IS

Oneness is possible and prevailing only where the Son is. The Son is in the Father and in the Father's glory. Without doubt, Peter, John, and the other early disciples could boldly testify that they were in the Father and in His glory. Therefore, in the early chapters of Acts, the Lord's word in John 14 through 16 and His prayer in John 17 were fulfilled among them, for they had all been perfected into one. The Lord Jesus could boast, "Father, I am in You, You are in Me, and all these are in Us and in the glory. They are with Me where I am."

We need to be delivered from a false understanding of oneness. Oneness does not mean that we have the same concept or that we merely gather together without dissension or division. Genuine oneness is our living in the Father and in the Father's glory. Whatever we think, say, and do must be in the Father and in His glory. When we live in this way, we are perfected into one. This is not a matter of outward behavior but of inward reality, and we need to devote our full attention to it. Instead of living in ourselves—in our goal, purpose, ambition, feeling, or concept—we should live in the Father and in His expression. Then we will be one where the Son is.

CHAPTER NINE

ONE IN THE TRIUNE GOD AND IN HIS EXPRESSION

In John 17 the Lord Jesus prayed that we would be one in the Triune God. This concept is deep and profound, far beyond our understanding. In verse 23 the Lord said, "I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one." Such a word surpasses our comprehension. However, if we consider the type of the tabernacle in Exodus 26, we will find it much easier to grasp the meaning of the Lord's prayer for oneness in John 17.

A PICTURE OF OUR ONENESS IN THE TRIUNE GOD

Nearly all the spiritual realities in the New Testament are abstract. However, for most of the spiritual realities there are types or pictures in the Old Testament. In Exodus 26 we have a picture of the oneness in the Triune God. The standing boards of the tabernacle make up a corporate structure. The Ark inside the tabernacle was an individual item, but the tabernacle was a corporate entity. The Ark typifies Christ. However, the same materials used in making the Ark were also used for the standing boards. Both the Ark and the boards were made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. There was a total of forty-eight boards. When these boards were put together, they composed God's dwelling place. To be sure, God's dwelling place is a corporate matter. Hence, in the tabernacle with the forty-eight standing boards we see a picture of real oneness. In order to become one entity as God's dwelling place, the forty-eight boards had to be brought into oneness. They were one not in the acacia wood but in the gold that overlaid the wood.

The Ark is a type of Christ with His two natures: the human nature typified by the acacia wood and the divine nature signified by the gold. We have pointed out that these materials were also used in making the boards for the building of God's dwelling place. If the gold had been taken away from the standing boards, leaving only the acacia wood, the boards would immediately have fallen down. Even if they had remained upright, standing side by side, they would still not have been one. Rather, they would have been forty-eight

separate, individual boards. Their oneness was not in the acacia wood; it was in the gold. This clearly portrays the fact that our oneness is not in humanity but in divinity, in the Triune God. If the divine nature were taken away from us, we would immediately become detached from one another. Although we might still love one another and even embrace one another, we nevertheless would not be one. The oneness of the standing boards of the tabernacle, or this oneness in the gold, symbolizes our oneness in the Triune God.

ONE IN THE GLORY OF GOD

The gold was not only the oneness of the standing boards; it was also their glory. By being overlaid with gold, the standing boards bore the glory of the gold, for the shining of the gold was their glory, their expression. Anyone who entered into the tabernacle could see on every side the shining of the gold. Hence, the oneness of the forty-eight boards was not only in the gold, signifying God, but also in the shining of the gold, signifying the glory of God. In the same principle, our oneness today is in the Triune God and in His glory, His shining.

THE WOOD AND THE GOLD

We all have been saved, washed in the Lord's precious blood, forgiven of our sins, reconciled to God, and regenerated with the life of God by the Spirit. This means that we are genuine Christians. Let me now ask you this question: As one who has both the human nature and the divine nature, are you wood with gold in it, or are you wood overlaid with gold? In other words, with you, is the gold in the wood, or is the wood in the gold? If you simply have gold in the wood, you are finished with the oneness. If you say that you are wood in the gold, I would then ask you another question: What do others see when they come in contact with you, wood or gold? And if others see gold upon you, how much gold do they see? How much have you been overlaid with gold? Yes, we are wooden boards in the gold, but how much gold do we have upon us? This is a crucial question.

THE NEED FOR A WEIGHTY LAYER OF GOLD

Each standing board of the tabernacle was ten cubits high and one and a half cubits wide. This means its dimensions were fifteen feet in length by

twenty-seven inches in width. Certainly a large amount of gold was required to overlay a board of this size. If the layer of gold were too thin, it would not have been able to bear the weight of the board. To prepare the wooden boards was not too difficult; however, to overlay these large boards was quite a difficult task. Although we all are boards, we may be overlaid with a very thin layer of gold. Yes, we may be in the Triune God, but we may not be deeply in Him. Instead of being overlaid with gold, we may be merely gilded with gold, like Babylon the Great in Revelation 17. If the standing boards had been only gilded with gold, there would have been no gold for the rings that supported the weight of the boards. In order for the forty-eight heavy boards to be held together, they each had to be overlaid with a heavy layer of gold.

Although gold is glorious and shiny, it is somewhat soft. In like manner, the uniting God is also rather "soft." If we have just a little of Him, we shall not have a sufficient amount of gold for the oneness. Our experience proves this. Suppose you contact the Lord early in the morning and gain some gold. But when you see an unpleasant expression on the face of your husband or wife at the breakfast table, you are immediately offended. The thin layer of gold that was covering you seems to have disappeared. However, if you have been overlaid with a heavy layer of gold, you will not be offended, no matter how much unpleasantness you may have to face. Nothing can damage such a thick layer of gold. Although you may have a certain amount of gold, the amount you have may not be enough to keep you in the genuine oneness.

NOT ONE IN OUR HUMANITY

We have pointed out that according to the type of the standing boards of the tabernacle, our oneness is not in the wood but in the gold. Years ago, I thought that if I were humble, gentle, mild, kind, and meek, I could easily be one with others. Eventually, I learned that the more humble, gentle, mild, kind, and meek I was, the more difficult it was for me to be one with other believers. The reason for this is that those who have these characteristics are also very careful and are good faultfinders; therefore, they often condemn others. Those who are rough and tough, however, are not nearly as bothered about the mistakes of others. Whenever I am with the careful ones, I feel as if I am being observed, accused, and condemned. This does not mean, however, that we should endeavor to be rough, for both meekness and roughness cause difficulties.

I used to think that if both a husband and wife were meek, they would have a happy married life. But I have learned through experience that this is not true. It does not seem to matter whether or not both are meek, both are rough, or one is meek and the other is rough. Every married couple has problems. Many married ones compare their marriage with that of others. This indicates that they are somewhat dissatisfied with their marriage. When I made such a comparison in the past, I found out that other married ones were not more satisfied than I. My point here is that in our humanity it is impossible for us to be one. Instead of oneness, there is friction. The picture of the standing boards in Exodus 26 clearly shows that the oneness of the boards is altogether in the gold. And this gold must be weighty, thick, and sufficient to support a heavy board and hold it together with other boards. How important it is for us to have an adequate layer of gold! We need enough gold to bear the weight of the board.

BELIEVING GOD'S WORD CONCERNING GENUINE ONENESS

It is not an easy matter to acquire enough gold to thickly overlay a board of acacia wood fifteen feet long and twenty-seven inches wide. Humanly speaking, it is impossible. Likewise, it seems impossible for the saints to be truly one. Nevertheless, the fact that the tabernacle was built in the wilderness indicates that although it is impossible with man, it is possible with God. My experiences in the church life throughout the years have caused me much disappointment and discouragement. The encouragement I have today does not come from experience; it comes from the Word. Nothing written in the Word of God is vain. Eventually, everything written in God's Word will be fulfilled by Him. With God there are no impossibilities. Therefore, we need to believe what is written in the Word regarding genuine oneness. I believe that the time has come for God to see the actual oneness among us in His recovery.

My burden in this chapter is to point out that genuine oneness is absolutely not to be found in our humanity. Do not think that if you are humble or meek, you can be one with others. No matter whether we are meek or rough, slow or quick, proud or humble, educated or uneducated, we all have a problem with oneness. In ourselves, by ourselves, and with ourselves we simply cannot be one with others. In fact, we are not always one with ourselves. Once again we

need to emphasize that the oneness is in the gold, not in the acacia wood. This means that the oneness in the church is not in our humanity; it is altogether in the Triune God. In the past I wondered why the Lord did not mention such virtues as humility, meekness, and kindness in His prayer for oneness. Instead, He spoke mainly about being in the Triune God. The concept of John 17:21-23 is that of oneness in the Triune God. This reveals that oneness is not in humanity; it is only in the Triune God.

PERFECTED INTO ONE BY GAINING MORE GOLD

In no other portion of the Bible is the Triune God revealed in such a practical way as in chapter 17 of John. The various pronouns used—*I, Us, You*—indicate that the Triune God is related to our oneness. It is in the Triune God that we are perfected into one. To be perfected means to have more gold. Only when the boards were adequately overlaid with gold were they perfected into one. This indicates that to be perfected into one means to gain more of God. Surely mere teachings about oneness can never make us one.

Oneness is not a superficial matter. It is a matter of sinking deeply into the Triune God until we are fully overlaid with gold. We all need a great deal more of God. It is not sufficient simply to be coated with a thin layer of Him. If we truly have light on our need to be overlaid with gold, we will repent and say, "Lord, I repent that I am only gilded with gold. I have not yet been overlaid. What I have experienced of You is merely gilding. It is good for causing others to praise me, but it is not good for the real oneness, for holding me together with others. When even a small problem arises, my layer of gold is not sufficient, and the oneness is damaged. Lord, for the oneness, overlay me with an adequate amount of gold."

The more we are overlaid with gold, the more oneness we have. Nothing can damage the oneness that comes from our being overlaid with an ample quantity of gold. The more we have of God, the stronger is our oneness.

GOD OVERLAYING HIS RECOVERED PEOPLE WITH HIMSELF

Recently, some among us became dissenting, although they claimed to have seen the ground and to be for the Lord's recovery. Because they had not been solidly overlaid with gold, they caused the oneness to be damaged. The same

thing may happen in the future to anyone who is not fully overlaid with gold. Not having an adequate amount of God can create a serious problem with the oneness. The Lord's recovery is not a movement. We do not desire to gain a large number of people. In the recovery we are concerned for the genuine weight of gold. The important question is this: How much of God do you have? The Lord's recovery consists of God overlaying His recovered people with Himself.

Whenever I see that any are dissenting, I feel sorry for them. At the same time I realize that such a situation of dissension is a test, an exposure, and a purification. It is a test of what is real, of how much gold we actually have. We all need to gain more gold. It is not sufficient only to have a good heart, to know the truth, and to care for the Lord's recovery. Everything depends upon how much gold we have. We all can become dissenting if we are short of gold. This should be a warning to us all. Again I say that genuine oneness is possible only in the Triune God.

THE TOP PORTION OF GOD

We need to say a word now about the golden rings. Even after the boards had been overlaid with a heavy layer of gold, they could not be held together without the rings, which were receptacles. The overlaying gold was the ordinary gold, but the golden rings were the top portion of gold. This indicates our need for the top portion of God. For the practical oneness we need this special portion of Him. In order for there to be the oneness among the standing boards of the tabernacle, every board had to have this portion. It was the rings made from this portion of gold that held the uniting bars.

If we seriously consider the picture of the standing boards in Exodus 26, we will be deeply impressed with how much we are short of God. From 1925 I began to read articles in Christian magazines about the overcoming life. Although these articles provided help on how to be victorious, they did not say that we needed more of God. We do not need to learn so many methods. Our need is simply to sink into the Triune God and to gain more of Him. God is our truth, our way, our life, our everything. If we do not have God, we have nothing. Our problem is that we are short of God, and our need is to gain more of Him.

Perhaps you are one who is standing firmly in the church life. This is very good, but what about the oneness in the Triune God? We all need an adequate portion of God for the overlaying of the boards and the top portion of God for the rings that hold the uniting bars. When we have both the ordinary gold and the top portion of gold, we will have no problems with the oneness. However, if we do not gain the necessary gold, sooner or later we will have a problem. We need the solid oneness. This oneness is the adequate amount of God we have obtained. Do not rely on teachings or doctrines. Moreover, do not depend on your own love or your natural affection. Not even your steady will is trustworthy in keeping the oneness. Only one thing is dependable for oneness, and that is the adequate amount of God. Just as the standing boards could be one only in the gold, we can be one only by sinking into God.

Today the Lord needs the genuine oneness. If we do not have this oneness, we cannot go on in the recovery. Hence, the most vital and crucial matter is the genuine oneness. The only way to be kept in this solid, real oneness is to have an adequate amount of the experienced God. This is our need today.

CHAPTER TEN

THE INITIAL SPIRIT BECOMING THE UNITING SPIRIT (1)

We have seen that genuine oneness is possible only in the Triune God. The Lord Jesus has brought us into the Father, where He is. Before we were saved, we were outside the Father, and we had nothing to do with Him. But now that we have been saved, we have been transferred into the Father. However, we still need to be with Christ in the glory of the Father. To be in the Father's glory is to be in the Father's expression.

In a very real sense, all genuine Christians are in the Father. However, very few can truly say that they are in the Father's glory. In John 17 the genuine oneness of the believers is related to the two occurrences of the word *in: in* the Father and *in* the glory of the Father. The first *in* indicates that we have been saved, whereas the second indicates that we are one in the expression of God. By the Lord's mercy and grace, we are one with Him where He is, in the Father and in the Father's glory.

In order to understand the oneness in John 17, we need the type, the picture, of the tabernacle in Exodus 26. The oneness in the Triune God is very profound; it is a mystery. Hence, it is difficult for us to explain or define. Because this is the case with many spiritual realities in the Bible, there are types depicting the details of them. Because the oneness revealed in John 17 is abstract and mysterious, we cannot understand it adequately without the type in the book of Exodus. The tabernacle is a picture of the building up of the New Testament believers into God's dwelling place on earth. After the Old Testament tabernacle was erected, it was filled with the glory of God. From that time onward, the tabernacle became God's dwelling place on earth, the place where His glory rested.

BUILDED ONENESS

In the Old Testament tabernacle there were forty-eight boards. The number forty-eight is composed of six times eight. The number six signifies the natural man, and the number eight signifies resurrection. Therefore, the

number forty-eight signifies people who were formerly in the natural man but who have now become believers and have come into resurrection. When these believers are put together, or, to use a New Testament term, are built up together, they become the dwelling place of God. The oneness for which the Lord Jesus prayed in John 17 is this building.

In John 14 through 17 we find the concept of building. In John 14 the Lord Jesus said that He and the Father will come to the one who loves Him and will make Their abode with him (v. 23). Then in chapter 15 the Lord said, "Abide in Me and I in you." Furthermore, in John 17 He prayed concerning this abode, which is simply the oneness of His believers. If there is no oneness among the believers in Christ, how can there be any abode, any dwelling place, for God on earth today? The oneness, which is the building, in actuality is the church built up in a practical way. Many Christians talk about the church, but to them the word *church* is an empty term. For God's dwelling place to be a reality in a practical way, there must be the builded oneness. The oneness among the believers is the building up of the believers into one abode.

As we consider the picture of the tabernacle, we see both the details of this oneness and the steps by which we reach it. In the foregoing chapter we pointed out that, in themselves, the forty-eight standing boards were separate from one another. No matter how close to one another they might have been, they still were separate. The oneness among the standing boards was not in the boards themselves but in the gold that overlaid them, linked them, and united them. Each of the boards was overlaid with gold. Hence, it was the gold that made the tabernacle one unit as God's dwelling place. Therefore, God's dwelling place was constituted of the practical oneness of the boards. Without such a oneness it is impossible for God to have a dwelling place on earth.

THREE FUNCTIONS OF THE GOLD

Concerning the standing boards in the tabernacle, the gold had three functions. One of these functions was that of overlaying the boards. However, as we shall see, this was not the first function. Another function of the gold, seen in the golden rings, was that of linking the boards together. Eventually, the uniting function of the gold was seen in the golden bars. Therefore, the three functions of the gold were overlaying, linking, and uniting.

According to our natural concept, we may think that the boards were first overlaid with gold and that the rings were then welded to the gold that overlaid the boards. However, if the rings had been welded to the overlaying gold, they would not have been strong enough to bear the weight of the boards. I believe that the golden rings were placed on the boards directly, although I do not know by what means. Before the boards were overlaid with gold, the golden rings were attached to them. After that, the boards were overlaid with gold and then united by the golden bars. Therefore, the initial function of the gold was the attaching of the golden rings to the boards.

THE INITIAL SPIRIT

Until now, you may have thought that the rings were the product of the overlaying of the boards with gold. Sound Bible teachers and expositors agree that the rings signify the initial Spirit given to us, that is, the regenerating Spirit, the sealing Spirit mentioned in Ephesians 1. When we were regenerated, God put His Spirit into us. Immediately, the regenerating Spirit became the indwelling Spirit. This regenerating and indwelling Spirit is the initial Spirit given to us by God. When the prodigal son returned home, three things were put on him: the robe, the ring, and the sandals. The robe signifies Christ as our righteousness, and the ring, the sealing Spirit. In ancient times people used a signet ring as a seal. For this reason Bible teachers say that according to Luke 15, after we come back to the Father, the Father gives us Christ as our righteousness to cover us and the Spirit as the seal to testify that we belong to the Father and that we have become His inheritance.

Another aspect of the ring is revealed in the story of Rebekah. The servant sent by Abraham to obtain a wife for Isaac put a golden ring on Rebekah's nose. This indicates that the initial Spirit gives us discernment, which is related to the sense of smell. Furthermore, according to ancient custom, a nose ring signifies expression. Therefore, the initial Spirit, who is the sealing Spirit, is the Spirit for discernment and expression. We all have received such a Spirit. We have something within us sealing us and testifying to us that we belong not to the world but to the Father. No matter how dark this age is or how corrupt society may be, we have an inward testimony from the Spirit that we do not belong to this evil age. We belong to the Father, and the indwelling Spirit constantly reminds us of this fact. If we go to a certain worldly place after we are saved, something within will tell us that we do not belong there. This is the sealing Spirit.

This sealing Spirit gives us a sense of discernment, a spiritual "nose." With this divine sense of discernment we can detect what is of God and what is not of God. The unsaved, on the contrary, do not have this divine sense of smell. Spiritually speaking, all the believers should have a prominent nose. In the Song of Songs the Lord appreciates the nose of His seeking one, which He compares to a high tower (7:4).

We have pointed out that a nose ring also signifies expression, beautiful expression. The sealing Spirit is not only for discernment but also for the expression of God through us. This is the initial Spirit, the regenerating and indwelling Spirit typified in the Bible by golden rings. This Spirit seals us, gives us the faculty of discernment, and enables us to express God.

THREE RINGS SIGNIFYING THE TRIUNE GOD

Because the initial Spirit has been installed into our being, we have become the boards with the rings. How many rings were on each board? If you study the arrangement of the five bars on each side of the tabernacle, you will conclude that there must have been three rings on each board. The five horizontal crossing bars were arranged in three lines, with the middle bar going from one end to the other. Above and below the middle bar were lines made up of two bars each, half as long as the middle bar, joined at the midpoint. Therefore, on each vertical board there had to be at least one ring near the top, one at the middle, and one at the bottom. But were there more than one at each place? Exodus 26:24 speaks of "a single ring," or "the first ring" (ASV, margin). Hence, on every vertical board there was one ring at each of the three places the horizontal bars crossed it. This means that there were three rings on each board. These rings signify the Triune God. Therefore, the initial Spirit is the Triune God. When the Spirit comes to us, the Father and the Son come with Him. Hallelujah, we have the Triune God within us as the initial Spirit. We are boards not with one ring but with three rings. These three rings are the initial stage of our Christian life, and they indicate that the Christian life begins with the Triune God.

After the golden rings were installed on the boards, the boards were overlaid with gold. The overlaying caused the golden rings and the overlaying gold to have one appearance. This indicates the spreading of the sealing Spirit, and it corresponds to our experience.

POOR IN GOD

To have the rings without the overlaying gold is to be poor in gold. It is to have the Triune God as the rings but not as the gold overlaying the boards. To be in such a condition is to be poor in God. We need to learn to confess that we sometimes are poor in God. We may be rich in the self but quite poor in God. Therefore, we need the initial Spirit to spread throughout our being; that is, the initial gold must spread out in order to overlay us. As we grow in the Lord, the Spirit spreads within us and overlays us with Himself.

The gold did not overlay some inferior or corrupt material; it overlaid acacia wood. Although the acacia wood was very good, it was not the purpose of the tabernacle to express the wood. This indicates that God does not want man to be expressed; rather, He wants to see the expression of Himself. God desires for Himself to be expressed upon man. This requires that man be covered with God, even overlaid completely with Him. In our hymnal there is a hymn entitled "Not I but Christ." The chorus goes like this:

Oh, to be saved from myself, dear Lord,
Oh, to be lost in Thee,
Oh, that it may be no more I,
But Christ that lives in me.

(*Hymns*, #591)

To be lost in the Lord is to be overlaid with Him and to be hidden in Him. When we are concealed within the Lord Himself, He becomes the expression.

RICH IN GOD AND IN THE ONENESS

To have simply the three rings is not to be rich in the expression of the proper oneness. Genuine oneness requires a full expression, a full appearance, of the gold. Therefore, day by day we need to be overlaid more with gold. The more the initial Spirit spreads within us, the more oneness we have. In addition to admitting that we are poor in God, we should also learn to confess that we are poor in the oneness. However, by the Lord's grace we can also say, "Hallelujah, I am rich in Christ, and I am also rich in the oneness!" When a board has been fully overlaid with gold, that is, with the Triune God, it is rich both in God and in the oneness.

Since the time the Lord's recovery came to this country, we have emphasized the need to see the church and to know the ground of genuine oneness. Nevertheless, some still became dissenting and said that the church was wrong. However, the church is the church, no matter whether it is perfect or imperfect. For example, the United States is our country whether it is perfect or not. How foolish to say that this country is no longer our country because it may be wrong in certain respects! It is the same with the church. Even the Bible reveals that the church in this age may not be perfect; rather, it may have a number of defects. But no matter what defects there may be, the ground of the church remains unique, and the church is still the church. If we have seen the church and if we are faithful to stand on the ground of the church whatever the condition of the church may be at present, we will know that the church is simply the church.

TRANSFORMATION AND OVERLAYING

We have seen that the gold overlays acacia wood. It will never be applied to any other type of wood. This indicates that if our natural man has not been transformed, the Triune God will not overlay us. The Triune God will never overlay the flesh or the natural man. The overlaying requires transformation. This is a crucial matter.

All Christians have the initial Spirit, the three rings, but in many of them the gold has not spread because they lack transformation. They have not yet become the acacia wood. Instead, they may still be involved with the four negative things implied in John 17: worldliness, ambition, self-exaltation, and opinion. As long as part of us is still related to worldliness, that part of our being is not acacia wood. The same is true regarding ambition. Any ambitious element in our being cannot be overlaid with the Triune God. Before the overlaying can take place, that ambitious aspect of us must be transformed. Likewise, if I am still opinionated and filled with concepts, this proves that part of my being has not yet been transformed into acacia wood. The point here is not whether or not we express our opinions; it is the need for transformation. Some people would refrain from expressing their opinion if they were in the presence of the president of the United States. However, they would freely express opinions before the elders of the church. If the opinionated element of our being has been transformed, we will not express our opinion either before the president or before a little child. No matter

where we may be, we will simply have no opinions, for the part of our being that used to be opinionated will have been transformed into acacia wood.

I say once again that the Triune God as the initial Spirit will not overlay us until we are transformed. This is the reason the five foolish virgins in Matthew 25 still must buy oil. To buy oil means to be transformed in order to gain more oil. This is to be transformed in order to have more of the overlaying gold. If we are still sinful, worldly, and natural, the Spirit will have no way to overlay us. We may regard our natural being very highly and not be willing to allow the Lord to touch it. We may think that we are just right, neither proud nor humble, neither fast nor slow. As long as you think that you are so right, you are through with the experience of being overlaid with gold. Yes, you may be right, but you are natural. You are not acacia wood.

ONENESS REQUIRING TRANSFORMATION

My burden in this chapter is not to pass on Bible teachings. Rather, it is to point out the actual situation among the saints throughout the centuries concerning the oneness. It is a fact that it is very difficult to realize the proper oneness. I doubt that any other group of Christians has ever emphasized oneness as much as we have. Nevertheless, although we have stressed oneness again and again, some who were once in the recovery still dared to damage the oneness. They mocked the ground of the church and virtually trampled the church beneath their feet. Some say, “What is wrong with having a meeting in my home? We enjoy the Lord here.” Although you may have some enjoyment of the Lord in a small meeting in your home, you cannot have a feast like that typified by the yearly feasts held among the Israelites. Although the Israelites could enjoy the ordinary portion of the produce of the good land at home, they could enjoy the top portion only when they came together on Mount Zion, at the unique place chosen by God for their corporate worship.

Oneness requires transformation. As I was praying about this message, I reminded myself that I need to be careful, lest after preaching to others I myself become disapproved. We cannot afford to be careless with the Lord concerning spiritual matters such as transformation. Again I say, if we are not transformed, we cannot be covered with the overlaying gold.

I have no doubt that you all have the three rings, the Triune God as the initial Spirit sealing you, giving you the sense of discernment, and enabling you to express the Lord whom you love. But I am concerned that day after day may go by without you allowing the Lord to transform you. The Lord's overlaying us with Himself always goes along with transformation. Transformation may be likened to railroad tracks, and the overlaying to the train that moves on these tracks. If no tracks have been laid, it will be impossible for the train to move. A particular part of our being cannot be reached by the overlaying gold until that part of us has truly been transformed. This should not be a mere doctrine to us. We need to love the Lord, contact Him, get into His Word, pray, and walk according to the spirit. If we do these things, transformation will take place spontaneously.

THE SPREADING OF THE ONENESS

The overlaying of the gold is actually the spreading of the oneness. We already have the oneness of the Spirit spoken of in Ephesians 4. This oneness of the Spirit is the gold of the three rings. The initial Spirit, who is the Triune God, is the very oneness of the Spirit. Now this oneness must spread until it overlays our whole being. We have seen that God does not overlay anything natural. Whatever is not acacia wood must be transformed, that is, changed in nature and form. No matter how good our natural being may seem to be, we still need to be transformed. Transformation has nothing to do with self-correction or self-improvement. Transformation depends upon our loving the Lord, our contacting Him, our listening to His word, our praying to Him, and our walking according to the spirit. As long as we have these five things, we are living Christ. We are taking Christ as our life. Therefore, transformation takes place spontaneously. The overlaying of gold occurs simultaneously with this transformation. Wherever transformation is, there the overlaying gold is also.

This message is not the result of Bible study; it is the result of intense suffering. Because of this suffering, I have been greatly exercised before the Lord in an attempt to understand the situation. Gradually, the Lord showed me that certain dear ones had nothing more than the three rings. With them, there was no spreading of the gold because there was no transformation. The reason there was no transformation was that in the experience of these dissenting ones there was no dealing of the cross. In the next chapter we will see that the standing boards are crossed by the uniting bars. This indicates

that although we may be standing upright, the uniting Spirit crosses us. Some today hate the cross; they even despise the word *cross*. But without the cross there can be no resurrection. The cross is very positive because it ushers us into resurrection. It is in resurrection that our natural life is transformed. This transformation in resurrection brings in the overlaying gold.

THE ONLY SAFEGUARD

Only when we all have been transformed and overlaid with gold will it no longer be possible for there to be dissension among us. Until we are thus transformed and overlaid, we will always be in danger of falling into dissension. The only safeguard is to be overlaid with gold. We must not go on according to the natural being; instead of a natural humanity we must have a transformed humanity with the very humanity of Jesus as its element. In other words, as *Hymns*, #1146 says, we must be "human, Jesusly." Only the humanity of Jesus, which is a humanity in resurrection, is qualified to be overlaid with gold.

I beg you to bring this matter to the Lord in prayer. We need much prayer in order to realize that the steps to the genuine oneness come from our experience of God. Do not think that simply by reading this chapter you have the reality of what it is talking about. In order to have the reality of this word, we need time and much prayer. The realization of oneness is not easy, because it is a divine reality. The divine nature must be wrought into our being. The initial Spirit, the Triune God installed in us as the rings, must spread throughout our being. This spreading requires transformation, and transformation demands that we take Christ as our life by loving Him, contacting Him, listening to His word, praying to Him, and walking in the spirit. If this is our experience, we will be transformed and overlaid with gold. Then the oneness will be completed within us, and we will be safeguarded from dissension and division.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE INITIAL SPIRIT BECOMING THE UNITING SPIRIT (2)

The oneness mentioned by the Lord in His prayer in John 17 is mysterious, for it is a oneness realized and practiced in the Triune God. Thank the Lord for the clear picture of this oneness in the building of the tabernacle in the Old Testament. The building of the tabernacle in Exodus corresponds to the oneness in John 17. The Lord prayed that all His believers would be one so that God could have a dwelling place on earth. The tabernacle was such a dwelling place. The oneness seen in the tabernacle is simply the building of the tabernacle.

The tabernacle had forty-eight boards. Because these boards were built together to be the dwelling place of God, the tabernacle is a clear picture of the oneness in the Triune God. This oneness is not in the acacia wood out of which the boards were made; it is in the gold that overlaid them. The wood and the gold signify the Christian's human and divine natures. The human nature is signified by the acacia wood, and the divine nature, by the gold. Each board was made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. Because we Christians are both wooden and golden, we are wonderful.

We have seen that acacia wood signifies not our fallen nature but our transformed and uplifted nature. We have been regenerated, and now we are undergoing the process of transformation. Day by day a change is taking place in our nature. This change is transformation. Although I have not been fully perfected yet, I can testify boldly that a great change has taken place within me since I became a Christian. This is not a mere change in behavior but a change in nature. As we are being transformed into acacia wood, we are also being overlaid with gold. We worship the Lord and give Him praise that daily He is overlaying us with Himself as the gold. Our oneness is in this gold.

THREE ASPECTS OF ONENESS

This oneness has three aspects. The first aspect, the initial aspect, is with the golden rings. I am quite certain that the golden rings were attached to the

boards before the boards were overlaid with gold. Thus, the first step was to attach the rings to the boards, and the second step was to overlay the boards with gold. The third step was to make the uniting bars, which held the forty-eight boards together and brought them into oneness. This oneness is the building, which is the dwelling place of God.

Without the picture of the tabernacle, we cannot adequately understand the oneness spoken of in John 17. Since my youth I have devoted much attention to John 17. But because I was short of experience and did not see the picture of the oneness portrayed in the tabernacle, I did not have an adequate understanding of the Lord's prayer for oneness in John 17. But now, after years of experience and even of suffering, I can say that the oneness for which the Lord prayed in John 17 is the very oneness seen in the tabernacle. By considering the picture of the tabernacle, we can have the proper understanding of the practical oneness for which the Lord Jesus prayed.

ONENESS IN THE TRIUNE GOD

This oneness is in the Triune God. The boards were one in the gold, and the gold signifies the nature of God. We have pointed out that on each board there were the three rings signifying the Triune God, who is the sealing Spirit we have received. This Spirit is not merely the Spirit of God, but the Spirit of God with the Father and the Son. In John the Lord Jesus said that the Spirit would be sent from the Father (15:26). The Greek preposition rendered "from" should actually be rendered "from with." This means that the Spirit is sent not only from the Father but also with the Father. After He sent the Spirit, the Father did not remain in the heavens. No, when the Father sent the Spirit, the Spirit came to us with the Father. Therefore, to have the Spirit in us is also to have the Father in us. In like manner, the Son is with the Father. From eternity to eternity the Son has always been and always will be with the Father. Therefore, to have the Spirit in us is also to have the Father and the Son in us. Hence, we have the Triune God as the three rings. The Father is embodied in the Son, and the Son is realized as the Spirit. Therefore, when we have the Spirit, we have the Father and the Son. This is the initial Spirit, the sealing Spirit, we have received as the rings. This life-giving Spirit has regenerated us and now is dwelling in us.

THE SPREADING OF THE SEALING SPIRIT

After we are regenerated, the sealing Spirit begins to spread throughout our being. With some of us this spreading may take place very slowly. Nevertheless, it is going on. Many of us can testify that the spreading of the gold has increased since we came into the Lord's recovery. As we pointed out in the foregoing chapter, being overlaid with gold always goes along with transformation, for the gold overlays only acacia wood. The golden nature of God will never overlay our fallen nature, but will overlay only our regenerated and transformed nature. Our fallen nature is corrupt wood, but our regenerated and transformed nature is acacia wood. This is confirmed by our experience and by observing the experience of many other saints.

We have received not only the seal of the Spirit but also the sealing of the Spirit (see *Life-study of Ephesians,* Message 12). This sealing is spreading in our being, overlaying us with gold. From the time we were regenerated, we have had something very precious within us. By reading the Word we have come to see that this precious substance is the divine nature added to us with God the Spirit. Day by day this Spirit with the divine nature is spreading within us. The more we pray, have fellowship with the Lord, read His Word, and tell Him that we love Him and want to be one with Him, the more we sense that something is spreading within us and overlaying us with gold.

THE UNITING SPIRIT

Although we may have the initial Spirit and some experience of being overlaid with gold, we still need to go on to the uniting Spirit. After the boards, the rings, and the overlaying gold, we still need the bars. Without the bars the forty-eight boards cannot be one, for it is the bars that hold them together. What do the bars signify? Since we are the boards, the bars cannot represent us. Furthermore, the rings signify the Triune God, and the gold covering the boards signifies the spreading of God. Just as the rings are a symbol of the initial Spirit, the bars are a symbol of the uniting Spirit. The boards stand upright, and the bars unite them by crossing them horizontally.

Now we need to consider some details of the bars as the uniting Spirit. The first thing we should notice is that the bars that unite the boards are in three groups of five. With the initial Spirit, on each board there were three rings signifying the Triune God. Now with the bars there are three groups of five, also signifying the Triune God. Furthermore, in every group of five bars there were three lines, the middle line, which reached from end to end, and the top

and bottom lines, which were each composed of two bars joined at the midpoint. There were three sets with five bars in each set, each set was arranged in three lines, and on each standing board there were three rings. The number three, therefore, indicates the Triune God.

We have pointed out that each set of bars contained five bars. The number five is composed of four plus one. One denotes the unique God, and four denotes the creatures. Therefore, the number five signifies the Triune God added to His creatures. The uniting bars are the three-one God added to His creatures. The uniting Spirit today is simply the Triune God, the three-one God, added to His creatures.

In the Bible the number five signifies responsibility borne by the man with God added to him. For this reason the Gospel of Matthew speaks of five wise virgins and five foolish virgins. Also, the Ten Commandments were put on two tablets, with five commandments inscribed on each tablet. We cannot bear the responsibility ourselves, and God will not bear it Himself. On the contrary, the bearing of responsibility is a matter of incarnation, of God added to man. This is the significance of the number five. Therefore, the bars signify the three-one God added to His creatures to bear responsibility. What a wonderful definition this is!

KEEPING THE ONENESS

We come now to a rather difficult question: Why do the uniting bars have acacia wood within? For us, the standing boards, to have acacia wood overlaid with gold is quite understandable. But what does it mean to say that the uniting Spirit has humanity, typified by acacia wood, overlaid with divinity, typified by gold? Some Christian teachers have pointed out that the uniting bars signify the uniting Spirit, but no one has explained why in the uniting Spirit there is acacia wood.

Ephesians 4:2 and 3 help us to understand this matter. Verse 3 speaks of being diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace. Although the oneness is the oneness of the Spirit, it is a oneness that we must keep. The keeping of the oneness is our responsibility, not the responsibility of the Spirit. Here we have both divinity, the oneness of the Spirit, and humanity, the keeping of the oneness. If we have the oneness of the Spirit without the keeping of the oneness, we will be short. Therefore, we need to be

diligent to keep the oneness. The keeping of the oneness spoken of in verse 3 is related to the virtues mentioned in verse 2. We must keep the oneness of the Spirit by having lowliness, meekness, and long-suffering and by bearing one another in love. Lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, and the bearing love are all human virtues signified by the acacia wood within the uniting bars. Therefore, in order to keep the oneness of the Spirit, we need a humanity with certain virtues.

Such virtues are not the product of our flesh or natural man. Rather, they originate from our spirit, not from our soul. Hence, this is a spiritual meekness, a spiritual lowliness, a spiritual long-suffering, and a spiritual bearing in love.

COOPERATING WITH THE UNITING SPIRIT

The uniting bars are not the Holy Spirit alone but the Holy Spirit with the human spirit. In the Epistles it is often difficult to decide whether the Greek word for *spirit* should be rendered with a capital letter or a lowercase letter. In other words, it is difficult to determine whether the Greek word refers to the Holy Spirit or to the human spirit. Often it denotes the mingled spirit, the Holy Spirit mingled with our spirit. Therefore, the uniting bars are not only the Triune God added to man to bear responsibility; the Spirit represented by these bars also includes the human spirit. This means that if our spirit does not cooperate with the uniting Spirit, the oneness cannot be realized in a practical way. The uniting Spirit is actually the mingled spirit. In this mingled spirit there is both divinity and humanity, both gold and acacia wood.

Whether or not the uniting Spirit can actually join us into one depends on whether or not we are willing to cooperate with this Spirit. If the Spirit does not have a way to pass through us, there can be no oneness. In order for the uniting Spirit to pass through us and thus join us with others, we need to receive the cross, for the uniting Spirit always crosses the standing boards. If we are willing to receive the cross, our spirit will cooperate with the uniting Spirit. Then the Spirit with our spirit will join us to another believer in Christ. We are joined into one by our spirit cooperating with the crossing Spirit. However, most of the time we are not willing to be crossed by the Spirit.

The uniting Spirit is seeking to cross through us to others. The question is whether or not we are willing to go along with Him. Whenever our spirit is

one with the crossing Spirit, we experience the uniting Spirit. Every time we walk according to the Spirit, we experience the crossing of the Spirit. We stand, but we are crossed by the Spirit. The Spirit will never cross through us unless our spirit goes along with Him. When our spirit agrees with the crossing Spirit, we have the uniting bar. This is the unique way to keep the oneness. This understanding of the uniting bars is confirmed by our experience.

STEPS TO ONENESS

There are several steps to the oneness portrayed in the tabernacle. First, we have the initial Spirit, who is the regenerating and sealing Spirit. Then we have the process of transformation by which we are transformed into acacia wood. Along with transformation there is the overlaying of the wood with the divine nature. Furthermore, the Spirit is continually endeavoring to cross us, to pass through us. In order for this to take place, our spirit, with our mind, will, and emotion, must go along with Him. Only then do we have the uniting bars, the five bars in three rows to unite the believers into one. When we have all these aspects, we have the oneness in the Triune God revealed in John 17. This means that we have the building in the overlaying and uniting gold.

CROSSED BY THE UNITING SPIRIT

We need to emphasize the importance of being crossed by the uniting Spirit. The uniting Spirit not only strengthens us in standing; it also crosses us. Something passes through us not vertically but horizontally. Although we are standing, we still need to be crossed. The standing Spirit must also be the crossing Spirit. If we are willing to be crossed, it means that our spirit goes along with the crossing Spirit. The Spirit will never join us to others without this willingness. The uniting Spirit cannot unite me to you unless your spirit is willing to cooperate with the Spirit. When the uniting Spirit comes to me, it comes with the spirit of another brother, and when it goes from me to still another, it goes with my spirit. The uniting Spirit cannot unite us Himself. He must have the cooperation of our spirit. This means that we must be willing to be crossed by Him.

If we see this matter, then we will realize why, even after more than nineteen centuries, the oneness for which the Lord prayed in John 17 has not yet come into existence. Among today's Christians there is little

transformation or overlaying with the divine nature. Furthermore, there is little crossing of the Spirit and little cooperation of the human spirit with the divine Spirit. Hence, there is no oneness. But what about the situation among us in the Lord's recovery? We need to ask ourselves how much we have of transformation, the overlaying with the divine nature, the crossing of the uniting Spirit, and the cooperation of our spirit with the uniting Spirit. Are you willing to allow the Spirit to cross through you? Yes, you may be standing firmly for the Lord's testimony as one of the boards, but are you willing to be crossed by the Spirit? Can the Spirit pass through you? Many times the Spirit cannot pass through us because we are not willing to be crossed by Him. Is your spirit willing to go with the Spirit to another saint? Please do not think that the Spirit of God Himself alone can unite us. No, He needs our spirit to go along with Him. This is the meaning of keeping the oneness of the Spirit with all lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, and with bearing one another in love.

THE UNITING BOND OF PEACE

Ephesians 4:3 speaks of the uniting bond of peace. This bond of peace is the cooperation of our spirit with the uniting Spirit. Years ago when I read Ephesians 4:2 and 3, I paid attention only to the matter of keeping the oneness of the Spirit. I did not consider all the related matters mentioned in verse 2. Eventually, I came to see the relationship between these two verses. I can testify assuredly from my experience that we have the uniting bond of peace only when our spirit goes along with the Spirit. Certain brothers may come together, but there may be no peace among them. They will not have the uniting bond of peace until their spirits are willing to go along with the crossing Spirit. This is the way to keep the oneness of the Spirit, and this is also the proper understanding of the uniting bars in the tabernacle. The uniting bars are the mingled spirit, the divine Spirit mingled with the human spirit to become the uniting bond of peace. This is the way to have the genuine building.

WILLING TO BE CROSSED BY THE UNITING SPIRIT

As believers in Christ, we all have the initial Spirit. We are also undergoing the process of transformation and of being overlaid with the divine nature. But I am concerned that when the crossing Spirit comes to us, many are not willing for Him to cross through. We need to say, "Lord, my spirit is willing to

go along with You. I am willing for You to cross through me." If you have this willingness, you will immediately and spontaneously have the uniting bars, and you will experience the practical oneness. The Holy Spirit with your spirit will pass on to the spirit of another saint. This will in turn help other brothers and sisters to be willing for the uniting Spirit to cross them.

The uniting Spirit crosses through all the members of the Body when the spirits of the members are willing to be crossed by Him. Through this willingness and this crossing, we have the oneness. It was in this way that the entire tabernacle was brought into one. This is the oneness for the building, the dwelling place of God.

If you consider the picture of the tabernacle in the light of John 17, you will see the truth concerning oneness. To have such a oneness we need the initial Spirit, we need the transformation into acacia wood, we need the overlaying with gold, and we need the crossing of the uniting Spirit according to the willingness of our spirit to cooperate with Him. Then we will have the oneness and the building. This building is God's dwelling place with man on earth.