
LIVING BY FAITH



LIVING STREAM MINISTRY

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CHAPTER ONE

LIVING BY FAITH

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Scripture Reading: Heb. 10:38

The word "live" in this verse can be translated two ways according to Greek. It can be translated "have life," or "live." In Romans 1 it should be translated "have life," while in Hebrews it should be translated "live." Because Romans talks about sinners, "live" should be translated "shall have life by faith." Hebrews is written to the believers, those who are saved and have eternal life; therefore, the more accurate translation is "live by faith."

I have met many believers who have mentioned various spiritual problems. Of all of the spiritual problems, there is one that many people have difficulty overcoming. Many believers frequently wonder why at times they feel spiritually dry and tasteless, while at other times they are happy and excited. When they are happy and excited, even though they are not having the experience in the third heaven, it seems as if they are having a unique mountaintop experience. They wonder how they can overcome the dry life to remain all the time in a happy and excited condition. They wish that their whole life would be one of constant flowing and bubbling. If they could do this, they would be able to sing hallelujahs all their life. Many believers are seeking a solution to this problem.

Believers ordinarily refer to this type of living as "wave-like." They live a fluctuating life. In their feelings, many Christians live a life that is sometimes on the mountaintop and sometimes in the valley. Sometimes they are on the top of the wave, and sometimes they are under the waterline. Sometimes they are high, and sometimes they are low. Almost every Christian feels that he is living a fluctuating life. Sometimes he feels very happy and will not be satisfied with only two hours of prayer. The more he testifies, the more he has to say, and the words come out like a river. When he listens to a message, he feels very interested and does not become tired at all. When he studies the

Bible, he feels that God's Word is as sweet as honey. But then sometimes, things seem to be completely different. He feels that praying is the same as not praying. Whether or not he prays does not seem to make much difference. The Bible seems to be letters of black and white only, and it is dry and tasteless. When he meets someone, he feels guilty if he does not testify, and so he reluctantly says a few words like, "If you believe in Jesus, you will have eternal life." However, in his heart he feels uninspired and has nothing to say. Other things of the same nature are done halfheartedly. Sometimes he feels that it is only profitable to draw near to God and pray to Him and that no work is necessary. Yet at other times he feels that even this is too dry, and there is not much joy in drawing near to God. Since he feels obligated to draw near to God, however, he does it reluctantly.

We can compare this kind of Christian life to nature. Where there is a mountain, there must be a valley. Where there is a high wave, there is also a low wave. Because many Christians frequently have this kind of experience, they conclude that a fluctuating life is inevitable and that it is impossible to live a steady life. They think that this will be their experience until they die. There is another group of Christians who say that mountain and valley, high and low wave experiences are unnecessary and that the Christian experience of life can be steady and on a straight line. What I want to tell you is that it is not altogether right to say that a Christian must have fluctuating and wavy experiences, nor is it altogether right to say that a Christian's experience must always be level and flat.

If we want to find out the principle of something, we have to combine the experiences of all kinds of people. Only by combining the spiritual experiences of all kinds of people can we come up with a common principle. For example, a person may study patients who have suffered from a certain illness. He will study the causes, symptoms, and results of many cases before he can draw a conclusion. If the hundreds or thousands of patients that are studied are found to have the same cause and same result, he can then draw a conclusion from what is common in all the cases. For this reason, we have to study how the highs and lows of a Christian life occur and how they develop before we can find out the proper principle.

A Christian begins his life from the time he is saved. Is a person sad when he is saved? No, he is very happy. When someone finds a treasure, he is happy. When someone tells you that believing in Jesus Christ will give you eternal

life and that you will pass from death to life and never come under condemnation anymore, that is the happiest day of your life. But let me ask, can this happiness remain forever? No, after a while this happy feeling will go away. How long will the happiness last? It is not certain, and it differs from person to person. According to my knowledge, the happy feeling and great joy that one had at the time of salvation seldom lasts more than a few months. Generally speaking, after a month or two, the feeling goes away. With some, the feeling of joy from salvation is gone in only a matter of one or two weeks.

Let us use a horizontal line to illustrate the experiences of a Christian. Anything above this line is joy, and anything below this line is dryness. When some are saved, for the first few months they live in joy. But one morning, though they study the Bible, pray, and fellowship just as before, they feel that their joy is not as full as the day before. It has diminished. Some people are persecuted and ill-treated after they are saved. Others want to deal with their sins to the extent that they are willing to cut off their right arm after they are saved. Still others want to confess their sins to others and give up their sins after they are saved. At this time they are happy and consider it worthwhile to be saved because their happiness more than compensates for their loss. Of course, they should be happy when they are saved. Even God is happy that they are saved. But a few months later, they begin to lose their joy, or the joy is no longer as full as it was before. At the time of salvation, they loved to read the Bible. Even though they may not understand the meaning of the Bible, they are interested in reading it. Although there are many things that new believers do not understand about the Bible, they like to eat and do not think that it is too much to read more than a dozen chapters a day. At that time they feel very happy about praying. Although they cannot tell how many times God has answered their prayer, they still like to pray. They lock themselves up in a room for a few hours and jump up and down for joy. But when the joy is gone, they begin to feel sad. Temptation will come from two sides. On the one side, the enemy will come; Satan will tell them that they are backslidden and no longer saved. On the other side, they will think that they have committed some sins and have become fallen. Yet in spite of their searching, they cannot find out what sins they have committed. Now, they feel that everything has dried up.

However, this dryness does not last long. Sometimes it lasts for one or two weeks; sometimes it goes away in three to five days. Once the dryness goes away, the joy comes back. Formerly, their reading of the Bible and praying

were such an effort and drag that it felt like trying to recite a forgotten passage. Now it seems that the fellowship with God is resumed. But how the recovery came about, they do not know. Now they are more careful to maintain their joy. They try their best to maintain the exciting joy. They are more careful in reading the Bible, praying, and testifying to others.

But not long after this, the joy is gone again. They wonder why today is not the same as the day before for they read the Bible, pray, and testify just the same. Why is there such a big difference between the two days? Why was there the joy yesterday but not today? Under such a condition, they even wonder what God is like and what Jesus Christ is like. They have fallen into a great error. They think that their spiritual power is gone and that they have become fallen. Although they pray, it is not done faithfully; although they read the Bible, they spend less time on it; and although they testify, they do so only reluctantly.

After a few days or several weeks, however, the joy strangely returns. Now they feel an interest in everything again. If they are not having the experience of the third heaven, they are, at least, having a mountaintop experience. But stranger than this is the fact that after a while, they revert to their former dry and tasteless condition. They begin to conclude that their spiritual life is one of ups and downs. If someone asks them about their spiritual life, they would say that their life is fluctuating. During the highs, they read the Bible, pray, and testify with interest and joy, and during the lows, they do the same things without any interest and in dryness. This is the fluctuating life.

I would like to consider the matter of this fluctuation, starting from the first joy we received at the time of salvation. If we can find the cause of the illness, we can find the cure. From the experience of many saved people, we can find a law that joy is greater at the beginning than at the end, while dryness is greater at the end than at the beginning. The joy becomes less intense (though deeper), and the time of joy becomes shorter. At the same time, the dryness becomes more intense and lasts longer (though shallower). Perhaps the first dryness lasts for three to five days; the second dryness for a week; the third for two weeks, and the fourth for perhaps a month. In other words, the second time around, the joy is less intense and shorter than the first, while the dryness is more intense and longer than the first. The period of dryness extends longer, and its intensity increases more. All believers have this kind of experience. Eventually, our dryness is more than our joy.

Can any Christian say that he has more joy today than on the day he was saved? We may feel sad in our hearts and feel that we have sinned or failed. We are not as joyful as when we were first saved. When we were first saved, it was like riding on a cloud or like standing on a mountaintop. We were bold to testify without fear, even on the street. We could read fifty to sixty chapters of the Bible a day and still feel that this was not sufficient. But today we feel that we are dragging our feet in everything we do, and we are reluctant to do anything.

Let me say that we have made a basic mistake. We have a big misconception concerning spiritual experiences; we think that the joyful times are the peak times of our spiritual life. But the dry times are not times of spiritual decline. Suppose I lost a watch. When I find the watch again, I will become very happy. After three to five days, my joy will not be as great as when I first found the watch. Perhaps after a few days, the joy will be completely gone. But this does not mean that I have lost my watch again. What has been lost is merely the joy of finding the watch. The same is true with our spiritual life. When we found the Savior, we were saved and could not help but rejoice. Not only did we rejoice from ourselves, God gave us joy as well. If someone did not have joy when he was saved, I doubt that he has found the Savior yet. But later the joy was lost. We may think that the things that we gained are lost. Actually, only the joy is lost; the things we gained are not lost. Let me ask: Has the Lord Jesus changed? No. Has God changed? No. Has the eternal life that God has given us been taken back? No. They were ours when we were excited about them. They are still ours when we feel so dry. It does not matter how excited we are or how dry we are. What we gained has not been lost; it is still there. This is why I say that there are no fluctuations in a Christian's life and experience. (This does not include the case of those Christians who have sinned, fallen, or backslidden. Those are exceptions. What we are talking about are the normal conditions of Christians.)

God never changes, the work of the Lord Jesus never changes, and the Holy Spirit never changes. The eternal life that we have received is still there; it is never lost. What is lost is merely our initial joy. A young child may think that the sun is gone when it rains. He may go to his father and ask, "Where is the sun?" He may go up to the roof and find that the sun is not there. He may go to a nearby watchtower and find that the sun is not there. But the sun has not changed; it has merely been blocked by the dark clouds. Today our Sun has not changed; what has changed is our feelings. The sun in the sky has not

changed at all. But there are dark clouds in the sky which block the sunlight. If we live in our feelings, our sky will always change, and there will always be the covering of the clouds. If we do not live in our feelings, there will be no change in our sky. We ought to live above the clouds of our feelings.

I have said that the intensity of joy decreases while the duration is shorter, and the intensity of dryness increases while the duration is longer. These are common phenomena of a Christian's experience; they are not accidental. The experience of most Christians falls under this pattern. We can conclude that these things do not happen by accident. Since they do not happen by accident, there must be a hand behind everything. Whose hand? It must be God's hand. He causes our joy to become less intense and its duration to become shorter. He causes our dryness to become more intense and its duration to become longer. (We are merely referring to the experiences of ordinary Christians; we are not talking about the experiences of abnormal or outstanding Christians.)

Abnormal Christians have sinned and become fallen. Of course they have no joy. Outstanding Christians have denied themselves from the beginning in a specific way and pursued after God in a specific way. Every time they go through some special dealing, they experience special joy. Every time they see God working in a special way, they experience special joy. Outstanding Christians and abnormal Christians are exceptions. What we are talking about are the normal Christians.

GOD'S PURPOSE

God's purpose for doing all these things are:

A. That We Would Not Be for Ourselves

When we read the Bible during a period of excitement and joy, we have a great interest in reading. But are we reading the Bible because of our interest or because the Bible is the Word of God? Is the purpose of our prayer to seek God in His presence, or is the goal the joy we feel in our prayer? Are we praying at the expense of forsaking our duty, or are we praying for God's sake? If we do all these things for ourselves and to satisfy ourselves, then our aim is not God's glory. At the height of our excitement, we do not realize that we are doing these things for ourselves; we think that we are doing these things for God. We have to realize that the times we are most excited, when we seem to

be living on the mountaintop, perhaps are the times when we are in our flesh the most! This is why God takes our joy away and puts us in a condition of dryness. How do we feel then? Our prayer, reading of the Word, and witnessing become dry. Under these conditions, God is teaching us a lesson; He makes us realize that our peak spiritual experiences are just something of ourselves. We may think that they are the most spiritual experiences. Little do we realize that they are merely of the flesh. Toward the world, we expressed the part of our flesh that is evil. Now we try to express the part of our flesh that is good. God is testing us to see if we will keep praying, reading the Word, and testifying for Him during the times when the joy is gone and the dryness is present. God does not want the dryness to be too harsh for us, so He gives back the joy after a while. But He also does not want us to presume that we have reached the peak of our spirituality, so He takes the joy away again. God does not want us to be discouraged because of the dryness, so that we will not want to be Christians anymore. Therefore, He gives us a little joy again and recovers our taste to a certain degree.

When the dryness comes the second time, God will see if we have learned anything. We may think that we have done something wrong again. Actually, this is not God's intention. He is seeing if we are working according to our duty, or if we are working because of joy. Perhaps some people have to go through these experiences five or six times; perhaps others seven or eight times. Most of the time, the feelings alternate between joy and dryness. This cycle will continue until God arrives at His purpose when we realize that our desire for joy is for ourselves and not for God. This is the first reason God deals with us with joy and dryness.

B. Disciplining the Power of the Will

When we are living a life full of joy on the mountaintop, do we feel that we must exert any effort? We do not feel this. We do not exert any effort in reading the Word, in praying, and in testifying. Suppose we are talkative. During the times when we are happy, when we feel that God is so near us that we can almost touch the Lord Jesus and God, we would rather lock ourselves in a room and not see anybody. At such times, we can easily overcome our natural weaknesses. Suppose we are quick-tempered and very easily lose our temper. During the times when we are excited, we can very easily forgive others. But when the joy is gone, we are like porcupines; others cannot touch us. If they do, we become angry. When we are excited, we do not feel any

burden to our work or living. But when we are dry, we feel that all our living and our work are burdensome. At such times it is an exercise of the will for us to read the Word, pray, or testify. At this time we feel that we have to exert much effort and that it is a duty to read the Bible, pray, and testify. Originally in testifying for the Lord, we could speak for five hours according to our excited feelings. But in our dryness we can find nothing to say. We speak about believing in the Lord and receiving eternal life in a restricted way. We have to take control of ourselves to speak something. When we are doing it at the height of our excitement, no effort is involved. But when we feel dry, we consider such work to be extremely burdensome, and we are not able to do it except with much determination. Let me ask: During which time do we experience actual spiritual dealings? It is when we are dry. When we are excited, we may not have any spiritual experience but only the results from the power of our emotion. When we are dry, we have to exercise our will, and our work is the result of our real person. The reason God gives us the dryness is so that we will learn to exercise our will during these dry times.

Suppose we are traveling by a sailboat from one place to another. The journey may take only a few hours. At the beginning of the journey, the wind blows in the right direction, and we hoist the sail. After a while the wind stops, but there are still a few hours to go. Should we take out our oars and row, or should we anchor and wait until a good wind comes before we set sail again? If we want to reach our destination sooner, we have to try our best to row. At such times we are exerting the true strength we have. This is only an illustration. When we are excited in our emotion, we are like a boat sailing with the wind; the boat does not have to exert any effort. We wish that there could be smooth sailing all year round. But if this were the case, both the captain and the sailors of a ship would become useless; they would only be able to sail in favorable winds. If the direction of the wind changed, they would not know what to do. I am afraid no one would want these sailors. When God gives us favorable wind, we praise Him. But He is also stirring us up to exercise the resurrection power given to us, without which we would not move when the joy is gone. God gives us the dryness, so that when joy and excitement are not present, we would exercise our own strength (the strength we received at the time of our regeneration). In this way, we will be able to pass through hindrances and contrary winds. The power of resurrection is more clearly demonstrated in an environment filled with death.

God can grant us the help of emotions, but this is not His purpose. The help of emotions is merely the means by which God deals with us. His intention is to train our will, so that at the darkest hour, we could still exercise our will, and at the time when we feel dry, we could still exercise our will to read the Bible, pray, and testify. By doing this, the strength of our will will become stronger and stronger. If we only move by the power of the emotion, we will never advance. The reason God gives us feelings of joy is so that we would not turn back halfway in our Christian life. This is why the joy we receive from Him diminishes to a shorter time as we go on, and the dryness increases for a longer period of time. We will then exercise our will more, and our will will be greatly strengthened.

When we examine our past experiences, we see that our joy and dryness fluctuate. We also learn that during the times of joy, there is not much progress, while during the times of dryness, there is much more progress than when we were joyful. We observe that during the weeks of dryness we have advanced. We normally think that if every day were dry and suffering, we would fall. But when we compare this with our experience, we see that, on the contrary, it was when we felt weak that we advanced. When we are happy, there is not much progress. When the wind is strong and favorable, will it help us develop our muscles? No, our muscles become stronger and stronger during contrary winds. But please remember that for ordinary believers, there is no such thing as so-called up and down spiritual experiences. Our growth is absolutely dependent on the way we exercise our will. When we are dry and exercise our will to say, "I will advance," we will advance. Unfortunately, the eyes of many believers are set only on the matter of joy; they think that this is the peak of spiritual experiences. Little do they realize that there is real spiritual progress only when they exercise their will to advance.

C. Overcoming the Environment

If you can overcome the feeling of dryness, you can overcome your environment. The feeling of dryness is the most difficult to overcome. If you can overcome this feeling, you surely will overcome your environment. The environment that is closest to a Christian is his emotion. Only by overcoming your emotion can you overcome other things. If you exercise your will to say, "I will read the Bible, I will pray, and I will testify," even though you are living a dry and parched life, you will find that you can overcome all kinds of environments, no matter how great they may be. I will say frankly that those

who have not overcome their environment have not overcome their emotion. Those who would overcome their environment must first overcome their own emotions.

D. Living by Faith

The duration of joy becomes shorter, while the duration of dryness becomes longer. The degree of joy is less, while the degree of dryness becomes more. The end result is that at a certain point, the two will meet. They will be like two streams merging into one; there will not be any distinction between them anymore. At the beginning, the joy becomes shorter and less intense, and the dryness becomes longer and more intense. But in the end, we cannot tell the difference between our joy and our dryness anymore. The reason God is leading us this way is to show us that there will eventually be no difference between the two. In other words, our joy and our dryness will be completely merged as one. Today God has no intention other than having the just live by faith. The just do not live by emotions. Therefore, no matter how we feel in our emotions, they will not bring us anything. Some believers have to go through God's training ten or twenty times until they do not exercise the strength of their emotion. God's training causes the dryness to increase more and the duration to become longer, in order to bring these ones to the point where they will live by faith.

If a man is not saved, we have nothing to say about him. But if he is saved, his experience will surely be one in which the times of dryness become longer, while the times of joy become shorter. His plain days will become more, and his joyous days will become less. God will point out to him what his goal is. Many Christians are living a dry life. Of all the days in a year, he may only experience three to five days of joy. Some may even go through three to five years in dryness, without any joy at all. If you have never been trained, you will see in that day that your emotional strength is useless because the just live by faith.

Finally, if you live by faith, you will be able to live a joyful life in the driest hour and live the driest life in a joyful way. These words seems to be contradictory, but it is a reality in the spiritual life. God is leading you to live such a life by faith.

What is it to live by faith? It is what the three Hebrew men Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego said to Nebuchadnezzar: "Our God...will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if He does not...we will not serve your gods nor worship the golden image that you have set up" (Dan. 3:17-18). They were saying even if God did not save them, they still would not change. This is to live by faith. Christians today are strongly inclined toward a life in the emotion. Whenever God takes away their feeling of joy, they have nothing left. But God says that we should live by faith and not by feelings. In a few years, we will see that joy and dryness are the same, and neither joy nor dryness can affect us anymore. We will live the same in dryness or in joy. We do not have to live like those whose vessel is small and who are easily satisfied. When they are happy, they dance in their rooms. When they are dry, they wet the wall with tears. If we live by faith, we will not be affected by either of the two. This does not mean we are insensitive; we do have feelings of joy and dryness. But these outward feelings will not affect us inwardly. (This article covers the joy experienced by the outward man; it does not cover the joy that the inward man enjoys in the Lord. The latter is deep and unshakable. But this deep and unshakable joy can only be enjoyed by us after we can fully control the outward joy.)

CHAPTER TWO

A LIFE OF FAITH

The Normal Christian Faith,

Sect. 4, Ch. 14

We have mentioned the resurrection of Christ and shown how we can receive a new life in this resurrection. But there is another crucial matter which has decisive bearing upon our Christian life. We have to devote our present chapter to the study of this matter. If we miss this, we will miss a vital aspect of our belief. In addition, we want to supplement our previous messages with a number of points concerning faith. We will combine them all in this same chapter.

THE PURPOSE OF A NEW LIFE

First, we want to ask why God gives us a new life. We have to look at this matter from the beginning. I shall consider you all as Christians and shall therefore approach the whole problem from the biblical point of view. In the Old Testament there are the laws with all the ordinances. The laws do not consist merely of the Ten Commandments; they comprise hundreds of ordinances and regulations. There are laws to govern your way of dressing. There are laws telling men when to plant and sow. There are laws governing the use of oxen or mules. Weaving and cooking have their arrangements. Everything is so strictly regulated. The totality of all these codes of behavior is the law. We want to know why there is the need for all these laws. Why did God set up all these ordinances in the Old Testament?

IS THE LAW FOR KEEPING?

If you check with every nation in the world as to why they instituted their various laws, each would surely answer that the laws are for their citizens to keep. Is this also the reason for God's institution of His laws? Did God set down the law of forbidding idol worship because He wants us to not worship idols? Did He give us laws because He wants us to honor our parents or not covet, kill, or steal? If we ask anyone this question, the answer would surely be yes. They would say that God gave us the laws, commandments, and

ordinances so that we would keep them and abide by them, in the same way that every nation demands its citizens to be subject to its laws.

But Christians should never answer this question in this way. You have to give me permission to say an honest word. If you think that God introduced these laws for you to keep, you know nothing about the Christian faith. You are still an outsider.

Naturally, you may ask, "If God's purpose for giving us the laws was not for us to keep them, then what was the use of giving them to us?" My answer is so that we would break them! All the ordinances written in the laws are for us to break! This is the truth according to the Bible. The books of Romans and Galatians expressly tell us this.

THE LAW IS FOR EXPOSING MAN

We need a word of explanation here. Why did God give us the law? The Spirit of God gave the answer through the words of Paul: "The law entered in alongside that the offense might abound" (Rom. 5:20). Because of the presence of sin, the law was added. Paul also told us that the law exposes man's sins (Rom. 3:20). In other words, the purpose of the law is not to remove our sins, but rather to reveal them. If the law is for the removal of sins, then we have to keep it. But the law is not intended for that. It is there to expose us. "The law entered in alongside" for the purpose of showing us our sins.

God knows very clearly what kind of people we are. He knows all too well our weaknesses and corruption. He realizes that our conduct and behavior are such that even if we wanted to do good, we could not. Inwardly, we are corrupted; outwardly, we are degraded. The root problem is that we do not merely have an evil behavior but an evil life.

Here is the problem: God knows our wickedness, but we are ignorant of it. He realizes our utter depravity, but we have not given up hope in ourselves. We think that if we could be a little stronger or have a little more will power, we could obey God's words. Or we may think that what we lack is more effort, higher doctrines, or some other kind of help from God. We think that we can do something, but God knows that we can do nothing! For this reason God gave man a long list of laws, not for man to keep, but rather to break. In this

way man will be exposed by his evil and realize that salvation can never come by the law.

God knows us all too well. But we do not know ourselves. God knows that we are only little children, and running the way we do, we will fall. Yet we do not realize it. Eventually, we fall, and then we believe that we are fallible. We do not know ourselves.

For this reason, the Bible says that the law has shut us all up under sin (Gal. 3:22). Throughout the centuries, God has been teaching us one lesson, that we would know the impossibility of keeping the law. We can never make it. None of the commandments are there for us to keep. They are all there for us to break. The result is that we would come to know ourselves. When we know ourselves, we will say, "O God, I quit! Now I know what You want to do with me!"

WHAT TO DO?

When Christ was on the earth, a young Israelite came to Him. This man was a very noble and refined person. He asked, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 18:18). On that day, the Lord did not tell him what we are used to hearing, that if he believed in Him he would have eternal life. Rather, He said, "You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your father and mother'" (v. 20).

After the young man heard this, he said confidently, "All these things I have kept from my youth" (v. 21). The Lord knew that he did not know himself. He said, "Still you lack one thing." It seems as if He was saying, "So you think you are perfect. Let's see if this is the case or not." He continued, "All that you have, sell and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in the heavens; and come, follow Me" (v. 22). How did the young man react to these words? He began to realize that what God requires he could never fulfill. This additional item was something he could not do. So he left sorrowfully. He needed to know himself; he needed to realize that he was unable.

WITH MAN IT IS IMPOSSIBLE

What did Christ say? He said, "How difficult it is for those who have riches to go into the kingdom of God. For it is easier for a camel to enter through the

eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (vv. 24-25). Here is the purpose behind Christ's confounding of the young man. He wants us to realize that with men these things are impossible. I am not saying that the Lord demands everyone to sell all his possessions before he can be saved. He was making all those who thought that they were able realize their real situation. God only wants to show man that he is unable. Man's life is an impotent one. There is no possibility for him to become able.

If man would confess his inability and give up before God, everything would be all right. O young man! O young ruler! Why do you have to depart sorrowfully? It is right to recognize your inability. But it is wrong to leave sorrowfully. What you could have said was, "Lord, I cannot do this. I have no way. Save me." If you had said this, everything would be different. The Lord's purpose is not for you to turn away, but to make you see that you are not able.

When a man says, "I am able," God becomes unable in him. But whenever man becomes unable, God will become able. When we have exhausted our strength, God will manifest His power and glory.

THE HISTORY OF THE ISRAELITES

Let us look a little more into the history of the Israelites. After God gave the law, the children of Israel seemingly responded in a good way. They said that all the Lord commanded them, they would do (Exo. 19:8). The first commandment that God gave was that there should be no other God besides Him (20:3). Moses received this commandment on the mountain. But even before he came down, the children of Israel had already built themselves a golden calf, saying, "This is our God." They promised easily that they would obey God's commandments. But God showed them that they were unable to do so. This happened to the children of Israel. It happened to the young ruler. It is also happening to us. Over and over again, God is showing us that we are unable.

WHO CAN KEEP GOD'S LAWS?

Well, then, who can keep God's laws? This is the second crucial question we have to ask. Please remember that every commandment in the Bible is unreasonably demanding. Every rich man has to sell all his possessions, give to the poor, and then follow Jesus of Nazareth. What is this? Is this not

unreasonable? The demands of Christ are so severe; they take your life! He says that whoever loves his father, mother, or children more than Him is not worthy to be His disciple. Neither is any worthy of Him who will not take up his cross to follow Him (Matt. 10:37-38). Is this not asking for your life? The clause concerning the bearing of the cross is especially so. The modern equivalent of the cross is to take a criminal to the execution ground with his hands and feet bound and then have him dragged through the streets for public ridicule. If you cannot be like that criminal, you are not worthy to be His disciple! Is not He demanding our life?

Again, He says, "Love your enemies" (5:44). Mere forgiveness is close to impossible for us. Yet He talks about loving. Hence, we have to see that all of God's commandments are impossible to keep.

ONLY GOD HIMSELF

God Himself is the only able One. The commandments of Christ can only be fulfilled by Christ Himself. Neither you nor I can do anything. Hence, the answer to our second question is that only the Son of God can fulfill the requirements of God. All of us are unable. God alone is able.

Therefore, whenever a brother in the Lord tells me that he is hopeless, that he falls as soon as he rises, and that the more he tries the more he fails, I rejoice greatly. The more he weeps for his transgressions and failures, the more I laugh inside. I will say, "Today you know that you are a failure. This is something to be congratulated. Although you should have known this earlier, it is not too late to know it now." We cannot obey God's will. God's will can only be done by God Himself, and the commandments of Christ can be fulfilled by none other than Christ.

THE GLAD TIDINGS

Our gospel is also called the glad tidings. Why is it called the glad tidings? Is it because the Bible contains commandments that have a higher standard than all other religions? If so, then we are preaching grievous tidings. In a physical fitness test, if the requirement is only to jump a foot, everyone can easily pass. But if the requirement is ten feet, then we have a grievous tidings.

What is the glad tiding that God gave us? It is the bestowing of His Son to us. By His resurrection we are resurrected. Now He is living inside of us to be our life, so that we may live Him out and fulfill His demands. This is the glad tiding. The glad tiding is that God is fulfilling His own commandments inside of us! The gospel is not a set of do's and don'ts. You do not have to crawl around the earth day and night like crabgrass, telling yourself over and over again that you are not supposed to sin. This is not a glad tiding. This is a grievous tiding. The gospel is that God is coming into us to live and obey for us.

HE MAKES US ABLE

Not only do we have to see that we are unable; we have to realize that God is able! (Luke 18:27). The young ruler only saw that he was unable and concluded that God was the same and proceeded to leave sorrowfully. But God is able! Do not think that when you are unable everything is over with you. The inability of man is the beginning of the ability of God. It is the time for God to show forth His power. Not that we are able, but His doing a work for us makes us able.

The meaning of Christ being our life is this: formerly man lived by his own life, but the natural life is ousted by the coming in of the resurrection life of Christ. The "I" who formerly lived is gone, and the life of Christ comes in to take its place. Then it is no longer I who live. When the life within is exchanged, the behavior without cannot remain the same. Because our life is Christ, we can fulfill Christ's commandments. It is not the power of Christ helping us to conform to His ordinances. Rather, it is the life of Christ substituting ours to live out His commandments. When His life inside is working, we can keep His laws.

THE OLD COVENANT—A FAILURE

We have to look at one passage carefully. Hebrews 8:8-9 says, "For finding fault with them He says, 'Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, and I will consummate a new covenant upon the house of Israel and upon the house of Judah, not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by their hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord.'"

How did God establish His covenant with the children of Israel? He did so by taking them by the hand. It was something outward. The laws were written on stone tablets. They were outward. The result was that the children of Israel did not continue in God's covenant, and God did not regard them. God's commandments are one thing. Our obeying is another. The result of that whole experiment was a failure.

THE NEW COVENANT WITHIN

Now let us look at the second covenant. Hebrews 8:10 and 11 say, "For this is the covenant which I will covenant with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will impart My laws into their mind, and on their hearts I will inscribe them; and I will be God to them, and they will be a people to Me. And they shall by no means each teach his fellow citizen and each his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all will know Me from the little one to the great one among them."

Now the law is put within man. It is no longer inscribed on stones, nor is it recorded merely in the Bible; it is written upon our hearts. What is the good of having the law put inside of us? Ezekiel 36:27 says, "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." Please note the word "cause." It is a strong word in the Hebrew language. The result of God's putting His Spirit within us is to cause us to be able to obey His ordinances and walk in His statutes.

Under the old covenant, man had to struggle to obey God's commandments. Now the Spirit of God is in us. He causes us to obey. Hitherto God gave the commandments, and we supplied our own strength for their fulfillment. Now the commanding One is God, but the supplying One becomes God also. After resurrection, Christ came into us to become our life. The result is that we are enabled to fulfill God's commandments. This is the gospel. Christ's sufficiency has become our ability. Because Christ is living for us, all the problems are solved.

I AM CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

I turn the question now to you. Have you given up hope in yourself? Are you still trying to improve yourself and reform to a better status? I have completely abandoned any hope in myself! I am crucified on the cross. My

goodness and wickedness alike are terminated. Now everything is Christ. This is the only way. Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20).

Do you believe that God has crucified you? Do you believe that your old man is nullified and that Christ is in you? If so, you have to substantiate all these facts. Then you will be able to say that henceforth it is Christ living in you.

NO NEED TO WAIT

Once I was invited to dinner at a missionary's home. We sat and talked for a long time concerning this matter. I asked him, "Can you say that you have overcome all your sins?" He answered, "I have to wait and see if this will work or not." What he meant was, "Paul said that he had died and was resurrected. But I cannot say the same because if I say it and then lose my temper, what am I going to do? Am I not still alive? Therefore, I must wait a few days to see if it works or not."

I told him, "God has put you into His Son; you are now dead with Him. God has also put you into His resurrection that He may be your life within. What you should do is believe. Instead you are just waiting. Do you really believe? You are not believing because if you were, you would praise God for Christ being your life. You would not even worry whether this would work or not. God is responsible for it, and He never fails. All His accomplished works become real when you exercise your faith. What are you waiting for? Are you doubting the Word of God?"

BELIEVING IN THE FACTS

Once again it is a matter of faith. Faith always concerns accomplished facts. Anything for tomorrow is not faith. Nor is anything in hope. Many, after hearing such messages, say that they have faith. But whether or not they really possess it is an open question.

Let me illustrate my point by a real story. I have two co-workers. One is a brother by the name of Nee. The other is a sister called Lee. Both started in

their Christian work recently and both are nearsighted. Eventually, both had a pair of glasses. Miss Lee went to the Lord and prayed, "Lord, You have healed the blind. Can't You do the same for me? It is very inconvenient for me to go around preaching in villages with this pair of glasses. Lord, heal me." She made this prayer on a little steamboat on her way to a village. After her prayer she knew that God had answered her request. She had the faith within her to throw her glasses into the river. Her eyes were consequently healed.

FAITH IS NOT FOR THE FUTURE

The news came to Mr. Nee. One day he came to me, saying, "God has healed Miss Lee's eyes. I believe that He will do the same for me." I answered, "You said that God will heal you. This proves that you do not have the faith yet. You will not be healed." He insisted, however, that God would work a miracle and that he had such a faith.

After two days he was on a steamboat. He took off his glasses and threw them into the water. A month afterward I saw him, and he told me that his eyes had not improved any. It seemed as if God had not healed him yet. I said, "If you are wise, you had better spend twelve dollars to buy another pair of glasses." He said that he was going to preach in Ku-tien and would be back in four months. He had the faith that by then he would be healed. I said, "If you think that four months from now God will heal you, you are putting your faith in the future. This is not genuine faith."

THE PROPER FAITH

Do you see it now? Miss Lee has the genuine faith. She said, "Lord, I thank You that I am no longer nearsighted. For this reason I throw my glasses away." But Mr. Nee said, "When I throw away my glasses I shall be healed." She believed that God had accomplished her healing already. This is what real faith demands. It is a faith that believes that God has accomplished and has fulfilled all His will.

The same principle applies to our salvation and the living of a victorious life. We are not hoping that God will save us. I am afraid some will keep hoping even after they reach hell. Neither are we hoping that victory will come in another two days. What we should say is, "Lord, I thank You. My sins are forgiven. Thank You, Lord, that it is no longer I who live, but You live within

me." We have to believe in what is and what has been. When we do this we will be saved.

RECEIVED THROUGH FAITH

There is another passage in the Bible concerning faith. Mark 11:24 should be read with care: "For this reason I say to you, All things that you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and you will have them."

The crucial word in this verse is "received." I have underlined this word in my Bible. "Believe that you have received them, and you will have them." The first clause gives the past tense, while the second is in the future. The Bible gives only this kind of faith. It is faith that believes in having received, not one that hopes to receive. Only the receiving that is through faith is the true receiving. Without the receiving in faith, there is no receiving in reality.

Sometimes my co-workers or I would anoint sick people with oil and pray for them. Often I ask a sick man, "Has God answered your prayers yet?" Those who have faith say, "Yes, God has answered prayers. My illness is gone." This kind of patient may still have a high fever and not look too positive, but he eventually gets well. There are others who say, "God will heal me," or "I will be healed." We have to pray again for these because we detect no faith in them. What they have is not faith, but mere hope. To hope to be healed and to believe that one is healed are very different. Those who believe that they have received will receive.

VICTORY

The same is true of victorious living. If you believe that you are victorious already, then you will experience victory after victory. But if you put your hope in the future, you can only experience victory in the future. The past tense occupies a vital position in our prayers. It is what I have and not what I want. Wanting something is a sign of unbelief. The word want often blocks our prayers from being answered. The word of the Lord is clear: he who believes that he has received shall receive.

CHAPTER THREE

LIFE IN THE DEPTHS

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(Editor's Note: The following article is translated from the Chinese series, Twelve Baskets Full, Volume 7, chapter twelve. The content is similar to the second "Preparation Message" given by Watchman Nee in the Third Overcomer Conference in January 1934 (see Volume 11 of The Collected Works). Since we have no assurance that this article is taken from the same spoken message, we have included it in this volume.)

Scripture Reading: Mark 4:5-6, 16-17; Hosea 14:5-7; S.S. 4:12

From the above three passages we can see the kind of Christian living that God delights in and the kind of living that is enduring and unchanging, one that survives blows and withstands tests. Why do some Christians look quite promising at the beginning of their Christian experience, yet are nowhere to be found after a period of time? Why do some drop out halfway? Why are some unable to follow the Lord to the end? The answer is very much related to the way a Christian lives. If a Christian does not live a normal Christian life, he is shaky, and it is easy for him to drop out. Therefore, we must not neglect this problem.

A SHALLOW LIFE

Mark 4:5-6 says, "And other seed fell on the rocky place, where it did not have much earth, and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered." This is one of the many parables the Lord Jesus spoke on the sowing of seeds. In verses 16 and 17 the Lord explains the parable to the disciples: "And likewise, these are the ones being sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. Yet they have no root in themselves, but last only for a time; then when affliction or persecution occurs because of the word, immediately they are stumbled." From the Lord's explanation we see that a shallow life cannot endure or stand

the test of trials. Apparently this kind of life has a good start, but eventually, it ends miserably. The appearance of this kind of life is that "immediately it sprang up." Since it has sprung up, the outer shell of the seed has burst, and it has sprouted. This means that the word is no longer merely a doctrine to a person. It has been transformed into life. It has sprouted and sprung up immediately. As far as its appearance is concerned, it has advanced very fast and progressed in a wonderful way. One should be satisfied with such a growth. However, its end is disappointing because it becomes scorched when the sun comes up and it withers away. It springs up immediately but withers quickly. Sprouts that cannot withstand the heat of the sun have little hope of ripening and wither away quickly. This is the condition of many Christians. Shortly after they hear the word, they receive it with joy under the illusion that they have everything, understand everything, and are prepared to pay any price and embark on any way. Before God they have the will and the consecration; before men they bear their testimony and zeal. However, when trials soon befall them, they immediately shake and become dismayed. They find things to be unbearable. They flinch through fear and eventually fall away. Brothers and sisters, as long as we are Christians, the scorching of the sun is indispensable; it helps our growth and assists our ripening. If we are shaken and fall away as soon as we meet the scorching of the sun, it indicates that we are shallow. The scorching of the sun only exposes our true condition; it will not rob us of what we really possess. Does the word of God wither at the scorching of the sun? No. The problem is how we received the word. Why does God's word sprout immediately and then wither away as soon as it is exposed to the scorching of the sun? What is the reason for this? The Bible shows us three reasons.

Shallowness of Ground

The first reason that the word withers away is the shallowness of the ground. This means there is not much soil and consequently no depth; there is only a little soil on the ground. A Christian with shallow ground has very little inside of him. When such a person hears the word, every sentence seems to be well received and easily comprehended. He is apt to relay the word to other people and ready to bear witness before men. However, it is just as easy for this kind of person to lose the truth, overthrow the truth, and deny what he has said to other people. He is satisfied easily, and he becomes hungry easily. He is happy and sad easily; he is excited and cooled easily; he laughs

and weeps easily. Such a person is very shallow; he lives in his emotions and circumstances.

We know that if a tree is big, its roots must be deep. Some trees can reach a depth of several hundred feet. A tree which cannot absorb water from the surface will send its roots deep until it finds a source of water. The palm trees in the Arabian Desert survive with green foliage, despite the scorching of the sun, because they draw water from the depths, enabling them to defy the blazing sun. If a Christian sends his roots down, he will not need to fear the scorching of the sun. Everyone who lives by his circumstances or in his feelings is living on shallow ground. Those who are prone to be swayed by their emotions or influenced by circumstances are similarly shallow. However, those whose lives are deeply rooted do not care about their circumstances; they do not live by feeling but solely by faith. They do not look to or depend upon circumstances. Instead they look to the Lord behind the circumstances. Such persons receive their sustenance, support, and power from God instead of from the circumstances. If a person lives by his emotions and circumstances, instead of trusting in the Lord behind the circumstances, he will not be able to hold fast to a single truth or teaching. When circumstances are favorable, he will be energetic and elated, but as soon as he encounters trials, he will become disheartened and depressed. He will fall as soon as he is confronted with the cross. Brothers and sisters, if you retreat when trials come, it proves that you are a shallow person. When the sun scorches, you will wither away immediately.

Lacking in Root

The second reason that the word withers away is the lack of root. What are roots? The section of a tree that is above the ground is the trunk, and the section that is hidden under the ground is the root. The visible life-section is the branches; the invisible life-section is the root. Therefore, the root represents the hidden life. Those who are rootless in the Lord live a dry life. Those who have no hidden spiritual life, except that which is manifest before men, have no root. The root is the hidden, invisible part. What is exposed and visible is not the root. Brothers and sisters, we should ask ourselves: Besides the part of our life which is visible before men, how much hidden life do we have before the Lord? If all that we have is that which is exposed, it is no wonder that we wither away as soon as the sun comes and scorches us. In our spiritual life nothing sustains us like the hidden life. If we see a brother or

sister falling away, do not regard the fall as an accidental or sudden occurrence. Instead, we should realize that there must be something wrong with his hidden life before God. Since he has no root, he falls when the sun rises to scorch him.

In Matthew 6:6 the Lord Jesus said, "But you, when you pray, enter into your private room, and shut your door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you." To shut the door is to have a hidden life, and this is to have roots. The Lord spoke in a very peculiar way: The Father will see in secret. Oh, praying can be seen! We think that praying is heard, but the Lord said that it is seen. Sometimes when we are before the Lord, we have no words; there is only an attitude—this is precious also. Brothers and sisters, what proportion of our life is seen by God in secret? Is all that we have apparent before men? How much of our spiritual life before God has never been divulged? How much experience do we have which is comparable to what Paul kept secret from other people for fourteen years (2 Cor. 12:2)? If we have none, it indicates that we have no root. If we are persons without root, we will immediately fall away when the sun comes up to scorch us. Brothers and sisters, only the part of us which can survive the test of trials is reliable. If our roots are not deep enough, we are bound to fail.

The Rocky Place

The third reason that the word withers away is that there are rocks underneath the shallow earth. A person with shallow earth may be willing to send his roots deep, but rocks may obstruct them. Outwardly, he is the same as other people, but within him there are hidden sins and a hardened self. In the Bible the word rock has several meanings—one relates to a stony heart (Ezek. 36:26). If we wish to send our spiritual roots deep, we should not harden our hearts (Heb. 3:8). Many Christians have never experienced the breaking of their concepts and have never been broken. They give many reasons to reject God's will and insist on their own views. They always have opinions as to whether something should be done this way or that way. They have rocks within, and their hearts are very hard. God has to blast these inner rocks away before they can strike their roots. There is only one kind of people who can strike roots: those who tremble at the word of the Lord (Isa. 66:5). Brothers and sisters, a heart that is not submissive to God is a stony heart. We should ask God to enlighten us and show us how big the rocks within us are. If

we have rocks inside, we cannot strike roots, and when the sun comes up and scorches, how can we escape from withering away?

Rocks not only stand for a hardened heart but also for hidden sins. Perhaps there is a particular sin in your life which you have not given up because the price is too high, and you do not have the courage to deal with it. Perhaps God's demand is strong; consequently, you reason and argue with God because you cannot obey. If you allow your hidden sins to remain, you cannot strike roots. When the sun comes up and scorches, how can you escape from withering away?

THE SCORCHING OF THE SUN

Brothers and sisters, without light we will not realize how shallow we are. Without the scorching of the sun, we will not understand why those who spring up fast also wither away fast. How often we are deceived into complacency with our spiritual state! Yet we regard ourselves as wonderful people! To our great surprise, when the sun comes up and scorches us, we immediately wither away.

Why does God permit the scorching of the sun to come to us? Why does He allow difficulties to befall us? Brothers and sisters, this is the ultimate expression of the Lord's love—the cross. There is nothing which can cultivate our spiritual life as much as the cross; no trial can be better than the cross. When we heard the word of truth, we immediately accepted it with joy and consecrated ourselves to God. Perhaps we fancied that we were all right. In reality we overestimated ourselves. God purposely sent us trials and the cross so that we would see ourselves. Yet sometimes we end up having an argument with God because He acts contrary to our expectations. He tells us to go to places that we do not want to go to. He assigns us to work that we do not want to do. Therefore, we are dissatisfied. Inevitably, we misunderstand God, blame God, and have an argument with Him. Brothers and sisters, please remember that arguments bring us into dryness. All spiritual dryness has its beginnings in our controversy with God. If God gives way and we win, we will be doomed to wither away. Therefore, the cross is a test to us; it decides whether our life will end in richness or dryness. In other words, whether our life will be abundant or dry depends on how we deal with our argument with God. If we prevail and God yields, the only result for our life will be dryness. Therefore, we must never rejoice in our apparent victory or delight in our

freedom. This merely points out the fact that our life is withering away and that our living will soon degenerate. The experience of many Christians testifies to this fact. Our life does not remain abundant when God yields. If there is an unresolved dispute, an unsolved problem, or an unclarified point between God and ourselves concerning His will, we must be extremely careful. If we are double-minded and not satisfied with God's arrangement, choosing the path which we consider to be good, we will not have to wait until the issue becomes apparent; we will begin to wither away immediately.

Brothers and sisters, we should not imagine that we can acquire something simply by listening to a message. God has to create an environment for us to actually feel the need for the word we hear. This will test whether we have accepted the word genuinely or superficially. God has to create an environment to show us that no teaching of the Bible can be ours without paying a price. For example, after we have listened to a word on endurance, God will arrange tribulation for us because "tribulation produces endurance" (Rom. 5:3). After we have heard a word on obedience, God will confront us with hardship so that we can learn obedience from the things which we suffer (Heb. 5:8). After we have heard a word on gentleness, God will bring us face to face with many irritating people and matters so that we will be "gentle toward all" (2 Tim. 2:24). After we have heard a word on faith, God will seem to hide Himself from us and take no notice of us when we call upon Him so that we will not "doubt in unbelief" but be "empowered by faith, giving glory to God" (Rom. 4:20). Each time we hear a word, something always seems to be waiting to test us. Brothers and sisters, if we can stand the test, the word will become real in us.

God will never allow us to simply listen to a message or consecrate ourselves; He must test us. He can only use the vessels which stand firm after the tests. Once an older sister, long in the service of the Lord, spoke to a young brother who was about to embark on the Lord's service, and said, "Every piece of bread that is consecrated to the Lord's hands must be broken before it can be distributed to others. Unbroken bread cannot multiply and will not sustain others' lives. We often consecrate ourselves to God yet hope in our heart: 'Lord, I have consecrated myself to You, but please do not break me up!' We all want the bread to remain intact forever and stay permanently untouched. But every piece of bread in the Lord's hands must be broken. If you do not want to be broken, do not place yourself in His hands." Brothers and sisters, these are words of experience by one who knew the Lord. All the

bread that is placed in the Lord's hands will be broken by Him. This is where the difficulty lies with many Christians. They listen to a sermon and joyfully say, "Lord, I consecrate everything to You." But when the Lord breaks them, they yearn to be delivered from their environment. Brothers and sisters, on the one hand, we are captured by God, but on the other hand, we are unwilling to be broken by Him. This is a struggling life. If we want to have an abundant life, we must allow God to send many trials to us.

LIFE IN THE DEPTHS

Hosea 14:5-7 reads, "I will be like the dew to Israel;/He will bud like the lily/And will send forth his roots like the trees of Lebanon./His shoots will go forth;/And his splendor will be like that of the olive tree,/And his fragrance, like that of the trees of Lebanon./Those who sit under his shade will return;/They will revive like grain/And will bud like the vine;/His renown will be like the wine of Lebanon." In this passage, Lebanon is spoken of three times: once in relation to the lily, once in relation to the olive tree, and once in relation to the vine. Why is there such an emphasis on Lebanon? There is such an emphasis because the cedars on the mountain of Lebanon are very tall and the roots are very deep. The Bible uses the cedars of Lebanon to represent the tallest and biggest trees on earth; they also signify people who strike their roots deep. In this passage Lebanon is first spoken of with reference to the lily, then the olive tree, and finally the vine. For the Bible to speak in this way is profoundly significant. Let us briefly consider these verses.

Why is the lily linked to Lebanon? A lily is pure and beautiful. The lily that is referred to grows in the wilderness, not in a house garden. No gardener cultivates this lily; it depends solely upon sunshine, rain, and dew for sustenance. Christians are lilies of the valleys (S.S. 2:1); we rely entirely upon God's cultivation and maintenance. A pure and beautiful spiritual life is derived from uninterrupted fellowship with God. Hence, "he will bud like the lily/And will send forth his roots like the trees of Lebanon."

Why is the olive tree linked to Lebanon? In the eyes of man, an olive tree has no splendor at all. If we said that something has splendor like a peony plant, it would be easy to understand. But to compare splendor to an olive tree does not sound very appropriate. However, the Bible shows us that splendor to God is not a superficial splendor but genuine fruit. The olive tree

bears oil-yielding drupe—its splendor is in its fruit. The splendor of a Christian is in the bearing of the fruit of the Spirit. This can be achieved only by going inward and striking roots in the depths. Therefore, his splendor is said to be as the olive tree and his fragrance as Lebanon.

Why is the vine linked to Lebanon? The verse says, "They will...bud like the vine." Have we ever seen the budding of a vine? Vine blossoms are tiny! Very soon after budding, the buds are turned into grapes. We never see vine blossoms in a flower vase. Why does the verse not say that the budding is like that of the peach tree or the chrysanthemum? This is because the budding which God honors is not something for man's appreciation but something that bears fruit like the vine. God requires a Christian to strike roots and bear fruit abundantly. That is why the verse says that they shall bud like the vine and their renown will be like the wine of Lebanon.

Lebanon is referred to three times—all for the purpose of drawing attention to a life in the depths. Although this life in the depths is a secluded life (like the lily in the valley), a life that is outwardly unattractive (like the olive tree), and a life that is not prominent (like the budding vine), it looks to God in simplicity and is capable of bearing much fruit. This is the kind of life a Christian should have. Yet it is impossible to have this kind of life unless one strikes deep roots; there has to be a regular daily exercise. We must set aside a little time every day to pray and study God's Word—reading and praying simultaneously in the presence of God. If possible, we should also appropriate some time to pray for the saints, the churches, and God's work. If a Christian does not read the Bible or pray every morning, he simply does not have any life in the depths. To strike roots is not a matter of words but is an actual practice in our daily life. At the beginning of this practice, one has to pay a price. May God's love attract and lead us into the depths day after day so that our roots may go down deeper and deeper.

In order to live a life in the depths, it is necessary to have direct and intimate fellowship with the Lord. Song of Songs 4:12 says, "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse;/a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." What is spoken of here is a garden. According to the Bible, a garden is God's very first thought. A garden is not an ordinary plot of land; it is not for general-purpose planting. Neither is it a field, which is specifically for tillage. A garden exists solely for the purpose of beauty and enjoyment. In a garden there may be trees, but their purpose is not for wood. There may be fruit trees, but their

purpose is not for fruit bearing. The importance of a garden is in its flowers. They are planted only for their beauty. Flowers are for the pleasure of the eyes. The description of the garden as "enclosed" means that it is not a public park which everybody has access to for enjoyment. Rather, it is enclosed exclusively for Christ. The inward beauty is to be seen and appreciated by Christ alone. This kind of life is not one that pleases men but one that only pleases Christ.

This life is "a spring shut up." The word "spring" can be translated "well." A well is for man's use. Although this well is for man's use, it is still under the restriction of the Lord. This life is also "a fountain sealed." A well is produced artificially, but a fountain is not. A well is for man, but a fountain is for God. A fountain stands for the joy and contentment we acquire before God. We cannot consciously divulge our experience to men, because it is a sealed fountain. A Christian should not consciously exhibit his beauty, pursuit, and spiritual experience to others. Everything should be silently sealed up for the Lord. Only this kind of life in the depths will satisfy the Lord's heart.

Brothers and sisters, our life is often too shallow, and a large portion of it is exposed on the surface. May the Lord grant us grace and do a deeper work in us through the cross so that we may strike roots and have a life in the depths to fulfill God's requirements and satisfy His heart.

CHAPTER FOUR

HE IS NOT WHO IS ONE OUTWARDLY, BUT WHO IS ONE INWARDLY

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 37:

General Messages (1), Ch. 34

Scripture Reading: Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 1:11-16

We should focus on a few expressions from the two verses we have read in Romans 2: "For he is not...who is one outwardly...But he is...who is one inwardly"; "in spirit, not in letter"; "not from men, but from God." Here are a few contrasts: "outwardly" versus "inwardly"; "spirit" versus "letter"; and "from men" versus "from God." The Bible shows us clearly through these contrasts the fact that Christianity is not a matter of outward regulations, forms, and ceremonies but a matter of the inner life. Christianity is not an outward religion or a product of the human mind; Christianity is an inward revelation and a religion of life.

What is it to be a Christian? A Christian is one who has the life of the Lord within him. Some people were baptized when they were young; they attend church services regularly and carry a Bible with them. They can recite the Lord's Prayer and know the Ten Commandments. They can sing hymns and say amen to others' prayers, and they are very familiar with the stories in the Bible. They even consider themselves to be Christians. But are they? The Bible says that "he is not...who is one outwardly." Therefore, a Christian is not a Christian by teaching or by learning. A Christian becomes a Christian inwardly; he is a person who has the life of the Lord within him. The Lord Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly" (John 10:10). A Christian is a person who has something to do with life. He is not one outwardly but one inwardly.

Life comes from the Lord Himself. In fact, life is the Lord Himself. A man receives this life through knowing the Lord Jesus and through knowing Him as the Son of God and as the Christ of God. This knowledge comes from God's revelation. Paul had been instructed in the law according to the strict

traditions of his fathers. He persecuted the church greatly and thought that by so doing he was zealously serving God. When the Lord appeared to him, he repented and was saved. He testified in Galatians 1 that his gospel was not received from men nor taught by men; it came from the revelation of Jesus Christ. If a man has not received any revelation from God, his zeal is vain. He may be able to keep all the traditions of his fathers, but these traditions can never give him God's life. Paul did not become a Christian through men. He became a Christian because it pleased God to reveal His Son in him.

Once the Lord asked the disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of Man is?" They answered, "Some, John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." The Lord then asked the disciples, "But you, who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." The Lord immediately said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in the heavens" (Matt. 16:13-17). This shows us clearly that a Christian must be one who has received a revelation from God. If you want to be a Christian, you must have this revelation and knowledge. If you say that you admire the life of Jesus, this will not make you a Christian. If you say that Jesus' teaching contains some very deep philosophy, this will not make you a Christian either. You may not agree with this word. You may argue: "I admire Jesus and honor Him; I am favorably inclined towards Christianity. Does that not make me a Christian?" No, it does not. Being a Christian is not a question of admiring or not admiring; it is not a question of being favorably or ill inclined towards Christianity. Some considered the Lord Jesus to be John the Baptist, Elijah, or Jeremiah. Was not John the Baptist good? Was not Elijah good? Was not Jeremiah good? Yet these were all man's views and man's opinions. Christianity is absolutely not from man. Therefore, human views and human opinions cannot replace Christianity. Christianity is a religion of revelation. Only those who have received a revelation from God and who know the Lord Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, are blessed by the Lord.

Once a man receives a revelation, he touches the Lord Jesus in the Holy Spirit, and he comes face to face with the Lord Jesus. He has a direct relationship with Him and has made contact with the Lord. Let me give a little illustration. Once an electrical power line in a brother's home became worn out. It was easy to receive an electric shock from the wire. The brother was not careful enough and touched the line. Immediately he withdrew his hand and

shouted, "What a shock! What a shock!" His young son saw how his hand stretched out and pulled back, and he imitated his father and pretended that he had been shocked also. He stretched out his little hand and pulled it back shouting, "What a shock! What a shock!" But we know that the son was acting in an outward way; he was imitating. The father was genuinely shocked by the electricity; he tasted the reality of the experience. Brothers and sisters, outward imitations do not count; it is the real taste that counts. You must touch Christ like the brother who touched the electrical current. Do you know that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God today? It is not what men say, but what you say within yourself that counts. You may not have any knowledge within you, and you may only have heard about Him from others. When others say that He is the Son of God, you echo and say the same thing. When others say that Jesus was a great social reformer, you follow suit and say the same thing. Your "faith" is one that revolves around others. I am afraid that you are not clear what you believe in.

In John 3, the Lord Jesus discussed the question of regeneration with Nicodemus, who said, "We know that You have come from God as a teacher." The Lord answered him, saying, "Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (vv. 2-3). With a teacher, the main emphasis is teaching and learning; these are all outward matters. With regeneration, it is a question of spirit and life; these are inward matters. Many so-called Christians have tried to enter through the gate called "Teacher." They think that as long as they understand the teachings of Christianity, as long as they are baptized and are familiar with the prophecies and types of the Bible, and as long as they have picked up outward Christian behavior such as prayer, attending services, and tithing, they can consider themselves good Christians. These people are wrong about Christianity. The Bible shows us that a Christian life begins from regeneration. If a man is not regenerated and does not have the life of the Lord within Him, he is not yet a Christian. Let me repeat: Christianity is not an outward religion but an inward revelation. A Christian is not one who is one outwardly but who is one inwardly.

In John 6, the Lord Jesus fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. The same group of people looked for Jesus the next day, and the Lord told them plainly: "You seek Me...because you ate of the bread and were filled. Work not for the food which perishes, but for the food which abides unto eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you" (vv. 26-27). Again He said: "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall by no means hunger, and he

who believes into Me shall by no means ever thirst" (v. 35). These men came to the Lord Jesus because they ate bread and were filled. They did not know what their real need was. Neither did they know what the Lord was giving to men when He came to the earth. They only saw the physical bread without but did not see the preciousness of the life within. The Lord Jesus was full of mercy; He did not hide Himself from these ignorant ones. He opened Himself to them and told them that He is the bread of life and that He gives life to those who believe in Him. But these ones were still circling around the periphery. They asked, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" (v. 42). They only knew the Lord Jesus from the outside. The Lord told them again, "I am the living bread which came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread which I will give is My flesh, given for the life of the world" (v. 51). The Jews contended with one another because of this word. Their eyes only saw outward things. They wanted to know the Lord Jesus and understand His words in an outward way. But it was impossible for them to know and understand in this way.

We have to pay attention to the words which followed. Not only were the Jews bewildered by the Lord's word, but many of His disciples did not understand it either. They said, "This word is hard; who can hear it?" (v. 60). Many of the disciples went back to what they had left behind and no longer walked with Him. They stumbled and were no longer His disciples. Five loaves and two fish on the outside attracted many to seek after the Lord Jesus. But when the inward bread of life was presented, many so-called disciples could not take it. How easy it is for men to pay attention to outward things and reject inward things! Brothers and sisters, we ought to be warned here! Many who were called disciples dropped out halfway. Those who are Christians in an outward way will drop out halfway. Those who do not touch life will drop out halfway. Anyone who has not received the Lord's life within him cannot be His disciple. No one needs to discourage such a one from becoming a Christian; he himself will find it impossible to go on.

These so-called disciples did not withdraw because of tribulations or trials. There was only one reason for their withdrawal: "This word is hard; who can hear it?" They fell in the presence of the truth! Brothers and sisters, nothing outward works. An outward Christian will fall in the presence of the truth; there is no need for trials to come to him. Some people call themselves Christians, but they do not accept the Lord's Word. They do not understand

the truth of Christianity. They doubt, misunderstand, and even mock and oppose it. They only want the name of Christianity; they do not want the truth of Christianity. They are Christians according to their own "theology," and not according to the Lord's Word. The Lord said, "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). When a man receives the Lord's word, he receives the Lord's life. One characteristic of the outward Christian is that he cannot understand and will not believe, receive, or treasure the Lord's Word. All of God's children have one fundamental feeling towards God's Word, the Bible. They believe, honor, and treasure God's Word. This feeling towards the Bible is the basic and fundamental attitude which a Christian ought to have. If a person calls himself a Christian, yet doubts, rather than believes the Bible, criticizes, rather than honors it, and tramples, rather than treasures it, he must not be a genuine Christian. Although the disciples who withdrew at the Lord's word were called disciples outwardly, in reality they were unbelievers. The Bible says clearly, "For Jesus knew from the beginning who were the ones who did not believe and who was the one who would betray Him" (v. 64). This kind of outward Christian either withdraws halfway or mixes in with the disciples only to eventually betray the Lord!

When the many so-called disciples were withdrawing, the Lord asked the twelve disciples: "Do you also want to go away?" Simon Peter answered and said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life, and we have believed..." (vv. 67-69). Peter had received the revelation. The heavenly Father had revealed to him that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of the living God. This is why he still followed the Lord when many withdrew. The Lord's word was like a yardstick which differentiated those who genuinely believed in Him from those who did not believe in Him. It separated the outward ones from the inward ones.

Christians who have revelation and who are Christians inwardly can withstand tests. They treasure God's truth and are not afraid of any trial. We see Paul suffering many persecutions and much tribulation for the sake of the Lord's name. One day he was brought in chains to Caesarea to be judged by Festus. Even Festus himself admitted that Paul did not commit any crime and that the only questions against him were about a certain Jesus who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive (Acts 25:18-19). Brothers and sisters, this is a sober question: Are you an outward Christian or an inward Christian? Paul had the experience; it pleased God to reveal His Son in him. This is why he

insisted that Jesus was living when others said that He had died. Even when others held him in chains, he said the same thing. Even when others charged him with many false accusations, he said the same thing. On the way to Damascus, he had indeed met the Jesus who was raised from the dead. Therefore, he could present his good testimony under any trial.

Brothers and sisters, no outward Christian can withstand the test of the truth or the test of trials. I wish everyone who called himself a Christian would settle this question once and for all: Is the Christianity you know outward, or is it inward? Are you a Christian by tradition, by learning, or by revelation? Is your knowledge of the Lord Jesus in your head or in life and revelation? Is your Christianity something of man or something of God?

Finally, I will repeat again: "For he is not...who is one outwardly...But...who is one inwardly."

CHAPTER FIVE

FOUR THINGS A CHRISTIAN SHOULD PAY ATTENTION TO

CWWN, The (Set 1) Vol. 18:

Notes on Scriptural Messages (2), Issue No. 39

Scripture Reading: Matt. 9:38; Mark 11:22; 2 Cor. 5:7; Rom. 1:1, 14; 2 Cor. 12:1, 4, 7; Gal. 2:20; 2 Cor. 4:10; Matt. 13:9, 52; Hosea 7:8; Matt. 5:48

We hope to see by the help of God the kind of way God ordains for us to take. I have taken verses from various places in the Bible. Some may wonder what these verses are all about. In particular, I want to draw your attention to Hosea 7:8, which says that "Ephraim is a cake/Not turned." Brothers, in God's eyes, there are always two sides to whatever we do. A bird can only fly with two wings. Even a blade of grass has to have two sides before it can be complete. Likewise, a door has to have two sides. In this universe, everything is balanced. What is true in the physical realm is also true in the spiritual realm; everything should be balanced between two sides.

Hosea 7:8 says, "Ephraim is a cake/Not turned." What is an unturned cake? Although many of us have not made cakes before, we all have eaten cakes. Even if we do not know how cakes are baked, we have at least seen others cooking bean curd or frying vegetables. If a person only cooks one side without turning it over, the result will surely be that one side is raw, and the other side is overcooked. One side will have too little heat, while the other side will have too much heat. Anyone who cooks vegetables or bean curd knows that the same amount of heat has to be applied to both sides. If one keeps cooking only one side, the result will be that one side is burnt and the other side is uncooked. Anything burnt cannot be considered proper food; it cannot feed others. Today I will not expound on Ephraim becoming an unturned cake through mixing himself with the Gentiles. I will only draw attention to the phrase "a cake not turned." This is a principle from God for our living. If a person pays too much attention to anything, he becomes a cake not turned. One can, of course, cook one side by exposing it to fire. But if he does not turn it to the other side, the whole piece will not be well-cooked and will become

useless. The most important thing for a Christian to do is to be balanced. We will pick out some examples to see how a Christian who over-emphasizes one aspect of things will become a cake not turned.

Many Christians are living a life of an unturned cake. Many emphasize personal spiritual living and neglect the corporate life. This is an unturned cake. Some pay much attention to the corporate life but forget about the individual life. Such people are also unturned cakes. Some pay too much attention to righteousness and have no grace at all. Such people are unturned cakes. It is right to be righteous. But paying attention to righteousness all the time without taking care of grace is being an unturned cake. Some people are nice; they are good to others. But they do not have any principle of righteousness. They do not want to deal with others. They pay too much attention to grace and no attention to righteousness. This also is an unturned cake. Some people pay most of their attention to the objective truths and forget the work of the Holy Spirit within man. These people are also unturned cakes. Some people pay too much attention to the subjective truths and do not pay much attention to the accomplishments of Christ on the cross. They also are unturned cakes. We can say much more about what an unturned cake is. But because of time, I will only mention these few cases.

No truth should be over-emphasized. There is always the need of balance, and there is always the need to pay attention to both sides. With the Bible, we should be aware of two things. The first is fact, and the second is principle. A fact requires us to believe in it, while a principle requires us to obey it. Many people pay attention only to the facts and not to the principles. These persons are unturned cakes, being burnt on one side. Other people only pay attention to the principles and speak much about obedience, but they do not pay attention to the accomplished facts of Christ. These people are also unturned cakes, being burnt on the other side. Such an over-emphasis of one side will cause a Christian to have a distorted living and not bring him to perfection.

Today I will draw your attention to the matter of being a Christian in four aspects. We should not be an unturned cake. I cannot enumerate all the examples of unturned cakes. I can only mention a few of them. Now I will speak on being a four-sided Christian. On the one hand, we will consider the Lord's commands. On the other hand, we will consider Paul's pattern. The Gospels show us the Lord's commands, while Paul's Epistles show us his experience.

THE LORD'S COMMANDS

First, the Lord commands His disciples to know. He says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 13:9). Again He says, "For this reason every scribe disciplined to the kingdom of the heavens is like a householder who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old" (v. 52). This refers to knowledge. If a believer is not an unturned cake, he will surely advance in knowledge.

Second, one should have faith because the Lord says, "Have faith in God." This is the original meaning of Mark 11:22.

Third, the Lord says, "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest that He would thrust out workers into His harvest" (Matt. 9:38). This refers to zeal. We should be zealous for the gospel.

Fourth, the Lord says, "You therefore shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). This refers to life and in particular to love. We may not be as perfect as the heavenly Father is in other aspects. But at least we should pursue to be as perfect as our heavenly Father is in love. The Lord once passed through Samaria, and the people there would not receive Him. When James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (Luke 9:54). The Lord turned and rebuked the two disciples, saying, "You do not know of what kind of spirit you are" (v. 55). Oh, we should know of what kind of spirit we are.

We have not divided these subjects randomly. If we read the Gospels carefully and group the Lord's commands together, they are of these four categories. The Lord turns our attention to either faith, zeal, knowledge, or life. It is always one of these four things.

PAUL'S PATTERN

The same is true with Paul. This is why he could say, "Be imitators of me, as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

As far as knowledge is concerned, even God feared that Paul's knowledge would become too great. Therefore, He allowed the messenger of Satan to buffet him and press him down so that he might not be exceedingly lifted up.

Paul was caught away into Paradise and heard unspeakable words—words which were not allowed for a man to speak. It seemed as if God had shown him too much. Within him, there were still many things that he did not speak. There are still many questions which we would like to ask him today. He knew the mysteries, all kinds of mysteries. He mentioned "the transcendence of the revelations" (2 Cor. 12:7) that he received and that he was not inferior to the super-apostles in anything (v. 11).

Concerning faith, he said, "For we walk by faith, not by appearance" (2 Cor. 5:7). He said that he once fought with wild beasts at Ephesus (1 Cor. 15:32) and despaired even of living (2 Cor. 1:8). Yet through God who raises the dead (v. 9), he was able to find the good end. He could perform works of wonders and heal sickness. He was a prophet and not afraid of snake bites. When he was on a ship and everyone abandoned hope of being saved, even when no one had food for a long time and there seemed to be nothing that anyone could do, he was still able to calm everyone down. He could do this because of what he said: "I believe God that it shall be so, even in the way in which it has been spoken to me" (Acts 27:25). This was his life of faith.

Not only did he have knowledge and faith, but he was also excellent in life. He could say, "I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). He could truly say, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21) and "Always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body" (2 Cor. 4:10).

At the same time, he was very zealous in preaching the gospel. He was truly zealous. He went from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum, preaching the gospel of Christ everywhere he went. He said, "But now I no longer have place in these regions" (Rom. 15:23). Brothers, have you ever preached in a region until there was no longer any place to preach in that region? Paul said this as if he knew every face there. While he was on the road, he preached the gospel. While he was at sea, he preached the gospel. While he was in prison, he preached the gospel. Even while he was under bondage in Rome, his testimony became manifest among the whole Praetorian guard and to all the rest. This means that even his guards received the gospel. These guards were originally posted there to keep a watch on Paul. But they became locked up by the Christ whom Paul preached; they had become the prisoners of Christ.

My intention is not just to speak on the Lord's commands, nor on Paul's experience, but to draw your attention to one thing: a Christian ought to be a four-sided person. Every Christian must pay attention to these four things. Not only should we have zeal, but faith as well. Not only should we grow in knowledge, but in life as well. If any one of the four things are missing, there will be an imbalance. Please analyze the experiences of Paul when you read the New Testament again, and see if zeal, faith, knowledge, and life are the four characteristics of Paul. We are only speaking in a general way. This is why we say that there are only these four points. According to the Lord's commands, we should not only be encouraged to have zeal and faith, but we should also grow in knowledge and life.

Today I will speak a little more about faith. Sadly, the church has become desolate and lost its eyes for the Lord. We have a perfect Lord, but there are so many different kinds of Christians. I am not talking about differences in terms of sins. Some have tempers, while others have pride. The devil can create a hundred different kinds of sins. The differences I am talking about are the differences in the good things. Brothers, when you contact others, do you not feel that there are many different kinds of virtues?

EXAMPLES OF ONE-SIDEDNESS

Once I met a Western missionary preaching in Kweichow. He was very zealous for the Lord in China. Although he was a university graduate and a capable man, he was willing to give up everything in order to preach the gospel in inland China. During the Boxer Rebellion, he was preaching the gospel in China. He had many virtues and was very powerful in preaching. Yet his virtues were all one-sided in the matter of zeal; he was lacking in the other aspects.

I also met a missionary in Shanghai who was very good at memorizing the Scriptures. He could memorize the Scriptures verse by verse and expound them with much light. His knowledge was very good, but in the matter of faith in God, he was lacking. When he was sick, he was hopeless. When he caught a cold, he would have to find a doctor. As far as his knowledge was concerned, he could speak about faith. But he had no assurance of what faith actually was. At the same time, his life did not match his knowledge.

I knew another Western missionary who was as gentle as a lamb. Whenever you prayed with her, she would carry you away with her gentleness. She never lost her temper. Wherever she was, God's presence was there. She indeed had considerable growth in life, but she did not have much knowledge. She was also strong in faith, though faith was not her special characteristic. She also had zeal, but her zeal was not as strong as her growth in life.

Another Western missionary had great faith. She could believe even when she had nothing in her pocket. Every time I was with her, she always said that she was down to the last dollar in her pocket. Although she lived in the countryside for many years, she never experienced any financial difficulties. When she spoke on the victory of Christ, there was the real manifestation of the victory of Christ. But in other aspects, she was not as strong as her faith.

Does this mean that Christians can be divided into four categories: the zealous kind, the faithful kind, the knowledgeable kind, and the life kind? May we not have the intention of criticizing others, but may we gain some benefit from this study. We are not separating people into categories in an intentional way. We are merely saying that naturally there are these four groups. These are not differences in sins but differences in good things. When a man develops himself in a certain area and becomes more advanced in that area, those who come in contact with him will feel that he is excellent in a certain, particular aspect. Some may be the zealous kind, while others may be the faith kind. Some may belong to the knowledge group, while others may belong to the life group. As long as one has special growth only in one area, his growth will be distorted. Either he has to continually advance in certain points or continually advance in some other points. It is difficult to find a four-sided Christian who is advancing on all four sides.

I admit that the holiness group of believers have certain virtues in certain areas. They pay a great deal of attention to life. Men like John Wesley were excellent in their growth in life; the beauty that was manifested in their life is unmatched. They knew God very well. But one does not find many among them with deep and profound knowledge. They were lacking in knowledge. They were good at faith and zeal, but they were still short in knowledge.

Among the so-called Brethren, you can find one interesting phenomenon. Their specialty is not faith. I do not mean to say that they have no faith. Their specialty is not life. I do not mean to say that they are poor in life. Even more

their specialty is not zeal. They seem to be somewhat cool for gospel preaching. Yet they are particularly strong in knowledge, Bible teaching, and the light and revelation they have received from God. They are particularly gifted in the aspect of knowledge.

The founder of the China Inland Mission, Mr. Hudson Taylor, was a man of great faith. At the beginning when he started the China Inland Mission, he only had a few sterling pounds in his pocket. He deposited this money into the bank under the name of the China Inland Mission. This was the beginning of the China Inland Mission. Today they receive offerings about every minute. At the beginning, only a few went to the China inland to preach. Even while the money in his hands was only enough to support a few people, he prayed that God would send more men to China. First he asked God to send a few, then a few dozen, and finally a few hundred. He was very advanced in faith and zeal. He was also very good in life. But in knowledge, he was not very outstanding.

Mr. George Müller was also a person advanced in faith and life. But his specialty was not the light of the truth. He was very good in life and zeal. But his specialty was his faith.

As for zeal, we can find many people who are very zealous in China and in other countries. For example, the first person to come to China, Mr. Robert Morrison, was very zealous. But he was stronger in zeal than in other areas.

I present all these cases to you to draw your attention to the fact that we should not be one-sided. This is not what God is after. If a person is good in knowledge, we receive help from him. He may not be that zealous, but we should not therefore consider that zeal is unimportant. A bad thing among believers today is that some do not want knowledge at all, while others do not pay attention to life at all. Those who emphasize life but not knowledge think that it is all right even if one does not know anything. Those who emphasize knowledge but not life can lose their temper as soon as they finish their preaching. While their temper is still with them and the redness still on their face, they can sit down and immediately start teaching again. Brothers, we should not pay attention only to others' shortcomings. But at the same time, we should not pay attention only to others' virtues. Someone may be good in knowledge but not good in life. Others may be good in faith but inadequate in zeal. Still others may be good in life but not preach the gospel to others. Some

are good in faith, and you should follow their faith. Some are good in knowledge, and you should follow them in their knowledge. Some are good in life, and you should follow them in life. Some are good in zeal, and you should follow them in zeal. If you want to be a four-sided Christian, you should pursue all four things.

Faith enables us to receive God's power. Knowledge enables us to know the things of God. Life enables us to express God's love and light. Zeal enables us to bring God to men and give God's salvation to men. Whenever there is the opportunity, we should pass out gospel tracts, and we must testify to our colleagues, family members, and children. If we only emphasize one of these four aspects, we are an unturned cake.

Furthermore, we should be people who experience answers to our prayers. A believer once told me that prayers are for children and that grown-ups do not have to pray. This is a joke. Saying that one can advance from getting answers to prayer to not getting answers to prayers and advance from God answering prayers to God not answering prayers is like "advancing" from a grown-up to a child! Those who say this think that they have advanced. They may have advanced in knowledge but certainly not in faith. If a Christian never has his prayers answered, we cannot say that he is an experienced person. Every Christian must experience some answers to prayers. Faith is always indispensable. In the church, there are not a few who have knowledge, zeal, and even life. But the greatest lack is those who have faith. It is easy to find growth in other aspects. But it is difficult to find growth in faith.

Furthermore, knowledge is also very important; it has its place. If a Christian does not know the basic truths of the Bible, if he is ignorant of the principles of God's work, and if he does not understand the general outlines of the Bible, he will take in all kinds of doctrines. For example, in the matter of baptism, someone may tell him to be baptized with his face looking downward because the Lord lowered His head on the cross. He may think that this is very reasonable. But if he has biblical knowledge, he will see that the Lord lowered His head on the cross, not in the tomb. If all one cares for is scriptural quotations and does not ask for what purpose they are quoted, he may end up lowering his head even when he eats. Many believers have been listening to messages for one, two, or even five years. If anyone asked them about the difference between justification and salvation, they would say that the two things are more or less the same. They do not know what justification

is and what salvation is. To them forgiveness and salvation are more or less the same. In fact, everything is more or less the same. Only paying attention to faith is to be cooked on one side; it is to be an unturned cake. Those without knowledge do not know how to go on and do not know how to lead others to go on because they are blind.

At the same time, we should pay attention to life. We should seek for God and overcome all sins. May God cause us to realize our sins, and may God put our besetting sins under our feet. How many of us can say that we know we have overcome all sins through Christ living in us? If a Christian does not grow, it is because he has not overcome his sins. We should daily deny ourselves and deal with ourselves. Not only do we have to deal with sins every day, but we also have to obey God. We have to allow the Holy Spirit to work within us day by day so that His life can flow out of us.

I am presenting these four things before all of you. If we want to be a perfect Christian, we have to pursue these four things. We should not pay attention to just one of them, but we should have a balanced development in all four areas. We should not be an unturned cake. We should not only pursue love; we should also pursue knowledge. At the same time, we should pursue faith and zeal so that we can please God. May God bless us.

CHAPTER SIX

THE POWER OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 44:

Conferences, Messages, and Fellowship (4), Ch. 108

NOT WILL POWER BUT LIFE POWER

A Christian does not live by the power of his will but by the power of life. Many Christians have never seen this, nor have they learned this lesson. They often say, "I will make up my mind. I have to make resolutions. I will promise and make vows. I will do this today and I will do that tomorrow." The power of their living is derived from their will. Even many co-workers work through the exercise of their will. Their work is controlled by their human will. However, Romans 7:19 says, "For I do not do the good which I will; but the evil which I do not will, this I practice." The man in this verse could only say that he willed; he could not do what he willed. Matthew 26:41 says, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." This verse proves that the spirit is willing but that the will is weak. A man may say that he wants God's will, that he will do God's will, and that he will perform all kinds of goodness. No matter how much he wills, he will not accomplish what he wants to do. The greatest mistake is to think that man does good because he wills to do good and that he does evil because he wills to do evil. However, doing good and committing evil are all a matter of law; they have nothing to do with the will. In order to do good, man needs a life that is good. However, man has become fallen and can no longer do good. A man who tries to do good by his will is like a man trying to drive a car that is out of gasoline. All he can do is push the car. If he pushes, the car moves, and if he does not push, the car does not move. This is the way many believers live today.

We have to realize that within a believer there is something deeper than the will. This is the life of God. This life has nothing to do with our will. It is something spontaneous. This life is a law. It lives out all kinds of goodness in a spontaneous way. In the physical life, a man eats when he is hungry. He puts on clothing when he is cold. He gets out of bed when he wakes up in the morning. These are spontaneous acts. The same is true with the spiritual life.

We read the Bible because it is beneficial to our spiritual life; we eat the word spontaneously. We do not read just because we resolve to read. For a healthy person, eating is something spontaneous. Only a sick person needs others to force him to eat. The same is true with our spiritual life. God's life is good; therefore, doing good is a spontaneous thing. It is abnormal for us not to do good. We do not testify just because we resolve to testify; our testimony should be an outflow of life. Whatever is in us spontaneously comes out of us. If we are inwardly filled with God's life, we will outwardly express this life in a spontaneous way.

THE RESURRECTION LIFE

A sister once became sick on a journey. She suffered much, but the Lord brought her through. Later she testified that the Lord of glory literally carried her on His back and brought her through. She had experienced God's life, and she knew this life. Hence, her testimony was spontaneous. Many believers are physically weak because they love their own life. They are not able to bear even the slightest burden. They have not experienced the Lord's resurrection life, and they cannot testify of the riches of this life. Blessed are those who live by the power of the Lord's life. They are able to experience the resurrection power of the Lord and to testify of this power under any circumstance. In 2 Corinthians 1:9 Paul said, "We should not base our confidence on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead." This is the life that God wants us to live. It is a life that lives by the resurrection life of the Lord, not by ourselves.

What is the resurrection life? In John 11:25 the Lord said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes into Me, even if he should die, shall live." The resurrection life is just Christ. Philippians 3:10 speaks of the power of Christ's resurrection. Hebrews 7:16 speaks of the power of an indestructible life. Acts 2:24 says that God raised Christ from the dead, because it was not possible for Him to be held by death. The greatest power in this world is death; the totality of the power of the gates of Hades is the power of death. But Christ has resurrected from the dead. He has overcome the power of death and Hades. Resurrection means that life has gone into death and come out of death. Revelation 1:18 is a precious verse. It says that the Lord became dead but is living forever and ever. Resurrection means that something "became dead, and behold...[is] living forever and ever." This life possesses the greatest power. It overcomes death, transcends death, and is not bound by death. The life that we have is such a life. Consequently, we can transcend over all

sufferings and trials and overcome the bondage of the power of death in our daily living.

Once, when I was in Nanking, there was an air raid. I saw one man crawling out of a heap of debris. He was able to do this because he was still living; there was still life in him. Anything that was dead and lifeless would not crawl out. Ephesians 1:19-20 speaks of the great power that God operated in Christ in raising Him from the dead. This life is now manifesting itself through us. It can manifest itself through us because Christ is in us, and He is our resurrection life. Once we see this, we will no longer trust in our will power but in the life power of Christ. When a sick man is dying, he cannot just decide in his mind to live. Doctors tell us that only a very small percentage of people survive through the exercise of their will power. Living is a matter of life; it is not a matter of the will. Paul said in Colossians 1:29 that he labored and struggled according to the Lord's operation which operated in him in power. This is the secret to our Christian living. We live according to the power of the inner life, and not according to the power of our will.

The amount of burden a Christian can bear in his outward living depends on the working of God within; it does not depend on his will power. This is like filling a tire with air. When all the tires of a car have twenty-five pounds of pressure per square inch, the car can move smoothly. But if any of the tires are flat, the car will not move. A man who acts according to his will is like a man who is pushing a car with a flat tire. A Christian can never be energized by the power of his will. Every outward performance and work of the will will eventually be shattered. The Christian life should be spontaneous. Everyone who lives by the life of God is a spontaneous person; there is nothing unnatural about him. Anything unnatural, awkward, or artificial is a result of the human will. This is not the kind of life that God has ordained for a Christian. We have to see the futility of the will. We have to see that the power for our Christian living is not the power of the will but the power of the life of God. May the Lord show us the power of God's life, and may we always live by the power of this life.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE PRINCIPLES OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 44:

Conferences, Messages, and Fellowship (4), Ch. 109

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 1:12; Gen. 12:11-13; Luke 20:1-8; John 6:38

Prayer: Lord, shine on us so that we will be honest enough to acknowledge what we have and what we do not have. We do not want to be empty inwardly while pretending to have something outwardly. We want to first be filled with something inwardly and then express it outwardly. We do not want to be empty inwardly while pretending to have something outwardly. Make us those who live in a spontaneous way before You. Amen.

NOT BY POLITICS, BUT BY GOD'S GRACE

Paul testified in 2 Corinthians 1:12 that "our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in singleness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and more abundantly toward you." This verse tells us that the principle of Christian living is not human wisdom but the grace of God. It is not maneuvering or politics but the will of God. The world has its principle of living; it can apply human wisdom, maneuverings, and politics. But a Christian should never resort to his own wisdom, maneuverings, or politics. Being without politics is being void of any motive of self-gain. Those who trust in their own wisdom, maneuverings, or politics are only for themselves. They only care for their own interest in everything, and they only seek their own gain.

In Genesis 12 Abraham went down to Egypt because of famine in Canaan. There he resorted to politics. He knew that his wife was fair and that when the Egyptians saw her, they would kill him to get her. He asked Sarai to tell others that she was his sister so that he could be spared and have peace. Later, Pharaoh took Sarai to be his wife, and God sent a plague to Pharaoh's

household as a result of this. Eventually, Pharaoh went to Abraham and rebuked him. Abraham resorted to politics, but he failed and was rebuked by a Gentile (vv. 11-19). What a shame! Sometimes there is famine in Canaan and food in Egypt. It is all right to go to Egypt to buy food like Jacob, but one should not resort to politics for the sake of preserving his own life and peace like Abraham.

Miss Barber used to carry a walking stick and take a walk every afternoon for an hour or two. Some criticized her for indulging in sightseeing. When I told her about this, she asked me, "Does a Christian live by what others say or by what he knows?" At that time I did not know what this meant. In her early days Miss Barber returned to England once every three or five years. After she moved to Lo-hsing Pagoda, very few people visited her. She stayed there for eighteen years. She knew that it was God's will that she take a walk for an hour or two every day. She was aware of the criticisms against her. However, she would not resort to human politics; rather, she trusted in the simplicity of God. She did not explain or vindicate herself but only acted according to God's will.

Once a famous person invited me to dinner. At that time a somewhat renowned worker of the Lord was in Shanghai. He was also invited, and he wanted to go with me. At that time I was taking care of a conference. On my way to the dinner, the Lord told me not to go. I obeyed God's will and turned back. I could not brush aside God's will just because a famous man had invited me, nor could I accept the invitation just because a renowned worker of the Lord was going. God stopped me from exercising human politics and led me to act according to the singleness and sincerity of God.

The same should be true in how we serve the saints. We should not trust in human wisdom but in God's will. For example, some brothers and sisters are under God's disciplining hand. We have to render them help according to the Lord's timing. If we step in too early, we will disturb God's work. We cannot overstep the Lord to extend help to others according to our own zeal and wisdom. If we do, it will be like trying to pull a butterfly out of a cocoon. The result will be nothing but death.

Once Miss Barber dealt with a troubled sister in a very severe way. The sister cried bitterly. When I saw this, I asked Miss Barber why she rebuked the sister in such a strong way. She asked, "Is this sister crying for the Lord or

is she crying for herself?" Miss Barber was very absolute for God. She did not care for human sentiment and would not do anything to save others' faces. She truly lived by God's singleness and sincerity.

Once I was preaching at a certain place, and two brothers were translating my speaking into the local dialect. One was a good translator, and the other one was not that good. At the beginning the one who was good was not present, and I had to ask the second one to translate for me. He was in fear and trembling and prayed all the time while he translated. After twelve days, with two days remaining, the first brother came. Everyone wanted him to take over the translation, and he came and told me that everyone expected him to take over the translation. I knew within me that I should not let him, but I was too polite. I made some superficial remarks and said, "There are only two more meetings left. If we change now, the other brother may feel embarrassed." Later, I had to confess to the Lord concerning this matter. I knew God's will, yet I was too sensitive to man's face and had spoken a word of politics. God was not pleased with this. A believer has to learn to suffer misunderstanding and criticism rather than forsake God's will.

NOT ACCORDING TO NATURAL DISPOSITION, BUT ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL

The principle of Christian living is based not on natural disposition but on God's own nature. Our natural disposition should not be the guideline for our daily living. We should not live according to our looseness or caution. It is not a matter of how we feel. It is a matter of prayer and of acting according to God's will. If we do not put God's will first and do not seek after it, we will do something based on our natural disposition or character, and it will be nothing but acts of self-will.

The Lord's life on earth was a life of acting according to the will of the One who sent Him (John 6:38), not according to His self-will. He went up to Jerusalem, cleansed the temple, and cast out those who were making merchandise in the temple. Although this offended many and although others interrogated Him, He was not discouraged from carrying out God's will. The Lord did not care for man; He did not save men's faces. He only cared for God's will. It is often the clever and capable saints who get themselves into trouble. While we may face many obstacles in doing God's will, including

criticism, mockery, and opposition from others, we should remain single to the Lord, obeying His will and pleasing Him alone.

A clever man often has to resort to lies, tricks, maneuverings, or politics. Luke 20:1-8 records the story of priests, scribes, and elders finding Jesus teaching the people in the temple. They asked the Lord by what authority He was doing all these things and who had given Him such authority. The Lord asked them, "The baptism of John, was it from heaven or from men?" (v. 4). They reasoned together among themselves and told the Lord that they did not know. They avoided the Lord's question, even though they knew the answer. They knew that the baptism of John came from heaven. All the people believed this, but they themselves did not believe this. They could not say that it was from heaven, because they were afraid the Lord would ask, "Why did you not believe him?" (v. 5). Neither could they say that it was from men, because the people would stone them; therefore, they said that they did not know. They did not answer because their words would have condemned them. The Lord then said, "Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things" (v. 8). The Lord did not say that He did not know; He said that He would not tell them by what authority He did these things. The word "neither" is very interesting. This word exposed the lies of the priests, scribes, and elders. They lied when they said they did not know; therefore, the Lord said, "Neither do I tell you." The priests, scribes, and elders were men of politics. They resorted to human politics and plots to avoid hurting themselves. A person who resorts to such things is absolutely useless in the hand of the Lord.

May the Lord be merciful to us. May we learn to live by God's singleness and sincerity and not by human wisdom, maneuverings, or politics, and may we not seek our own advantage or be driven by motives of self-advancement. May the Lord cause us to live according to His singleness and sincerity, and may we carry out His will with singleness of heart.

CHAPTER EIGHT
TWO PRINCIPLES OF LIVING—
THE PRINCIPLE OF LIFE
OR THE PRINCIPLE OF RIGHT AND WRONG

CWWN, The (Set 3) Vol. 56:

The Present Testimony, Issue No. 37

"For we walk by faith, not by appearance" (2 Cor. 5:7).

"Behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with Him" (Matt. 17:3).

"When they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone" (v. 8).

"Hear Him!" (v. 5b).

"But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you or by man's day; rather I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself; but I am not justified by this, but He who examines me is the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:3-4).

"The tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:9b).

"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (vv. 16-17). (The tree of the knowledge of good and evil can also be translated "the tree of the knowledge of right and wrong.")

After God created man, He considered the problem of man's food. The act of giving life is the beginning of life, but food is for the maintenance of life. God created a living man and therefore needed to consider how man should live. Man should not just live; man also needs a living. God wanted man to

depend on Him for his living in the same way that he was dependent upon food for his living. "For in Him we live and move and are" (Acts 17:28). Thus, God uses two trees to speak to us in a parable. The tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil are a kind of parable. They show us that man has two different kinds of food and can live either by life or by the knowledge of good and evil, that is, the knowledge of right and wrong. Many people have read about the two trees in Genesis 2, but we would like to emphasize that the two trees were put there to show us that man, especially a Christian, can live on earth according to two different principles. Man can live according to the principle of right and wrong or according to the principle of life. Some Christians take the principle of right and wrong as the standard for their living, while other Christians take the principle of life as their standard for living.

Today we would like to spend some time before God to see these two principles for living. What does it mean when a person lives according to right and wrong? What does it mean when a person lives according to life? Many people only have the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in their lives. Other people have the tree of life in their lives. Some have both trees. The Word of God tells us, however, that he who eats of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil shall surely die, while he who eats of the tree of life shall live. God also shows us that whoever lives by the knowledge of good and evil will lose his position before God. If man wants to constantly live before God, then he must know what it means to eat the fruit of the tree of life.

Two Principles of Christian Living

Here, I would like to add another principle for living: the principle of sin. You could say that everyone in the world can live according to at least three principles: they can live by sin, or they can live by right and wrong, or they can live by life.

What does this mean? It is very simple. Many people live on earth by following the lusts of their flesh. They are sons of wrath who are bound by the fashions of the world. They live and act according to the operation of the evil spirits in their hearts. Their principle for living is that they live by sin (Eph. 2:1-3). This morning I do not want to speak about this principle. I believe that many among us have already left the principle of sin. What we will consider this morning is apart from the principle of sin. These two trees represent two

principles of living. After becoming Christians, some people live by the principle of right and wrong, while others live by the principle of life.

In speaking about this matter, I am making the assumption that we have already left the principle of sin and are walking before God. If we would consider a little, we would see that some people live according to the principle of right and wrong or good and evil. Please remember that the principle of right and wrong, the principle of good and evil, is not Christianity. Christianity is a matter of life, not of being according to a standard. Christianity speaks of life, not of good and evil. Christianity teaches life, not right and wrong. There are many young brothers and sisters here this morning. I would like to tell you that after you received the Lord Jesus and gained a new life, you gained something marvelous inwardly. You obtained another principle of living. But if you do not know about it, you will set the principle of life aside and begin to follow the principle of right and wrong.

The Meaning of Following the Principle of Right and Wrong

What is the principle of right and wrong? If our conduct is controlled by the principle of right and wrong, then we ask if something is right or wrong whenever we have to make a decision. Would it be good to do this, or would it be evil? When we ask whether it is good, we are, in effect, asking ourselves, "Am I right to do this or not?" Many people consider much whether something is good or evil. They consider whether they can or cannot do a certain thing. They ask, "Is this right or wrong?" As they carefully consider a certain matter, being Christians, they determine whether it is good and right to do that thing. By taking care to decide whether or not something is good and right, they consider themselves to be good Christians.

God's Word says, "The tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). At the most, this practice is only a discerning of good from evil. At best, it is merely choosing and rejecting—choosing good and rejecting evil. This is not Christianity. Christianity does not have an outward good and an outward evil. It does not have a definite standard in place. I may choose something good and reject something evil today, but this is not Christianity. It is the Old Testament, the law, worldly religions, human morality, and human ethics, but it is not Christianity.

Christianity Is Based on Life

What is Christianity? Christianity is life. Christianity is not a matter of asking whether something is right or wrong. Christianity is a matter of checking with the life inside us whenever we do something. What does the new life which God has given us tell us inwardly about this matter? It is very strange that many people have only seen an outward standard, the standard of good and evil. But God has not given us an outward standard. Christianity is not a new set of Ten Commandments. In Christianity we have not been brought to a new Sinai, nor has God given us a new set of rules and regulations with "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not." Christianity does not require that we ask whether something is right or wrong, good or evil. On the contrary, whenever we do anything, there is a life within us which rises up to speak with us. When we feel right inwardly, when we feel the life inside of us moving, when we are strong within and sense the anointing, we know that we have life. Many times something is right and good in the eyes of man, but strangely the inner life has no response and grows cold and retreats.

Please remember, God's Word tells us that our Christian living is based on an inner life, not an outward standard of right and wrong. Many worldly people, who are not saved, live according to the best standard of living they can attain: the principle of right and wrong. If you or I also live by the principle of right or wrong, we are the same as worldly people. Christians are different from non-Christians because we do not live by an outward standard or law. Our subject is not human morality or concepts. We do not determine whether something is right or wrong by subjecting it to human criticism or opinion. Today we have only one question: What does our inner life say? If the life is strong and active within us, we can do this; if the life is cold and retreating within us, we should not. Our principle for living is inward instead of outward. This is the only real principle of living; the others are false. People may say that many things are right to do, and I may feel that to do them is right, but what does the sense of the inner life tell us? The inner life does not agree. If we were to do them, we would not be rewarded, and if we were not to do them, there should be no shame, because they are outside of us. We can only see what is really right when the Spirit of God operates within us. If we feel that there is life inwardly, then that matter is right. If we do not feel the inward life, then the matter is wrong. Right and wrong are not decided by an outward standard but by the inner life.

The Standard of Life Is Higher Than the Standard of Good

Once this matter is resolved, we can see that we must not only avoid all that is evil but also all that is merely good. Christians can only do that which comes out of life. We can see that there are evil things, good things, and things of life. We are not saying that Christians should only do things that are good and things that are of life. Rather, we are saying that Christians must not do good things or evil things. God said, "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Note that "good and evil" are put together here as one way, while "life" is another way. Christians should not just refuse evil, they should even refuse good. There is a standard that is higher than the standard of good; it is the standard of life.

I have spoken about this matter with many young brothers, but I would like to repeat my story again today. When I first began to serve the Lord, I sought to avoid all that was evil and deliberately set myself to do what was good. According to the human point of view, I seemed to be making splendid progress in avoiding evil and doing good. There was a problem, however. Since I was pursuing right and wrong, I wanted to be clear about what was right and what was wrong in each matter before I did anything. At that time I had a co-worker who was two years older than I, and we were always disagreeing. The differences that arose between us did not concern our own personal affairs. Our disagreements were about public matters, and our disputes were public too. I used to say to myself: That is wrong; if he wants to do things that way, I will protest. But no matter how much I protested, he would never give way. His only excuse was that he was two years older than I. I could argue with any other reason, but I could not argue with the fact that he was two years older than I. I could not get around this argument, but inwardly I did not agree with him. I told this story to an elderly sister, who had a wealth of spiritual experience, and I asked her to arbitrate. Was he right or was I? She did not say he was right, nor did she say he was wrong. She simply stared at me and said, "You should do as he says." I was unhappy inwardly and thought, "If I am right, tell me so; if I am wrong, then say it. Why do you say that I should do as he says?" I asked her to give me a reason for her answer. She said, "In the Lord the younger should submit to the older." "But," I retorted, "in the Lord, if the younger is right and the older wrong, must the

younger still submit?" At that time I was in secondary school and had learned nothing of discipline, so I gave free vent to my anger. She still smiled and said, "You had better do as he says."

Once some people were going to be baptized, and there were three of us caring for the matter. I was the youngest, then the brother two years older than I, and finally there was a Brother Wu, who was seven years older than he. I thought, "You are two years older than I, so I have to submit to you in everything. He is even older; let us see whether or not you will submit." We got together to discuss this matter, but he refused to accept anything from Brother Wu. At every point he insisted on having his own way. Finally, he said, "Just leave things to me; I will do it alone." I thought, "What kind of logic is this? You insist that I always obey you because you are my senior, but you never need to obey your senior." Immediately I sought out this sister to ask her about this matter. I was upset that she did not pay attention to right or wrong. She stood up and asked, "Have you not seen what the life of Christ is? Over the past few months, you have continually come to say that you are right and this brother is wrong. Do you not know what the cross is? You are insisting on the rightness of the matter, but I insist upon the life of the cross." I had been insisting upon right and wrong. I had not seen the matter of life, nor the cross. So she asked me, "Do you think you are right in doing this? Do you think you are right to say these things? Do you think it is right for you to tell me these things? They are all right according to reason, but I would ask how you feel inwardly. What is your inner sense?" I could only confess that I had been right according to reason but wrong according to the inner life.

The standard of Christian living does not only deal with evil things but also with good and right things. Many matters are right according to human standards, but the divine standard pronounces them wrong because they lack the divine life. On the day to which I just referred, I saw this light for the first time. From then on I began to ask myself if the life I lived before God was according to the principle of life or the principle of what I considered right and wrong. I would check, "Am I doing this just because it is right?" The key to everything is this point: Others may say something is right. We also may say that it is right, but does the Lord's life rise up within us or does it recede when we begin to do something? When we begin to do something, do we sense the anointing or do we feel weighed down? As we are doing that thing, do we have an increasing sense that we are on the right track, or is something telling us that we are off? Please remember that life does not make decisions

according to outward standards of right and wrong. Matters should be decided according to the sense of God's life or the sense of death. Decisions should be made according to God's life as it rises up or recedes within us. No Christian should say that he can do something because it is good or right. We must ask the Lord within us. What is the inner feeling that the Lord gives? Do we feel joyful inwardly about this matter? Do we have spiritual happiness and peace? These are the matters that decide our spiritual path.

When I was visiting Honor Oak, there was another brother who was also a guest there. He had many criticisms of the place. He had been a pastor and was a good preacher, and he knew that Honor Oak had much to offer spiritually. Still, he disapproved of many things. Whenever we ran into each other, he would tell me how much better his place was than Honor Oak. During the two or three months we were together, his criticism exceeded that of everyone else. One day he went too far, so I asked him, "You say Honor Oak is bad, so would it not be best if you left? Why do you remain here?" He answered, pointing to his heart, "The reason lies here; it wants to stay. Every time I pack my things to leave, my peace of heart leaves. Once I even left for two weeks, but I had to write and ask to return." I said, "Brother, have you seen these two ways: the way of life and the way of what you consider to be right or wrong?" He said, "Some days I go to my room to pack my bags as many as three times. But each time I want to leave, there is an inward forbidding. Inwardly, I feel that they are doing things wrong, but I also feel that it would be wrong for me to go." God had shown him that if he could receive spiritual help there, he should stay there to meet God. We all can see that this is not a matter of what we conceive as right or wrong. God uses His life to control His children.

Externalities Do Not Govern Decisions

The greatest error among God's children is that many people determine right and wrong by what they see. Many people determine right and wrong according to their backgrounds and based upon their years of experience. Therefore, they do not know what is really right and what is really wrong. Please remember that Christian living is based upon the inward life. Many people only have externalities before God. Many people decide what is right or wrong according to outward things. Life, however, is a different matter. Those with life know what it is.

I hope we all would see this before God: No Christian can determine anything apart from life. Whatever increases the inner life is right, and whatever decreases the inner life is wrong. No one should determine whether a matter is right or wrong by some outward standard.

I recall going to a certain place where the brothers were working with real effect. God was truly using them. If you were to ask me whether or not their work was perfect, I would have to say that there was room for improvement. In great humility they asked me to point out anything I saw that could be corrected, so I pointed out this and that. They asked me several times, but they did not change anything. Was I annoyed? No! A foolish person would become annoyed, but one who knows God could not be upset. I could only indicate external matters that needed adjustment, but I could not see what God was doing within them. I had no way to tell God what He should do within them.

In another place I visited, the brothers were not preaching the gospel. They discussed the matter with me and asked if I thought that they should be doing so. I answered, "Doctrinally speaking, we certainly should preach the gospel." They said they realized this as well, but that surprisingly God did not give them the life to do so. Those who know God can only stand aside in silence, for our pathway is His life, not right and wrong. The difference between these two principles is immense. Brothers and sisters, the contrast here is too great. So many people only think whether it is right or wrong for them to do something. But today we should not act according to what is right and what is wrong. The one question we must ask today is whether the divine life within us rises or falls. This is what must determine the path we take. Everything is decided in our hearts.

"Hear Him"

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses was present, representing the outward, moral standard, and Elijah was present, representing the outward, human standard (Matt. 17:3). We all know that Moses stands for the law, and Elijah stands for the prophets. The standard of the law was present, and the standard of the prophets was present. In the Old Testament the law and the prophets were most qualified to speak, but God silenced them here. God told Peter, "This is My Son, the Beloved...Hear Him!" (v. 5). Today the standard for Christian living is no longer the law, nor is it the prophets. The standard

for Christian living is now Christ Himself; it is the indwelling Christ within us. Therefore, it is not a question of whether we are right or wrong but of whether or not the divine life in us agrees with something. Often, to our surprise, we find that the life within us disapproves of what we approve. When this happens, we cannot insist on what we think is right.

The Divine Life Must Be Satisfied

I recall a story of two brothers, both Christians, who had a rice paddy. Rice paddies need to be irrigated. Their paddy was halfway up a hill; others were lower down. In the great heat of the day they drew water and filled their paddy. In the evening they went to sleep. But while they were sleeping, the farmer lower down the hill dug a hole in the irrigation channel surrounding the brothers' field and let all the water flow into his field. The next morning the brothers saw what had happened, but they said nothing. Again they filled the channels with water. The following day they saw that their field had been emptied again, but they still did not say anything. They were Christians and felt that they should endure in silence. This happened every day for a week. Some people suggested that they stand guard in their field at night to catch the thief and beat him. They did not say a word in response; they just endured because they were Christians.

According to the human concept, they should have been walking joyfully, happily, and victoriously because they were enduring in silence, even after drawing water daily and having it stolen so many times. But strangely enough, even though they drew water every day and remained silent while others stole it, they did not have peace in their hearts. They then went to see a brother with some experience in the Lord's work and said, "We do not understand why we have no peace after enduring for seven or eight days. Christians should endure and allow others to steal from them, but we do not have peace in our hearts." This brother was very experienced. He said, "You have not done enough, nor have you endured enough. You should first fill the field of the person who has stolen your water. Then you can fill your own field. Go and try this, then see whether you will have peace within." They both agreed. The next day they got up earlier than usual and filled the field of the person who had stolen their water, before filling their own field. Strangely enough, they became more and more joyful as they filled that person's field. When they came to fill their own field, they had peace in their hearts. They were at peace with the thought of allowing that person to steal their water. After two

or three days of doing this, the person who had stolen their water came to apologize, saying, "If this is Christianity, I want to hear about it."

This shows us that in the realm of right and wrong, enduring is right. What more can we ask one to do? These ones had spent an entire day drawing water, and not in ordinary weather, but in hot weather. They were not educated people; they were farmers. They had done the right and good thing. What else could one ask of them? Yet they had no peace inwardly. This illustrates the way of life. This is the way we take. The way of right and wrong is another way. Man says that right is good enough, but God says that only life is sufficient. We must do things to the point that joy and peace are produced inwardly. This is the difference between the way of life and the way of right and wrong. It seems as if right and wrong are sufficient and that nothing else is needed. But God is not satisfied with being right. He requires us to satisfy the divine life.

What does the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5—7 teach us? It teaches us nothing less than that being right is not enough. We must do things in a way which satisfies the life God has given us. This is the content of Matthew 5—7, the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount does not say that everything is all right as long as things are done according to what is right. Man asks why he has to turn the other cheek when someone hits him. Is it not good enough if we do not say anything when someone strikes us? Is it not wonderful that we have not rebuked him and have shown great restraint? But God says that it is not even enough to just lower our heads and leave when we are struck. This does not satisfy the inner life. We must turn our other cheek for that person to strike as well. This means that we have no hate in our hearts. We are not angry and can endure this treatment a second time. Life is humble. Life can turn the other cheek for another blow. This is the way of life.

Many people say that Matthew 5—7 is too difficult for them. I admit that it is. It is impossible for us to carry out Matthew 5—7. If we try, we will die because we cannot do it. However, we have another life within us. It tells us that we will not be happy if we do not do this. It does not matter how much we have been offended by a brother or sister. If we do not kneel down to pray for him or her, we will not have inward joy. It is good to endure in silence, but if we do not follow the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, we will not have inward joy. The Sermon on the Mount teaches that we must satisfy the life of God within us. In doing these things, the divine life is satisfied, released, at

peace, and happy. This is the whole matter: Are we walking in the way of life or in the way of right and wrong? If we read God's Word clearly, we will see that it is wrong to decide matters by the principle of right and wrong or to live, act, and have our being according to our self-life.

There Should Be Fullness of Life Within

Sometimes we come across a brother who has acted very foolishly. According to what is proper, we should strongly exhort or rebuke him. We tell ourselves that he requires a serious, thorough dealing. We prepare ourselves to face the situation because we know he will be around for a few days. We go to his home and knock on the door, but then we ask ourselves whether we are right or wrong. He acted foolishly, so what can we do but exhort him? We have gone to his door and raised our hand to knock, but inwardly there is a problem. Our raised hand drops to our side. Even though we have convinced ourselves that we are right, this is not a matter of right or wrong. This is a matter of whether or not the life of God allows us. Many times when we go to exhort a brother, he will receive our exhortation with courtesy and promise to do what God says. Yet the more we preach to him, the more our inward being wilts. When we return home, we have to admit that we have been wrong in exhorting the brother! Therefore, it is not a matter of good or bad but a matter of being full of life inwardly.

I will give you another example. I met a needy brother a few days ago. He was extremely poor and needed some help. I thought that I certainly should do something for him because there was no prospect of help coming to him from any direction. Just at that point I had no surplus, so it was a great sacrifice to come to his aid. I seemed to be exceeding the limits of my strength to help him. According to what is proper, I was right. I should have been happy as I gave him some money. Yet for some unknown reason, I wilted inwardly as I gave him the money which I had promised to give him. A voice within said, "You are just acting on charity. That was not an act of life; it was merely human chivalry and natural kindness. It was not done in life but in yourself." God did not want me to do this. I have suffered concerning that matter for two or three weeks. Even though I had given the brother money, I had to bow before God, confess my sin, and ask His forgiveness when I reached home.

Our Living and Actions Must Be

according to the Leading of Life

Brothers and sisters, as we live before God, our actions must not be determined by good and evil, but by the life within. Whatever life wants us to do is worthwhile. Anything that we do without life, no matter how good it may be, will bring us nothing but inward condemnation. A Christian should not only repent before God for the sins he has committed; often, he must repent before God for the good things he has done. The principle of our living is not one that differentiates between good and evil. We must come before God to determine what is of life and what is of death. When we have life within and feel life rising up, we are doing the proper thing. When the life does not rise up and we cannot sense the anointing in our being, we should not care whether we are acting according to right or wrong. Instead, we must confess before God and ask His forgiveness.

Paul said that he judged nothing by himself, but that only God judged him (1 Cor. 4:3-4). Many people do not understand this passage in 1 Corinthians. This sentence is very simple, but if we do not know life, it is very difficult. If we have an outward standard of good and evil, it is very easy to judge when we are wrong and right. Paul did not act according to an outward standard of right and wrong, so he could only say, "I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself; but I am not justified in this, but He who examines me is the Lord." The one who examines us before the judgment seat is the Lord. In addition, we have a life within us that leads us on. That is the reason 2 Corinthians 5:7 says, "We walk by faith, not by appearance." We do not determine things by an outward, visible law. We live according to the leading which the Lord gives us inwardly.

We must learn the lesson before God that we should never act merely according to the standard of right and wrong. The standard of right and wrong is not bad; it is a good standard, but it is not good enough for a Christian. The Christian's standard surpasses right and wrong. The things which are wrong are wrong, but the things which are right are not always right. If we act according to God's life, He will show us that His demands are higher than those of human law. This being the case, it becomes very easy to live the Christian life. In every matter when we seek God's speaking within us, spontaneously there will be the shining of inward light. Please remember that our regeneration is a fact. It is also a fact that God is living in us through the Lord Jesus. The Lord is constantly expressing Himself within us. We hope

that each of us would be able to say to God, "Grace me so that I live by the tree of life, not by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. I want to constantly pay attention to life. I want to ask, `What is the sense of life?'" If we live by this principle, we will see a great change in our Christian life.

Many problems arise because we only have a standard of right and wrong. Many mistakes are made because we do not have the standard of life. If we have the standard of life, many problems will be resolved.

Prayer

O Lord, we stand before You beseeching You to speak again. Man is empty and cannot do anything. We can only ask for Your grace to open our eyes. Every time we open our mouths or make decisions, cause us to come before You and ask if our decision is according to right and wrong or according to the inward leading of life. Lord, cause us to see the difference between what is spiritual and what is fleshly. Cause us to really see the difference between inward light and outward law. Lord, save us from the way of death. Lord, it is wrong for us to live by discerning right from wrong. May we see that discerning right from wrong is sin and death, because only those who live in death can do this. Those who live in life must be led by life. It must be the life that takes the lead. Lord, be among us so that we would see this clearly. We have said this many times, and we want to say it again: May Your Word not be spoken in vain. Cause us to know what life is and what law is. Bless these scattered utterances. Have mercy on us, and grace us. Lead us in the way before us. In the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

CHAPTER NINE

THE PRINCIPLE OF BEING THE SECOND

CWWN, The (Set 1) Vol. 9:

The Present Testimony (2), Issue No. 21

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 15:46-47; Gen. 17:18-19; 25:23; Rom. 9:12-13;
Gen. 48:18-19; 1 Sam. 8:5; 16:1; 2 Sam. 12:14, 24-25

The message that the Lord gives us this afternoon involves these few portions of the Word. These verses show us a principle that God reveals in the Bible. The subject of today's message can be called "The Principle of Being the Second" or "The Law of Being the Second."

In the portions that we have read, we can see that God chooses the second and not the first. First Corinthians 15:46-47 says that the first is earthy and the second is heavenly; the first is soulish and the second is spiritual. I have often considered that it is an amazing thing in the Bible that God always chooses the second one. Ishmael was the eldest son and older brother, and Isaac was the younger brother. Yet God chose Isaac. Esau was also the eldest son and older brother, and Jacob was the younger son and brother. But God chose Jacob, not Esau. Manasseh was the first son, and Ephraim was the second; yet God chose Ephraim. Bathsheba had two sons. God smote her first son and loved the second son, Solomon. God loved Solomon so much that He sent the prophet Nathan to give him the name Jedidiah which means "Jehovah's beloved." Our Lord was born from this lineage according to the flesh.

From the Bible, therefore, we see that God always chooses the second and not the first. This is not all. God did not want the first king, Saul; He chose David, the second king. God said that David was a man after His heart.

Why did God reject the older brother and prefer the younger? Why did God hate the first one and choose the second? This is what we have to find out.

God not only deals with the Israelites and the believers in this way, He also deals with sinners in this way. In Exodus, why did God want the Israelites to

strike the blood on the side posts and on the upper doorpost for their firstborn? Why was the firstborn in danger and the secondborn not? Why did the Bible require the firstborn of the cattle and sheep to be redeemed, and if they were not redeemed, that their neck be broken? Breaking the neck damages the central nervous system and results in death. Why did the firstborn of the cattle and sheep need to be redeemed? Why did the secondborn of the cattle and sheep not need to be redeemed? Even the firstborn sons had to be redeemed, in addition to the firstborn of the cattle and sheep. The second son, however, did not need to be redeemed. If the firstborn was not redeemed with a price, he was not counted as one of God's people and had to be cut off. Why was God displeased with the firstborn? Why were they not favored? Why were the second sons loved by God? Why was God gracious to them? Why did He also cherish them? Why did God make the whole tribe of Levi the price of redemption for the firstborn of Israel? When the number was short, why did He demand silver to fill up the number? Why did God reject the first son and choose the second son?

We know that the Bible is not a careless record. The reason the Bible records things in a particular way reveals a very important principle, even though this principle may not be understood by many. God does not do things in a haphazard way. He repeatedly acts this way because this is His way. All of His acts are controlled by His ways. Therefore, if we can learn from this principle, we will greatly advance in our knowledge of God and spiritual things.

What is the significance of God choosing the second and rejecting the first? Let us read 1 Corinthians 15:46, "But the spiritual is not first but the soulish, then the spiritual." While 1 Corinthians 15 primarily speaks about the resurrection of the body, our purpose in reading this passage is not to focus on the resurrection of the body. Our focus is on the spiritual principle. According to this portion of the Scripture, there is first a soulish body and then a spiritual body. The principle here is that everything that comes first is soulish while everything that comes second is spiritual. This is the reason that God chooses the one that comes second and rejects the one that comes first.

What is the first? In John 3:3, "Jesus answered and said to him, Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Then 3:6 says, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." The Lord Jesus was speaking of regeneration. The Lord

said that it is not enough to be born once; a man must be born anew. He said that only one birth is not sufficient; a man cannot see the kingdom of God in this way. But if he is born anew, he will have eternal life and be able to see the kingdom of God. Following this, the Lord Jesus explained that the first birth is of the flesh. He also explained that the second birth is of the Spirit. The first is everything that comes from our flesh, our natural birth, and what we possess at the time of our natural birth. The second is everything that is not of the flesh, that is born of the Spirit, and that comes as a result of the birth of the Spirit.

Let us consider the many things that are included in that which is born of the flesh. We inherit these things from our parents. They include our emotion, talent, intelligence, and all the meekness, humility, love, peace, decisiveness, patience, etc. that come from our natural birth. All the virtues that we possessed before we received the Spirit and were regenerated, and everything that others consider to be most desirable are included in the category which the Lord Jesus calls "that which is born of the flesh." Brothers and sisters, we have to ask ourselves: Is everything that we have, after regeneration, born of God? Or are there still things that are born of the flesh? We should not consider that only sinful and filthy things are born of the flesh and that they are the only things that need to be removed. We should not consider our meekness, patience, loveliness, intelligence, and talent as things that we can retain and that do not need to pass through the process of being born of God. Do we realize that everything we can obtain and do and which can exist without the Holy Spirit, without believing in the Lord, or without trusting in God is inherited from the first? Do we realize that they are from the flesh and from our parents? All these things should be rejected and abandoned. Only the things which we can obtain and acquire and which exist through the Holy Spirit, through believing in the Lord, and through trusting in God are pleasing to God; they are what God desires.

Therefore, the first thing is regeneration. Blessed are those who have two lives! Blessed are those who have two natures! Some people say with their mouth that they believe in the Lord Jesus; they may even attend church services. But if all they have is what they inherited from their parents, they are still sinners destined for perdition. If all that a man has and is and all that he has acquired and obtained are but things that he has from his birth, he is a hopeless and useless person before God. If one believes in the Lord and acquires the second, he is regenerated, saved, and has eternal life.

Christians should pay attention to the difference between the first and the second. They should be able to differentiate between what they have inherited from their parents and what God has given to them through the Spirit. Many Christians have very confused views; they cannot differentiate between the first and the second. They do not know what is of the first and what is of the second. Many Christians think that if they are zealous, patient, and speak nice words, if they pray well, zealously distribute tracts, and save people, their life, living, nature, and work will be sufficient.

Please pay attention to what I am saying. I am not speaking what I do not know; I am speaking what I know. God does not care for our good work. God only cares about where our good work originates from. Where does the work originate? What is the source? Even though you have done some good, where does the goodness come from? This does not mean that God hates meekness; rather, we have to ask where the meekness comes from? Does it come from our self or does it come from the Holy Spirit? Where does our zeal come from? Does it come from our self or does it come from the Holy Spirit? What is the principle? The principle is that in everything we must ask if it comes from the first or the second. God always rejects the first and always approves the second. Therefore, you have to see whether your zeal comes from the first or the second.

Suppose I have a quick temper. When I see others being patient, I may admire them very much and commend them. But God is concerned about another matter. He would ask about the source of the strength for this patience. He would ask where the power behind this patience originated. When we see goodness in the first, we say that it is good. But God will only say that something is good if the goodness is from Him. Only what God considers to be good is truly good. When we see a preacher with a loud voice, clear enunciation, zest for work, and zeal for saving souls, we often say that he is spiritual. But God asks if these attributes are from the first or the second. A brother once said that Christians today have no discernment at all. When they see a preacher banging the podium with his fist, they say that he is very powerful! But where does his power come from? Any talent, strength, and natural attribute that comes from the first should not be trusted. God only wants what is acquired after regeneration; He wants everything that comes from the second.

Not only should a preacher reject what is from the first, but every believer should reject what is from the first. Natural goodness and patience are like rubber bands; when the rubber is stretched to the limit of its elasticity, it is no longer flexible. They can never match God. If anything is from God, it can be stretched indefinitely. A fleshly source cannot supply a spiritual need; this fact is certain. Adam cannot help Christ, and that which is of Adam cannot help that which is of Christ. Many people think that as long as they love others, everything will be "all right." But this "all right" is not enough; we still have to ask if this "all right" is given to you by God.

A brother once said that only what proceeds from heaven will go back to heaven. I think the reason we often say that heaven is our home is because all we are and have comes from heaven; this is why going to heaven is returning home. If all that we have is of the earth, then heaven must be a guest house and not our home! God can never receive what did not proceed from Him. This is certain.

Is there a difference between the day we first believed and today? Does being a Christian merely involve the removal of the sins, failures, weaknesses, filth, and other negative things that existed before we believed? If this were so, then others will say that being a Christian is just removing all that is bad. But this is not good enough for God. God does not disapprove of only bad things; he also disapproves of many good things. God does not just remove all that is bad; He rejects everything that comes from the first. God rejects not only the sin in the flesh; He also rejects the cleverness in the flesh. He not only rejects the filth of the flesh; He also rejects the goodness and righteousness of the flesh. God is not pleased with anything that comes from the first—the fleshly and natural life. Nothing of the first can mix with that which is new.

In the four Gospels we see the Lord Jesus telling men that if they do not love Him more than their father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and their own life, they were not worthy to be called His disciples. In another place the Lord said that if a man did not hate his own father, mother, wife, and children, he was not worthy to be His disciple. In Paul's Epistles he not only exhorts children to submit to their parents, but also for parents not to provoke their children. In another place we see a word for the husband and wife: the husband should love the wife and the wife should love the husband. The Gospels repeatedly say that we should hate, while the Epistles repeatedly say that we should love. If you cannot differentiate between the first and the

second, and if you cannot differentiate between the flesh and the Spirit, you will not understand the meaning behind these words. If you cannot differentiate between the first and the second, the natural and the supernatural, you will think that you can treat your relatives any way you want when you read that the Lord said that he who does not love Him more than his father, mother, and children is not worthy to be called His disciple. When Paul says that parents, children, and couples should love one another, you will think that you can forget about everything else except loving your relatives. The Lord Jesus forbid natural love, while Paul commanded us to have spiritual love. If your love is natural, you will drift from the Lord, your fellowship will lessen, your love will be diverted, and your intimacy will be lost because of the relatives that you love. If you are willing to put your parents, wife, and children into God's hand, and if you are willing to hate them if God wants this, you will immediately be aware of God's second commandment, which is to love your parents, wife, and children. Then you will be delivered from the first and enter the second. Many people receive only the first half in the Gospels, while many others receive only the second half in Paul's writings. Both of them are wrong.

Brothers, our work and life must be delivered from the first. For example, it is easy to understand the terms fleshly and spiritual according to the letter, but it is difficult to differentiate between the two in our living. How can we tell if our goodness and righteousness come from the first or the second? Is there any mark that can help us clearly identify which is which? Let me tell you a law: everything that is spiritual has passed through death. Those who have experience will say "amen" to this. In other words, everything spiritual is in resurrection. Anything that comes from birth, that we can acquire without the need for God's strength, is of the first. All the cleverness, loveliness, goodness, and talents that we possess from the time of our birth until the time we believe in the Lord are considered to be fleshly by God. Everything that falls within this period cannot please God. Anything that God puts in after regeneration and that God adds to us through the Spirit from the time when we believed in the Lord Jesus is of the second. As far as natural virtues are concerned, they should be specifically rejected; we should not live by them and boast in them. Instead, we should trust helplessly in the Holy Spirit, looking to Him for guidance and beseeching Him for strength, victory, and the way to live out Christ. Everything that is of the second is from God and requires the specific denial of our own wisdom, strength, and natural abilities. Only after this denial do we have what is resurrected, spiritual, and from the second.

We have received too little of the second from God! We have lived too infrequently according to the second! What do we do all the time? We try to take away the evil things from the first and borrow the good things. But God says even though evil, filthy, and sinful things should be removed, our naturally clever, talented, meek, and lovely things should also be dropped and passed through death. We may think: if we should not use our own cleverness, should we be senseless? If we should not use our meekness, should we be blunt? No. It merely means that God wants to bring everything through death. For example, I may be a very clever person and may be able to find many new ideas in the Bible through my cleverness. However, I will not trust in my cleverness, but in God alone. I will trust in God in reading the Bible and in prayer. Without trusting in God, I can do nothing. The Bible says that "apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). If we do this nothing apart from Him, we will pass through death, and our self will be abandoned. We will see God use our renewed wisdom, and we will see God take and use everything that has passed through death and the cross.

This is indeed a suffering life! How painful is this type of life! If we live this way, we will lose all our freedom. We should not do anything quickly. We have to wait on God, pray more, and know our uselessness and corruption. Yet only this life is a fruit-bearing life. "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). Many people are not willing to adopt this attitude. Therefore, they live in the first all their life. They never live in the second because their natural being has not died. Although they look good outwardly, they cannot bear genuine spiritual fruit. Consider the example of the Lord Jesus who did not know sin. If He had said anything by Himself, He would not have been wrong. If He had done anything by Himself, He would surely have done it well because He was sinless, clean, and without blemish. His life and nature was perfect. Yet He said that He could do nothing or say nothing by Himself. He only spoke what He heard from the Father. Why would He not do things according to Himself? He realized that to do this would be natural and not be according to God. Even a person like the Lord Jesus, whose natural being was perfect, clean, and beautiful, did not follow Himself. How much more we should do the same! The Lord came from heaven. He did not trust in His perfect flesh, but trusted in the Holy Spirit. How much more should we do the same! The way that He insisted on walking according to God's will and by the power of the Holy Spirit shows us that being sinless alone is not enough. Our life must not be one that merely overcomes sin; it must also overcome the

flesh. It must not only overcome filthiness, but must overcome the natural being. God's life has been too suppressed by our natural being. Our life and work have been too controlled by our own will and too motivated by our own wisdom. We have tried to serve God by our own strength too much. God's calling today is that we see the futility of everything that comes from the natural realm so that we will humble and empty ourselves before God, obey, and trust in Him entirely.

I admit that this is a painful way! This life is a dependent life, a lowly life, a life of bondage, imprisonment, and slavery. This kind of life is a suffering life. If you live by the second, you will be humbled and bound as a prisoner and slave every day. But this is the only kind of life that pleases God. Only this kind of work is spiritually effective. Everything from the flesh, whether it is fleshly holiness or fleshly zeal, amounts to nothing in God's eyes as long as it comes from the natural instinct or emotional impulse.

Finally, let us remember that anything we can do, will do, or are able to do without much prayer, without a full trust in God, and without the power of the Holy Spirit, is not pleasing to God and will be surely condemned by Him because it is something from the flesh. All that we have must be received humbly through trusting in God. May we put the natural life to death daily by God's life until the day the Lord returns. May God's new creation swallow up our old creation.

CHAPTER TEN

A FLEXIBLE LIFE

CWWN, The (Set 3) Vol. 60:

Miscellaneous Records of the Kuling Training (2), Ch. 25

Scripture Reading: Matt. 11:16-19; 1 Cor. 7:29-31; 9:19-22; 2 Cor. 6:4-10; Phil. 4:11-13

I. TWO PHILOSOPHIES

The church of Christ has been on this earth for two thousand years. As a result of the spread of the gospel to many nations, men have developed different views concerning Christianity. We can group these views into at least two categories. The first category suggests that all things should follow their own natural course of action. Those with this view realize that the created man has many needs, needs which have been planted by God in man. Since God has prepared many things in man's environment that are pleasing to him and which match his many needs, man should do his best to enjoy all these things in life. The second view is that of the ascetics. They think that man should deny all the demands of his body. They think that man is sinful, and that all of his needs are related to sin. Man should not enjoy any pleasure which is derived from sin. Instead, he should suffer and suppress his natural demands. Each of these two views are quite complicated; they are not simple at all.

II. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE—A FLEXIBLE LIFE

Not a Matter of Eating and Drinking

At the beginning of the New Testament, John the Baptist came. He was a forerunner of the Lord Jesus. We can say that John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus together give us a complete pattern of the New Testament. The two combined give us a full picture of the Christian life. Matthew 11:16-19 says, "But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like little children sitting in the market places, who call to the others and say, We have played the flute to you, and you did not dance; we have sung a dirge, and you did not mourn. For John came neither eating nor drinking; and they say, He has a demon. The

Son of Man came eating and drinking; and they say, Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Yet wisdom is justified by her works.” The New Testament has not laid down a strict code of outward conduct for Christians. The Lord Jesus said that John the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking, yet He came eating and drinking. This is the Christian life. The Christian life is one that mourns as well as plays the flute. Its emphasis is not on outward eating and drinking. The Lord Jesus acted in exactly the opposite way of John the Baptist, yet He was not opposed to John the Baptist. We can say that the Lord Jesus behaved like a Christian, and John the Baptist also behaved like a Christian. A Christian does not believe in the suppression of natural desires, nor does he believe in hedonism. A Christian can mourn, and he can play the flute. A Christian is a flexible person; he can act either way. This is what a real Christian is. Some Christians believe in enjoyment, while others believe in suffering. The two views are two “isms.” In the end one turns to hedonism while the other turns to asceticism. But between these two extremes, we have a flexible life, the life that a Christian should have. We should turn our attention to different things. Our attention should not be on matters related to eating and drinking.

B. Being Able to Do All Things through the Discipline of the Holy Spirit

Now let us consider the life of Paul. He served God in a very flexible way. He became all things to all men (1 Cor. 9:19-22). This is the basic qualification of a servant of the Lord. If a Christian does not behave this way, he cannot be a servant of the Lord, because the demand of the Christian life is deeper than the outward issues of the outward man. The Christian life has nothing to do with the outward man. It has to do with the inward man. The Christian life is not a matter of eating and drinking but a matter of inner fellowship. The Christian fellowship that goes on within is more important than any outward activity. To a Christian eating does not destroy anything, nor does the abstinence from it frustrate anything. We are concerned with something deeper than these things. Eating and drinking are issues involving the outward man. But the Christian life revolves around the inward man. To God, issues that are related to the outward man are minor. The important and crucial thing is for the Son of God to be life within us. To Paul, the emphasis of the Christian life is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). All other matters such as eating, drinking, and clothing are minor and unimportant. Paul’s life was flexible.

In Philippians 4:11-13 Paul said, “I have learned, in whatever circumstances I am, to be content. I know also how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in everything and in all things I have learned the secret both to be filled and to hunger, both to abound and to lack. I am able to do all things in Him who empowers me.” Paul said that he could live in abundance or abasement. He could be filled or be in hunger. These are all outward things; they are very minor. We have to remember that a worker of the Lord does not necessarily live in fullness or in hunger. He is not necessarily in lack or in excess. He is not necessarily in abasement or in abundance. Our life must be flexible. It must be under the discipline of the Holy Spirit. A worker has to go through strict discipline before he can be a flexible person.

It is actually more difficult to live a flexible life than to live either in poverty or in abundance. Being flexible means that we can travel either in economy class or in first class when we are on a boat. If we can only go first class, or if we can only go economy class, we are not a servant of God. God’s servants are flexible. We have a secret within us—the Christ of glory as the empowering One. Some people hold on to the little outward things that they have, but they have nothing within them to back them up. When things go a little contrary to their ways, they immediately stumble. Many of God’s servants cannot adapt to many situations because they are inflexible. As God’s workers, we must give ourselves to strict dealings. The Chinese are reserved, the Americans are free and uninhibited, while the British are conservative. As a worker, we have to be able to work among all kinds of people. This is what it means to be a servant of the Lord. A worker must be able to deal even with children and elderly people. We must be flexible in all outward things.

C. Transcending All Outward Things

First Corinthians 7:29-31 says, “But this I say, brothers, the time is shortened. Henceforth both those who have wives should be as though they had none, and those who weep as though they did not weep, and those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, and those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use the world as though they did not abuse it; for the fashion of this world is passing away.” Paul’s word was very peculiar. In view of the greatness and glory of the indwelling Lord, all outward things had dwindled in significance. If we are filled with Christ, we will transcend all outward things. To a Christian, having a wife is as though having none, and those who do not have a wife need not ask for one. Weeping or not weeping

does not matter. Those who rejoice do not have to worry if they are acting out of place. Those who possess are like those who do not, and those who use the world are like those who do not. God's servants have to be flexible in all outward things. A Christian is one who transcends all outward things.

D. Dealing with the Self, and Not Being Bound by Any Mode

In Luke 10:38-42 Mary was quiet, while Martha labored. Both were right in their services. The Lord rebuked Martha, not because she was laboring, but because she was too busy; she even implored the Lord to send her sister to help her. She was too busy. It is right to labor, but one must be able to become calm as well. A worker of God should learn both to be quiet as well as to labor. It is not that easy to live a flexible life.

In all the lessons we learn related to our flesh, flexibility is probably the most difficult of them all. Some people have a hard time eating simple food; others have a harder time eating good food. These things are problems for them because they have made the kingdom of God a matter of eating and drinking. Paul said that the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). We have to learn to be a broad person, one who can accommodate everything. Madam Guyon once said that a man who is in perfect union with God is a teacher to the elderly and a friend to children. In 2 Corinthians 6:4-10 Paul went on a long discourse to show how flexible he was as a servant of the Lord: "As having nothing and yet possessing all things" (v. 10). This is the standard of God's worker. Only those whose self has been thoroughly dealt with are able to live such a flexible life. It is difficult for some Christians to live a flexible life because they still live by their self. The self has its own concepts and ideas, and it always considers itself to be right. It will not submit to the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. These Christians are lopsided. We should allow God to deal with our self. As soon as the self is gone, we can become flexible.

Hence, we must go through fundamental, thorough, and strict dealings before we can run a straight race before us. Only then will we be able to embrace the proper spiritual "contradictions" within us. God's servants should always bear in mind that God's way is never a single-track line, but a two-track line. Muslims are for the enjoyment of life. Buddhists are for suffering. But a standard Christian is not biased toward any side. He lives according to God's sovereign arrangements, transcending the outward man. Paul's outward man was alive, yet his inward man was hidden in God and was

forever unshaken. Our true person is the one that lives in God; the outward man is merely a performance. It is a glorious thing for the inner man and the outward man to be separated from each other. The inner man should be hidden in God, while the outward man should be thoroughly broken. This is the basic qualification for working for God. Anyone who is bound in just one mode has not passed through the basic dealings.

**E. The Outward Man Needing the Dealing,
while the Inner Man Needing to Be Strengthened**

Whenever a worker of the Lord goes to a place, he has to live the same way that the people in that place do. His clothing and food have to be the same as the people's. If the gospel is confined by things like eating, drinking, and clothing, our faith will not be much different from that of the worldly religions; we will not convey the right flavor that is in our faith. Our Lord did not bring anything with Him when He came to the earth. He ate and drank. He was genuinely a man. The servant cannot be greater than the master. Our inner man has to be strengthened, while our outward man should not insist on anything. It should be happy to go along with anyone. For this reason, our outward man must be dealt with. The Christian life is neither a matter of eating nor of not eating. It is neither hedonism nor asceticism. The Christian life is flexible. What is within us is far greater and more glorious, and we should not be affected by the outward mode of living in any way.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE LIFE OF THE ALTAR AND THE TENT

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 37:

General Messages (1), Ch. 16

Scripture Reading: 12:7-8; 13:3, 4, 18

The life of a Christian is the life of the altar and the tent. The altar is toward God while the tent is toward the world. In His presence, God requires that His children have an altar and on the earth that they have a tent. An altar calls for a tent, and a tent in turn demands an altar. It is impossible to have an altar without a tent, and it is also impossible to have a tent without a return to the altar. The altar and the tent are interrelated; they cannot be separated.

THE LIFE OF THE ALTAR

Genesis 12:7 says, "The Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him." In this verse we see that the altar is based on God's appearance. Where there is no divine appearance, there is no altar. No one can offer himself to God unless he has first met God. Unless God has appeared to a man, he cannot offer his all to God. Consecration is not the result of man's exhortation or persuasion but of God's revelation. No one can voluntarily offer up all he has on the altar if God has not first appeared to him. By nature, no one can offer himself to God. Even when a man does want to offer himself to God, he finds that he really has nothing to offer. Some have said, "I want to give my heart to the Lord, but my heart will not agree." Man cannot come over to God's side. However, when man meets God, consecration takes place spontaneously in his life. If you catch sight of God just once and touch God just once, you are no longer your own. God is Someone who cannot be touched lightly! Once a man touches God, he can no longer live for himself.

We need to realize that the power to offer oneself to God comes through His appearance; it comes from His revelation. Those who talk about consecration are not necessarily consecrated themselves. Not everyone who preaches consecration or understands the doctrine of consecration is a consecrated

person. Only those who have seen God are consecrated persons. God appeared to Abraham, and the immediate issue was that Abraham built an altar to God. The Lord Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, and Paul immediately asked, "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10). A turning point in our spiritual life does not come through our decision to do something for God; it does not come as a result of our resolving to do this or that for God. It comes when we see Him. When we meet God, a radical change takes place in our life. We can no longer do what we did in the past. When we meet God Himself, we have the power to deny ourselves. The matter of denying one's self ceases to be optional when we have met God. His appearance makes a person unable to go on by himself; it forces him to not live by himself anymore. God's appearance brings with it inexhaustible power. Such an appearance will alter the whole course of a person's life. For a Christian, the power to live for God is based on his vision of God. Oh! It is not our decision to serve the Lord that enables us to serve Him. It is not our will to build an altar that produces an altar. An altar is built when God comes to a man.

Thank the Lord that He does not have to say anything when He appears. Yet many times, He chooses to say something when He appears. When God appeared to Abraham, He said to him, "Unto thy seed have I given this land" (Gen. 15:18). God's appearance brings us into a new inheritance. It brings the realization that the Holy Spirit has been given to us as an earnest of the inheritance which we shall later possess in fullness. The part that we have received today in the Holy Spirit will be ours in full in the future. When God's plan is fulfilled, we will enter the full inheritance.

God appeared to Abraham, and Abraham built an altar. This altar was not for a sin offering but for a burnt offering. A sin offering is for redemption, while a burnt offering is an offering of ourselves to God. The altar here does not refer to the Lord Jesus' vicarious death for us; it refers to the consecration of ourselves to God. It was the kind of altar spoken of in Romans 12:1: "I exhort you therefore, brothers, through the compassions of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable service." The mercy of God caused the Lord Jesus to die for us. The mercy of God provided the cross on which we died with Him and on which the devil was dealt with. By the mercy of God we have His life within, and by His mercy, He will bring us into glory. It is on the ground of His mercies that God beseeches us to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to Him.

In connection with the burnt offering, we should note that a person of ample resources may have offered a bullock, one with less resources may have offered a sheep, and one whose means were even more limited may have offered a turtledove or pigeon (Lev. 1:3, 10, 14). But whether one offered a bullock, a sheep, or a turtledove or pigeon, the offerer had to offer up the whole. One could not offer half a bullock or half a sheep. God wants everything whole; He does not want a half offering. He cannot accept anything less than utter consecration.

For what purpose was the burnt offering placed on the altar? It was to be wholly burned. Many of us think that we offer ourselves to God to do this or that for Him, whereas what He wants of us is a burning. He does not need a bullock to plow the field for Him; He wants the bullock to be burned on the altar. God is not after our work, but ourselves. He wants us to offer ourselves to Him and be burned for Him. The altar does not signify doing something for God but living for God. The altar does not mean having busy activities but having a living for God. No activity or work can replace the altar. The altar is a life that is totally for God. Unlike the sacrifice of the Old Testament, which was utterly burned in one act, the sacrifice of the New Testament, as depicted in Romans 12, is the presenting of our bodies as a living sacrifice. Daily we are consumed on the altar, yet daily we are living; we are ever living, yet ever consumed. This is the sacrifice of the New Testament.

God appeared to Abraham, and Abraham offered himself to God. Once a man sees God, he will offer himself up totally to God. It is impossible for a man to see God and yet be indifferent. The altar is present as soon as a person sees God. Once there is the taste of His grace, the result is the altar. Once a man sees God's mercy, he becomes a living sacrifice. When the Lord's light comes, he will say, "What shall I do, Lord?"

Abraham had not heard many doctrines about consecration, nor had he been urged by others to consecrate himself. But Abraham had seen God, and when he did, he immediately built an altar to God. Oh, brothers and sisters, consecration is a spontaneous thing. Anyone to whom God has manifested Himself cannot do anything other than live for Him. Once God appears to a person, he will live totally for God. So it was with Abraham, and so it has been with everyone who has met God throughout the two thousand years of church history.

THE LIFE OF THE TENT

The altar has its issue in the tent. Genesis 12:8 says, "And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent." From then on, Abraham lived in God's house—Bethel. From then on, he lived in a tent. Actually he lived in a tent before, but God did not mention it. Not until he had built the altar does the Word of God bring the tent into view.

What is a tent? A tent is something movable; it does not take root anywhere. Through the altar God deals with us; through the tent God deals with our possessions. At the altar Abraham offered up his all to God. Was he thereafter stripped of everything, even his clothing and belongings? No! Abraham still possessed cattle and sheep and many other things, but he had become a tent dweller. What was not consumed on the altar could only be kept in the tent. Here we see a principle. Everything we have should be placed on the altar. But there is still something left. These are the things that are for our own use. However, they are not ours, they are to be left in the tent. We have to remember that anything that has not passed the altar cannot even be in the tent. But not everything that has passed the altar is consumed. Many things are burned away by the fire and are gone. When we consecrate many things to God, He takes them and nothing is left behind. But God leaves some of the things offered on the altar for our own use. The things that have passed through the altar and are for our use can only be kept in the tent.

Abraham's life was a life of the altar. A day came when even his only begotten son was offered upon it. But what did God do with Isaac? He did not take him away. What you place on the altar, God accepts. He cannot allow you to live for yourself, for your own pleasure, or by your own strength. The altar claims your all, yet not everything that is on the altar is burned. Many things that are placed on the altar are like Isaac; God gives them back to you. Yet these things in your hand can no longer be regarded as your own; they can only be kept in the tent.

Some people ask, "If I give my all to God, do I have to sell all my possessions and dispose of all my money? If I consecrate myself to God, how many chairs and tables may I have in my home and how many garments in my wardrobe?" Some people are truly perplexed over such questions. But we need to remember that we have two lives. We have a life to live before God, and we also have a life to live in the world. In our life before God everything

must truly be on the altar, but for our life in the world we still have need of many material things. While we are living in the world, we need clothing, food, and a dwelling place. We ought to consecrate our all to God and live for Him alone; but if He says we may retain a certain thing, then we may retain it. Nevertheless, we must apply the principle of the tent to all the physical things that He permits us to retain, because they have been given back to us to meet our need in the world. If we do not need them, we should dispose of them. We may use them, but we must not be touched by them. We can have them or let them go; they can be given, and they can be taken away. This is the life of the tent.

May we learn this lesson. We dare not use anything that has not been placed on the altar, we may not take anything back from the altar, and what God gives back must be kept according to the principle of the tent.

THE SECOND ALTAR

Genesis 12:8 says, "And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord." This is Abraham's second altar. The altar led to the tent, and then the tent led again to the altar. With the altar, nothing is ours any longer, and whatever is left from the altar is placed in the tent. Nothing can occupy our heart anymore; our conscience is at peace before God, and we can boldly say to Him, "I have not held back one thing from You." In this way, the tent leads us back to the altar. If our possessions have taken root and we cannot drop them or move them anymore, we become bound by these things, and there can never be a second altar.

When we offer ourselves upon the altar and consecrate our all to God, He leaves certain things for our use; but we have no choice as to what we can keep in the tent and what we have to take out of the tent back to the altar. Everything must first pass the altar. Whatever God leaves for our use, we can put in the tent. But we must still inquire of God concerning all the objects in the tent; we can only keep those that God allows us to keep. We cannot decide to keep anything for ourselves. Everything has to pass the altar first; we must first check with God about every one of them before we can put them into the tent. What has been placed in the tent may go to the altar again at any time. If at any time God says, "You do not need this thing," we should relinquish it immediately. If we cling to it and say, "This is mine," then in our heart we

have forsaken the altar and are no longer consecrated. We cannot return to the second altar and say to God that our life is being lived for Him.

God demands that everything we have be placed on the altar and that we have placed what He has left for us in the tent. We can only have the second altar when everything is in the tent. The most precious experience is the experience of the second altar. It is easy for us to be stirred up, to become zealous, and to consecrate ourselves. But three or five years after this, we collect many things from the world again, and we cannot go back to the altar anymore. But it is very precious if we can always be tent dwellers and build a second altar. The problem is not with possessions. The problem is with how our consecration stands.

THE RECOVERY OF THE ALTAR AND THE TENT

Abraham had his failures. In his history there was a forsaking of the altar and the tent; he went down to Egypt. But there was recovery. How did that recovery come about? Genesis 13:3-4 says, "He went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai; unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the Lord." Recovery is a matter of returning to the altar and the tent. Have any of you failed? Have any of you slipped or betrayed your cause? Have any of you gone down into Egypt, so that now you have your own demands, your own hopes, your own interests, and your own aspirations? If you are seeking the way of recovery, you have to come back to the altar and the tent. God's Word shows us that Abraham's recovery involved his return "unto the place where his tent had been...unto the place of the altar, which he had made." Recovery is to return to the tent and to the altar.

What happened to Abraham after his recovery? Genesis 13:18 says, "Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord." Hebron is the place of fellowship with God; it is the place of eternal and continuous fellowship. Abraham dwelt in Hebron, and in Hebron he built another altar for God. If we want to be in fellowship with God, we can never forsake the altar. May He be gracious to us and cause us to see the importance of consecration so that we may live a life of the altar and the tent!

CHAPTER TWELVE

REDEEMING THE TIME

CWWN, The (Set 1) Vol. 17:

Notes on Scriptural Messages (1), Issue No. 13

Scripture Reading: Gal. 6:10; Eph. 5:16; 4:27; Rom. 13:14

Today is the first Lord's Day of the new year. Therefore, let us listen to what the Bible has to say. Even though we do not care about the so-called new year, we should have a new impression whenever a new year comes. Even though to a Christian the new year is nothing, we should always have a new beginning whenever a new year comes. In the Old Testament there is also the record of the new year. Moreover, in the Old Testament the month and the day for the beginning of the new year were ordained by God. Hence, today we want to consider this matter. Whether or not you are a Christian, as the years pass by, do you have any special feelings or impressions, or do the years mean anything special to you? I do not know what you think, but for me, every year means a little more opportunity. To lose the opportunity is to miss the time. Today, whether or not you are a Christian, the first question to ask yourself is whether you have missed your opportunity.

One proverb says, "Opportunity enters by the door, but flies out through the window." This is true. You have to open the door to invite the opportunity to come in, but it can go out without waiting for you to open the door. Therefore, for those who are here, if you are not saved, you should seek the opportunity to be saved. If you are already saved, you should seek the opportunity to serve the Lord; you should seek the opportunity to love others, and you should seek the opportunity to save men.

We have just read the phrase, "redeeming the time" (Eph. 5:16). Redeeming in the original text means "buying back." Brothers and sisters, God gives us time. It is like capital to a businessman. Time is our capital. Perhaps year after year you have done many things which are excellent, or perhaps year after year, as a businessman who has suffered loss, you have just been wasting your time away. Perhaps some have had few opportunities but they have accomplished much, or some have had many opportunities yet they have not

accomplished anything. However, this year we have to redeem our time. God has given us time and expects us to make good use of it in the same way that businessmen make good use of their capital. May we all use our time properly, and may we not allow it to pass by vainly and to become wasted.

Galatians 6:10 says, "So then, as we have the opportunity, let us do what is good toward all, but especially toward those of the household of the faith." Whenever there is the opportunity, we should do good. We should take care of this matter. If there is no opportunity, obviously there is no way to do good. However, when there is the opportunity, there is no more excuse for us not to do good. Today we shall briefly look at a few things which we should seize the opportunity to do:

I. SEEKING THE OPPORTUNITY TO LOVE OUR LORD

Brothers and sisters, do you remember the woman in Mark 14 who poured ointment from an alabaster flask on the head of the Lord? Regarding this event, the Lord spoke well of her in this way, "And truly I say to you, Wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this woman has done shall also be told as a memorial of her" (v. 9). Why did she do this? The Lord said, "She has anointed My body beforehand for the burial" (v. 8). Oh, some disciples thought that Mary was too foolish. Why this waste? Why not use the three hundred or more denarii to give to the poor? What did the Lord say? He said, "For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you do not always have Me" (v. 7). The Lord meant that one has the opportunity to help the poor every day but that there would not always be an opportunity to anoint Him because He was going to die. Once today's opportunity is missed, there cannot be another opportunity of today. The year 1931 is the year 1931. Next year will not be the same as this year. Today is today; tomorrow is not today. Today will pass away. The Lord is coming back soon! Whatever you can do for the Lord today, you should do it while there is still today. By the time you come before the Lord and meet Him face to face, it will be too late to turn back to do anything else. Who can say that the Lord Jesus will not come this year? Who can say that the Lord Jesus will not come today? Perhaps the Lord will come today. Perhaps today is the very last opportunity. Therefore, we should consecrate to the Lord today. There is only today. On that day when you meet the Lord, even if you had ten thousand hearts, you would surely give all of them to the Lord. Even if there were ten thousand worlds, you would gladly forsake them all. But it would be

too late, for you would have missed your opportunity. You should serve the Lord while you still have the opportunity.

Why is there a difference between the five foolish virgins and the five prudent virgins in Matthew 25:2? What is the difference between the prudent and the foolish? They bore the same name—virgins. The oil was the same; they all took lamps. Their goal was the same, which was to go forth to meet the bridegroom. They heard the same cry; they arose the same way. What was the difference between them? Perhaps some would say that the foolish ones took the lamps but did not prepare the oil; the prudent ones took the lamps and also prepared the oil in the vessels. No doubt this is true, and I have not forgotten this. But I would say that the foolish ones also prepared the oil in the vessels; only they went to buy it later (v. 10). What is the main difference between them? This difference is that the five prudent virgins had their oil beforehand, before the coming of the bridegroom. The five foolish virgins had their oil afterward, after the coming of the bridegroom. There was oil, but it was bought after the bridegroom had come; the time had already passed. The question is not one of having or not having but one of timing. Time is a big question. The foolish ones are the ones who lose the opportunities.

A certain believer gave a gospel tract to an unbeliever in the park. That person, after reading it, said that it was something of Christianity and was sheer nonsense. This believer told him, "Even though today you do not believe in this, there will be a day when you have to believe that this is true. By the time you go to hell, you will believe. Everyone in hell believes, but the believing will come too late." What he said was true. Furthermore, the same is true for Christians. It is not that things are not done, but that they are done too late. An unbeliever can lose his opportunity, and a believer can also lose his opportunity.

I remember a story which goes something like this. There was a certain young man who had just started in the Lord's work. He prayed that God would give him a vision so that he would know how to labor. He had a dream in which he was advanced in years and was being judged in front of God. God said that on a certain day, at a certain time, he should have gained many people, but that he let the opportunity go and not many people were saved, and that on another day, at another time, he should have preached to a certain person, but that he let the opportunity go and did not preach. God said further that on yet a third certain day at a certain time, he should have

done good to a certain person, but that he let the opportunity go again and did not do so. In every case, it was concerning a certain day and a certain time in which something should have been done, but the opportunity was missed. The believer then asked God for another opportunity to make up for this lack. At this point he woke up. He was relieved that this was only a dream and that everything was not over.

Oh, if there can be any regret in heaven, the only regret will be the loss of opportunity! If there will be regret in hell, the only regret will also be the loss of opportunity! Oh, when a sinner misses his opportunity, he will not be saved! When a believer misses his opportunity, he will not be able to serve the Lord fully! Only one week has passed by this year. Fortunately, there are still fifty-one weeks left. May we all not miss the opportunity.

There is a custom in Italy that when a girl is married, she receives a pocket. Every year on the first day of the first month, she must go to pick a rose and put it in this pocket. When she dies, this pocket full of roses will become her pillow in the coffin. The sweet scent of the roses collected throughout the years is thought to remain fragrant for her for eternity. As we go through life day after day, we should also pick our roses, so that their sweet scent will remain with us for eternity. We should redeem our time and not lose our opportunity. If you are not a Christian and allow your days to pass by one after another, there will surely be a day when you will regret that you have not been saved. If you are a Christian and allow your days to pass by one after another, there will surely be a day when you will regret that you have not served the Lord fully.

II. SEEKING THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO GOOD

Not only do we need to seek the opportunity to love the Lord, we should also seek the opportunity to do good. Brothers and sisters, what do you think to do good means? What is the best kindness and goodness? I think it is said best in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. There is one English version which translates these few verses in a particular way with particular significance. Today let me read this translation to you:

"Love is very patient, very kind. Love knows no jealousy; love makes no parade, gives itself no airs, is never rude, never selfish, never irritated, never resentful; love is never glad when others go wrong, love is gladdened by

goodness, always slow to expose, always eager to believe the best, always hopeful, always patient" (from The New Testament, a new translation by James Moffatt).

This is a very meaningful passage. It is our weakness to rejoice when others go wrong, but love will never be glad. "Covers" in "covers all things" is the same word as "roof" in Mark 2:4 in the original text. To cover means not to remove other people's roofs. To remove the roof is to uncover other people's affairs. Love is not like this. Love always hopes for others' good. Love always has trust in the good aspects of others. It is our weakness to think that others are not as good. How did Paul commend Philemon? "Hearing of your love and the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and to all the saints" (Philem. 5). Philemon not only had faith in the Lord; he also had faith in all the saints. This is what we need. We should earnestly believe in the goodness of others.

We have read Galatians 6:10. This verse tells us that as we have opportunity, let us do good. What God requires of us today is that we do good while there is the opportunity. In regard to doing good, I have to mention a few points.

First, I need to talk about forgiving others. We should realize that God gives us opportunities to forgive others. These opportunities to forgive others will pass away. Perhaps in the twinkling of an eye you will die or he will die. Brothers and sisters, I do not know if anyone among us today is unwilling to forgive others. If there are some, please forgive now. If you wait until later, the opportunity may be gone.

There was a Western couple who once quarreled at home. Later on the husband, seeing that it was time to go to work, held his wife's hand before he left, said good-bye to her, kissed her, and asked her for forgiveness. His wife ignored him and was unwilling to forgive him. At noon the police suddenly brought her husband home; he was already dead, covered with blood. When his wife saw this, she said, "O God! If I had known that he would come back like this, surely I would not have let him leave the way he did! Oh, the opportunity is gone!" Brothers and sisters, once you realize that opportunities will pass by, can you afford not to find the opportunity to forgive others?

Second, we should do our best to love others. There was a wife who had died. Her husband carefully put a bunch of flowers into her hand. A little child, leaning against the wall, said coldly, "This is the first time he gave flowers to

her." Oh, if you give someone flowers when he is dead, why do you not give him flowers while he is still alive? I have seen many people neglected when they were alive, but when they died people sent them flowers! We should do good when there is still the opportunity. Many people are waiting for us to do good to them. One poem says:

O friends,
I beg thee tonight,
Withhold not thy kisses
From my chilly forehead.
How lonely is the pathway!
Let me feel thy closeness now.
May you think warmly of me!
Traveling over land and sea,
My strength is withdrawn from me;
My trembling feet,
Full of scars of thorns.
Forgive me! O cold heart!
Forgive me!
In that future dreamless rest,
Will I still need the love which
I long for tonight?

Many believers and many of God's children are waiting for our help. There is one thing among us which I feel is not good. The modernists speak much with their mouths concerning service, but they do not serve. This obviously is not good. But for us, we have neglected too much the matter of doing good and helping others. This is most pitiful. We should seek for opportunities to do good to others. Two years ago there was an unusual article in the news in the United States. A man had gone to work in some place. After he finished his work, he took a train home. When he was not far away from his home, he made a long distance telephone call to his wife, which cost him thirteen dollars and sixty-five cents. When his wife answered the call, she thought that he was in danger. However, he said only, "I still love you." His wife marveled that he would spend so much money to say these few words. When he reached home, his wife asked him concerning this. He replied, "I was afraid that I might die on the way and not reach home. So I called first to tell you those words."

There was a woman who suffered from tuberculosis and was about to die. Her husband was there and the doctor told him that his wife was dying. The husband then spoke to his wife, "If you die, I do not know what I will do because I really love you." His wife replied, "Everything would have been fine if you had told me this earlier." She said this because his conduct toward her before had caused her to doubt his love and had depressed her to the point that she had fallen sick.

Mr. Panton said, "Take the opportunity today to speak a little word of kindness, a word of praise, and a word of appreciation."

There was a very famous literary person in England. His relationship with his wife had been cold for many years. One day, his wife died. When he arrived home he spoke to the dead body, "I wish you had lived for another five minutes so that I could have had the opportunity to tell you that even though our relationship was so distant these many years, my heart has never left you."

If we do not take the opportunity to love others today and to do good to them, we will regret it one day. May we learn to forgive others today, and may we learn to love others and to speak a kind word to them today.

Third, we have to help other people with our money. A rich man said, "Whenever there is money it should be given away." Do not think that your money can be saved for some better use in the future, and that you will give more money when there is a better use. Actually, the "good use" of the present time is better than the "better use" of the future. Many people want to save fifty or a hundred dollars and take it out when there is a real need. But I must tell you that you may not be able to take it out on that day. Why not give the ten, twenty, or thirty cents to the beggar today? Perhaps when the real need comes, it will already be too late.

What does it say in the Gospel of Luke concerning the deeds of the unfaithful steward? He took advantage of his position while he was still the steward to speak to the man that owed his master a hundred measures of oil, "Take your bill and sit down quickly and write fifty" (16:6). And to the one who owed his master one hundred measures of wheat he said, "Take your bill and write eighty" (v. 7). He did not wait until he was out of his stewardship to do all this. To wait until he was no longer the steward would have been too

late. Through this incident, the Lord taught the disciples to seize the opportunity to gain friends, that is, friends in eternity. Brothers and sisters, this is what we should learn today. Take the opportunity today to use the three or five dollars you still possess for the work of the Lord, for the poor believers, and for the poor. In the streets we meet poor people; in the meetings we come across poor believers. If we have the ability, we should take the opportunity to do good to them.

III. NOT LEAVING THE OPPORTUNITY

The above speaks of taking the opportunity. There is also another aspect, which is what Romans 13:14 says: "Make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts," and what Ephesians 4:27 says, "Neither give place to the devil." Not only do we have to seize the opportunity, but we have to avoid giving opportunity. Not only do we have to take the opportunity to love God and man, but we should not give any opportunity to the flesh or the devil.

The cause of the sin of the first man was due to his speaking a word incorrectly. If we do not wish to give any opportunity to the flesh or to the devil, there is only one way, which is to say "no." If we say "no" the right way, everything will be well, but if we say it the wrong way, we will fail. For example, if a young man was invited out to carouse with others, and his first word was "no," everything would be fine. I have a younger brother whose friends often invited him to play. I told him that he did not have to involve himself with whatever was wrong. He only muttered something without saying yes or no. If you can say "no" as the first word, the second word will be easy, and the third will be even easier. If you dare not say "no" on the first hand, your heart is shaken already. Initially, your conscience may not agree; but in the end you may not even care for your conscience anymore. If you do not resist the first time, you will fail the second and third time. Many people overcome because they will say "no" the first time. These people will not be sought after by others because the others know that they will refuse anyway. Many brothers and sisters fail because they will not say "no" at the beginning. Therefore they are wearing what they should not wear, eating what they should not eat, doing what they should not do, and going where they should not go.

Two weeks ago I read a magazine in which an old man wrote an article which said that if a young man does not know how to say "no," he should go to

the wilderness and repeatedly say "no" until his tongue obeys him and is able to say "no." Of course, when we say "no," we should be polite, courteous, and respectful.

In the Bible there was a man who certainly knew how to say "no." That was John the Baptist. When the Jews sent some to ask him whether or not he was the Christ, he replied, "No." Because of such a clear word, a great deal of trouble was avoided. If he had replied a little ambiguously, he would have been able to gain a little glory. But he preferred to lower his status by saying "no," saving himself a great deal of trouble. Eve failed because she spoke one word after another. I know a number of brothers and sisters who fell because they could not say the first word, "no." In the end, it was too late even when they wanted to say "no."

IV. LOOKING FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SAVE MEN

Not only should we seize opportunity, we should also not give any opportunity for the flesh to make provision for itself, and we should not give any place to the devil. Besides this, we should also seek for opportunities to save men. There was a man from England who was well-known for saving souls. When he was dying, he spoke the following words, "I can see that not everyone will go to hell. If I did not see this, I would not be able to sleep in peace." The time is late. Brothers and sisters, may we see that if a sinner passes by, he is gone forever. The Bible teaches us to do good to all men, that is, to do good to those we meet.

There was a preacher who spoke a certain message in his first year of preaching, and in his fiftieth year he spoke the same message. However, there were only five men who had heard his message fifty years earlier. Perhaps the people you meet in a train will not see you again. If you do not give out tracts and do not testify, your opportunity will pass away.

Mr. Moody was preaching at one time in a chapel in Chicago. At the end of the meeting he said, "Friends, if there is anyone here who has not believed in the Lord today and has not repented, I hope that you will come again." That same evening, there was a big fire in Chicago. Even the chapel was burned down. Afterward, Mr. Moody preached again in a rebuilt wooden house. At the beginning of his speaking, he wept because those who were there that day were not the same ones who had attended the previous meeting. From then

on, Mr. Moody always exhorted the people to believe immediately and not wait for another time because there might not be another time.

We still have fifty-one weeks before us this year. May we not lose the opportunity to love God, to love man, and to save souls.

V. A FEW WORDS TO THE SINNERS

To those who are here and have not believed in the Lord, let me say a few words. I advise you not to say that there is still much time, that there are many opportunities, and that you can take your time to consider. Have you not suffered enough from sins? In the Bible there is a record of a king called Pharaoh. He hardened his heart, and God caused frogs to enter into his house. He went to plead with a servant of God called Moses that God would cause the frogs to depart from him. The servant of God asked, "When shall I entreat for thee,...to destroy the frogs from thee and thy houses?" He said, "Tomorrow" (Exo. 8:9-10). Are you not surprised with his answer? He still wanted to stay with the frogs another night and smell the bad odor another night. He said, "Tomorrow"; he wanted to wait until the next day. Many people think, "I have sinned; I do not have peace, but I think that I still have the opportunity. I still want to suffer another night and commit sins another day." But I tell you that such a matter cannot wait till the next day. Whenever there is an opportunity, you must plead with God. Salvation is a matter of this life, and salvation is a matter for today. If you wait for another day, you may not have the opportunity anymore. If you have already heard the gospel and know that Jesus has died for you and has resurrected for you, and if you still want to wait a while before you believe, I advise you to believe now because you may not have another opportunity.

Once I was preaching in a certain girls' school in Nanking. A student whose father worked for the government held strongly to her anti-Christian thoughts. After I had spoken for a few days, I invited those who had questions to ask them. She stood up and said, "I know that I must believe in Jesus, and I also know that Jesus is my Savior. But a minute ago, you told us that a robber believed right before he died. I want to wait until I am about to die before I believe." I replied, "Certainly, a man can be saved if he believes in the Lord right before he dies. However, I have three questions to ask you. First, do you know when you will die? How do you know at any time if you are going to die and that you should believe in Jesus then? Can you say that you will believe

today and that you will die tomorrow? Second, can you say that you will die slowly, and that there will be sufficient time for you to believe? Will you never be killed by a car or by a stray bullet? Can you guarantee that your death will be a slow one and that you will have opportunity to believe in the Lord? Third, you can say today that you should believe in Jesus and that you have indeed sinned, but can you be sure that on the day you die you will still have this intention? Even if you knew that the time of your death was near, can you say that you would surely believe and that you would surely want to believe? If you are waiting for the right opportunity, I am afraid that the time will pass you by. You have sinned, and the Lord Jesus has already borne your sins; He has died for you on the cross and has already resurrected and ascended. I hope that you will not wait for tomorrow. I know what I am talking about because I have been at the side of dead men. I have seen many people who have said in the morning that they were not ready to die yet, but in the same afternoon they were not afraid anymore because they had already believed in Jesus."

Let me come back to the friend whom I mentioned earlier, who gave out tracts at the park. When an unbeliever saw the tract and despised it as being nonsense, her reply was very good. She said, "From my childhood my temper was very bad. After I believed in the Lord, I changed. Not only does my family say that I am a good person, even my teacher says the same thing. Sir, is this also nonsense? When my mother died, I saw that she passed away peacefully and joyfully. Sir, is this also nonsense? Many of my brothers and friends, like you, believe neither in eternity nor in heaven or hell, but they are not satisfied. They sinned; they fell sick; they are sorrowful. Sir, is this also nonsense? If there is such a big difference between believing and not believing, I am willing to be deceived even if it is 'nonsense' to you. You think that this is nonsense only because you do not know God."

I hope that today no Christian would lose any opportunity. Moreover, I hope that none would give any opportunity to the flesh and the devil. I also hope that today there is not a sinner who would lose the opportunity of salvation.