THE MENDING MINISTRY OF JOHN

Witness Lee



LIVING STREAM MINISTRY

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by Witness Lee

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PREFACE

This book is composed of messages given by Brother Witness Lee in three conferences given in the spring of 1980. Chapters one through five were given in Copenhagen, Denmark in April 1980. Chapters six through eleven were given in Seattle, Washington in May 1980. Chapters twelve through seventeen were given in New York City, New York in April 1980.

CHAPTER ONE

GOD INCARNATED TO BE OUR REDEEMER AND OUR LIFE

Scripture Reading: John 1:1, 12-14, 16-17, 29; 3:14-15; 12:24

THE TWO MINISTRIES OF CHRIST

The New Testament reveals to us that Christ has taken two major steps. The first was His incarnation, which opened the way for Him to fulfill His earthly ministry. He finished His earthly ministry when He accomplished redemption on the cross. The second step was His resurrection and ascension, at which time He began His heavenly ministry. By these two ministries, His earthly ministry and His heavenly ministry, Christ has accomplished His divine commission. To see His earthly ministry is simple, but His heavenly ministry is hidden. Nonetheless, without it Christ cannot fulfill God's eternal purpose, which is to have the church as Christ's Body.

The accomplishment of redemption brought fallen mankind back to God. Once this earthly ministry was completed, however, Christ still needed to build up His Body and produce the church in order for God's purpose to be realized. This heavenly ministry, which is far greater and more significant than His earthly ministry, is unfolded to us in the writings of Paul.

THE COMPLETING MINISTRY OF PAUL

In Colossians 1:25 Paul tells us that his ministry was to complete the word of God. If the New Testament lacked the fourteen Epistles of Paul, the divine revelation would not be complete. From his writings, and only in his writings, do we learn:

(1) Christ lives in us. He must be our life, and we must be His living.

(2) Christ is all-inclusive. He is the embodiment and mystery of God, the reality of every positive thing, our life, and the constituent of the new man.

(3) Christ is the Head, and the church is His Body.

No other books in the Bible tell us that the church is the Body of Christ, that this Body is the center of God's eternal purpose, and that God's purpose is not only to redeem His fallen people but also to regenerate them and make them the Body of Christ to express Christ. This revelation granted to Paul brought to completion the word of God.

THE NEED FOR A MENDING MINISTRY

After the time of Paul, whose writings were finished about A.D. 66, differing teachings crept in to damage the church. In the quarter century after the death of Paul, Satan insidiously brought in false teachings regarding both the person of Christ and the church. Heresies came in, claiming that Christ was not God, that Christ was not the Son of God, and even that He did not come in the flesh.

To counter these heresies, around A.D. 90 the apostle John began writing his books. One was a Gospel, three were Epistles, and the last was Revelation. As we study these writings, we will see that John was mending what was damaged. Paul completed the revelation in the Bible, but before too long it was damaged. Thus, after the completing ministry there needed to be a mending ministry. With these two ministries the Bible is concluded. Notice that with John's writings the Gospels are concluded; the Gospel of John was the last to be written. Then his three Epistles are the conclusion of the Epistles. Finally, his Revelation brings to an end the New Testament and even the whole Bible.

Without the ministries of Paul and John, the Bible would have no conclusion. Their main goal, furthermore, is to reveal Christ's heavenly ministry. In their writings we can see what Christ is now doing in the heavens. Yes, they sometimes refer to Christ's earthly ministry, but primarily they are concerned with the carrying out of His heavenly ministry.

If my jacket gets torn, it needs to be mended. The part that is repaired will be even stronger than the original fabric. So it was with the writings of John. Paul wrote strongly of the church as the Body of Christ. John, however, was even stronger. He described the churches as lampstands, which would eventually consummate in the New Jerusalem. How much stronger is the city than the Body!

With this chapter we will begin a series on the mending ministry of John. We will begin with the Gospel of John.

John's Gospel, though it has twenty-one chapters, has only two main sections. Chapters 1 through 12 form one section; chapter 13 stands in the middle, belonging to neither the first nor the second section; and then chapters 14 through 21 comprise the second section.

GOD BECOMING INCARNATE

The first section presents Christ as God. The very first verse says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Word was not only with God; He *was* God. I would ask you, Is Christ the Son of God or God Himself? Even in John 1 this problem arises; verse 18 refers to Him as "the only begotten Son." In 1:1 Christ is God; in 1:18 He is the Son of God. I leave this question for you to consider.

Verse 14 further says regarding the Word, "And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us... full of grace and reality." God became flesh. No wonder Paul says, "Great is the mystery of godliness" (1 Tim. 3:16). God was manifested in the flesh. Jesus of Nazareth was nothing less than God. He was God incarnate. Hebrews 13:8 does tell us, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes, even forever." In eternity past, however, Christ was not a man. *In the beginning* (John 1:1) means in eternity past. Then He was God but not man. A day came, however, when He became incarnate. In the incarnation He took on another form. There was no change in His divine nature; only His outward appearance changed. He existed in the form of God "but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:6-7).

GRACE AND REALITY BROUGHT TO MAN

For what purpose did Christ become a man? It was in order that grace and reality might come to us (John 1:14). What is reality? Everything in the universe is vanity. Nothing is real except God. Without Him, whatever we have is vanity. God has come, by the incarnation, to be our reality.

What is grace? The Word incarnate was "full of grace." Verse 17 goes on to tell us, "The law was given through Moses; grace and reality came through

Jesus Christ." Many Christians consider material blessings as God's grace. From this verse, however, it is clear that before the coming of the Lord Jesus, grace was not available to man. There may have been material blessings in the Old Testament, but there was not grace. When God became a man, grace came. Grace is God as our enjoyment. When we receive Him, we have reality. This reality becomes our enjoyment, which is grace. Grace is God Himself as our life, our light, our holiness, and our righteousness. To enjoy God in such an all-inclusive way is to enjoy grace. Before Christ came, such an enjoyment of Him was not possible. Now that He has become incarnate, He can be man's reality and grace.

Verse 16 says, "Of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace." We have received of His fullness. This includes countless items: joy, comfort, peace, rest, forgiveness, redemption, righteousness, patience, holiness, power, light, sight, etc. In ourselves we lack all these. We do not have patience. We are not submissive. All that we have is negative—sins, weaknesses, and shortcomings. The Bible tells wives to submit to their husbands (Eph. 5:22) and husbands to love their wives (v. 25). Who can fulfill this word? Women are not submissive, and men are not loving. But both submission and love are included in the fullness we have received from Christ. We have received of His fullness, grace upon grace.

THREE FORMS OF CHRIST

There are three major problems that needed to be taken care of. How could our sins be taken away? How could Satan be destroyed? How could God's life be ours?

In the first twelve chapters of John these problems are fully resolved. Christ is portrayed in three different ways. These three pictures are of three different aspects of His death.

The Lamb

In John 1:29 Christ is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." Christ died first as the redeeming Lamb. On the cross He died for our sins and redeemed us by His blood. His death has taken away our sins.

The Bronze Serpent

In 3:14 the Lord, referring to Himself, said that "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up." In the eyes of God, when Christ was lifted up on the cross, He was in the form of a bronze serpent, that is, in the likeness of the flesh of sin (Rom. 8:3). Why was He in this form? It was "that through death He might destroy him who has the might of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14). By the death of the cross He judged Satan and destroyed him. Christians appreciate Christ's dying for us as the Lamb of God, but few have ever heard that He died also in the form of a bronze serpent.

The story of the bronze serpent is recounted in Numbers 21:5-9. Two kinds of serpents are described. The first kind was the fiery serpents that bit and poisoned the children of Israel as a punishment for their complaining. The second kind was the serpent of bronze, which Moses made at the Lord's command and set on a pole; anyone who was bitten and looked at this serpent was healed.

Christ was like that serpent of bronze. He was lifted up on the cross so that "everyone who believes into Him may have eternal life" (John 3:15). Because the devil was judged and destroyed by Christ's death, we may have eternal life by believing into Him.

The Grain of Wheat

In 12:24 the Lord likened Himself to a grain of wheat: "Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Christ died in the form of a grain of wheat in order to release the divine life and impart it into us. Originally, life is only in the single grain. But through death the life in this grain is released and imparted into many grains. We are those grains of wheat.

CHRIST AVAILABLE TO US

Have you seen these three aspects of the death of Christ? It is because of all three that we are able to receive of Christ. We were sinners, under the dark power of Satan and without the divine life. Through His death as the Lamb, Christ bore away our sins; as the bronze serpent, He destroyed Satan; as the grain of wheat, He imparted the divine life into us. Our sins are gone. The devil is destroyed. God's life in Christ is available to us. There is no longer any

hindrance for us to receive all things of God. We have boldness through the blood of Christ to enter the Holy of Holies to receive mercy and find grace for timely help.

Whatever you need of Christ you may receive. Right now if you need refreshing, you can turn to Him and declare, "Hallelujah! My sins have been taken away, the devil has been destroyed, and life has been imparted into me!" You will be refreshed by Him. If you ask me what my need is, I will reply that my need right now is for utterance. While I am speaking, I am looking to the Lord for power, for impact, for utterance. I need a fresh, instant utterance in order to gain you for the Lord. As I speak, I am praying, "Lord, gain Scandinavia! Gain Sweden! Norway! Denmark! Finland!" I am hungry for this. I need the Lord to satisfy my hunger. You too can have your hunger and thirst satisfied. To be hungry for Him indicates that you are pursuing Him. How is it that you can pursue Him? It is because on the cross He took away your sins and destroyed Satan. The devil is under your feet. Sins and Satan are on the negative side; on the positive side, the divine life has been imparted into you, making you a child of God.

GRAINS FOR A LOAF

John 1:12-13 reveals that we are God's children: "As many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those who believe into His name, who were begotten not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." How is it that we human beings can be children of God? It is because God's life has come into us. This came about because a grain of wheat fell into the ground and died. The life in that grain has been released into many grains. We are those many grains, God's children possessing His life.

What are the grains of wheat used for? They are used to make a loaf of bread. "Seeing that there is one bread, we who are many are one Body; for we all partake of one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17). The many sons of God are the members of Christ for Him to have a living Body.

REPAIRING THE DAMAGE

What we have covered in this chapter is part of John's mending ministry. Even in our time this matter of the many grains possessing the divine life so

that Christ may have a Body is almost entirely overlooked by the vast majority of Christians. This item was damaged. John stepped in to repair the damage. The other Gospels do not cover this. It is John who tells us that our Christ was God; that He became a man to bring us reality and grace; and that for us to receive Him, He died on the cross—as the Lamb of God to take away our sins, as the bronze serpent to destroy the devil, and as the grain of wheat to release the divine life into many grains, children of God for the Body of Christ.

This is the first main point of John's mending ministry. Paul's ministry had completed the word of God a quarter of a century earlier. In the years after that, many damaging teachings found their way into the church. Because of this damage, John wrote his Gospel, his Epistles, and Revelation. These writings were to repair the torn fabric of the church. How much we owe to his mending ministry!

CHAPTER TWO

CHRIST, AS THE EMBODIMENT OF THE FATHER, BECOMING THE INDWELLING SPIRIT THROUGH DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Scripture Reading: John 14:8-11, 16-20, 23; 15:4-5; 16:13-15; 7:37-39; 20:22

LIFE AND SPIRIT

Life is wonderful because it is mysterious. Even our human life is a mystery. How much more the life of God! Life is mentioned repeatedly in the Gospel of John, far more than in the other Gospels. The life John speaks of is the eternal, uncreated life, which is God Himself. Surely such a life is a mystery. Eventually, John tells us that this life is the divine Spirit Himself.

John 1:1 says that the Word was God. Then 1:14 says that the Word became flesh. Yet 4:24 says that God is Spirit. In eternity past there was the Word; this Word was God. He became flesh, but He is also Spirit. Who can explain this? Flesh and spirit are almost invariably put in contrast to each other. Yet here we have the Word, God, flesh, and Spirit all related to each other.

The Lord further referred to the Spirit in John 14, where He said that He would "ask the Father" to send "the Spirit of reality" who would abide with the disciples and then be in them (vv. 16-17). Then in the next verse He said, "I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you," thus implying that the Spirit's coming was the Lord's own coming. In that day He would be in them (v. 20), meaning that when the Spirit of reality indwelt them, the Lord Jesus Himself was in them. It is clear that the Lord here was identifying Himself with the Spirit.

After the Lord's resurrection He appeared to His disciples (20:19-22), showing them His hands and His side. Then "He breathed into them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit." The Lord came not teaching or commanding but breathing. He breathed the Holy Spirit into them. In Greek the word for *spirit* and the word for *breath* are the same. Thus, we may also

translate what the Lord said as, “Receive the holy breath.” When He breathed into them, what they received was His breath. They received the Holy Spirit by breathing in the Lord’s breath.

CHRIST AS THE LAMB, THE BRONZE SERPENT, AND THE GRAIN OF WHEAT

As we covered in the previous chapter, the first section of John is chapters 1 through 12. In this section we learn that Christ was God but that one day He became flesh. He became a man so that He might accomplish redemption for us and might thus open the way for us to receive the divine life. In His redemptive death He was in three forms. He was the Lamb of God for our redemption, He was in the form of a bronze serpent to destroy the devil, and He was in the form of a grain of wheat, falling into the ground to release the divine life into many grains.

How much we should rejoice! Our sins have been taken away, the devil has been destroyed, life has been released and imparted into us, and we have thus been made the many sons and the members of Christ’s Body.

CHRIST MEETING EVERY NEED

In these first twelve chapters of John there are nine cases presented to us. These cases demonstrate that Christ is able to meet the need of anyone, from whatever segment of society he may come and however hopeless he seems.

Nicodemus

The first case was of an upright, God-seeking man named Nicodemus (3:1-21). To such a good person the dear Lord said, “You must be born anew” (v. 7). If such a refined person nonetheless needed regeneration, how much more do the evil ones need it. What is born of the divine Spirit is the human spirit (v. 6). By believing in this dear Christ, we are regenerated; this second birth, in our spirit, makes us children of God. Nicodemus, however good he was, was still a child of man. The same is true of us. We do not need to check whether we are good or bad. Even if we are the best, we still do not have God’s life until we are reborn.

How marvelous it is that we have two fathers! We have an earthly father, to whom we owe our physical life. But we have also a spiritual father, who is God. We are God's children. What a status we have because of regeneration!

The Samaritan Woman

The second case was of an immoral, despised woman (4:6-42).

This woman of Samaria came to Jacob's well to draw water. She had had five husbands and was now living with a sixth, who was not her husband. No doubt, all who knew her looked down upon her. To such a one the Lord came. He understood her and met her need. Why had she tried so many husbands? It was because of a thirst within her, which none of them had been able to satisfy. Every time she changed husbands, she had hope that her thirst would be quenched. After five futile attempts to satisfy her longing, she was now trying for the sixth time to get the satisfaction she craved.

Are we not the same? We try one thing after another, seeking satisfaction. After a little time we are disappointed and turn elsewhere. When our new effort is unrewarded, we "change husbands" again. Whatever we try of this world's water, it leaves us empty and thirsty. Then the Lord Jesus comes to us. Because we are thirsty, He is thirsty too. "Give Me something to drink," He says. We are the water He needs for His thirst to be quenched.

What the Lord Jesus gave to the Samaritan woman was living water, a fountain springing up into eternal life. With this water she was satisfied.

The Royal Official's Son

The third case was of a boy who was about to die (vv. 46-54). His father, a royal official, went to see the Lord and asked Him to come and heal his son, who was at the point of death.

Do you realize that you are dying? Even if you are still young and feel very much alive, you are dying. The longer you live, the closer you are to dying.

But Hallelujah! The Lord Jesus comes into the situation of death to deliver us. By His word, "Go, your son lives," He healed the dying one.

The Impotent Man

The fourth case was of the man who had been lying sick and impotent for thirty-eight years (5:2-9). When the Lord came on the scene and spoke the word, the sick man became instantly well. He picked up his bed and walked. Our Lord can meet every man's need.

The Hungry Crowd

The fifth case was of the great crowd who followed Jesus and whose hunger was satisfied by Him (6:2-13, 26-57). The Lord told them that He was the living bread which came down out of heaven. He wanted them to know that He could be eaten: "He who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me." He is the heavenly food and can satisfy our hunger.

The Thirsty Ones

The sixth case was of the thirsty ones (7:37-39). On the last day of the feast, Jesus cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink." He would quench the thirst and even cause rivers of living water to flow out from within. He was speaking of the Spirit, but at that time "the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified." After His crucifixion and resurrection He became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Now whoever thirsts may come to Him and drink.

Drink of the Spirit. He will quench your thirst, fill you, and flow out of you as rivers of living water.

The Woman Taken in Adultery

The seventh case was of the woman caught committing adultery (John 8:3-11), According to the law of Moses, she should have been stoned to death. The scribes and Pharisees brought the woman to the Lord Jesus, testing Him to see if He would say something different from the law. The Lord's reply, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her," caused every one of them to leave in a silent admission that they were sinful. Then the Lord turned to the woman who was left alone with Him. Instead of condemning her, the Lord set her free. In this case the Lord met the need of a sinner and freed her from sin's bondage.

The Blind Man

The eighth case was of a blind man whose sight the Lord restored (9:1-38). The Lord came to him, anointed his eyes, and imparted sight to him.

Lazarus

The ninth and last case was that of Lazarus (11:1-44). Lazarus died and was buried in a tomb, but the Lord Jesus came and called him out. When He met a man in death, He raised him up. No case is too hard for Him.

The cases presented in this first section of John demonstrate that the Lord Jesus can meet every need.

CHRIST LEAVING THE DISCIPLES

With John 14 a change comes in. The Lord told the disciples that He was going away (v. 2). This news was disturbing to them, for they enjoyed being with Him. He went on to tell them that it was better for them that He went away. After all, He was only among them, not in them. As long as He was there with them physically, He was outside them, even though He was in their midst. His longing was to enter into them and be their life.

In chapter 10 He had said, “I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly” (v. 10). He came not merely to enjoy their companionship. The disciples were happy to be in His presence, but they still did not have His life in them. He could not enter into them.

How could He enter into them? He was God, but one day He became flesh. As a man He went about meeting the needs of man. His disciples were happy to be with Him. They loved Him and rejoiced that He was among them. Yet for Him this was not sufficient. As long as He was external to them, He could not be satisfied.

More than twenty years ago my family and I were living in Taiwan. One winter day I bought a huge watermelon. We were from the northern part of mainland China, where such melons were not available in the winter. In Taiwan, however, the climate was tropical, and all year round, watermelons could be bought. I was happy to buy one and take it home. I put it on the dining table, and my eight children gathered around, excited to see it. Suddenly, I picked it up and took it to the kitchen. The youngest one cried, “Daddy, don’t take it away! We like it.” I said to her, “Little one, if this melon

stays on the table as it is, you can't eat it. Wait just a few minutes, and it will be ready for you to eat." In the kitchen the maid cut it into slices. When it came back out, it was all ready to be eaten. In less than twenty minutes the whole melon was gone. It had entered into all my children.

It is as if the Lord said, "Peter, James, and John, do you understand this? It is good for Me to be here with you, but how can I enter into you? I need to go to the kitchen and be cut. I need to be cut on the cross for you. I need to die for your sins. I need to die to destroy the devil. I need to be cut so that My life may be released. I must go away, but I will be back. I will not leave you as orphans. After three days I will return in another form. Now I am in the flesh, but when I come back, it will be in another form. I will come back in resurrection. I will return to you as the Spirit."

If you read John 14, 15, and 16, you will see that this thought is behind the Lord's words to His disciples.

He did leave them. He died. The disciples lost Him for three sad days. On the morning of the third day, however, one of their number, a sister, saw Him at His tomb. He talked with her and sent word to His brothers that He would meet with them.

They only half believed. After all, only three days before, they had seen Him crucified and then buried in a tomb. Others of their number also met and talked with Him. They did not know what to make of it all. Then on the evening of that same day they came together, keeping the doors shut for fear of the Jews. What they talked about is hard to imagine. Perhaps they just sat there looking at each other, wondering about the strange happenings.

CHRIST RETURNING AS THE SPIRIT

Suddenly, Jesus was standing among them and saying, "Peace be to you"! His words were few, but He breathed into them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (20:21-22). His words could also be translated, "Receive the holy breath." A few more words, and He was gone. He came in without anyone opening the door; He left without saying goodbye. It was not that He went away. Rather, He entered into them as the holy breath. From then on, wherever the disciples were, Jesus was also there. He was within them. Here is Christ in resurrection becoming the indwelling Spirit.

The Gospel of John tells us this wonderful, mysterious story. This is his mending ministry. Perhaps no other book in the Bible portrays Christ in such a living yet spiritual way.

NEVER LEAVING

On a later occasion (21:2-13) Peter, probably hungry and short of food, said to the others with him, "I am going fishing." Since he was taking the lead, the rest said that they would go with him. They did not catch one fish the whole night. Nonetheless, Christ was there! At first they did not recognize Him when He spoke to them, but when they followed what He said, they caught fish in abundance. Back on land, they saw that the Lord had prepared fish and bread for them. The fish were there, already cooked. It had not been necessary for them to go to the sea. All the fish were in His hand. Not one would go into their net. If they needed fish, they had only to tell Him; He would provide them not only with fish but also with bread. They could disregard all the fish they had caught and come and eat what the Lord had prepared for them.

We can all be assured that this Christ is within us. Wherever we go, He is within us. When we are happy with Him, attending the meetings, praying, and pray-reading, we may not have a strong sense that He is within us. But if we go against Him, He will appear to us in a strong way. If we go to a movie or to a gambling casino, He will speak to us from within, "What are you doing here?" Our Lord is real, living, present, and within. We do not have a religion. What need have we for a religion? We have the living Christ. He is what we need and what we have.

John's mending ministry strongly stresses this point that Christ lives in us (14:17, 23; 15:4-5). He is real, living, and powerful, yet kind, loving, and patient. We must not think that if we offend Him, He will leave. The more we offend Him, the more He will convince us that He will never leave.

John first introduces Jesus as God. Eventually, he tells us that this very One is now in us. He is the embodiment of the Father (14:8-11), He is the Son, and in resurrection He has become the indwelling Spirit. With Him we have the Triune God. He is our life.

CHAPTER THREE

CHRIST AND THE BELIEVERS BECOMING ONE ORGANISM

Scripture Reading: John 15:1, 4-5, 7-8, 16

THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES

John 15 is a most mysterious chapter, yet because the illustration is so simple, we may not really catch its significance. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches" (v. 5). Such a statement implies that He and we are one tree. How could this be possible? He is God, and we are sinful human beings. How could we be one with the almighty God?

To liken the relationship between the Lord and us to a vine and its branches is to imply a living, organic relationship. A vine is not constructed by man; it grows and develops according to its life and nature. Man may build a chair, for instance, in whatever style suits him; he is free to choose the material to be used, the shape, and the way the parts will be attached. John writes of a vine, however, something that is not designed or arranged by man. Paul writes of a Body, also a living organism not subject to man's rearranging. Do we have a better place to locate our nose? Can we assign it a different function from what it has?

Have you ever thought of the Lord Jesus as a vine and of yourself as a branch? It is time to consider this. How could you be one with the Lord Jesus in life? He is without sin; you are a sinner. He is divine; you are human. You were a poor branch from a poor tree, but one day you believed in the Lord Jesus. Through believing, you were grafted into this better vine.

You were not merely attached in some outward way by joining. You are not like a denture, fitted in but not really belonging. No. You are like a living tooth. Years ago I had a denture of two teeth. After using it for a few weeks, I threw it away. Every time I ate, I had to be on guard lest the teeth would come loose and fall into my mouth. I was afraid I would swallow them along with my food. You have been grafted into Christ, not artificially added to Him. He will never discard you.

HOW THE LORD MADE US ONE WITH HIM

If we are to understand how we and the Lord Jesus could be the same in life and nature as a vine and its branches and could indwell each other, we must relate John 15 with the foregoing chapters. These earlier chapters tell us that the Lord Jesus was the Word in the beginning and that the Word was God. One day this One, who in eternity past was God, became a man. He lived on this earth and went about with His disciples. For three and a half years they had Him with them and enjoyed His company. Then to their surprise they heard Him say that He was going away. He would die and be resurrected so that He might become the Spirit and be able to enter into them.

When Christ entered into the disciples, He made them the same as He. He imparted into them the divine life and nature. By His death and resurrection He became the living Spirit, able to enter into all those who believe in Him. We ourselves can testify that this is not a superstition. When we repented and believed in the Lord Jesus, we had a sense of something entering into us and of our having been put into something. To be saved is more than to have our sins forgiven and be justified by God in Christ. It is to have something living, holy, and divine—the Spirit—come into us. It made us feel as happy as the birds flying in the air. We also sensed that we no longer belonged to this earth, even though we were still living here. We were put into a living One, Christ Himself.

How can we be the same as He? How can we be in Him and He in us? Consider again the illustration of grafting. To attach a branch to another tree and have them grow together and become one is possible because they are both living. They do not stay together because of nails or glue. As long as they are brought together and attached, they will grow together into one organism. This comes about by life. We can grow into Christ and have Him grow in us by life. This life is the Spirit. It is by this Spirit that we have been grafted into Christ and that Christ can be worked into us. Now deep in our spirit we sense that Christ is one with us and that in spirit we are one with Him.

THE PRACTICE OF ABIDING

How can we fulfill the Lord's word to abide in Him so that He may abide in us? Christians today are prone to pay attention to outward formalities, rituals, and ordinances. They neglect this crucial, spiritual matter of abiding in Christ

and letting Him abide in us. Because the Lord's word here is mysterious and abstract, it is easy to pass it by.

If we had not been grafted into Christ and had Him worked into us, we would still be fallen persons. John 15, however, indicates that we are organically one with Christ the way a vine and its branches are one. We no longer need to live as fallen persons. We may abide in Christ and have Him abide in us.

John 3:6 mentions two spirits: "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." We have a spirit within, which can be born of the Spirit. The two spirits must be brought together by spiritual birth. Thus, 1 Corinthians 6:17 says, "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit." To abide in the Lord, then, is to be one spirit with Him.

In our daily practice, however, we disregard this matter. Suppose I encounter a brother whom I have not seen for some time. I begin to converse with him. How is he getting along? How is his family? What has he been doing? We easily talk on and on, but the whole time I am altogether in myself; none of my conversation is in the Lord. Although there is nothing outwardly sinful in what we say, I have left the Lord aside and acted in myself. Nonetheless, I have no sense that I am off. I do not condemn myself.

If I talked to a brother in a mean way, however, my conscience would trouble me. If I lied to him or told him what a poor character he had or said that I could not stand being with him, then I would have to go to the Lord and confess. I would also have to go back to the brother, apologize, and ask his forgiveness.

In the latter case we feel condemned, but in the former case we have no realization that we need forgiveness for acting in ourselves. How many of our waking hours do we spend being one spirit with the Lord? Does our conscience bother us when we are apart from Him, acting and speaking in ourselves? We may read the Bible yet be apart from the Lord. The time when we pray is when we are most likely to be one spirit with the Lord. Of course, we must pray properly until we are in our spirit; then our time in prayer is spent with Him. The rest of the day, however, we spend mostly in ourselves and by ourselves.

A number of times I have been talking with someone, when suddenly I was reminded in my spirit that I was conversing according to myself, not by the spirit. I would stop talking and pray inwardly, "Lord, forgive me. I am not with You. I am not living by You. Instead of abiding in You and letting You abide in me, I leave You aside. I am acting by myself." It is not that what I was saying or doing was wrong in itself; my words and my conduct seemed blameless. My right words and my right actions were in myself, however, not in the Lord.

We are Christians, yet our Christian life is not by Christ. We are Christians, yet we live by ourselves. We are Christians, yet we do not live in our spirit by Christ. Because this crucial matter of abiding was lost, John's mending ministry came in to restore. He mended this tear by reminding us that we are no longer by ourselves. Now Christ is within us, and we are in Him. He and we are one organism. We are His branches, grafted into Him. He lives in us, and we must live in Him.

TURNING FROM DISTRACTIONS TO THE SPIRIT

Distracted by Religion

We need this reminder to turn our whole inward being to Christ. Because we have a background of Christianity and a knowledge of the Bible, we know what is right and what is wrong, what we should do and what we should not do. To live according to this standard is to be governed by ordinances and to be in the realm of religion. These ordinances are distinct from Christ, the living person. Christ is the living Spirit. He is not only Lord over all in the heavens, King of kings, and Head over all things; even while He is there on the throne, He is simultaneously the Spirit in our spirit. "The Lord be with your spirit" (2 Tim. 4:22). He is in our spirit. The Lord in the heavens is also the Spirit in our spirit. He is not only our Lord but also our life. If He were only on the throne in the heavens, how could He be our life? He is our life; we must live by Him.

Sad to say, most Christians have been distracted from living by Christ. Some have been distracted by sin; others, by the world. The vast majority, however, have been distracted by the things pertaining to religion. They care for rituals, formalities, or doctrines. They have been lured away from the living person of Christ.

We are one organism with Christ. He is our life, and we must be His living. He lives within us; we express Him by living Him out. Even this is only a doctrine to us if we do not practice it. Suppose we are arguing with someone. No doubt, we are not in the spirit. We are in our reasonings, our thoughts, and our feelings. Nonetheless, in our spirit there is a reminding that our arguing is not by the Lord. The realization comes that we are not one with the Lord but rather acting in ourselves. Will we stop? Many times we just go on. The question is not whether we should argue but whether we are one with Him in spirit.

Distracted by Doctrines

There are many things about which Christians can argue. There are many doctrines in the Bible. It is hard to come to the same opinion as someone else. Our oneness, however, is not in our mental understanding. It is in our spirit. Doctrinally we cannot be one. Our oneness must be the Lord Himself. Even among us, if two of us begin to discuss doctrines, we will be in disagreement within a very short time. There is no possibility for oneness based on doctrine. This is because we all have different understandings.

Over thirty years ago a brother talked with me about immersion. “Brother Lee,” he said, “I know how much you respect the Bible, but do you realize that you do not practice baptism by immersion rightly?”

“Surely we practice baptism by immersion,” I replied, “but what do you mean by ‘rightly’?”

He asked, “In whose name do you baptize? Is it in the name of the Lord Jesus, or in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost?”

“Well,” I told him, “sometimes we say to the first one to be baptized, ‘I baptize you in the name of the Lord Jesus,’ and then, when we come to the next one, we may say, ‘We baptize you into the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.’ What is the difference?”

“Oh, no,” he protested, “you must not say you baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. You must baptize into the name of the Lord Jesus. There is a big difference.”

This is not the only argument about baptism. Some say it matters whether we are baptized forwards or backwards and whether the water is salt water or fresh water. The disagreements about doctrine are endless. It is foolish to get into them.

Let us return to our spirit and tell the Lord, "O Lord Jesus, I love You. I want to live by You. I want to walk according to the spirit. Thank You that You are one spirit with me. You are within me. I am in You. How I praise You that we are one!" Here in the spirit is the only place that we can be one. John 15 does not stress doctrine; the emphasis is that the Lord and we are one. We abide in Him when we are in our spirit, not when we are in our mentality. Whenever we turn to the spirit, we sense that He is there.

FRUIT-BEARING

If you abide in Him, you will bear much fruit (vv. 5, 8, 16). *Fruit* does not mean behavior or good deeds; it is the expression of a life. To bring forth fruit is to live Christ out in your daily life. Expressing Christ in your daily life depends upon your fully realizing that you are one spirit with Him. He is the vine, and you are a branch. Together you are one organism. This is the real Christian life: a mingling of God with man.

ONENESS

If we live this way, we have the church life. There will be no division. The oneness we enjoy is simply the Lord Himself. Even among couples there is not oneness. The wife may be pleasant and gentle, yet she still has her ideas about how things ought to be. The husband may be considerate and mild mannered, but he has his opinions. They cannot be one as long as they are not in the spirit. They may not fight, but one of them is traveling in the air, and the other on the ocean! They are liberal toward each other, so things appear peaceful, but they are traveling in different circles.

This may also be the situation in the church life. You lack the real oneness because you are in your mentality. You give others the liberty to travel on the ocean, while you remain in your higher opinions in the air. There is no possibility for the church life unless you come back to this uniting and mingled spirit, that is, Christ as the life-giving Spirit mingled with your spirit. It is here that you must remain.

It is to this that John's mending ministry is calling us back. Christians have been distracted from this, but John comes to remind us that the Lord is in us and we are in Him. We must abide in Him and let Him abide in us. If we live in spirit by the Lord, we will fully enjoy Him. We will experience reality and grace. In this one organism, that is, Christ mingling with our spirit, we grow, we live, we walk, and we have our being. We have no argument with our spouse and no argument with our fellow believers.

ABIDING IN OUR SPIRIT WITH THE LORD

This oneness is mysterious yet simple. If we abide in our spirit with the Lord, all the complications and distractions will be gone. If, however, we remain in our doctrines, we will keep getting more complicated and confused. The only way out is to return to the spirit. Here we have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit with the life of God. Here Christ as the Spirit gives life. Here we are one with the Lord. We must turn away from every distraction and return to the spirit. As we live Him, we will enjoy the Triune God. This is our wonderful Christian life, which issues in the church life.

CHAPTER FOUR

ONENESS IN AND WITH THE TRIUNE GOD

Scripture Reading: John 17:1-5, 11-12, 16-24

John 14 through 16 records the Lord's words to His disciples on His last night on earth. After this wonderful message He offered a prayer to the Father. This prayer in John 17 is the most profound word in the Bible. It is far beyond our mental understanding. Even to grasp its central point is not easy.

Notice that in this prayer the Lord did not pray for small things. He made no mention of the healing of the sick or the salvation of the lost. What He prayed for is something deep within God's heart.

He began by saying, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You" (v. 1). What does it mean for the Father to glorify the Son? How is the Son to glorify the Father? How can the Father and the Son be glorified? Glory, we know from the Bible, is God expressed. The illustration of electricity may help make us clear. Electricity is concealed until the switch is turned on. Then the lights shine. The shining of these lights is the glory of electricity. When electricity shines, it is glorified. As we look at the bright lights, we can realize how electricity is glorified by being manifested.

GLIMPSES OF GLORY

God too is hidden. Whenever He is expressed, however, there is glory. When the tabernacle was erected, for example, God's glory filled it (Exo. 40:34-35). An overshadowing cloud could be seen by the Israelites. The glory over the tabernacle made them realize that God was there.

This happened a second time when the temple was completed. "When the priests came out of the Holy Place, the cloud filled the house of Jehovah; and the priests were not able to stand and minister because of the cloud, for the glory of Jehovah filled the house of Jehovah" (1 Kings 8:10-11). As the bright light bulb indicates the presence of electricity, so the cloud of glory showed the presence of God.

When the Lord Jesus became a man, His glory was concealed in His humanity. His physical body was like the tabernacle with the shekinah glory hidden within it. From the outside, this glory was not visible, but when the high priest entered the Holy of Holies, he saw the shekinah glory there. The tabernacle was a type of Christ in the flesh. God's glory was concealed in Christ's physical body. One day, on a high mountain privately, Christ was transfigured in the presence of Peter, James, and John (Matt. 17:1-8). "His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as the light" (v. 2). God was expressed, but just for a short time; after that the glory was again concealed.

GLORY IN RESURRECTION

In John 17 the time was at hand for the Lord Jesus to die and then be resurrected. Resurrection, you may not realize, is simply the full expression. Consider a carnation seed. It is small and inconspicuous, yet within this tiny seed the blossom is concealed. As long as it stays where we can see it, there is no blossom, that is, no glory, to be seen. If, however, we sow the seed into the soil and it dies, it will grow up and then blossom. The blossom is the release of the hidden glory. The blossoming of the carnation is its glorification.

The Lord Jesus was a seed. He was a despised Nazarene with no beauty that we should desire Him. That seed, however, concealed the divine glory. Now He was about to fall into the ground and die. Then He would be raised from the dead, and the divine glory would be expressed. Christ, in other words, would be glorified.

The glory released in the resurrection was the Father Himself. For the Son to be glorified meant that the Father too was glorified, because the Father was concealed in the man Jesus. When the glory shone forth, both the Son and the Father alike were glorified.

How, then, could the Son of God be glorified? It was by death and resurrection. How could the Father be glorified in the Son? It was by the Son's glorification. When the Son was glorified, that glory was the Father expressed. So the Lord prayed, "Glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You" (v. 1). To be glorified, then, is to have the divine nature expressed. Dear saints, we are touching something that human language cannot adequately express; I sense

that I am short of utterance. I look to the Lord that you may see what I have seen.

GLORY IN FRUIT-BEARING

Many plants, after they blossom, bear fruit. The blossom is a temporary expression; it is followed by the fruit, which is more lasting. In my home province in north China there were many apple groves. What interested us was not so much the blossoming of the trees. Year by year we eagerly anticipated the month of September, when the trees would be laden with fruit. We greatly enjoyed going to see these apple trees in their glorification. Even while we were still far away, we could smell the fragrance of the apples. The aroma was so sweet that we would store some apples in with our clothing for the next few months so that their fragrance would permeate our clothes.

Is Christ in His glorification more like the carnation flower or like the apple tree? He is like the apple tree. The fruit He has borne is even more fragrant and beautiful than the blossom. We are this fruit. If Christ had never produced a disciple after His resurrection, He would have remained a carnation blossom. After His resurrection, however, there were one hundred twenty in Jerusalem (Acts 1:15). Then three thousand were added (2:41). Before long there were five thousand (4:4). Now throughout this whole earth there are "apple groves" that have issued from Christ's resurrection. From Europe to Africa to North and South America and all the way to the Far East are spread these apple groves, expressing and glorifying the Lord Jesus.

A church is simply an apple grove, bearing the fruit of the resurrected Christ. When the Lord Jesus as the Son of God is glorified by our thus expressing Him, the Father is also glorified. What the Lord Jesus was praying that night in John 17 was for the proper church life, with all His disciples expressing Him the way apples express the apple tree. We are His apples, expressing Him in resurrection so that the Father may be glorified. The proper church life, in other words, is the glorification of the Son and of the Father, the glorification of the Father in the Son. The Lord's prayer, "Glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You," is fulfilled in the proper church life.

If we understand this first verse, then we can come to some understanding of this whole prayer.

The Lord goes on to pray four times for the oneness of all believers.

(1) “Holy Father, keep them in Your name... that they may be one even as We are” (v. 11).

(2) “That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us” (v. 21).

(3) “The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, even as We are one” (v. 22).

(4) “I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one” (v. 23).

GLORY IN ONENESS

In John 17 glorification is equated with oneness. When oneness disappears, glorification is gone. When there is oneness, the Son is glorified, and the Father is glorified in the Son.

Perhaps you can see now why we are so concerned about the situation among Christians today. When there are divisions among the saints, is there any glorification? Once the genuine oneness was destroyed, there could be no glorification of the Son nor of the Father through the Son. Nevertheless, we do thank the Lord that in spite of the divisions these past centuries, there have been a few sincere, faithful seekers of Him in every generation who would let lesser things go and come together to be one in Him, one in the Spirit, one in the Father. Wherever and whenever there has been such a gathering with the genuine oneness in the Triune God, there has been some glorification of the Son and of the Father.

The oneness of believers is the central point of the Lord’s prayer in John 17. After fifty-five years of receiving the Lord’s mercy, I can testify that there is nothing so glorious as believers meeting together in the real oneness. When we come together mindful of nothing but the Lord, we are one in the Spirit and one in the Father. Such oneness in the Triune God is the glorification. To experience this, even to a limited degree, is to have part of the answer to the Lord’s prayer. This answer of the Father to the Son’s prayer is still going on. The answer began on the day of Pentecost, when all one hundred twenty were made one, and the Son and the Father were thus glorified. In the nineteen

centuries since then, the answer to this prayer has been continuing here and there on the earth.

Even as we meet here, I believe there is a measure of answer by the Father to this prayer. How great a measure depends on how much we drop the differences and take Christ as our center, even as our constituent. We are one not because of our opinions or doctrines or practices. Our oneness is Christ. He Himself is the content of our oneness. Such a oneness is the glorification of the Son and of the Father.

Of all the books in the Bible, John's Gospel most fully reveals the Triune God. Chapters 14, 15, and 16 comprise the message, and chapter 17, the prayer. These four chapters are a full revelation of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

THE TRIUNE GOD REVEALED IN JOHN 14

In John 14:7-11 the Lord spoke of the Father, and Philip foolishly asked, "Lord, show us the Father and it is sufficient for us." The Lord indicated surprise that He had been among them so long, yet Philip still did not know Him. Day after day Philip had been with Him. Did Philip not realize that to see Him was to see the Father? How could Philip ask to be shown the Father? The Lord was in the Father and the Father in Him. Even the words He was speaking were not from Himself; the Father was abiding in Him, doing His works. Did Philip not believe that He was in the Father and the Father in Him?

In human relationships a father and his son are not one. A son cannot say that his father is in him or that he is in his father. He is not one with his father, nor does his father work while he is speaking. Such a oneness cannot exist on an earthly level. In the whole universe only the Son of God can say this of His relationship with His Father. In the Trinity there is a distinction between the Father and the Son; They are two. Yet They are one, for the Son is in the Father, and the Father is in the Son. What a wonderful mystery!

After the conversation with Philip, the Lord went on to say more strange things: "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever" (v. 16). The disciples already had the Lord as their Comforter. Now He would ask the Father to send them another One, the Spirit of reality. This second Comforter would be in them, whereas the first

could only be among them. “I will not leave you as orphans,” the Lord said; “I am coming to you” (v. 18). Strange! Who was coming to them—the Lord or the Spirit of reality? Were two coming? No, only One was coming. The coming of the Spirit was the coming of the Lord Himself. When the Comforter was in them, the Lord would be in them.

When we touch the matter of the Trinity, we are out of our depths. I have studied this chapter time and again, hour after hour, trying to figure out what the Lord was saying. The more I read and the more I studied, the more I found myself in a maze. Eventually, I turned away from my analytical study and took John 14 simply as it is written. It tells us that the Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father. It tells us that the Spirit of reality is coming. He will make real the Father and the Son. For one of Them to be with us means that all three are with us. Yet the three are not here separately; They are one.

Consider your experience. Do you not have the Father, the Son, and the Spirit? Where are They? They are simultaneously in your spirit and also in the heavens on the throne. This is the God we enjoy.

When I was with the Brethren, I was taught to pray to the Father in the name of the Son through the power of the Spirit. Under certain circumstances, but not often, it was all right to pray to the Son. Never, they said, should we pray to the Holy Spirit. I tried to follow their teaching, but I found it was a bother to me. Where was the Father that I was praying to? How could I distinguish Him from the Son when I prayed? Where was the Spirit? Eventually, I came out of this confusion. All of Them are with us, the New Testament tells us; the three are one.

John 4:24 says, “God is Spirit.” The third of the Trinity is the Holy Spirit. The Son in resurrection became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Is the Father a Spirit, the Son the life-giving Spirit, and the Holy Spirit yet another Spirit? Are there three Spirits? Surely not. These three are one Spirit. Do not think that I am trying to bring you into theological confusion or mental stimulation. My desire is simply to share with you my enjoyment of the Triune God. Day by day from morning till evening the Father, Son, and Spirit are my full enjoyment. How happy I am to have the Triune God in me!

THE TRIUNE GOD AND THE BRANCHES IN JOHN 15

John 15 is even more glorious than chapter 14. In verse 1 the Lord declared, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman." Consider what is implied in this picture. The Father is the source, the origin, of this vine. It was planted by Him and is cultivated and supplied by Him. He is its soil, its sunshine, its air. The Son is a vine, embodying the Father. All that the Father is, has, and does is wrapped up in this vine.

When we come to John 15:26, the Spirit is brought in: "When the Comforter comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of reality, who proceeds from the Father, He will testify concerning Me." The Greek preposition translated twice here as "from" has no precise English equivalent. It means "from with." The Spirit comes from and with the Father. The two cannot be separated; when the Spirit comes, the Father comes.

This is true of the Son also. He came from and with the Father. While He was on the earth, He was not alone; the Father was with Him (8:16, 29). Wherever He was, the Father was there also. The three of the Trinity are distinct, but They are not separate. When we have the Father, we have the Son. When we have the Son, we have the Father (1 John 2:23). With the Son, we have the Spirit. The Father is the source of the vine. The Son is the vine. The Spirit is the vine's life-juice.

This great vine is the organism of the Triune God. All that the Father is, is in this organism, embodied in this vine, which is the second of the Trinity. Within the vine is the circulating life flow of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who carries the riches of the Father to sustain the vine and its branches. This is the very vine into which we have been grafted. We have been grafted into this organism of the Triune God.

Does this mean that we are deified? I have been accused of teaching that there are four in the Godhead—the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the church. We are not objects of worship, but we surely have the divine life and the divine nature. The branches unquestionably have the life and nature of the vine. We are children of God. Since God is our Father, we surely have His life and nature. We are members of the Body of Christ. Surely we are one with the Head.

John 14 unveils to us the relationship of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. John 15 goes further to speak of the vine with the branches. John 16 speaks again of the Triune God.

THE TRINITY IN JOHN 16

FOR OUR EXPERIENCE AND ENJOYMENT

"When He, the Spirit of reality, comes, He will guide you into all the reality;... He will declare to you the things that are coming. He will glorify Me, for He will receive of Mine and will declare it to you. All that the Father has is Mine; for this reason I have said that He receives of Mine and will declare it to you" (vv. 13-15). Whatever the Father has is the Son's. The Son is therefore the embodiment of the Father. Whatever the Son has, has been given to the Spirit. The Spirit is therefore the realization of the Son. Then, what the Spirit has, He passes on to us. From this sequence we can see that eventually all becomes ours. All that the Father has belongs to the Son. What the Son has, the Spirit receives. What the Spirit takes, He discloses to us. The Spirit, the Son, and the Father are all ours to possess.

Your experience will confirm this. You surely have the assurance that the Spirit is within you. This Spirit is the realization of the Son. The Son within you is the embodiment of the Father. How do you know you have all three within you? By the Spirit. He is real to you, comforting you in sadness, enlightening you in darkness, and bothering you when you would turn aside. Did you have such experiences before you were saved? This inner sustaining and supplying have been yours only since you believed in Him. This rich One within is the realization of the Son, who is the embodiment of the Father. Thus, the Triune God is within you for your daily and hourly enjoyment.

After these three chapters—John 14, 15, and 16—unveiling the riches of the Triune God, the Son, lifting up His eyes to heaven, prayed, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You" (17:1). How was this glorification to come about? It was by the oneness of the believers (vv. 11, 21-23).

THE ONENESS OF THE BELIEVERS IN JOHN 17

In the Father's Name and by His Life

The Son has been given authority to impart eternal life to all those whom the Father gave Him (v. 2). Then He prayed, “Holy Father, keep them in Your name, which You have given to Me, that they may be one even as We are. When I was with them, I kept them in Your name, which You have given to Me, and I guarded them” (vv. 11-12). The life and the name are inseparable. Without the Father’s life, how could we have His name? If we were not born of Him, He would not be our Father. God is our Father because we have His life. Thus, we call Him “Abba, Father!”

By the Word

Besides giving the believers eternal life, the Lord said, “I have given them Your word, and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world even as I am not of the world... Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth... And for their sake I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. And I do not ask concerning these only, but concerning those also who believe into Me through their word, that they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that You have sent Me” (vv. 14-21).

The word that the Lord has given the believers separates them from the world. They do not belong to the world but to Him. The sanctifying word keeps them, even while they are left in the world.

Thus, through the word, the life, and the name the believers can be brought into oneness.

By the Glory

“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” (vv. 22-23). The Son has been given the Father’s life and nature so that He may express the Father. The glory of the Son is that He expresses the Father by having the Father’s life and nature. Suppose the president has a son whom he sends as his representative. The glory of this son is that he expresses the president in life and nature. The Son of God has received glory from the Father in that He has the Father’s life and nature to express.

He has given the very glory of the Son to us. We share the Father's life and nature and have the position and right to express Him. We have this glory.

We are brought into oneness, then, through the life, in the name, by the word, and in the glory. This oneness is genuine because it is in the Triune God. We are mingled with Him in such a oneness.

We are here for this genuine oneness—oneness in the name of the Father through His life; oneness in the Triune God by His word, which separates us from the world; oneness in the glory to express God with His nature and life. This is the glorification of the Son and of the Father, and this is the church life.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ISSUE OF LIFE—THE CHURCH

Scripture Reading: John 2:16-22; 3:26-30; 10:16; 11:52; 12:24; 14:2-3; 15:5, 12; 17:11, 21-23

The Gospel of John is a book of life. This life is simply the Triune God Himself. Christ came that we might have this life and might have it abundantly (10:10). Through His death and resurrection He released this life and has imparted it into us. We now have the Triune God within us as our life.

Life always has an issue. Living things bring forth fruit. Surely the divine life will have a divine result. In the Gospel of John the Triune God as the divine life brings forth the church. Although this actual term is not used in John, the implication is strongly apparent. The verses above are the references in John that allude to the church.

THE HOUSE OF GOD

When Christ cleansed the temple, He said, "Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise" (2:16). When the Jews asked for a sign of His authority, He told them that if they destroyed this temple, in three days He would raise it up. Contrary to their understanding, He was referring to the temple of His body. While He was on earth, His physical body was the temple of God.

The Old Testament type was first the tabernacle and then the temple, two stages of one thing, both typifying Christ. John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us." His human body was a tabernacle. Like the tabernacle of old, it was God's dwelling place on earth. Then in John 2 the Lord likened His physical body to the temple. He predicted that the Jews would kill Him and destroy His body, yet in three days it would be resurrected. This is a clear indication that He considered His body the temple or house of God, the place where God dwelt on earth.

In resurrection Christ raised up not only His physical body but also His mystical Body, which includes us. First Peter 1:3 says that we were

regenerated unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. His mystical Body was regenerated with Him in resurrection. The body of Christ, then, both physically and mystically, is the house of God. This mystical Body of Christ, as we know, is the church.

There is the implication in John 2, then, that out of Christ's resurrection the church will be produced. His physical body was a small type of His mystical Body. Today Christ has a larger Body, the church, which is God's house.

THE BRIDE

"He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices with joy because of the bridegroom's voice. This joy of mine therefore is made full" (3:29). The bride here, of course, is the church, and Christ is the Bridegroom.

You recall the occasion when John the Baptist spoke these words. More and more of his followers were leaving him to go to the Lord Jesus. John's disciples were unhappy about this. When they complained to him, John reminded them that he was not the Christ but only one testifying for Him. The bride belongs to the bridegroom. Since John was only the friend of the bridegroom, surely the bride should not be with him.

Since John 3 is the chapter on regeneration, we know that the bride is the sum total of those who have been regenerated. Out of regeneration the children of God are produced. Taken together, they form the bride. In Revelation John was still writing of the bride and the sons. He saw the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (21:2). He heard the promise that the overcomer will inherit these things, "and I will be God to him, and he will be a son to Me" (v. 7). The sons of God are the components of the bride. Such a statement is beyond our mental understanding, but this is what the Bible reveals.

We may describe regeneration as the divine life in action. The result of this action is the sons of God that constitute the bride of Christ. That this bride is the church is fully revealed in Ephesians 5:23-32. In John's mending ministry, however, the church, alluded to in John 3 as the bride, will ultimately consummate in the New Jerusalem.

THE FLOCK

"I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must lead them also, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one flock, one Shepherd" (John 10:16). The flock is the totality of the sheep. God's people are His flock. The Lord Jesus was saying that besides the sheep in the Jewish fold, He had other sheep. He would gather all of them together into one flock.

The fold is an enclosure where the sheep are kept to protect them from danger and bad weather. At night or during storms or in wintertime when the shepherd was not with them, the sheep would remain in the fold. Until Christ came as the Shepherd, the Jews were kept in the fold of religion, preserved during the cold, dark time of His absence. Now the Lord had come to gather the flock together and lead them out. Besides those kept under the guardianship of the law, this unique Shepherd had other sheep—the Gentiles who believed. They must be brought together with the Jews to form the one flock. This one flock is the church.

John 10, besides telling us of the one flock, also says that Christ came that we may have life "and may have it abundantly" (v. 10). The life that the Lord came to make available goes hand in hand with the church. The life and the flock are brought together in this one chapter. The more we enjoy the life of Christ, the more we desire to be with the flock. If we have no interest in the life and no growth in life, we do not care about the church life. But when we receive life from Christ and that life grows in us so that we enjoy life more abundantly, there wells up within us the desire for the church life. We feel like scattered sheep, and our longing is to be gathered together into one flock. Thus, John 10, a chapter on life, alludes to the church, the one flock.

GATHERING THE CHILDREN OF GOD INTO ONE

The high priest Caiaphas prophesied that "one man die for the people and that not the whole nation perish" (11:50). This meant that the Lord Jesus was "to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but that He might also gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (vv. 51-52). These verses are also referring to the church. By this one death there would be a way for God to gather His scattered children. They could be brought together in the church.

Even today God's children are scattered and divided, but through the death and resurrection of Christ we can be gathered together. The more we experience the death and resurrection of Christ, the more we are gathered with others into one. It is sad that many of God's children care more for doctrines and practices than they do for the experience of the death of Christ and the enjoyment of His resurrection.

The church is implied, then, in John 11 by the gathering together of God's scattered children through the death and resurrection of Christ.

MANY GRAINS

"Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (12:24). The Lord thus likened Himself to a single grain falling into the ground and dying. The fruit that resulted was the church. From typology we know that the many grains are for the making of a loaf of bread. First Christ was alone, but after His death and resurrection many grains sprang up. By the blending together of these grains into one loaf, the church as the Body of Christ was produced.

Again in John 12, then, we find the church implied. It is the Body of Christ, issuing from His resurrected life.

THE MANY ABODES IN THE FATHER'S HOUSE

"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. And 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" (14:2-3).

The Father's house, we know from 2:16, was the temple, which today is the church, the house of God. In God's house there are many abodes. The word translated "abodes" is the noun form of the verb *abide*. Every member of the church is an abode, or a room, in God's house. The Lord was intimating to His disciples that by His death and resurrection He would prepare rooms for them.

This is clear from 14:23, where the word *abode* again is used: "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him." By comparing this verse with verse 2 we can clearly see that the abodes in God's house are those who love the Lord Jesus. We must interpret the Bible by the Bible, not according to our natural, religious, or traditional concepts. Those who love the Lord will be an abode for the Father and for the Son.

From 1 Timothy 3:15 we know that the church today is the Father's house: "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." All we who are members are abodes in this house, which was prepared by Christ's death and resurrection. The Lord passed through death and entered into resurrection in order to prepare the church. He thus cleared away every obstacle and released the riches of the divine life. Without His death and resurrection there would have been no way for us to be the church. We were hindered by sins, the flesh, the old creation, worldliness, and the devil. But by His death and resurrection He took away sins, destroyed the devil, and released the divine life. Thus He prepared the church, making us all abodes in the house of God.

Do not consider the Father's house in John 14 as a place. Yes, the Lord did say that He was going to prepare a place for us, but this place is not a lifeless space. This place is actually a living person. This is apparent from verses 5 and 6, where the Lord told Thomas that He Himself is the way to this place. Since the way to the place is a person, the place also must be a living person. The way is a living person, and this way leads us to a living person. This living person is the church. Do you know that the church is the enlargement of Christ? Christ Himself is the living way, leading us to the church, which is His enlargement. The personal Christ is the way leading us to the enlarged Christ.

No doubt, what I have said conflicts with how these verses have been traditionally interpreted. I was taught that the Father's house is in heaven, where there is a golden street. The Lord Jesus went there to prepare us a heavenly mansion. Over nineteen hundred years have gone by, and still that mansion is not completed. Think what a splendid mansion that will be, that after so many years it is still not finished! This is what the Brethren taught. I believed it and thanked the Lord for the wonderful mansion He was still working on. It must not yet be finished, because He had promised He would

come back and receive me there; since He still had not returned, He must still be laboring on it.

Most Bible teachers interpret the Lord's words in verse 3, "I am coming again and will receive you to Myself," to refer to His second coming. However, in verse 18 the Lord again says, "I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you." Then He adds, "Yet a little while and the world beholds Me no longer, but you behold Me; because I live, you also shall live. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you" (vv. 19-20).

When the Lord went to prepare a place for the believers by death and resurrection, He came again in resurrection to them. His going was His coming. He came back to enter into the disciples by going into death. "I am going away and I am coming to you" (v. 28). This coming is not His second coming but His coming in resurrection. For a little while they lost Him, but they would behold Him. Because He lived, they also would live. In that day they would know that He was in the Father, they were in Him, and He was in them. "In that day" is not the day of His second coming; if it were, we would all be here as orphans. "That day" came after three days. On the day of resurrection He brought us not to the heavens but into the Father. The Father was the place where He was and where He promised to bring us (v. 3).

The Lord's concept was that He was in the Father but that we were not. We were outside. He would die to take away our sins, to destroy the devil, and to release the Father's life. Then in resurrection He would bring us into His Father. Thus where He was, we also would be.

Through His death and resurrection He has brought us into the Triune God. For this Triune God we are the many abodes of the Father's house. This is the church. The church is implied in John 14 in this wonderful way. The church is our home, yet we are all rooms (abodes) in which the Father and the Son may dwell.

You may never have heard such an interpretation of John 14 before. I hope you will not pass off my words as a peculiar way of looking at these verses. If you take the traditional interpretation, you will destroy these four chapters. To consider these verses as referring to literal heavenly mansions is too low, too physical. Such an interpretation is off. John 14 through 17 reveals that we the redeemed ones, through the death and resurrection of Christ, have been

brought into the Triune God. The thought here is the Triune God, not heavenly mansions. Because we have been brought into Him, we become Christ's mystical Body. As His mystical Body, the church is the house of God. In this house of God, which is the real temple of God, are many abodes. Each of us is one of these abodes.

The church is the Father's house. For centuries 14:2 has been wrongly interpreted. When the Father's house is mentioned in 2:16, Bible teachers do not connect it with the heavenly mansions. They all recognize that the Father's house refers to the temple on this earth. Why, then, do they think that the Father's house in 14:2 refers to heaven? It is a principle of biblical interpretation that we must understand the Bible by the Bible. God's dwelling place in this age on this earth is the church.

The Father's house in John 14, then, refers to the church. We, the regenerated ones, are the abodes in this house.

THE BRANCHES OF THE VINE

"I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing... This is My commandment, that you love one another even as I have loved you" (15:5, 12). The branches of the vine are the church. When the Lord said that we should love one another, He was implying that fruit-bearing is not an individual matter. If we each go our separate ways and seek to bear fruit, there does not need to be any love for one another. To bear fruit while we love one another means that together we bear fruit. The fruit is brought forth in a collective way.

The branches of the vine form a corporate entity, the church. If our concern is only to win souls and we have no regard for the church life, we are being individualistic. We are killing the Body while we are "bearing fruit"!

PERFECTED INTO ONE

In John 17 the word *one* is used four times (vv. 11, 21, 22, 23). The last reference says not only "that they may be one" but adds two more words, *perfected into* one.

The Shortcomings of Other Saints

We all have our defects and shortcomings. Whenever we are together, even for a short period of time, these are exposed. The ways of others are annoying to us. Even if we are one with the saints, we are not perfected into one.

How do we handle these annoyances? Do we feel that we must put up with them in order to keep the oneness? We keep the oneness while we gnash our teeth! Our oneness needs to be perfected. We need to be transformed so that our shortcomings and defects are left behind. All of us need this perfecting.

I am a punctual person. When I travel with the brothers, however, they sometimes keep me waiting until the last minute. We have a plane to catch, but they do not show up until the time is too short, and we must rush to the airport. For years the brothers have kept me waiting.

It may be almost time for the meeting to begin, yet I see that some are still outside talking. What shall I do? Shall I lose my temper with you? I must stay on the cross and be perfected. We all need this perfecting.

Yes, the church life is surely wonderful. But even while we declare how wonderful it is, we hold back our tears, acknowledging that we need to be perfected. John 17:23, the last of the four references in this chapter to the oneness, adds this last aspect: “That they may be perfected into one.” Perfected!

No Way Out

There can be no divorce from the church life. It is as permanent as marriage. There is no back door and no fire escape. The church door is good only as an entrance. Once you step across the threshold, the door locks behind you. It will not unlock for you to leave. If there is any place where you may come and go as you please, that place is not the church. The church is the Body. Could your nose decide to stop being part of your body? No member of the Body can leave. If you feel at liberty to withdraw, you are probably only a denture, not a genuine member. Your thumb may be in a great deal of pain, but can it say, “That is all I can stand. I quit!”? Can the thumb leave the body? Because the church is the Body, your only way is to be perfected; there is no way out.

I have been in the church life almost fifty years. Do not think that every day has been happy. Yes, there may be a honeymoon at first, but a honeymoon is of short duration. Our whole marriage will not be like that; it is the "vinegar-moon" that is real! But there can be no divorce in the divine marriage. We have to be perfected. We cannot be separated.

No Tolerance

There are only four things that the church will not tolerate. The first is idolatry. To worship idols is an insult to God; the church cannot allow idolatry. The second is fornication. Because this damages the humanity God created for His purpose, the Bible strongly forbids it. The third is division. Because it damages the Body of Christ, the church cannot permit division. The last is the denial of Christ's person and redemptive work. The church cannot accept any teaching which denies that Christ is the Son of God who died for our sins; nor can the church receive anyone who holds such a teaching.

Tolerance

Apart from these four things—idol worship, immorality, division, and the denial of Christ's person and redemptive work—the church must be tolerant. If someone stands up in a meeting and speaks in tongues, what will you do? You cannot cast him out; to do so would be sectarian. If someone insists that believers should be sprinkled, will you reject him? If you insist that your way is right, or if you reject him, you are being sectarian.

Oneness Only in the Triune God

We are here for the proper church life, standing on the genuine oneness. We are not trying to be one in doctrine or in practices; a oneness in these areas is not genuine. Our oneness is in the Triune God, not in our beliefs or ways of doing things. As those who believe in the Lord Jesus and are the regenerated children of God, we are all members of the Body of Christ. Regardless of the differences we may have in practice or in doctrine, we have no way but to remain here in the genuine oneness. We can give no place to idol worship, immorality, division, or the denial of Christ's divinity and redemptive work. But of other things we must be tolerant.

May the Lord preserve us in Himself so that we may enjoy the real oneness.

CHAPTER SIX

LIFE BEING A PERSON FOR US TO LIVE

Scripture Reading: 1 John 1:1-3a; 3:14-15; 4:9; 5:4, 11-13, 16a

THE MINISTRIES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The twenty-seven books of the New Testament are largely a record of four ministries: Christ's earthly ministry, His heavenly ministry, Paul's completing ministry, and John's mending ministry.

Christians for the most part focus their attention mainly on the earthly ministry of Christ. This is the subject of most Christian messages. Christ's earthly ministry is recorded in the four Gospels. It begins with the incarnation and ends with the ascension. Included in it are His human living and then His death on the cross for the accomplishment of redemption. By His death He took away our sins and released the eternal life to us. He also terminated the old creation and destroyed God's enemy Satan. How great were these accomplishments!

Yes, Christ's earthly ministry did accomplish redemption. Redemption in itself, however, did not accomplish God's purpose. God's purpose is not merely to have sinners redeemed. His goal is the church. Redemption was the procedure for the producing and building up of the church.

In the four Gospels the word *church* occurs only in Matthew 16:18 and 18:17. The other twenty-three books of the New Testament, in contrast, use this word again and again. From Acts and through all the Epistles to the end of the New Testament, not only is the term *church* used; the church is referred to by many other titles as well. These books reveal the church as the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all; the house or dwelling place of God; the household or family of God; the kingdom of God; the bride of Christ; the new man; the warrior; the lampstand; and, finally, the New Jerusalem, the ultimate consummation.

To say that the New Testament, apart from the Gospels, is a revelation of the church in all its varied aspects is to give a proper, inclusive summary. To

see that this is really the case, however, requires our being enlightened. We may study these twenty-three books in a detailed, analytical way without ever realizing the point behind them. It takes a vision for us to see that these books reveal the goal of God's eternal purpose and that Christ's complete redemption is for this goal. This goal is the church.

How is the church to be produced, built up, and brought to completion? Three ministries are needed.

The first is Christ's heavenly ministry, which began in Acts and will continue right through eternity. It covers a wide span of time. His earthly ministry, in contrast, lasted only thirty-three and a half years. The second is Paul's completing ministry. The third is John's mending ministry.

In my youth I was taught that Christ's work is finished. He is now seated on the throne in the heavens, waiting for His enemies to be made His footstool. That He is seated is a strong indication that His work is completed. This is true, but it is only partially true. As far as His earthly ministry is concerned, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). When we come to His heavenly ministry, however, it is another story.

CHRIST'S HEAVENLY MINISTRY

Christ's heavenly ministry began with His ascension. How much greater and far-reaching is this than His earthly ministry! The scene in Revelation 4 and 5 presents Christ in ascension. When Christ ascended, the heavens became busy. Here Christ is not sitting but standing. John saw "a Lamb standing as having just been slain" (5:6). This Christ had seven eyes to observe. He was active and aggressive.

In the opening chapters of Revelation Christ is seen walking in the midst of the churches (1:13, 20; 2:1). There are many churches on this earth, all needing His care. How could He be sitting with nothing to do? Just recently there was a volcanic eruption in the northwest of the United States. Some of you who are here live quite near that site. The Lord has been busy these few days, taking care of you. I am grateful to the Lord that, in spite of much loss and suffering by many, you saints here have been spared. He is the Ruler of kings. He administrates the whole universe, including the eruption of that volcano. That disaster will cause many to turn and call on Him. The news

reports quoted some who said that, although they were not in the habit of praying, this event turned them to pray and to decide to go to church. Even our meeting together is under His operation. The Lord has kept me in good health so that we could be together for these messages. We are all under His operation.

THE CORRESPONDING MINISTRIES OF PAUL AND JOHN

Christ's heavenly ministry to build up the church is carried out by two other ministries, Paul's and John's. As Colossians 1:25 says, Paul's ministry was to complete the word of God. Surely Paul's fourteen Epistles are a completion of the divine revelation. What a big hole there would be in the New Testament without them! Paul's ministry was to complete God's economy, or, in other words, to carry out Christ's heavenly ministry. What Paul did on earth was a response to what Christ was doing in the heavens. Paul's ministry echoed Christ's. The two ministries were actually two ends of one ministry. The two corresponded for the producing and completing of the church.

Paul's ministry did complete God's economy, yet within a quarter century after his departure, the church fell into heresy. Paul's last book, 2 Timothy, was written in approximately A.D. 67. During the next twenty-five years or so, heresies sprang up, claiming that Christ was not God or that Christ had not come in the flesh. Thus, about A.D. 90 John's writings appeared. The Gospel of John was written to testify to the fact that Christ was indeed God (1:1; 20:28). His first Epistle was written to confirm that Christ had truly come in the flesh (4:2-3).

John's ministry, then, was to mend the damage that had been done to Paul's ministry. If the sleeve of my jacket gets ripped, it must be mended according to the original pattern. To make it tighter or longer while mending it would just be to further damage it. All it needs is to be made stronger where it was ripped; then it is properly mended. The Lord's recovery today is in the time of the mending ministry. We must therefore be brought back to the original, but in a strengthened way. Some who claim to be in the line of the recovery are turning out a jacket with a sleeve that is tighter or longer than the original; to mend the sleeve in such a way is only to further damage it.

How can we say that John's ministry is stronger than Paul's? In other messages we have said that Paul's ministry is stronger than John's. Now we are speaking from another standpoint. Paul did tell us that the church is the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all; the household of God; the house of God; the kingdom of God; the bride; and the warrior. But Paul did not tell us that the church is a lampstand. Nor did he tell us that the church will consummate in the New Jerusalem. Is a city not greater than a house? John's ministry is stronger, deeper, and higher than Paul's.

JOHN'S DESCRIPTION OF LIFE

Both John and Paul taught that Christ is a person for us to live. John's presentation, however, is stronger than Paul's. Yes, Paul did say, "Christ our life" (Col. 3:4); "it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20); and "to me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21).

Notice John's language in 1 John 1:1-3a about life: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and report to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us); that which we have seen and heard we report also to you that you also may have fellowship with us."

What was it that the apostles declared? John here does not use the word *gospel*. Rather, what they declared was life. He describes life as "that which was from the beginning," which they have heard, seen, and handled, concerning the Word of life. This life, John says, was manifested and was seen by them; now they are declaring it to others.

LIFE BEING A PERSON

What life is this? Was John presenting a doctrine? Was it the gospel? This life is a wonderful person, indescribable in human language. John could say only "that which" when he referred to Him. This person was with the Father from eternity. He was manifested and handled by the apostles, who then declared Him as life.

Surely it is a strange message that says that a person is life. In our natural thinking we do not consider life as a person. Life is one thing; a person is another. A person has life, but we do not say that he *is* life. John boldly declared—he does not say preached or taught—this life, who is a person.

John clearly says that this One who is life is ours: "This is the testimony, that God gave to us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. I have written these things to you that you may know that you have eternal life, to you who believe into the name of the Son of God" (5:11-13). If we have the Son, where does He dwell?

A PERSON TO BE EXPERIENCED

Our opposers claim that Christ is in the heavens. Many of them will not acknowledge subjective experience. Not too long ago, someone asked them, "What does the Bible mean when it says that we should abide in Christ and that He should abide in us?" Here is the way they answered: "This does not mean that we really dwell in Christ nor that Christ actually dwells in us. It is a figurative way of indicating a close relationship." Why do they feel the need to come up with an explanation like this? It is because their Christ is only in the heavens. They reject what they regard as our teaching that Christ is in us; such a teaching to them is too experiential. Such a position leaves them with some Bible verses to be reconciled. Thus, they must come up with this weak interpretation that abiding in Christ simply means being close to Him. If Christ is in the heavens and we are on earth, how could they call that a close relationship?

John boldly tells us that this life that we have received is Christ Himself and that He is in us.

Doctrinal debate does not interest me. I want to know about your practical experience. Since you have received this One as your life, by whom do you live? You may doctrinally answer that you live by Christ, but in your daily living how many hours is this really your experience? It must be a rare person who lives by the Lord more than one or two hours out of the twenty-four. Every day I find that I must ask the Lord's forgiveness that I did not live Him as I should have. I did not do anything outwardly sinful. I did not do anything that others would consider wrong. Nonetheless, I did not live Him sufficiently.

When the apostle John wrote this Epistle, the believers were being confronted with arguments about who Christ was. His last writing, the book of Revelation, was not even officially accepted as a book of the Bible until A.D. 397 at the third council of Carthage. Thus, you can see that John's mending ministry, because it was somewhat mysterious, was not quickly and properly recognized. Even today some Christian teachers avoid Revelation, and many so-called fundamentalists use John's Gospel and Epistles superficially.

The very Christ in whom we have believed is Himself our life. We must live Him, not ourselves. Even though I myself have been practicing this for many years, I still have to confess my shortcomings to the Lord day after day. Rather than living Him, I all too often live according to my background, my culture, my characteristics, my habits, and even my spiritual attainments. While we condemn those who deny the subjective experience of Christ, we ourselves, who have received so much light concerning Christ as our life, do not live Him adequately.

LIFE EXPRESSED

"We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3:14-15).

The life that we have received should have an expression. In the third chapter of 1 John, life is expressed in love for the brothers.

In the fourth chapter we are told that "God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might have life and live through Him" (v. 9). The word *live* here includes the thought both of "live" and *have life.*

"Everything that has been begotten of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory which has overcome the world—our faith." (5:4). *Everything that has been begotten of God* refers not to a person but to the part within us that is born of God. It is this part born of God that overcomes the world.

"If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask and he will give life to him, to those sinning not unto death" (v. 16a). If we see a brother sinning, we need to pray for him; then he will receive life.

From these verses we can see that the life John is referring to is something substantial, not vague or up in the air. This substantial matter is the Lord Jesus Himself, the embodiment of the Triune God. We have the Triune God within us as our life. Life is not nebulous; it is the Triune God as our person. We must live by this life. Then we can express it in love and minister it to others who need it.

Life should not be a term that we use lightly. We must realize that this life is in actuality the Triune God Himself. We must not be deceived by the blinding teaching that God is merely objective. God is both objective and subjective. He is so subjective that He has become our life.

If my subjective being is removed from me, then my life is gone. Without my subjective existence, I am dead. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit have become life to us because of the process They have gone through. This divine person in a subjective way has become life to us. He is our life. We must live by Him. We must live Him. In the coming chapters we will speak further on how we can do this.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE FELLOWSHIP OF LIFE

Scripture Reading: 1 John 5:20; 1:2-7; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1

JOHN'S EMPHASIS ON LIFE

"We know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding that we might know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20).

This verse is the conclusion to 1 John. It is a strong declaration that Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God and who has come, is the true God and eternal life. At the beginning of this Epistle we are told that the One who was with the Father in eternity and was manifested in time, and who was seen and handled by the apostles, is the Word of life who has been reported to us as eternal life. Then, at the end of the Epistle, we have this verse quoted above, which tells us that the very One who has come to us and in whom we are is the true God and eternal life.

What a bold word is this! Though Paul wrote fourteen letters in all, and though he told us that Christ is our life, he was not as emphatic as John here in declaring that this very person is life to us.

There is a strong emphasis in the New Testament that God's intention is to give Christ, His Son, to us as life. When we believed in Him, we received Him not only as our Redeemer and Savior but even the more as our life. I keep repeating this because, even though the New Testament stresses it, it is almost unheard of in Christian circles.

What Christianity emphasizes to those who are saved is the improvement of their behavior. They are told that since they are saved and are children of God, they need to behave in a way that will glorify God. The apostle John, however, in his mending ministry stresses life. "We report to you... life." This is the thought with which he opens 1 John.

The same emphasis is found in the Gospel of John: “In the beginning was the Word,... and the Word was God... In Him was life” (1:1, 4). In 10:10 the Lord Jesus declared, “I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly.” In 14:6 He said, “I am... the life.” In 11:25 He said, “I am the resurrection and the life.” John writes boldly, telling us that Jesus Christ the Son of God is life to us.

THE INDWELLING CHRIST

Some may think that we make Christ too low when we say that He is in us. Christ, they say, has been highly exalted by the Father. He is seated on the throne far above all. How could we demean Him by saying that He dwells in us pathetic, low human beings? They may want to keep Christ in His exaltation, but Christ would respond, “Yes, I am far above all, but I am omnipresent. I am indeed in the heavens, exalted to the throne. But don’t keep Me up here. I want to leave the mountaintop and go down to the valley to be with My people. I like being in them. I am in them. Whatever they are doing, wherever they go, I like being in them.”

To teach that Christ does not indwell His people indicates that some Bible verses are being ignored. At the end of Matthew, before the ascension, the Lord Jesus told His disciples to go and disciple all the nations, adding, “Behold, I am with you all the days until the consummation of the age” (28:19-20). He did not say that He would be with them or that He had been with them. No. He said, “I am with you.” Go with Me, because I am with you! The Lord is still on earth today. He is within us.

Those who reject the indwelling Christ claim that Christ is too great to be contained in small, puny man. Such logic must be condemned. The Bible clearly gives us the Lord’s words, “Abide in Me and I in you” (John 15:4). It also says, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). Yes, He is great. No one is greater. Yet He is small enough for us to contain Him. Hallelujah! We can contain the great Christ. He is unlimited, yet He is within us. He is our life.

I am not trying to prove a doctrinal point. Doctrine without experience has no value. It is like going to a restaurant and studying the menu but not eating a meal. It is like being in the kitchen reading and appreciating a recipe but not getting out the ingredients and preparing it.

Theologians may be full of Bible knowledge but without experience. Of what use is that? They need to learn to cook instead of just talking about the menu.

GOD'S DESIRE
THAT WE LIVE CHRIST

Dear saints, be deeply impressed that Jesus Christ is your life. God does not want you to improve your behavior; He wants you to live Christ. He does not want you to begin loving your wife and no longer hate her; He wants you to live Christ. As you live Him, you will love others. Whatever you are doing, God wants you to live Christ. Paul says, "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20) and, "To me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). To me, to live is not love. It is not humility. It is not frankness or kindness. To me to live is Christ. Christ is our life; He must become our living.

We need to pray in a definite way. "Lord, I want to live You. Keep me in Your Spirit so that I never forget that You are my life. When I am about to lose my temper, remind me that You are my life. When I am about to love someone, remind me that You are my life. When I am about to act in a humble way, remind me that You are my life. When I smile, remind me that You are my life."

This must be our prayer not just once but over and over again. Before we begin our day, we should tell the Lord, "Remind me during the whole day that You are my life. In dealing with my children or in dealing with my parents, I want to take You as my life. I know You do not want me to try to improve my behavior. Your desire is to have Yourself lived out of me. Keep this before me all day long whatever I am doing. O Lord, remind me that You are my life."

THE MEANING OF FELLOWSHIP

When I was young, the word *fellowship* used to puzzle me. In Chinese the word was usually translated as "fraternity," a kind of social brotherhood. Gradually, due to our influence in the Far East, the word *fraternity* has largely been dropped, and now the word used is *fellowship*.

The Greek word for *fellowship* means "mutual participation or communication." According to the New Testament revelation, such as in 2

Corinthians 13:14, it can be likened to the term *transmission*, which is used for electricity and means "a sending back and forth." When the electric lights in the ceiling are turned on, the electricity flows into them. When the lights are turned off, the current stops. The electricity is still there, but the transmission has ceased. The electric current is the transmission of electricity from the power plant into this building. It goes back and forth.

Fellowship is like this. It is not merely friendly contact with others, as in a fraternity. It is instead a powerful, dynamic transmission from one place to another and then back to the original place. We have Christ in us as life. When this life functions, it is fellowship. Life corresponds to electricity; fellowship corresponds to the electric current. The electric current is simply electricity itself in motion. Fellowship is nothing less than Christ Himself as life moving within us.

"God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9). This fellowship into which we have been called is simply Christ Himself moving within us. While Christ remains in us, He is life. When He moves in us, He is the fellowship.

LIVING CHRIST BY FELLOWSHIP

We live Christ by fellowship; that is to say, we live Him by His moving in us. Before we were saved, we were alone. We may have had lots of schoolmates and relatives, but we were actually by ourself. Even after we were married and had our spouse with us, we were still by ourself. Once we got saved, however, we were never again alone. Now wherever we go and whatever we do, we have another person with us. Sometimes we are pleased with Him and love Him. Other times we are annoyed with Him and secretly wish He would go away and leave us alone.

There are times when we want to be alone. Once in a while we like to go off by ourself and take a little break. When it comes to other people, we can do this. This One, however, our Christ, we cannot escape from. After we are saved, we may still want to go to a movie. Even if we do go, we do not go alone. Christ accompanies us. No Christian is single. We may not yet be married, but if we are saved, the Lord Jesus is always with us. It is impossible to be alone.

Christ wants to be our life. Formerly we were one person, but now we are two. With one person there is no fellowship, but with two there is the possibility. If we want to live Christ, we must not do anything by ourselves. To do even the best thing by ourselves is to fail to live Christ. We live Him by fellowship, which includes mutuality. We are not single. There are two of us; between us there is a mutuality.

NOT ACTING ALONE

When I say that the way to live Christ is by fellowship, I am referring to this mutuality between Him and you. Never do anything by yourself. If you keep this one principle, it will be easy for you to live Christ. If you are about to talk with your wife, you must do so with another person. Brothers, let us all learn not to talk to our wives by ourselves. Sisters, you must not go shopping by yourselves. Do not write a check by yourself. Do not talk to others by yourself. Do everything by fellowship. Always have this other person with you in whatever you do. Then you will live Christ, not yourself.

This is especially important in your talk. Do you want to pass on the news that a certain sister is pregnant? You may find that before the words can leave your mouth, that other One will not agree. You do not realize how accustomed you are to doing things by yourself. As soon as you meet someone you know, you begin to talk about who is about to get married or who is having what kind of trouble. This is gossip. By whom? By Christ? Never. It is by you when you are living yourself.

You would not think of stealing. You know that this is sin. You need to realize that in the Lord's eyes to do things by yourself is ugly. It may not be sinful, but it is ugly.

Always keep in mind that you have a Partner who is with you; in fact, He is in you. He says, "Abide in Me and I in you." This is your position and your status, but you neglect it. In your daily life you would not tell lies, but it may not bother you to gossip. You may think of it as common to pass on information to others. You may look at such things in that way, but what does your Partner say?

You may be encouraged to love others. It is right to have love for others, but you must check whether you love them by yourself or by fellowship. It is not a

matter of love or of hatred; it is a matter of living Christ or living yourself. Either you live, or Christ lives out of you.

CHRIST MOVING WITHIN

When the life within, which is Christ Himself, moves, that moving is fellowship. *Fellowship* means mutuality. It includes mutual communication, participation, and enjoyment. Christ enjoys you, and you enjoy Him. There is a transmission back and forth between the two of you. Within you there is a current for your daily life. Rather than doing things by yourself, you must do things by that current between you.

You may feel at a disadvantage if you do not have a strong will and it is hard for you to make up your mind. Be assured, it is of no help to make up your mind to live Christ. To make up your mind to live Christ does not work. You must realize that He is in you, moving in you. When He moves, His moving is the fellowship. He Himself is the fellowship. There is a flowing from Him to you and from you back to Him.

This transmission occurs even when you do what is not proper. You may have gone shopping even when you realized that the Lord Jesus did not agree with you. While you were on the way, there was some fellowship within, a current moving, which said, "Don't go!" You may have replied, as I myself have done many times, "Lord, You are not really that narrow, are You? I don't go shopping like this very often. It is not evil, like going to Las Vegas to gamble. I am going to buy something that is useful." I am sure many of you have had such experiences. This indwelling Lord is dealing with you. As long as He is moving, the current is flowing.

In 1933 I went to Shanghai for the first time. As a young man, I had no love for the world, but I did have an appetite for spiritual books. Shanghai was a densely populated city. There were many missionaries there and a good many secondhand Christian bookstores. In those days I was hungry to read spiritual books in English. During those months my behavior was nearly blameless. My only fault was in going to the secondhand bookstores. Whenever the brothers did not occupy my time, I would slip away to those stores and buy those old books. All the while, I felt condemned. The fellowship within said, "You are doing things by yourself." But I could not stop! I had heard of books such as George Müller's autobiography and the writings of G. H. Pember. Now I had

the chance to have a copy of my own. When I got back, I would put them on the table, happy to have them, on the one hand, but rebuked, on the other. The fellowship within was strong against me.

In buying those books I was in myself; I was not living Christ. I was doing what I loved. It was not evil, but I was living myself. While I had no heart for the horse races, which were famous in Shanghai, and no heart for the newspapers, I did find that going from bookstore to bookstore was a real entertainment to me. I did collect a good many books. I brought some of them with me to the United States. While I was living in Los Angeles, one day I put out five big cartons of books for the trash collectors. These had been bought by me in Shanghai while offending the Lord.

Years ago I could not have told you how to live Christ. Now, because of my experience all through the years, I can tell you that there is no other way except, first, by fellowship. Remember that you have a Companion who indwells you. He is always with you. You are no longer single. He is your life. When He moves, He is the fellowship. Do everything by this fellowship. If you have your being by it, you will have a wonderful life. All day long you will live only Him. You will not only be doing good and overcoming; you will be living Him. He will be lived out of you because of your living by fellowship with Him.

TWO SPIRITS

This fellowship is the fellowship of Christ (1 Cor. 1:9). Since Christ today is the life-giving Spirit, it is also the fellowship of the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). Since Christ indwells our spirit as the life-giving Spirit, it is also the fellowship of our spirit (Phil. 2:1). The fellowship is a matter concerning these two spirits.

As you practice, you will realize that the Lord Jesus is in you. When He moves, that is His fellowship. This fellowship is, on the one hand, of the Spirit, and, on the other hand, of your spirit. Christ is the life-giving Spirit in your spirit. Here you enjoy Him, and He enjoys you in mutual participation, communication, and transmission. Here you live by Him, and He lives by you. You live Him out, and He lives in you.

CHAPTER EIGHT

OUR MUTUAL ABIDING WITH GOD

Scripture Reading: 1 John 2:6, 28; 3:24; 4:4, 13, 15-16; John 14:23; 15:4-5; Eph. 3:17

MYSTERIOUS WRITINGS

All John's writings are mysterious. His Gospel, for example, begins: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This sentence is simple, but its meaning is mysterious. What is the beginning? What is meant by *the Word*? How can the Word be with God yet also be God? In John 1:14 John says that the Word became flesh. The Word is high and glorious; the flesh, low and mean. Yet the Word became flesh!

When we come to John's Epistles, we find in these few chapters mystery after mystery. In the opening verses of 1 John we have life reported to us. Who can define life? Even physical life is hard to define. John is referring to the eternal life. What does *eternal* mean? Whatever it means, this eternal life has been reported, even ministered, to us, and we have received it.

Fellowship is another mysterious term John uses in his first Epistle. How short of utterance we are when it comes to explaining what fellowship is! Fellowship is not merely shaking hands. It does not mean simply associating and meeting with like-minded people. It does not mean merely talking together or showing affection for others. These may be indications of a fraternal relationship or of friendship, but fellowship is not that superficial. It is hard to define.

Abiding is another term John uses. To abide does not mean merely to have a close relationship. However close a relationship we may have with someone, we cannot abide in that person. The Bible in John's writings nonetheless tells us repeatedly and emphatically that we are to abide in Christ and have Him abide in us.

In both his Gospel and his first Epistle, John stresses this mutual abiding. How can we abide in the Lord Jesus? In 1 John the abiding is in God (4:15-16);

in the Gospel the abiding is in Christ (15:4-5). Here is a strong proof that Jesus Christ is God. To abide in Christ is to abide in God. To abide in God is to abide in Christ.

The actual meaning of having God abide in us and us abide in Him is beyond our ability to explain. There are many things that we participate in and enjoy but cannot define. This mutual abiding is one of them.

FELLOWSHIP

I would first like to amplify what I said in the previous chapter about fellowship. Let us use the illustration that John uses in chapter 15 of his Gospel. He says that the Lord Jesus is the vine and that we are the branches.

We are His branches, but this is not true of us naturally. According to the fact and according to the revelation of the Bible, we are not naturally His branches. We were branches of the wild olive tree (see Rom. 11:17). It is through redemption and regeneration that we wild, sinful branches have been grafted into Him.

This vine is under the cultivation of God the Father. He is the Husbandman who has planted and is caring for this vine. Here, then, are two entities: the cultivated vine and the formerly wild branches. What happens when they are grafted together? By the life flowing within them, they become one. This life is not motionless. It flows, grows, and develops. When the life within moves, it is fellowship.

To live Christ by fellowship is not merely to listen to His voice and obey His word. Do not bring this thought into the matter of fellowship. Fellowship is not a question of listening to His voice or of obeying His word. We may use such terms, but that is an inaccurate way of describing the fellowship between Him and us. No actual words are spoken. No words are necessary. We two are one. The flowing life within us has brought us into oneness. The tree and the branch are no longer separated from each other. By the inner, flowing life they have been made one. He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17).

The most intimate relationship in human life is marriage. Our relationship with the Lord Jesus, however, is deeper than even the closest bond between

husband and wife. A couple needs to talk matters over and make decisions because they are two separate people. The Lord Jesus, however, lives within us; the two of us are one. The life we share has made us one. We two have become one spirit.

Fellowship is the life moving within to bring two entities into one. The branch and the vine are no longer distinct from each other. By the flowing, growing, and developing of the inner life, these two, which formerly were separate, become one. When I grow, He grows. This is not to say that there is both my growth and His. He grows in my growth; my growth is His growth.

The relationship of husband and wife is not this close. There are two people involved. One may want to go somewhere, and the other may feel like staying home. Even if they go together or stay home together, there are still two people acting. They may do something together, yet they are two.

With the vine and the branch, we have not a couple but a single entity. Does the vine tell the branch to listen to its voice, to obey what it says, to grow along with it? How foolish! There is no need of speaking and no need of listening.

Apparently, the New Testament teaches that we need to imitate Christ. We have been taught that we must improve our behavior according to His pattern. Christ is our example; we must follow in His steps. But actually, what the New Testament teaches is that we must live Christ by the fellowship of Him in life. It is not an effort to improve our behavior. It is to live Him by the inner fellowship that comes out of this moving life. When this life moves in us, there is a current; we are to live Him by this current, which is the fellowship. How different this is from merely imitating Christ!

MINGLING

Life issues in fellowship. Fellowship leads to mingling. We are mingled with God.

Do you object to saying that God is mingled with humanity? Some think it is blasphemy to say that the almighty God is mingled with His creature. They claim that we are uplifting ourselves into the Godhead.

Has God not lowered Himself down to our level? He as the Word in eternity became flesh (John 1:14). Philippians 2:6-7 says that He existed in the form of God yet did not "consider being equal with God a treasure to be grasped, but emptied Himself." He was God, yet He humbled Himself to become a man. He was on the throne, yet He condescended to be born in a manger. Not only did He lower Himself to become a man; He lowered Himself even to the lowest standard of humanity, growing up in a carpenter's home. How we thank Him!

Have we not been uplifted? We were in a dungeon. One day He came to where we were and entered into us. He has uplifted us to where He is. We are now with Him in the heavens (Eph. 2:6). He has become part of us, and we have become part of Him. Are we not members of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27)? Is my little finger not a member of me?

God is mingled with us, and we are mingled with Him. The objection has been raised that such a statement implies that God loses His divinity and we lose our humanity. Not so. When we make tea by adding tea leaves to water, there is no change in the substance and nature of the water nor of the tea. If we evaporate the water, the tea is still present. Nonetheless, the two are mingled into one drink. We do not drink water and then tea. When we drink the water, we drink tea. When we drink tea, we drink the water. They are one drink. The divine and the human are mingled into one spirit. Our being joined to the Lord in one spirit neither annuls His divinity nor destroys our humanity. Humanity still exists in divinity; divinity still exists in humanity.

God's intention is to become one with us. The vast majority of Christians do not realize this. Christianity has largely missed the mark. They are familiar with redemption and regeneration. God's economy, however, goes far beyond this. He has made us one with Himself. This is not to say that we are deified and are objects of worship. It is to say that we have God's life and nature, but we have not become part of the Godhead.

THE WAY TO ABIDE

Taking our oneness with God as a base, we will now consider how to abide in Him and have Him abide in us.

By His salvation He has regenerated us. To be regenerated is to be grafted into Him. Once we were wild, sinful, and far away from Him. But one day His redemption brought us back, and His regeneration grafted us into Him. This means that now we are in God. We are now in God, and God is now in us.

To abide in God and have Him abide in us is to remain in this very position. Remain in the vine. Do not slip away. Do not be apart from Him. Apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). We must stay in Him.

Paul's word is even stronger than John's on this point. In Ephesians 3:17 he speaks of Christ making His home in our hearts. *To make home* in Greek is the verb form of the noun *house.* Christ wants to house Himself in us. This meaning goes further than that of abiding. To make a home means more than to stay or remain in a place. Many times I have stayed in motels or hotels. Whatever condition they are in, I leave them as they are. They are not my home. After a few hours I shall be gone; there is no reason for me to fix anything. With my own house it is another story. I want to see that everything is kept in good condition to fit my living because it is my dwelling place. I do not simply stay or abide there. I make home there.

Not only are we to abide in God; we have to make Him our dwelling place. Do not simply stay there overnight. Try to live there. Settle down in Him. Do not move out, even for eternity. Our dwelling is our God. Our house is the eternal God.

We must also let Him make us His home. "Lord Jesus, make Your home in me. Don't just stay here. Settle down and make me Your home." Young people like to go camping overnight. Are we camping out in God? Are we simply letting God camp out in us? No. This is not a temporary, overnight stay. It is a matter of making home.

Have you made God your home? At best you probably only abide in Him. There is no other place on earth as sweet as home. God must be your home, not merely a place where you stay.

You must also let God make you His home. The Lord Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him" (John 14:23). The *We* here means the Father and the Son. They will come to the one who loves the Lord Jesus.

Their coming is not simply for a visit. They will "make an abode with him." The very God whom you love will come not to visit nor even just to stay but to make you His abode. You will be His dwelling place.

ABIDING AND MINGLING

We can abide in Him, making Him our dwelling place. He can abide in us, making us His abode. What is this mutual abiding? It is a mingling.

The word *mingled* is used a number of times in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers in referring to the mingling of the fine flour with oil in the preparation of the offerings. The meal offering was made of unleavened cakes of fine flour mingled with oil (Lev. 2:4). Fine flour signifies the humanity of Christ; the oil is related to His divinity. Christ as the meal offering presented to God was a mingling of humanity with divinity.

BY THE SPIRIT

When we abide in Christ and let Him abide in us, we are mingled together. How is it possible for one to abide in another? It would be impossible, except that He is the Spirit and we have a spirit. These two spirits are joined in one. The human spirit is joined to the divine Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). Some would make a distinction between being joined and being mingled. The Bible says that He is the water for us to drink (John 7:37-39; 1 Cor. 10:4). Suppose we pour some milk into a glass of water. Are the two liquids joined yet not mingled? It is illogical to make a distinction between these two words. We are mingled with Christ because He is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17) and we have a spirit. One day these two spirits were joined. When this happened, they were mingled together.

"In this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He gave to us... In this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, that He has given to us of His Spirit" (1 John 3:24b; 4:13). In both these verses John tells us that we know we are abiding in Him and He in us because of the Spirit. By ourselves we are unable to abide, but by the Spirit we abide in Him and have Him abiding in us.

In the previous chapter we said that we live Christ first by fellowship. Now we come to the second way. We live Christ by our mutual abiding with God.

To abide is to remain in the mingled spirit. Within us is our spirit, mingled with the divine Spirit. It is here that we must remain. This part of us must become our home. Here also we must allow God to make His home. We both live here. As long as we both have our dwelling place in this mingled spirit, spontaneously we are living Christ. Spontaneously, there is fellowship. We two are one in this flowing life.

If this is our mutual abode, Christ is lived out in our speaking. He is lived out in whatever we do. He is lived out even in the attitudes we express. In loving our wife, we express Him. If we are humble, our humility is Christ lived out.

To live Christ is the issue of our abiding in Him and His abiding in us. We both make home in the same place, the mingled spirit. He and we are mingled as one spirit. This mingled spirit is our joint abode. This is what makes us joyful, living, and uplifted. We are in the mingled spirit, and this is our home.

CHAPTER NINE

THE REACHING OF THE ANOINTING

Scripture Reading: 1 John 2:20, 27; John 7:38-39; Exo. 30:23-25

The anointing is another mysterious matter revealed in John's first Epistle. In previous chapters we have covered the matters of life, fellowship, and mutual abiding. Now we come to the anointing, which John tells us we have received (1 John 2:27). The word itself is a verbal noun and is used metaphorically.

THE ANOINTING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

To understand biblical metaphors we must look to the Old Testament. Because spiritual things are abstract and therefore hard to comprehend, in the Old Testament God used many pictures, shadows, and types to portray their meaning. This is a biblical principle we need to be aware of. The Spirit of God is a mystery. God is invisible. His Spirit is abstract. Thus, to portray Him, oil is used as the visible type. When someone was anointed as king to rule over God's people or as prophet to speak forth for God, he was anointed with oil. By this visible means the invisible Spirit of God was signified.

Another principle in the Bible is that of first mention. The first mentioning of a matter indicates the principle of that matter. When was oil first used for anointing? It was when Jacob was escaping from his brother and on his way to his uncle Laban's house (Gen. 28). At night he dreamed of a ladder reaching to heaven and heard God's word of promise (vv. 11-15). Upon awaking, he "took the stone that he had put under his head, and he set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel" (vv. 18-19). *Bethel* means "the house of God." The oil poured upon the stone, then, was related to God's house. When a thing was anointed with oil, it was associated with the building of God's house.

When the children of Israel were led out of Egypt and brought to Mount Sinai, they received the vision of the tabernacle and how it was to be built. Then in Exodus 30, when the tabernacle was almost ready to be built, God told Moses how to prepare the anointing ointment. This ointment was to be

used to anoint the whole tabernacle, as well as the furniture, the utensils, and the priests. The purpose of this anointing was the maintaining of the house of God on earth.

God charged Moses to make a compound ointment. He was not to use olive oil alone; four spices were to be compounded with it, making the oil an ointment. Bible students generally recognize that the oil is a type of the Holy Spirit. How can we explain, though, these four spices that were added? Why was there a need for the oil to be compounded with them?

THE FOUR SPICES

These are the four spices in the anointing ointment, together with the amount and their meaning:

Myrrh	500 shekels	death
Cinnamon	250 shekels	sweetness and strength of Christ's death
Calamus	250 shekels	resurrection
Cassia	500 shekels	power of Christ's resurrection

Myrrh in biblical typology is commonly known to signify death. Cinnamon, a flavorful spice still used in cooking, speaks of the sweetness and strength of the death of Christ. Calamus, a reed that grows out of the mud high into the air, is a picture of resurrection. Cassia, which was used in ancient times as a repellent especially for snakes, signifies the power of resurrection.

All these spices are compounded into the anointing ointment; that is to say, to the Spirit of God are added the death of Christ, the sweetness and strength of that death, His resurrection, and the power of that resurrection.

THE MEANING OF JOHN 7:39

When I was young, in my study of the Bible I was puzzled by John 7:39, which says, "But this He said concerning the Spirit, whom those who believed into Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet glorified." Why does John 7:39 say that the Spirit was not yet? He is mentioned over and over again in the Old Testament. For years this verse bothered me. I could see that *the Spirit was not yet* had something to do with Jesus' being glorified, but this was only a hint of what was implied.

One day when I was reading in Exodus 30, this verse in John became clear to me. I could see that prior to Exodus 30 the oil was there, but the anointing ointment "was not yet."

Philippians 1:19 speaks of the "bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." Was the Spirit of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament? No, for He "was not yet." In the Old Testament there was the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jehovah. When Jesus was conceived, there was the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:20). The Spirit of Jesus Christ, however, "was not yet." When the Lord spoke those words in John 7, prophesying that His disciples would receive the Spirit, He had not yet been crucified and resurrected. It was only after these two events—the death and resurrection of Christ—occurred, that these two principal spices could be added to the plain oil. How great was His death! How great was His resurrection! Nothing like them had ever happened before.

Perhaps I can impress you with their significance by telling you a little of my experience.

In the very year that I got saved, I found out from some books I read that according to Romans 6 I had been crucified with Christ. How much I appreciated my death with Christ! It is good to die! When we cannot overcome our besetting sin, we surely want to die. A dead person can never lose his temper, but a living person reacts to every situation. How wonderful to be victorious over sin by being dead and buried!

After reading these books, I looked forward to experiencing my union with Christ in death. I had died with Him and was buried with Him. As the situations came up, however, I found myself very much alive. The more I expected to be dead, the more I found myself reacting. How troubled I was! Eventually, I concluded that Romans 6 does not work. The theory is right: to die is to be free from sin. But how could I die? I could not crucify myself. I could not commit suicide. How was I to resolve this matter of dying with Christ?

As time went on and my reading of spiritual books continued, I learned of the power of the resurrection of Christ. Paul's words, "To know Him and the power of His resurrection" (Phil. 3:10), stirred up my appetite. I surely desired to experience the power of resurrection. In this too I failed. Though I was born into organized Christianity and traveled through the Brethren, the

inner-life circle, and the Pentecostal movement, nowhere did I experience the power of resurrection.

Eventually, I found out that both the death and resurrection of Christ are in the compound Spirit.

After Christ's resurrection the Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit) became the Spirit of Jesus Christ. At that time there were added to the Holy Spirit the elements of Christ, of His death, of His resurrection, of the strength or effectiveness of His death, and of the power of His resurrection. All these elements are now compounded into the Spirit of God.

Surely you can see now the meaning of these four spices being added to the oil: the myrrh, speaking of His death; the cinnamon, speaking of the sweetness and strength of His death; the calamus, speaking of His resurrection; and the cassia, speaking of the resurrection power.

The numbers used in reference to the anointing ointment are also meaningful. Four, the number of spices, signifies the creatures and thus indicates the humanity of Christ. If we combine the middle two spices, we have three measures of five hundred shekels. The number three speaks of Christ's divinity. It is the number of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Spirit. Why is the middle unit of five hundred shekels split? This indicates that the middle One of the Godhead was broken; the split into two units speaks of the cross.

All these items indicated by the spices and the measures have been compounded into this Spirit, this Spirit who "was not yet" before Christ's resurrection. How can we practically apply them to us?

According to what we were told in the past, we experience the death of Christ and the power of His resurrection first by believing that we were crucified with Christ. This I did: I believed I had been crucified with Him. I thoroughly believed. Nonetheless, when the irritations came, I reacted. Then I was taught that believing is not adequate; I must also reckon. So I began to reckon. Just as I reckoned on the fact that two and two are four, so I tried to reckon on the fact that I had died with Christ. I did a great deal of reckoning. I found that the more I reckoned, the less I experienced dying with Christ and the more alive I was.

How can we make the practical application? We must get this compound ointment.

TAKING IN THE COMPOUND SPIRIT

A few days ago I had a painful toothache. I had to have it treated in the emergency room of the hospital. I had gotten an infection from a dead tooth, which was decaying. After some surgery I was given thirty tablets of antibiotics to kill the infection. There was no need to ask the surgeon to kill the bacteria. I myself had to take the tablets. Then the killing power would get into me and take care of the germs. In our natural being there are many germs. The antibiotic is the compound Spirit. We must take Him in.

Besides an antibiotic to kill the germs, we need nourishment. Antibiotics kill infection, but they do not provide us with nourishment. We need the proper food to supply us and maintain us in good health. The antibiotic of the death of Christ kills the germs, and the nourishing food of the resurrection of Christ supplies us.

Of course, we must be sure to take the antibiotics and the food. If I had left my tablets on the table instead of taking them as I had been directed, there would have been no killing of my infection. I may be provided with the most nourishing food, but if I do not eat it, it will not do me any good. Without the medicine and the food, my infection might flare up again in a few days.

How do we take in the compound Spirit?

Over fifty years ago I heard our pastor say that Jesus is the heavenly manna, the bread of life that came down from heaven. He spoke many times from John 6 but never told us how to take this bread or eat the manna. I really did not discover the secret until 1958, thirty-three years after I got saved. Then I gave a message in Taipei on eating Jesus. After the meeting a brother who was a professor came up and shook hands with me. He said, “Brother Lee, tonight’s message was good.” I waited, because I knew something was not good! “But to use the word *eat*,” he continued, “especially to say that we must eat Jesus, is a little wild.”

“Brother,” I replied, “I am not the first one who is wild. The Lord Jesus was. He said in John 6:57, ‘He who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me.’ The Lord told us to eat Him.”

You may have heard sermons on Jesus as the bread of life. Were you ever told how to eat this bread? You were probably told that to eat the living bread is to meditate on the Word of God. I tried that way. I would read a portion of the Word and then close my eyes to meditate. Before very many minutes went by, the fowls of the air would come to visit. My father-in-law would come to mind, or my thoughts would travel to Hong Kong, or London, or New York.

It was not until 1958 that the Lord showed me how necessary it is that we eat Him. How are we to eat? From John 6 it is clear that the Lord Jesus cannot be separated from the Spirit. After saying that we must eat of this bread (v. 51) and that He Himself is eatable (vv. 55-57), the Lord went on to say, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life” (v. 63). In this one verse are two key words: *the Spirit* and *the words.* We have the word in the Bible and the Spirit within us. These are the means by which we can eat and drink of the Lord.

By Pray-reading the Word

The way to eat the Lord is to pray the Word. Even before 1958 we had some experience of coming to the Bible in a prayerful way. We would read a portion and then pray over the verses we had read. We would even use the verses themselves as our prayer. We came to the Word not with a reading mind but with a praying spirit. In this way we were nourished.

After 1958 the saints who were helped by that message began to practice eating Jesus by eating the Word. Gradually, pray-reading became common among us. We found out that the best way to get spiritual nourishment from the Word of God is not only to read it but also to pray it. When we read, we use our eyes to see, our mind to understand, and our heart to receive. When we pray, we exercise our spirit to digest what we understand and receive. To pray-read the Word of God is to exercise our spirit to digest the Word rather than our mind to understand it. All of us who pray-read can testify what nourishment we receive from it. To eat, then, is to take the Lord in by praying His Word.

By Calling on His Name

How can we drink of Him? When we call on His name, we have the sense that we have had a refreshing drink. Throughout the day, if we call "O Lord Jesus!" a few times, we will have a good drink. Oftentimes during the course of my day, I feel weary from my writing, studying, reading, and listening to people. When I pause to call "O Lord Jesus," I am refreshed. I like to tell the Lord, "Lord, I still love You. O Lord Jesus, I still love You." It makes a big difference to my day. People in this country like to stop and have a cup of coffee. The real refreshment comes not from a cup of coffee but from calling on the name of the Lord.

Romans 10:9 says, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." We have been criticized for saying that we are saved by calling on the Lord's name. Is it sufficient to listen to a gospel message and believe what is preached without calling on the Lord? Suppose an unsaved one hears the gospel. He recognizes that he is a sinner and believes that Jesus is the Son of God who died on the cross for his sins, was resurrected, and is now the Redeemer and Savior. Is this adequate? Romans 10 says further, "There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all and rich to all who call upon Him; for 'whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved'" (vv. 12-13). There are two sides here: one is believing; the other, calling on the name of the Lord. The one who believes the gospel may say, "Lord Jesus, I am a sinner. Do forgive me. I believe You died for me." He is calling on the Lord, though only a little. We may say that he is saved, but he is scarcely saved. Later, however, while he is alone in his room, he may call out, "O Lord Jesus! Hallelujah! You died for me! I am a sinner, but Your blood was shed for me!" Now he is more saved. The louder he calls, the stronger his experience of salvation will be.

I have a friend who was an unbeliever. When he got saved, he was rolling on the floor, repenting and calling out that he was a sinner. No one told him to roll on the floor or to shout. Then he called out, "Lord Jesus! Jesus!" He got thoroughly saved.

It is not only sinners whose thirst is quenched by calling on the Lord. Though I have been in the Lord for over fifty-five years, I still find that every time I call on the name of the Lord Jesus, I am refreshed. People may say that

it is not refined to call out like this. Possibly this is true, but I do enjoy it. I care more for the enjoyment of eating than for table manners.

In this compound Spirit are the death of Christ with its effectiveness, His resurrection, and the power of His resurrection. This Spirit is embodied in the word. The Spirit and the word cannot be separated from each other. "It is the Spirit who gives life;... the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." We have both the word and the Spirit. The Spirit is compounded with all the excellent, divine elements as well as the humanity of Christ and His death and resurrection. He is the all-inclusive Spirit.

"You have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know... And as for you, the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone teach you; but as His anointing teaches you concerning all things and is true and is not a lie, and even as it has taught you, abide in Him" (1 John 2:20, 27).

The more we pray-read and the more we call on His name, the more His humanity will be anointed into our being. This compound ointment is like paint. When we have our house painted, it gets one coating of paint and then another added to it. By pray-reading and calling on the name of the Lord, the spiritual painting will add coating after coating to us. Then within us there will be both the humanity and the divinity of Christ. There will be the effectiveness of His death, by which all the negative things of our natural being will be killed. We will also have the power of His resurrection to nourish, strengthen, and sustain us with its heavenly supply.

In the church life we enjoy the Triune God. We enjoy Christ. We enjoy both His humanity and His divinity, His death and its effectiveness, His resurrection and its power. Our enjoyment cannot be denied, even by those who criticize us as being emotional. Let us disregard such criticisms. Let us keep on pray-reading. Let us keep on calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. The enemy Satan hates the church life. He also hates our pray-reading and our calling. But to us they are an enjoyment.

By means of the pray-reading and the calling we experience the compound ointment. This ointment within us is moving and active. *Anointing* is the noun form of the verb *to anoint*. The anointing is the moving of the ointment; in other words, it is the action of the compound Spirit.

In the New Testament this compound Spirit is called "the Spirit." Many times Paul uses this term rather than *Holy Spirit* or *Spirit of God*. For example, he says, "The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit" (Rom. 8:16). It is by this compound all-inclusive Spirit that we enjoy Him, that we live Christ, and that we have the church life. It is the Spirit who makes the church life so living, rich, and uplifting.

When John spoke of the anointing in his Epistle, he must have had in mind Exodus 30:23-25. This reference in Moses' writings is the source of this matter of the anointing. In the time of Moses there was only the type. Today we have the reality, the all-inclusive compound Spirit. We enjoy Him by pray-reading and by calling on the name of the Lord. Then John in his Revelation, the last book of the Bible, used *the Spirit* more than other terms or titles for the Spirit of God (2:7, 11, 17, 28; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; 22:17). This indicates that eventually the Bible stresses "the Spirit" for our experience of the Triune God with all His achievements and attainments.

CHAPTER TEN

OUR SPIRIT BORN OF GOD AND THE SEED OF GOD IN IT

Scripture Reading: 1 John 3:9; 5:4a; John 3:6b; 2 Pet. 1:4

In this chapter we come to the fifth mystery in 1 John.

We began with the mystery of life—the divine, eternal life, which is in reality the Triune God Himself. Then we spoke of fellowship, that is, the life moving in us to bring God and us into oneness. After that we continued with the mutual abiding. We abide in the Triune God, and He abides in us. Then in the last chapter we dealt with the anointing, the moving within us of the Triune God as the all-inclusive compound Spirit.

The anointing, as we said, imparts the divine elements into us. All these elements are included in the compound Spirit. Besides divinity, there is humanity, Christ's death and its effectiveness, and His resurrection and the power of that resurrection. This life-giving Spirit, the very Triune God processed into our being, is now anointing, "painting," us so that we may gain more of Himself. As we receive not only the divine elements but also the death and resurrection of Christ, we get the proper killing and the rich nourishment. That wonderful death works in us to kill the negative things of our natural being. That wonderful resurrection supplies us with Christ's divine riches. By this anointing we are being transformed and are growing into maturity.

The fifth mystery in 1 John is twofold. It comprises both our regenerated spirit and the seed of God. These are within us, though they are abstract and invisible.

MAN'S TRIPARTITE NATURE

The Bible clearly teaches that we have a spirit. The belief that man has three parts—body, soul, and spirit—is called trichotomy. This is according to the Bible. Genesis 2:7 says, "Jehovah God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." Even from this verse it is clear that man has three parts. God first

used the dust to form a physical body for man. Then He used breath to form man's spirit. The breath of life got into man and became his spirit. The spirit of man is mentioned in Proverbs 20:27. *Spirit* and *breath* in Hebrew are the same word. This indicates that the breath breathed into man became the human spirit. When these two parts, the body and spirit, came together, they produced the third part, a living soul. First Thessalonians 5:23 also mentions these three parts: "The God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Trichotomy then is a scriptural teaching.

Some Christian teachers, however, believe instead in dichotomy. They follow psychology, which claims that man has a visible, outward part and an invisible, inward part. The outward part is lower; the inward, higher. To those who believe this way, *spirit* and *soul* are synonyms.

The translators for the New American Standard Version evidently believe this way. In Philippians 2:2 they have "united in spirit" and in 2:20 "of kindred spirit." In both instances the Greek word is not *spirit* but *psuche, soul.* In our Recovery Version we are careful to translate these words according to the Greek. These scholars may know Greek well. Yet because of their concept that *spirit* and *soul* are synonyms, they have translated according to their concept rather than according to what the Bible says.

Do you believe that *spirit, mind, soul,* and *heart* are simply different ways of referring to one thing? The Bible makes a distinction. It treasures our spirit, and it condemns our soul. In His salvation God has rejected our soul but regenerated our spirit. Our spirit is a pleasure to Him. Animals have souls, but trees and flowers do not. If we do not distinguish between the spirit and the soul, we put ourselves in the same category as cats and dogs. As human beings, we have a treasured part. Zechariah 12:1 says that Jehovah "stretches forth the heavens and lays the foundations of the earth and forms the spirit of man within him." How great must the spirit of man be for it to be ranked with the heavens and the earth! In the Bible besides God there are three important things: the heavens, the earth, and man's spirit (not his soul). We are not mere animals. We are men with a spirit.

A RECEIVING ORGAN

Our spirit was created by God as the organ for us to receive Him. We must not confuse it with another organ. Suppose a medical doctor considered that *stomach, heart, liver,* and *kidneys* were all synonyms for the same organ. What kind of a doctor could he be! The stomach is the receiving organ for our food. We take in food with our mouth; then the food passes to the stomach to be digested. This food, after being completely digested, is assimilated into our tissues and cells, becoming part of us. How useful is this physical organ that receives our physical supply! We have another receiving organ, that we may take in the spiritual supply. This supply is God Himself.

After man's creation God provided him with the tree of life and told him to freely eat (Gen. 2:8-9, 16). This was an indication that the man created by God needed to receive this life, which was God Himself, as his supply. John 6 makes this clear. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the bread of life... This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, that anyone may eat of it and not die... He who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me" (vv. 48, 50, 57). We can eat the Lord Jesus because He is our life supply. He is the food of life from heaven.

A SENSING ORGAN

Let us consider the organ that receives this spiritual and heavenly food.

Where is our spirit located? This we are not sure of. We know that we have two hearts: a physical one and a psychological one. We know the location of the physical one; but where is the psychological one? It is hard for us to pinpoint its exact location, though we know from experience that it is inside us. The same is true of our spirit. Our experience confirms that we do have such an organ within us.

Let us suppose that the thought comes to me that I need to contact Brother So-and-so. My mind considers it and approves. My emotion has the desire to go. My will then makes the decision that I will go. Nonetheless, deeper than all these there is a sense that I should not go. My mind, emotion, and will are all in agreement that I should take one course. What part of me is saying that I should take another? It cannot be the soul. It is the spirit.

Let us use another illustration. You may have quite a comfortable life. You have a good family. You live in a nice house. You eat well and dress well. You

are happy with your work. In the evenings you enjoy listening to good music. Your environment is peaceful. Nonetheless, you sense a lack. You need something more. Where does this sense of emptiness come from? Outwardly you are satisfied, but deep within you are not.

The Bible calls this part deep within us that feels dissatisfied the human spirit. Even in fallen man the spirit has been preserved by God. His evil doings come not from his spirit but from his mind, emotion, will, and heart. No verse in the Bible tells us that man's spirit is evil. The mind, in contrast, is spoken of as corrupt (2 Tim. 3:8); the heart, as deceitful and incurable (Jer. 17:9). The spirit in fallen man, though deadened (Eph. 2:1, 5), has been sovereignly preserved by God.

When we hear the gospel preached, God's word touches our conscience and causes us to repent. Repentance is an act from the spirit. It is a response to the conscience, which is part of the spirit, in fact, the main part. Then, when we believe in the Lord and call on His name, the Spirit of God enters into our spirit. He comes in to enliven us with God's life, that is, to regenerate us.

THE REGENERATED SPIRIT

In our regenerated spirit there is now the Spirit of God and the life of God. We have been born of God. Something of God has been conceived into our being. We have not only been united with Him; we are mingled with Him. We have been conceived not only *by* Him but also *with* Him.

Our human language fails when we try to describe the relationship in life that we have with God. We have been born of God, not adopted by Him. It is not that we were born on the street and then God took us up and adopted us. Nor has He merely been added to us. When we are born of our earthly father, we have his life; in a sense, he has been conceived into us. With God, the same is true: we have His life, for He has been conceived into us. We have become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4).

This birth has taken place in our spirit. As John 3:6b says, "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." That which is born of the Spirit of God is our human spirit.

As one who was raised in China, I studied the ethical teachings of Confucius. His writings are not concerned with God. They deal only with ethics. The high point of his teachings is his statement that the highest learning is to develop the bright virtue of man. By the bright virtue he means the conscience. The best he could advise was that we should develop our conscience. Before I was saved, to some extent I appreciated Confucius's teachings. Afterward, though, I realized I had something far better. Those who follow him can have no higher learning than to develop their conscience. I now had not a teaching but a fact: the Spirit of God was in my conscience, and I possessed the divine life. How much better to have God born into my spirit and to have His life!

Have you ever considered that the Spirit of God and the divine life are in your spirit? Suppose you were given a beautiful diamond on your way here. Would there not be an indication of joy on your face that you possessed such a treasure? How could you conceal your delight? The same delight and joy should show on your face if you truly realize what you have in your spirit. In belief you have God in you, even the Spirit of God and the life of God; but in experience you do not have the adequate realization of them. If you did, you would be beside yourself, shouting hallelujahs and praising the Lord for His life in you. Your spirit has been born of God! God has been born into you!

In the fifty-five years since I got saved, I have been fully preserved by the Lord. I never went through a time of backsliding. What has kept me? It is the excitement that comes from realizing that my spirit has been born of God, that the very living God is in my spirit, and that His Spirit and His life are also there! I realize how wonderful a person I am to have such a One in me! I am really happy to testify about the wonderful One in me. He is worth getting excited about!

Paul said to Timothy, "The Lord be with your spirit" (2 Tim. 4:22). He did not say that the Lord be with Timothy's mind, that he might have a sober mind, nor that the Lord be with his good heart. No. The Lord be with your *spirit*!

We have been discussing the matter of the spirit, yet if you check 1 John, you will find that the word *spirit* does not occur even once. Nonetheless, there is a reference to the spirit in 5:4: "Everything that has been begotten of God overcomes the world." The word *everything* is neuter, as it is also in the original.

There is a part within us that has been born of God. Our whole being has not been regenerated; only our spirit has. Our body will be transfigured at His coming. Our soul is now undergoing the process of transformation. It is our spirit that has been born of God. It is our spirit that overcomes the world.

OVERCOMING THE WORLD

Your experience will confirm this. Before you were saved, you loved the world. Even afterward, the world still attracted you. Whenever you still felt drawn to the world, however, you can testify that something within you was opposed to that attraction. There was a part inside you that would not agree with your continuing to love the world. Your mind might dwell on worldly things. Your emotions might be stirred by the world's appeal. Your will might lean toward the world's allure. Your spirit, however, utterly refused to go along. Within you it was constantly hating the world. It is our spirit that overcomes the world.

Let us go along with this part. Do not follow the dictates of your mind. Begin early in the day by saying to the Lord, "Lord, thank You that I have a part within me that has been born of You. Thank You for my spirit, which overcomes the world. Lord, have mercy upon me. Grant me the portion of grace for this day that I may live You by this part that has been born of You. Thank You, Lord, that I have such a part within me."

Do not try to use another organ to overcome the world. If you want to see, you need to exercise your eyes, not your ears. To overcome the world, the right organ is your regenerated spirit. It is not your clever mind or your strong will. Your spirit was regenerated when you believed in the Lord Jesus. It has been born of God, with God, and in God. This organ is capable of overcoming the world.

THE SEED OF GOD

"Everyone who has been born of God does not practice sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been begotten of God" (3:9).

This verse with *everyone* seems to refer to the whole person. From 5:4, however, we know that only a part of us is born of God. Notice the second part of 3:9: "His seed abides in him." The seed of God abides in us.

Suppose you want to grow some flowers. You buy the seeds and sow them into the earth. The seed is the seed of the flower, but it is also the flower itself. The same is true of the seed of God; the seed of God is God Himself planted in you as a seed. A few days after you plant the flower seeds, something will break through the soil. After another little period of time, sprouts will appear. Before too long you will see the beautiful blossoms. If you have planted carnation seeds, you will see the carnation blossoms. What blossoms from the seed of God? This seed grows, sprouts, and blossoms God Himself.

God is a seed in us, growing until He Himself blossoms forth. This is not a human teaching or Greek philosophical thought or Chinese ethics. It is a heavenly truth. The Triune God, the almighty, infinite, eternal God, has been sown into our spirit to grow Himself and to blossom Himself.

In this series we have been considering how to live Christ. We have already said that we live Him by fellowship, by mutual abiding, and by the anointing. Now we add what we have covered here. We live Christ by the spirit born of God and by the seed of God, which grows God from within us and blossoms Him out. Because we have been born of God, we have the Spirit of God and the life of God within our spirit. Instead of committing sin, this wonderful spirit overcomes the world.

Let us live Christ by the spirit and by this seed of God within us.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

MINISTERING LIFE TO THE SINNING ONE

Scripture Reading: 1 John 5:16-21

THE BASIC THOUGHTS IN FIRST JOHN

When an author decides to compose a writing, he has some basic thoughts in mind as to what he plans to cover. I believe that when the apostle John wrote this Epistle, the basic matters that he wanted to share were the very items we have covered in the previous chapters.

There was within him this matter of the eternal life. Out of this life is the fellowship, the flowing of this life within us. Within John also must have been the fact of the mutual abiding, then the anointing, and then the spirit, which has been reborn of God. He wanted to remind his readers of the part within them that was not only created by God but also regenerated by His Spirit with the divine life. Then there must also have been the thought of the seed of God, that is, God Himself sown into mankind as the soil. It is of these basic items that John composed this Epistle.

THE CONCLUDING ITEMS

With this chapter we come to the conclusion of 1 John, the last six verses.

"If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask and he will give life to him, to those sinning not unto death. There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he should make request concerning that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not unto death. We know that everyone who is begotten of God does not sin, but he who has been begotten of God keeps himself, and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the evil one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding that we might know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, guard yourselves from idols" (5:16-21).

John's conclusion here is also composed of several basic matters. There are five on the negative side and three on the positive. The negative ones are: sin, death, the world, the evil one, and idols. The positive ones are: God, the Son of God, and life.

It is a help in studying the Bible to take note of the main items. If you do not pick them out, you probably will not notice them. Do not hesitate to mark up your Bible. Then the important themes will stand out, and the light will shine. If you circle the negative items in these verses in black and then use another color to circle the positive items, your attention will be drawn to them.

JOHN'S WAY OF WRITING

It was the work of the apostle John to mend the broken revelation that had been given to Paul. He surely did a marvelous job! Even in these six verses we can see his wisdom and skillfulness. It is not sufficient for a carpenter to have good pieces of wood; he also needs skill if he is to shape them into fine furniture. In these verses John handled his words in a skillful way.

Like the rest of the Bible, John's composition is not doctrinal but experiential. He begins his conclusion by directing a man who sees his brother sinning to ask life for him. What John has in mind is not a doctrine but a case. He is speaking about experience. There is no doctrinal flavor to these verses. They are written from the standpoint of experience.

The Bible is surely not composed in a doctrinal way. Systematic theology is a human invention. The revelation in the Bible is not given in systematized doctrines. Genesis begins by telling us, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This is not a doctrine. In Genesis 3 we have the account of the subtle serpent who came and beguiled the woman into partaking of the forbidden tree. There is no doctrine of the devil given. The New Testament likewise begins in a way that is not doctrinal. It says, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

Beware of doctrinal talk. The divisions in Christianity have come about largely over doctrine. If Christians cared more for experience and less for doctrine, there would not be so many divisions.

A SHORTAGE OF LIFE

If anyone sees his brother sinning, John writes, "he shall ask and he will give life to him, to those sinning not unto death" (1 John 5:16). This is the only reference in the Bible to ministering life to someone. How is it possible to give life to someone? I can give him, say, a watch, but what does it mean to give him life? It means that I impart Christ to him. It is of no help to talk doctrines to him. He has sinned because he is short of life. When we are short of the Lord Jesus, we commit sin. Doctrine will not help us to overcome sin. Only one person can overcome sin, and that is the Lord Jesus. If we lose our temper, that is an indication that we are short of the Lord Jesus. We do not need a rebuke. We do not need to be told what we should do or should not do. We do not need to be told that we were wrong. The more we are condemned, the more our temper will rise. A rebuking reduces our measure of Christ. What we need is an addition of Him, not a reduction. We need more of Him imparted into us.

Have you ever realized that you sin because you are short of the Lord Jesus? Why do you mistreat your wife or husband? Have you ever looked in the mirror when you were angry and seen how ugly you were? Yet you had every intention of being considerate and loving toward your spouse. Why is it that you have not been able to live up to your resolves? You are short of the Lord Jesus.

Husbands, do not rebuke your wife. You will simply make yourself and her miserable. Rebuking makes the situation worse. What can you do? You may say that you must love her. Sometimes that may help, but love may corrupt and do damage. Only Christ works. Only life helps. We husbands must minister life to our wives.

Sisters, deep in your heart you may have the intention to subdue your husband. Husbands like to rebuke; wives like to subdue. You will never succeed in subduing your husband; God created man to be over you. The only husband who can be subdued is the clever one; he will merely be tricking you into thinking that he is subdued. Give up your efforts to subdue your husband. What he needs is for you to minister life to him. You must minister a portion of Christ to him. Both husbands and wives need more Christ. Only He saves.

What short simple words John uses! “Give life to him”—a first grader can read this. Yet how marvelous is the expression, found nowhere else in the Bible! Some may protest that the Bible tells us to admonish and rebuke. It does, but this is not the word of the mending ministry here. Why is Christianity so degraded? One reason is that there are many to admonish but few to give life. What can mend today’s broken situation? Only the life-giving mending ministry. Christianity’s poor situation is due to the shortage of life.

THE WAY TO HELP A SINNING ONE

In the church life we must learn to minister life. This is what is needed. Do not try other ways. No way of helping is better than that of ministering life.

You may raise the objection that you yourself are short of life; how can you minister it to others? You may indeed be short of life. Then what should you do? Do not go to admonish or rebuke. Do not even go to the other party. You yourself must turn to the Lord: “Lord, have mercy upon me. My brother is sinning; he needs the supply of life. He lacks life. But so do I, Lord. I don’t have much life either. Have mercy upon us, but first have mercy upon me. I need more life. I must have more life.” You may be so burdened that you will even fast and shorten your sleeping hours in order to pray for more life. I can assure you that you will be supplied. If your car is almost out of gasoline, you can turn into the gas station and stay there to have the tank refilled. After a little while your gas supply will be replenished, and you can continue on your way. When you yourself have the supply, then you can supply others.

We need to learn that when any brother or sister sins, this is a strong indication that he or she is short of life. To be of help, we must first check whether we have life. Do we have a surplus of life? Do we have more than we need? If not, we must wait on the Lord with prayer and fasting until we get the rich supply. Then we can minister from this supply to others. This is the way to go on in the church life during this time of degraded Christianity.

John stresses that this life which we need to minister to others is simply God Himself. It is the Son of God. “This is the true God and eternal life.” Our need is to have a bigger portion of the Lord Jesus. Then we will have a surplus to minister to others, a surplus not of knowledge or doctrine but of God.

SIN ISSUING IN DEATH

Notice that 1 John 5:16-17 speaks of a sin not unto death and of a sin unto death. Sin of course always results in death, but some sins do not bring in death right away. Death in some cases comes later. The children of Israel—during their wilderness wandering—provide us with illustrations of both types of sin. When Korah and his company rebelled against Moses (Num. 16), they died at once. Theirs was a sin unto death. Within a day of their sin they died. Miriam, in contrast, did not die immediately after sinning against Moses (ch. 12). That sin, however, caused both her and Aaron to die in the wilderness before the children of Israel entered the good land (20:1, 28). Sin, then, always issues in death; sometimes it is immediate, and other times delayed.

It is good to avoid sin. We cannot by ourselves overcome it, however. Only life can. First John 5:18 says, "We know that everyone who is begotten of God does not sin." Life overcomes sin. By overcoming sin, life also overcomes death. Life deals with the source or root of death, which is sin. By overcoming sin, it overcomes death. Every sin we commit kills us a little. Even losing our temper kills us. It not only kills our spirit; it even brings death to our physical body. There is nothing good about sin, but nonetheless we cannot overcome it. We must put our trust in that life which is God, even the Son of God Himself. Trust in life. Since life overcomes sin, it rescues us from death.

THE WORLD, THE EVIL ONE, AND IDOLS

Sin is also closely related to the world. We can neither separate the world from sin, nor can we separate sin from the world. If we go shopping and purchase some things we do not need, we are being worldly. At the moment what we have done may not be sin, but it is close to sin. The world is close to sin. In the concluding verses of 1 John there is a cluster of negative things: sin, death, the world, the evil one, and idols. "The whole world lies in the evil one." When we buy unnecessary things from the world, what we get is from within the evil one. We may think of them simply as purchases from the department store, but those worldly things are from within Satan. The whole world, including modern things and fashionable styles, lies in the evil one.

John says, "The whole world lies in the evil one." He does not use the word *devil* or *Satan,* but rather *the evil one.* Actually, in Greek the word is *evil,* but it is clear that *evil* denotes the evil one. The whole world is lying in evil, or in the evil one. If you get an unnecessary article from the world, you

are getting something out of the evil one. In the eyes of God, that thing is an idol.

The last verse says, “Little children, guard yourselves from idols.” From the context we can see that idols are those things of the world that we love. We may choose to purchase a necktie, for example, because we think it is the latest style. To take pleasure in that necktie is to like something from within the evil one. A pair of shoes may be an idol. A car may be an idol. It may be an essential for transportation in our society, but if we go beyond fulfilling that need and love its style, it becomes an idol. Keep yourselves from idols.

This is not to say that we should be sloppy in our dress. But it is one thing to dress carefully and another to care for fashions and select our clothing on the basis of what is in style. To choose our clothes according to the fashion of this age is a sign that we are short of life. Fashionable clothes are then an idol to us.

Read over these concluding verses carefully. Pray-read them. Notice how interrelated sin, death, the world, and the evil one are. Sin issues in death. Sin comes in because we are close to the world. The world is lying in the evil one. What we choose to take out of it is an idol in the eyes of God. We must overcome sin and the world, and we must keep ourselves from idols.

OUR CONFIDENCE

When we sin, we not only need life ministered to us; we also need to realize that we are born of God. We have a part within us that has been born of God. In our prayers we must put our trust in these two things: the life that is God Himself and the part within us that has been born of Him. “We know that everyone who is begotten of God does not sin, but he who has been begotten of God keeps himself, and the evil one does not touch him” (v. 18). Our spirit and the life that is the Lord Jesus Himself ministered to us as a life supply will overcome sin, death, the world, and the evil one. Then, since we are no longer under those things, our idols will be gone. As long as we are under sin, death, the world, and the evil one, we will have many idols.

Your experience will confirm this. When you live in the world, you are under sin, under death, and under Satan, and you have many things that are idols. How are you delivered out of these five negative things? To be brought

out of them you must grow with life into God. Then you will be in the three positive things: God; the Son of God, Jesus Christ; and life. You will mature.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CHRIST'S HEAVENLY MINISTRY IN GOD'S ADMINISTRATION

Scripture Reading: Rev. 1:12, 20; 5:1-7

Paul's ministry was completed in the late A.D. 60s when he was martyred. A period of about twenty-five years went by before John's writings appeared. His Gospel, Epistles, and Revelation were written about A.D. 90. This gap in time was under the Lord's sovereignty.

From what Paul tells us in Colossians 1:25, we know that Paul's stewardship, which he received from God, was to complete the word of God. *The word of God* refers to the Scriptures, God's full revelation. Thus, with Paul's writings, the divine revelation should have been completed. Why was it, then, that another ministry came along after his?

ANOTHER MINISTRY NEEDED AFTER PAUL'S

History records that before the end of the first century, after Paul's martyrdom, the church was carried away by serious heresies. Thus, the revelation of God was damaged. John's ministry came in to repair this damage.

One heresy was that Christ is not God. The Gospel of John was written to counter this false teaching. All twenty-one chapters bear strong testimony that Christ is God Himself. The Gospel begins by saying, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John declares clearly throughout his Gospel that Christ is not only the Son of God but God Himself. In 20:24-29 he tells us how Thomas doubted the resurrection of Christ. The Lord was patient with Thomas until he was convinced. Then Thomas said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Here is an example of John's testimony that Christ is God.

A second heresy that arose taught that Christ did not come in the flesh. Satan, on the one hand, instigated the teaching that Christ was not God. If Christ was not God, He must be a man. But the subtle one, on the other hand,

also was behind the heresy that claimed Christ had not come in the flesh; this means that He was not a man.

Notice how strongly John fights these errors. After stressing in the first verse of his Gospel that Christ is God, he tells us in verse 14 that this Word, which was God, became flesh. In his first Epistle John warns the believers not to believe every spirit but to prove whether the spirit recognizes that Christ has come in the flesh (4:1-3).

Christ's person is wonderful, and it is wonderful mainly in two aspects. One is that He is God; the other, that He became a man. It was these two points that Satan attacked by means of the heresies he inspired. What a damage to Paul's completing ministry for these evil beliefs to creep in! It meant a breakage in the divine revelation. Another ministry was needed, not to complete but to mend.

Suppose I have a new jacket, which gets torn. It must be mended. Where the tear is repaired, that place on the jacket will be stronger than the rest of the fabric. John's ministry is to some extent stronger than Paul's. The fact that he wrote after Paul is an indication that John's writings are stronger. Compare also the Christ revealed in these two ministries.

CHRIST IN THE WRITINGS OF PAUL

Paul's main revelation is of Christ and the church. The Christ he reveals is all-inclusive. In Colossians he presents Christ as the portion of the saints (1:12); the image of the invisible God (v. 15); the Firstborn of all creation (v. 15); the Firstborn from the dead (v. 18); the mystery of God's economy, Christ in us, the hope of glory (v. 27); the mystery of God (2:2); the embodiment of God (v. 9); the Head of all rule and authority (v. 10); the body of the shadows of all positive things (v. 17); our life (3:4); and all in all in the new man (v. 11). Surely the Christ Paul reveals is wonderful and all-inclusive.

Nowhere, however, does Paul reveal Christ as the universal Administrator in God's universal government. God's throne in the heavens is over the whole universe. Who is the One who carries out His administration? John tells us in Revelation 5.

CHRIST IN THE WRITINGS OF JOHN

Those in the world do not know what is going on behind the scenes regarding God's government. Revelation 5 opens this view to us, but it is concealed from them.

"I saw on the right hand of Him who sits upon the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals? And no one in heaven nor on the earth nor under the earth was able to open the scroll or look into it" (vv. 1-3).

The scroll must be the new covenant, recording God's thought concerning the church, Israel, the world, and the universe. When no one was found worthy to open this scroll, John wept (v. 4). Then one of the elders comforted him, saying, "The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so that He may open the scroll and its seven seals" (v. 5).

What John saw when he looked, however, was a Lamb, not a Lion. In John's Gospel John the Baptist had recommended this same Lamb: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (1:29). The Lamb here, however, is not concerned with redemption. He is concerned with God's administration. John, then, opens the view to us of the redeeming Lamb who has now become God's universal Administrator so that His purpose might be fulfilled.

Surely God has an administration over the universe. Otherwise, how could His purpose be realized? In this administration the redeeming Lamb, the Redeemer, is the Administrator. When did the Lamb come and take the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sits upon the throne (Rev. 5:7)? It must have been right after He ascended to the heavens. What John records here is a view, not a prophecy, of what has taken place already. When Christ ascended to the heavens, He received a scroll from God, thus opening the secret of the universe for the carrying out of God's administration.

How great a view of Christ John had! Yes, Paul did reveal that Christ is all-inclusive, but he did not say that Christ is the universal Administrator. Why is John's ministry stronger than Paul's? It is because he came to mend what was damaged; a repair has to be doubly strong. He wanted to make sure that there would be no more damage regarding these matters.

THE CHURCH IN THE WRITINGS OF PAUL AND JOHN

Now let us compare what the two writers say regarding the church. Paul surely tells us some wonderful facts. The church is the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (Eph. 1:22-23). It is also the new man (2:15). It is also the temple of God, His dwelling place (vv. 21-22). John, however, adds two more items of what the church is.

In Revelation 1 John shows the church as a lampstand (v. 12). What Paul reveals of the church—the Body of Christ—is in the realm of life. Brother Paul, why did you not tell us of the golden nature of the church? Why did you not mention its shining function? I have spent much time with you, Brother Paul, but now I must come to John. He has something further to say about the church. When I was with you, I learned that the church is the Body, that it is the fullness, and that it is the new man. But without John I could not have known that the church is also a golden lampstand. A lampstand is stronger than the Body, though both are surely precious.

John also reveals the ultimate consummation of the church as the New Jerusalem. How much greater is a city than a temple! Paul presented the temple. When that revelation was damaged, John presented something greater, higher, and stronger. How indestructible is the New Jerusalem! How strong is the mending ministry of John!

THE INDWELLING CHRIST IN THE WRITINGS OF PAUL AND JOHN

Both Paul and John speak of the indwelling Christ. Let us compare what they say. Paul tells us, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27); “It pleased God... to reveal His Son in me” (Gal. 1:15-16); and “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (2:20). Paul surely reveals the indwelling Christ.

John, however, speaks of the indwelling in a more vital way. To say that Christ lives in us is to speak in a general, vague way. To say, as John does, that Christ is the vine and that we are the branches, that we are to abide in Him and have Him abide in us, is to speak in a specific, particular way.

Paul could make the declaration, "To me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). But in John 15 we can see that to live Christ is simply to be a branch abiding in the vine; what the branch expresses is spontaneously the life of the vine.

Paul says, "I am able to do all things in Him who empowers me" (Phil. 4:13). This is indeed a marvelous statement, but it is too general for us to really understand. The explanation again comes from John 15, where we are told, "Abide in Me and I in you" (v. 4) because "apart from Me you can do nothing" (v. 5). How can we do all things in the One who empowers us? It is by abiding in Him. If we are apart from Him, we can do nothing. It seems that Paul is stating the fact positively, whereas in John 15 it is stated negatively. Actually, what John 15 says about abiding is more positive. It is by abiding in Him that we can do all things in Him. In reality it is not we who are doing, but the One in whom we are abiding and who abides in us. As He lives out of us, He does all things through us.

If we see how these two ministries go along with each other, the one completing and the other mending and strengthening what was damaged, we have a good foundation for understanding the New Testament.

THE TWO MINISTRIES OF CHRIST

The New Testament is a full revelation of Christ. This Christ is presented to us in two stages: one on earth and the second in heaven. Of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, only four (besides a half chapter in Acts) deal with Christ on this earth. Then He ascended to the heavens.

Have you been saved by the heavenly Christ or by the earthly Christ? Our Redeemer is the heavenly Christ. Are you still living in the Gospels, or can you say that you are at least in Paul's Epistles? I trust we can all say that we are enjoying the indwelling Christ, the hope of glory; that we are experiencing Him as the all-inclusive One; and that we are in the church, the Body, the new man, the temple. I hope also that some of us can say that we are in John's ministry, that we are part of the lampstand, and that we are on our way to the New Jerusalem.

Christ's earthly ministry lasted only three and a half years. His heavenly ministry is eternal; it has already been going on for close to two thousand years, and there will be no end.

It is common in fundamental Christian circles to speak of the finished work of Christ. They use John 19:30, where Christ said, "It is finished," to prove that Christ has completed the work He came to do. Because all has been accomplished, He is now seated on the throne. To sit down is an indication that the work is finished. Such a teaching indicates a lack of understanding of the two ministries of Christ.

In His earthly ministry Christ fully accomplished redemption. He has redeemed us, taken away our sins, and destroyed Satan. In His all-inclusive crucifixion He terminated sin, sins, the self, the flesh, the old man, the world, Satan, and Satan's kingdom of darkness—all the old creation. Through His death His eternal life was released.

Nonetheless, God's eternal purpose is not fulfilled merely by redemption. Redemption is part of a process. When Christ's earthly ministry was over, the church still had not come into being. Now in His heavenly ministry Christ is actively engaged in producing, building, and maturing the church. What a great work is this! Redemption was accomplished within thirty-three and a half years. The church, though, has taken two thousand years to prepare. Even in eternity Christ will still be ministering in the New Jerusalem. This, the ultimate consummation of the church, still needs His supply. Throughout eternity He will be ministering the life supply to all God's redeemed people.

Twenty-three books of the New Testament deal with Christ's heavenly ministry. From them we can see that Christ is busily working in the heavens. He is interceding. He is carrying on His priesthood. He is administrating God's universal government.

This heavenly ministry is fully revealed by the writings of Paul and John. Paul's ministry was to complete the revelation of Christ's heavenly ministry. John's ministry was to mend and strengthen that damaged revelation. Without their writings we would not have any idea of what Christ is doing in the heavens.

JOHN'S MINISTRY MORE PROFOUND THAN PAUL'S

Paul opened a number of heavenly windows to us. He opened one in Romans, another in Galatians, and a big one in Ephesians. We need to do

some heavenly window-shopping to enjoy what all these windows show us of Christ's ministry in the heavens!

When we come to John's writings, however, it is not windows that he opens to us. The whole expanse of the heavens is opened! The windows are gone. There are no more walls. Consider how strong is the mending work that John does. Paul was caught up to the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2), but whether he saw the New Jerusalem or not, he did not tell us. John, however, surely saw it. John not only opened the heavens to us; he showed us the New Jerusalem as well.

In the previous chapters we have covered John's mending ministry as found in his Gospel and his Epistles. In the next few chapters we will consider the mending work of John in Revelation. In this last book there are three great repairs to the damage done to the church. The first is the unveiling of the churches as the lampstands, as found in Revelation 1 through 3. A lampstand cannot easily be damaged. The second is the presentation of a clear view of God's administration of the whole universe, found in Revelation 4 through 20. We need not be disturbed by daily events, however alarming they seem. From John's mending ministry we know that the Lord is the Ruler of kings; all earthly affairs are under His administration. The third repair is the vision of the New Jerusalem. How strong is this mending! Nothing can damage the New Jerusalem.

We are not only backed by Paul's completing ministry. We are also enjoying John's mending ministry. How strongly he mended the damage done to the church after the time of Paul!

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CHRIST'S HEAVENLY PRIESTHOOD MINISTERED TO THE CHURCHES FOR THE PRODUCING OF OVERCOMERS (1)

Scripture Reading: Rev. 1:12-18; 2:1, 7-8, 10-12, 17-18, 26-29; 3:1, 5-7, 12-14, 20-22

The book of Revelation opens the heavens to show what Christ is now doing there. Though we are here on earth, we can see what is going on in the heavens. We who accept the Bible as God's revelation surely treasure what is revealed in this last book. Its contents are like a television program portraying what is taking place in the heavens.

Day by day an infinite number of activities are carried out on earth. These happenings, however, are for the most part insignificant. What really matters is what is taking place in the heavens and what there is on earth that corresponds to it. There the heavenly ministry of Christ is being carried out, and here there are the two earthly ministries that correspond to it, Paul's and John's.

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT PART OF THE BIBLE

Consider the books of the Bible that precede the writings of Paul and John. There are the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, the four Gospels, and the Acts. If you were asked to give a summary as to how these books conclude, you would probably find it hard to do so. You might mention God, the creation, the fall of man, the children of Israel, Christ, and the spread of the church. But to say what after all is the message of these books is difficult, because the Bible is not completed with them. There is a long record but no conclusion. Even the book of Acts is, as the title indicates, a record of the doings of the apostles. It does not contain much revelation to bring us to a conclusion of the Bible.

The book of Acts tells us that the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected Christ ascended to the heavens. From there He took action to cause the acts in

the Acts to take place. Peter, James, John, and even Saul of Tarsus were active because Someone above was gearing them to action. But there was not much revelation going on.

If you were to ask Peter the meaning of what he was doing in the Acts, he probably could not explain why he did what he did. Even from reading his two Epistles you can see that his part in the concluding revelation in the Bible was minor. He was honest and faithful to direct us to Paul, though he found in Paul's Epistles "some things... hard to understand" (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Catholicism has exalted Peter, but Peter rather commended Paul to us, saying that Paul had written according to the wisdom given to him.

Peter might tell us, "Go to Paul. Some of the things he knows I really don't quite understand. When I was called, the man of Nazareth simply passed by and said, 'Follow Me.' He promised to make me a fisher of men. On the day of Pentecost I spread out the net and caught three thousand fish. Not too long after, some five thousand fish were caught. My calling was to be a fisherman, and catching fish was what I did. I don't know much of God's mystery. I had only a simple education. If you want to know about the deep things, check with Paul. He is an expert. From his calling, you can see that he was ordained to be an expert. His calling was not simple like mine. He was called not by the Jesus on this earth but by the Lord Jesus in the heavens. He thought Jesus was dead and buried, but suddenly this One appeared to him, not from the tomb but from the heavens."

It was a strange question that Paul heard from the heavens. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4). Jesus, Saul was certain, was in the tomb. Saul was surely persecuting the followers of the Nazarene even unto death, but this One was now claiming that Saul was persecuting *Him*. From such a calling, Saul came to realize that the "Me" was a corporate "Me." It included Stephen, Peter, John, and all the other believers. They had all become part of this enlarged "Me." When Saul persecuted Stephen, he was persecuting Christ. How profound was this calling! It made Paul not a simple fisher of men but a minister to supply and build up all the members of the Body.

After Saul found out who Jesus was and asked, "What shall I do, Lord?" (22:10), the Lord did not give him a direct answer. With Peter's calling he was clearly told that he would be a fisher of men (Matt. 4:19). But Saul was told

only that he must arise and go into the city in order that he might find out what to do. While he was in Damascus, he saw in a vision that a man named Ananias would come and heal him of his blindness. Here was another lesson for Saul to learn about the Body. He was directed not to Peter, the leading apostle, but to Ananias, a little member whom he had probably never heard of. Yes, the Lord Himself came to visit Saul and to rescue him. But He would leave it for His little finger to complete the rescue. An unknown disciple would represent the Body to receive this rebel into the Body as another member.

In Hebrews 3:1 Paul calls the believers "partakers of a heavenly calling." Peter's calling was from the earth, but Paul's was a heavenly calling. We are partakers with him of that heavenly calling.

The sermons heard today usually linger around the four Gospels. Many Christian preachers find no place in their sermons even for the book of Acts. Yet even Acts is largely a record of doings, not of revelations. What about the books that follow Acts? From Romans to Revelation are twenty-two books. These books form the conclusion to the Bible. In them the ultimate issue is fully revealed. If you look into the messages we have put out in this country, you will find that most of them center on these very books. In my Bible the pages of these books are nearly worn out because I spend so much time in them. Others may neglect them, but we have focused on them.

From this it is clear that in the Lord's recovery we do have the completing ministry and the mending ministry. Most of the messages spoken these past eighteen years have been in the nature of completing. More recently we have been covering the mending ministry.

Christ's heavenly ministry is fully revealed in these last twenty-two books. This ministry is carried out mainly by the ministries of Paul and John. The earlier messages in these series dealt with these ministries. All that remains for us to cover is the last part of the mending ministry. The first part is the Gospel of John; the second, his Epistles. Now we are on the last part, Revelation.

THE CHURCHES FIRST IN JOHN'S FINAL WORD

When we come to the last part of a writing, we know that we have the final word of the author. We can see this in John's writings. In his Gospel we do not have much sense of being in the heavens. The same is true of his Epistles. With Revelation, however, we are at least at the front door of the heavens! If we are not in, we can at least stretch our necks and look around! What a view! How much is going on! We are sitting before a universally wide television screen. We can see Christ's ministry in the heavens, this ministry which is now being carried out on earth by John's mending ministry.

In this final book there are twenty-two chapters, but only three positive major things are covered. The first is the local churches, represented by the seven golden lampstands (chs. 1 through 3). The second is the open heavens (chs. 4 through 20), unveiling God's universal administration. The last is the New Jerusalem (chs. 21 and 22), the ultimate consummation of the churches.

It is interesting that Revelation begins with the golden lampstands, the local churches. I used to consider why John did not first show us the heavens opened, with God sitting on the throne. This seemed more logical, since Christ has ascended to the heavens. Then he could portray for us how Christ came forward, took the scroll of the new testament, and opened it. After that scene, the view of the churches could follow.

John chose to show us the churches before unveiling the open heaven. Here is an indication that the churches come before the heavens. The churches are better than the heavens. If they are not above the heavens, at least they are before the heavens. Today we are in the church. Where are the churches? We may answer that the churches are in the heavens. This answer is only partially true. If the churches are only in the heavens, then the church is no greater than the heavens. But the churches are superior to the heavens! Why do I say this? Eventually, God will leave the heavens and stay in the consummation of the churches. In Revelation 21 we are told that the New Jerusalem, God's tabernacle, comes down out of heaven (vv. 3, 10). God comes to stay with His chosen people, who are the components of the church.

We do not realize how precious the church is to God the Father. We are in Him and in the church, yet we do not have much appreciation of the church. God is homesick in the heavens! To be homesick is to be away from home and to keep thinking about home and to long to be there instead of somewhere

else. God is in the heavens, but that is not His home. He longs to be with us. We are His home.

John places the churches before the heavens because in his speaking, as in God's, the most treasured thing is the churches. In God's consideration the churches have the preeminence in the whole universe. The first item in God's seeing is the churches. The book of Revelation is the final word of God. In His final word the churches come first. Someday you will realize that there is nothing in the whole earth, even in the whole universe, more precious to God than the churches.

CHRIST IN THE MIDST OF THE CHURCHES

In Revelation 2 and 3 Christ is shown walking in the midst of the churches. How many churches are there on the earth? The seven mentioned here are representative of all the churches. If He is walking in the midst of seven churches, He is surely walking in the midst of all of them. We are here from several different localities. Do you realize that the Lord Jesus has often been in your locality, walking in the church? The Lord has often been here to visit the church in New York. He has passed again and again through Newton, Miami, and Goldsboro.

His Garments

Yes, He still walks in the midst of the churches. The churches, however, are on the earth, whereas the One walking is not the earthly Jesus. His walking is in the atmosphere of the heavens. His garments indicate this. Suppose a uniformed policeman walked into the room while we are meeting. We would all become aware of his presence and take note of him. Of course, if he came in ordinary clothing instead of his uniform, we would not notice him. In uniform, however, he brings a police atmosphere. The same principle would apply if the queen of England came amongst us wearing her royal garments. She would bring with her a regal atmosphere.

What garment is Christ wearing as He walks among the churches? He is "clothed with a garment reaching to the feet, and girded about at the breasts with a golden girdle" (1:13). He is wearing the priestly robe (cf. Exo. 28:33-35), but He is girded not at the loins but at the breasts with a golden girdle. The gold indicates that He is divine, bringing the divine administration. The girdle

at the breasts indicates love. The atmosphere He brings is not that of a policeman but a divine atmosphere filled with love.

His Eyes

Watch out for His eyes though! They will terrify you. They are "like a flame of fire" (Rev. 1:14). In fact, in Revelation He has seven eyes (5:6). Think how frightened you would be if I were here before you with seven eyes! Keep your gaze fixed on His breast, which is full of the divine love for us. How tender is His concern for the church in New York, in Philadelphia, in Washington, D.C.!

His Feet

His feet are terrifying too. They are "like shining bronze, as having been fired in a furnace" (1:15). The Lord is visiting the churches. He goes from church to church—from Washington to Raleigh to Goldsboro, then down to Miami, then over to Atlanta, and then on to Houston and Austin. The Lord with His shining bronze feet is walking through the churches. Surely many times you have sensed this. Because of the golden girdle at His breasts, you have been aware of His loving care. How tender is His love for the church! Yet at the same time you dare not look at His face. You want to kneel before Him, cover your head, bow lower and lower, and weep. "Too poor! Too poor!" you groan. If the Lord Jesus were not walking through the church, watching you with His seven eyes, you would not feel that you are too poor. You would feel that your church is the best.

As you sense under His gaze how poor the church is, you begin also to realize how poor and unworthy you yourself are. His shining feet cause you to notice your own dirty, muddy feet. How weak, how earthly, how dusty you are! You become fearful and trembling.

Many times such humbling experiences have come to us. This is a strong sign that the Lord is walking through the churches. How much His loving accomplishes! I may give one message after another, but the Lord Jesus simply walks through and looks at us, without saying much. Just a glance at His feet, and the elders and all the service groups are judged and humbled. Such is our experience in the churches time and again. In the denominations we rarely if ever felt humbled and fearful of the Lord's moving. We had no

inclination to weep and confess our failure. Why do we so often feel humbled and repentant in the churches? It is because the Lord is walking in the midst, caring for us.

Such experiences, which happen to us again and again, are an indication that our High Priest is walking through, loving us and also judging us. His tender care and the judging fire are to purify us. We may have the sense day after day that we are poor, unclean, and desperately in need of His mercy. On the one hand, it is good for us to realize our condition, but on the other hand, we also need to see that in His eyes the church in our locality is a pure, shining, golden lampstand.

EVERY CHURCH A GOLDEN LAMPSTAND

In His eyes every church is a golden lampstand. Yet if you read the seven epistles to the seven churches, you will see how poor some were. Suppose you were in Thyatira (2:18-23). After hearing such a letter, you might feel that you must leave and go to Philadelphia. But both Philadelphia and Thyatira were golden lampstands. Even in Thyatira there was something golden (vv. 24-29). The same is true of Pergamos (vv. 12-17). I surely would not have liked to remain there. If I could not go to Philadelphia, at least I would have tried to go to Ephesus. Nonetheless, in Pergamos there was still a golden lampstand.

As long as we are on the proper ground and have come back to the genuine nature of the local church, in the Lord's eyes we are a golden lampstand, regardless of how poor, weak, and defeated we may be. How can this be so? It is because here the Lord has the position to come in and deal with us. He does not have this way in the denominations; they are closed to Him. In His recovery every church is open to Him. Not one has been usurped by any human hand. Each one takes the position before the Lord, "Lord, this is Your church. It is a part of Your life. Lord, come in. We welcome You. We are waiting for You to come and look at us, to visit us, and to walk through our midst." What matters is not our condition of weakness and poverty but our openness to Him. Do we give Him the ground to come in and walk around? Do we welcome His visit? I believe we would all say, "Surely we do." As long as a local church is open to Him, it is a golden lampstand because there is at least some gold there.

John's revelation is finer, more detailed than Paul's. Paul's highest revelation of the church is as the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all, and the new man. He does not mention the church as a lampstand. Yet this point is great.

In the Bible Christ Himself is portrayed as a lampstand. In Exodus 25:31-37 God charged Moses to make a lampstand according to the pattern he had been shown. That lampstand was a type of Christ. In Revelation John tells us that the local churches are lampstands. This is an indication that every local church is Christ. The church is not only the Body of Christ. It is not only the new man. The church is Christ. In Exodus there was only one lampstand. In Revelation there are seven. In the United States there are more than seven lampstands. Every one is Christ. Do you think I am too bold? How else shall we describe the church in our locality? It is surely not a synagogue of Satan (2:9). It is Christ.

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE LAMPSTAND

The lampstand is a full symbol of the Triune God. According to the full revelation of the New Testament, Christ is the fullness of the Triune God (Col. 1:19). The Father is embodied in Him, the Son. He, as the Son embodying the Father, is fully realized as the Spirit. With Christ, then, we have both the Father and the Spirit. This Triune God is fully symbolized in the lampstand.

Its nature is golden. A wooden table has wood as its nature. The lampstand is of pure gold. In typology gold signifies the Father's divine nature. Thus, the nature and source of the lampstand signify God the Father.

There is a form to the lampstand. It is not a shapeless lump of gold. Its design is the very best possible. Just as the human face is so beautifully designed that no one can improve upon it, so the lampstand, whose pattern is given to us in Exodus, has never been improved upon all these centuries. Christ is the shape of the lampstand. He is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). The shape of the lampstand signifies the excellent form of the Son of God.

The seven lamps shining speak of the seven Spirits, which are the seven eyes of the Lamb (Rev. 1:4; 5:6). The seven lamps symbolize the Spirit for expression.

In this one entity, the lampstand, there is the Father as the nature, the Son as the form, and the Spirit as the expression. The lampstand, then, is the Triune God embodied and symbolized.

Some say that they have no trust in typology; they will take only plain words. But if the emblems have no meaning, why are they revealed in the Bible, not only in the Old Testament but also in the New? If this emblem of the lampstand in the last book of the New Testament has no spiritual significance, why is it revealed there? A picture is better than a thousand words. The heavenly vision of the lampstand is worth ten pages of description.

Not only is the Triune God embodied and symbolized by the simple symbol of the lampstand; the church in Revelation is the lampstand. This indicates that the church is also the embodiment of the Triune God. The church in your locality is the embodiment of the Triune God. First the Triune God is embodied in Christ. Now Christ is enlarged into a corporate Christ. In New York, Los Angeles, Stuttgart, Taipei, and Hong Kong—wherever there is a church—there is the corporate Christ. The church is the lampstand, symbolizing both the Triune God and the enlarged Christ.

THE HIGH PRIESTLY MINISTRY

How is it possible for every local church to be an embodiment of the Triune God as the lampstand? Christ's heavenly priesthood is needed. His walking in the midst of the churches is His functioning as the heavenly High Priest. By ministering His priesthood to us, He purifies and transforms us. Originally, we are not golden but muddy. We may still have a layer of mud on us! We need to be purified. We need to be transformed.

Read again the seven epistles in Revelation 2 and 3. There Christ as the High Priest is ministering to cleanse away the mud and add the gold. If you read these two chapters with this thought in mind, you will have new insights. These epistles seem full of rebukes. Why did He rebuke so much? He wanted to purify.

While He was rebuking, His word was also supplying. To the church in Ephesus He said, "To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God" (2:7). To the church in Pergamos He

promised, “To him who overcomes, to him I will give of the hidden manna, and to him I will give a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knows except him who receives it” (v. 17). To eat of the tree of life and of the hidden manna is to take in Christ as our life supply. The result of eating this supply is transformation. We become a white stone. To the overcomer in the church in Philadelphia the Lord promises, “Him I will make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall by no means go out anymore” (3:12). Purified and transformed, those who overcome eventually are built into the temple as pillars.

OVERCOMERS BROUGHT FORTH

The outcome of our High Priest’s ministering in the churches is that a number of overcomers are brought forth. This is not to say that everyone in the local churches is an overcomer. Outside the churches, however, does the Lord have a way to produce any overcomers? I do not see any possibility for Him to gain any overcomers in the Catholic Church. I doubt that He can do so in the denominations or free groups either. In the local churches, however, the Lord has the full ground and a full entrance to come in and purify His seeking ones, supply His lovers, and transform them into stones for His building and pillars for His temple.

Thus, Christ’s heavenly priesthood ministered to the churches produces a number of overcomers. We are now under this ministry. Christ is busy walking through the churches and speaking. As He walks through the churches, He speaks to everyone.

His speaking is according to what He is and also according to the condition of the church. In every epistle He begins by saying who and what He is. Then He also speaks in every case according to what the church is. His speaking is both practical and equipping.

In His walking He is Christ. In His speaking He is the Spirit. At the beginning of each of the seven epistles it is the Lord who speaks (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). At the end it is the Spirit speaking to the churches (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Your experience will confirm this. When Christ came and walked through the church in your locality, you were enlightened and rebuked. The walking Christ became the speaking Spirit. Christ is the Spirit. By His speaking you are supplied with the tree of life and the hidden manna. Then you are transformed. Little by little the muddy things are washed away, and you become a white stone, justified, accepted, and approved by God for the building up of His dwelling place, which consummates in the New Jerusalem. Christ today is busy ministering His heavenly priesthood.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

CHRIST'S HEAVENLY PRIESTHOOD MINISTERED TO THE CHURCHES FOR THE PRODUCING OF OVERCOMERS (2)

Scripture Reading: Rev. 1:12-18; 2:1, 7- 8, 10-12, 17-18, 26-29; 3:1, 5-7, 12-14, 20-22

OUR WALKING AND SPEAKING HIGH PRIEST

When we read Revelation, we should consider the first three chapters together. The first chapter clearly depicts Christ as our High Priest, wearing the priestly robe, which signifies that He is ministering Himself and the divine nature and life into us. If you separate this chapter from the next two, you will not easily realize that what these two chapters cover is the real priestly service. You may think that in chapters 2 and 3 the Lord is dealing with the seven churches, and not associate this with His priestly service. If you think this way, you are missing the mark. Chapters 2 and 3 show how He ministers the priestly service to us.

This ministry of the priestly service is accomplished mainly by His speaking. Christ's heavenly priesthood is a speaking ministry. In my early Christian life I thought that Christ was in the heavens only interceding for us as our High Priest. In those years I did not see that, besides His speaking Godward to intercede, He also has a speaking that is usward. He speaks to God to intercede for us, and He speaks to us to minister the priestly service.

Christ's speaking to us surely follows His speaking to the Father. In other words, His intercession takes place first; then by His speaking to us, He continues to accomplish what He has interceded.

How busy Christ is! He is not only walking in the midst of the churches; He is also carrying on His twofold speaking, a Godward speaking and an usward speaking. He is a walking and a speaking High Priest. I used to think that Christ is only seated in the heavens, but actually He is both speaking and walking as well. As I am speaking, I am busy walking at the same time. In fact,

I also have a twofold speaking. On the one hand, I am addressing you; on the other hand, my inner being is also speaking to the heavenly One. What Christ intercedes for, He then speaks forth to us. Then, after He speaks to us, He again speaks to the Father. He has much to say in Revelation 2 and 3 to the seven churches; correspondingly, He has much to say to the Father for the carrying out of what He has spoken in the seven epistles. This speaking, then, goes back and forth: first to the Father, then to us, then back to the Father again. Hallelujah for our speaking High Priest!

An attorney in a law court has the job of speaking. Our Attorney is the best! He is our High Priest, the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord. He is speaking in the heavens, and He is also speaking here. As He walks among us, He speaks. Even in these messages being given here, if the speaking is genuine, it is also a part of His speaking. Surely before the speaking of these messages there was some intercession that transpired before the throne. Then after the speaking, the intercession goes on again. All this is part of the proper speaking.

It should be clear to you now that Christ's priestly service is not only His walking in Revelation 1 but also His speaking in chapters 2 and 3. By His walking in the midst of the churches, He gets to know the condition of each church. How could He write those seven epistles right to the point? It is because He visited all those churches. He traveled through Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Such a tour made Him thoroughly familiar with every situation. Then after His seeing, He spoke.

Even today it is the same. Our High Priest in His heavenly ministry is now walking among the churches to look into the condition of each one. Then according to what He sees, He speaks to us. This is the real priestly service. Do not think that what He is saying is doctrine. His speaking is His serving, His ministering. If you reread these seven epistles with this understanding, you will find them altogether new. Many Bible teachers use these epistles to expound doctrines, but what Christ is speaking here is not doctrinal. It is a priestly speaking.

TRIMMING AND INFILLING

What is the nature of this priestly speaking? In the Old Testament there was the lampstand in the tabernacle. Every morning these lamps were

trimmed by having their charred wicks snuffed (Exo. 30:7). In addition, they were kept supplied with oil (27:20). To trim is to cut off the charred ends, which would no longer burn brightly; to add oil is to supply what is needed. In Revelation 2 and 3 our High Priest was trimming the seven lampstands. He was cutting away those things that were not needed and that frustrated the shining. At the same time He was supplying the oil that was needed and that would make the lampstands burn brightly. The seven lampstands were receiving His trimming and His infilling.

Trimming Religion

Of all the things He trimmed away, to me the most striking is the synagogue of Satan (2:9). Are you familiar with this term? That the Lord speaks of Judaism in such a way indicates that by the time of the church age, Judaism had become satanic. If you are a Jewish believer, subconsciously you may still be for Judaism. When you hear that it has become satanic, you may want to protest. Nonetheless, this is the word of our heavenly High Priest. In fact, He uses the term a second time in 3:9.

A synagogue is the symbol of Judaism, just as a building with a steeple is a symbol of Christianity. In any present-day town, whether here or in other countries, if we see a building with a steeple and a bell, we recognize it as a symbol of Christianity; if we see a synagogue, we know it is a symbol of Judaism. During the church dispensation this symbol of Judaism became the synagogue of Satan. It is utilized by him in rebellion against God's New Testament economy.

I surely love the Jews because they are God's chosen people. Yet to speak the truth I must say that today Judaism is in rebellion against God. Who sentenced the Son of God to death? It was not Pilate; nor was it Herod. Judaism must take the responsibility. The high priest and then the other Jews called for His death (John 18:13-14; 19:14-15; Matt. 27:20).

What can we learn from this? Our old religious concepts are against God's economy and need to be trimmed away. These concepts are black, charred, and dark. They are one of the things that hinder the shining of the local churches. Thus, we need our High Priest to step in and trim them away.

Trimming Worldliness

Another thing that chars the wick is worldliness. Our heavenly High Priest cannot tolerate this. Pergamos speaks of the marriage of the church with the world (Rev. 2:12-17). The Lord again steps in to trim the wick. You who live in New York are surely living in a worldly city. Apart from the church I certainly would not like to live there. We heard a brother from Texas give a testimony that when he got on the subway, he said, "Lord, take me back to Texas. It's not so worldly there." The truth is, Texas has its own worldliness. We may think that those who live in the countryside are spared from worldliness, but this is not the case. The country has its worldliness too. All this worldliness, symbolized by Pergamos, must be trimmed away.

Trimming Evil

When the Lord comes to the church in Thyatira, He condemns them for tolerating the woman Jezebel (v. 20). Who is this evil woman He calls Jezebel? It is the Roman Catholic Church. She "calls herself a prophetess and teaches and leads My slaves astray to commit fornication and to eat idol sacrifices." The Catholic Church is full of evil. The woman Jezebel is in the church. All that she represents must be trimmed away.

Trimming Lukewarmness

In the last epistle, the one to Laodicea, there is lukewarmness (3:15-16). "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am about to spew you out of My mouth." Lukewarmness also must be trimmed away.

A number of you may be lukewarm. You are somewhat indifferent, yet still you come to the meetings. You may even be proud that you are moderate, and think, "I'm a middle-of-the-road person. It's good not to be too wild or too committed. I'm not cold, but I'm not hot either. Too much heat burns people; I don't think that's good."

In 1948 an elderly sister came to me in Shanghai and said, "What you people are doing is good, but it is too hot." She meant that we were overly zealous. She may not have liked it, but our heavenly High Priest likes us to be hot. She went on to say, "If you serve people hot water, they will get burned. It would be better to make the water neither too hot nor too cold."

Many Christian meetings are in this category. The service is neither too hot nor too cold. It is just right for the indifferent audience who attends. But we have to be hot! We need to burn others!

Sometimes I have been advised to tone down my messages. Some said, "Brother Lee, you are too strong. It's better to be a little milder. You don't need to make such extreme statements. What is the benefit of saying that Judaism is satanic, Catholicism is demonic, and Protestantism is Christless?" To take such advice would be to compromise. I am not a politician, telling you what you want to hear.

Lukewarmness must be trimmed away, along with religion, worldliness, and the evils of Jezebel. Morning by morning the priests did this trimming work.

INFILLING BY EATING

The priests also filled the lamps with oil. What is this infilling?

The Lord Jesus says to the church in Ephesus, "To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God" (2:7). To eat of the tree of life is the best infilling. This oil surpasses the oil found in the Arab countries.

Then in Revelation 2:17 He promises the one who overcomes in Pergamos, "To him I will give of the hidden manna." To eat of the hidden manna is to be filled and supplied.

To the church in Laodicea He says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, then I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me" (3:20). By feasting with the Lord, the infilling takes place.

To eat of the tree of life, to eat of the hidden manna, to feast with the Lord: these are all the infilling.

Even as you read this chapter, the speaking trims and infills or refills. This is Christ's high-priestly service. By it all the dark, black things of religion, worldliness, evil, and lukewarmness are trimmed away. Also by it the

heavenly, divine element of the tree of life, the hidden manna, and the heavenly feast is ministered to you.

TRANSFORMATION

The effect of this heavenly ministry is a metabolic transformation. The old things will be discharged and replaced with something new, heavenly, and divine. You will be transformed into precious stones for the building of God's dwelling place. Even while you read, this transformation is going on because this ministry is under the heavenly priesthood of Christ. It seeks to trim the churches and supply them with the infilling so that all the saints in the churches might be metabolically and organically transformed.

Since I last visited the church here, I can see a change especially in you young ones. There has been some transformation in you. This is not cause for you to be proud. You have probably been unaware that such a thing was going on in you. Nonetheless, you have been at least partially transformed. How has this come about? It has not been by teaching. It has been because your High Priest in the heavens is doing His priestly service, walking among you, speaking to you, and interceding for you. I believe your names have been frequently mentioned by Him in the heavens. Otherwise, none of you would still be here. For you young people to be here is a great matter. Surely it is the heavenly High Priest who has kept you. Day and night He has been taking care of everything that concerns you.

THE OVERCOMERS

All His service and care has the aim of making you an overcomer. Religion, worldliness, evil things, and lukewarmness are not part of the golden lampstand. But when you eat of the tree of life, when you partake of the hidden manna, and when you enjoy the heavenly feast, this nourishment will become the divine element of which the lampstand is composed.

Thus every local church will be a lampstand, and in every local church will be overcomers. These overcomers will make up the lampstand. With them religion, worldliness, evil, and lukewarmness will have been trimmed away. The heavenly element will have been supplied to you as the tree of life, the hidden manna, and the heavenly feast. What you will have is the Triune God Himself. He will become your constituent. With such a golden constitution

there will be the lampstand. A lampstand eventually is the overcomers in a local church.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

CHRIST'S HEAVENLY ADMINISTRATION IN GOD'S UNIVERSAL GOVERNMENT

Scripture Reading: Rev. 1:5a; 4:1-2; 5:1-8; 6:1; 7:2-3; 8:1-6; 10:1-3; 18:1-2; 19:11-16

In the verses above, Christ is revealed as the heavenly Administrator in God's universal government. It may seem that this administration has nothing to do with us; actually, it concerns us very much. In the previous two chapters we discussed how Christ's heavenly priesthood is a ministry to the churches. Now we will see that His priesthood requires His rulership in order for this ministry to the churches to be carried out.

THE RULER OF THE KINGS OF THE EARTH

Notice the greeting to the churches in Revelation 1:4-5: "Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is coming, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth." The greeting in Paul's Epistles is usually, "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"; this contrasts with the greeting here in Revelation.

Here the Lord Jesus is called the faithful Witness; this Witness is for God. Then He is called the Firstborn of the dead; this is for the church. Finally, He is called the Ruler of the kings of the earth; this is for the nations. Our heavenly Christ is God's faithful Witness. He is the Firstborn of the dead to be Head of the church, the new creation. He is the Ruler of the kings of the earth; all nations are under Him.

Do you doubt His rulership over the nations? The whole world uses Christ's calendar. It is not Alexander the Great or Napoleon whose calendar is in use. All the nations, whether Communist or "Christian" or neutral, use Christ's calendar. To use His calendar is to acknowledge that He is the King. The whole world is Christ's kingdom.

THE PRIESTHOOD CARRIED OUT BY THE RULERSHIP

Without Christ's heavenly rulership it would be hard for His heavenly priesthood to be carried out.

The Circumstances Leading to Your Salvation

Just consider how it came about that you were brought to the Lord. If Christ were not the Ruler of the whole earth, many of you would have had no chance to be saved. Christ as the Ruler of kings arranges the world situation. It was because of His ordering that you were brought to the locality you are in. Then perhaps an economic situation forced you to move from one part of town to another, which happened to be near the meeting hall. Next door lived a neighbor who happened to be in the church. After a little while he brought you to a meeting, and you got saved.

You got saved because He was interceding for you. He knew that you were one of those chosen before the foundation of the world. He might have said, "Father, You chose that one. Now he is wandering. Father, there is a church in New York. Bring him in." And the Father might have answered, "You are the Ruler of the kings. You administrate to bring him in." He did. He arranged all kinds of situations in your work and family so that eventually you were brought to New York, then from Manhattan to Queens, and then close to the meeting hall, where you heard the gospel and were saved. Your intention might have been to make money in real estate, but all your moves were arranged by Him for His purpose.

The Move to Taiwan

We have seen many similar cases that demonstrate how the rulership of Christ matches His heavenly priesthood. When we went from mainland China to Taiwan over thirty years ago, this story was repeated many times over. Many Chinese spurned the gospel when they were on the mainland. When the gospel was preached to them, they would have no part of it. But the Ruler of kings said, "You don't want My gospel? Very well then. I will exercise My rulership to let someone else take over your country and chase you out." When circumstances forced them to go to Taiwan, they went with nothing.

They lost all their worldly goods. Thus they were ready to receive the Lord Jesus. At the same time, we believers were also forced to go to Taiwan. With nothing much to do there, we put on gospel robes, picked up drums, and paraded by the hundreds down the street. We got hundreds to follow us to the central part of the city, where there was a park with concert facilities that could seat three thousand people. Week after week on Lord's Day afternoons we would get four or five hundred new names. Many hundreds were saved. Many of them would tell you that if circumstances had not forced them to Taiwan, they would never have been open to the gospel.

What is the purpose of Christ's rulership? It is that we might be brought to God and especially to the church life. How marvelous it is that we are in the church life! It was the Lord Jesus Himself who arranged the events that brought us here.

England Saved from Invasion in World War II

Consider the Second World War, which lasted from 1939 to 1945. How the Lord exercised His rulership to manage events then! He surely is the Ruler of kings. In 1940 Hitler's forces invaded Belgium. How easily they could have crossed the narrow English Channel from there and invaded England! It would have been easy to take London. The British government and the royal family were all ready to move to Canada. Nonetheless, the German forces did not invade. Instead, the next year they launched an attack on the Soviet Union and destroyed much of its army. If Hitler's troops had crossed that narrow stretch of water into England instead of turning to fight Russia, the world situation today might be entirely different. But Hitler was not king. The rulership is in the hands of the Lord Jesus.

A Testimony

Let me recount to you now how the Lord exercised His rulership over my plans to serve Him.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, the United States joined the war against Japan. I began to realize that Japan's defeat was inescapable and that China's victory was assured. Once the war was over, China would no doubt be a vast, democratic country. I picked up the burden to develop the Northwest,

Inner Mongolia. We would be supplied for this undertaking by the wealthy saints in the Northeast, Manchuria. When I shared this with others, we were all in agreement. In March 1943 we sent seventy from my hometown of Chefoo to Inner Mongolia. These were to do the work of preparation so that after the war the useful ones from north China could go to develop that backward section of China with the financial assistance of the brothers in the Northeast. Our hearts were very much for this.

My testimony is that the Ruler of kings did not allow our plans to be realized. Within a few years north China was gone, taken over by the Communists. I was driven away. My intention had been to go to the Northwest, but where I ended up was in the Southeast. I was sent to Southeast Asia, to the Philippines, and eventually to the United States. Who brought me here? The Ruler of kings. He wanted the recovery brought here and so ordered events that this did happen.

Even during the Second World War, we had no thought of coming to the United States. Our work in China was prevailing. After the war there were about five hundred local churches throughout the thirty-three provinces of China. We were in Shanghai, the central spot. With just one language we could serve over seven hundred million people. With such a vast field we had no intention of leaving. We did think that the Lord's recovery would spread to the Western world, but it would probably be by the translation of the books or by some saints from the West. We did not expect ourselves to be personally involved in it. But the rulership of the Lord Jesus arranged otherwise. By His rule we were brought to this country, in spite of all our plans to go another way.

Revelation, then, first presents Christ as the faithful Witness to God, as the Firstborn of the dead to the church, and as the Ruler of the kings of the earth to the nations.

WORTHY TO OPEN THE SCROLL

In Revelation 4 and 5 Christ is again presented to us: "After these things I saw, and behold, a door opened in heaven, and the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, Come up here, and I will show you the things that must take place after these things. Immediately I was in

spirit; and behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and upon the throne there was One sitting" (4:1-2).

The scene in these two chapters portrays for us what went on when Christ ascended to the heavens. God was sitting upon the throne with a scroll in His right hand (5:1). That scroll contained His secret of the universe, but there seemed to be no one qualified to open it (v. 4). Then Christ as the Lion-Lamb stepped forward and took the scroll to open it (vv. 5-7). By opening the seven seals Christ unlocked the secret of the universe.

CHRIST AS "ANOTHER ANGEL"

The Opener of this mysterious scroll is four times in Revelation called another Angel (7:2; 8:3-5; 10:1-3; 18:1). These chapters, Revelation 7, 8, 10, and 18, reveal Christ as another Angel. An angel is a sent one. Of all the myriads of angels, Christ was the unique One sent by God to carry out His administration.

In chapter 7 this another Angel "cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom authority was given to harm the earth and the sea, saying, Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we seal the slaves of our God upon their foreheads" (vv. 2-3). He ordered the angels who were going to damage the earth to wait until those of Israel were sealed.

In chapter 8 "another Angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer, and much incense was given to Him to offer with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense went up with the prayers of the saints out of the hand of the Angel before God. And the Angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar and cast it to the earth; and there were thunders and voices and lightnings and an earthquake" (vv. 3-5). This another Angel here offers the saints' prayers to God. Then He brings God's answer back to earth. When He pours out God's answer to the saints' prayers, the earth comes under God's judgment.

In chapter 10 John saw "another strong Angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon His head, and His face was like the sun, and His feet like pillars of fire; and He had in His hand a little opened scroll. And He placed His right foot on the sea and the left on the land;

and He cried out with a loud voice just as a lion roars. And when He cried out, the seven thunders uttered their own voices" (vv. 1-3). Here Christ descends as the mighty One. His having one foot on the sea and the other on the land signifies that He is coming to take possession of the whole globe. Both the water and the land belong to Him. At this stage of His coming, however, He is hidden in a cloud, not visible openly to those on earth.

In chapter 18 there is "another Angel coming down out of heaven, having great authority; and the earth was illumined with His glory. And He cried with a strong voice, saying, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great! And she has become a dwelling place of demons and a hold of every unclean spirit and a hold of every unclean and hateful bird" (vv. 1-2). At this stage of His coming, the another Angel is no longer hidden. He comes with authority and glory to judge the great Babylon.

SUBDUING AND JUDGING

In the next chapter He comes as the Commander of the heavenly army (19:11-16). He is called the Word of God (v. 13), the King of kings, and the Lord of lords (v. 16). He comes to execute God's government by fighting. Some citizens refuse to obey the law; then the police must step in and take them into custody. They must go before the judge and be sentenced. In God's government Christ is both the Commander of the army to subdue the rebellious ones and the Judge to execute the heavenly judgment.

ALL THINGS UNDER CHRIST'S RULERSHIP

The affairs of the nations are under Christ's rulership. There is no need to be concerned about what is going on in Iran. Every nation, including Iran and Russia, takes orders from Him. He is not a King of only one nation. He is the Ruler of all kings. Whatever He commands, the nations must follow. Do not be anxious.

The whole world situation corresponds to His heavenly priesthood. He is working to save God's chosen ones and to discipline some. You may think that the economy in this country is out of hand. You may be worried about inflation and high unemployment. You may lose your job. Nonetheless, praise the Lord! Before you were fired, you may have been lukewarm. By losing your job you have become burning. One kind of firing causes another kind of fire!

Romans 8:28 says, “We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” *All things* includes Russia, Iran, the economy, your job situation, and all your circumstances. All these things work together not for Satan or Russia but for us, God’s chosen people. All things are for the benefit of the saints and of the churches.

HIS PURPOSE BEING WORKED OUT

May we all see the complete picture of Christ’s heavenly ministry. He is working in the heavens to see that God’s chosen people are saved and called. He is ordering events and circumstances so that we may all grow in life. He is arranging things so that the local churches may be built up and the lampstands may all be completed. By His ministry the dark things are being trimmed away and the heavenly elements added so that we may be transformed into golden lampstands shining forth His glory.

If we once see this heavenly ministry, our lukewarmness will be gone. We will be hot, even burning others.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

CHRIST'S HEAVENLY MINISTRY IN SUSTAINING THE OVERCOMING OF THE SAINTS

Scripture Reading: Rev. 7:9-17; 12:1-5; 14:1-5; 15:2-4; 17:12-14; 19:7-9, 14; 20:4-6

THE CHURCHES AND THE NEW JERUSALEM

The book of Revelation begins with Christ walking in the midst of the churches and concludes with the New Jerusalem. The first three chapters, dealing with the churches in this age, consummate in the last two chapters, the New Jerusalem in eternity. What the churches are today for God, the New Jerusalem will be for Him in eternity. The churches are God's expression. This is what the New Jerusalem will be in eternity: the full and eternal expression of God.

These crucial factors of the churches and of the New Jerusalem are actually the concluding factors not only of Revelation but of the whole Bible as well. The entire book concludes with God's expression, which is first the church and eventually the New Jerusalem.

CHRIST'S RULERSHIP MATCHING HIS PRIESTHOOD

Between the first three chapters of Revelation and the last two, there are seventeen chapters. From the opening verses of chapter 4 we can see the subject of these intervening chapters. John saw "a throne set in heaven, and upon the throne there was One sitting" (v. 2). The scene John describes indicates that God is administrating His government throughout the universe. These seventeen chapters, then, are on God's universal administration.

In this administration Christ plays the central role. From these seventeen chapters we have seen how Christ exercises His rulership to administer God's government. He controls the whole earth and even the heavens.

He is managing all things in correspondence with His heavenly ministry. The purpose of His priesthood is to bring the churches into maturity. For this to be accomplished, He needs to exercise His rulership to arrange the situations on earth that will lead to this. He intercedes to the Father. Then He comes to bring about God's answer to His intercession. Among the nations, among the kings of the earth, He arranges affairs so that God's chosen and predestinated people may be brought into God's salvation and even the more into the proper church life where they can enjoy His heavenly priesthood.

His rulership, then, matches His priesthood to bring the churches into maturity. This is the main point of these seventeen chapters. While He is administrating God's government over the whole universe by arranging events on earth, He is also carrying out His heavenly ministry.

These chapters cover a long period of time, at least two thousand years, from His ascension to His second advent. All during this long period He is the Ruler of the kings of the earth, administrating God's government for the carrying out of God's purpose. At the same time, He is sustaining the overcoming of the saints. While He is ruling, He is supplying those who love Him, who seek after Him, that they may overcome.

We are among those who were chosen and predestinated by God before the foundation of the world. Then in time we were all called, saved, regenerated, and indwelt by the Triune God. These are the blessed ones. Yet among these there are some who love Him more than others. These ones especially need the care of the ascended Christ to minister the heavenly supply to them while they are overcoming everything that would hold them back. They overcome sin, the world, Satan, the self, the flesh, their lusts, even everything of the old creation, especially including religion.

OVERCOMING RELIGION

Nothing holds back God's chosen ones as does religion. About one fourth of the world's population is Catholic. The Catholic Church brings her followers only a short distance of the way to God. Then she prevents them from taking even one further step. We must overcome this subtle, demonic religion. Then there is Protestantism, which brings people only a little farther on the way to God and then hinders them from going on. We must also overcome Christless Protestantism. Finally, there is the satanic religion, which completely blocks

the way to God. Here again we must overcome. There are not only the openly evil things to be overcome, such as sin, Satan, and the world; there are especially the demonic, Christless, and satanic religions to be overcome.

Consider, as illustrations, eight typical fallen sinners. Though they were born of Adam and therefore fallen, they were all chosen and predestinated by God.

Let us say that two of them were caught by Judaism, a religion formed according to the Old Testament. When someone comes to preach the gospel to them, they will have nothing to do with him; they refuse to budge from their religion. Do you see how this religion holds people in its grasp and hinders them from reaching the goal of God?

Let us say that another two are attending a Catholic university. One of their professors, a brilliant man, is a priest. Under his influence these two students decide to enter the Catholic Church. One of them has an uncle who is with the Brethren. He talks to his nephew and the other student and tries his best to persuade them of their need of salvation. When the two boys later check with their professor-priest, he tells them not to be influenced by such old-fashioned views. Thus the two are kept in the snare of demonic religion.

Another two hear the gospel from a Christian preacher and believe. At their school one of the teachers is a brother in the Lord's recovery. In his contacts with these two students, he helps them to go on beyond their initial salvation. In the background, however, there is this preacher. As he watches the change in the two who were converted through him, he is upset that he is losing his influence. A conflict develops in the students between their desire to go on and their loyalty to the preacher who first gave them the gospel.

The last two of the eight cases one day meet a brother from the church. From his preaching they hear the gospel and are saved. They go together to the church meetings and are encouraged to go on to God's goal.

Of the eight, then, two are held back by Judaism, two by Catholicism, and two by Protestantism. Only two come into the church life, where they can be helped to reach God's goal.

Do you see the need now to overcome religion? You must overcome your kind of religion. Look again at the letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3. Where overcoming is mentioned, it is mainly a matter pertaining to religion. Many Christian teachers think that overcoming pertains to the flesh, to sin, and to worldliness. They do not see that what needs to be overcome is religion. We must overcome all the other things, and religion as well.

A HEAVENLY SUPPLY TO GOD'S LOVERS AND SEEKERS

While the Lord Jesus is arranging the world's situation so that God's people may go on, He is also exercising His heavenly ministry to especially supply God's lovers and seekers with the heavenly riches, the divine element, so that they may be kept at an overcoming level. All they are seeking is God and Christ; there is nothing else they desire. The sustaining of these God-lovers and Christ-seekers needs Christ's heavenly ministry.

It is not a small thing that we are in the Lord's recovery. Our Lord has exercised His rulership to arrange our environment so that we could be here. Meantime He also exercises His heavenly ministry to supply us with God's riches.

At the Lord's table Christ comes as the heavenly Melchizedek, bringing us bread and wine. In the ancient time, when Abraham was weary from fighting with the kings, Melchizedek came to refresh him with bread and wine (Gen. 14:18-20). How refreshing is the Lord's table, where He serves us the bread and wine! But He also comes to us to refresh us morning by morning with the nourishment to supply our daily need. This Melchizedek is our heavenly Christ, bringing the heavenly riches to sustain us so that we can overcome.

SUSTAINING THE OVERCOMERS

From Revelation 4 through 20 we have seven cases that portray this heavenly Priest ministering the divine element into His lovers and seekers. While these middle chapters mainly deal with His rulership, these cases are concerned not with that but rather with His sustaining ministry to the overcomers.

The Great Multitude

Chapter 7 is an insertion between the sixth and seventh seals. While the Lord Jesus as the Lamb is opening the seals, that is, administering God's universal government, two instances are inserted. The first is the sealing of the one hundred forty-four thousand of Israel (vv. 2-8); the second is the innumerable multitude before the throne (vv. 9-17).

In the first instance Christ as "another Angel" restrains the damaging angels so that those of the twelve tribes of Israel may be sealed. This restraint is by His rulership.

The second instance, in contrast, is the result of His heavenly ministry: "Behold, there was a great multitude which no one could number, out of every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and palm branches in their hands. And they cry with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb" (vv. 9-10). This multitude, one of the elders explains, is made up of those "who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Because of this they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits upon the throne will tabernacle over them. They will not hunger anymore, neither will they thirst anymore, neither will the sun beat upon them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and guide them to springs of waters of life; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (vv. 14-17).

The robe indicates that these ones have been washed and justified by God. Its whiteness shows that they are not in darkness but have been approved and accepted by God. We know that they are overcomers because they carry palm branches, meaning that they have overcome all that they have encountered in the long, hot desert.

How could this great multitude be so approved by God and so overcoming? It is by Christ's heavenly ministry. To the world and to the Jews He is the Ruler of the kings, but to this great multitude the Lamb is the Shepherd. He shepherds and guides them to springs of waters of life; that is, He brings them to God Himself. These dear ones who love God and seek Christ at any cost gain the supply of living water, which is God Himself. This living water sustains them so that they overcome every obstacle.

The time covered in Revelation 7:9-17, speaking in a general way, begins from the Lord's ascension, or at the latest after the seventh seal, and continues to eternity. There is a long span of time. A good number have been sustained by the Lord to overcome all obstacles and to come to the springs of waters of life.

Many among us can testify that in their background in religion there was no living water to refresh them. Some of you were brought up in Judaism. You would surely say that you found the Jewish religion a desert with no supply of living water. Those of you who were in Catholicism were day by day eating dry straw, with never a cup of living water. Many of you were formerly in Protestantism and can testify of the dryness. Our intention in saying this is not to criticize; we are simply speaking the truth.

Hallelujah for the day the Lord brought us to the church—to the church where there is a fountain, which is God Himself, the source of living water! Day and night this water flows, too much for us to contain it all. It is when we are full of this thirst-quenching water that we can easily overcome whatever comes across our path. By the living water out of this spring we overcome all things.

The Lamb who today is in the heavens is the One who is shepherding us. He exercises His rulership over the universe, over the nations, and over the Jews. But He leads us who are His seekers to the very God, to the springs of waters of life. That is why we enjoy singing,

Drinking at the Fountain that never runs dry,
Drinking at the Fountain of life am I;
Finding joy and pleasure
In abounding measure,
I am drinking at the Fountain of life.

(*Hymns,* #322)

We can surely testify that here we have found a never ending, sure supply. In this drink we find joy and pleasure in abounding measure. What a fountain the Lamb has brought us to by His heavenly ministry!

The Man-child

In Revelation 12:1-5 there is the description of a strange sign: “A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon underneath her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; and she was with child, and she cried out, travailing in birth and being in pain to bring forth. And another sign was seen in heaven; and behold, there was a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. And his tail drags away the third part of the stars of heaven, and he cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bring forth, so that when she brings forth he might devour her child. And she brought forth a son, a man-child, who is to shepherd all the nations with an iron rod; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.”

This sign about the woman, the dragon, and the man-child is hard to understand until we come to the key point, which is the ruling of the man-child over the nations. Those who will reign over the nations are the overcomers. These are considered by God as the stronger part of His people. The rest He considers a woman, not as strong as the man-child.

Among God’s people there is a stronger part. Most are weaker ones. Nonetheless, both are God’s people. In His heavenly ministry Christ is taking care of both parts. When He cares for the weaker part, however, He does so mainly by the exercise of His rulership to prepare “the two wings of the great eagle” to bring the woman to a refuge in the wilderness (v. 14). (You can study this further by going over the Life-studies of Revelation.)

The man-child, in contrast, is cared for not so much by the Lord’s rulership as by His heavenly ministry. It is sustained in an overcoming condition by the heavenly life supply. Christ exercises His heavenly ministry to supply the stronger part of His people so that they may be strengthened to be the rulers of the coming kingdom.

Chapter 12, like chapter 7, is an insertion. These insertions indicate that while Christ is executing God’s administration, He also labors to nourish and supply His lovers and seekers that they may be kept in the overcoming state. Christ is busy. On the one hand, He has to take care of the crisis in Iran; on the other hand, He is here to nourish us. In Iran He is the Ruler of kings; here He is the heavenly Minister, providing all of us with the rich, divine element.

Even while you have been attending this conference, I have the assurance that you have been nourished and strengthened. Sometimes I have been told that I overload people with too much food, as though they were camels, needing a supply for a long journey. This actually is my intention! I know you have a long journey to take, so I want to be sure you have plenty of food. I hope you will have enough for several meals, not just one. Thank the Lord, we have such a big capacity for storing our food!

The Lord is the heavenly Minister caring for us, His members. Though we are only small ones, we are still under His care. He ministers the heavenly supply to us not only during a conference like this but also in all the church meetings. We can all testify that in every church meeting He is there ministering. Whether the meetings are good or poor is secondary. As long as there is a church meeting, be assured that the Lord is walking and speaking there. His heavenly ministry is going on.

The Hundred and Forty-four Thousand

"I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him a hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice out of heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder; and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harp-singers playing on their harps. And they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the hundred and forty-four thousand, who have been purchased from the earth. These are they who have not been defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are they who follow the Lamb wherever He may go. These were purchased from among men as firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth no lie was found; they are without blemish" (14:1-5).

These one hundred forty-four thousand as the firstfruits have grown into maturity ahead of others. Their faster ripening is the result of their receiving the most supply from the Lord. By following the Lamb "wherever He may go," this supply has been their portion. Some of us are satisfied with the supply we get from the meetings. Apart from the meetings, when we are at home, we may not seek any supply. Of course, the supply from the meetings is better than nothing. But there are some who are continually with the Lord, following Him all day every day, and these receive a greater supply. Wherever they are

and whatever their situation, they grow. This implies that the Lamb whom they follow is ministering the life supply to them.

The Overcomers on the Glassy Sea

"I saw as it were a glassy sea mingled with fire and those who come away victorious from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name standing on the glassy sea, having harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses, the slave of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and wonderful are Your works, Lord God the Almighty! Righteous and true are Your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; for all the nations will come and worship before You, for Your righteous judgments have been manifested" (15:2-4).

This fourth case tells us of those who overcome the persecution of the beast, refusing to worship him and to bear the number of his name. Standing on the glassy sea, they sing two songs, that of Moses and that of the Lamb. When the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, they sang in celebration of their victory over Pharaoh (Exo. 15:1-19). The day will come when the late overcomers will also stand on the seashore, not of the Red Sea but of the glassy sea, and praise God with the song of Moses, These overcomers, however, will also praise with the song of the Lamb. The song of Moses is mainly about judgment, while the song of the Lamb is for redemption. They will be there praising God for His judgment over Satan's power and praising the Lamb for redeeming them. They will be singing in praise of God as the eternal, righteous Judge and in praise of the Lamb as the Redeemer.

How were they able to overcome the persecution they suffered at the hands of the Antichrist and to stand on the glassy sea? It was by Christ's heavenly ministry, including His intercession. Both chapters 14 and 15 are insertions. While Christ was opening the seals and thus executing God's eternal and universal administration, at the same time He was caring for His people—the hundred forty-four thousand in chapter 14 and the victors over the beast in chapter 15. His people can withstand persecution and suffering because of His ministering the life supply to them. In themselves they could not bear it, but His heavenly ministry sustains them so that they can overcome any difficulty.

The Bride

"Let us rejoice and exult, and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints" (Rev. 19:7-8).

The bride is made up of all these earlier cases we have mentioned. First, they were followers of the Lamb; finally, they became His bride. We are that bride.

The Armies in Heaven

"The armies which are in heaven followed Him on white horses, dressed in fine linen, white and clean" (v. 14). The armies here are the called and chosen and faithful in 17:14. Those who have overcome every obstacle will be Christ's co-fighters in the final battle against Antichrist. These are His bride. They have become His co-fighters by His ministering the rich life supply to them. Surely the expectation is here that all of us will be such co-fighters.

Co-kings

In chapter 20 the millennial kingdom is set up (vv. 4-6). Christ will be King, and we the overcomers will be co-kings. First we are His co-fighters. Then we become His co-kings to rule over the whole earth.

GOD'S PURPOSE FULFILLED

From these cases that we have covered, you can see how Christ's rulership and His heavenly ministry go hand in hand. His rulership covers the universal situation, while His heavenly ministry supplies the heavenly riches to His seekers to make them all overcomers. In the end God's purpose is fulfilled. Christ has His bride, His co-fighters, and His co-kings. How great is the accomplishment of Christ's heavenly ministry!

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

CHRIST'S ETERNAL MINISTRY IN SUPPLYING THE NEW JERUSALEM

Scripture Reading: Rev. 21:1-7, 9-11, 22-23; 22:1-5, 13, 17

THE NEW JERUSALEM

The last two chapters of the Bible are profound. With our human mentality we cannot fathom them. In the early days of my Christian life I simply could not understand how they fit in or what they were trying to say. Yes, these chapters are about the New Jerusalem, but what is the New Jerusalem?

The Tabernacle of God

Revelation 21:3 describes the New Jerusalem as the tabernacle of God. To understand the meaning of the tabernacle we must refer to the Old Testament.

At first there was no tabernacle. Adam was created; then he fell. After him there was Abel, then Enoch, then Noah, and then Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Noah was a great man, enjoying God's blessing, but there was no tabernacle in his day. Like Abraham, he dwelt in a tent.

One day God in the form of man came to visit Abraham. Genesis 18 says that Abraham received Him as a guest outside his tent. There was no tabernacle; God came to that place just for a visit.

In later years Abraham's grandson, Jacob, was on his way to his uncle's house, fleeing from his brother and feeling sorrowful and desolate. When he lay down to sleep, "he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it" (28:12). When he awoke, "he was afraid and said, How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (v. 17). He called that place Bethel, the house of God (v. 19). But Jacob's experience of the house of God was only a dream. Instead of

entering the house of God, he and his kinfolk ended up in Egypt, where Jacob died.

In Exodus God sent Moses to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt to a place where they would build Him a tabernacle (3:10; 25:8). Exodus shows us that God's salvation delivers from the bondage of the world to His tabernacle. The ultimate consummation of salvation is God's tabernacle, which is His very home. Not only God dwelt there; the priests who served also lived there. They and God lived in the same home.

Have you ever asked God, "Where is Your home?" Have you ever asked where your own home is? Your home must be God's home. Where God dwells, there you should also dwell. Unless God is dwelling with you, you should not consider any place your home. Because you are a priest, you should live in God's home. That home in the Old Testament was the tabernacle.

In the conclusion of the Bible a city appears. A voice out of the throne declares that this city is the tabernacle of God (Rev. 21:2-3).

The tabernacle of Moses was a miniature, prefiguring this true tabernacle. The first tabernacle was only fifteen feet wide (ten cubits), forty-five feet long (thirty cubits), and fifteen feet high. It was much smaller than one of our three-bedroom houses today. It was small, but nonetheless it was God's home on this earth. He lived there for about forty years in the wilderness and for more than four centuries in the promised land. It was a movable house, without floors and without a foundation. Furthermore, only the priests were qualified to enter that home and stay there with God.

The New Jerusalem is the fulfillment of this type. How great a tabernacle this is! Its height, breadth, and length are all the same—twelve thousand stadia, or about fourteen hundred miles. Have you ever seen any house that big? The type was small, but the fulfillment is bigger than we can imagine.

The Bride, the Wife of the Lamb

Strange as it may seem, this tabernacle is also called the bride, the wife of the Lamb (Rev. 21:9-10). How can the wife of the Lamb be also God's dwelling place? It is hard to explain. However, the Bible tells us that the New

Jerusalem is, on the one hand, God's tabernacle and, on the other hand, Christ's wife.

The Father's home is the Son's wife. In eternity God the Father has a home, which is called the tabernacle, and God the Son has a wife, which is that very tabernacle. How can the theologians systematize this?

A City

This tabernacle is also called the holy city (vv. 2-3). A tabernacle is only a tent. How could a tent be a city? The New Jerusalem is a city; the city is a tabernacle; and the tabernacle is a wife. This is what the Bible tells us. I will leave the matter there.

The Temple

At first the children of Israel had the tabernacle. Then they entered the good land, conquered the enemy, and secured the peace. Afterward they built the temple. The tabernacle was then merged with the temple (1 Kings 8:4).

These two, the tabernacle and the temple, were God's greatest blessing to His people on earth. This is because both were God's home. As long as they had the house of God, they could locate God. They could tell others where He was. The tabernacle and the temple were the center and focus of the Old Testament.

When we come to the New Jerusalem, we are told that it is the tabernacle of God. John must have been looking around for the temple, since he tells us, "I saw no temple in it" (Rev. 21:22). He then adds, "For the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." These words are troublesome, but from carefully reading these last two chapters, we can see that the city is not only the tabernacle but also the temple. As the tabernacle, the city is the wife of the Lamb. As the temple, the city is the enlargement of God Himself and the Lamb.

God Mingled with His Redeemed People

As we dig through all that is implied here, we must conclude that this city is the enlargement of God Himself, so it is the wife of the Lamb. The wife is God's redeemed, including us. The new city is the tabernacle, the wife, and

the temple. This city is all-inclusive. Theologians are left with no explanation for the strange city. We say, however, that it is the mingling of the Triune God with man.

So far we have made reference to God the Father and to Christ the Son, the Lamb (v. 22). Where can we find the Spirit mentioned? Revelation 22:17 tells us, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him who hears say, Come! And let him who is thirsty come; let him who wills take the water of life freely." Thus, in these two chapters we have the Triune God mentioned. And there is also the tabernacle, the temple, the bride. In 21:7 it says, "He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be God to him, and he will be a son to Me." Here is an indication that this city is composed of the sons of God. If the city is a wife, how could it be made up of sons? Is it male or female? This bothers the human mentality.

With our limited understanding, we can only say that the New Jerusalem is a composition of the Triune God and His redeemed people. The Old Testament presents first the tabernacle, then the temple. It also considers God's redeemed people as His wife (Isa. 54:5-6) and His redeemed and regenerated ones as His sons (Exo. 4:22; Isa. 43:6). In this New Testament age we also have a double status. We are the sons of God, enjoying and inheriting all the Father's blessing (Rom. 8:14, 17). We are also the wife of Christ, participating in His love (Eph. 5:31-32). As sons, we enjoy the Father's life; as a wife, we enjoy the Son's love. The New Jerusalem, then, is composed of the Father's sons enjoying His life; it is also the wife of the Lamb, enjoying the Son's love. Both life and love are here; one is for the sons, the other for the wife.

This composition of the Triune God and His redeemed and regenerated people is a mingling. This city, as the tabernacle and temple of God, is where He dwells. The New Testament tells us clearly that God does not dwell in a physical building (Acts 17:24), that we are the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15) and God's temple (1 Cor. 3:16). The New Jerusalem, then, is the ultimate consummation of God's dwelling place. We are that dwelling place; God is the Dweller.

Where do we dwell? We dwell in God. This fulfills what Moses said in Psalm 90:1: "O Lord, You have been our dwelling place / In all generations." We are God's dwelling place, and God becomes our dwelling place. This is

also the concept in John 15:4: “Abide in Me and I in you.” This is the mingling of God and man.

Some may say that God is too lofty to mingle with mean man. We have been saved, redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and uplifted. We are human, but we are no longer mean. We are noble, even splendid. Our full splendor is yet to be manifested. When He comes, we shall be transfigured. Then our splendor will appear in full. We are not only joined to the Lord; we have even been mingled with Him. He dwells in us, and we dwell in Him. What a wonder this is!

CHRIST’S ETERNAL MINISTRY

With this background we are prepared to see that in eternity Christ will still have His ministry. Revelation 21 and 22 show us His eternal ministry. By then His ministry is no longer in the heavens, because the New Jerusalem, where He will minister, has come down out of heaven.

In eternity Christ ministers to supply the New Jerusalem. A river of water of life flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb (22:1). Both God and the Lamb are the source of the living water, the water which supplies the whole city. On the two banks of the river grows the tree of life (v. 2).

From the description in these two chapters we can see that this one city has one street with one river flowing in the midst of the street. In this river grows one tree, which is the life supply for the whole city. One city, one street, one river, one tree! What an enjoyment to be here! The source is the throne of God and of the Lamb. Out of this throne flows the river; in the river grows the tree of life. What a picture of the ministry of Christ, supplying the New Jerusalem for eternity! Here we enjoy the tabernacle, the temple, the Father’s life, the Son’s love, the water of life, and the tree of life.

THE LIGHT OF THE CITY

Furthermore, in this new city there is no natural light. Sun and moon are not needed here. God Himself is the light. In the presence of the greatest light, all the meaner lights count for nothing. Outside the New Jerusalem there will still be day and night (21:25), but inside there is no night. “The city has no need of the sun or of the moon that they should shine in it, for the glory of

God illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb" (v. 23). "Night will be no more; and they have no need of the light of a lamp and of the light of the sun, for the Lord God will shine upon them" (22:5).

God is the light. Christ the Son is the lamp. The Lamb is the lamp. This lamp has God in it as the light. The city as the lampstand shines the light of God in the Lamb. In viewing the city, it is hard to tell where the light is coming from. God is the light, yet His shining is in the Son, Christ. And this shining is expressed through the city, that is, through us. We are the expression of Christ, who has God in Him as the light. This light, which is God Himself shining in Christ throughout the new city, saturates us. We are immersed in God Himself as the light. We will be the expression of Christ with God as the light.

"There will no longer be a curse" (v. 3). Surely there will be no more curse. The curse came in through Adam's fall (Gen. 3:17) and was dealt with by Christ's redemption (Gal. 3:13). Surely no curse can come in!

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death will be no more, nor will there be sorrow or crying or pain anymore; for the former things have passed away" (21:4). No more tears! No curse! No death! No sorrow! No crying! No pain! No night!

What is there in this new city? God! The Lamb! The throne! The river of water of life! The tree of life! Light!

THE KINGSHIP

There will also be the kingship, for "they will reign forever and ever" (22:5). We are the sons of God, enjoying His life. We are the wife of Christ, receiving His love. We are kings over the nations, reigning forever.

I trust that we have a clear view of what there will be in eternity. In it all, Christ will still minister His supply to us.

A PROMISE AND A CALL

In the last chapter we have a promise and a call.

“Blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have right to the tree of life and may enter by the gates into the city” (v. 14). Here is a promise that those who wash their robes in the blood will enjoy the tree of life. Then in verse 17 there is a call: “The Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him who hears say, Come! And let him who is thirsty come; let him who wills take the water of life freely.” Whoever answers the call and comes will drink of the water of life. Those who respond to this call, which is still going out, will also receive the promise. They will enjoy Christ as the tree of life and drink of Him as the life-giving Spirit. These two verses are profound, though very brief.

THE NEW JERUSALEM AND ITS FORETASTE TODAY

We have a clear picture here of what there will be in eternity. Our enjoyment will be the very Triune God—the Father, the Son as the Lamb, and the Spirit. Out of the throne of this Triune God flows the river of water of life. In this water grows the tree of life for the life supply. We will be there as the city to be God’s dwelling place. God will be there as our dwelling place. He will dwell in us, and we will dwell in Him. We will be mingled together as a wonderful though indescribable unit! Christ will still be the center, ministering eternally to keep the whole city supplied.

In this age the church life is a miniature of the New Jerusalem. We are God’s dwelling place, and we take Him as our abode; that is, He dwells in us, and we dwell in Him. We have the throne of God and of the Lamb. We enjoy a river flowing and the tree of life growing. The church is also full of light. The Spirit speaks along with the church, the bride. The New Jerusalem will be the full consummation of the church life. The foretaste we enjoy now has the very taste we will know in full in the New Jerusalem. As we are enjoying the church life, we have the sense that we are truly enjoying the Triune God according to the view of the New Jerusalem.