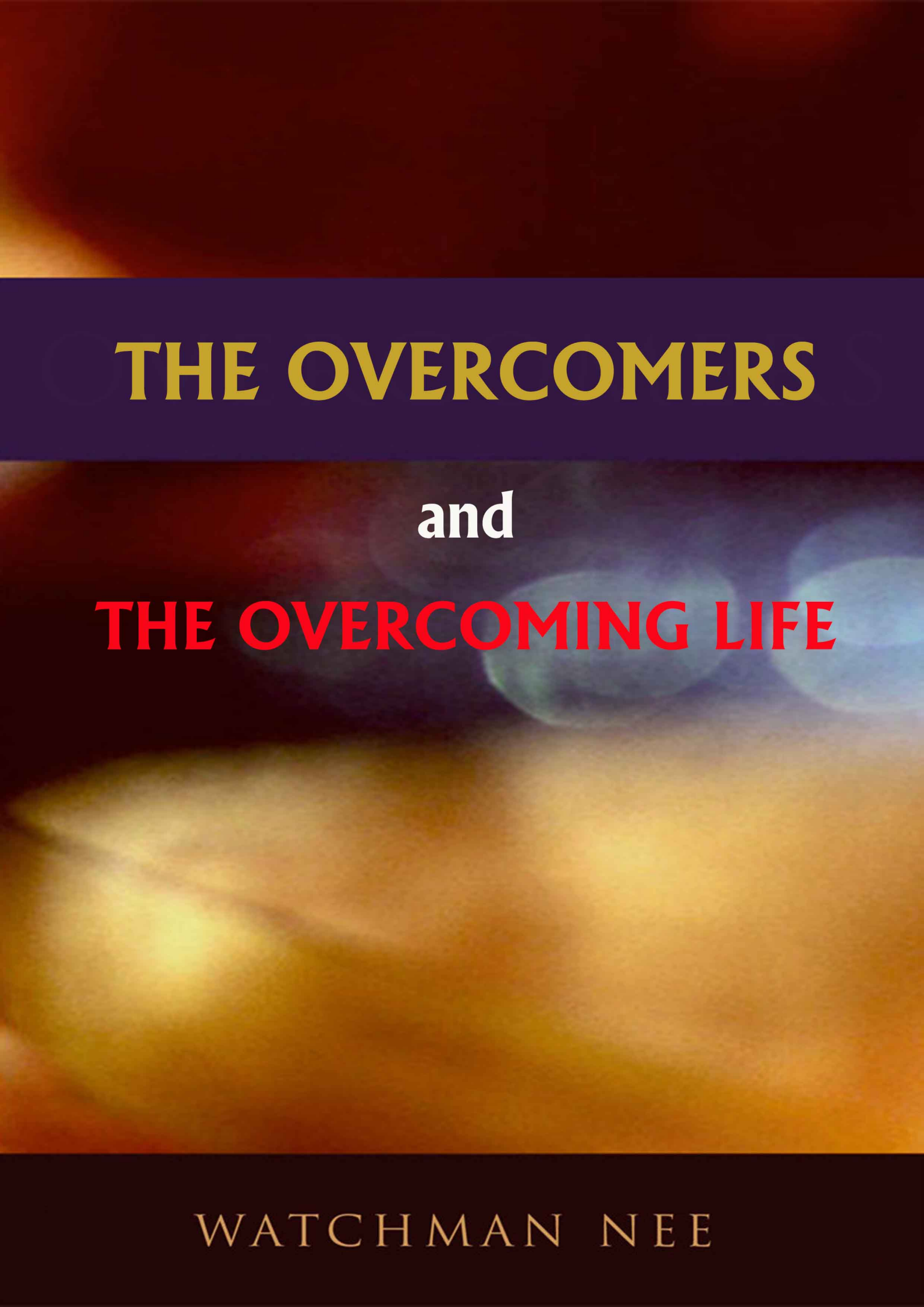




THE OVERCOMERS

and

THE OVERCOMING LIFE

WATCHMAN NEE

THE OVERCOMERS AND THE OVERCOMING LIFE

by Watchman Nee

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CHAPTER ONE

SALVATION AND REWARD

CWWN, The (Set 1) Vol. 2:

Bible Studies for Beginners; Lsn. 15, Chap. 9

When a lost person receives Jesus, he freely obtains an eternal and perfect salvation. His sins are forgiven, righteousness is imputed to him, and the records of his sins are forever erased.

God calls sinners to receive salvation and calls saints to receive the reward. Salvation is given through the righteousness of the Lord Jesus. The reward is given through the work of the Christians. A man cannot be saved through good works, neither can he be rewarded through faith. Salvation comes from believing in the Lord Jesus as the Savior, and the reward comes from the good works which one performs after he is saved.

I. Salvation:

A. Salvation is a free gift:

1. "The gift of God" (John 4:10)
2. "Take...freely" (Rev. 22:17)
3. "The gift of God" (Rom. 6:23)

B. Salvation is a present inheritance:

1. "Gave" (1 John 5:11)
2. "Has saved us" (2 Tim. 1:9)
3. "Has eternal life" (John 6:47)

If a saved person works faithfully for the Lord, he will receive a reward. Such a promise may cause a believer to free himself from the pleasures of the world, keep him from falling, and grant him victory in an hour of persecution or temptation.

II. Reward:

A. What is the reward?

1. "Crown" (2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 5:2-4; Rev. 2:10)
2. "Throne" (Matt. 19:28; Rev. 3:21)

3. "Reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:6)
 - B. The requirements for the reward:
 1. "Labor" (1 Cor. 3:8)
 2. "Work" (Rev. 22:12)
 3. "A cup of cold water" (Matt. 10:42)
 4. "Do" (Col. 3:23-24)
 5. "Do good" (Luke 6:35)
 6. "Pray...in secret" (Matt. 6:6)
 - C. The basis of reward:
 1. Motive (Matt. 6:1)
 2. "Hidden things...counsels of the hearts" (1 Cor. 4:5)
 3. "In the name of a disciple" (Matt. 10:42)
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In summary, "For by grace you have been saved...not of works" (Eph. 2:8-9). "But if by grace, it is no longer out of works" (Rom. 11:6). The reward depends on whether or not we have worked for the Lord after being saved.

CHAPTER TWO

A DEFEATED RIGHTEOUS MAN

CWWN, The (Set 1) Vol. 18:

Notes on Scriptural Messages (2), Issue No. 38

This morning I want to tell the story of one person. The title of this story is "A Defeated Righteous Man." This title means that the person is defeated, but he is also a righteous man. There are victorious righteous people, and there are defeated righteous people. We must use this defeated righteous man as a warning in order to be victorious righteous persons. Who is this defeated righteous one? Let us read 2 Peter 2:6-8 in the Bible.

"And having reduced to ashes the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, condemned them to ruin, having set them as an example to those who intend to live an ungodly life, and rescued righteous Lot, who had been oppressed by the licentious manner of life of the lawless (for that righteous man, who settled down among them, in seeing and hearing tormented his righteous soul day after day with their lawless works)." Lot was such a person. His soul was a righteous soul, and he was a righteous man. His soul was tormented day after day upon seeing and hearing unlawful works. Since he was such a man, why do we say that he was a defeated righteous man?

We have to know who Lot was. Lot was neither a famous person nor an uncommon man. Lot is well-known because he had a famous uncle, Abraham. His uncle was a renowned man. He became well-known because of his uncle. Let us read in the book of Genesis to see what kind of person Lot was.

THE BEGINNING OF LOT

Genesis 11:31 says, "And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there." If we read Acts 7, we know that when Abraham was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, God appeared to him and called him out of his country and his kindred to go into a land which God would show him. He left the land of the Chaldeans for

Canaan. He was not the only one who left Ur of the Chaldees; his father followed him. And Abraham's father was not the only one who left with him; his nephew Lot also followed him. Lot was just like a "preacher's boy" or part of a believer's family. Lot followed his uncle when he left Ur for Canaan because his uncle said that Ur of the Chaldees was a place of confusing morality that had been condemned by God and that they had to go to Canaan because God had called them to leave Ur.

According to the historians, Abraham's house was a house of idol-makers. This, most likely, was the profession of Abraham's father. Joshua 24 mentions that Abraham was brought out of the house of idol-worshippers. Since Lot heard his uncle say that he wanted to leave the world behind and no longer live carelessly, he followed his uncle and departed from Ur.

Our friends here today may not have personally heard God's call. Perhaps your grandfather, father, mother, wife, or uncle have heard God's call and brought you along. Lot himself did not hear God's call. Only his uncle heard it. This is why he left with his uncle. Perhaps your father, brother, sister, or wife believed first, but eventually you also believed. You are a Lot. If there is someone in your house who has believed in the Lord, and if you are not willing to follow, you are wrong. It is best to follow. It is excellent when some people follow their mother or father in believing, but unfortunately, many people themselves do not know God. Your grandfather believes, your uncle believes, but you do not know God. This is a pity.

Lot was good. Not only did he follow his uncle, but he was also a righteous person. Abraham was like an older believer. Lot was like a young believer. Since Lot and Abraham were relatives and had taken the same path, it should have been excellent. The beginning of these two men was excellent, but eventually they separated. How were they separated? Let us look at the ensuing passage in the Bible.

LOT'S CHOICE

Genesis 13:5-6 says, "And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together." It is easy to bear suffering and distress together. It is more difficult to be in comfort together. The two men left Ur together and went to Canaan.

This was very good, and God blessed them. Their possessions multiplied. However, problems arise as soon as possessions multiply. If I have a place to live, you will not have the same place to live. If you have a place to live, I will not be able to have the same place. If your flocks and herds have grass to feed on, mine will have none. If my flocks and herds have grass, yours will have none. You may not say anything, and I may not say anything, but the servants will speak even if the masters do not.

Genesis 13:7 says, "And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle." There was a strife among their subordinates. One said, "My cattle must graze on the pasture here." The other said, "My sheep need to be fed here." They could not dwell together because their possessions were too great. Many people can leave Ur of the Chaldees together, but trouble begins to happen once they get to Canaan.

I would like to mention one thing in passing. Many places in the Bible symbolize the world: Ur of the Chaldees symbolizes the confusion of the world, Sodom and Gomorrah symbolize the pleasure of sin and the evil of the world, and Egypt symbolizes the fact that the world is under the authority of Satan. These three places symbolize the world, but each symbol has its own unique emphasis.

Lot was able to let go of Ur's chaos. However, he was reluctant to give up something when he reached Canaan. A Christian is the same. After believing in the Lord, he may be unwilling to abandon spiritual fame and position in the work. Formerly, he struggled and strove in the world; now he strives and struggles in the church. Originally, he was struggling for gain in an idolatrous profession. Now he is struggling for gain in the church.

Genesis 13:8-9 says, "And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." One reason Christians fall is that they cannot dwell together with other Christians. The moment you realize that you cannot live with other Christians, you will find that you can no longer communicate with them. Whenever you say that Christians are worse than your relatives, you will become afraid to see them. This is evidence that something has gone wrong with your spiritual life. Whenever you find that

you cannot get along with other Christians, that is the time when you are being defeated.

All the blame was with Lot. Abraham was the head of the family. Lot was a young man. Lot gained his inheritance through his uncle. He should not have allowed his herdmen to strive with Abraham's herdmen. With Abraham there was no strife; with him, there was always the victory. Lot should have said, "My cattle can starve to death, but I cannot leave my uncle. There is only one family who believes in the Lord in the land of Canaan, how can I depart?" Yet Lot did not think this way. He thought that it was more important for his cattle to have grass to eat than for himself to be fed. He would rather have a breach in fellowship with his uncle than lose his cattle. He would rather renounce his spiritual achievement than allow his possessions to suffer loss. He would rather drop Abraham than one of his cattle. "Since today my uncle opened his mouth and asked me to choose, I should choose the best." So he made his choice.

Genesis 13:10 says, "And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar." The first thing that stepped in was material goods. Young people are very bold when they first believe in the Lord. Lot left when his uncle left. Later after tasting the flavor of the world, it seemed that the matter of believing in the Lord could be set aside and that fellowship with other Christians need not be taken care of. He "lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered." He did not care whether or not Abraham's cattle had grass to feed on. He cared only for his own cattle.

Brothers and sisters, I will not ask how many years you have believed in the Lord. I only want to tell you that today God has set two ways before you. God puts the world before you, and He also spreads the land of Canaan before you. God wants to see how you will choose.

Lot beheld all the plain of Jordan unto Zoar. It was like the garden of the Lord and the land of Egypt. On the one hand, it was like paradise; on the other hand, it was like Egypt. This is the world. Sodom and Gomorrah represent the sinful pleasure of the world. The worldly people seek pleasure in sin.

Genesis 13:11 says, "Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other." In the world there are blessings, glory, and pleasure. Therefore, Lot chose all the plain of Jordan. Perhaps he thought, "This is somewhat like paradise!" A brother once sinned, and I asked him how he felt. He said that there was a bit of heaven's pleasure in it. After he believed in the Lord, he found out that he could not do this or that. Now that he committed a little sin, he found some pleasure in it. In Lot's eyes, Sodom and Gomorrah were like paradise. I am afraid that what the world shows us is a little like heaven.

However, Sodom and Gomorrah also look somewhat like Egypt. A Christian's conscience enables him to know that there is a distinction. It is like paradise, but it is also like Egypt. There is pleasure in it, but there is also pain. In Egypt the Israelites were slaves to the Egyptians. They were afflicted and scourged by the Egyptians. They were not given straw, but they still had to produce bricks. Therefore, the Israelites wanted to leave Egypt. If you love the world, you may have some amount of pleasure and blessing, and you may feel that the world is like paradise, but your conscience will make you feel uneasy. On the one hand, many Christians feel happy when they sin. On the other hand, their conscience does not give them peace. Oh, it is like paradise in one aspect, and yet it is similar to Egypt in another aspect. On the one hand, there is the pleasure of paradise. On the other hand, there is the affliction of Egypt.

What is the preference of all the young brothers and sisters here today? Is it the world? Or is it pleasure? God does not force you to take a particular way. God wants you to make the choice yourself. Are you an Abraham choosing Canaan? Or are you a Lot preferring the world? Lot did not choose to live in the city; he only chose to be outside the city. All the plain of Jordan was a pleasure, but at the same time, it was a suffering. Where are you living day after day?

The geography of Canaan is as follows: on the east side is the river Euphrates. (This was the river Euphrates which Abraham crossed from Ur of the Chaldees to Canaan.) On the west side is the Jordan River. Canaan lies in between the two rivers. What does the Bible say after Lot chose all the plain of Jordan? "Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east" (13:11). "Journeyed east" was to move towards Sodom. This was the fall. Since he made this choice, he was able to move east gradually. No one succumbs to sin in one day. No one falls in one day. It is all a matter of losing a little today

and a little tomorrow. After a while, one falls into sins. If you choose the plain, it is easy for you to shepherd the flock and look for water because there is no need to climb the mountains, and you can live comfortably. If you desire comfort and do not want hardship, your tent will slowly move eastward. If you love the sinful pleasure of the world, your feet will eventually walk toward the world. If you cannot hold back the first step, you will not be able to hold back the second step. Since your heart leans toward the world, you cannot keep your feet from walking toward the world. Since your eyes are fixed on the world, you cannot safeguard your feet from treading upon the world. If you have chosen the world, you will not be able to keep your feet from walking in the world.

Genesis 13:12 says, "Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain." Friends, brothers, and sisters, I do not know what choice you have made today. Abraham yielded the fat and beautiful land to Lot. He remained in the land of Canaan, the land to which God called him, the land that God could bless, and the place where he could receive spiritual edification. What about Lot? He dwelt in the cities of the plain of the Jordan River, the place that he chose. Are we like Abraham, who dwelt in Canaan, the land to which God called him? Or are we like Lot, who lived in the cities of the plain of the river Jordan, which he chose by himself?

Genesis 13:12 says, "Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom." Lot thought to himself, "I am a righteous man. If I choose Sodom, I will surely fall and become apostate. However, it may be all right to choose a place outside Sodom. This is merely close to Sodom; it is not in Sodom. It is not good to be completely in Sodom, but perhaps it is all right to be near Sodom." Oh, we may think that it is not good to choose the world, yet perhaps it is permissible to choose something or some place that borders the world. Many Christians are borderline Christians. The world says, "You do not look like one of us." Canaan also says, "You do not look like one of us." It is true that you are only settling close to the world, but you do not live in Canaan either. On which side are you? Once I was in a village, and I asked a soldier why some soldiers so easily change sides. He said that it was because the uniform was gray. The color gray is a mixture of black and white. It is neither white nor black. Many Christians are like this. They do not seem to be on this side or that side. They seem to be in Paradise, yet at the same time in Egypt. They are reluctant to give up God on this side, and they are unwilling to let go of the world on the other side.

Friends, on which side are you today? Are you a gray Christian, one who is neither white nor black? When you encounter people of the world, do they consider you degraded or a twelfth-century man, who is very different from others in the world? The sad thing is that some consider Christians to be very different, yet find that they are just like themselves! This is the saddest remark an outsider can make toward a Christian! Many are not willing to stand up to say that they belong to Christ. Since they are already Christians, they do not consider it to be of any importance to acknowledge it. They cannot let go of Paradise, but they also want Egypt. They go to church on Sunday mornings, and they read the Bible for five minutes every day, thinking that they are Christians. However, they do not have real Christian fellowship. They cannot really give up the cattle. Nevertheless, we must ask God to deliver us out of this way. Otherwise, it will be very dangerous.

You may think that it is all right that you have not entered Sodom, that you have not become apostate, and that you have not declared that you do not believe in the Lord Jesus. However, your tent is gradually moving, and it will move all the way to Sodom. If you take the first step, it is inevitable that you will take the second step. If you have chosen to face Sodom, you will eventually enter the city of Sodom. If you have chosen worldly pleasure, you will inevitably end up in sin and evil. If you have chosen material goods, you will inevitably be defiled. You must say, "God, in what direction are my feet heading toward?" Originally, you were outside the cities of the plain, but your tent can move gradually. I do not know whether your feet have moved or not. I do not know if you have entered Sodom or not. Perhaps the footprints you have left behind will tell whether or not your feet have moved. At first, you can choose to leave other Christians because you value your cattle. But it is inevitable that your footsteps will move further along. Thank God that there are still many Christians today whose tents are in Canaan. May we see that we must repudiate the sin of the world as well as the pleasure of the world.

Genesis 13:13 says, "But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." Did Lot know the condition of Sodom? Lot knew. The Sodomites were exceedingly sinful and wicked before the Lord. Yet step by step Lot moved into Sodom. When your feet move away from other Christians, your tent will also gradually move toward Sodom. What God hates, you will not hate. What God condemns, you will no longer condemn. Your feet will slowly move eastward. There is a saying in the north which goes, "Slow is not something to be afraid of, but standing still is." Standing still is something

Satan fears. But being slow easily gives opportunity to Satan. This is how temptation comes in. If we go against our conscience a little today, we will go against it a little more tomorrow. If we cut down a little in reading the Bible today, we will cut down a little more tomorrow. If we pray a few minutes less today, we will pray a few minutes less tomorrow. If we testify a little less today, we will testify a little less tomorrow. By these reductions day after day, we eventually backslide. Satan does not make us cease from going to the meetings, reading the Bible, praying, and testifying all at once. He causes us to backslide gradually, bit by bit and moment by moment. He is extremely patient in dragging us along.

GOD'S WARNING

Lot's tent was gradually pitched "toward Sodom." What danger did he run into? In Genesis 14:9-12 four kings went to war with five. "And the vale of Siddim was full of slime pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain. And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way. And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed" (vv. 10-12). This war was between two forces: five kings were defeated by four kings. Lot and his goods were also captured. Lot was captured because he dwelt in Sodom. The last time we saw him, he was still outside the city; but now he was dwelling in the city. The last time someone saw you, you might have still looked like a Christian; but now you have become a citizen of Sodom. The more sins you commit, the closer you are to Sodom. After a while, you will feel that the country is not as good as the city. As time goes on, you will even feel that the plain is not as good as the city.

Lot's residing in Sodom was not without God's warning. When the five kings were defeated by the four kings, Lot was also captured. This was a warning God gave to Lot that Sodom was not the place to be. Today I will ask you most frankly; this is also my word to you. If someone is sick, meets with failures in his business, or has problems in his family, these all are probably warnings from God. The defeat of the five kings by the four kings was God's warning to Lot not to dwell in Sodom. Lot's tent was gradually pitched "toward Sodom." Later he even became a citizen of Sodom. The way Lot moved was a little today, a little tomorrow, a little this time, and a little more the next time. After a few moves, he eventually moved into the city. Therefore, God gave Lot a warning. What about us today? Perhaps some experience the

death of their spouse or the death of their son, and perhaps some become sick or meet with business failures. God's warning might be in these happenings. If you are a Christian, yet drawing closer to the world day by day, God will warn you and give you no peace. God gives you His warning so that you will turn back quickly.

It is a pity that many Christians have no feelings; they cannot feel pain. Even though they realize that they are sick, that they have business failures, and that their families have problems, they do not know that these are God's scourging. As a result, they will not turn back. However, if they do not turn back, greater things will happen to them. There was a brother, who though not yet backsliding, was gradually losing his heart. Another brother advised him one day that he should not go on in that manner anymore. He answered, "It does not matter. Mr. So-and-so was very zealous at first, then he gradually lost his heart. This year at the age of sixty, his oldest son who had just graduated from college died suddenly, and the old man has now become zealous again." The one who advised him then said, "God will most certainly accomplish things according to your wish." He said, "I certainly do not want this." Friends, if you belong to God, and if your feet walk toward the sinful world, God will certainly discipline you. If you are sick, and if you experience family problems or business failure, you should inquire of God. If God says that these things have happened to you because you have forsaken Him, you should turn back. Many times if the love of God cannot draw us, He will scourge us with a whip. If God's word cannot touch us, He will press us with adversity. If you belong to the Lord and have committed sin or become backslidden, God will most certainly discipline you. He will not let you go. (Fortunately, Lot was rescued by his uncle when he was captured.)

Lot first dwelt outside of the city and was only close to Sodom. A person may still act like a Christian; he may not have moved into the city, but he is touching Sodom, and the boundary line is still very clear. But what happened at the end? He finally moved into the city. I will illustrate by a story. There was a child whose mother gave him six candies and told him to save them and eat them the next day. The child put the candies in front of him. He wanted to eat them but dared not to. Yet he could not bear the thought of not eating them. What did he do? He put each candy on his lip and licked it with his tongue. In this way, he licked all six candies again and again. At first there were six candies. Later they became smaller one by one. After a while one was gone, and five remained. And then two were gone, and four remained. In the

end all six were eaten up. This is the way many Christians fall into sins. They disobey their conscience once, twice, until gradually they seek happiness in the world. Brothers and sisters, please realize that one does not stop sinning after the first sin. Once a person commits one sin, an addiction is built up which will cause him to commit sin again next time. Every time a person commits a sin, there are two results: first, it affords one the pleasure of sin; second, it builds up an addiction to commit more sin. Lot moved into the city gradually. Is it possible for you not to go into the city? At the beginning, we think that we will only commit that much sin and not go into the city. But there is no such thing. If you reach the entrance of Sodom, you will certainly go into the city. Either you do not sin or you sin. If you sin, you will not have the power to restrict yourself to that one sin and avoid committing more sins.

LOT'S END

Genesis 19:1 says that Lot sat at the gate of Sodom. At that time the custom of all the countries in the east was not like today's court. These countries judged the civil affairs at the gate of the city. Their judges were those who were elected among the qualified ones in the city, and they served as the elders. As judges they sat at the gate of the city to judge the civil affairs. Lot sat at the gate of the city; he was promoted. He was not only a commoner of Sodom; he became a judge. Lot's position in the world had become higher and more advanced. The way to sin is like this; it only goes faster. At first Lot was only near Sodom. Later on, he dwelt in Sodom, and finally he became a judge in Sodom.

What was the result of Lot's doing such things? His wife died halfway, his daughters committed fornication, and his sons-in-law were burnt by the fire from heaven.

The book of 2 Peter says that Lot was a righteous man (2:7), but he forgot that he had taken residence in Sodom. He even shed tears for those who were evil, but he forgot to shed tears for himself. A person can shed tears for other Christians, but forget to shed tears for himself. Lot saw the great sins in the people of Sodom. He even wanted to help them. But he did not realize that he could not do it. Many Christians are the same way. They have become backslidden, yet they still urge others to believe in the Lord Jesus.

God wanted to destroy Sodom. But He listened to Abraham's prayer, and two angels went to rescue Lot. Genesis 19:12-14 says, "And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place: for we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it. And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons-in-law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law." Lot had no testimony in front of his sons-in-law. They thought that he mocked them. People may believe if you say that the street is on fire. But no one will believe if you say that there will be fire coming from the heaven. People may still believe if you say that the fire of the gas tank will burn a man. But no one will believe if you say that brimstone will burn a man.

Genesis 19:16 says, "And while he lingered..." These words show a vivid portrait. It seems that Lot wanted to speak to his cows and sheep: "O cows, for you I separated myself from Abraham; for you I chose the plain of Jordan. O sheep, you have been in my place for five years, can I desert you today?" It seems that he looked at his furniture, his treasures, his sheepfold, and his warehouse, and thought, "I thought that I could live in Sodom forever. I wanted to build a larger warehouse to store all my goods and belongings. And then I would speak to my soul and say, 'Soul, eat, drink, and be merry.' Am I going to leave all these behind? Am I going to walk away like this today? I cannot suffer losing so many wonderful things!"

Genesis 19:16-17 says, "The men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city. And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." These were the instructions to them after the angels led them out of the city. Today you are in the world, and you may not have much money. But you may be as reluctant to part company with the world as Lot. There was an old lady who only had fifteen dollars, and she counted them every day. We may laugh at her for her obsession with money. But when a person with a box full of property deeds inspects them and treasures them, God in the heavens laughs at him in the

same way that we laugh at the old lady. In our eyes fifteen dollars means nothing. But in God's eyes, a box full of title deeds also means nothing.

The Lord Jesus is coming soon. The destruction of Sodom is a type of the coming destruction of the world. If all your hopes, whether great or small, are built on this world, one day the fire from heaven will consume them all. One day God will destroy them all. When that day comes, you will not be able to escape even if you want to. There will be no way for you to escape. Whatever you cannot let go of today will be let go in that day. At the time of the rapture, God will only rapture men; He will not rapture any objects. God will only save men; He will not put out fire. Therefore, today we should gladly let things go.

Genesis 19:26 says, "But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt." Lot's wife followed her husband's desire; she looked back. Even though there was nothing more to see, a glance back at the burning fire would still make her feel better. What she wanted to see indicated what her heart would not let go of. This looking back tells us many things and expresses many inward feelings. This look turned her into a pillar of salt, and she became a serious warning to us even until today! The Lord said, "But on the day in which Lot went out from Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be in the same way on the day in which the Son of Man is revealed...Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:29-30, 32). At the coming of the Lord, this world will also be judged, and everything on the earth will be burned. The ones who love the world will be left on earth. They will be like Lot's wife, who remained on earth to become a pillar of salt.

Friends, I am afraid that we have paid too much attention to vain things and have forgotten about the eternal things. We are very busy with social activities, with our children's education, and with our businesses. It is right to educate our children and take care of our business. But the eternal things need our attention too. Friends, particularly young friends, your way may still be long. If the Lord still delays, let us choose today the way which we should take. Let us pay attention today to what is valuable, what is coming from God, and what will last to eternity. Let us hope that our glory is not today, that we will learn to draw near to God, and that we will go on properly in the way ahead.

AN ANNOUNCEMENT

The detailed catalog from the Gospel Book Room has already been published. Anyone who wants it may request it by mail, and we will send it to you right away.

The Questions on the Gospel will not be published for a while. The first edition of The Little Flock hymnal has already been sold out, and there is no definite date for the second edition. Thank you for your many requests. Hopefully, this will serve as our notification concerning this matter.

CHAPTER THREE

TWO SIDES OF A MOST GLORIOUS TRUTH

CWWN, The (Set 1) Vol. 8:

The Present Testimony (1), Issue No. 17

Scripture Reading: Phil. 2:12-18

We know that the Epistle to the Philippians was written by Paul when he was imprisoned in Rome. Paul not only wrote Philippians; he also wrote the Epistles of Ephesians and Colossians as well. Each of these three Epistles has its own emphasis. Ephesians talks about the church as the Body of Christ. Colossians talks about how Christ is in the church. Philippians does not talk about such profound doctrines as those contained in Ephesians and Colossians; rather, it emphasizes one thing: freedom from disputes. Philippians 4:2 says, "I exhort Euodias, and I exhort Syntyche, to think the same thing in the Lord." These two serving sisters did not get along peacefully. For this reason Paul specifically beseeched them.

Philippians places special emphasis on the matters of humility, peace, and love for one another. We may say that Philippians is a footnote to 1 Corinthians 13. Paul beseeched the Philippians to consider one another in lowliness of mind more excellent than themselves, not regarding each his own virtues, but each the virtues of others also. After this he mentions how the Lord emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men, humbling Himself, becoming obedient even unto the death of a cross. Paul told them that this was the mind of Christ; therefore, he beseeched them to let the mind that was in Christ Jesus also be in them. However, there was a difficulty here. Although there was a willingness, there was not an ability. Listening is one thing, but doing is another. The apostle Paul talked about how the Lord emptied Himself, humbled Himself, and became obedient even unto the death of a cross. With such a high standard, the two sisters undoubtedly thought that it was impossible for them to attain to this standard. Therefore, Paul continued and told them how it could be done in verses 12 through 18 in chapter two.

Verse 12 says, "So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only but now much rather in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." So then refers to the previous context. My beloved was used by Paul whenever he was giving a very important word. Since he used this designation, what follows must be very important. "Even as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only but now much rather in my absence." What is the meaning of this word? Paul said that in the past when he preached the gospel to them, they always obeyed. Since things had gone wrong, they should obey even more. They obeyed him when he preached the gospel there, when he was an example there, and when they had contact with him; therefore, they should still obey him. These few words contain three points. First, they obeyed Paul when he was there because he had contact with them. Second, in Paul's absence, they should obey even more because they were entrusted more to God. Third, they needed to obey so that they could work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (2:12b). We should read this verse several times. Fear is toward God, trembling is toward ourselves. On one hand, we should fear God; on the other hand, we should tremble toward ourselves. Temptation is strong; therefore, we tremble. God is great, therefore, we fear. How can salvation be worked out? We thank God that He has a way; salvation can be worked out.

The Bible has divided the matter of salvation into three stages. First, in the past, God delivered us from the punishment of hell. Second, in the present, God saves us from the power of sin. Third, in the future, God will cause us to enter into the kingdom to be co-kings with Christ. Let me give a few examples:

Second Timothy 1:9 says, "Who has saved us." This occurred in the past, and every believer has received this salvation.

Hebrews 7:25 says, "Hence also He is able to save to the uttermost those who come forward to God through Him." This is the present salvation, and it can be received today.

Hebrews 9:28 says, "So Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time to those who eagerly await Him, apart from sin, unto salvation." This is the salvation in the future.

The Bible clearly mentions three kinds of salvation, one in the past, one in the present, and one in the future. Some Christians may have received the past salvation, but they may not have received the present and the future salvation. Some Christians have received the past salvation as well as the present salvation, and they are going to receive the future salvation. It is possible to be delivered from the punishment of hell and yet sin daily. It is possible to be delivered from the punishment of hell, but this does not necessarily mean that one will be a king in the future. I will mention three more verses in the Bible to prove these three stages of salvation.

Ephesians 2:8 says, "For by grace you have been saved." This is the past salvation.

Romans 8:24 says, "For we are saved by hope" [KJV]. This means that we are in the process of being saved; this is the present salvation.

Romans 5:10 says, "For if we, being enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled." This is in the future.

We thank and praise God that we have been saved! However, there are still two kinds of salvation which we have not yet achieved. Therefore, we need to pursue further. Some may not think that they are saved, so we tell them that once they believe they are saved. This refers to being saved from the punishment of hell. We have been saved from hell, but we still need to be delivered from the power of sin and pursue after the glory in the future kingdom. Therefore, we should work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

Dwight L. Moody was a very powerful preacher and extremely capable in saving souls. In his lifetime he said that he had never seen a lazy person be saved! Even if a person desires to be delivered from the punishment of hell, he cannot obtain it if he is lazy. "Therefore He says, Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you" (Eph. 5:14).

In the past few weeks I have mentioned many times that we are incapable in ourselves. If it is up to us to do anything, it will be very difficult. But if we are willing to surrender and believe, then Christ will do it on our behalf. While one should listen to this side of the truth, there is another side of the truth: to

work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. This is our responsibility for, if we do not do this, we are off. No doubt, Christ has died on my behalf, shed His blood on my behalf, and resurrected and ascended on my behalf. Some may think that since this is the case, all we need to do is just worship and be absolutely passive. There is no need to pray, read the Bible, and donate. However, we need to know that since God has done this, we can work out our salvation even more fervently. Since God has done it, we should work it out. How can we work it out? The following verse tells us the answer.

Philippians 2:13 says, "For it is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure." Verses 12 and 13 are two sides of a most glorious truth; they include everything. If you look at the first verse, you think that we should do everything. But if you look at the second verse, it seems that God will do everything. On one hand, we should work out our salvation, and on the other hand, God will work it out. This is not contradictory, but complementary. Verse 12 says that we should work out our salvation, and verse 13 says that God is able to make us do what we should do.

These two verses explain two very important aspects of truth in the Bible. In one aspect there are many severe commandments in the Bible from God. He commands us to do this and do that. It seems that God has given us a hard burden that we can hardly bear. It seems almost impossible to take any step forward. We seem pressed to death. But in the other aspect there are many promises from God. They tell us that this and that are taken care of by God. Everything is God's grace and God's doing. It seems it is not necessary for us to do anything. Due to a lack of understanding of these two aspects of truth, some people tend to go to the extreme. Some think that everything is a commandment from God and that they must do it all by themselves. They see God's commandments as heavy burdens. They are not able to bear them, yet they are afraid not to bear them. They seem to be pressed to death. Others think that everything is according to God's grace. Everything is God's doing, and everything is done by God. They themselves do not need to bear any responsibility. This invariably leads to laxity toward themselves. When man deviates—it does not matter which way he deviates—there is a danger that he will neither abide by God's commandments nor receive God's promises in the Bible. God's truths are balanced on both sides. God is working inside of us, and we are working outwardly—working out what God has done within us. If we only let God work inwardly, without our working outwardly, we cannot

receive anything. But if we are working outwardly, and nothing is being done by God inwardly, we cannot achieve anything.

All things in our human life are covered by these two matters: the willing and the working. To will is an inward decision; to work is an outward behavior. Whatever is decided within, we fulfill without. This is the willing and the working. Willing refers to our inward situation; working refers to our outward living. But both our inward willing and outward working are God's operating within us, which operates until we fulfill His good pleasure. All our willingness is according to God's operating, and all our working is also according to God's operating.

Oftentimes, we want to obey God, but we cannot do so. However, God says, "I am operating in you; therefore, it is possible to obey; you can do it." Many Christians suffer so much because they cannot do so many things. Many times they tell God, "It is such a suffering to obey You. I just cannot do it. I want to forsake the world, but I cannot do it. I should not hate someone, but I cannot help it." However, God has no intention for you to suffer. He wants to operate within you until you can do it. Therefore, you should tell God, "Although I cannot obey You, and I cannot give up the world, nor do I know how to love others, I ask You to work within me until I am willing to obey You, until I am willing to give up the world, and until I am willing not to hate others." If you believe after you pray this way, there surely will be changes. Even if you have things which you have not been able to overcome for years, by committing and believing this way, you will be able to overcome.

When Mr. [Chapman] first began his ministry, his congregation grew day by day, and he had a large chapel built. When Mr. Moody heard of his name, he took a train to listen to his preaching. After Mr. Moody arrived at the meeting hall, he sat there silently listening. At the end of the meeting, Mr. Chapman, who knew Moody, came down from the platform to Moody to ask his opinion. Mr. Moody said, "Brother, what you have ministered is a failure. It is not a success. There is some flaw in your life." When Mr. Chapman heard this word, he was not happy. He thought, "Mr. Moody should not have criticized me in this way. He has no authority to say that." However, Moody had said what he said. At any rate, Mr. Chapman knew that there was one weakness in himself. He realized that he was too attached to his wife and children. He felt bad for two or three weeks. Finally, he said to God, "I have no way not to love my wife and children, but I pray You would work until I

can." From that day on, he learned how to love his wife and children. Later, he ministered effectively. Someone asked him to give a testimony, and he said only a few words: "If I know how to preach the gospel and minister, or if there is anything good in me, I know where it came from. It came from that time when I obeyed."

God wants to work to the extent that we are able. Abraham asked an old servant to bring back Rebekah. The servant had to bring her to Canaan, but the camel for the journey was prepared by Abraham. The Samaritan helped the robbed one on the way to Jericho ride on his beast and sent him to the inn. By ourselves we have no strength to walk. We are damaged by our sin, and we can never have the strength to walk by ourselves. However, God operates within us to cause us to will, work, and perform. Everything that can fulfill God's good pleasure comes through His operation within us. He makes us to will and work for His good pleasure. We will be on the right way if we can remember this.

D.M. Panton of England said once, "Whatever God can do, we can do also, since we have God abiding in us." When one sister died, there was a word about her on a sign which said, "She did what she could not do!"

Every day we live a life which we can hardly live. If we want to obtain full salvation, if we want our life to be clean and perfect, we need God's operation. Many have tried to imitate Christ, but it can never be done. It is God who operates; consequently, we can work. Every day we should hold on to the fact that it is not we, but God who operates within us. We can only do what God has done. If we see the Bible as a high standard, think that we should do all of these things, and try to do them, we will surely fail. We should only ask God to operate until we are willing.

Mr. Panton told another story: There was a doctor who instructed a nurse to ask a patient to do a certain thing. The nurse asked the patient to do it. However, the patient said that he could not. The nurse reported to the doctor what the patient had said, and the doctor then went to see the patient. After an examination, the doctor said that it was not that he could not do it or was unwilling, but rather that he himself could not be willing. We are not willing inwardly and not able outwardly. If we are inwardly unwilling to forsake the world, we will be outwardly unable to forsake the world. However, God is able

to operate within us until we are truly willing and able to carry out His good pleasure.

Since God has worked in us, we can work out. Because God has operated within us, we can work out His good pleasure. We should pay special attention to carrying it out. Whoever is a believer has Christ abiding in him. Second Corinthians 13:5b says, "Or do you not realize about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you, unless you are disapproved?"

There are two common mistakes: one mistake is to think, "I want to do good, I hope to do good, and I hope to obtain a spiritual life." The second mistake is to think, "I am already saved, and there is no need for me to move a finger." It seems as if Christ will make this one zealous without prayer, reading, or making any offerings. The former mistake is thinking that one can do good by himself; the latter mistake is thinking that one needs to do nothing after he is saved. When a person is saved, he cannot have a spiritual living if he is not diligent. But if he does not trust in God, he will not succeed either. He must believe that God is operating within to enable him to will and work, which results in being able to pray, read the Bible, and testify. Believing comes first, then the working out. The kingdom is taken by violence, and only violent men seize it (Matt. 11:12). Day by day we have to diligently work out our salvation. We are not hopeless because God has operated. Since we have received this operation, we will surely be able to do it. Let us consider an example.

When the Lord taught His disciples, He said, "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day and turns again to you seven times, saying, I repent, you shall forgive him" (Luke 17:3-4). Right after this word, the disciples prayed, "Increase our faith." The disciples knew they could not do this. It is difficult enough to be sinned against once, twice, or three times. But if someone sins against you seven times a day and repents seven times, it becomes rather annoying and hard to endure. Therefore, they asked the Lord to increase their faith. How did the Lord answer them? "If you have faith like a mustard seed, you would have said to this sycamine tree, Be uprooted and be planted in the sea; and it would have obeyed you" (v. 6). How is this related to forgiveness? Because you have faith within, you are able to say to your hating heart, "Hatred, get away from me." Since you have such faith, when others ask you for forgiveness, you are able to say, "I forgive you." Since

you believe that God has done it, you are able to do it. Faith is needed not only in forgiveness, but also in reading the Bible, praying, and not loving the world. If you believe that God makes you able, you are able.

Philippians 2:14 says, "Do all things without murmurings and reasonings." The apostle told the believers that it was God who operates within them to will and work. The result of this kind of operation is peace with others without murmurings and reasonings. Being without reasonings is having nothing doubtful or indecisive. Being without murmurings is being able to believe others and love one another. Verse 13 tells us that God's life is operating within; as a result, in verse 14 there is complete peace.

We see this not only in Philippians, but in similar examples in Ephesians and Colossians as well. After Ephesians 3:19, "That you may be filled unto all the fullness of God" (verses 20-21 are words of praise), 4:2-3 immediately says, "With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, bearing one another in love, being diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace." When the inward operating of the power of God is manifested in a believer, the result is peace. Colossians 1:11 says, "Being empowered with all power, according to the might of His glory, unto all endurance and long-suffering with joy." The might of His glory is God's great power. We think that if we have the might of God's power, we can do marvelous things, perform miracles, and accomplish great things beyond understanding. Little do we realize that long-suffering and forbearance is the supreme expression of God's power.

It is more difficult to pray to God and ask for an answer than it is to be patient with a bothersome saint. Long-suffering is hard, but God's power can enable us. All three Epistles speak about a Christian being able to have peace with others and being long-suffering and forbearing once he receives the operating and filling of God.

Philippians 2:15 says, "That you may be blameless and guileless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine as luminaries in the world." "Blameless" means that others have nothing to say against you. "Guileless" is being inwardly single and not double-minded. "Crooked" is not straight, while "perverted" means disjointed and unrelated. The word "generation" in this verse can be translated as "species" according to the original text. The main point of this

verse is that a Christian is distinct in the midst of a species which is crooked and disjointed from the will of God; he is single and blameless. He is like a light in the world. To "shine" is an expression of life.

Verse 16 says, "Holding forth the word of life, so that I may have a boast in the day of Christ that I did not run in vain nor labor in vain." Some believers think that it is not necessary to open their mouths to testify and that they only need to lead others by good behavior. However, this is only what quiet believers would say. We should hold forth the word of life. We should bring forth the word of life; in other words, we should lift it up purposely so that others may see. Not only do we need to testify by our lives, but by our mouths also. The Bible never tells us to testify only by life, without our mouths. Among our relatives, friends, and people we have contact with, we must open our mouths to testify; otherwise, we have not held forth the word of life. It is true that Matthew says, "You are the light of the world" (5:14). However, the Bible also tells us to confess the Lord's name. If you are able to believe, please believe that you are not only able to shine among those around you, but you are also able to testify to them as well. Paul meant that if you do this, you will be perfect.

"The day of Christ" is the day when Christ will reign. "Run in vain" refers to finding the sinners and preaching the gospel. "Labor" refers to serving the saints, shepherding them, and preaching to them. The apostle was indicating that if the Philippians would hold forth the word of life, he, in the day of Christ, would not have run in vain, neither labored in vain.

Philippians 2:17 says, "But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice, and I rejoice together with you all." This is the same as Romans 12:1 which says, "Present your bodies a living sacrifice." Paul meant that if the believers were able to present themselves to God, he was willing to even give up his life and die with them. If they really presented themselves as gifts to God, he was willing to even give up his own life.

Paul had rejoiced already. However, he also wanted them to rejoice with him. Philippians 2:18 says, "And in like manner you also rejoice, and you rejoice together with me." Verse 17 says that Paul had rejoiced already and that he would rejoice with them all. In this verse he said that they should

rejoice and rejoice with him. Oh, those who have God's power operating within them have nothing else but joy.

Brothers and sisters, we should believe in what God has done; then we will also be able. Now all we need is to be willing.

CHAPTER FOUR

HOW GOD DEALS WITH THE BELIEVERS' SINS— DISCIPLINE AND REWARD

The Gospel of God, Ch. 20

We have to differentiate two things in the Bible: God's discipline of believers in this age and their salvation in eternity. In the previous message, we saw the first difference. In this message, we are going to see the second. Hebrews records the matter of the discipline of the believers. Now we have to see what are the kinds of people that God disciplines and what is the purpose of this discipline.

THE MOTIVE AND GOAL OF DISCIPLINE

Hebrews 12:5-6 says, "And you have completely forgotten the exhortation which reasons with you as with sons, 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when reproved by Him; for whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.'" Here, we see clearly that the motive of discipline is the love of God. Those who receive God's discipline are the sons of God. If someone is not a son of God, God will not discipline him. You can never find in the Bible that God disciplines an unbeliever. God does not waste His time and energy to discipline all the people on this earth. It is the same with us. We do not discipline our neighbors' children. If the neighbors' children do not dress well or do things properly, we do not discipline them. Only when it is a case of our own children do we discipline them. Therefore, the realm of discipline is confined only to Christians, and the motive of discipline is love. It is not because God hates man that He disciplines him. He disciplines man because He loves him. Revelation 3:19 also says that God disciplines because of love.

Hebrews 12:7-8 says, "It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons. For what son is there whom the father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all sons have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons." Therefore, the extent of discipline is limited to the children only. Verse 9 says, "Furthermore we have had the

fathers of our flesh as discipliners and we respected them; shall we not much more be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?" If we accept the discipline of our parents in the flesh, how much more should we accept the discipline from our Father, the Father of spirits.

Verse 10 says, "For they disciplined for a few days as it seemed good to them; but He, for what is profitable that we might partake of His holiness." This tells us the purpose of discipline. It is not because God likes to discipline us that He does it. Neither is it because He wants us to suffer. He disciplines us so that we can partake of His holiness. If a Christian lives in a very loose way on earth, without manifesting God's nature and holiness, God's hand will fall heavily on such a one. God does not like to chastise us. His purpose is to have His holiness manifested in us. He will only stop disciplining us when His holiness is manifested in us. Therefore, we see that discipline does not prove that we are not the Lord's. Rather, it proves that we belong to the Lord. There is no need of discipline for someone who does not belong to the Lord. Only those who belong to the Lord are qualified to be disciplined.

There is a big difference between punishment and discipline. God's disciplining of His children is not His punishment upon them. Even when God chastises them, this chastisement is not a punishment, but a discipline. Discipline is with a definite goal, which is that we may partake of His holiness, that we may not live foolishly day by day. After a Christian believes into the Lord Jesus, although he will never lose his salvation, he may receive severe chastisement from God. We should never say that a Christian can do whatever he wants after he is saved. The Bible clearly tells us that after a Christian is saved, even if he is defeated and fallen, he will not perish eternally and will not lose eternal life. However, he will receive God's chastising on earth today.

We should not make the mistake of thinking that because we are eternally saved, we can live loosely on this earth. No one can refute the fact that once a person is saved, he is eternally saved. This is a fact. If a Christian unbridles his lusts, commits sins, falls into defilements, and does not have God's holiness, God will extend His hand and will discipline such a one through his environment, his family, his personal health, and his future plans. He may encounter difficulties in his family. He may experience much illness and misfortune in his environment. The purpose of God in allowing these things to fall upon him is not a matter of punishing him; they are not there to give him a hard time, but to make him partake of God's holiness and to become

worthy of the grace of His calling. This is the proper understanding of salvation.

One should not say that if a Christian does not do good, God will deny that he is a child of God and kick him out like a dog. If one would say such a thing, either he is blind to the work of the cross of Christ, or he thinks that the work of Christ is a very light matter.

The Bible shows us that salvation is eternal. At the same time, the Bible also shows us that there are quite serious punishments among the believers. If we fail, there will be much punishment for us. God wants us to partake of His holiness. On this earth He wants us to live like sons of God. He does not want to intimidate us with hell so that we will pursue holiness. To be saved is totally of grace, but God has His way to lead us into His holiness. He causes us to encounter many things in our families, in our bodies, in our career, and in our environment so that we will turn back to Him. This is the purpose of discipline.

Ananias and Sapphira were believers; they were saved. They committed the sin of lying to the Spirit, and they received a very severe discipline (Acts 5:1-10). At one time, I thought that perhaps Ananias and Sapphira were not saved. By reading the Bible carefully, one has to acknowledge that they were saved because they were with the disciples at the time of Pentecost. In addition, they also made an offering. They were only after some vain glory. Their sins were not as severe as one would think. They did not get drunk or commit fornication. The fact that they were taken from the world quickly proves that they were believers. If they were worldly people, they probably would have lived much longer. The fact that they were removed quickly from the world proves that they were our brother and sister.

The Corinthian believers did not respect the Lord's table meeting. They did not respect the Body of the Lord, and they treated the Lord's supper loosely. What were the results of these things? Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:29-30, "He who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not discern the body. Because of this many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep." The disciplining hand of God makes people sick and weak and even causes them to die. God treated them this way because they treated the Body of the Lord lightly. They did not see the Lord's death nor the work of Christ, and they did not see the Body of Christ. They did not see the respect

they should render to the Lord Jesus, and they did not see their proper standing in the Body of Christ. This resulted in weakness, in sickness, and even in death. After they had sinned, God disciplined them.

Verse 32 says, "But being judged by the Lord, we are disciplined that we may not be condemned with the world." There is a purpose in God's discipline. It is to save us from condemnation in the future. God disciplines us so that we will not fall into the condemnation that the world will receive. In other words, discipline proves that we are saved. Discipline preserves our salvation. God's way and our way of doing things are totally different. We think that if we tell people that they are saved, they will be loose and unrestrained. God is not like this. He proclaims clearly, absolutely, and without limitation to all those who believe in Him that all who believe have eternal life and will not perish. But He has His way of saving us from sinning and keeping us from being wanton and loose Christians. His discipline is a substitute for our being condemned. Man may think that condemnation is the best method to keep us from sinning, but God does not use the way of condemnation. Rather, He uses the way of discipline. It is very clear that God separates the believers from the worldly people by discipline. The matters of discipline and salvation must be clearly differentiated. Discipline is exercised only for the present and has nothing to do with our eternal salvation.

There is a good example in 1 Corinthians to show that discipline for a Christian proves that he is saved. Even if a Christian has committed a very gross sin, he is still saved. First Corinthians 5 talks about a Christian who committed adultery. Such an act of adultery with one's stepmother was not even found among the unbelievers. Those who are clear about the law of Moses would say that this person will surely perish and is guaranteed to go to hell. But surprisingly, 1 Corinthians shows us clearly that here is one who had committed a very grave and despicable sin; it is a sin that is not committed by ordinary people. Paul says that with the power of the Lord Jesus, he delivered such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that is to allow Satan to exhibit his power on the body of this one to cause him to be weak, to be ill, and even to die. The purpose of Paul in doing this was that this one may be saved in the day of the Lord. Discipline is something for this life. It is absolutely not related to salvation in eternity. If it were up to us, we would say, "It is finished. Although such a one has been saved, surely he will perish again because of committing such a gross sin." However, Paul says that this one will not perish even though he has committed such a sin. A saved one can

temporarily receive discipline, but he cannot be penalized with eternal perdition. This is the teaching of Paul. A Christian can have temporary discipline in this age, but he cannot perish eternally. We may need discipline, but we will still be saved in eternity. Paul made a clear distinction between these two things many times in the New Testament. The destruction mentioned here and the sleep mentioned before relate to the body only; they do not refer to the spirit. The matters of the spirit and of eternal salvation were decided already when we believed in the Lord.

Some people have a problem with 1 John 5:16, where it says that we should not make request for anyone who has committed a sin unto death. They have this problem because they do not understand the Word of God. They think that to sin unto death as spoken of here means perdition. Actually there is no such thing. First John 5:16 tells us of some people who sinned to the extent that God would have them die and their flesh removed from the world. The death mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11, the destruction in 1 Corinthians 5, and the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira are all deaths of the flesh and have nothing to do with the death of the spirit. Discipline is totally a matter with the body. Therefore, in the Bible, many places which seem to say that believers may perish are actually speaking about discipline.

REWARD AND GIFT

Now we want to see the third difference—the difference between reward and gift, in other words, the difference between the kingdom and eternal life. There are many Christians in the church today who cannot differentiate between the kingdom of the heavens and eternal life. They think that the kingdom of the heavens is eternal life and that eternal life is simply the kingdom of the heavens. They have mixed up the Word of God, taking the condition for the receiving of the kingdom as the condition for the preservation of eternal life. They take the losing of the kingdom as the losing of eternal life. However, the distinction between these two is very clear in the Bible. One may lose the kingdom of the heavens, but he will not lose eternal life. One can lose the reward, but he will not lose the gift.

What then is the reward, and what is the gift? We were saved because of the gift. God gave the gift to us freely by His grace; therefore, we were saved. The reward pertains to the relationship between us and the Holy Spirit after we were saved. When we were saved, we were related to Christ. This relationship

allows us to obtain the gift that we are absolutely unworthy of receiving. Similarly, after we have been saved, we have a relationship with the Holy Spirit. This relationship allows us to obtain the reward which we could not otherwise obtain by ourselves. If one believes in the Lord Jesus as Savior, accepting the Lord Jesus as life, this one is saved before God. After he is saved, God immediately puts this one on a pathway, so that he will run in the race and will obtain the reward placed before him. A Christian is saved because of the Lord Jesus. After he is saved, he has to manifest the victory of Christ by the Holy Spirit day by day. If one will do this, then at the end of the race, he will obtain the heavenly glory and the heavenly reward from God.

Hence, salvation is the first step of this path, and the reward is the last step. Only the saved ones are qualified to gain the reward. The unsaved ones are not qualified for this. God has given us two things rather than one thing. God places the gift before the worldly people and places the reward before the Christians. When one believes in Christ, he receives the gift. When one follows Christ, he receives the reward. Gift is obtained through faith, and it is for the worldly people. Reward is obtained by being faithful and having good deeds, and it is for the Christians.

There is a big mistake in the churches today. Man thinks that salvation is the only thing and that there is nothing else besides being saved. He takes the kingdom of the heavens and eternal life as the same thing. He considers that since one is saved when he believes, he no longer has to be concerned with works. The Bible makes a distinction between God's part and man's part. One part is the salvation given by God, and the other part is the glory of the millennial kingdom. To be saved has absolutely nothing to do with one's works. Once anyone believes in the Lord Jesus, he is saved. But after his salvation, God immediately places the second thing before him, telling him that besides salvation, there is a reward, a coming glory, a crown, and a throne for him. God puts His throne, crown, glory, and reward before the believers. If one is faithful, he will obtain these. If he is unfaithful, he will lose them.

Therefore, we do not say that good works are useless. However, we do say that good works are useless as far as salvation is concerned. Man cannot be saved by his good works. Neither can he be prevented from salvation by his evil works. Good works are applicable to the matter of the reward, the matter of the crown, the matter of the glory, and the matter of the throne. Good

works are useless regarding the matter of salvation. God cannot allow man to be saved by his work; neither will He allow man to be rewarded by his faith. God cannot allow man to perish because of his evil works. God can determine only man's salvation or perdition by whether or not he believes in His Son. Similarly, God cannot determine a man's receiving of His glory by whether or not one believes in His Son. Whether or not you have His Son in you determines the matter of eternal life or perdition. Whether or not you have good works before God determines the matter of receiving the reward and the glory. In other words, God will never save a person because he has merits, and He will never reward one who has no merit. If someone has merits, God will not therefore save such a one. On the other hand, God will never reward anyone who has no merit. Man has to come before God totally helpless and meritless in order for God to save him. But after salvation, we have to be faithful, and we have to endeavor to produce good works through His Son Jesus Christ in order to obtain the reward.

Please do not think that good works are useless. We are saying that good works are useless towards salvation. Good works have nothing to do with salvation at all. Salvation depends on whether or not you would repent of your former position. It depends on whether you would have regret over your past to believe in His work on the cross and in His resurrection as the proof of your justification. This is the crux of all problems. The matter of work is related to reward. Work is useful, but only in the matter of reward.

Today's problem is that people will not differentiate between salvation and the kingdom. In the Bible, there is a clear distinction between salvation and the kingdom and between the gift and the reward. Because people would not differentiate these matters, the question of salvation is mishandled, and the question of reward is also mishandled. God has never placed the matter of reward before the unsaved ones. God only wants the unsaved ones to obtain salvation. However, after salvation, God places the reward before them so that they will endeavor, pursue, and run after the reward. Salvation is not the last step of the Christian experience. Rather, salvation is its first step. After we have been saved, we have to run and pursue after the reward before us. The problem is that we think that our salvation is our reward. The sinners think that to be saved is to obtain the reward, and therefore they rely on their works. The Christians think that the glory is simply grace, and therefore they become foolish in their living. Please apply work only to reward and grace to salvation.

Through salvation God separates the saved ones from the unsaved ones; He separates the ones having eternal life from those being condemned. Similarly, God also separates His children into two groups by His reward. Just as salvation separates the worldly people, in the same way, reward also separates God's children. God separates His children into the obedient and disobedient ones. With the worldly people, it is a matter of having faith and not having faith. With the Christians, it is a matter of being faithful or not being faithful. With the worldly people, it is a question of being saved or not being saved. With the Christians, it is a matter of having or not having the reward. Today's problem with God's children is that they magnify salvation too much; all that they see is simply salvation. They think that only when their work is taken care of can they be saved. As a result, they have no more time to pursue after the reward. If one has not passed through the first gate, he cannot pass through the second. May God be merciful to us that we would realize that the matter of salvation is solved already. It cannot be shaken, for it has been accomplished by the Lord Jesus already. It is fully done. Today what we have to strive for is the reward before us. There will be a big differentiation in the kingdom. Some will have glory, and some will not have glory.

Now we need to see on what basis reward is given. God's Word says that the reward is given because of work. Just as the Bible says clearly that salvation is by faith, in the same way the Bible says clearly that reward is by work. The Bible reveals to us that salvation is by the faith of the sinners, and the reward is by the work of the Christians. Faith is related to salvation; this is more than clear. Work is related to reward; this is also more than clear. One should not mix up these two.

Romans 4:4 says, "Now to the one who works, his wages are not accounted according to grace, but according to what is due." To give a reward to one who works is not grace, but a debt. In other words, how can one obtain a reward? Reward comes by works and not by grace.

Revelation 2:23 says, "And her children I will kill with death; and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the inward parts and the hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your works." This verse says that the Lord will make all the churches know that He is the One who searches the inward parts and the hearts, and will give to each one according to his works. In other words, He will reward each one according to his works. How does He reward or recompense? It is according to our work. Of course,

this work is not our own work. We only wash our clothes to be white in the blood. When the Holy Spirit lives out Christ in us, we have the works of a Christian. Some will live out Christ, and some will not live out Christ. All the capital comes from Christ. All the power also originates from Christ. But some let the Lord work within them and some do not. Therefore, this verse clearly shows us the matter of recompense. The matter of reward depends on whether or not a Christian is worthy. Today God will not save a person who is worthy, and in the future God will not reward a Christian who is not worthy.

First Corinthians 3:14 says, "If anyone's work which he has built upon the foundation remains, he will receive a reward." Here it says that if his work remains, he will be rewarded. It does not say that if his faith remains he will be rewarded. The matter of reward depends on one's work. The Bible distinguishes clearly between salvation and reward. It never mixes up salvation and reward, and it never mixes up faith and work. Without faith, man cannot be saved. Without good works, man cannot be rewarded. One's works must withstand before the judgment seat and survive under the scrutiny of the burning eyes before there is the possibility of receiving a reward.

Luke 6:35 says, "But love your enemies, and do good and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great." Reward is entirely due to one's work. To lend money to another without hoping to be repaid is your work, and to love your enemy is your work. You have to do these to obtain the reward. Nowhere does the Bible mention that one has to love his enemies and do good before he can receive eternal life. Neither is there any verse that says one has to lend to others before he can be saved, or that he has to lend to others before he can avoid perdition. But there is such a verse that says if you lend to others and do good to others, your reward in heaven will be great. Reward is of work and not of faith. Faith can save you, but faith cannot help you obtain the reward.

Second Timothy 4:14 says, "Alexander the coppersmith did many evil things to me; the Lord will recompense him according to his works." Here an example is cited. A Christian was trying to hurt Paul; he had sinned against Paul. The person mentioned here was a Christian. He was not a worldly person. In the future, Christians will be rewarded before God according to their works.

THE REWARD BEING THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS

Let us go on. Many people know that there is a difference between salvation and reward. But there are many people who do not see what the reward is. In the Bible, whether with the Lord Jesus, or with the apostles, the words they spoke concerning the reward and the kingdom were not spoken lightly, in the same way the gift and eternal life were not spoken of lightly. When the Lord Jesus says in the Gospel of John that He gives eternal life to His sheep, He is speaking reality and not some empty words (John 10:28). Romans 6 says that the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (v. 23). It is so clear that the gift of God is eternal life. What then is the reward? The Bible clearly shows us that the reward is the crown, the throne, and the kingdom of the heavens. The kingdom of the heavens is the reward. In the Bible, there are three aspects to the kingdom of the heavens. In the first aspect, the kingdom of the heavens is the outward manifestation of God's authority today; it is the outward manifestation of God's sovereignty. The Bible calls this the kingdom of the heavens. The second aspect is the authority of the heavens controlling and limiting man. This is also called the kingdom of the heavens. However, there is a third aspect of the kingdom of the heavens; it refers to the reward.

The Lord's sermon on the mount in Matthew 5—7 speaks of the kingdom of the heavens. These teachings of the Lord tell us how man can enter into the kingdom of the heavens. Matthew 5—7 repeatedly speaks of the matter of reward. We see very clearly that the words "the kingdom of the heavens" and the word "reward" are found together many times. Many are familiar with the Beatitudes. The Chinese call them the Eight Blessings. Actually, there are nine blessings in the Beatitudes. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Also, blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens. The kingdom of the heavens is mentioned twice in these few blessings. At the end, the Lord says, "Blessed are you when they reproach and persecute you, and while speaking lies, say every evil thing against you because of Me. Rejoice and exult, for your reward is great in the heavens" (Matt. 5:11-12). Here we must admit that the reward is the kingdom of the heavens. The Lord begins by saying that this kind and that kind of people are blessed because the kingdom of the heavens is theirs. At the end He says that

these people are blessed because their reward is great in the heavens. These parallel sentences show us that the kingdom of the heavens is God's reward. There is no difference between the two.

In the sermon on the mount, the Lord mentioned the matter of the reward many times because this portion concerns the kingdom. Matthew 5:46 says, "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?" Matthew 6:1-2 says, "But take care not to do your righteousness before men in order to be gazed at by them; otherwise, you have no reward with your Father who is in the heavens. Therefore when you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be glorified by men. Truly I say to you, They have their reward in full." Verse 5 says, "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites....They have their reward in full." Verse 16 says, "And when you fast, do not be like the sullen-faced hypocrites....They have their reward in full." Verse 4 says, "So that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you." Verse 6 says, "But you, when you pray, enter into your private room, and shut your door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you." The last part of verse 18 says, "And your Father who sees in secret will repay you." Every reader of the Bible agrees that the main subject of the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5—7 is the kingdom of the heavens. But here, the matter of reward is also repeatedly mentioned because the kingdom of the heavens is the reward.

Matthew 16:27-28 says, "For the Son of Man is to come in the glory of His Father and with His angels, and then He will repay each man according to his doings." God will reward or punish a saved person according to his doings. "Truly I say to you, There are some of those standing here who shall by no means taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." There are three facts here. First, man will be rewarded according to his works. The matter of reward is entirely based on works. Second, at what time will the reward be given out? It will be given out when Christ comes in the glory of His Father with His angels. When Christ comes in the glory of His Father with His angels, that will be the time for Him to establish His kingdom on the earth. Hence, it is only when the kingdom begins that the reward will begin. Third, here is a type which speaks of a fact. The transfiguration of the Lord on the mountain typifies His manifestation in glory in the coming kingdom. By that time some believers will be rewarded.

The verses in Matthew 6 which we just read regarding the reward for giving, the reward for prayer, and the reward for fasting all involve reward. Some think that the reward for prayer is God's answering of our prayer. But this is not all that is meant. The Lord Jesus said that we have to pray to our Father who is in secret, and our Father who sees in secret will repay us. It may be possible to interpret this as the Father answering our prayer. However, both in the first part when the Lord mentions alms-giving, and in the second part when He mentions fasting, He said, "And your Father who sees in secret will repay you." This repaying must refer to something in the future. Furthermore, the Lord said that we have to pray to the Father who sees in secret. It does not say that the Father hears in secret, but that He sees in secret. When God gives out the reward in the future, He gives according to what He sees. God sees with His eyes. Hence, the reward is in the future.

Revelation 11:15 says, "And the seventh angel trumpeted; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever." Verse 18 says, "And the nations became angry, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to give the reward to Your slaves the prophets and to the saints and to those who fear Your name, to the small and to the great." This verse clearly shows us that when the Lord becomes King and the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, that is the time for giving the reward to the saints, to the small and to the great. In other words, the time of the kingdom is the time of reward. Whenever the kingdom comes, the reward will come also.

There is a further point. The reward is the obtaining of the crown and the obtaining of the throne. Once a Western missionary told me, "If I cannot have the crown, at least I can have the kingdom." You can ask King Edward of England, if he loses his crown, will he still have the kingdom? What is a crown? It is not merely a hat beaten with gold and studded with diamonds. That kind of crown can be gained with a little money. What is a crown? A crown represents position in the kingdom. It also represents glory in the kingdom. If a crown is only a physical thing, it does not mean much. If one has money, he can make a golden one. If he does not have money, he can make a brass one or an iron one. Even if one is very poor, he can still make a crown out of cloth. In the future, it will not be a matter of one crown being bigger than the other in size, or one crown having more diamonds than the other. A crown stands

for something. When one loses the crown, he loses the thing that the crown represents. We have to see that the crown is the symbol of the kingdom.

What is the throne? The Bible shows us that the twelve apostles will sit on twelve thrones. The crown is a reward for the overcomers, and the throne is also a reward for the overcomers. Hence, the throne is also a symbol of the kingdom. It represents position in the kingdom, authority in the kingdom, and glory in the kingdom. There is no such thing as losing the crown but still having the kingdom. Similarly, one cannot lose the throne but still have the kingdom. If one loses the throne, he will lose the kingdom. Similarly, if one loses the crown, he will lose the kingdom. The throne and the crown are not significant in themselves; they are there simply to represent the kingdom. In other words, the reward is the kingdom. The Bible clearly shows us that the reward is simply the kingdom.

JUDGMENT AT THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

How will God give us the reward? The time for us to be rewarded is when Christ comes again to execute judgment. Peter tells us that judgment begins from the house of God. In the future, God will judge the Christians first, before He judges the worldly people. Concerning what will God judge us? He will not judge us for eternal salvation or perdition. That judgment has been taken care of on the cross. All our sins have been judged on the cross, and the problem of eternal perdition has been resolved. But we Christians will be judged in the future. That judgment will determine whether or not we will participate in the kingdom. For some, not only will there not be participation in the kingdom, but there will be punishment as well. At that time, Christ will set up the judgment seat, and He will judge His believers at that judgment seat.

We will read two verses which are even clearer concerning this matter. Second Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done through the body according to what he has practiced, whether good or bad." Every one of us who has believed in the Lord will be manifested before the judgment seat. The word "judgment seat" is bema in the original Greek. It means a raised platform. Bema is the place where matters are settled in the family. This verse says that we must all be manifested before the judgment seat that each may be recompensed according to what he has practiced. Eternal

salvation or death is a matter of believing. But the judgment of a Christian is according to what he practices, whether good or evil. This is the judgment before the judgment seat.

Regarding the kingdom, there are a few things which we must know. Whether or not one can enter into the kingdom is one thing. Even if one can enter into the kingdom, there will still be a difference of position in the kingdom. If one cannot enter into the kingdom, he will go into outer darkness or will be chastised. Therefore, after we have believed in the Lord, though our good work cannot save us, it will determine our status in the kingdom. Thank God that the question of our eternal life or death is settled, but we will still be judged before the judgment seat of Christ. That judgment is not for determining our eternal life or death. It is for determining our position in the kingdom.

There are many other verses in the Bible that show us that believers will be judged by the Lord Jesus before the judgment seat of Christ. Among these verses, 1 Corinthians 3 shows us most clearly how we will be judged by the Lord before the judgment seat. First Corinthians 3:8 says, "Now he who plants and he who waters are one, but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor." The subject here is how each one will be rewarded according to his own labor. Verse 10 says, "According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, and another builds upon it. But let each man take heed how he builds upon it." The foundation is Jesus Christ. Each one's own labor is the way each one builds. The way we build is determined by the material we use. Verses 12-15 say, "But if anyone builds upon the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, stubble, the work of each will become manifest; for the day will declare it, because it is revealed by fire, and the fire itself will prove each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built upon the foundation remains, he will receive a reward; if anyone's work is consumed, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." This passage shows us that everyone who is building on this foundation is saved. The work which some build upon it will remain, and those ones will be rewarded. The work of some will not remain, and it will be consumed by fire. They will suffer loss, even though they will still be saved. Let us remember that there is still a judgment before us. That judgment will not determine whether or not we will perish, but it will determine whether we will receive a reward.

CHAPTER FIVE

HOW GOD DEALS WITH THE BELIEVERS' SINS— THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR ENTERING INTO THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS

The Gospel of God, Ch. 21

We have made it clear that the kingdom is the time when God will reward the Christians according to their works. In the kingdom, the faithful believers will be rewarded, and the unfaithful believers will be punished. Many people think that if a Christian is unfaithful, although he may have to occupy a lower position, he will nevertheless make it into the kingdom. Many who do not understand God's word and God's work think that they are guaranteed an entrance into the kingdom of the heavens. They think that when the Lord Jesus comes to rule, there will merely be a distinction between higher and lower positions in the kingdom; no one will lose the kingdom of the heavens altogether. However, in the kingdom of the heavens, there is not only a distinction between higher and lower positions, but also the distinction between being allowed to enter and being kept out. The Bible shows us that there is a clear distinction between ten cities and five cities, between a large crown and a small one, and between a greater glory and a lesser one. As one star differs from another star, so also are the positions in the kingdom different. Not only is there the difference of lower and higher positions in the kingdom; there is also the distinction of being able or not able to get in.

DOING THE WILL OF THE FATHER

The Bible tells us of a very serious truth. Although someone may have eternal life, he may still be rejected from the kingdom of the heavens. One verse that speaks of this is Matthew 7:21: "Not every one who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he who does the will of My Father who is in the heavens." The persons in this verse all address the Lord as "Lord." The Lord will make a distinction between those disciples who can enter into the kingdom of the heavens and those who cannot. The Lord clearly shows us here that the condition for entering the kingdom of the heavens is doing the will of God. Although some have been saved and have

called Him Lord, and although they have also done some works, without doing the will of God they nevertheless cannot enter into the kingdom of the heavens. The reward of the kingdom of the heavens is based on the obedience of man. If one is not faithful while living on the earth, though he will not lose eternal life, he will lose the kingdom of the heavens. When the time comes for the heavens to rule, that is, when the Lord Jesus comes the second time, some will not be able to enter the kingdom, but will lose it instead.

First, the Lord mentioned this matter in verse 21. Following this, in verses 22 and 23, He explained the matter to us in the way of a prophecy. There will be many, not only one or two, who will not do the will of God. "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, was it not in Your name that we prophesied, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name did many works of power? And then I will declare to them: I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness." Here the Lord Jesus tells us what will happen before the judgment seat. He says, "In that day." Hence, this does not refer to today, but to the future. There are many who work hard but do not see the light of God in their lives. When the time of the judgment seat comes, and when Christ begins to judge from the house of God, these Christians will have light for the first time. They will see that they are off in their standing and in their living.

In that day many will say before the Lord, "Was it not in Your name that we prophesied, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name did many works of power?" Within one sentence, the phrase "in Your name" is mentioned three times. This proves that these ones are the Lord's. The fact that they say, "Lord, Lord," proves that their standing is that of a Christian. Not only do they say that they prophesy, cast out demons, and do many works of power; they do these in the Lord's name. The mentioning of "in Your name" three times tells us of their relationship with the Lord.

Amazingly, the Lord tells them, "And then I will declare to them: I never knew you." Because many do not understand the meaning of these words, they think that these surely are not saved ones. But if these are not saved ones, then the Lord's word here would be meaningless. Matthew 7 is a conclusion to the sermon on the mount following the Lord's word concerning the Beatitudes. These words on the mount were spoken by the Lord Jesus to the disciples. After the Lord went up the mountain, His disciples came before

Him, and He opened His mouth and taught them from chapter five to chapter seven.

The Lord Jesus said that they should not call Him Lord with their mouth only. If they call Him Lord, they should do the will of the Father. Even if they have the outward works of prophesying, casting out demons, and doing works of power, these works must not replace the Father's will. Doing the Father's will is one thing, whereas prophesying, casting out demons, and doing works of power are another thing altogether. Sometimes, one can prophesy, cast out demons, and do works of power without doing the will of the Father. We must remember that we should not only call Him Lord with our mouth, but we should do the Father's will in our walk as well. If the Lord were speaking about unsaved persons, this word would lose its meaning altogether, for if these are not saved ones, it would not matter much for the disciples to listen or not to listen to His word. The disciples may say that His word is for the unsaved ones, but they are the saved ones; therefore whether or not they do the Father's will, the Lord cannot deny knowing them. If this were the case, then all the unsaved ones would be those who do not do the will of God, and all the saved ones would be those who do the will of God. This would take away the highest meaning of these words.

The Lord Jesus must be warning the saved ones here by speaking about the saved ones. He cannot be warning the saved ones by speaking about the unsaved ones. Suppose one has a maid and two daughters, and suppose this one were to say to the younger daughter, "Do you see that maid? She is not born of me; I am beating her. You have to be obedient today. If you are not obedient, I will punish you in the same way I am punishing her." Is this word logical? A maid is not born of the family. If she becomes disobedient, she may be beaten. But the daughter of the family is not a maid. One cannot apply the way to deal with a maid to a daughter. The mother ought to say, "Last night I punished your sister because she was disobedient. Now be careful. If you are not obedient, I will punish you as well." The mother must take the sister as an example. The maid cannot be used for a comparison. There is no reason for the Lord to use unsaved ones as an example to show the disciples that they ought to do God's will. If He did, the disciples would rise up and say, "They are the unsaved ones, but we are the saved ones." If they were to say this, no one could say anything further.

What the Lord Jesus is saying is this: "Many people are God's children. They are saved and are the same as you are. They call Me 'Lord,' and they have done many works. But they are nevertheless shut outside the kingdom. For this reason you must be careful. You have to do the will of God." Only in this way will the disciples know that though they do many works, if they do not do the will of God, they will receive the same punishment. If He were speaking to the unsaved ones, there would no longer be the piercing element to His word. The Lord was warning us that only those who do the will of God can enter the kingdom. If one were to rely on his own work to come before God, the Lord Jesus would tell him, "I never knew you."

Let me give you another example. Suppose a judge's son drives carelessly and hits another car. He is taken by the police to the court for a hearing. The judge would ask, "Young man, what is your name? How old are you? Where do you live?" The son down at the stand may think, "You should know all these things better than I do." He may answer the first few questions. But after a while, he may shout to the father, "Father, don't you know me?" What should the judge do then? He may bang his gavel and say, "I do not know you. In my home, I know you. But in the court, I never knew you." If one sees the matter of the kingdom, he will realize that in the kingdom, it is not a matter of whether or not a person is saved and whether he is a child of God; what really matters is his work after becoming a believer. Suppose after you are saved, you are very zealous. Although you have not carried out God's will, you nevertheless prophesy, cast out demons, and do works of power in the Lord's name. If you come before the Lord asking to be admitted into the kingdom because of these unprincipled works, the Lord will say that He never knew you.

Why did the Lord say, "I never knew you"? The next sentence explains: "Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness." Please remember that the Lord did not tell them to depart from eternal life. In the original Greek the meaning of workers of lawlessness is people who do not follow the rules, keep the law, or abide by the regulations. In the eyes of God, to do evil does not mean only to do bad things. It does not matter how much one has done; as long as he has not hearkened to God's demand, His judgment, and His sovereign arrangements, it is evil in God's eyes. If this word "lawlessness" were translated as "evil," as some versions have done, many would have the ground to argue. The problem here is not a matter of doing evil, but a matter of being unprincipled. What are the principles? The principles are God's word.

But what is God's word? God's word is God's will. If you are not doing the will of God, no matter what you do, the Lord Jesus would say that you are lawless. Those who do things according to their own self will have no part in the kingdom of the heavens.

My purpose in saying these things is to show you the importance of a Christian's works. The Bible shows us clearly that after a person believes in the Lord, though he will never lose eternal life, he may lose his place and glory in the kingdom. If we do not do the will of God, but work according to our own will instead, we will be shut out of the kingdom. We may think that prophesying, casting out demons, and doing works of power are most important, because we think that if we can do these things, we will be a marvelous person. But these things can never replace the will of God. All those who have never learned not to work for God are not worthy to work for God. Those who do not know how to stop their own work surely know nothing about God's will. Only those who know the will of God can stop working. God wants us first to obey His will and then to work. God does not want us to volunteer to work for Him. The more one knows about the will of the Lord, the more he will learn not to work carelessly. Thus, there is a big difference between working and doing the will of God. Today we may appreciate the works and may be interested in prophesying, casting out demons, and doing works of power. But one day, many will be awakened.

BUFFETING THE BODY TO PLEASE THE LORD

Another passage which some misinterpret as referring to perdition actually refers to the losing of the kingdom and the losing of the reward. First Corinthians 9:23-27 says, "And I do all things for the sake of the gospel that I may become a fellow partaker of it. Do you not know that those who run on a racecourse all run, but one receives the prize? Run in this way, that you may lay hold. And everyone who contends, exercises self-control in all things; they then, that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we, an incorruptible. I therefore run in this way, not as though without a clear aim; I box in this way, not as though beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest perhaps having preached to others, I myself may become disapproved." Paul feared that, having preached to others, he himself might be disapproved. Here Paul was saying that he could also be disapproved. What is the meaning of being disapproved here? And of what is one being disapproved? In these

messages, we have emphasized the fact that in reading the Bible, one should pay attention to the context. Here we must also consider the context.

In verse 24 Paul likens himself to one who is running in a race in which only one will get the prize. Therefore, the problem here is not a matter of salvation, but a matter of receiving the prize. Paul is talking about how a saved one can receive the prize; he is not talking about how an unsaved one can be saved. Only the ones who are saved, who have believed in the Lord Jesus, who are reborn, and who have become the children of God are qualified to enter the race. Only the children of God can run in the race and pursue the prize that God intends for us to gain. If someone is not a child of God, he will not be qualified even to enter the race. Nowhere does the Bible say that salvation is gained by our running the race. The Bible never says that if someone is able to run, he will be saved. If that were so, then very few could be saved, and salvation would be dependent on works. The Bible says that the prize comes from the running; God has placed us on a racecourse for us to run the race.

What is the prize? Verse 25 says, "And everyone who contends exercises self-control in all things; they then, that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we, an incorruptible." Here it says that the prize is a crown. We have mentioned that the crown signifies glory and the kingdom. Therefore, the word "disapproved" does not refer to the losing of salvation. The word "disapproved" means to fail to receive the crown and the prize. If Paul could be disapproved, then we all have the possibility of being disapproved. If Paul had the possibility of losing his prize and losing his crown, then each one of us also has the possibility of losing the prize and the crown.

Verse 26 indicates the reason for being disapproved: "I therefore run in this way, not as though without a clear aim; I box in this way, not as though beating the air." Paul had a purpose and a direction. He was not beating the air. His goal and direction were what he said in 2 Corinthians 5, that he was ambitious to be well-pleasing to the Lord. Whether he would live or die on this earth, his desire was to please the Lord. How did he run in the race? He did not run in a loose way. He had a definite direction and a definite goal. He was not beating the air. He did not simply do whatever others told him to do. Nor did he do something simply because the need was there. If he were to work according to the need, he would have to run day and night, for the need was too great. We are not for the work, but for pleasing the Lord.

If we want to receive the prize, what should we do? "But I buffet my body and make it my slave." Many would place their own bodies above the prize. Many would place their own bodies above the will of God. But Paul said that he subjected his body; he was able to control it. Paul could control the lust of his body, the excessive demands of his body, and the desires of his body. He did not let his body get on top. He said that he buffeted his body and made it his slave. Whether or not a Christian can please the Lord depends upon whether he can control his body. Many people cannot control their own bodies. Whenever a little stimulus comes to their body, all kinds of sins result. We must see that all those who cannot control their own bodies will lose their prize and their crown. Although they can preach the gospel to others, they themselves will be disapproved.

We believers are saved once and for all and will never lose our salvation. But when the Lord Jesus returns in His glory to rule the earth, He will not give crowns to everyone. In the new heaven and new earth, although every saved one will receive the same glory, when the Lord Jesus comes to rule on this earth for a thousand years, some will lose their prize, their authority, and their glory. Some will not be able to enter the kingdom and will not be able to receive a crown.

The Lord's word is very clear concerning the matters of salvation and eternal life: both are totally of grace. Moreover, whether or not one can enter into the kingdom of the heavens depends upon his works. We have just seen that we have to do the will of God. Here we see that we have to buffet our own body. We may do many works outwardly, but as long as we do not restrict our body, we will not be allowed into the kingdom.

In the Bible there seems to be a fixed number of crowns. Revelation 3:11 says, "I come quickly; hold fast what you have that no one take your crown." Some who do not understand the Bible do not know the difference between a reward and a gift. Neither do they know the difference between the crown and God's salvation. They think that salvation can be taken away from them. The word "take" here does not refer to salvation but to the crown. One can be saved yet still lose the crown. There was a very sensational headline in the news recently. A certain king of a certain country had lost his crown. If a saved one does not hold fast to what he has, if he does not keep the words of endurance of the Lord Jesus, and if he forsakes the name of the Lord Jesus,

he will lose his crown some day. If you are loose, and if you do not hold fast, you will lose your crown. Someone else might take away your crown from you.

Revelation 2:10 has a word similar to this: "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." Here it does not say give life, but give the crown of life. Life is obtained through faith; it is not obtained through faithfulness. If a person does not have faith, he cannot have life. But if a person is unfaithful after he has life, he will lose the crown of life. Hence, if a Christian does not have good works after being saved, though he will not lose life, he will nevertheless lose the crown.

BUILDING WITH GOLD, SILVER, AND PRECIOUS STONES

The clearest passage in the Bible about the reward is 1 Corinthians 3:14-15: "If anyone's work which he has built upon the foundation remains, he will receive a reward; if anyone's work is consumed, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved." This shows us clearly what a Christian cannot lose and what he can lose. Once a person is saved, he is surely saved forever. But whether or not such a one will receive a reward cannot be decided today. A Christian's eternal salvation is settled already. But the future reward is a question that is still pending. It is decided by how one builds upon the foundation of the Lord Jesus. Our salvation does not depend on how we build. It depends only on how the Lord builds. If His work is perfect, we are surely saved. However, whether or not we will receive the reward or suffer loss depends on our own building work. If one builds with gold, silver, and precious stones, things with eternal value, upon the foundation of the Lord Jesus, he will surely receive a reward. But if he builds with wood, hay, and stubble, he will not receive a reward before God. He may have much before man, yet he will not have much before God. This shows us that it is possible for a man to lose his reward and to have his work burned away.

Let me repeat this. Thank God that the matter of our eternal salvation was decided over nineteen hundred years ago. When the Son of God was hung on the cross, the question of our salvation was settled. But whether or not we will receive the reward depends on how we behave. The truth of the gospel is very balanced. Salvation rests totally with the Lord Jesus. The giving of salvation depends absolutely on the Lord Jesus. However, whether or not one can obtain his reward depends on his own building work. Man must believe, and he also must work. This work is not his own work, but what the Holy Spirit

has worked out in him. Here we see that it is possible for us to lose our reward. It is also possible for us to be disapproved for the kingdom and to have our crown taken away. It seems that our position in the kingdom is never settled; it is subject to change and not assured.

HOLDING FAST THE BOAST OF HOPE

Hebrews 3:6 gives us a similar word. "But Christ was faithful as a Son over His house, whose house we are if indeed we hold fast the boldness and the boast of hope firm to the end." Here it seems uncertain as to whether or not we are His house. The apostle said that we are His house if we hold fast the boldness and the boast of hope firm to the end. What is this house and this hope? This blessed hope is nothing other than that of the Lord Jesus returning in glory to set up His kingdom on the earth. If a Christian has such a hope, knowing that the Lord Jesus will come again to set up His kingdom in glory, and knowing that all those faithful ones who do the will of God will reign with the Lord, if such a one holds fast to this, he will be His house. Today we are His house already. We are all living stones built into a spiritual house. This is what Peter has told us (1 Pet. 2:5). But how we will fare in the future kingdom depends on how we hold fast. This matter cannot be decided once and for all. There are many verses in the Bible concerning this, and all are very clear. The problem of eternity is totally settled, but the matter of position and reward in the kingdom depends on how we hold fast today.

BEING THE MORE DILIGENT TO MAKE THE CALLING AND SELECTION FIRM

We come to 2 Peter 1:10: "Therefore, brothers, be the more diligent to make your calling and selection firm, for doing these things you shall by no means ever stumble." If one does not know the truth about selection, he will not see that this refers to the hope of the kingdom being firm. Here it says that a person's selection and calling is not necessarily firm. Does this mean that a person will become unsaved again? No, it does not, because Romans 11 clearly tells us that the calling of God is irrevocable (11:29). Here it is not talking only about calling, but selection as well. Peter put calling and selection together. The Bible says many times that many are called, but few are chosen. Except for one place which I am not absolutely sure about, all the other places refer to many being saved and few obtaining a reward. Hence, the selection here refers to the position in the kingdom.

Peter said, "For doing these things you shall by no means ever stumble." These are the things mentioned in verses 5-7, such as faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, and love. If we do these things, we will never stumble. This is the same as saying that if we are the more diligent, our calling and selection will be firm. These are parallel expressions. The first of these parallel expressions says that we should be diligent to make our calling and selection firm. The second of these parallel expressions says that by doing these, we will never stumble.

Verse 11 says, "For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly and bountifully supplied to you." The Bible shows us that the kingdom of Christ is eternal. But some will enter it only in eternity future, whereas others will enter it during the millennium. The ruling of Christ begins with the millennial kingdom. Therefore, Revelation 11:15 says, "And the seventh angel trumpeted; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever." This verse shows us that the kingdom of Christ is linked to eternity future; it lasts forever and ever. However, it begins at the trumpeting of the seventh angel, that is, at the beginning of the tribulation. When Christ begins His reign, some will enter the kingdom. They will not only enter in, but will be richly and bountifully supplied an entrance. Therefore, to make our calling and selection firm is to be richly and bountifully supplied with an entrance into this eternal kingdom.

One can see that salvation has been settled, but that the entrance into the kingdom has not yet been settled. Once a Christian believes in the Lord Jesus, he can immediately praise the Lord because he knows that the question of eternal life or death is settled. However, after one believes, there are experiences ahead of him; he still has the kingdom before him and a future glory waiting for him. Some will obtain these things: the kingdom, the crown, the glory, and the reward; whereas others will not obtain them. Some will enter into the kingdom of Christ; others will not be able to enter in. Some will not only enter in, but will be richly and bountifully supplied an entrance into the kingdom of Christ. This does not mean that those who cannot enter the kingdom of Christ are not saved. But it does mean that their reward and glory are taken away. Hence, we need to run and strive. Our being able to reign with Jesus the Nazarene in the future depends on how we strive today.

ENTERING THE KINGDOM TO SHARE IN CHRIST'S GLORY

I wonder if you have ever thought of the kind of glory with which God will reward Christ in the millennium for what He suffered nineteen hundred years ago. A reward must match a suffering. If a man is brought to the lowest position, his reward must be the greatest. Suppose your house is burned or you have encountered a grave danger, and a servant in your house risked everything and nearly lost his life trying to save you. How would you reward him? Would you say, "I reward you with twenty cents"? No one would do this. The reward has to match the suffering. Christ has glorified God in such a way and has died such a death on the cross. How shall God reward Christ in the future? And how shall He glorify Christ?

The kingdom is the time when Christ and the Christians will receive glory together. The kingdom is the time when God will reward Christ. At that time, we will have a portion there as well. Whether or not we would be counted worthy to receive the Lord's glory depends absolutely on the results of our personal walk and work. There is no question of worthiness in the new heaven and new earth. But in the kingdom only those who are worthy will receive the glory. The Lord has suffered persecution, difficulties, and shame. If we suffer persecution, difficulties, and shame today in the same way, we will share a portion with Him in the coming kingdom.

CHAPTER SIX

HOW GOD DEALS WITH THE BELIEVERS' SINS— DISCIPLINE IN THE KINGDOM (1)

The Gospel of God, Ch. 22

SUFFERING GOD'S DISCIPLINE IN THE COMING AGE

The Bible tells us that the Lord disciplines us because He loves us (Heb. 12:6). When man loves, he overlooks. But when God loves, He disciplines. When man loves, he is loose. But when God loves, He is serious. If God had not loved us, He would not have sent His Son to die for our sins on the cross. Similarly, if God does not love us, He would not discipline us. God's disciplining love is the same as His saving love, which caused Him to send His Son to die for us on the cross. It was His love that caused His Son to die on our behalf. It is also His love that disciplines us. Every Christian knows that there is no contradiction between God's discipline and God's grace. On the contrary, God's discipline manifests God's grace. Although we have seen that a man cannot perish again after he is saved, we can never say that such a one will never suffer God's discipline. Now the question is whether God's discipline is confined to this age or whether it will be found in the coming age as well. This is a question that many people have never considered. We will take a look at this matter.

The Bible shows us that God's discipline is not restricted to this age only. It is also found in the next age. Many people have confined God's discipline to this age. But you cannot find the basis for such a teaching in the Bible. In terms of the experience of Christians, there is surely the possibility for discipline in the next age. Many have not been disciplined in this age. Although they are God's children, they have not lived a consecrated life in this age. They do whatever they want and do many things in disobedience throughout their lives and until their death. Although some have been zealous for the Lord and have worked and have even experienced many miracles and works of power outwardly, these things are all done according to their own will and contrary to God's purpose. Some even have obvious sins and specific

transgressions. But we do not see much discipline in these ones. On the contrary, they live peacefully and depart from this world in peace. However, in addition to losing the reward, these people will be disciplined in the kingdom. They will experience specific discipline from God. Hence, experientially speaking, if a Christian lives on earth today without checking his lust and instead loves the world and walks in his own ways, he will be disciplined in the coming age. We have ample evidence of this from the Bible.

THE PURPOSE OF DISCIPLINE BEING FOR THE CLEANSING

According to the Word of God, discipline is for cleansing. Man is defiled; therefore, he needs to be cleansed. In the Bible there is not only one kind of cleansing. The first cleansing is the cleansing of the blood, that is, the cleansing by the blood of the Lord Jesus. The Bible mentions the cleansing of the blood over three hundred times. Here we will mention only two verses. Hebrews 9:22 says, "And almost all things are purified by blood according to the law, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." This verse speaks of the purification by the blood. Hebrews 1:3 says, "Who, being the effulgence of His glory and the impress of His substance and upholding and bearing all things by the word of His power, having made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Here we can translate "having made cleansing of sins." In the Bible we see the cleansing of our sins by the blood of the Lord Jesus. After He cleansed our sins, He ascended to the heights and sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. This is the first kind of cleansing in the Bible.

However, although many people have received the cleansing of the blood of the Lord Jesus, they still have many filthy thoughts while living on earth. They are still very much defiled by the world and have many fleshly sins. Because there are these many other things, God uses other means to cleanse us. This is the way of cleansing by discipline and chastisement which we will now talk about.

In John 15:2 the Lord says, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes it away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it that it may bear more fruit." The pruning here is a cleansing. God cuts away the unnecessary, unimportant, and hindering elements that the branches may bear more fruit. This is God's discipline. Hence, the purpose of God's discipline is not for

destroying us but for perfecting us, so that we may become more worthy of God's glory, of God's holiness, and of the righteousness that is set before us.

Thus, there are two lines and two cleansings in God's Word. One is the cleansing by the blood of the Lord Jesus. The other is the cleansing by God which comes through our environment, our family, our personal health, or our job. If we indulge in what we should not indulge in or refuse to cut off what we should cut off, God's disciplining hand will be upon us in our environment.

THE CLEANSING IN THE COMING AGE

Is this cleansing discipline from God restricted to this age only, or is it found also in the coming age? From the Bible we know that death never changes anyone. Nowhere in the Bible are we shown a case of a man changed by death. We know that in the future we will be with God forever. In eternity we will be the same as the Lord; we will be holy, even as the Lord is holy. But can we say that today we are as holy as the Lord is? Can we say that we are worthy to be with the Lord for eternity? The blood of the Lord Jesus has cleansed us and that the record of our sins has been wiped away. This is a fact. But subjectively speaking, do we have Christ living in us experientially? Have we allowed the resurrected Christ to live out from us? Our walk today is far too different from what our walk must be in eternity; the two are too far apart. Today we come far short of the Lord's holiness, righteousness, and glory. Many Christians today are still full of sins and filth.

So then, we have a problem. If things are so bad today but will be so good in the future, if things are so imperfect today but will be so perfect in the future, when will the change take place? Somewhere along the way there must be a change. If you are not perfect today, but will be perfect in that day, when will such a change take place? In eternity, when we are with God and the Lamb in the New Jerusalem, we will be in the light as God is in the light. But when will we become such ones? The human concept is that when we die we will change. But the Bible never tells us that physical death will make a person holy. This was a doctrine that was preached five or six hundred years ago. But the Bible never says that death can change a person. If death could change a Christian, then death could also change an unsaved person. But death never changes anyone. The slothful servant is still slothful when he is resurrected. The foolish virgins are still foolish when they wake up. When they wake up, their

slothfulness and foolishness have not gone away. If a man is not changed in this age but will be different in the new heaven and new earth, and if death does not cause a person to change, then when does the change occur? The Bible shows us clearly that in the coming age there will be discipline, and this discipline will prune and cleanse us.

SOME SERVANTS OF GOD TO BE JUDGED IN THE COMING AGE

We need to look at a few verses concerning this future discipline. Luke 12:45-48 says, "But if that slave says in his heart, My master is delaying his coming, and begins to beat the male servants and the female servants and to eat and to drink and become drunk, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him asunder, and will appoint his portion with the unbelievers. And that slave who knew his master's will and did not prepare or do according to his will, will receive many lashes; but he who did not know, yet did things worthy of stripes, will receive few lashes. But to every one to whom much has been given, much will be required from him; and to whom much has been committed, they will ask of him all the more."

The first thing in these verses that we have to decide is whether or not the slave belongs to the Lord. Is he a Christian? Is he saved? Surely the slave is a saved one. How can I say this? First, in the New Testament God never considers those who do not belong to Him as His slaves. In going from the Old Testament to the New Testament age, first, man is a slave and then becomes a son. Thus, in the Old Testament there are many unsaved slaves. But in the New Testament the order is reversed. If a man is not God's son, he is not qualified to be God's slave. All slaves of God are sons in the New Testament. Therefore, the slave spoken of here is surely a saved one.

There is a second proof that the slave in Luke 12:45-48 is saved. The proof is in the previous verses. Verses 42-44 say, "And the Lord said, Who then is the faithful and prudent steward, whom the master will set over his service to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Truly I tell you that he will set him over all his possessions." Is the slave in these verses the same one as the slave in verses 45 and 46? Or are there two slaves? There is only one slave. The slave in verses 43 and 44 is the one in verse 45. The same person can be a

good slave as well as a bad slave. This slave can have two different minds. If he is faithful to the charge of the master of the house and would give to the household their portion of food at the proper time, the master will reward him well and will set him over all his possessions. But if the slave says in his heart, "The master is delaying his coming; I can act any way I want," and he begins to beat the male servants and the female servants, the master will come and judge his sins. This proves that a saved person can both be a good slave and a bad slave.

If a saved person has unfortunately become an evil slave, what will his end be? Verse 46 says, "The master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him asunder, and will appoint his portion with the unbelievers." Does this chastisement occur in this age or in the age to come? What does the day and hour which he does not know refer to? They must refer to the time when the Lord will come back. This is something in the future. The Lord says that a slave can be faithful or unfaithful and that an unfaithful slave will not only miss the reward, but will also be condemned and receive a definite punishment. Verses 47 and 48 are based on the words of verse 46. They tell us of the future of those who belong to the Lord and who work for the Lord. "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not prepare or do according to his will, will receive many lashes; but he who did not know, yet did things worthy of stripes, will receive few lashes. But to every one to whom much has been given, much will be required from him; and to whom much has been committed, they will ask of him all the more." These verses do not say that those who do not know will not receive any lashes; they only say that they will receive few lashes. There will still be the lashes. God does not let those who do not know get by, because His word is here. Those who know have to be responsible before God; those who do not know and who have done things worthy of lashes will still receive lashes, yet they will receive few lashes. Everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required from him; and to whom much has been committed, they will ask of him all the more. This is the principle of God's future chastisement. Luke 12:47-48 settles for us the question of future chastisement of Christians before God.

My friends, I am here preaching the gospel of grace. When a man is saved, he is saved forever. This is an immutable fact. However, after we are saved, if our conduct is unbecoming of Christians, we will be chastised in the future. I am only a preacher of the Word of God. I am responsible to speak only what

the Bible says. I am not responsible for what the Bible ought to say. Today some may ask why Christians need to be chastised in the future. I do not know. You can ask the Lord for yourself. I am only saying what the Bible has said. This is the Lord's word.

Let us read Colossians 3:23-25. "Whatever you do, work from the soul as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as recompense. You serve the Lord Christ. For he who does unrighteously will receive what he unrighteously did, and there is no respect of persons." The context of this passage makes it clear that these verses refer to Christians, not to unbelievers. The preceding verses speak of how a Christian should be a wife, a husband, a father or a mother, a son or a daughter, a master or a slave. Then Paul says that if a Christian does unrighteously, he will receive what he unrighteously did, because there is no respect of persons. This shows us clearly that a Christian's recompense comes at the judgment seat of Christ. If he does unrighteously today, he will receive a recompense according to what he has done unrighteously. If he acts righteously, he will receive his recompense according to his righteousness. Hence, we cannot say that Christians will not receive a certain amount of discipline and chastisement.

RECEIVING THE THINGS DONE THROUGH THE BODY

Now let us read 2 Corinthians 5:10. "For we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done through the body according to what he has practiced, whether good or bad." All Bible readers know that the judgment seat of Christ is in the air. Hence, those standing before the judgment seat are those who have been raptured. And who can be raptured? The Bible tells us that only Christians can be raptured. Those who are not Christians cannot be raptured. If a man is not saved and is not a child of God, he is not even qualified to be judged at this judgment. This is God's judgment within His own family. Here it tells us what we will be faced with at the future judgment seat of Christ. We will be recompensed for the things done through the body. In other words, we will be recompensed for the things done in the body, that is, for the things we have done while living on earth, whether good or bad. If you do good in the body, you will receive a good reward. If you do evil in the body, you will receive the

recompense of evil. The Word of God shows us clearly that at the judgment seat those who do well will receive a reward and that those who do not do well will lose their reward and will be recompensed according to their evil.

Because there is a future judgment, the apostle Paul prayed concerning mercy in the future. Second Timothy 1:18 says, "May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord in that day. And in how many things he served me in Ephesus, you know best." Paul expressed the wish that Onesiphorus would find mercy from the Lord in that day. If a Christian will at most lose his reward in the future when he stands before the judgment seat and will not be punished or disciplined, then this word is meaningless. Paul hoped that the Lord would be merciful to Onesiphorus at His judgment, because Onesiphorus had helped Paul so much and had propagated the gospel with him. If there were any wrongs that Onesiphorus had done, Paul hoped that the Lord would be merciful to him. Hence, we see that Christians need not only forgiveness, but also God's mercy at the time of judgment at the beginning of the millennium; otherwise, they will fall under God's chastisement.

In 2 Timothy 4 there is another verse which we should read. Verse 16 says, "At my first defense no one was with me to support me, but all abandoned me. May it not be counted against them." This is another prayer. While Paul was in Asia, the whole of Asia abandoned him. While he was before the king being judged, many Christians were fearful of death and hid off to the side. Yet even though they had abandoned him, Paul prayed that this sin would not be counted against them. Hence, we see that in the future God will still judge our sins. Paul prayed here that this sin would not be counted against them. There is enough light in the Bible to show us that if a saved person is not disciplined for his loose conduct in this age, or if he does not repent after discipline, he will not only lose his reward but will also be chastised in a definite way.

In Matthew 12 the Lord Jesus specifically mentions blaspheming the Holy Spirit. All sins can be forgiven. All the words spoken against the Son of Man can be forgiven. But the sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven. There will not be forgiveness in this age, and there will not be forgiveness in the next age (v. 32). In the Bible the coming age always refers to the kingdom. In the original language the word for age is *aion*, not *cosmos*. If the word were *cosmos*, it would refer to the organization of the world. But since it is *aion*, it refers to a time span. Hence, it is translated age. Today is the age of grace. The

next age is the age when the Lord will come to reign for a thousand years. When you read Matthew 12, you see that the forgiveness of sins is divided into two time periods. Some sins are forgiven in this age, and some sins are forgiven in the coming age. Some people, through discipline, are forgiven in this age. Some people may not have done well today, but they will be forgiven in the kingdom. Some people are forgiven when they are saved, but their subsequent sins will not be forgiven in the kingdom; they will be chastised severely instead. This is the biblical teaching concerning chastisement. Chastisement for the Christian in this age is clear enough. Some sinning Christians whose problems are not solved before God today will receive chastisement in the future.

THE KINGDOM BEING THE TIME OF THE FUTURE CHASTISEMENT

When exactly will the future chastisement be? It is clear that there will be chastisement in the future after the Lord comes back, but when after the Lord's return will it be? Let us consider three ages in the Bible. The present age can be called the age of grace. It can also be called the age of the gospel or the age of the church. The coming age can be called the age of the kingdom or the millennial age, because that age will only last a thousand years (Rev. 20:6). After that age, there is yet another age, which is an eternal age. It is the age of the new heaven and new earth.

The Bible presents to us these three ages. The age of the church is the age of grace because God's grace and love are manifested in it. In this age God saves the unrighteous ones and causes man to receive the grace of the Lord Jesus. Everything in this age is of grace. The coming age is the age of righteousness. The eternal age is also an age of grace. Today is an age of grace, and the new heaven and new earth is also an age of grace. But the kingdom is all righteousness. If you are not clear about these ages, your reading of the Bible, theology, and biblical understanding will be all wrong. Both the church age and the age of the new heaven and new earth are ages of grace. But the millennial age is a parenthetical age specially prepared by God for the reward of the faithful ones and the chastisement of the sinful ones. That is a special period.

Both the New Testament and the Old Testament tell us that in this period, God deals with man in righteousness (Psa. 72:2; 85:10-13; 96:13; 97:2; Isa.

11:5; 26:9; 33:5; 62:1; Jer. 33:15; Dan. 7:27). We can quote at least two hundred verses from the Old and New Testaments concerning the righteous judgment in the kingdom.

What is the difference between the kingdom and the new heaven and new earth? The Bible makes a clear distinction between the two. Let us consider Revelation 19:6-8. "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunders, saying, Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns." Please notice that here is the beginning of the kingdom. "Let us rejoice and exult, and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints." Here we read that fine linen is given to the bride. But though it is given, it is nevertheless of righteousness. The fine linen is the righteousness in the actions of the believers. In the original language, the righteousnesses mentioned here refer to righteousness in actions. The word has the sense of actions. Hence, it refers to our own righteous acts.

Now let us read 20:4-6. "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and of those who had not worshipped the beast nor his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no authority, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years." These verses tell us who will be the kings who reign with Christ a thousand years. The kingdom is not for everybody. The kingdom is only for the martyrs. It is only for those who reject Satan and Antichrist. Only these ones can reign for a thousand years. Hence, only the martyrs can reign; only those who reject Satan and Antichrist will be kings. This proves to us that the millennial kingdom is not given as a free gift, but is obtained through good works before God. Although in other passages we see other kinds of people reigning, in Revelation we see that there must be specific righteousness before there can be participation in the marriage feast of the Lamb. Only those who are the martyrs can be the kings. Without having

the particular righteousness and without being martyred, no one can have a part in the kingship. This is the millennium.

THE AGE OF THE NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH

Let us now consider Revelation 21. Verses 1 through 7 say, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice out of the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will tabernacle with them, and they will be His peoples, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death will be no more, nor will there be sorrow or crying or pain anymore; for the former things have passed away. And He who sits on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said, Write, for these words are faithful and true. And He said to me, They have come to pass. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give to him who thirsts from the spring of the water of life freely. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be God to him, and he will be a son to Me."

The description of the kingdom in Revelation 19 and 20 is entirely different from the description of the new heaven and new earth in chapter twenty-one. When describing the kingdom, the Bible speaks about what man has done. But when it describes the new heaven and new earth, there is no more mention of what man has done. From chapter twenty-one on, the Bible simply speaks of what God has done. God said that He has made all things new. God said that the first heaven and the first earth have passed away and that the sea is no more. All these are done by God. The tabernacle of God will be with men. He shall tabernacle with men. We are His people; God Himself will dwell with us and will be our God. He will wipe away all our tears, so that we will have no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain, for all the former things will have passed away, and all things will have been made new. God said all these words are faithful. He said that He is the Alpha and the Omega. Man has no place here at all. These verses go on and on, telling us what God has done. There is no condition or demand. If you wish to know how to obtain such a wonderful new heaven and new earth, just listen to His word: "And He said to me, They have come to pass. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the

End" (v. 6a). In other words, everything is done by God. "I will give to him who thirsts from the spring of the water of life freely" (v. 6b). After all these things have been said, everything is summed up in one sentence: "I will give to him who thirsts from the spring of the water of life freely." As long as there is the thirst, as long as there is the need, God will give from the spring of the water of life freely. This is grace. Grace is to give from the spring of the water of life freely. The new heaven and the new earth is of grace. God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. The new heaven and the new earth are absolutely from Him.

The next verse says, "He who overcomes will inherit these things." Who are these overcomers to whom John refers? The overcomers here are different from the overcomers in the epistles to the seven churches at the beginning of Revelation. Here, by the use of the term overcomers, a distinction is being made between the worldly people and the Christians. The distinction here is not between one kind of Christian and another kind of Christian. The overcoming in the first three chapters of Revelation is the overcoming by some Christians among other Christians. But the overcoming in chapter twenty-one is the overcoming by the Christians among the worldly people. How can we drink of the water of life? It is by faith. Those who believe can drink. In order to drink of the water of life freely, we have to believe. It is faith that enables us to overcome the world. Compared to the worldly people, every Christian is an overcomer. But compared to other Christians, many Christians are failing ones. Compared to those in the world, we are all overcomers because we have a faith before God that the worldly people do not have. Those who overcome and those who drink of the water of life will inherit these things, and God will be God to them, and they will be sons to God.

Chapter twenty-two also mentions the new heaven and new earth. Verses 1 through 5 say, "And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the middle of its street. And on this side and on that side of the river was the tree of life, producing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. And there will no longer be a curse. And the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His slaves will serve Him; and they will see His face, and His name will be on their forehead. And night will be no more; and they have no need of the light of a lamp and of the light of the sun, for the Lord God will shine upon them; and they will reign forever and ever." The main thing in the New Jerusalem is the river of water

of life. This river proceeds from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Because it is the river of life, there is the tree of life, with the fruit of life growing. In Revelation 22, after everything has been said, one thing is prominent, the river of life. This river of the water of life flows throughout the city. How can we enjoy the river of the water of life? At the end of Revelation, after the kingdom is over and after the church is over, verse 17 says, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him who hears say, Come! And let him who is thirsty come; let him who wills take the water of life freely." In other words, everyone is welcomed into the new heaven and new earth. In the new heaven and new earth there is a throne, and beneath the throne there is a river. The river comes forth from God and has the throne as its source. The throne is the center of the new heaven and new earth.

Furthermore, the word Lamb is never mentioned related to the kingdom. But in the new heaven and new earth, the Lamb is indeed mentioned. The throne is of God and of the Lamb (22:1); the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of the city (21:22); and the Lamb is the lamp of the city (21:23). That the Lamb is mentioned related to the new heaven and new earth indicates that this will be an age of grace. When we come to the end of Revelation, the church, the kingdom, and the tribulation are no longer mentioned. Instead, we find only that all who are thirsty can come and take of the water of life freely. This means that you are invited to the new heaven and new earth. Everything is free. And that it is free means that it is of grace. Therefore, the new heaven and new earth are entirely different from the kingdom. The new heaven and new earth are freely given to us. According to the teaching of Revelation, we can say that in the new heaven and new earth God deals with man in grace. In the kingdom, however, He deals with the Christians in righteousness. Therefore, we have to admit that it is in the kingdom that God chastises us. In the new heaven and new earth everything is received freely.

In this we see the relationship between today and the future. If we love the world today, walk by the flesh, and live a loose life, in the age to come we will be chastised by God. But if we love the Lord today and forsake everything for the Lord's sake, we will receive God's grace and His reward. This is the biblical teaching concerning these three ages. I am not responsible for what I am speaking here. I am only speaking God's Word. God's Word says that in the coming age there will be these things. God Himself is responsible for all of His own words. I only know that the Son of God has said these words. It is

true that a man can enjoy eternal life today. But the kingdom is the time when God will deal with His children. If you live a loose life today, you will be disciplined in the future. Hence, we have eternal security, but we also have temporary danger. We have the security of the new heaven and new earth. But we also have the peril of the kingdom. In the kingdom we may suffer severe punishment and chastisement. Whereas salvation is settled by the work of the Lord Jesus, reward is judged by one's work. Salvation comes by the work of the Lord Jesus. Reward comes by our own work. We are rewarded because we obey the will of God and walk not according to our own will. May we treasure the grace that we have received, and may we receive the warning from God and pursue after the reward of the kingdom.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HOW GOD DEALS WITH THE BELIEVERS' SINS— DISCIPLINE IN THE KINGDOM (2)

The Gospel of God, Ch. 23

RECEIVING LIFE IN THE KINGDOM IN THE COMING AGE

When we preach the gospel, we tell others that we receive eternal life through believing in Jesus Christ. If a person believes in Him, he will have eternal life. Everyone who understands the Word of God knows that in the church age, as soon as a man believes, he has eternal life. This is our message. But the question now is this: When is this eternal life manifested, revealed, and enjoyed? Today our minds and spirits are constantly being harassed by death. Satan is still very strong. So when will the eternal life be fully manifested? Will it be in the new heaven and new earth? Or will it be in the kingdom? Let us read John 5:24-29. "Truly, truly, I say to you, He who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. Truly, truly, I say to you, An hour is coming, and it is now, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, so He gave to the Son to also have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming in which all in the tombs will hear His voice and will come forth: those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have practiced evil, to the resurrection of judgment." Verse 24 says that as soon as a person believes, he has eternal life and will not come into judgment. He who hears the word of the Lord and believes the Father who sent the Lord has eternal life. But verse 29 says that those who have done good will come forth to the resurrection of life, while those that have practiced evil will come forth to the resurrection of judgment. The word life (Gk. *zoe*) in verse 29 is the same word as in verse 24. Those that have done good will come forth to the resurrection of *zoe*, and those that have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment. Verse 24 says clearly that we have eternal life already. But verse 29

says that some will not have eternal life until after the resurrection. Can you see the difference here?

Verse 25 is on the church age. It says that the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God. We all are these dead people. We have heard the voice of the Son of God, and as a result, we live. Verses 28-29 say, "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming in which all in the tombs will hear His voice and will come forth." Verse 25 says that an hour is coming and it is now. Verse 28, however, omits the phrase "and it is now," saying only that an hour is coming. Hence, it refers to the future, not to the present. Also, the Lord Jesus says that in the future all the ones from the tombs will come forth from the tombs. In verse 25, He refers to "the dead." In verse 28 He refers to the dead who are in the tombs. Verse 25 talks about the dead, referring to those dead in trespasses and sins. When the Lord speaks of those dead in the tombs, He is not referring to the death of the soul in sin; rather, He is referring to those dead in the body. All those who are dead in their body, that is, those who are in the tombs, will hear the voice of the Son of God for the second time. Those who have done good will go into the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil will go into the resurrection of judgment. This second time is the time when all those in the tombs will rise up.

Let us read Mark 10:30. "But that he shall receive a hundred times as much now at this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and fields, with persecutions, and in the coming age, eternal life." Here the Lord Jesus mentions eternal life again. We have to note what kind of eternal life this is. The eternal life in Mark 10:30 is not the eternal life of the church age spoken of in the Gospel of John or the eternal life in the new heaven and new earth. Please note that this eternal life is in the coming age. The phrase the coming age in the original language means the next age or the subsequent age. Today we are in the age of grace. The next age is the age of the kingdom, that is, the age of the millennium. Here, the Lord says that one can receive eternal life in the coming age. This does not refer to the eternal life we receive when we believe in the Lord.

Before the Lord spoke this word, a man came to Jesus asking what he should do to inherit eternal life. This was a question concerning works. Hence, the Lord Jesus told him of an eternal life that is gained by works. He told the young man that he must keep the law and sell all he had before he could inherit this eternal life. In the Gospel of John, the Lord Jesus shows us clearly

that eternal life comes by grace and not by works. So why does He say here that we have to keep the law and sell all that we have, before we can inherit eternal life? It is because the eternal life described here in Mark 10 is different from the eternal life described in John. The eternal life in Mark 10 is received through works. The eternal life in John is received through faith.

After the young man left, the Lord Jesus looked around Him and said to the disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" (v. 23). In saying this, the Lord put eternal life and the kingdom together. After the Lord Jesus said this, the disciples wondered what His word meant. The Lord said, "Children, how difficult it is for those who trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (vv. 24-25). The disciples were astounded and asked who then could be saved. The Lord said that "with men it is impossible, but not with God, for all things are possible with God" (v. 27). Peter then asked what he would get for having left all to follow Him, and the Lord told them of the things that are to come. "Jesus said, Truly I say to you, There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now at this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and fields, with persecutions, and in the coming age, eternal life" (vv. 29-30). They will receive eternal life in the kingdom.

Hence, the eternal life spoken of here is the eternal life in the kingdom. The eternal life in the kingdom is obtained through works. It is acquired through consecration, through suffering and bearing reproach for the Lord. For the Christian, the question of eternal life in this age is solved. The question of eternal life in eternity is also solved. But whether or not he will have eternal life in the kingdom depends on whether he loves the Lord, forsakes everything for the sake of the gospel, denies himself in everything, and rejects the world. It depends on whether or not he is living for money, for material gain, for his family, or for the worldly people. If he loves the Lord and forsakes all things for the sake of the gospel, the Lord promised that he will not lose these things even in this age, but on the contrary, he will gain a hundred times as much. If one gives up a little for the Lord today, he will reap a hundredfold return in the heavenly bank. Who can get such a high interest rate? A deposit of one dollar will yield a hundred dollars. You cannot find such a bank in the world. In addition, there is eternal life in the coming age.

In many places in Matthew, the phrase "eternal life" is used interchangeably with the word "kingdom." In these places the living ones are the ones who enter into the kingdom. For example, Matthew 7:14 says that the gate is narrow and the way is constricted that leads to life, and there are few that find it. Today many preach the gospel using this passage, and exhort people to enter the narrow gate and take the constricted way. But if one were saved through entering the narrow gate and taking the constricted way, salvation would not be of grace, but of works. Salvation would then become a reward for entering the narrow gate and taking the constricted way. The eternal life revealed in the book of Matthew does not refer to the eternal life of today; rather, it refers to the life in the millennial kingdom. In order to reign with Christ in the kingdom, a person must enter the narrow gate and take the constricted way. If one does not obey God's commandments and God's will, he will lose his eternal life. However, this does not mean that he will perish. But he will lose the eternal life in the kingdom.

If this problem is solved, then the problem of the ages in the Bible will be clearly resolved. In the age of the church, everything is by grace. At the end of the church age, God will establish His kingdom through His Son. In the kingdom only the faithful servants will reign with Christ by being resurrected from among the dead. The Bible shows us this very clearly.

PUNISHMENT IN THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM

The Bible says that many children of God will have specific punishment. Many Christians have improper walks. They do not live in a godly way. They love the world and walk according to their will. They worship God according to man's way. They have not obeyed God's Word in taking care of God's work, but have instead done what they themselves like to do. They try to please men. They seek man's glory rather than God's glory and are not willing to stand in the same place of shame that the Lord stood in. They commit many mistakes and many sins. They have not been disciplined by God in this age. After they die and are resurrected on that day, can they reign with the Lord? The Bible says that we have to suffer and bear reproach with Him first before we can reign and be glorified with Him (2 Tim. 2:12). Not only have many believers never suffered, they have many sins. They love the world and walk according to the flesh. When they leave the world, they will still have much unrighteousness and many sins that were not dealt with. The Bible shows us that such believers will have specific and definite chastisement.

Matthew 18:23-35 speaks of a slave being forgiven of his debts by the master. Another slave owed this first one a debt. But the slave who was forgiven of his debt would not forgive his fellow slave. The first slave definitely represents a saved person, because he pleaded for the master's forgiveness, and the master, who was moved with compassion, released him and forgave his debt. We are all helpless persons coming to the Lord to seek grace. The Lord has forgiven our debt and has let us go. If this one represents a Christian, then whatever this one faces represents what we will face. The way the master deals with this slave will be the way the Lord deals with us.

Verses 28-30 say, "But that slave went out." He went out because he was now a free man. "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii, and he took hold of him and began to choke him, saying, Repay me what you owe. Then his fellow slave fell down and begged him, saying, Be patient with me and I will repay you. But he would not; instead, he went away and threw him into prison until he would repay what was owed." This passage is about one Christian not forgiving the sin of another. You are a forgiven person. But you are not willing to be forgiving. The Lord has forgiven you of ten thousand talents. Now your brother owes you a mere one hundred denarii, but you say in your heart that he must repay. He must repay you even the last cent. What will the result be then? Verses 31-33 continue, "Then his fellow slaves, seeing what had taken place, were greatly grieved and came and explained fully to their master all that had taken place. Then his master called him to him and said to him, Evil slave, all that debt I forgave you, because you begged me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave even as I had mercy on you?" That this person represents a saved one is again proved by the fact that the Lord had mercy on him. The Lord said, Should you not have mercy on your fellow slave as I have had mercy on you? Should you not forgive your fellow slave as I have forgiven you? This proves that this one represents one who has received God's mercy and forgiveness. He must be one that has life already. But he will not forgive other Christians. "And his master became angry and delivered him to the torturers until he would repay all that was owed" (v. 34). This one, who had been shown mercy and who had been forgiven, was put back into the hand of the torturers until he repaid all that was owed to the Lord. Whether he could repay all that he owed is another matter. The fact is, he would have to suffer. This shows us that if a Christian will not forgive another, on that day the Lord will deal with him in the same way that he has dealt with others. If you would

not forgive your brother, the Lord will deal with you according to your unforgiving attitude.

MERCY AND JUDGMENT

We know that our God is a righteous God. In the future, at the judgment seat, He will judge us according to righteousness. However, though there is righteousness at the judgment seat, there is mercy also. If you show mercy to others, the Lord will be merciful to you. If you are unforgiving toward others, and if you are so righteous and unyielding toward others' failures and weaknesses, the Lord will deal with you in righteousness in that day. If you are merciful to others, the Lord will show mercy to you. Luke 6:37 says that if you do not pass sentence on others, sentence will not be passed on you; if you will not judge others, you will not be judged, and if you forgive others, you will be forgiven. Some Christians are too mean today. When they criticize others they scrutinize every mistake others make. When they do their best to criticize and judge others, they have to be careful. In the future God will deal with them in the same way they deal with others. With what measure you measure to others, it will be measured to you. If you give to others good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, the Lord will give to you in the same way. He who forgives will be forgiven, and to him who shows mercy, mercy will be shown.

Hence, the Bible says that mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:13). There is one thing which even judgment cannot triumph over—a person showing mercy to others throughout his entire life. We cannot be without mistakes. But if we show mercy to others today, God will be unable to deal with us. Many Christians are not able to lose in their dealings with others. They argue all the time with others. They give little ground to others and grant themselves all the ground. But we should rather show mercy to others today. When the time of judgment comes, there will be some whom even the Lord of judgment will not be able to hold anything against. This does not mean that man can purposely change God's commandment. It simply means that if you are merciful to others while you are living on earth, God will be merciful to you. Your mercy today will triumph over your judgment tomorrow. The way you judge others will be the way that you will be judged. This grace is righteous. The way you treat others will be the way that the Lord will treat you. The way you treat others will fashion for you a vessel, with which God will measure out judgment to you. James 2:13 says, "For the judgment is without

mercy to him who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment." Those who show no mercy to others will be judged without mercy. But those who show mercy to others will triumph over judgment. Your mercy will surpass the judgment. This is an amazing fact.

Matthew 18 shows us clearly that God's children can still fall into the hand of the torturers. If they do, they will have to remain there until they pay off all their debts. Of course, there is no way to pay off all the debts. But at least one day they will learn to be merciful and to forgive others in the same way that the Lord showed mercy to them and forgave them. By then they will still have to show mercy to others. Hence, in verse 35 the Lord says, "So also will My heavenly Father do to you if each of you does not forgive his brother from your hearts." This portion of the Word is not spoken to unbelievers, but to Christians. It shows the relationship between the heavenly Father and His children and the relationship between the brothers.

Prior to this portion of the Word, Peter asked the Lord, "How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" (Matt. 18:21). The Lord told him that he should forgive up to seventy times seven. Then the Lord spoke the word about the two slaves. Peter will face chastisement if he does not forgive his brother. The word of the Lord shows Peter that there is the possibility that he could be thrown to the torturers. There is the possibility that he could be put into prison. If there is the possibility for Peter to be thrown to the torturers and cast into prison, there is the possibility for us to be treated the same way also. That is why the Lord used the plural "you" in verse 35. His word is not for Peter only; it is for everyone. If we do not forgive each one of our brothers from our heart, the heavenly Father will do the same to us. Please remember that our eternal salvation in the new heaven and new earth is unshakable. Thank the Lord that this is by grace. But if our problems today are not dealt with specifically, we will still suffer specific punishment in the future kingdom.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HOW GOD DEALS WITH THE BELIEVERS' SINS— THE GEHENNA OF FIRE IN THE KINGDOM

The Gospel of God, Ch. 24

There are many places in the Bible that mention God's punishment for the defeated Christians in the millennial kingdom. We will take a look at these places now. Later, we will draw a conclusion concerning them.

THE ENTRANCE INTO AND THE POSITION IN THE KINGDOM

Let us first consider Matthew 18:1-3. "In that hour the disciples came to Jesus, saying, Who then is greatest in the kingdom of the heavens? And He called a little child to Him and stood him in their midst and said, Truly I say to you, Unless you turn and become like little children, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens." Here the disciples asked a question concerning the kingdom of the heavens. It is a question concerning greatness in the kingdom. It is not a question concerning salvation and perdition, but a question concerning being great or small, high or low, in the kingdom. The Lord Jesus showed us that unless we turn and become like little children, we cannot enter into the kingdom of the heavens. Following this, verse 4 says, "He therefore who will humble himself like this little child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of the heavens." Verse 3 gives us the condition for entering the kingdom, while verse 4 gives us the way to be great in the kingdom. Verse 3 says that we must turn and become like children before we can enter the kingdom, and verse 4 says that if we continue to be children and humble ourselves, we will be the greatest in the kingdom of the heavens. This shows us that in the kingdom we should continue in the same way that we begin. The direction we face when we enter the kingdom should be the same direction we face when we continue in it. To enter into the kingdom of the heavens, we must turn and become like little children; and to be great in the kingdom of the heavens, we must continue to be humble like children. Here the Lord continues to bring up the matter of being like children.

Following this, the Lord said, "And whoever receives one such little child because of My name, receives Me" (v. 5). Whoever receives someone like this child because of Christ's name, that is, someone who turns to become like a child and who continues to be humble like a child, receives Christ. "And whoever stumbles one of these little ones who believe in Me, it is more profitable for him that a great millstone be hung around his neck and he be drowned in the open sea" (v. 6). This word indicates that stumbling others is a bigger problem than suffering and being killed in an ignoble way. Suppose someone kills you and casts your body into the sea. You are not even buried properly. Indeed this would be an unfortunate tragedy. But if you stumble others, your fate will be worse than this. Verse 7 says, "Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! For it is necessary for stumbling blocks to come, but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes."

THE GEHENNA OF FIRE IN THE KINGDOM

Verses 1 through 7 are the general words of the Lord. We will just mention them briefly. We want to pay more attention to the words beginning in verse 8. The Lord Jesus expanded on this matter to point out that it is not only wrong to stumble others, but it is a serious and grave matter even to stumble yourself. Verse 8 says, "If your hand or your foot stumbles you, cut it off and cast it from you." Who does "you" refer to here? In verses 3 through 7, "you" refers to the disciples who asked the question in verse 1. After the Lord Jesus answered them, He told them to be watchful and not to stumble others. The Lord's words in verse 8 are directed at the same people. If a hand or a foot stumbles you, it is better to cut it off and cast it away. Of course, this need not be taken literally. If your hands steal and your feet walk in improper paths, that is, if there is sin and lust in you, you must deal with them. "It is better for you to enter into life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire" (v. 8).

The Lord shows us that if Christians tolerate sin, they will suffer either the casting into the eternal fire with both hands and both feet, or the entering into life with one hand or one foot. This shows us clearly that there are those who deal with their sins and lusts in this age and who will enter into the kingdom with one hand or one foot. There are also those who will leave their lusts unchecked and will be cast into the eternal fire. The fire is an eternal fire, but it does not say that they will remain in the eternal fire forever. What the Lord Jesus did not say is as significant as what He did say. If a person has become a

Christian but his hands or feet sin all the time, he will suffer the punishment of the eternal fire in the kingdom of the heavens. He will not suffer this punishment eternally, but will suffer it only in the age of the kingdom.

What does it mean to cut off a hand or a foot? When a man cuts off his hand or foot, he can still sin. If he does not have a foot, he can travel by car. If one of his hands is cut off, he can still sin with the other hand. It is not necessarily the Lord's intention that we cut off a hand or foot, for even if we do cut off a hand, we still cannot remove our lust. Therefore, this word must not refer to the outward body, but to the inward lust. What we have to cut off is that which drives us to sin.

Another thing that we have to realize is that the person spoken of here must be a Christian, for only a Christian is clean in his body as a whole and can thus enter into life after dealing with his lust in a single member of his body. It would not be enough for the unbelievers to cut off a hand or a foot. Even if they were to cut off both hands and both feet, they would still have to go to hell. In order to enter the kingdom of the heavens, it is better for a Christian to have an incomplete body than to go into eternal fire because of incomplete dealing.

Following this, verse 9 says, "And if your eye stumbles you, pluck it out and cast it from you; it is better for you to enter into life with one eye than to have two eyes and be cast into the Gehenna of fire." This shows us that if a saved person does not deal with his lust, he will not be able to enter into life, but will go into eternal fire. The eternal fire here is the Gehenna of fire. The Bible shows us that a Christian has the possibility of suffering the Gehenna of fire. Although he can suffer the Gehenna of fire, he cannot suffer it forever. He can only suffer it during the age of the kingdom.

Matthew 18 is not the only portion of Scripture that says this. Other portions of the Bible also contain the same teaching. For example, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5—7 contains clear words of the same kind. Matthew 5:21-22 says, "You have heard that it was said to the ancients, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders shall be liable to the judgment.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, Raca, shall be liable to the judgment of the Sanhedrin; and whoever says, Moreh, shall be liable to the Gehenna of fire." At the beginning of chapter five, we read that the Lord Jesus

saw the multitude. But He did not teach the multitude; rather, He taught the disciples (v. 1). The Sermon on the Mount is for the disciples. Therefore, the one who reviles others in verse 22 is a brother. He calls another brother Raca, that is, good-for-nothing, or Moreh, that is, a fool. When he calls his brother this way, he shall be liable to the Gehenna of fire. This does not refer to an unsaved person, for an unsaved person will go to hell even if he does not call anyone Moreh. Every time the Bible talks about works, it refers to one who belongs to God. If such a one does not belong to God, there is no need to mention such things. This is a saved person, a brother, but because he has reviled his brother, he is liable to the Gehenna of fire.

Verse 23 says, "Therefore if you are offering your gift at the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you." Many times others hold things against us on purpose, and there is nothing that we can do about it; but if others complain because of our reviling, we have to be careful when we offer up our gift at the altar. If you think poorly of a brother and have spoken something against him, you have to go to him and deal with the matter. "Leave your gift there before the altar, and first go and be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (v. 24). The important thing is to be reconciled to your brother. Verse 25 says, "Be well disposed quickly toward your opponent at law, while you are with him on the way." Your brother is the plaintiff, and you are the defendant. Now he is bringing you to court: "Lest the opponent deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison." Such a thing will happen in the kingdom. The kingdom is very strict.

Tonight I will speak a few frank and serious words. No two brothers or two sisters who are at odds with each other can appear in the kingdom together. In the coming kingdom, there will only be love and mercy; only those who love and show mercy to one another can be in the kingdom of the heavens. If I am involved in an argument with a brother, and if the matter is not dealt with in this age, then in the future, either both of us will be barred from the kingdom, or only one of us will get in. It cannot be that both of us will enter in. It is not possible for us to have a problem with each other and yet reign at the same time in the millennium in the future. In the kingdom all the believers are in one accord. There are absolutely no barriers between any two persons. If while we are on earth today, we have some friction with any brother or sister, or if we cause a hindrance to any brother or sister, we have to be careful. Either we will go in and the other will be excluded, or the other will go in and

we will be excluded, or both will be excluded. The Lord says that while you are with him on the way you have to be reconciled to him. That means that while you and he are alive and before the Lord Jesus comes back, you have to be reconciled to him. The Lord Jesus will not tolerate two enemies complaining about each other in the kingdom. Today we may harbor complaints about others very easily; but these complaints will either keep us outside, keep others outside, or keep both us and others outside the kingdom. It seems that the church today is very free, but it will not be like this in that day. "While you are with him on the way," says the Lord. If you die, or if he dies, or if the Lord Jesus returns, the way is ended. Hence, you have to settle the matter quickly before the Lord comes back and while both he and you are on the way. "Lest the opponent deliver you to the judge." The judge is the Lord Jesus. "And the judge to the officer." The officer is the angel. "And you be thrown into prison." This shows us clearly that a brother who has offended another brother will suffer very severe punishment.

If you study this passage carefully, you will see that the prison here is the Gehenna of fire in verse 22, because verse 23 begins with "therefore." The words from verse 23 on are an explanation of the words in verse 22. Verse 22 says that anyone who calls his brother Moreh will be liable to the Gehenna of fire. Verses 23-25 follow by saying that those who are not reconciled to their brothers will be put into prison. Hence, the prison in verse 25 is very clearly the Gehenna of fire in verse 22. We are clear that there is no possibility for a Christian to perish eternally, but if a Christian has any unrepented of and unconfessed sins, which are not forgiven, he will suffer the Gehenna of fire. Notice the severity of the words of the Lord in verse 26: "Truly I say to you, You shall by no means come out from there until you pay the last quadrans." There is the possibility to come out if one has paid off everything. In the coming age, there is still the possibility of forgiveness, but one cannot come out until he pays the last quadrans and clears up everything with his brother.

Verses 27 through 30 form another section. This section is similar to the preceding one. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman in order to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." The commandment in the Old Testament says that we should not commit adultery, but the commandment of the New Testament says that we cannot even have adulterous thoughts. The word woman in the original language refers to another man's wife. If the woman is not another man's wife, there would be

no possibility for adultery, because adultery is unfaithfulness in marriage. If this is not another man's wife, this cannot be considered adultery; it is fornication. The Bible judges fornication, but not as much as it judges adultery. Here it is saying that an adulterous thought is produced towards another's wife.

Second, the scope of the word in the original language for look here is not as broad as that of our word look. The word look brings too many under the category of this sin. In the original language it does not imply a casual looking but an intentional looking. Looking could simply be glancing at something accidentally on the street. Watch may be a better word because watching is an intentional looking. Furthermore, in the original language the watching here is done with a specific purpose. We could translate, "every one who watches a woman with the purpose of lusting after her." What the Lord condemns are not the sudden thoughts that enter your mind. What He is dealing with is the further watching for the purpose of lusting, after a sudden thought comes in. In other words, our sins do not lie in Satan's inciting of the flesh by giving us filthy thoughts. Our sins lie in the further watching after Satan has given us a sudden thought. This is adultery. Sudden thoughts are from Satan. Watching is from you. Sudden thoughts are temptations. Your watching is your accepting of the temptations. We must know how to differentiate between these two things.

Verse 29 says, "So if your right eye stumbles you, pluck it out and cast it from you." If your right eye causes you to watch, pluck it out and throw it away. "For it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna." If the lust is not removed, if the sin is not dealt with, a person will be "cast into Gehenna." Then verse 30 says, "And if your right hand stumbles you, cut it off and cast it from you, for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to pass away into Gehenna." These are words that the Lord Jesus spoke to the disciples. Christ told those who belonged to Him and who desired that their righteousness would excel that of the Pharisees and the scribes (v. 20) that they have to deal with their sins. If they allow sin to develop in them, though they will not eternally perish, there is the possibility that they will "pass away into Gehenna." This is what the Lord shows us in the book of Matthew.

FEARING HIM WHO HAS AUTHORITY TO CAST INTO GEHENNA

Now let us look at what other places in the Bible say concerning this matter. Luke 12:1 says, "Meanwhile, when the myriads of the crowd were gathered together so that they trampled on one another, He began to say to His disciples first." He did not speak to everyone, but to the disciples first. "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." The Lord's word proves that the disciples are not the hypocrites; they are the Lord's people. Then in verses 4 and 5 the Lord said, "My friends, Do not fear those who kill the body and afterward have nothing more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: fear Him who, after killing, has authority to cast into Gehenna." The Word of God is clear enough. It tells us, not once, but many times, that it is possible for a Christian to be "cast into Gehenna." It says this clearly here. The Lord told the disciples not to fear those who kill the body but afterward can do nothing more. They should not fear what some can do to their body, as long as this is all they can do. But they should fear the One who can cast them into Gehenna.

The verses following also prove that the ones spoken of here are the disciples, that is, the believers. Verses 6 and 7 say, "Are not five sparrows sold for two assaria? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But even the hairs of your head have all been numbered. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows." Only Christians are sparrows. The unsaved ones are not sparrows; they are crows. In Matthew the lilies in the field refer to the Christians and so do the sparrows. The sparrows neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns (Matt. 6:26). This refers to Christians and not to unbelievers. Here we are told clearly that it is possible for God's "sparrows" to be "cast into Gehenna." Note also that it says the hairs of these ones have all been numbered. God would not exercise that much care on unbelievers. Therefore, what is meant here is that those belonging to the Lord need not fear what others do to their bodies. The One they must fear is God, for God has the authority to cast them "into Gehenna." We have to fear God who has the authority to deal with our souls. We have no fear of those who can only kill our bodies.

The next two verses, verses 8 and 9, are very precious. "Moreover, I tell you, Everyone who confesses in Me before men, the Son of Man will also confess in

him before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God." Christians can be divided into two classes: those who confess His name and those who do not. Some confess His name while others do not. Some are prepared to be persecuted while others are not. Some will only be Christians secretly. They desire man's glory. Others confess the Lord openly and are ready to be martyrs. Hence, you can see whom the Lord is talking about in these verses in Luke 12. We should not fear any suffering that comes through confessing His name. If we do not confess His name, our sin is more serious than all other sins. Consequently, He will not confess our names before the angels of God. When you take verses 1 through 9 together as a whole, you see that the "casting into Gehenna" in verse 5 is equivalent to the Lord not confessing their name before the angels in verse 9. The confessing before the angels can be illustrated by an example. Suppose a teenager has done something wrong and ends up in jail. His parents or other family members can bail him out of his trouble and let him slide by. But suppose that the child is really bad, and his parents feel that he needs some suffering. As a result, his parents will not bail him out. The same is true with the believers. Unless the Lord confesses our names, we will fall into punishment.

There is a wonderful word in Revelation 3:5. "He who overcomes will be clothed thus, in white garments, and I shall by no means erase his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels." At the beginning of the kingdom, before the judgment seat, the angels of God will take the Christians up to God. The book of life will be there. In the book of life the names of all the Christians are recorded. There will be many angels and many Christians. The Lord Jesus will also be there. One or more angels will then read off the names from the book of life, and the Lord Jesus will confess some of the names. Those whose names He confesses will then enter the kingdom. When the names of the others are read, the Lord will not say anything. In other words, He will not confess their names. The angels will then put a mark against these names. Hence, the overcomers' names are clean in the book of life, while the defeated ones' names are marked. As for the unsaved ones, their names do not appear in the book of life at all. One group does not have their names in the book. Another group has their names there, but their names are marked. And still a third group, by the time of the kingdom, has their names preserved in the same way as they were first written in the book.

If your name is marked at the judgment seat, that does not mean that you are through and are no longer saved. Revelation 20:15 says, "And if anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire." This shows us that those whose names are not recorded in the book of life will be eternally in the lake of fire. Those whose names do not appear in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire. This is at the beginning of the new heaven and new earth. We cannot say that the ones in Revelation 3 do not have their names written in the book of life. We can only say that their names have been marked. By then they will not be thrown into the lake of fire because their names are already in the book of life. Eternal salvation is most secure; it can never be shaken. But on the other hand, there is a danger. If we tolerate sin, if we do not forgive others, if we commit adultery, if we revile the brothers, if we are afraid to suffer, to be ashamed, to be persecuted, and to confess the Lord, we have to be careful, for God will cast us "into Gehenna" so that we may be punished temporarily.

THE HURT OF THE SECOND DEATH

There are similar passages in the Bible that speak of these matters. Revelation 2:11 tells us that those who overcome will not be hurt by the second death, and Revelation 20:6 says that one group of people will not die again and that the second death will not have authority over them. The second death is the lake of fire at the end of Revelation 20. This means that the defeated ones will suffer the hurt of the second death. Although they will not suffer the second death itself, they will suffer the hurt of the second death. Once a person is saved, he will not suffer the second death. But this does not guarantee that he will not suffer the hurt of the second death.

We know that the time of the lake of fire and brimstone is the time when the new heaven and the new earth begins. Satan, the world, and death will all be cast into the lake of fire at that time (Rev. 20:10, 14). Also at that time a man will be cast into the lake of fire if his name is not recorded in the book of life. That will be the time when unbelievers are officially put into the lake of fire. However, during the millennium, the defeated Christians will suffer the hurt of the second death. Of course, this dealing will not be like the dealing that the unbelievers will have; it is not for eternity. If a Christian is joined to the world and if he loves the world and the things of the world, the Lord will allow him to go into corruption, to suffer a little of what the unbelievers will suffer. This is what being hurt by the second death in Revelation 2 means, and

this word is spoken to Christians. The word "hurt" in the original language means to injure someone and to damage him. The second death will cause pain for some. From the time of the great white throne on, there is the second death itself, which is the suffering for eternity in the lake of fire and of brimstone. But in the millennium there is only the hurt of the second death. If some Christians have not dealt with their sins, they will still suffer the hurt and pain of the second death.

THE END BEING TO BE BURNED

Let us now read two passages from the book of Hebrews. Hebrews 6:4-6 says, "For it is impossible for those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and yet have fallen away, to renew themselves again unto repentance." These verses describe a person who has many qualifications. It is impossible for him to be an unsaved person. He has seen the light. He has seen the revealed God, the Only Begotten of the Father. He has known the love of God, and he has tasted the heavenly gift, the unique gift, Jesus Christ. In the Bible, gifts as a plural noun refer to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and gift as a singular noun refers to the unique gift, the only begotten Son of God, as in John 3:16. This gift is different from the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This person not only has God and the Lord Jesus, but has also become a partaker of the Holy Spirit. He knows God, he has tasted the Lord Jesus, and he has the Holy Spirit living within him. Furthermore, he has tasted the good word of God and the powers of the coming age. The powers of the coming age are the powers of the millennial kingdom. The gifts and powers of the Holy Spirit are particularly abundant in the millennial kingdom. The millennial kingdom will be full of works of power, miracles, wonders, and other such things. To say that one has tasted the powers of the coming age is to say that one has tasted the things of the millennial kingdom. Hence, this person is definitely a saved person.

If such a person leaves the word of the beginning of Christ today and slips and falls, there is no repentance for him. He cannot start all over again to believe in the Lord Jesus. He has too much history with the Lord already. He has received so much rain. He has fallen and does not bring forth good things for God, but has brought forth thorns and thistles. He, like "the earth, which drinks the rain which often comes upon it and brings forth vegetation suitable to those for whose sake also it is cultivated, partakes of blessing from God.

But if it brings forth thorns and thistles, it is disapproved and near a curse, whose end is to be burned" (vv. 7-8).

Notice three things about such a person and his end. First, he is disapproved. The word "disapproved" here is the same word as that used in 1 Corinthians 9:27 where Paul said that he feared that though he had preached the gospel to others, he himself would be rejected and would not be used by God anymore in this age and in the kingdom. To be disapproved, to be rejected, means that God will reject such a one and will not use him anymore in the kingdom. Second, such a person is "near a curse." The verse does not say that he will receive a curse, but the punishment that he receives is similar to a curse. He will not perish forever, but he will suffer the hurt of the second death and will suffer the Gehenna of fire in the kingdom. Third, his "end is to be burned." What is this? For example, a few weeks ago, I intended to burn up some land in Jen-ru. Could I burn the land forever? Could I burn the land for even five years? The burning here refers to something temporary.

Here it speaks about burning, whereas Matthew 5 says that some will be liable to the Gehenna of fire. If you put these two passages together, they match each other. If a Christian receives all these wonderful things but does not bear good fruit to God, but rather thorns and thistles, he will be burned. However this burning will only be for a while. Even an elementary school boy knows that if you burn a piece of land, the burning will stop after all the thorns are burned up. The burning in the kingdom will go on at most for a thousand years. How long it will actually burn depends on you. If you have brought forth many thorns and thistles, then there will be more burning. If you have brought forth few thorns and thistles, then there will be less burning.

How many things are there in us that are still not dealt with? How many things have not been cleansed away by the Lord's blood, and how many things are not yet confessed, dealt with, and settled with the brothers and sisters? These are the thorns and thistles referred to by the Lord. In Matthew 5 the Lord said that one cannot go out from there until every quadrans is paid. All the debts have to be paid. When everything is burned away, all the debts will be paid.

A Christian is likened to a field, and his improper behavior is likened to thorns and thistles. Suppose I have a five-acre piece of land. Is it possible that

after it has been burned by fire, only two acres are left and three acres are gone? This is impossible. What is burned are the thorns and thistles. The field itself cannot be burned. In other words, only those things in Adam that are cursed, that should be removed but have not been removed, are to be burned. They are the object of the burning of the Gehenna of fire. The life that God has given us cannot be touched by fire. Therefore, after the thorns and thistles are burned away, the land will still remain. No part of it will be taken away. There is absolutely no problem with our salvation, but there is so much that has grown on top of it, so much that has come out of the flesh. If these things have not been dealt with by the blood of Jesus, we must pass through quite a bit of dealing.

Now let us look at another place, Hebrews 10:26-29. "For when we sin willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice of bulls and goats for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fervor of fire, which is to consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without compassion on the testimony of two or three witnesses. By how much do you think he will be thought worthy of worse punishment who has trampled underfoot the Son of God and has considered the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing?" These verses refer to someone who has rejected Christ and returned to Judaism. He thinks that by spending a few dollars he can buy a bull or a goat as an offering for sin. But if someone has come to know Christ and returns to Judaism, he is trampling underfoot the Son of God and is regarding His blood as a common thing. He is treating the Lord like a bull or a goat. To him there is no difference between the Lord and a bull or a goat. The verse concludes, "And has insulted the Spirit of grace." While the Holy Spirit is giving him grace, he is insulting Him by going back to Judaism. These verses show us the way of an apostate. I will not say that such a one is saved; rather, I will only say that such a one may be saved. Perhaps he is not saved. The apostle does not tell us if such a one is saved or not. He only says that if a person has come to Christ and then returns to Judaism, he will suffer worse punishment. His end is an expectation of judgment and fervor of fire. Here we see a kind of fire.

In addition to all of these passages, we also have the Lord's own words in John 15. Verse 2 says, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes it away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it." These are not branches that have nothing to do with Him; these are branches in Him. What

is indicated here may not refer to the temporary punishment, but to the discipline of this age. But look at verse 6: "If one does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is dried up; and they gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." Some branches will be thrown into the fire and burned. Some branches have sprouted and have borne green leaves, but do not have fruit. Though they have life inwardly, they do not have fruit outwardly. The Lord Jesus said that they would be cast out, dried up, and burned in the fire. Here we see clearly that Christians may have to pass through the fire.

Having read all these passages, we can conclude that if a Christian does not take care of his sins properly, there will be punishment waiting for him. The Bible shows us clearly what kind of punishment this will be. It is not an ordinary kind of punishment but the punishment of the "Gehenna of fire." But it is the fire in the kingdom, not in eternity.

The question now is this: What kind of sin will bring us into this state? Once a person is saved, it is important that he deal with his sins. None of the sins that he has confessed, repented of, dealt with, and made recompense for under the blood of the Lord Jesus will come back to him at the judgment seat. All of these will be gone. Even the greatest sins will be gone. But there are many sins which will not be passed over. These are the sins that one regards in his heart. Psalm 66:18 says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, / The Lord will not hear." What are the sins that the heart regards? The heart is where our love and desires lie. The heart represents our emotion. It represents the psychological man. If the heart regards iniquity, the Lord will not hear us. Many confessions are made only because the person knows that he has sinned. There is no hatred for the sin nor condemnation of the sin. Such a one the Lord will not hear. Moreover, if we have a problem with another person that has not been solved, or if there are things that need to be forgiven but have not been forgiven, or if we have wronged others or the Lord, we have to deal with these things in a specific way. At the same time, we have to put these things under the Lord's blood. Only then will these things be dealt with, and we be delivered from the coming judgment.

SUMMARY

Now let us summarize what we have seen. The future of Christians is very simple. For a saved Christian the question of the new heaven and new earth,

including all eternity, is solved. But the age of the kingdom is controversial. No one dares to say anything about what will happen. What we have to solve today is the problem of the kingdom. In the kingdom there are many ranks of Christians. Many will reign with Christ because they have worked faithfully and have undergone persecution, reproach, and suffering. Some may not have undergone persecution, reproach, and suffering, but they do not have sins either. They have lived a clean life. Although they have done nothing that deserves special merit, they have at least given a cup of water to a little one for the sake of the Lord's name (Matt. 10:42). They will also receive a reward, but their reward will be very small.

In the age of the kingdom, some Christians will receive a reward in the kingdom. Some will receive a great reward; others will receive a small reward.

Those who will not receive a reward are also divided into a few categories. One group will not enter into the kingdom at all. The Bible does not tell us where they will go. It only says that they will be kept outside the kingdom in the outer darkness (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Luke 13:28). They will be left outside the glory of God. Second, there will be many who, in addition to not having worked well, have specific sins not yet dealt with. They are saved, but when they die, they still have sins which they have not repented of and dealt with. They still have the problem of sin with them. These ones will be temporarily put into the fire. They will come out only after they have paid all their debts. This will last at most until the end of the kingdom. I do not know how long this period will actually be.

There are still many things which we are not clear about concerning the future, but the Bible has shown us enough. Although there are details which we have not yet seen, we do know what the children of God will face. Some will receive a reward; some will go into corruption. Some will be put into prison, and still some will be cast into the fire and be burned.

The matter of our salvation is quite clear. When a man trusts in the Lord Jesus, both salvation and eternal life are settled for him. But after a person is saved and up until he dies, his works, that is, his failures or his victories, will determine his fate in the kingdom. Our God is a just God. On the one hand, our salvation is free, and those who believe will have eternal life. No one can overturn this fact. On the other hand, we cannot sin at will just because we have received eternal life. If we bring forth thorns and thistles, we will be

burned. If the Lord Jesus cannot disassociate us from our sins and if we have not settled everything in our lives, God has no choice but to chastise us in the future. He has no choice but to cleanse us with specific punishments, so that we can be together with Him in the new heaven and new earth. God is a just God. What He has prepared is also just. Once we have seen these things, we must learn the lesson and take the warnings from God.

THE PROPER ATTITUDE IN READING THE BIBLE

Concerning the way we study the Bible, I would like to mention a few things. First, there is a group of people who believe only in grace. Whenever they read about things related to the kingdom in the Bible, they apply it to the Jews. If you listen to their sermons and read their books, they invariably push everything related to the kingdom onto the Jews. Everything related to grace is for the church, and all the terrible things are for the Jews. To them, everything burdensome, difficult, and demanding is for the Jews, not for us. This is foolishness. God's Word is for His children, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. Some say that Paul never specifically said that his Epistles were written to Gentiles, and therefore, they are not for Gentiles. But this kind of explanation explains away and cuts apart the Word of God. Others say that the portions of the Scriptures quoted earlier refer to unbelievers only. But how can the distinction between overcomers and non-overcomers exist among the sinners? This is foolish talk. The Word of God shows us these matters in a clear and definite way. We have to eat what God has given us, whether it is sweet or bitter. When men hear about grace, they are happy; when they hear about the kingdom, they are unhappy. But the Word is balanced. On the one hand, we see grace; on the other hand, we see righteousness.

There is the fable of the eagle and the cat. Once a cat met an eagle. The eagle said to the cat, "The sky is really great. It has this and it has that. Would you like me to take you up to the sky?" The cat said, "No, I do not care to go there." When the eagle asked why not, the cat said, "There are no mice in the sky. If there were mice there, I would go. But since there aren't, I won't." Heaven is so holy; sin, the world, and Satan are not there. If God brings you to heaven, will you be able to live there? If we do not turn today, we will have to wait until we are worthy to enter in. It is true that the Lord Jesus has saved us,

but subjectively speaking, if we do not allow the Holy Spirit to work the Lord Jesus into us, God will have to chastise us that we may receive the benefit and be counted worthy to be with Him. If we only preach grace without preaching the kingdom, the church will suffer and God's children will suffer; and when the kingdom comes, there will be even greater suffering. I must speak as I ought to speak.

I admit that after my speaking in these few days, some will increase their opposition against me. If these are my words, I am willing to see them opposed. Even I myself would oppose them. But if these things are the Word of God, and if God has spoken them, what can I do? How I wish that I did not have to talk about these things. How I wish that I could preach something that everyone would like to hear. I am not Matthew. I am not Mark. I am not Paul. I did not write the book of Hebrews, and I did not write Revelation. If I were the writer, I could change things. But these things are God's Word. God has spoken them and determined that they should be so. My friends, when you read the Bible, you have to read what God has said. You must not consider what man has said. You should only care for what God has said.

The greatest difficulty today in studying the Bible lies in the prejudice in the mind of God's children. They have what they consider as truth and what they consider as heresy. They think that everything that matches them is truth, and everything that does not match them and that differs from them is heresy. Regardless of how scriptural a basis there is for it, any thought or concept contrary to theirs is considered heresy. But if that is one's attitude, he is through. At issue today is what God has said.

I am happy in my heart because I can preach the "heresy" of God's Word and I can oppose the "truth" in man's teaching. Today we have to be clear before the Lord. We cannot be under any other authority but that of God's Word. I know no other authority. I do not know what theology is; I do not know what man's word is; I do not know what the tradition of the church is. I only know what the Bible says, and only what it says counts. We must subject ourselves to it only. We cannot change God's Word. The Word of God tells us the destiny of His children. It tells us what we will experience in the kingdom. We must pay attention to these issues because sooner or later we will face them again. If we pay attention to them we will be careful how we live on earth today.

The second thing that we must realize is that only those who understand the truth can oppose heresy. One heresy cannot oppose another heresy. But all heresies are not pure heresy; they are the truth plus a little error. Heresy is to add wrong things to right things. Add a little of man's thought to God's thought, and you will have heresy.

Because Catholicism does not fully know the truth in the Bible, it preaches the doctrine of purgatory. If you do not know the truth that we have released in the last few meetings, you will not be able to tell whether the doctrine of purgatory is right or wrong. Now that you have heard these messages, you will realize that the doctrine of purgatory is absolutely wrong. You can say that it is heresy. In the Bible we see that God's discipline of the Christians happens in the millennium, but Catholics say that there is a purging going on today. They say that if a Christian does not live up to standard on earth today, he will not be able to go to heaven. Hence, he must be purged. Therefore, they say that as soon as a Christian dies, he begins to be purged and is purged until the job is done. However, there is absolutely no such teaching in the Bible. The Bible never says that as soon as a Christian dies, he will be purged in Hades. The Bible shows us that there will be the discipline in the kingdom in the future, but there is no purging in Hades today.

Second, Catholics make another grave mistake. They think that if they secure for themselves indulgences while they are alive or if the priests pray for them after they die, they will be relieved of some of the purging of purgatory. But the Bible never says anything like this. The Bible says only that he who has mercy on others will obtain mercy. Praying by the priest will not do anything for the dead. The Bible never teaches us to pray for the dead.

Third, Catholics tell people that a man will not be saved until he has been completely purged in purgatory. This is an absolute overturning of the teaching of the Bible. The Bible shows us that there is no other name in heaven or on earth besides that of the Lord Jesus whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12). Only He can save us. Apart from the Lord Jesus, there is no salvation. Discipline and chastisement are not for salvation but for sanctification. The matter of our salvation is settled long before God disciplines us, but there are still things in us that do not match Him. There are still imperfections and areas that are not up to standard. Therefore, there is the discipline in this age and the discipline in the coming kingdom.

Once a person is clear about the biblical truth, he will see the heresy in Roman Catholicism. The Roman Catholic Church takes a few verses and utilizes them for her own purpose. But if we know the biblical truth, we will realize that the doctrine of purgatory annuls grace. Thank God that, although I am a filthy sinner, through the Lord Jesus I am now saved. When I die, I do not have to be purged any further, because salvation is not of me, but of the Lord Jesus. Surely I am saved. Now we know what discipline is. Discipline is God's means to make us perfect as He is perfect. He chastises us so that we will be like Him, even the same as He is. This has nothing to do with our salvation. It is a matter within His family.

Finally, only after we know this will we be able to deal with the heresy in Protestantism. Today among the Protestants, two kinds of errors are being promulgated. First, one group of Protestant theologians proposes that since a man is "once saved, always saved," he can get away with anything in his conduct. Since a Christian is saved eternally, they say, he could be evil until the day he dies and still be in the kingdom. He would, however, occupy a lower position in the kingdom. His greatest loss is confined to occupying a lower position in the kingdom. This kind of teaching will make a man loose and irresponsible. What then is grace to them? To them grace is an excuse for looseness and licentiousness.

There is another group of Protestants who say that after a man believes, there is still the possibility that he will not be saved. Perhaps he can be saved and unsaved again three or four times within a day. If that were the case, the book of life would get very messy indeed. A brother once said that if we are not eternally saved once we have believed, then the book of life will be extremely thick. My name alone would be deleted and inserted many, many times. If a man is condemned as soon as he sins and if he is bound for hell as soon as he transgresses, we must wonder whether salvation is by grace or by works.

Both of these groups are too extreme, even though both have their scriptural basis. The Bible shows us clearly that when a man is saved, he is eternally saved. The Bible also shows us clearly that it is possible for a Christian to be "cast into Gehenna" temporarily. But the problem is that some brothers hold onto one side, insisting that salvation is eternal and that there is no such thing as discipline in the kingdom, while other brothers hold onto the other side, insisting that if we can be "cast into Gehenna," eternal life is shaky,

and therefore we can go into eternal perdition. But if we see the difference between the age of the kingdom and the eternal age and the difference between the temporary punishment of the millennium and eternal punishment, we will be clear that a Christian can receive punishment in the future, but at the same time, God has given His sheep eternal life, and they can never lose it. This knowledge gives us the boldness to say that once we are saved, we are eternally saved. After a man has been saved by grace, he will never perish again. Thus, not only have we properly settled the problem of the purgatory of Catholicism, but we have also made a clear distinction between eternal salvation and discipline. May the Lord grant us grace tonight and show us that the matter of eternal salvation is solved because of the work of Jesus of Nazareth, but as for one's situation in the kingdom, it is determined by the person himself.

CHAPTER NINE

HE THAT OVERCOMETH

“What Shall This Man Do?”, Ch. 11

John the apostle reaffirms that God’s end is certain, and I that His ways now are consistent with that end. Just as, in the heavenly City at the last, the principles of the body find their fullest development and expression, so is the reverse also true. Whenever the life of the eternities has a free course in us today, we shall find every feature of the heavenly City, every true character of the Lord Jesus, manifesting itself through His body here on the earth. And who that has once caught a glimpse of God’s heavenly Man can ever be satisfied with anything less than this?

But now we must be practical, and take a look at conditions around us. Most of us will agree that outward Christianity today is in a sorry state. It manifests all the ailments and weaknesses of the world. Its work is reduced to a little preaching and a little social service. Its impact on men is negligible. This is a fact; but what should cause us even greater personal distress is the tragedy that, as God’s people, our conscience has been so little exercised about this fact. We take things as a matter of course, and many seem indeed to accept them almost as though they ought to be as they are. Christians today do not believe that what Paul has set before us is possible. Such unbelief should have the effect of driving us back to the ministry of John, and compelling us to look again at its special character.

What the Lord revealed through Paul concerning the body of Christ was intended, as we saw earlier, to be realized in local churches, each expressing that body. In diverse localities there would be a true practical expression, not of a host of different bodies, but of one body. This was the divine intention, and this was how things began. But we know how sadly they failed, and how the Lord Himself had to speak again from heaven. In doing so, he touched a new note concerning the church of God and the churches, and this is why the second and third chapters of Revelation are so helpful. In those chapters, the Lord Jesus uses John to bring to light a further divine provision for His church. I refer to the seven promises at the ends of those seven letters. In them we have John’s special message for a time of general departure. It is that,

amid conditions of decay and general ruin, God looks for those of His people who will be His overcomers within the churches.

What is the meaning of an “overcomer”? To avoid misunderstanding, let it first be clear that these people are not Christians who are abnormally good. It is not that they are individually better than others, and that therefore they are destined to receive greater glory. Please remember, overcomers are simply normal Christians. All others have become, for the moment, subnormal.

In past eternity God had a definite plan, a design which He has never abandoned. Overcomers are those who, having seen that design, have set themselves by God’s grace to stand by it. They are not certain imaginary people who have gone further than Paul, or who take a different line from that revealed through Paul. They are, I repeat, no more than normal in God’s eyes; they can claim no special credit.

Overcoming, in John’s writings, does not mean simply the question of personal overcoming. It is not a matter of overcoming sin, which is better termed “deliverance,” nor of personal holiness—the so-called “victorious life.” The overcoming spoken of by John is the kind of overcoming that, in a given situation, lays claim to and holds that situation for God. In an hour when the Pauline message is rejected by so many, the Christian is tempted to say, “That is how things are. What can we do about it? We must just try to keep ourselves straight on certain lines, but we shall have to let some things pass as hopeless. They are beyond recovery. There is nothing we can do to improve them.” Beset by circumstances, real and hypothetical, with which we simply do not know how to contend, it is easy to resign ourselves to the view that our particular situation is beyond recovery. There are too many things in it to be adjusted, too many painful steps to be taken in the outworking. The thing is impossible.

It is in such an hour that overcomers reassert, by their life and testimony, that God is not a man that He should change. His standards, they affirm, have not altered, and He has still set himself to have a heavenly City at the end, a heavenly Man today. What the whole church, as the church, ought to be doing but has left undone, they, representatively and for the church, are raised up by God to do. Standing true to the victorious heavenly Man, they hold their ground. That is the “overcoming” spoken of here in the Word.

John in Revelation shows the sphere of the overcomers. It is within the defeated church today. Those of importance to God are those who now, each in his own situation, lay claim to those situations for God. There is a part of God's plan which concerns each of us, just where we are, and for it he needs overcomers. I say again, there is no special goodness about them; their only distinction is that they are not abnormally bad! They abide by God's standard, that is all. But knowing the Christian life, the heavenly calling of the body, the warfare of the church, they are like a lever in God's hands to dislodge Satan from his throne. They prepare themselves on the church's behalf, and they fight for the church. They put out all their effort, not for their own sakes but for the sake of the body; and because they are ready, God sees the church prepared as a bride. They set the torch, as it were, to the fire, and what the overcomers inherit the whole Church inherits.

YOU YOUNG MEN

Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers—these three books of the Old Testament offer an interesting parallel to Christian experience. I have likened them to the “sit,” “walk,” “stand” of Ephesians (see Eph. 1:20; 4:1; 6:13). Exodus sees Israel delivered from Egypt by a mighty hand, and established as the people of God through an irreversible work. Leviticus lays down the basis of their communion with Him by blood, and their walk of holiness by the cross. Numbers orders and arrays them for warfare, with a view to the enjoyment of their God-given inheritance. This last is stated clearly at the commencement of the book of Numbers, where, in 1:3, Aaron is told to number “all that are able to go forth to war in Israel.”

Just prior to this statement, in the final chapter of Leviticus, it seems that the Lord sets out to assess which of His children are going to be of the greatest value to Him. I refer to the instructions given there about voluntary vows (Lev. 27:1-8). We must distinguish carefully between this and the passage in Exodus 30 which speaks of the redemption money for their souls. That was commanded of every Israelite, and in every case it was exactly the same, namely, half a silver shekel. It speaks, I think, of what God is going to be for us; but here in Leviticus 27 it is a question of what we may be for Him, and so this is expressed not as something commanded but as a voluntary act. “When a man shall make a special vow, according to the estimation of persons unto the Lord, then thy estimation shall be ...” and there follows a scale of values in shekels, according to age and sex, which we may tabulate thus:

<u>Age</u>	<u>For men</u>	<u>For women</u>
Below 5 years	5 shekels	3 shekels
5-20 years	20 shekels	10 shekels
20-60 years	50 shekels	30 shekels
Over 60 years	15 shekels	10 shekels

God does not discount anybody, not even the children and babes, but we may ask ourselves: Why is there this high valuation on the over-twenty age group? Surely it is because, as we have just seen, the next book, Numbers, opens by defining those able to go forth to war as “from twenty years old and upward.” This means, surely, that the value of our giving of ourselves—heart, mind, will and life—to God is measured by Him in terms of our fitness for war. On our part it is merely a vow—and God forbid that any of us should be vow-less Christians!—but on God’s part it has definite values. Yes, it is good to save souls, good to have personal holiness, good to do a hundred-and-one useful things for God, but above all it is supremely precious to Him that we be fit to take part in the age-long battle of the Lord, to dislodge His foes and to bring His people into the enjoyment of their inheritance in Him. Jehovah is a man of war, and energy for war is what He prizes most highly.

The great Old Testament tragedy, of course, was that of the old men, when, in normal circumstances, their physical strength for war began to fail. But this is where we must at once come over in thought to the New Testament, for there, “though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16). The tree by the waterside does not wither. In a real Christian life there is no afternoon, no falling off of strength. Like that of Caleb, who was the true overcomer in the book of Numbers, our strength for war at eighty years can be as it was at forty, if we will wholly follow the Lord.

This is what I believe John is taking up and developing in his first epistle, when he says: “I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the evil one.” Young men are naturally full of vigor, and this statement suggests once again the divine approval of their spiritual energy and of its fruits. But let us remember, John’s classification of his readers into little children, young men, fathers, is not to be identified with that in Leviticus. He is talking to

spiritual babes who already have assurance of forgiveness of sins, to spiritual warriors in whom God's Word abides, to spiritual fathers who carry along with them all they have gathered up as babes, children, men of war, into the full-ranged knowledge of Him who is the very Origin of all things. Today no spiritual age group is excluded from a part in war. There should be no delayed maturity in the Christian life, just as there should be no retiring age in spiritual things. (And the term "young men" includes the young women, too, in the spiritual scale of military values, though in a sense this was already true in Leviticus.)

Whatever, then, be the length of our spiritual history, the question each of us must ask ourselves is: What will be my up-to-date value in the sanctuary? God has a definite estimate of how each of us counts for Him. He knows us individually, and His sanctuary-value for every one is measured on the scale of spiritual strength. There is no need for any of us, whatever our years, to be written off at fifteen shekels when we can be priced as high as thirty or fifty. Oh, to drink today, every one of us, of Caleb's militant spirit!

THE ACCUSER OF THE BRETHREN

John wrote to his "little children" of the assurance of the forgiveness of sins. In one sense we are always, in John's term, little children, for in this life we never advance to a point where we have left behind our need for the precious blood of Christ. It is indeed the very first weapon of the overcomer. Writing in Revelation 12 of the accuser of the brethren "which accuseth them before our God day and night," John tells us that "they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony, and they loved not their life even unto death" (12:10-11).

The basis of overcoming in the spiritual warfare is always the precious blood. No one can ever get to the place where the blood is not necessary. Satan is a murderer and a deceiver, he entices and he attacks, but today he specializes in accusing. In a very real sense he is the accuser of the brethren, and it is here that our Lord meets him as Priest and Mediator. Heaven recognizes Satan's work and so must every Christian. Night and day he accuses us, and his accusation is directed at our conscience, which is the point where we most feel we lack the strength to fight him. His object is to drive us to think in despair, "Of what possible use am I to God?" Why are some Christians found from morning to night reproaching themselves and crying,

“I am a hopeless failure. God can do nothing with me!”? It is because they have allowed themselves to accept the charges of the enemy as unanswerable. And if he can get us to this state, he is indeed the victor, for we have given the battle away. If, instead of looking at the glory of God, we accept Satan’s accusations and stop there, we are certainly left with no power to fight him.

Conscience is a very precious thing, but to repeat endlessly, “I am no good! I am no good!”—that is not Christian humility. It is healthy to confess our sins, but let us never carry confession to the point where, for us, our sinfulness looms larger than the work of Christ. The devil knows there is no weapon more effective against the Christian than the creation of this illusion. What is the remedy? It is to say to the Lord, “Lord, I am no good!” but then to look to His precious blood and add, “But Lord, I am abiding in thee!”

Satan does not accuse without reason. There are, no doubt, plenty of sins to which he can point us; but the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. Do we believe that? Then it is the answer to his charge. Sin calls for the blood, but the Bible does not tell us that sin calls for accusation—not, that is to say, if we plead guilty. Of course, if we say we have no sin, John warns us that the door is then wide open to the accuser. But if, standing in the light of God, we confess to Him our guilt, then the blood is powerful to cleanse, and all Satan’s charges are rendered ineffective. Praise God for such an Advocate! Praise Him for such a Priest! Let us never, never answer Satan either by boasting our good conduct or by bemoaning our sins, but always and only by the blood. It is our wholly sufficient defense.

The precious blood of Christ is our defense; the word of our testimony is our weapon of attack. By this is meant our testimony to man, but not to man alone. The victory of Christ, the fact that He reigns, that His Kingdom is near, that we have been translated from Satan’s kingdom into His—all these are facts to be declared, not to men only, but to the powers of darkness. Affirm that God is King, that His Son is Victor, that Satan is defeated, that the kingdoms of this world are shortly to become the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ. These are positive divine facts, and they are our shafts of offense. Satan fears such declarations of spiritual fact. For the word of our testimony can move back the gates of hell. Declare that Jesus is Lord; that His name is above every name. Declare it! Say it to the enemy. Many a time such testimony brings more results than does prayer.

Prayer has two sides: to God, and to the mountain. “Thou shalt say unto this mountain, be thou removed.” We can say to Satan, “Leave this place!” Peter and John said to the paralytic man, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” They dealt directly with the case, where today we would probably have called a prayer meeting. Don’t neglect prayer, but counting upon the efficacy of the precious blood of Christ, speak also a word of testimony. Oftentimes when we come to God, the atmosphere is oppressive and we cannot pray. What should we do? Don’t give in, but taking God’s Word, turn and speak to Satan. Declare the victory of the Lord. Declare that he Has given us authority to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy. And then pray!

Alas, we pay far too much attention today to the doctrine of the gospel and far too little to the fact. And without the fact, we have no testimony. But Calvary is history. The gospel—the good news of this fact—is with us. For nearly two thousand years the fact of the gospel has been on the earth. The Lord has given us the precious blood and a sure word of testimony. Let us face the enemy with these.

And finally, these overcomers are men and women who know what it means to be nailed to the cross—that is to say, to be “ruled out” altogether as men, so that whatever they accomplish, the glory is only Christ’s. We need not enlarge on this again here; but remember, it was Satan who challenged God concerning Job: “Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life” (Job 2:4). But now, as if in answer to this, a great voice in heaven affirms concerning these who overcame: “They loved not their life even unto the death” (Rev. 12:11). Well could that same voice proclaim: “Now is come the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ”!

“AND WHAT SHALL THIS MAN DO?”

We have spoken of some high matters, and lest we overreach ourselves I think it wise now to come briefly to something very practical and to talk quite simply to my young brothers who desire to serve the Lord. In the last chapter of John’s Gospel our Lord made a series of very personal challenges to His disciple Peter. Peter responded with some hesitation and, as if to divert attention away from himself, began to show a sudden interest in his fellow fisherman John. Looking around and seeing this “disciple whom Jesus loved”

following, he said to Jesus, “Lord, and what shall this man do?”¹⁰ But Jesus would not allow this switch of attention to someone else, and returned once more to the personal challenge to Peter himself: “What is that to thee? Follow thou me.” What this incident says, it seems to me, is that no single one of us may evade the obligation to ask the same personal question of himself: “Lord, and what shall this man do?”—or in Paul’s words: “What shall I do, Lord?” (Acts 22:10).

Some time ago, in England,¹¹ (1938) I was invited to meet a group of young men and women, most of whom were at that time preparing themselves to serve the Lord as missionaries in the East. They asked me if I would tell them what I regarded as the essential qualifications of a missionary. I replied that I indeed felt the days of missionaries are not over, and that God has called His servants of all nations to work alongside one another in the field. The notes that follow contain the essence of what I said to them then. They will be found to echo several of the matters we have treated at greater length already in these studies.

The Assurance of Salvation

This is the starting point, and experience warns us that it is never safe to take it for granted in making such a list of qualifications as this, or when addressing any group of men or women. The foundation of all service for the Lord is that we have met Him and come to know Him for ourselves, and have received the absolute assurance that, in Him, we are eternally saved.

Christ Our Life

We have to remind Christians today that many ancient religions of the East have a high ethical and moral code. In Chinese society, as in some others, while there may be less exacting standards on some matters, such things as anger and impatience in a man or woman are regarded as serious signs of a lack of self-control. Yet missionaries who do not themselves know the victorious life of a Christian often display these things, and do not realize how much their testimony suffers as a consequence. Those to whom they are seeking to witness are, by this fact, given ground to regard themselves as religiously and morally superior. If we are to witness to Christ effectively among a people who already worship “self-mastery,” and who even despise those who need recreation and comfort, it is necessary that in a real and convincing way we give proof by our lives of the true answer to “self.” We

must know the cross as our deliverance from sin and the flesh, and find in Christ risen the sufficient power to walk in newness of life.

Entire Dependence on the Lord

It is easy to exercise a “group faith”; it is much harder to trust God alone, and to do so without letting our eyes wander from Him to the channel of supply. Westerners talk of “rice-Christians,” but can we not recognize in all of us a sneaking tendency toward what, in more modern terms, we may call the “life of faith and hints,” or as someone has shrewdly put it, “faith and postage stamps”? The less our hands touch the miracles of God in supplying our needs, the better. We should not be afraid to make things hard for God—so hard in fact that no one dare “join” unless He is called. Perhaps our surest safeguard is to concern ourselves with the needs of others. Care for them, and God will care for us.

A Specific Ministry

As His children, we all of us have the general obligation of witnessing for the Lord, but the servant of God should go further than that. He should be marked by some special Spirit wrought knowledge of God that is distinctively his own. Out of this should his ministry spring. We shall be of little use to the church in China, or anywhere else for that matter, if all we can do is preach the gospel and edify in a general way. This is expected of every Christian, but Chinese believers will look to us for something more, something specific. Nor shall we satisfy their need with a special teaching or doctrine, however excellent, but only, I repeat, with a knowledge of the Lord that characterizes us because it is peculiarly our own. We complain sometimes that people are not hungry for the Word, but believe me, if we had something distinctive to give them, they would be. Are we, by our presence, creating in people a hunger for God? Food itself can create hunger if it is sufficiently appetizing, and people become hungry when they see men and women filled with the Spirit, full of love, not just preaching or dispensing a general knowledge, but ministering spiritual riches that bear the marks of personal dealings with him. Yes, there is something wrong with us if we are not hunger-creators.

The Attitude of a Learner

Always travel with a large “L” on your back!¹² “Those who set out to be “teachers” of others put themselves in a dangerous position. Many overstretch themselves, and by talking about things they have not put to the test of

experience, create problems in the minds of simple saints. If we are oversure and ready enough to say something hastily, we put ourselves under the necessity of remembering next time what answer we gave or we may discover we have now given a different one! The more we profess to know, the more room there will be for our hearers to criticize, because they will be led to expect more of us. It is such superiority, born of the overconfidence that we know, that imperceptibly but surely closes the door to what we may indeed have been given to share with others. Rather do we need grace to admit our ignorance and to ask the Lord about it. We must be willing to say, "I do not know." People will not be hard on the worker who adopts the attitude: "If you have something to say, I am willing to listen, because I too am a disciple of the Lord." My counsel to you therefore is to remain for very long a learner. Keep that "L" on your back for at least ten years!

A History of the Acts of God

I believe, further, that every servant of God should have some things in his history which are an abiding proof of the presence and power of God with him. I have given an account elsewhere of an incident where God answered the prayer of faith for rain in a quite miraculous way that none of us who were present ever forgot.¹³ (Note 13. Sit, Walk, Stand, Chapter 3.) But Western missionaries have a background. There are certain things for which they have worked out an explanation, and Christian teachers are ready enough today to excuse doctrinally the comparative infrequency of miracles in our time. Such excuses will never be accepted by simple believers, for often enough they have seen the hand of God at work themselves.

I remember one such, Chen the tailor. He was indeed very simple. Moreover he had never met another Christian. All he had was a copy of Mark's Gospel, but through reading it he had met the Savior, and he had believed. Then he came to chapter 16—the so-called "doubtful passage"—and after reading it carefully he said to the Lord, "Lord, I am so small that one small gift will suffice me. Give me the gift of healing!" At once he went out, and going from house to house, prayed for the sick in his village. When later we met him and questioned him closely, it became quite evident that his humility, together with his absolute trust in God quite regardless of the gravity of the diseases he tackled or of any immediate evidence of an answer, had in fact led to some wonderful happenings in that village! Idolators had been convinced of the Lord's superiority to heathen gods, and some had

believed. Yet we found him still just a humble brother, making no extravagant claims, and quietly continuing to witness to the Lord Jesus as he pursued his employment as a simple village tailor.

I confess that, on one occasion in the West, when I was attending a conference of very sincere brethren and heard them become more and more deeply involved in discussion of some difficult doctrinal question, I was at length impelled to break in. "My dear brothers!" I exclaimed. "In my country, all your knowledge of these nice scriptural details would avail you nothing if, when the need arose, you did not know how to cast out demons!" Today we have become civilized, and as a result, we often close the door to God. It sometimes seems to me that God brings us up to a certain point of opportunity, and then, because our natural caution forbids us to step out in faith on Him, instead of a miracle of life, all we get is a new teaching. But surely, we must expect God to seal His Word with signs and wonders. If we truly know God, His wondrous acts cannot be far away. Today Satan's seat is to be challenged by our faith in a living God.

THE CALLING OF GOD

No master has so many servants as our Master, and for each He has a suitable employment. For Joseph He had a particular task, to save Israel from famine. Samuel came at the hour chosen, for the very special work of setting aside the priest in favor of the king, even as later Elijah came to set aside the king for the prophet. The little maid was at hand to testify to Naaman in his need. Even an ass was ready for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem.

Many murmur against the position God has given them, or against the task He has entrusted to them in the body. They want to do this, but God puts them into that. They have an ambition to serve Him here, but His plan for them lies somewhere else. When faced by such apparent reverses, it is well to remember that the purpose of God for us in His church goes back before our conversion, for His foreknowledge has prepared our circumstances and determined our way even before we were born. Isaiah was chosen from birth, Saul of Tarsus "from the womb," Jeremiah still earlier, before he was formed in the womb. True, the case of Saul puzzled Ananias, in view of what he had heard from others of this "chosen vessel"! But the whole road is wonderfully prepared for his servants by God. He determines whose child we shall be, though sometimes we may think we have been born into the wrong family!

Some of us approve of our parents but would like perhaps to change our brothers and sisters or our other relatives! But Joseph said: “God sent me before you to preserve life.” If we have not seen God’s hand in His choices, we have lost a great opportunity to bring Him praise.

David’s work began with Goliath, but already he had learned the lesson in his shepherd days. “Jehovah delivered me out of the paw of the lion,” he could say. Peter was a fisherman, familiar with the dragnet. Perhaps for this reason he could better understand the “great sheet” at Joppa. Paul found Aquila and Priscilla through his ability to make tents. There was no need for someone outside that trade to acquire it in order to help these two to become, as they did, careful exponents of the way of God. And in a time of declension in Ephesus, a Timothy was at hand who from a babe had known the sacred writings.

God never does a thing suddenly; He has always prepared long, long before. So there is nothing to murmur about, nothing to be proud of in the calling of God. There is also no one of whom to be jealous, for other people’s advantages have nothing to do with us. “It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy” (Rom. 9:16). Our heritage, our birth, our natural equipment—these are things already determined by God. We may pick up other things on the way, for we are always learning, but the way is His way. When we look back over our life, we bow and acknowledge that all was prepared by God. There is no need to fear we have missed something. To have such an attitude of heart, that is true rest.

God is a God who works, and He started many years ago. When He wants a special kind of servant, or when the church needs a special kind of help, God is not unprepared. He never encounters an emergency. In the history of His children, His hand is everywhere. Each of us would say, if we pondered a minute, “All my life, his grace has followed me.” The words of Paul (though used, it is true, in another connection) effectively summarize such an attitude to the providence of God: “Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called” (1 Cor. 7:20). When we see the purpose of God, such words as these can take on a large meaning. God has called each of us and is preparing us for tasks foreknown to Him. “I press on,” Paul says elsewhere, “if so be that I may apprehend that for which also I was apprehended by Christ Jesus.”

SPIRIT OF TRUTH

Finally, I would say a little more about the work of the Holy Spirit. In earlier chapters, especially when discussing the ministry of Paul, we have spoken frequently of the need for a revelation of divine things. More than once have we said that it is essential to see the purpose of God, to see the Person and work of Christ, to see the church, the body of Christ. To this some reader may be goaded to reply, concerning one or another of these things, “I don’t see that. What do you suggest that I do?”

In answer I need to point once more to the Spirit of truth, recalling again that He is a Person, close at hand—nay, dwelling now within our hearts—ready to help each one of us in our need. It is the apostle John who tells us how, at a time of great mystification for the disciples, Jesus assured them of the Holy Spirit’s coming, to bear witness of Himself and to guide them into all the truth.

Whether it be for the initial revelation to our hearts of divine things, or amid the discipline that must follow ere those divine things become truly a part of us, we shall find it necessary to turn again and again to this gracious Helper of our infirmities. It is by His revelation alone that we behold spiritual realities; it is by His loving discipline that we enter into those realities. By the former, He opens the gateway to progress; by the latter, He leads us on in the pathway of progress. The former is the foundation, the latter the superstructure. Without revelation by the Spirit we cannot commence the course, but without the discipline of the Spirit we cannot complete it. Both these aspects of the Spirit’s work are equally essential, but for both we can assuredly count upon Him.

Father has conceived a plan; the Son has carried it out; now it is the Spirit who communicates to us what the Son has accomplished for us. We readily acknowledge the completeness of the work of the Son, when He said, “It is finished,” and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. But if we do not doubt that the Son has perfected the work committed to Him by the Father, why then do we doubt that the Spirit will perfect the work committed to Him by the Son?

The work of the Son is as comprehensive as the work of the Father. It does not go one whit beyond it, nor does it fall one whit short of it. As great as is the work of the Father, so great is the work of the Son; and as great as is the work of the Son, so great is the work of the Spirit. There is not one particle of

the work completed by the Son for us that will not be completed by the Spirit in us. All the fullness of spiritual reality that is in Christ will be imparted to us by the Spirit of Christ. Of Himself Jesus said, "I am the Reality," and of the Spirit, "He shall guide you into all Reality." The question of coming into all the fullness of spiritual reality rests, therefore, not with us but with the Spirit. It is not a question of our capacity, or of our ability, but of the absolute faithfulness of the Holy Spirit of God. Can He be depended on to do all the work committed to him by the Son? We must learn to trust Him. We must learn to count upon His twofold work, first of revealing to us the nature and the dimensions of divine reality and secondly of bringing us into every whit of the reality He has revealed.

As we look around us, we cannot fail to observe a tragic lack in the experience of so many Christians. There is nothing about their lives to indicate fullness. They have not sufficient for their own needs; much less have they anything to spare for others. Why are they so poor? Is it not because they do not know the discipline of the Spirit? The Psalmist says, "In pressure thou hast enlarged me" (Ps. 4:114). (Note 14. J. N. Darby, New Translation.) The object of all pressure is enlargement. James says something similar in his epistle: "Did not God choose them that are poor as to the world to be rich in faith?" (James 2:5). The object of temporal poverty is eternal enrichment. God never intended that pressure and poverty should issue in nothing. His purpose is that all pressure should lead to enlargement, all poverty to enrichment. God's goal for His people is neither continuous straitness nor continuous poverty. For difficulty and poverty are never the end; they are only the means to God's end. Straitness is the pathway to expansion, poverty the pathway to wealth.

Read again Revelation chapter 21. What a picture you get there of fullness! You may spend much time on the Book of Revelation and still understand little of its meaning, but you surely cannot fail to understand that chapter 21 speaks of a wealth, an abundance, a glory, that this earth has never yet known, no, not even in the fabulous days of Solomon. When were the streets of earth ever paved with gold? When had this world no need of the sun to light it? What riches! What splendor! Never was earthly empire so wealthy or so radiant as New Jerusalem. And what breadth! Never was city seen on earth one hundredth part of the scale of this. And he that overcometh, we are told, shall inherit these things!

Some have asked why, in the new heavens and the new earth, we read of God and of the Lamb but find there no mention of the Holy Spirit. Surely the answer is that just as, today, Christ has finished His work, and the outcome of that work of Christ is seen in the church, so, in that day, the Holy Spirit will have finished his work, and the outcome of that work of the Spirit will be seen in the New Jerusalem. For all that is there is real—the full realization by the Spirit of what He came to do. When you touch the church today, you touch Christ, but it will be no less true that when you touch the City then, you touch the Spirit of Christ. There the church will be filled with the Spirit of God in His sevenfold fullness; there, as the City, she will manifest in herself the Spirit's work in completeness, for she will be holy, as her Lord.

But how does the church reach that goal? Only by traveling the pathway from pressure to enlargement, from poverty to enrichment. You ask: What do we mean by enlargement through pressure? When three are shut into a furnace and the three become four, that is enlargement through pressure. Some find a furnace rather close quarters for three, so they seek a way of escape; others accept the limitation, and in accepting it, make room for a Fourth. Not to let difficulties shut us out from God but to let them shut us in to Him, that is enlargement through pressure. For Paul and Silas, the prison gates could only shut the world out and shut God in; so their prison, instead of cramping them, released them into greater fullness. God let trial upon trial press upon Job, but his trials only pressed him to God's goal. To John, on the island for the testimony, the risen Lord Himself opened the door and showed him the glorious consummation of all things. Some, through pressure, reach God's end; others come to an end in the pressure. Some die in difficult straits; others, through difficulties, find fullness of life. Some murmur when trials befall them and find in them only limitation, restriction and death; others praise God in the trials and find in them the pathway to enlargement, liberation and abundance of life.

Many Christians are so poor that they have not even sufficient to meet their own needs. Alas for any who go to them for help! Other Christians are so rich you can never assess their wealth. You can never meet a difficulty they have not met; you can never find yourself in a situation where they are unable to help. They have abundant resources to meet the demands of all who go to them in need. Many Christians escape going utterly bankrupt because they are being ministered to by others who continually pour their wealth into the body of Christ. Such Christians little know how much they owe to other

believers, some of whom they might even be tempted to despise. It may be that, when a friend comes from a journey and expects bread from us, the Lord will permit us to turn to a neighbor for something to give him; but it may be that He will say to us, “Give ye them to eat.”

Spiritual poverty and spiritual stuntedness are two of the greatest problems in the church, but poverty is effect, not cause, and stuntedness is effect, not cause. The cause of poverty and the cause of distress is lack of the Spirit’s discipline. Those who are wealthy and those who are enlarged are they, and they only, who have experienced such discipline. They have been through deep waters and have a spiritual history with God, because they have suffered for the body’s sake. Their sicknesses, their domestic problems, their adversities—all were for the increase of Christ in His people. Those, on the other hand, who bypass such disciplines, choosing instead a life of ease and comfort in a pathway of prosperity—they are the stunted and the poverty-stricken. The poor and needy come to them in vain for help. They have no overflow.

Do you think preaching is just preaching? Do you think ministry is just ministry? Believe me, they are not. Serving God is not just a matter of words or works, but of how much you have been through. If the Spirit is never allowed to trouble you, you will be condemned to poverty all your life. You will never learn how blessed it is to draw fullness from the Lord, not for yourself but for others. And that is ministry.

Revelation waits upon discipline. It is our acceptance of the discipline of the Spirit that opens the way for Him to reveal to us the realities that are in Christ, and to bring us into these. Avoidance of that discipline denies Him the opportunity of doing so. Every day God is looking for opportunities to enlarge us, but when difficulties arise we avoid them, when trials come we circumvent them. Oh, but at what loss to ourselves! And at what loss to God’s people! Of course there is no way of dodging divine chastening that comes to us when we have deliberately moved out of the will of the Lord; that is something different, designed for our correction and cure. We cannot escape that, but we can, if we will, dodge the creative disciplines of the Spirit. If, however, we are willing to commit ourselves to His dealings, He will take us in hand and bring us to God’s goal. Are we willing to say, “Lord, I will drink the cup thou givest to its last dregs; I will bear the cross, and seek no relief in gall or vinegar”? Oh, for an utter consecration in God’s people that will enable Him to do all that in His

heart He has planned for them! That will lead to fullness, the fullness of the New Jerusalem. There is not one nugget of gold in that City but has been tried in the furnace; not a precious stone but has been passed through the fires; not a pearl but has been produced through suffering.

When Peter put to Jesus his question about John, what was our Lord's reply? "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" Till I come! The ministry of the Spirit of truth set forth by John will go on until the story is completed; nothing can stop it. The purpose of God in His church is going to be accomplished; it can never be thwarted. The vision of the Holy City, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband, will unfailingly come to pass, and we shall see it. No one can touch that "till I come"; it is settled in heaven.

Shall we not, therefore, put ourselves into our Father's safe hands, that He may order our lives as He wills? It will be His care to see that the transforming work of the Holy Spirit within us is no less perfect, no less sure, than was the redemption first accomplished on our behalf by His beloved Son.

CHAPTER TEN

THE OVERCOMER OF GOD

“God’s Overcomers”, Chap. 3

“...the church, which is His Body,
the fullness of the One who fills all in all.”
Ephesians 1:23

GOD’S ETERNAL PLAN AND THE CHURCH

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:23

God’s Eternal Plan

God had an eternal plan before the foundation of the world. There are two goals in this plan. The first is to make all things express Christ, and the second is to make man like Christ, that man would have His life and glory. While God desires to accomplish these two goals, He encounters two problems: Satan’s rebellion and man’s fall.

On the day the archangel saw that Christ was the center of all things, he became jealous because of his pride. He wanted to raise himself to the same position as God’s Son. He rebelled because he wanted to rob Christ of His position as the center. One-third of the angels followed him to rebel against God, and on that day all the living creatures on the earth also followed him. Satan’s rebellion made everything a chaos, which could not express Christ. The universe is one big entity. We learn from science that if one speck of dust is out of order, the whole universe can become chaotic and be in confusion. Today, even though all things can express God’s glory, they cannot express God Himself.

God created man in order that first he would have the life and glory of Christ, and He intended to put all things under man’s subjection so that man would bring everything back to God. Second, He created man so that man would cooperate with God to deal with the rebellious Satan.

But man also fell. Therefore, now God has to accomplish two goals and solve two problems. In order to accomplish His two goals, God has to (1) save fallen man and (2) remove the rebellious Satan.

In order to carry out God's two goals and solve His two problems, the Lord Jesus became a man and accomplished redemption. The Lord Jesus is not only the Christ to mankind, but also the Christ to all things. Christ is the centrality and the universality. Universality means that He is not limited by time or space. Christ is not only the Christ of the Jews or the Christ of the church, but He is also the Christ of all things. He is all and in all.

There are three aspects to Christ's redemption: (1) substitution, for the individual; (2) representation, for the church; and (3) heading up, for all things. Christ as the Head includes all things. When the Head died, everything included in the Head died also. Christ's death is an all-inclusive death. Christ's death as the Head brought all things and mankind into death, so that all things and mankind are now reconciled to God.

Christ dealt with everything on the cross. He crushed the serpent's head and dealt with the rebellious Satan and all his works on the cross. He saved fallen mankind on the cross. He brought back all things and reconciled them to God on the cross. On the cross He gave His life to man so that man can be like Him.

Therefore, we can see that God has two goals and also two problems. By means of the cross, Christ accomplished God's two goals and also solved God's two problems.

The Church's Position and Responsibility

In what position has God put the church? What mission does God want the church to bear on the earth? Why did God allow Satan, whose head had been crushed, to remain on the earth?

God wants the church on earth not only to preach the gospel to save sinners but also to testify of Christ's victory on the cross. God allows Satan to remain on the earth in order to provide us the opportunities to testify to His Son's victory. God expects that we would testify to His Son's victory. All failing believers damage this testimony.

The church is the Body of Christ. The Body should continue the work of the Head. The church is the fullness of Christ. What overflows from Christ is the church. The church should continue the works of the four Gospels.

There are three very crucial things in the New Testament: (1) the cross, (2) the church, and (3) the kingdom. Christ on the cross accomplished redemption and victory. The kingdom is for the manifestation of the accomplishment of Christ's redemption and His victory. At present, the church is maintaining on earth Christ's accomplishment on the cross. The cross is God's proper judgment according to the law, while the kingdom is the execution of God's authority. The church lies in the middle; it maintains the accomplishment of the cross on the one hand and is a foretaste of the power of the coming age on the other hand.

Satan cannot overcome the individual Christ, but he can insult the individual Christ through the corporate Christ. Failure of the Body is failure to the Head. A member's failure is the Body's failure. We are the continuation of Christ. We are to extend Christ (Isa. 53:10) just as we extended Adam. God allows us to remain on earth for the purpose of accomplishing His eternal plan and achieving His eternal goal.

Before the ark entered Jerusalem, it was in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite (2 Sam. 6). We should be faithful to take care of the blood upon the ark (Christ's work) and the cherubim upon the ark (God's glory).

(Afternoon, January 24)

THE NATURE OF CHRIST'S VICTORY AND THE CHURCH

Scripture Reading: Revelation 3:21

All victories should take the victory of Christ as a pattern: "As I also overcame."

Three Enemies

The Bible tells us that we have three different enemies: (1) the flesh, within us, (2) the world, outside of us, and (3) Satan, above and below us. As far as the church's ascended position is concerned, Satan is below us.

There were three nations in the Old Testament that typified these three enemies. Amalek typifies the flesh; we should overcome it with our prayer. Egypt typifies the world; it should be buried in the Red Sea. The Canaanites typify the powers of Satan; they should be overcome and removed one by one.

The flesh is against the Spirit (Gal. 5:17). The world is against the Father. If any man loves the world, the love for the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15). Satan is against Christ. Christ came to destroy Satan (1 John 3:8). Therefore, subjection to the Spirit is victory over the flesh, the love for the Father is victory over the world, and faith in Christ is victory over Satan.

The first thing that came in was the flesh. One day, the archangel tried to uplift himself to be like God by means of the “self,” and the “self” entered the world. This was the beginning of sin, the world, and Satan.

At the time God created man, He bestowed on him the highest ability, the ability to reproduce, by which he can pass his life on to his offspring. Originally God expected man to eat the fruit of the tree of life so that he would have God’s life to pass on to his offspring. God forbade him to eat the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But Satan came and committed spiritual fornication with the first couple in their soul. Satan put his poisonous seed within them so that they passed this on to their offspring. Satan is the father of liars. The seed of Satan is lies. The seed of God is truth. The principle with which Satan beguiled Adam to sin is the same principle as that which caused Satan himself to sin at the beginning.

Satan has his household and kingdom. He gains men to be the members of his household and citizens of his kingdom so that he can be the king over them.

After Satan beguiled man to sin, his work was confined from the universe to just the earth, the world. He was cursed: “Upon your stomach you will go, / And dust you will eat / All the days of your life” (Gen. 3:14). He could only move on the earth and could only have man, who comes out of the dust, for his food. This was a great defeat for Satan. Man’s fall is a great victory for God.

Satan has his system on the earth. His organization becomes the present world. Satan is the king of this organization, while the whole world lies under his hand.

The Victory of Christ

Before the Lord Jesus began to minister, He was baptized. This means that His work during the three and a half years was carried out after His death and resurrection. As a result, there was no flesh in His work. We can call this three and a half years as a living of the cross. The Lord Jesus never walked according to His will but according to the will of Him who sent Him. He did the Father's will and also waited for the Father's time (John 7:6).

Satan tempted the Lord to do something without God's word by asking Him to turn stones into bread. But the Lord answered and said that man shall live on every word of God (Matt. 4:4). He said many times that He only spoke what He had heard, and in John 5:30 He said, "I can do nothing from Myself." This means that He did not consider the self as His source. Satan always wants man to justify himself after God has already justified him. This is like Satan trying to persuade the Lord to declare that He was the Son of God after God had already declared this.

The crucifixion of the Lord was according to the will of God. He prayed in Gethsemane, "Not as I will, but as You will" (Matt. 26:39). "If this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done" (Matt. 26:42). At the end He said, "The cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11). To be able to accept the cross is a victory. Not to be shaken by things inwardly or outwardly is a victory. Overcoming is having nothing of the flesh within, nothing of the world without, and nothing of Satan below. Throughout His life, the Lord did not allow the flesh to come into His living. He always put aside the flesh. The Lord was the first One from whom Satan could gain nothing. Neither the flesh nor the world had any ground in Him.

God Intending the Church to Live Out the Victory of Christ

God's salvation of man is to save him from the flesh, the world, and Satan. God wants us to refuse everything that is from the world, earth, self, flesh, and Satan. Satan attacks us through the world and flesh. Only those who are

absolutely spiritual, who have absolutely refused the worldly system and the will of the flesh, will be attacked by Satan directly.

The cross of Christ needs the Body of Christ. If a sinner merely accepts the cross objectively, only he himself will gain something. However, if we accept the cross subjectively, God will gain something. The cross of Christ cuts off like a knife everything of the old creation, while His resurrection brings us into a new beginning.

The victory of Christ is seen in (1) the crucifixion which removes the whole old creation on the negative side, (2) the resurrection which brings in a new beginning on the positive side, and (3) the ascension which secures for Him the position of victory.

The church lives out Christ's victory on earth by the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. The cross should be planted in the center of our life. God wants us to be responsible for the cross' cutting off of that part of the old creation which is known to us. God does not want us to be responsible for that part of the old creation which is not known to us.

(Afternoon, January 25)

WHO ARE GOD'S OVERCOMERS

Scripture Reading:

Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21

The Failure of the Church

The reason that the church is on the earth is to maintain the victory of Christ on the cross and bind Satan in each locality as the Lord bound him on Calvary. On the cross the Lord has condemned Satan according to the law. Now God desires that the church execute this judgment on the earth.

Satan knows that the church will be involved in his defeat. This is why he persecutes and tries to deceive the church with his falsehood. He is a murderer and a liar. The church is not afraid of his angry countenance but of his smiling face. The Acts of the Apostles is the record of how the church passed through death into life. God used Satan's attack to display Christ's victory. However, the church gradually became degraded. For example, there

were the falsehood of Ananias and Sapphira, the greediness of Simon, the admission of false brothers, the care of many for their own affairs, and the forsaking by many of Paul when he was in prison.

God's Search for Overcomers

After the failure of the church, God searched for a small number of people in the church to become His overcomers, those who would bear the responsibility which the church should have picked up but did not. God wanted a small number of faithful ones to represent the church and maintain the victory of Christ. In all of the seven ages of the church, there are God's overcomers. This line of overcomers has never been broken. The overcomers are not special people. The overcomers of God are a group of people who are one with God's original purpose.

The Principle of the Overcomers

According to the Bible, when God wants to do something, He first chooses a small number of people as a base and then works the same thing into the majority of the people. The record of the age of the patriarchs proves this principle is true. At that time, God chose men here and there in a scattered way. There were men like Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham. From Abraham, the record went on to the Israelites; from the dispensation of the patriarchs, to the dispensation of the law; from the dispensation of the law, to the dispensation of grace; from the dispensation of grace, to the dispensation of the kingdom; and from the dispensation of the kingdom, to the new heaven and new earth. The kingdom is a precursor to the new heaven and new earth. The altar and the tabernacle of the dispensation of the law typify items of the dispensation of grace. This is the principle of God's work; it always goes from few to many.

Colossians 2:19 says, "And...holding the Head, out from whom all the Body, being richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews, grows with the growth of God." "Joints" are for supply, while "sinews" are for the knitting together. The Head supplies and knits together the whole body through the joints and sinews. Only the overcomers can be the supplying joints and the connecting sinews.

Jerusalem typifies the church. Within Jerusalem, there was Mount Zion. One typifies the whole body of the church, while the other typifies the overcomers of the church. Jerusalem is large, while Zion is small. The stronghold of Jerusalem is Zion. Whenever there is something that has to do with God's heart desire, Zion is mentioned. Whenever there is something that has to do with the failures and sins of the Jews, Jerusalem is mentioned. God always allowed Jerusalem to be trodden down, but He always protected Zion. There is a New Jerusalem, but there never will be a new Zion, because Zion can never become old. Every time the Old Testament speaks of the relationship between Zion and Jerusalem, it shows us that the characteristics, the life, the blessing, and the establishment of Jerusalem come from Zion. In 1 Kings 8:1, the elders were in Jerusalem, and the ark of the covenant was in Zion. Psalm 51:18 says that God did good to Zion and built the walls of Jerusalem. Psalm 102:21 says that the name of the Lord was in Zion and that His praise was in Jerusalem. Psalm 128:5 says that the Lord blessed out of Zion and that the good was seen in Jerusalem. Psalm 135:21 says that the Lord dwelt at Jerusalem but that the Lord was to be blessed out of Zion. In Isaiah 41:27 the word was first announced to Zion and then preached to Jerusalem. Joel 3:17 says that when God dwelt in Zion, Jerusalem would be holy.

Today God is looking for the one hundred and forty-four thousand amidst the defeated church, who will stand on Mount Zion (Rev. 14). God always uses a small number of believers to pass on the flow of life to the church and to revive the church. As the Lord has done once before, so these overcomers have to pour out their blood before life can flow out to others. On behalf of the church, the overcomers take the stand of victory and also suffer tribulation and despising.

Thus, the overcomers of God need to give up what they consider as right. They have to pay the price and allow the cross to cut off all the old creation and deal with the gates of Hades (Matt. 16:18).

Are you willing to endure heartache to gain the heart of God? Are you willing to let yourself be defeated so that the Lord can be the Victor? When your obedience is fulfilled, God will deal with all disobedience (2 Cor. 10:6).

WHAT IS THE WORK OF THE OVERCOMER?

Scripture Reading:
Joshua 3:6, 8, 13, 15-17; 4:10-11, 15-18;
2 Corinthians 4:10-12

The Work of the Overcomer

In considering the overcomers, we need to pay attention to two things: (1) God chose a few persons to take the place of all the people who failed. (2) God made the few carry out God's command first, and then He worked the same thing into the majority.

God chose the Israelites to be a kingdom of priests among all people (Exo. 19:5-6), but they failed because they worshipped the golden calf at Mount Sinai. God then chose the sons of Levi, who had done His command, to be His overcomers to replace the Israelites as the priests (Exo. 32:15-29).

Originally God intended that the whole tribe of Israel be the priests. But because they worshipped the idol, God made the Levites to replace the Israelites as the priests.

God works on a few persons first. Then He works on the majority of the people through these few. Before God could deliver the Israelites, He first had to deliver Moses. God had to deliver Moses out of Egypt before He could deliver the Israelites out of Egypt. God had to deal with David to gain him first, before He could deliver the Israelites from the hand of the Philistines and could make them a nation. All spiritual goals must be fulfilled by spiritual means. God had to deal with Moses and David to the extent that they would no longer try to fulfill God's will by their flesh or exercise their flesh to render God the help.

First God gained twelve people, then one hundred and twenty, and finally He established the church. God allows a few persons to take up the responsibility which the majority should but would not. The principle of the overcomers is for God to allow a few persons to do something that results in blessing for the majority. He makes a few persons to stand in death so that the majority will receive life. God plants the cross into their heart for them to experience the principle of the cross in their family and their environment. The result of this is that life is poured into others. God needs channels of life in order to pour out life to others.

Standing in the Place of Death that Others May Receive Life

God put the priests in the place of death so that the Israelites would have a way to the land of life. The priests were the first ones to go into the water and the last ones to come up out of the water. They were the overcomers of God. Today God is seeking for a group of people who, like the priests of old, step into the water, that is, walk into death first. They are willing to be dealt with by the cross first, to stand in the place of death in order that the church will find the way of life. God must first put us in the place of death before others can receive life. The overcomers of God are the pioneers of God.

The priests could not do much by themselves; they merely bore the ark. They had to bear the ark of the covenant and go down into the midst of the water. We have to let Christ be the center, to put on Christ, and to go down to the water. The feet of the priests were standing on the riverbed while their shoulders were bearing the ark. They were standing in death, while lifting up Christ.

The bottom of the river is the position of death; it is not comfortable, attractive, or restful. They were not sitting there, nor lying there, but standing there. If I live in my temper, Christ cannot live in others. If I stand at the bottom of the river, others will cross over the Jordan victoriously. Death works in me, but life works in others. If I die in submitting to God, life will work in others to make them also submit to God. The death of Christ works His life into us. Without death, there is no life.

To bear the ark of the covenant at the bottom of the river is a great suffering. They needed to be very careful. If they were not careful, the holy God would destroy them. They stood there watching the Israelites crossing one by one. Yet they were set to be last. The apostle said, "God has set forth us the apostles last"; "we have become as the offscouring of the world, the scum of all things, until now" (1 Cor. 4:9, 13). He wished all would believe in the gospel but not be like him with chains on his hands (Acts 26:29). Do I want a good report, an easy life, or sympathy? Or do I want the church of God to gain life? May we be able to pray, "Lord, let me die so that others can gain life." God has said clearly that this is not an easy matter. Yet only in this way will God accomplish His eternal plan.

Before they could come out, they waited at the bottom of the river for all of God's people to cross over. We cannot come out of death before the kingdom comes. Eventually Joshua commanded, saying, "Come up out of the Jordan" (Josh. 4:17). Our triumphant Joshua will tell us to come up out of the water. This will happen at the beginning of the kingdom.

Many people are not disobedient; they are merely not obedient enough. It is not that they have not paid the price, but that they have not paid enough. It is not that they would not spend the money, or that they would not raise an army, but what they do is not adequate (Luke 14:25-35). Without going through the cross, one cannot reach Gethsemane. Without dealing with the cross, one cannot say, "Your will be done." Many people like the calling of Abraham, yet they do not like the consecration on Mount Moriah.

Have you ever envied others' easy living? God has put us at the river bottom in order that we would be His overcomers. He put us in chains in order that others can receive the gospel. Death works in me but life in others. This is the only channel of life. The life that flows into us has passed through two pipes, Paul and Martin Luther. The Lord's death first fills us with life, and then this life flows to others (2 Cor. 4:10-12).

The work of God's overcomer is to stand upon Christ's death so that others can gain life. The words of the Bible must first be realized by us before we can preach them. The light of the truth must first become life to us before it will become light to others. God makes His overcomers first see a truth and confirm such truth before He gains some others to obey this truth. Truth must first be constituted in us and become a part of our being. We ourselves must first have the experience of faith, prayer, and consecration before we can tell others what faith, prayer, and consecration are. Otherwise, we will only have the terms without the content. God wants us to go through death first after which He will give others life. We first must pass through the sufferings and the pain before others can have the life. To learn God's truth, one must stand at the bottom of the river first. The reason the church cannot gain the victory by crossing over to the good land is that there is a shortage of priests who will stand in the bottom of the Jordan. Those who stand in the bottom of the Jordan will create a seeking heart in others. If a truth is deeply constituted in us, it will attract others to pursue the truth. Today, many of God's truths need to be constituted in man. When we allow a truth to be constituted in us, we

are allowing the Body of Christ to grow one more inch. The overcomers are those who receive life from above to supply the Body.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE OVERCOMERS

Who are God's overcomers? The overcomers are the ones who allow their "self" to remain in the place of death in order that others might have the life. These ones are like the priests who bore the ark through the Jordan, who themselves stood in the place of death in order that the people of God could pass through. What does death here signify? What does it mean to stand in the place of death? This is a very crucial point; it has to do with the going on of God's people. This is the one thing that God is concerned with the most today. For this reason, it should also be the one thing that we are concerned with the most.

The truths in the Bible are not put together in bits and pieces. Behind every truth, there is something living. The letter of the truth is dead; it does not have life. In order for the truth to become living, there is the need for a living spirit. Many truths in the Bible are read, preached, and believed by men. But these truths must be experienced, dealt with, and transformed into life before they can become powerful to us. Many people think that those people who are more intelligent will receive more scriptural truths than others or will understand more of the things of God. This is absolutely wrong. Spiritual truths are not limited by our natural wisdom. Many people think that they can help others by acquiring something by their own strength and wisdom and conveying the same to others. Actually, this will not give life to others.

John 1 says that the Lord is the light of life. Many people think that as long as they understand this truth and preach this truth, everything will be all right. They think that the truth is the truth and that it is not necessary that it has to have anything to do with the person himself. But this is not God's way. His way is first to constitute the truth in a man, so that the truth becomes part of his constitution before he can preach this truth to others. A man must be dealt with, cut open, and saturated by the truth in a deep way before he can convey this truth to others. If a truth has never gone through God's constituting work, it will not produce any effect on man.

Let me give you a few illustrations.

Faith

The first item is faith. What is faith? It does not mean that you know about faith on Saturday and then preach it on the Lord's Day. You may have the letter but not have seen the thing itself. This is like talking to primitive people about the electric light. They may know the term but never have seen the thing itself. They may act like they understand. But in fact, they do not know what the thing is.

Therefore, God must first deal with you through matters; you first must be dealt with in the matter of faith and allow God's faith to be constituted in you before you can convey to others what is constituted in you. Only then can you render help to others. Only when death works in you will life work in others.

Prayer

Next, let us consider prayer. Teaching others to pray is not a matter of preparing or composing some doctrines on prayer. God has to take you through many environments before He can teach you the lesson on prayer. Only after many such experiences will you be able to tell others the way to pray. In everything, you must first be God's experiment.

Real prayer requires more strength than I exert in preaching. Many times we think that as long as we can deliver a good message, everything will be all right. But we have to realize that it is only after we have prayed thoroughly that our message will flow into others.

What we have mentioned above is the principle of God. This principle states that one must first go through sufferings and pay the price to have the experience before he can communicate the truth to others. Such ones are the overcomers according to God's desire.

Consecration

Let us again take up the matter of consecration as an illustration. What is absolute consecration? The Bible speaks of this, and men talk about this. But many only have the letters without having seen the thing itself. This is like a person reading a dictionary; he can read the words in the dictionary, but he does not know what the words indicate. The same is true with the church of God. One day when God compares your family, your work, your possessions,

your career, and your loved ones with Christ, you will realize what it is to live for the Lord. What will you choose? Will you choose Christ or something else? Will you bargain with God? No truth can be acquired without paying a price. I am afraid that many people have learned the truth but do not have any experience of it.

The Need for the Truth to Be Constituted in the Workers

How much of the truth in you has never been constituted? How much of what you know has never been realized in you? From this we see that men today do not even know what obedience is, what prayer is, and what faith is. There is no short cut to learning God's truth. The seed determines what the plant eventually will be. How a worker is, determines how the ones he works on will be. If you are not a serious person, the fruit you bear will surely not be serious. If you are a sober person, the fruit you bear will be sober. The kind of person you are determines the kind of fruit you will produce. I have seen men preaching the doctrine of "dying with Christ," "living with Christ," and "ascending with Christ," but the person himself had nothing to do with the spiritual things he was speaking of.

Once I asked Miss Barber how one can produce the sense of the need of life within others and generate a hunger within them. She replied, "On the one hand, this matter depends on God. But on the other hand, there are things that the workers themselves have to be responsible for. Let us not consider God's side for now. On the worker's side, whether or not he can create in others a spiritual hunger does not depend on what he says but on what he is. When an advanced one is put together with one who has not made much progress, that one will spontaneously realize his backwardness. When an obedient one is put together with a disobedient one, the disobedient one will spontaneously recognize his own disobedience. In the same way, when a holy one is put side by side with an unholy one, the unholy one will spontaneously realize his own unholiness. If you are not that type of person, you will not be able to produce that type of hunger in others."

The nature which we have inherited in regeneration is very prone to imitate. If you put it in front of holiness, it will spontaneously incline toward holiness. If you put it in front of obedience, it will spontaneously learn to obey. We should be a group of people who take the lead to grow before God. Today God

is attracting others to the shore through the experience of the cross and the endurance of sufferings in the life of the overcomers. The ones who entered the water first were the priests; they took the lead to stand in the death water. The overcomers are the pioneers; they open up a way in the midst of darkness and take the lead into death. Only by doing this will they be able to help others to go through in the same way.

Believers in the past mostly stumbled their way through. But believers today are told of the way others have stumbled through. All they have to do today is to obey and allow the truth already released to be constituted in their very being. These are the ones who have the ark on their shoulders, whose feet are on the earth, and who are standing firmly on the ground of death. Only by bearing Christ on our shoulder in this way can we be God's overcomers. If God cannot gain us as such a group of overcomers, He will have to find someone else.

Every time the cross comes upon you, or every time God deals with you, are you willing to accept the dealing, or will you run away from it? This is the crucial question today.

THE SELECTION OF THE OVERCOMERS

Scripture Reading:

Judges 6:1-6, 11-35; 7:1-8, 19-25; 8:1-4

Now we come to the matter of selecting the overcomers, of how to separate the overcomers from the non-overcomers.

Numbers says that every male of the Israelites from twenty years old and upward had to be a soldier to go forth to war for the Lord. At the time of the Judges, the Israelites had failed. In order for God to deliver them all, He had to select three hundred men who would fight the battle which the others should but did not fight. The others had failed and would not fight for Jehovah anymore. Many people know how to keep the faith and finish the course, yet they do not know how to fight the good fight.

How to Be an Overcomer—Gideon

Realizing Oneself to Be the Least:

Knowing the Self

It is easy to be humble before God, but it is very difficult to be humble before man in comparison with others. Saying, “I am the least” is easy, but saying, “I am the least in my father’s house” is not easy. Saying, “My family is poor” is easy, but saying, “My family is poor in Manasseh” is not easy (Judg. 6:15). The overcomers do not see the shining on their own faces, though others may see it. All those who see the shining on their own faces through a mirror are not overcomers. Though David was anointed, he still considered himself a dog. The overcomers have the reality of an overcomer rather than the name of an overcomer.

Seeing the Heavenly Vision: Seeing the Lord

No one can work without seeing a vision. If one has the vision, though he may encounter difficulties, he will still reach his goal. When we have the Lord’s word, we can cross to the other side. When we have the vision, our footsteps will be steadfast in our work.

Seeing and Not Disobeying the Vision:

Responding to the Lord’s Call

by Offering the Sacrifices

We need to offer up ourselves, even what we regard to be the least, to the hand of God. It does not matter whether we see ourselves as big or as small. If we do not put ourselves in the hand of God, both are equally futile. All living sacrifices that are according to God’s will are acceptable to God. The overcomers were called by God. Have you heard and answered the call to the overcomers in Revelation 2 and 3?

Tearing Down the Idols:

Making an Outward Testimony

After one has consecrated himself in his heart, he still needs to tear down the idols as an outward testimony. We need to be aware of ourselves, our family, and those with whom we have contact. Anything that occupies equal standing with God should be torn down. Only those who have seen God know what an idol is. Only those who have seen the Angel of God, who is the Lord,

know that anything besides the Lord is an idol. Only after one has seen the Angel of God will he realize that the wooden image is not God. The sacrifice on the rock (Judg. 6:21) is for the individual, but the sacrifice on the altar (v. 24) is for the multitude.

After having passed through these four steps, the Holy Spirit came upon Gideon. The filling of the Holy Spirit does not come as a result of prayer for power. When a man stands in the proper condition, the Holy Spirit will come upon him.

The blowing of the trumpet (v. 34) is a call for others to join the ranks of the overcomers. Overcomers should not act independently. We should separate ourselves from the defeated ones, but we should not separate ourselves from the other overcomers.

How to Select the Overcomers—

The Three Hundred Men

The First Selection

The first selection resulted in twenty-two thousand people leaving. They left because (1) they wanted to glorify themselves. We are willing to give up our life but not to give up our glory. Not only do we have to overcome Satan, we have to overcome ourselves as well. God wants only those who will work for Him without boasting about it. After working for God, we should merely say, “We are unprofitable slaves” (Luke 17:10). We should forget how much we have plowed, how many sheep we have shepherded. God cannot divide His glory between Him and us. If we still expect anything for ourselves, we will be eliminated. These ones also left because (2) they were fearful and afraid (Josh. 7:3). Whoever is fearful and afraid will be asked to leave. One must not love himself but must endure suffering. The greatest suffering is not material but spiritual. Whoever wants to glorify himself and is fearful and afraid will be eliminated. Overcoming does not depend on the number of people but on knowing God.

The Second Selection

The selection this time was based on a very small matter, that of drinking. A small matter always exposes what we are. In those days both the Jews and the

Arabs carried their luggage on their backs when they traveled. There were two ways to drink water along the way. One was to put down the luggage and kneel, bowing down to the ground to drink with the mouth. The other was to leave the luggage on the back and drink by putting the hand to the mouth. The latter was done for the sake of saving time for the journey and also for guarding oneself from robbers. Among the ten thousand, nine thousand and seven hundred drank with their mouths directly to the water, while three hundred drank by putting water in their hand to the mouth. Those who drank directly with their mouths were eliminated by God. Those who drank by bringing water in their hand to the mouth were selected by God. A person who has the chance to indulge himself but who will not do so is one who has been dealt with by the cross. This kind of person can be used by God. God can only use those who are willing to be unconditionally dealt with by the cross.

The three conditions by which God selects the overcomers are: (1) being absolute for God's glory, (2) being afraid of nothing, and (3) allowing the cross to deal with the self. One can judge for himself if he is an overcomer. God will test us, and we will be exposed as to whether or not we are overcomers. Only those who know the victory of the cross will be able to maintain the victory of the cross.

The Oneness of the Overcomers

God gave Gideon three hundred men and made them one body. Individual victory is not proper. Gideon and those three hundred men moved together and acted in one accord. All of their flesh was cut off, so they could be one. This is the oneness in the Spirit and a living in the Body. The record in the New Testament is a record of meetings rather than a record of working.

The Result

The three hundred men fought the battle, yet the whole congregation chased the enemy. The three hundred labored, yet the whole congregation reaped the harvest. When we overcome, the whole body is revived. To stand at the bottom of the river is not for ourselves, but for the whole body. "I...fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His Body, which is the church" (Col. 1:24). To be an overcomer, we also have to suffer the murmurings of the people, in the same way that Gideon suffered the murmurings of the men from Ephraim. Gideon not only defeated the

Midianites from without but also defeated the Midianites from within. Only this kind of person can continue to overcome. They were “weary yet pursuing” (Judg. 8:4b).

THE OVERCOMER’S PRAYER

Scripture Reading:

Matthew 18:18; Ephesians 6:12-13; 1:20-22; 2:6;

Mark 11:23-24

Authoritative Prayer—Praying with Authority

To be God’s overcomer, one has to learn to pray with authority by exercising Christ’s authority. In the Bible prayer is not merely a petition but a representation of authority. Prayer is to command with authority.

God’s overcomer must first be faithful to deny the self, the world, and Satan. We should first allow God to defeat us by the cross, that is we should allow ourselves to be defeated before God. Second, we must know how to apply Christ’s authority. We should exercise Christ’s authority to defeat Satan, that is, we should win the victory over Satan. Authoritative prayers are not petitions but commands. There are two kinds of prayer: petitioning prayers and commanding prayers. Isaiah 45:11 says, “Command Me.” We can command God to do something. This is a commanding prayer.

Commanding prayer begins from Christ’s ascension. Christ’s death and resurrection solved God’s four big problems. The death of Christ solved all the problems in Adam. His resurrection granted us a new position. His ascension seated us in the heavens, far above all rule, authority, power, lordship, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come. Ephesians 1 refers to Christ’s ascension far above all principality and power. Chapter two refers to the fact that we are also seated in the heavens with Him. Therefore, as Christ is far above all rule and authority, we also are far above all rule and authority.

Ephesians 1 tells us that Christ’s position is in the heavens. Chapter two tells us of our position in Christ, which is that we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies. Chapter six tells us what we do in the heavenlies. We are to sit in

the heavenlies and pray by issuing commanding prayers with the authority of Christ's victory.

A common prayer is one that prays from earth to heaven. A commanding prayer is one that prays from heaven to earth. Matthew 6 is a prayer of petition; it is upward. Ephesians 6 is a commanding prayer; it is downward. We are sitting in the heavenlies issuing prayers of command. *Amen* in Hebrew means "definitely so." This is a command. Satan, at the beginning of all battles, tries to dislodge our position as victors in the heavenlies. To battle means to fight for our position, while to overcome means to occupy our position. In Christ we sit in the heavenly position and are able to pray with authoritative prayer.

The words "for this reason" in Mark 11:24 indicate that verse 23 is also on prayer. But verse 23 does not tell us to pray to God. It merely says, "Whoever says to this mountain," that is, commands the mountain. It is not a direct speaking to God, but it is still a prayer, a prayer of command. It is not to ask God to do something but to exercise God's authority to deal with the mountain, the things that hinder us. Absolute faith comes out of absolute knowledge of God's will. Only with this faith can we speak to the mountain. We command what God has already commanded and decide what God has already decided. We have faith through having a full knowledge of God's will.

The Relationship between Authoritative Prayers and the Overcomers

The one who sits on the throne is God, who is the Lord. The one who is under the throne is the enemy. Prayer unites us to God. The overcoming ones, the reigning and ruling ones, know how to pray and exercise the authority of God's throne. (This authority of God's throne governs the world.) We may turn to the throne and apply the authority there to call a brother to come. (Hudson Taylor did this before.) In order to rule over the church, the world, and the authority in the heavenlies, the overcomers have to exercise the authority of the throne. In England about ten years ago, there were some brothers who had applied the authority of God's throne to govern the political changes. This is to rule over the nations. Spiritual battle is not only defensive but also offensive. We will not only rule over the nations but also over Hades and all rule, authority, power, and lordship. May God grant us to know how to exercise Christ's authority. All things are under Christ's feet. He is the Head of

the church. When we exercise Christ's authority, all things will be under our feet also.

Matthew 18:18-19 refers to praying. "On earth" and "in the heavens" in verse 19 show us that the prayer in verse 18 is a command. This praying is an execution, not a petition. It is a binding and a loosing, not a petitioning for God to bind and loose. There are two aspects to this commanding prayer. The first is to bind. We should bind the brothers and sisters who do not behave properly in the meetings. We should bind the world that frustrates the work. We should bind the demons and the evil spirits, and we should bind Satan and all his work. We can be kings and rule over all things. Whenever something goes wrong in the world or among the brothers, it is time for us to rule as kings. The second aspect to a commanding prayer is to loose. We should be those who can loose others. We should loose the brothers who are withdrawn. We should loose the brothers who need to free themselves for the work. We should loose men's money for God. We should loose the truth of God. We are ambassadors sent by God. On this earth, we should enjoy our right of "foreign diplomatic immunity." We can call on heaven to dominate this earth.

WHAT GOD'S OVERCOMERS SHOULD DO AT THE END OF THIS AGE

Scripture Reading:

Genesis 3:14-15; Revelation 12:1-11

The two passages we read today correspond with each other. One is in the beginning of the Bible while the other is at the end. In Genesis 3 we have (1) the serpent, (2) the woman, and (3) the seed. In Revelation 12 we have (1) the serpent, (2) the woman, and (3) the man-child.

God's Pronouncement on the Serpent

Genesis 3 covers God's pronouncement on man and on the serpent after the fall. It also covers God's redemption. "Upon thy belly shalt thou go" means God restricted Satan's work to the earth; he can no longer work throughout the universe. "And dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life" means God restricted Satan to feed on the man of dust. God ordained that all the descendants of Adam be the food of Satan.

“The woman” was the mother of all living. Hence, the woman represents all the living ones whom God intends to save.

“The seed of the woman” means Christ. When Christ was on the earth, He bruised the serpent’s head. The head is the vital part of a body. The Lord bruised the vital power of Satan.

The serpent bruising His heel means Satan doing his work behind Christ’s back. After Christ bruised the serpent’s head, He went on, while the serpent worked behind His back. This has always been the way he works in the believers—behind their back.

“The seed of the woman” refers to the individual Christ; it also refers to the corporate Christ. Those who participate in Christ’s resurrection are the seed of the woman. The Lord was born of a woman and is without the Adamic nature. Likewise, the regenerated new man in the believers does not have Adam’s nature in it. Christ is the Son of God, and the new man is also the son of God. Christ is not out of the flesh, neither is the new man out of the flesh nor out of the will of man.

Beginning from Genesis 3, both God and man set their hope on the seed of the woman. Satan also paid much attention to the seed of the woman. That is why he tried to stir up Herod to kill the Lord, why he tempted the Lord in the wilderness, and why he persecuted Him during the three and a half years. But in all these situations, the Lord overcame.

The Overcomers Dealing with the Serpent

Revelation 4 through 11 is one section. Chapter fifteen to the end is another section. Chapters twelve through fourteen are inserted as a footnote for the previous chapters; they do not form part of the main text. Chapter twelve is a continuation of chapters two and three. These two chapters mention “overcoming” seven times, while chapter twelve says “they overcame him.” Chapters two and three mention God’s calling of the overcomers at the time when most of the church has failed, while chapter twelve tells what these overcomers are and what they do. Revelation 2:27 says that the overcomers will rule the nations with an iron rod, while 12:5 says that the man-child will rule over the nations with an iron rod. The overcomers in the church are the

man-child. The man-child is corporate, composed of the “brothers” in verses 10 and 11.

The Lord purposely calls Satan the “ancient serpent” here to remind us of the record in Genesis 3.

In Revelation 12 the woman who brought forth the man-child is Jerusalem. This does not refer only to the earthly Jerusalem but also to the heavenly Jerusalem. The Bible tells us that God is our Father, the Lord is our elder Brother, and Jerusalem is our mother (Gal. 4:26).

The sun, the moon, and the twelve stars are consistent with the dream of Joseph. Hence, these things refer to the Israelites. Jerusalem is the center for the Israelites. Hence, this woman must mean Jerusalem.

This woman is the Jerusalem in chapters twenty-one and twenty-two. This city is composed of all the saved ones in the Old and the New Testaments, who have the life of Christ in them. The woman before the bringing forth of the man-child is a type of the church. The woman after the bringing forth of the man-child is a type of the Israelites. Before the bringing forth of the man-child, the description was concerning the things in the heavens—the sun, the moon, and the stars. After the bringing forth of the man-child, the description is concerning her condition on earth—fleeing to the wilderness.

The woman typifies the many sons whom God has saved. They will be very much persecuted by the enemy; the woman will suffer under the serpent. They should fight for themselves but because they cannot do this, God will raise up some overcomers from among them to fight for them. These overcomers will rule over the nations with an iron rod and will have a special place in the kingdom. When they are raptured to heaven, Satan will be cast down, and they will take back the serpent’s place in heaven. When they are on earth, Satan will withdraw. When they are in heaven, Satan will be cast down. To overcome means to recover the lost ground. The man-child overcomes on behalf of the mother. This means that the overcomers overcome on behalf of the church. At the end times, God is looking for the overcomers to end the battle in heaven. God’s “salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ” (Rev. 12:10) will be brought to heaven by them. As a result, the serpent will no longer have a place in heaven. Wherever the overcomers go, Satan will have to withdraw.

The Weapons of the Overcomers

These overcomers overcome the enemy by the following things:

The Blood of the Lamb

First, the blood of Christ is poured out, signifying that the life of the flesh is poured out. Through this, Satan will not be able to do anything to us. The food of Satan is dust; he can only work within a life of the flesh. Second, the blood of Christ deals with the attack of Satan. We are protected under the blood of Christ from the attack of Satan, in the same way that the Israelites were protected under the blood of the Passover. The blood satisfies God's righteousness; it signifies death. Therefore, Satan cannot attack us. Third, the blood of Christ answers Satan's accusations.

The Word of Testimony

All the works of Satan in the church are to overthrow the testimony. The church is the lampstand, and the lampstand is a testimony. Satan wants to overthrow the church in order to overthrow the testimony. The testimony spoken of here refers especially to the testimony against Satan. When the Lord was tempted, He said three sentences which were testimonies directed at Satan. We also should declare a testimony against Satan. Satan may say to us, "You are weak." But we should say to him that the power of the Lord is perfected in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). We should exercise the victory of Christ by applying God's Word. The blood speaks of the victory of Christ. A testimony is an application of the victory of Christ with the Word of God.

Not Loving One's Life

We should sacrifice our body and our life and have no pity on ourselves. We should "consider my life of no account as if precious to myself" (Acts 20:24). By the blood and the word of our testimony, we should not fear death but should fight until we overcome. Such men will fulfill the pronouncement of Genesis 3:15.

The dragon wants to devour the man-child which is about to be delivered. This is the reason we have persecutions and sufferings. These persecutions and sufferings force us to become the man-child, and cause us to be among the first to be raptured—the first rapture. The first rapture is not only a

blessing but a responsibility. Whoever has a place for the dragon in his heart will be persecuted by the dragon; he will go through the tribulation. Whoever does not have a place for the dragon in his heart will step on the head of the dragon. The serpent corrupted the woman. This is why there is the need for the seed of the woman to bruise him. God will not defeat the serpent by Himself. God needs the overcomers to defeat him. May we be part of the overcomers.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE OVERCOMING LIFE

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 41:

Conferences, Messages, and Fellowship (1), Chap. 11

Scripture Reading: Phil. 1:21; Col. 3:4; 1 Cor. 1:30

GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE

God has no intention for man to live by his own life. In eternity past God ordained that man would live out the life of God. This is why God is not satisfied with man simply living by his human life. According to His eternal purpose, God intends for man to live by His life. Man did not realize this in the garden of Eden. Even if he did realize this, he did not accept it. Hence, one day Christ came into the world as a man. He was crucified on the cross; He died, resurrected, and came back as the Spirit so that man might receive God's life through Him. In this way, Christ became the receivable Christ. Those who have believed in Him have received such a Christ. Many people know that they receive the forgiveness of sins when they receive Christ. However, God is not satisfied with forgiving sins alone; He wants man to no longer live in sin. He wants man to accept this receivable Christ into him to be his life so that he can live victoriously.

WRONG CONCEPTS AMONG CHRISTIANS

CONCERNING OVERCOMING

Trying to Meet God's Demand by One's Own Strength

When a Christian first believes in the Lord, he surely has God's life in him. Yet many people do not have a clear understanding of how Christ becomes their life and how He lives within them. They develop many wrong concepts about this matter because they lack the proper knowledge. After a Christian is regenerated, he begins to have new inclinations. He wants what he formerly did not want and rejects what he formerly embraced. Man's wrong concepts

come in when he strives to walk in God's will, resolving not to sin anymore and trying to live out the virtues of Christ. Many are renewed in their conscience after they are saved, and they are more sensitive toward sin, yet they do not have the power to do God's will and do not have the strength to overcome sin. As a result they live in deep remorse. Previously, when they lived in sin, they did not know that it was sin and did not feel any sorrow. They simply lived in a loose way. But now they have obtained a new life with a new nature and new inclinations. Christ is now living within them as their life. This brings in new demands that they find impossible to fulfill. Formerly, they suffered under sin. Now they suffer under the burden of holiness. For example, they may realize that Christians should not be proud or jealous or lose their temper, and they may resolve not to be proud or jealous or lose their temper. To their dismay, however, they find that they can do none of these things. Formerly, they did not realize that these were sins. They did not know what holiness is, and they had no desire to live a holy life. Now they know what holiness is, and they have a desire to live a holy life. But in spite of their knowledge and desire, they find that they cannot make it. This is the kind of suffering that many Christians experience after they are saved. This suffering for holiness is often more painful than the suffering they experienced before they were saved.

Some people can act like good Christians before men, but they realize their own evil before God. Some can pretend to be zealous and faithful in serving the Lord before men, but they know that their life is a series of failures. Their experience tells them that they are zigzagging between victory and failure; they alternate between overcoming and failing. Their life is a perpetual cycle of victories and failures. They know very well that they do not have the strength in themselves to do what they desire to do. Their thoughts and concepts are changed; they are clearly more noble than before. Furthermore, their inward being urges them to change for the better. Yet the life they have and the source of power within them have not changed. They are unable to supply adequate strength to meet their inward demands. Daily they are clear what they should do, and daily they aspire to overcome and be holy, yet daily they fail.

During this period, many Christians acquire new knowledge and experience new demands. As a result, they often make up their minds to do something, to fulfill the inner demands, and to act according to their new aspirations. They try hard to deal with their own sins and to be humble and meek before the

Lord, hoping that they will be inwardly free from unclean thoughts and outwardly free from unkind words. They hope to live a life before men that is according to the God-prescribed pattern shown in the Scriptures. They remind themselves repeatedly that they have to do good and that they have to strive to achieve their goal. Yet they find to their surprise that when they do not consciously try to do anything, they live in peace. But once they make up their mind to do anything, they fail no matter how hard they try. At this stage many Christians become discouraged and disheartened. Some even begin to doubt if they are saved. This is the common experience shared by many Christians.

What we have just described is an interesting phenomenon. It is the first mistake Christians commit in their Christian life. They think that God gave them a new life so that they could have a new knowledge and a new understanding of what is good and evil, right and wrong. When they were living in sin, they did not know to differentiate between good and evil. But once they desire to meet God's standard, they fall into a different kind of misunderstanding. What a tragedy this is! They think that God gives them a new life for no other reason than to give them new desires, new cravings, new inclinations, and new hopes so that they will strive for heavenly and spiritual things. Since they are Christians, they think that they should act according to these new desires. They think that receiving a new life means nothing more than receiving a new attitude, a new hope, and a new inclination, and that they still need to exercise their own strength to fulfill these new demands. This is a great mistake.

The new life is God's new law within us. This new law, of course, has new demands. Because it has demands, we exert as much strength as we can to act according to this new law. Yet the new demands that God puts within us can never be met by ourselves. Man only has the human life. This human life is natural and common; it cannot meet the needs of the new law. The old life cannot satisfy the demands of the new law. For example, consider a fish. Even if I could give it a new demand to fly and even if I had the power to put a new desire to fly within it, the fish could not fly because there is no flying power within the life of the fish. Although it can aspire to fly, it cannot actually fly. The same is true with Christians today. The new life brings new desires and new inclinations. Yet the old life cannot meet the demands of the new life. This is the kind of Christians we find in Romans 7. The Christian in Romans 7 is one who aspires to meet the demands of God's law by his own strength, but

who fails. I have never seen a Christian who can meet God's demand by his own strength. Nothing that comes out of our old life can meet God's demand.

Asking God to Grant Us the Power to Overcome

Another group of people know that they have received a new life, new standards, and new demands and aspirations. They know that they are weak and prone to defeat and failure. They think that they should ask God to grant them strength and help them to overcome sin. They think that they should ask God to empower them for their new living. They think that God will grant them the necessary strength if they pray enough. They think that once God hears their prayer, they will overcome many sins and be able to do good and live out God's requirements. These Christians know that it is wrong to make resolutions, and they know that they cannot do anything by their own strength. Therefore, they pray for God to give them the strength. Even though they cannot make it by their own strength, they think that they can surely make it if they have God's strength. As a result they beseech God, pray, and even fast. They shut themselves up behind closed doors to pray to the Lord, or they leave the secular world behind to pray on the mountains or by the sea. They think that God will answer their prayers if they are earnest enough. The amazing thing is that even though God seems to answer other prayers, He never answers their prayer for victory over sin. They are surprised that their sin can torment them to the extent that they become totally defeated in its face. They think that they are not desperate enough; consequently, they pray day and night, asking God to grant them the power to overcome their sin. When they lock themselves up in their rooms, they are kept from their sins, and they think that they have overcome. But as soon as they finish praying and walk out of their rooms, temptations and Satan are waiting outside the door, and they fail again.

Tonight I will not ask if you have prayed. I will only ask one penetrating question: How many of you have overcome sin through praying for God's help? You may have prayed for God to make you a strong Christian. You may have prayed for Him to give you strength and help. God may answer your prayer and make you strong, but you still cannot overcome your sin. This is an amazing fact. God never helps you overcome. He never helps you stop yourself from sinning.

Asking God for Virtues

After many failures, some Christians become aware of the sins they frequently commit. They know why they fail. I am afraid many of you have not yet realized your habitual sins. Some are better and know their habitual sins. Some realize that they are too quick and excessive in their speaking. Some realize that their thoughts are unclean and unpresentable before men. Some realize that they are too blunt; they know that they hurt others all the time. They know that they are not meek. Some realize that they have a bad temper, and some realize that they are proud. Many people realize their habitual sins and then pursue the virtues that are the opposite of their sins. For example, those who are proud seek humility. Those who are jealous seek to be lowly. Those who have a bad temper seek patience. Those who have unclean thoughts seek to have a clean heart. Whatever sins they have, they seek virtues that are opposite of their sins. While one is seeking patience, he may think that he is not all that bad. He thinks that he only has a little shortcoming in his conduct; he only needs a little patience. He prays for God to send a package of patience from heaven. The amazing thing is that this patience never comes. No matter how hard he tries, patience never comes. He tells the Lord that he lacks a certain virtue and that he aspires to have it from the Lord. But no matter how hard he prays, the Lord will not give it to him.

GOD'S WAY OF SALVATION

My burden is not to speak about the wrong concepts of Christians. I have mentioned only these three, but other concepts are similar in principle. My purpose for bringing them up is to show that they are dead ends for a Christian. They are not the biblical way. God has no intention for a Christian to live this way. If we live according to these principles, we will fail all the time. God has given us a new life. This new life brings us not only new knowledge and new desires, but also new energy and new strength to meet the new desires and new demands. The new desires and new demands come from the new life, just as the new source of supply to meet these new desires and new demands also comes from this new life. When we were regenerated, we not only received new desires and new knowledge, which aspire to overcome our lusts and our sins, but we also received new power to meet the demands of this new life.

GOD INTENDS FOR CHRIST TO BE OUR LIFE AND SATISFACTION

The new life and new power that God has given to us is simply Christ Himself. Today Christ lives within us. What is He doing within us? He is within us as our life, and He is within us to be with us all the time. The Lord said that He will not leave us as orphans (John 14:18). We can say that the wretched man in Romans 7 is an orphan, and we can call Romans 7 a chapter about orphans. The man in Romans 7 had new demands and new desires, yet he could not meet these needs. He was like an orphan hungry for food, but who was without food. The weather was cold and he needed clothing, yet he was without clothing. He had to find all these things by himself. Yet even when he willed to have these things, he could not have them. The Lord said that He would live within us and meet all our needs. Tonight I am not just preaching a Christ who has died for us. I am not just preaching a crucified Christ but a Christ who is living in us, a Christ who supplies all our needs.

We should not be satisfied with the Christ we knew in the past. In John 4 the Lord told the Samaritan woman, "Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever; but the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water gushing up into eternal life" (vv. 13-14). This is the life in the Spirit which Christ gives to us. This life is a spring. Christ does not give us something that can be contained in a bucket or exhausted in a few days. Christ supplies a spring within us. We can draw from it all the time "into eternal life." It will not run out even when we see God face to face. Christ is in us as our life, and He is supplying all of our needs.

Many Christians say that they are saved, but their lives do not appear any different from those who are not saved. I have often joked that some Christians are "not quite saved." Do not be mistaken. I am not saying that they are not saved. I am saying that they do not appear to be quite saved. This means that they have not reached the biblical definition of being saved. Can you say that you have Christ as your Shepherd and that you "shall not want"? Is Christ your Shepherd? Can you say that you have no want? You may have to confess that you have many wants. If you answer in this way, it proves that you need to know Christ in a deeper way. The Christ mentioned in the Bible is One who can satisfy your heart. He will make your heart thirsty again and again, yet He will satisfy your thirst again and again. I must say Hallelujah! The Lord has given us a spring. This is not like listening to a sermon once a week on Sunday and then running out of the supply for the other six days of the week. He is a spring within us which wells up into eternal life. A Christian

has no need of a bucket because there is a well within him. The water within many Christians seems to come from a bucket; it quickly runs out. But the Bible says that there is a spring within a Christian, which wells up into eternal life. The source of supply in a tap is the reservoir; the supply is not from the house itself. In the same way, the source of life of a Christian is Christ; it is not from himself. What a difference this is from the man in Romans 7, who wills and fails again and again.

GOD INTENDS FOR CHRIST TO BECOME OUR VICTORY

Many people think that they are too weak and that they have failed too often. They ask God to strengthen them. They think that as long as they have the power, they can overcome sin. Yet even if they had the power, they could not overcome sin. They are often amazed when they are overcome by their sin. But in themselves can they do anything other than sin? It should not be a surprise at all for them to sin. A Western missionary once said to me, "I sin often. I am sick of my sins. I cannot overcome no matter how hard I try. My work in China has failed." While I was listening, I was laughing. She asked, "Why are you laughing?" I said, "You feel strange that you sin. But I do not feel strange at all. To me this is most common. I may be surprised if you committed greater sins, but I am not surprised that you are committing these kinds of sins." She said, "I have been preaching in China for seven years. I know that God has called me, and I have experienced Him a little. Yet I always fail. How can I work any longer? God has to give me the strength to overcome my sins." I said, "If you prayed for anything else, God might answer you. But if you pray for God to give you the strength to overcome your sins, He will not answer. He will not give you the strength to overcome your sins."

I told her that her mistake was in trying to mend the old creation with the new creation. She was weak, and she asked for strength to overcome her sin. Yet the power of the new life, the power of God, is not given to us to sustain our old man or to empower it to overcome sins. God never does this. We need to ask God to grant us new light and new revelation. We need Him to show us that it is not a surprise for us to be weak. It is absolutely right that we should overcome sin. The problem is that the human life will always remain the human life. This life does not have the power to overcome sin. God has no intention for us to overcome sin with our human life, and He has no intention

to sustain our old life with His power. God intends for Christ to be our life, our strength, and our victory.

THE WAY TO RECEIVE THE OVERCOMING LIFE

How does God give us the overcoming life? He gives us the overcoming life by giving us His Son, who becomes our victory. Paul said, "For to me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21a). Paul did not say that we should live by Christ, that we should live by His strength, or that we should live by His life. He said that for him to live was Christ. Our greatest misconception is to think that God gives us Christ to help us to overcome our sins. It is true that we have to overcome sin. But the way is not by Christ granting us the strength to overcome our sin. The biblical way is to set ourselves aside and to allow Christ to overcome for us. Christ died for us on the cross. Now Christ is living within us and for us. If Christ were not living for us and if Christ only died for us on the cross, it would be impossible for us to overcome. Christ is not here to sustain us or to strengthen us to overcome our sins. He is here to set us aside and to live within us in our place. He is overcoming sin for us. This is why Paul said that for him to live was Christ. Only when Christ lives for us can we say that for us to live is Christ. If Christ is not living for us, we cannot say that for us to live is Christ. We are not living by Him, and we are not living by imitating Him or living by drawing from His strength. For us to live is Christ. It is not a matter of Christ strengthening us, but a matter of Christ becoming our life.

VICTORY BEING CHRIST LIVING FOR US WITHIN

Three years ago I was working in America. One day after a meeting, a doctor invited me to go to his home. His wife said to me, "Please pray for me." I asked, "Why do you want me to pray for you?" She said, "I have several naughty boys, and they make me lose my temper all the time. I tried to be patient when the first child was born, and I tried to endure when the second child was born. However, when the third child came along, I felt powerless. When all four are together, I can no longer hold back, and I begin to lose my temper. The more they are together, the more I lose my temper. I cannot be patient. What should I do?" I smiled at her and said, "Do you really want to be patient?" She answered, "It would be wonderful if God would grant me patience. Then I could keep from losing my temper." I said, "You are not lacking in patience." She said, "What do you mean? If I am not lacking in

patience, what do I lack?" I said, "You lack Christ. You do not lack patience. If you pray for patience, God will never give it to you, because Christ is our patience." Christ does not help us become patient; He does not give us the power to be patient. He is patience within us. There is a great difference between these two things. We do not lack patience; we lack Christ. Christ is our patience. He does not help us become patient. He does not give us the strength to make us patient. He is living within us and for us, and He is living out His patience within us. Christ within is our patience.

First Corinthians 1:30 says, "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom to us from God: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption." This verse shows us that God has made Christ our sanctification. It does not say that Christ helps us to become sanctified or gives us the strength for sanctification. Christ does not give us the strength for us to be sanctified. Rather, He becomes our sanctification. Christ is our very sanctification. This is victory. Victory is for Christ to be our life.

Many people are familiar with Galatians 2:20. But few see the real significance of this verse. We often think, "Since it should be no longer I that live, I must strive and struggle to live no longer." Actually, it is not a matter of us striving or struggling to live; it is a matter of Christ living. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who is living. This means that Christ is living instead of us. Christ has redeemed us from sin on the cross, and He is now living within us and for us. This is an exchanged life: It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

THE OVERCOMING LIFE BEING AN EXCHANGE RATHER THAN A CHANGE

Last year in Chefoo, a Christian said to me, "I need a great change. Once I am changed, everything will be fine." I said, "Your hope can never be realized." He said, "You do not know me. How do you know that there is no hope in me?" I said, "I knew you long ago. Before you were born, I knew you already. What are you? You are hopelessness itself. God has said in the Bible that there is no hope in you. If there were some hope in you, God would not have crucified you. The cross is God's valuation of you. It means that you only deserve to die. You are worthy of nothing but death. You should die, and you

must die. You are absolutely useless. God was not mistreating you when He crucified you. You say that you want to change, but I say that you can never change for the better. You can never improve. This hope can never be realized. It does not matter how much a cow changes; it will still be a cow. It does not matter how much a pig changes; it will still be a pig. No matter how much you change, you will still be yourself. You want to change. But let me say something to you. Add the letters e and x to the word change and make it exchange. What you need is not a change, but an exchange."

No matter how much I, Watchman Nee, change, the life within me will always be the life of a sinner. God's way of salvation and His method of deliverance is not changing what is evil and weak within me into something that is good and powerful. God's way of salvation is to set me aside. Henceforth, it is no longer I, but Christ who lives in me. God has exchanged my life for the life of Christ. It is not a change, but an exchange. God put Christ within us so that He would live instead of us. This is victory. A man may have a bad temper, but God's way of salvation is not to change his bad temper. His way of salvation is to put Christ within him so that Christ becomes his patience and meekness. God intends that Christ be our sanctification, righteousness, humility, patience, etc. This means that everything is Christ. It is Christ who is everything to us. This is the meaning of victory.

Victory is something that God gives to us; it is not something we strive to attain. Many people read only the letter of the Bible but do not understand the reality behind the letter of the Word. They do not understand what Galatians 2:20 means. Over ten years ago, when I was first saved, someone read me a story about a little eight-year-old girl. She was saved and had the excellent experience of overcoming sin, and she knew what victory meant to her. During a meeting at the Keswick Convention, someone asked how she would overcome when temptation came. She answered, "Every time temptation comes, I will not speak to it, I will not fight against it, and I will not ask it to go away. When Satan knocks on my door, I tell the Lord, 'Lord, You open the door for me.' When Satan hears the Lord opening the door, he will say, 'Sir, sorry, I have knocked on the wrong door,' and he will turn and run away immediately." The first time I heard this story, I smiled like you do today. At that time, even though I knew that the little girl was right, I did not know how right she was because I did not have the experience yet. During the past few years, I have learned this secret of overcoming sin. The secret is for

Christ to deal with the sins instead of dealing with them myself. I do not need to resist sins; Christ resists them for me. I do not have to fight against temptations; Christ fights against them for me. I do not have to reject Satan; Christ rejects him for me. I do not have to overcome sin; Christ overcomes it for me. I do not have to exercise patience; Christ becomes my patience for me. I do not have to be pure and humble; Christ is my purity and humility.

The Son of God is in me; Christ is in me. This is my victory, and this is my everything. I cannot help but praise Him. The Son of God was willing to die on the cross for me. Today He is willing to live within me. He is sitting on the throne in heaven, but at the same time, He is also living within me. God has given His Son's life to us for this very purpose. He has set aside man's life and put His Son's life within us. Our living and our everything depends on Christ. Many people think that as long as they receive a package of patience, humility, or love from heaven everything will be solved. But we have to realize that God's salvation in Christ is a wholesale transaction instead of a retail transaction. We do not need to ask for a little today and a little tomorrow. He has put everything within us once and for all.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT BEING CHRIST

Many people say that there are nine kinds of fruit of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22 and 23. They think that the Holy Spirit has nine different kinds of fruit and that we take in this fruit one by one. This is like saying that we first take in a fruit called love. Now love is within us, but we do not have joy yet. So we move on and take in another fruit called joy. After we have joy, we move on to take in peace. But there is not such a thing. We have to realize that the word fruit in the phrase the fruit of the Spirit is singular in the original language. There is only one fruit of the Holy Spirit. Love, joy, peace, endurance, etc. are all part of the one fruit of the Spirit. Once we have the fruit of the Spirit, we have all nine virtues. If we do not have the fruit of the Spirit, we do not have any of the nine virtues. We cannot say that we have one kind but are short of the other eight. If we have one, we have all. If we are short of one, we are short of all. Christ is the fruit of the Spirit. When we receive Christ into us, we have the entire fruit of the Spirit.

We often ask what the fruit of the Spirit is. But God asks who the fruit of the Spirit is. The fruit of the Spirit is just Christ Himself. When we have Christ, we have the fruit of the Spirit. If we have Christ, we have everything. In the

eyes of God, we do not obtain these things item by item. Rather, we obtain the whole Christ once for all. Once we have Christ, we have the fruit of the Spirit. Many people have tried to buy a little grace from God here and there. The result is nothing but failure. Let me ask: You have been praying for patience for a long time, but have you received it yet? Christ is in us as our life, and He is living for us. What else do we need? Once we see that Christ is our life and that He is living for us, we will immediately have all the grace that we need. The Chinese have an expression: "As long as the green mountain remains, there is no fear that one will run out of wood for fire." Christ is our "green mountain," and the nine aspects of the fruit of the Spirit are the trees growing on this "mountain." If we want to be overcoming in our lives, our eyes have to be set continually on Christ.

The kind of Christians that God is after are not those who imitate Christ or those who have received a little power here and there. The kind of Christians that God is after are those who will set aside themselves and allow Christ to live instead of them. With this replacement, there will be the proper walk. When Christ lives for us and within us, we become Christ, and we can overcome. Otherwise, we will not live Christ, and we will not overcome no matter how we live. Victory is Christ becoming everything within us and living for us. This is the overcoming life.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OVERCOMING LIFE

The Overcoming Life, Chap. 3

What is victory? In the Bible, victory is first mentioned in 1 Samuel 15:29 (ASV margin), where it says that Victory will not lie nor repent. Indeed, victory is a person. A thing is not a person, and a matter is not a person, but the Victory of Israel is a person. Victory is not a thing or an experience. It is not a matter; it is a person. We all know who this person is; He is Christ! In a previous message I told you that victory is not something from us. It is not our experience; it is a person! Victory is not a matter of what we are, but a matter of Christ living on our behalf. This is why the victory we have will not lie nor repent. Thank and praise the Lord that victory is a living person!

In this message, we will go on to consider what victory is. We need to consider the characteristics of the overcoming life. The Bible shows us many characteristics of the overcoming life. We cannot enumerate all of them in this message. We will instead mention only five of them.

THE MEANING OF THIS LIFE— AN EXCHANGED LIFE, NOT A CHANGED LIFE

Brothers and sisters, victory has to do with an exchanged life, not a changed life. Victory does not mean that one is changed, but rather that one is exchanged. We are very familiar with Galatians 2:20, which says, “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.” What does this verse mean? It means that our life is exchanged. Our life is no longer in the realm of “I”; it has nothing to do with us anymore. It is not an evil “I” being changed into a good “I,” or a filthy “I” being changed into a clean “I.” It is to be “no longer I.” The greatest mistake we make today is to think that victory involves progress and that defeat involves the absence of progress. This is why we think that everything will be well if we do not lose our temper or if we have an intimate fellowship with God. We think that if we

have these things, we will overcome. But we have to remember that victory has nothing to do with us. We play no part in this victory.

One brother once said to me in tears, "I cannot overcome." I answered, "Brother, indeed you cannot overcome." He continued, "I cannot overcome, and there is nothing that I can do." I said, "God has no intention for you to overcome in yourself. It is not His intention that your evil temper be changed to a good temper or that your stubbornness be changed to meekness. God has no intention to change sorrow to joy. His way is to make an exchange of your life. It has nothing to do with you."

One sister said, "It is easy for others to overcome. But it is very difficult for me to overcome. My temper is worse than anyone else's, my thoughts are more unclean than others', and I am more ill-natured than others are. I cannot control myself." I answered, "You are right. Not only is it difficult for you to overcome; it is impossible for you to overcome." Do you think that if a man is a little more honest, well-tempered, and simple, it is easier for him to overcome? Never! On the one hand, even if a person becomes gentler, holier, and more perfect, he still has to go, and Christ still must move in before he can overcome. On the other hand, even if he is viler, more evil, and more imperfect than anyone else, he will still overcome if he lets go of himself and allows Christ to move in. A man who has a bad temper and is morally corrupt needs to believe in the Lord Jesus. A man who has a good temper and is very moral also needs to believe in the Lord Jesus. In the same way, it is not just ill-tempered and immoral ones who need victory; well-tempered and moral ones also need victory. Thank and praise the Lord that victory is Christ; it has nothing to do with us.

I met a sister once. I have never seen another person who found it as difficult to overcome as she did. She spent two hours telling me about all of her failures from the time she was a youth to the time she was fifty years old. She could not overcome her pride and temper. She was defeated again and again. No one was as eager to overcome as she was. Yet no one found it as impossible to overcome as she did. She told me that if there ever was a person who wanted to overcome, she must be one of them. Yet if there ever was a person who could not overcome, she must be one of them as well. She grieved over her failures and even attempted suicide once because of her failures. She was hopeless. While she was telling me all this, I smiled and said, "The Lord Jesus has another ideal patient for Himself today. There is business for His

clinic again!” She was filled with her own sins, her own pride, and her own temper. If you did not know the way to overcome, you might have been infected by her barrage of words. If you did not know what it is to overcome, you may have concluded that she was hopeless. But thank and praise the Lord! Here is a glad tidings: You cannot change, but all you need is an exchange! Thank and praise the Lord! The overcoming life is not a change but an exchange. If it were up to you, you could not make it. But if it is up to Christ, He can make it. The question is whether it is you or Christ who overcomes. If Christ overcomes, it would not matter even if you were ten times worse than you are now.

Brothers and sisters, what is victory? Victory is not you overcoming by yourself. It is Christ overcoming for you. The kind of victory in the Bible is seen in Galatians 2:20: “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” When Fukienese argue, they often use a colloquial expression, *si-bu-bien*, which means that there cannot be any change until one dies. When I was in Peking, I told the brothers that every one of us has to tell ourselves that we are *si-bu-bien*. Thank and praise Him that we are not changed but exchanged!

A sister once asked me about the difference between a change and an exchange. I illustrated it with an old Bible. If we want the Bible to change, we have to give it another cover and add glue to the spine. Perhaps we can put new gold foil on the cover. If letters are missing from the pages, we have to make them up. If places have become blurred, we have to trace in the original words. After so much work and so many days, we still cannot be sure whether we have changed it the right way. But if we exchange it for a new one, we can do it within a second. All you have to do is give the bad one to me, and I will give a good one to you. Then everything is done. God has given us His Son. There is no need for us to strive for anything. Once we make the exchange, everything is done!

Let me give another illustration. A few years ago, I bought a watch. The company that sold the watch put a two-year warranty on the watch. But the days that the watch was in the shop were more than the days it was in my home. Every few days the watch would break down, and I had to send it back to the shop for repair. This happened repeatedly. I went to the shop once, twice, even ten or more times. Eventually, I was exhausted. The watch was repaired over and over again, but it was never quite fixed. I asked the company if I could exchange it for another watch. The company said that it

could not offer an exchange; it could only repair the watch, but it was never fixed. I became so exhausted that eventually I said, "You can have the watch. I do not want it anymore." The human way is the way of constant repair. During the two years that I owned the watch, it was constantly under repair. With the human way, there is no exchange; there is only the way of repair.

Even in the Old Testament, we see that God's way was not to repair or to change, but to replace. Isaiah 61:3 says, "To grant to those who mourn in Zion, / To give to them a headdress instead of ashes, / The oil of gladness instead of mourning, / The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of heaviness; / That they may be called the terebinths of righteousness, / The planting of Jehovah, that He may be glorified." God's way is the way of replacement. God does not change the ashes. Rather, He replaces the ashes with a headdress. He does not change the mourning. Rather, He replaces the mourning with gladness. God's way is never to change, but to exchange.

Thank and praise the Lord. We have not been able to change ourselves for all these years. Now God is making an exchange. This is the meaning of holiness. This is the meaning of perfection. This is the meaning of victory. This is the life of the Son of God! Hallelujah! From now on Christ's meekness becomes my meekness. His holiness becomes my holiness. From now on His prayer life becomes my prayer life. His fellowship with God becomes my fellowship with God. From now on there is no sin too great for me to overcome. There is no temptation too great for me to withstand. Victory is Christ; it is no longer I! Is there any sin too great for Christ to overcome? Is there any temptation too great for Christ to surmount? Thank and praise the Lord! I am not afraid anymore! From now on, it is no longer I but Christ.

THE PRINCIPLE OF THIS LIFE— A GIFT, NOT A REWARD

Please remember that victory is a gift; it is not a reward. What is a gift? A gift is a present; it is something freely given. What we receive as a result of work is a reward. But what we freely receive without doing any work is a gift. The latter is given to us freely; it has nothing to do with what we have done, and we do not have to exert any effort to get it. The former requires our work; we must strive for it before we can have it. The overcoming life which we speak of does not require our own effort. We can look at 1 Corinthians 15:57, which says, "But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord

Jesus Christ.” Victory is something that God has prepared and given to us. Our victory comes to us free of charge; we do not have to earn it by our own effort.

Brothers and sisters, a great mistake is to think that salvation comes to us freely, while victory comes to us as a result of our own effort. We know we cannot trust in any merit or any work of our own for salvation. We simply need to come to the cross and receive the Lord Jesus as our Savior. This is the gospel. While we think that salvation does not require our works, we also think that we should have good works after we are saved. Even though we do not try to be saved through works, we try to overcome through works. But just as one cannot be saved through good works, one cannot overcome through good works. God says that we cannot have any good works at all. Christ has died for us on the cross, and He is living for us within us. What is of the flesh will always be of the flesh, and God wants nothing that is of the flesh. We think that salvation is through the Lord Jesus’ death for us on the cross, but that after salvation, we should try our best to do good and hope for the best. But let me ask, “Though you have been saved for years, are you good yet?” Thank and praise the Lord. We cannot do good. We cannot produce any amount of good. Hallelujah! We cannot do any good. Thank and praise Him that victory is a gift from Him; it is something freely given to us!

First Corinthians 15:56 speaks of sin, the law, and death. First Corinthians 15:57 speaks of God giving us the victory. Victory is a matter not only of overcoming sin, but also of overcoming the law and death. The redemption that God has prepared enables us to overcome not only sin but also the law, and it enables us to overcome not only the law but also death. I wish that I could walk around the meeting hall and say to each one of you that this is a gospel. God has given this victory to every one of us.

Perhaps you are trying to work out a way to overcome temptation. Perhaps you are trying to work out a way to overcome your temper. Perhaps you are trying to work out a way to overcome your pride or jealousy. You may have spent a considerable time to do what you want to do, but you are disappointed every time. I have a gospel for you. The meekness of the Lord Jesus is yours for free. The holiness of the Lord Jesus is yours for free. The Lord’s prayer is yours for free. Everything of the Lord is yours for free. As soon as you receive the Lord Jesus, all that is the Lord’s becomes yours. Hallelujah! If this is not the gospel, what is it then? You may think that you have to strive in order to

pray unceasingly. You may think that you have to strive for uninterrupted fellowship with God. You may think that you have to strive in order to deal with all the negative things and stop sinning. You may think that you have to strive in order to control your temper. You can confess your sins, but you cannot stop from committing these sins. You lie often, and in spite of your great effort to kick this habit, you continue to lie. I have met many brothers who told me that they do not want to lie, but they cannot change themselves. As soon as they speak something, lies come out of their mouth. I have a gospel for you today! God has given you the holiness of the Lord Jesus for free, the endurance of the Lord Jesus for free, the perfection, the love, and the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus for free. God gives freely to all those who want these things. God gives to you the intimate fellowship that Christ enjoys with God. He gives you the holy life that Christ lived, and He gives you the beauty of the perfection of Christ. These are gifts. If you tried to overcome by yourself, you could not change even if you tried for another twenty years; your temper would not change, and your pride would still be with you. Twenty years from now, you would still be the same. But God has prepared a full salvation for you. This salvation makes Christ's endurance your endurance. It makes Christ's holiness your holiness, and Christ's fellowship with God your fellowship with God. It makes all of Christ's virtues your virtues. Hallelujah! This is the salvation that God has prepared for you! God desires to freely give them to you!

Brothers and sisters, have you ever seen a sinner trying to save himself with his works? I have met many such people. When you meet a sinner, you can tell him that he does not need to do anything because Christ has done it all. God has given him the Lord Jesus. All he has to do is receive Him. In the same way, brothers and sisters, I have a message for you today: you do not need to do anything; Christ has done it all for you. God has given Christ to you. All you have to do is receive. Once you receive, you will overcome. Just as salvation does not depend on your work, because it is free grace from God, victory does not depend on your work, because it is free grace from God. Salvation does not require any of your own effort. Similarly, victory does not require any of your own effort.

I have a Bible here. Suppose I want to give it to you. The words in this Bible were not written by you; the book was not bound by you. You did not put the gold foil on the cover. Everything was done by others, but it is now a free gift to you. This is what victory is to us. It is a free gift from God. We do not work

ourselves gradually into victory. We do not work ourselves gradually into holiness or perfection. If there is a victorious man on earth, he must have received his victory from the Lord Jesus.

Recently I met a sister who told me that she had spent twenty years trying to overcome her pride and her temper. The result was not only defeat but also a gradual decline during the past twenty years. She could do nothing about herself. I told her, “If you expect to overcome your pride and temper by yourself, you would not make it even if you had another twenty years. If you want to be delivered from your sin, all you have to do is accept God’s gift now. This is God’s free gift to you. You only need to receive and it will be yours. The Lord Jesus is victory. If you receive Him as your victory, you will overcome.” Thank and praise the Lord! She has since received this gift of God! We should realize the vanity of our work and the failure in our life. If we accept Jesus Christ, we will overcome.

Romans 6:14 is a familiar verse: “For sin will not lord it over you, for you are not under the law but under grace.” How can sin not lord it over us? This can happen only when we are not under the law but under grace. What is the meaning of being under the law? I have said many times that being under the law is for God to demand man to do something. Being under the law means for us to do something for God. What then is the meaning of being under grace? Being under grace means that God is doing something for man. Being under grace is for God to do something for us. If we have to do something for God, the result will be sin lording it over us. The wages of our work is the lording over of sin. If God is doing something for us, sin will not be able to lord it over us. Under the law, we work. Under grace, God works. When God works, sin will not lord it over us. When God works, there will be victory. Everything that comes as a result of our own effort is not victory. Victory is something that comes free.

If there is anyone here who is tired of sinning, who is sick of sinning, who sins so much that he no longer acts like a Christian, and who feels that there is no longer any sense in becoming a Christian, I will tell him that all he has to do is receive this gift, and he will be a victorious man instantly. The principle of overcoming is the principle of grace; it is not the principle of reward. Once you receive this gift, every problem will be solved.

THE WAY TO RECEIVE THIS LIFE—

OBTAINED, NOT ATTAINED

The overcoming life is something that is obtained; it is not attained. This matter can only be obtained; it can never be attained. What does it mean to obtain something? To obtain is to acquire something. What does it mean to attain? To attain is to go through a long journey. One has to advance gradually, and there is no assurance of when he will arrive. Hallelujah, Christian victory is not attained by a gradual process. Once I was in Kuling, and Brother Shin-liang Yu was with me. We were climbing up a mountain slowly. The more I walked, the more tired I became. After a while I asked Brother Yu how much longer it would be before we reached our destiny. He told me that it would not be long. But while we plodded on, the destiny was still not in sight. Every time I asked Brother Yu, he would say, "Very soon." Eventually, we reached our destiny. If we had ridden up the mountain on a sedan chair, the situation would have been different; it would have been an "obtaining" instead of an "attaining" to Mount Kuling. Victory is something obtained; it is not something attained. Everything related to the Holy Spirit is received, and everything related to victory is received.

Romans 5:17 says, "For if by the offense of the one death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ." According to this verse, victory is a gift and we only have to receive. Victory is not something that is attained through a gradual process. Victory is a gift that is placed in our hand; no effort is required. If I give this Bible to Brother Chang, how much effort does he have to exert to get it? All he has to do is stretch out his hand and he will have it that very second. When I give the Bible to you, it is a gift. Do you have to go home and fast for it? Do you have to kneel down toward Jerusalem three times a day to pray for it? Do you have to make up your mind not to lose your temper? You do not have to do any of these things. Once you receive, everything is yours. What steps do you have to go through to receive this Bible? You do not have to go through any steps. As soon as you stretch out your hand, it is yours. Victory is a gift. You cannot attain it; you can only obtain it.

First Corinthians 1:30 is a very familiar verse to us. I can recite it to you: "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom to us from God: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption." Wisdom is the general subject, and we can set it aside for the time being. This verse says that

God has made Christ three things to us: (1) righteousness, (2) sanctification, and (3) redemption. When did God make Christ our righteousness? God made Christ our righteousness when Christ died on the cross. We received the Lord Jesus as our righteousness at that time. Did we have to cry for three days before we received it? Did we receive it only after we apologized to God enough? Thank and praise the Lord! The Son of God has died for us. As soon as we believe, we receive. Unfortunately, in the matter of receiving the Lord Jesus as our sanctification, many of us are going around in circles; we are wasting our time and labor. Receiving the Lord as our righteousness was instantaneous. In the same way, receiving the Lord as our sanctification is also instantaneous. If we try to advance slowly, expecting that we will arrive one day at sanctification, we will never attain it. Those who try to establish their own righteousness will never be saved. In the same way, those who try to establish their own sanctification will never overcome.

What is the difference between obtaining and attaining? The only difference between the two things lies in the time. One is instantaneous, while the other is gradual. There is a story about a man who stole chickens. Originally, he stole seven chickens a week. Later, he resolved to behave better, intending to steal one chicken less each week, hoping that by the end of the sixth week he would cease his stealing altogether. He hoped that his stealing would gradually decrease until he stole no more. Stealing no more in this way is a slow attainment; it does not come instantaneously. Yet the victory that is from the Lord is obtained instantaneously.

The last time I was in Chefoo, I met a brother who had a very bad temper. When he lost his temper, everyone in his family would become very fearful of him. His wife, children, and the workers in his shop would all become fearful of him. Even the brothers in the church were afraid of him because he would disturb the meeting when he lost his temper. He told me that he could do nothing about his temper. I told him that if he would take the Lord as his victory, he would immediately overcome. Thank and praise the Lord, he accepted this word, and he overcame. One day he asked me, "Mr. Nee, how long has it been since I have overcome?" We counted and realized that it had been a month. He said, "During this past month, my wife was sick and dying one day. In the past, when my child was sick, I would be so worried that I would walk from one end of the room to the other and my countenance would drop and I would lose my temper. But when my wife was sick and her pulse was beating irregularly, I spoke to God softly, saying, 'It is all right if you want

to take her away.’ I do not know where my temper has gone.” Later his wife’s condition improved a little, and he called in an acupuncturist to give her some treatment. He patiently served his wife all the time. On the day I left, he purposely came to see me off. He said that during the past twenty hours, he felt as if someone else’s wife was sick because he was not worried at all. This brother owned an embroidery factory, and there were many troublesome female workers working for him. During that same month, many things happened in the factory. In the past, he would have reacted and lost his temper over these things. But during this time, he felt as if they were not his problems. He could even smile when he discussed problems with the workers. He said, “I do not know where my temper has gone.” This is obtaining. If this were a matter of attainment, I am afraid that he would not attain given another twenty years. Thank and praise the Lord, victory is obtained, not attained. While you are sitting here, you can obtain it as soon as you say that you want it.

A missionary who went to India brought nothing along with her except her temper. She always lost her temper. She told herself she would be the last person in the world who would ever be patient. A friend who had rendered her spiritual help had found the secret of taking Christ as the overcoming life. She wrote to her missionary friend and told her that the overcoming life is something obtained. When the missionary received the letter, she did according to what the letter said. Three months later, her friend received an answer. In the letter she said, “When your letter came, I realized immediately that this is the gospel! Christ is my patience. As soon as I received it, my temper left. But since I had failed so miserably in the past, I did not dare say anything until I had tried it out for three months. The Indian servants here are very undisciplined and foolish. When I was angry with them in the past, I would slam the door to let them know that I was angry. Since I began to practice what you said, I have stopped slamming the door, and I no longer have a heart to do such a thing.” This shows us that victory over sin is something the Lord accomplishes for us; there is no need for us to exercise any effort of our own. If we tried to do it by ourselves, we would not succeed even if we tried for a hundred years.

Brothers and sisters, let me repeat: Victory is not attained but obtained.

THE RECEIVING OF THIS LIFE—A MIRACLE

You may remember that Paul once said, “For it is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Whatever we work out is according to God’s good pleasure. It is God who causes us to work out everything. God is operating in us to make us holy. We do not have to exert our own effort, because everything is accomplished through God working in us. Such a holy and perfect life does not come about by our own effort; it is absolutely a work of God.

With many people, nothing short of a miracle can deliver them from their wickedness. Some people do not feel their failures; they do not realize how hopeless they are. Others have given up on their temper, pride, or disposition. They realize that they will never overcome unless God performs a miracle. Is there anyone here who can overcome sin? Man’s way is to suppress sin. But God’s way is to perform a miracle by removing the old man and cleansing the heart altogether. If you realize the meaning of God’s victory, you will be overjoyed.

A sister had an exceptionally uncontrollable temper. Her husband, children, servants, and everyone around her were afraid of her. Yet she was a Christian. It was despairing to her to have such a hot temper. A few years after she was saved, she received the Lord Jesus as her victory. Immediately after she had such an experience, she faced a great test. The day after she had received the Lord Jesus as her victory, she woke up and came downstairs to the living room. Her husband and the servants were hanging a chandelier from the ceiling. The chandelier was expensive, but the husband and the servants were not being careful enough. It fell to the floor and shattered at the very moment that she came down the stairs. When her husband saw her coming, he froze and wondered if there would be an explosion of temper. To his amazement, she said calmly, “Just sweep away the broken pieces.” Her husband began to wonder. In the past she would have shouted and yelled when even a small cup or saucer broke. He thought that this time she surely would be very mad. When he saw her reaction, he asked, “Did you sleep well last night? Are you sick?” She answered, “I am not sick. God has performed a miracle on me and has taken away my old man.” The husband said, “This indeed is a miracle! What a miracle! Thank and praise the Lord! This is a miracle!”

Mr. C. G. Trumbull, the founder of the Sunday School Times Company, is a person experienced in the spiritual life. He realized that the overcoming life is a miracle. He testified once to an elder that after he received the Lord Jesus as

his life, not only was his temper gone, but even his desire to lose his temper disappeared. The elder asked, “Do you mean to say that all of our old sins can be removed?” Mr. Trumbull answered, “Yes.” The elder then said, “I believe that this is real in you because I believe in your word. But this can never happen to me.” Later, Mr. Trumbull invited the elder to pray with him. After a long prayer, the elder also received this fact. Some time thereafter, Mr. Trumbull met the elder again, and he told Mr. Trumbull, “I have never experienced in my life what I experienced on that evening. It was a miracle! There is no struggling and no striving. The cravings are gone, and even the desire for sin is gone. This is indeed wonderful. It is a miracle.” Not long after, he wrote a letter to Mr. Trumbull and told him of some improper evil influence existing among the board of directors at the place of his work. In the past he would always try to suppress himself. But when he was in the midst of it this time, he was not touched and did not even have an inclination for such sins. What a miracle!

Brothers and sisters, do you have some insurmountable barriers? Do you have some uncontrollable sins? If you do, the Lord Jesus can perform the same miracle on you. You may have been helpless in some areas for years. But the Lord can perform a miracle on you. It does not matter whether your sins are spiritual, carnal, mental, physical, or dispositional. It does not matter whether you can or cannot obey God’s will or whether or not you are consecrated, and it does not matter whether or not you have confessed your sins. The Lord can perform His miracle on you. If you cannot consecrate yourself, the Lord can cause you to consecrate yourself. If you cannot endure, the Lord can enable you to endure. He can overcome all the sins mentioned. God is able. When He performs a miracle, everything becomes possible.

**THE RESULT OF THIS LIFE—
A LIFE OF EXPRESSION,
NOT A LIFE OF SUPPRESSION**

The result of an overcoming life is a life of expression rather than a life of suppression. The problem with our “victory” is that most of it comes by suppression. There was an old lady who always suppressed her temper when she was irritated. She would maintain her smile outwardly, but she would struggle to suppress herself inwardly. This kind of suppressed life will only result in internal bleeding when it is allowed to continue for years. All the

bitterness remains inside with a suppressed life. But thank and praise the Lord! Our victory is a life of expression, not a life of suppression. A life of expression lives out what one has already obtained. This is what Philippians 2:12 means when it says to “work out your own salvation.” In the past, we tried to hide ourselves as much as possible. Now the victory of Christ expresses itself. It is expressible. In the past, the more we suppressed, the better it was. Now the more we express, the better it is. Christ lives within us, and we live Him out before men.

Mrs. Jessie Penn-Lewis had a young lady friend who was a poet. She was very good at helping children understand the meaning of the overcoming life. One day Mrs. Penn-Lewis visited her and tried to find out from her the way to teach children. On that day her friend invited dozens of children to come together to eat. After the meal and before the table was cleaned, a visitor suddenly came. The lady asked the children, “The table is so messy. What shall we do?” The children proposed covering up the table with a clean piece of tablecloth. She agreed and covered the mess on the table with a clean tablecloth. After the visitor left, she asked the children, “Did the visitor see the mess on the table?” They answered, “No.” She then asked, “Although he did not see the mess, was the mess still on the table?” They answered, “Yes.” Although the visitor did not see the mess, the mess was still on the table.

Brothers and sisters, many people allow themselves to be unclean within but do not like to be unclean on the outside. The thoughts and feelings in our heart cannot be exposed to men’s eyes. We think that we are victorious. Others may commend us for our humility, and we may call it humility. We may appear to have much patience, but actually everything is merely locked up inside. Brothers and sisters, I must say honestly that there is no victory when we suppress everything within us. Victory is when we go and Christ moves in. Victory is something that is expressed.

There was a sister who easily lost her temper. One day her servant broke a vase. Immediately she went to her bed and covered herself with a blanket in an effort to keep from losing her temper. This is a life of suppression.

A hawker may come to you to sell his fruit. You may tell him that you do not want to buy and ask him to go away. He may come the second time, and you may refuse and send him away again. He may come to you the third time. He comes because he wants to sell his fruit. He can control himself and make

sure that he does not lose his temper. But this is not overcoming; this is not victory. This is merely a business practice. Suppressing your temper is not victory. Christ overcame by purging man's heart. Hence, victory means purity in the heart.

A brother who is over fifty years old had been reading Confucius's teaching all his life. He had been a Christian for over three years. Although he believed in the cleansing of the Lord's blood, he did not know the difference between Christianity and Confucianism. The Confucian way of cultivation is the way of self restraint: it is trying to achieve sainthood through suppression and cultivation. After he became a Christian, he still tried to practice suppression, always attempting to look away from problems and even eliminating them altogether. Later, he experienced the way of victory. He testified that victory had nothing to do with him. Christianity is different from all other religions. The difference does not lie merely in the cross but in the fact that we have a living Christ living within us. We can preach a doctrine of redemption and also a living Christ. The aforementioned person was a true disciple of Confucius, and nothing inside was exposed. Yet he now testifies that he can let go of himself; he no longer has to suppress himself, and problems no longer arise.

Brothers and sisters, I have to say hallelujah to this! Victory is a matter of letting go of one's self and expression. An overcoming life is none other than Christ Himself.

These five points are the characteristics of this life. Finally, allow me to say an honest word. Please remember that victory, like salvation, is definite. There is a definite date when one experiences it. You are saved on a definite date. (Of course, some have forgotten the month and day of their salvation.) You should also write down the date that you overcome. There should also be a definite date. Everyone should have a definite date when they overcome. This is a specific gate which one passes through. You have either passed through it or have not passed through it; there is no "maybe" in this matter. No one in the world is "maybe" saved; if you are saved, you are saved. In the same way, no one in the world is "maybe" victorious; if you have overcome, you have overcome. Those who have "perhaps" overcome have not overcome at all. All of us should pass through this gate. I cannot speak further today. In the future we will see that victory is not just an individual matter; there is a greater issue at stake. This is all the more reason for us to overcome.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

HOW TO EXPERIENCE CHRIST AS THE OVERCOMING LIFE

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 41:

Conferences, Messages, and Fellowship (1), Chap. 12

Scripture Reading: Luke 18:27; 2 Cor. 12:9; Rom. 8:1

This afternoon we will consider how we can experience Christ as our life. I am not saying that we do not have this life. I am saying that in addition to having this life we can experience Christ as our life. If we have Christ living within us, we will have the same holy life as Christ. He will live a holy life from within us. Only Christ's life is holy, and only He can live the holy life. We are sinners. Our life is the human life; it can only sin and never do good. If our life is not exchanged, it can never be changed. This afternoon we will see how we can experience Christ's life and how we can allow Him to live within us.

Paul said in Galatians 2:20, "It is no longer I...but...Christ." We cannot fool anyone with this word. We cannot just claim this with our mouth, while our conscience condemns us. Paul was able to honestly say, "It is no longer I...but...Christ." This is the overcoming life. The overcoming life is not one which boasts of its own ability or victory. The overcoming life is one which says, "It is no longer I...but...Christ." This afternoon we will concentrate on this subject. Simply put, if a man wants to experience Christ as his life, there are two necessary conditions. The first is letting go, and the second is believing.

LETTING GO

Seeing That We Cannot Make It

What does it mean to let go? In order for a Christian to let go, he must go through certain experiences. There are three steps that he must take. There is no way to skip a step or change them. They are indispensable; one cannot have the overcoming life by any other means. Luke 18:27 says, "The things

that are impossible with men are possible with God." This verse is part of a story about a young man who came to Jesus to ask how he could inherit and enjoy eternal life. The Lord said that in order for him to inherit eternal life, he must not commit fornication or murder and must not steal or bear false witness, but must honor his father and mother. Since he had kept all these commandments, the man was happy when he heard the Lord's word. He thought that these commandments were easy to keep. He thought that they were not a problem to him because he had kept all of them from his youth. He was not short in any of them. But then the Lord said that he still lacked one thing. What was the one thing that he lacked? The Lord said, "All that you have, sell and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in the heavens; and come, follow Me" (v. 22). After the Lord said this, the man felt helpless. He thought that the price was too great, and he walked away in sorrow.

The Lord turned then to the disciples and 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). When the disciples heard this, they asked the Lord, "Then who can be saved?" (v. 26). (Most people today think that they are rich. How many realize that they are poor?) The Lord said, "The things that are impossible with men are possible with God" (v. 27). Why did the Lord say this? The problem with the young man was not that he was rich, nor was it that he was unwilling to sell all. His problem lay in the fact that he only had a view of himself. When he first came to the Lord, he saw himself and thought that he could make it. In effect, he told the Lord that he could make it. The Lord then gave him a new commandment, and he looked at himself again and said that he could not make it. He was only looking at himself. He first looked at what he could do and then at what he could not do. He never saw God's work and power. This is why the Lord said that the things that are impossible with men are possible with God. He meant that even though the young man could not make it, God could make it. The young man could not give his wealth to the poor. Yet God could make him give it to the poor. It was not a matter of being able in himself, but a matter of God being the able One. The young man did not see this and, therefore, went away in sorrow.

The Lord told the young man to sell and distribute all that he had to the poor. A rich man may be alarmed when he hears such a word and may say, "I cannot be a Christian anymore. What should I do if I sell all that I have?" The Lord's intention is not to have our money or all that we have. His intention is

to prove to us that we cannot make it. Ananias and Sapphira had money and property. Peter said that while the property remained in their hand, it was their own. Even after it was sold, it was still under their disposal (Acts 5:4). If one does not have the leading of the Spirit, he does not have to sell anything or offer it up. Philemon was also a rich man. Paul did not tell him to sell and distribute all that he had to the poor. The Lord asked the young man to sell all that he had because the young man claimed that he had kept all the commandments. When the Lord gave him the commandment to sell all that he had and follow Him, he had to concede that he could not make it.

The same is true with us. We may not be proud, jealous, or stubborn. We may not have committed fornication and may be loving and patient, having practiced these things for many years. We may feel that we are almost there. Once we feel this way, the Lord will say to us, "Still you lack one thing." Eventually, we find that we cannot make it. We may overcome many sins, but there will be one sin we cannot overcome. Every Christian has one or two particular sins. Everyone has one or two sins which he or she is very familiar with. These sins have a special attachment to certain ones; they come and visit them all the time, following them wherever they go. The Lord said, "Still you lack one thing." This one thing does not refer to the selling of all that we have, but to the one thing that we cannot do. If we think that we are able, God will find one thing to prove to us that we cannot make it.

There was a Western missionary who was a very seeking Christian. Once she came to me and said, "With me there is one sin. Please pray for me." I prayed for her every day. For about two weeks, she kept begging in tears, saying, "God, deliver me from this sin." I thought that she was suffering so much because her sin was very serious. I asked her to tell me about this serious sin. She said, "From my youth I have had a habit of eating snacks. I eat snacks all day long. I can overcome many sins, but I cannot overcome this one sin. Previously, I did not think that this was a sin, but now I know that this is a sin. However, I cannot overcome it." I am always happy to see someone who sins so much that he finds himself unable to stop sinning. It is a joy to see someone unable to overcome his sin. The worst thing for a man is to sin and be able to overcome it. If we sin so much that we cannot stop and find no way to overcome, then God is ready to save us. This sister lacked one thing. She did not know that she had this one sin and did not realize that this was a sin. Once she realized that it was a sin, she found that she could not overcome it. She was willing to see her husband give up a job earning \$800 per month

and instead take up work for \$100. She was willing to suffer many painful things for the Lord. She loved the Lord very much and loved the Chinese, but she was not able to overcome one thing. The thing that the young man lacked was victory over money, and the thing that she lacked was victory over snacks.

Every person has one particular sin which he cannot overcome. Why does the Lord put such a thing before us? It is to prove to us that we cannot make it, that we are helpless, and that we have esteemed ourselves too highly. It is true that we have not committed fornication or murder and that we may not be proud or jealous, but we always fail when we try to get rid of that one thing! We may boast that we are not like this or that person. But the Lord will say to us that we still lack one thing; there is one thing which we cannot overcome. We still lack one thing. The Lord proved to the young man that he could not make it. Eternal life is the life of Christ. In order to have this life, we must realize that we are fully incapable of doing anything. Once we realize this, God's life will manifest His power in us. If we have not been brought to the point where we fully realize our own inability, we will not allow God's life to live out of us.

The worst fear that I have is for a man to sin too little. Such a person is neither good nor bad, and neither Christ nor Satan is particularly fond of him. I love to see a person who finds himself unable to overcome a particular sin no matter how hard he tries. Some may have committed some filthy, base, and deplorable sins. Others may have committed some refined sins. No matter what kind of sin it may be, it is a sin which binds a person. It may only be one or two sins, but one cannot overcome them no matter how hard he tries. When this happens, there is hope for the person. The most difficult thing for a person to realize is that he cannot make it on his own. If a man sees that he cannot make it, he is close to salvation. If anyone this afternoon realizes that he cannot make it, he is close to experiencing the overcoming life. If we still do not realize that we cannot make it or if we only have an overcoming doctrine without an overcoming life, we have to ask God to give us the light and show us that we cannot make it at all.

Not Trying to Make It

After we realize that we cannot make it, what should we do? After we realize that we cannot make it, we must not try to make it. I know many brothers and sisters who have come to me and wept before me and before the Lord about

their inability to overcome their sins. They are not like others, who let everything go by easily. They are very remorseful about their sins. They feel that they cannot get through if they do not overcome their sin. Over a dozen people have come to me and said that if they cannot overcome their sin, they would rather die. What should we do when we realize that we cannot overcome our sin and are completely powerless? If we want deliverance, the first thing we should do is not to try to make it. We should not try to change ourselves or make any resolutions. We should not waste time in ourselves or make up our minds to do anything. This is the most crucial step. Many people realize that they cannot make it in themselves. They acknowledge that they cannot make it, yet they are constantly trying to make it. They still strive and struggle to overcome. When they do this, God cannot do anything with them.

Last summer I met a Western missionary who had one sin which she could not overcome. At that time she did not realize that Christ is her victory, and she did not know that Christ is in her to live for her. Yet she wanted to experience this life. I asked her, "Do you realize that you cannot make it?" She answered, "I knew that long ago, yet I have one sin which I keep committing. I really cannot overcome it." I asked, "What do you do when that sin comes to you?" She said, "I pray to resist this temptation, I pray for God to deliver me from it, or I pray for God to grant me the strength so that the sin will not prevail over me." I said, "You do not have to go on. I know the rest of your history. After you pray and stand up, you commit the same sin again. As soon as you walk out the door, you do the same thing. Every time after you pray, your sin comes back to you." I then told her, "You have made a great mistake. You know very well that you cannot make it, yet you still try to make it and you strive to make it. When sin comes to you, you still try to fight it. Since you know that you cannot make it, why are you still praying, resisting, and asking God to give you the strength to overcome your temptation? You are praying this way because you think that you are still good and that you can still do something."

I then told her that the way to freedom is first to let go. As soon as she decided to give up on improving, she would be nearer to victory. She said, "If I sin when I resist, would it not be unthinkable to not resist?" I said, "Resisting means that you are still living and working. When this happens, God cannot do anything. If you want God to come into you, you must first let go. You have to realize that God's power is already in you. He can live for you. Now is not the time to consider who you are, but who God is."

One summer I was preaching the gospel in the villages with over twenty brothers. The weather was hot, and we could not take our bath indoors. Therefore, we all went to the river to take our bath. While a few brothers were swimming, one brother had a cramp and began to drown. He kicked his limbs frantically and shouted for help. One of the brothers among us was Wei-san Wang, who was very good at swimming. He had served in the navy. I urged him to quickly jump into the water to save the drowning brother. Yet he stood in the same place and would not move. I was quite desperate and somewhat angry at him for loving his own life so much. When the drowning brother was nearly exhausted and sinking, Brother Wang jumped into the water and swam toward him. With one arm around the drowning one's waist and swimming with the other arm, Brother Wang brought him safely to shore. Later I asked Brother Wang, "Why did you not save him earlier? You could have saved him some suffering, and he would not have taken in so much water." He said, "If I had tried to save him earlier, he would have been struggling for his life and would have grabbed on to anything he could have gotten hold of, and both of us would have drowned. There is a secret to saving a drowning man: Do not save anyone who is living and do not save anyone who is dead; only save those who are half dead. Do not save the dead because it is hopeless to save them. Do not save the living, because they are still kicking with their strength. When you approach them, they will hold on to you and neither they nor you will be able to swim, and both will drown. This is why you should save only those who are half dead, those whom you can grab hold of, but who cannot grab hold of you. In this way, you will be safe, and they will be saved."

We are like the man who was drowning. God will only save us after we have exhausted all of our strength. But the problem is that men often try to make it when they know very well that they cannot make it. We pray, make resolutions, and struggle. This makes it impossible for God to save us. We must be like the drowning man who had exhausted all of his strength in struggling and striving; then God will save us. If we are still kicking with our arms and legs and still making up our minds and struggling, we are still trying to make it and are not yet depleted of our strength. God will wait and not do anything. He will wait until we give up trying to save ourselves, and then He will step forward to save us. Therefore, we must not only be clear that we cannot make it, but must also give up trying to make it. Satan loves to see us stepping forward to fight with him. Once we step forward, he wins the victory. His trick is to induce us to move. As soon as we move, he wins. God has to

wait until we drop both of our hands and have completely surrendered. Only then will we overcome. This is the meaning of letting go. Letting go is dropping all of our ability and setting aside our own life completely. By acknowledging that we cannot make it and by saying that we have no intention to try to make it, we will overcome.

Boasting in One's Own Weakness

Many people are familiar with the first part of 2 Corinthians 12:9, but they forget about the second part of this verse. Today we will pay special attention to the second part of this verse. Paul said that he most gladly boasted in his weaknesses so that the power of Christ might tabernacle over him. Weakness implies that a man is very vulnerable. When Paul was weak, what did he do? Did he cry? No, he boasted. He boasted that weakness to him was a grace and a glory. He boasted and gloried in his weaknesses. He said, "I am indeed weak. But I thank and praise the Lord." This was Paul's attitude. This was his boast and his glory. "I may be weak, but I thank and praise Him. I cannot overcome the temptations, yet I thank God in all things." Have we thanked God in this way? Have we given thanks in everything? We should go to the Lord and say, "I thank You that I cannot remove my filthy thoughts, pride, jealousy, and temper. God, I do not intend to remove my filthy thoughts, pride, jealousy, and temper. I cannot do anything, and I do not intend to do anything. I thank and praise you that I cannot make it. I am weak, and I boast in my weakness."

Last year I met a brother who was a general in the Manchuria Volunteer Army. He fought many battles against the Japanese in Manchuria. During the war, his sense of moral and human decency went completely bankrupt. Later he heard that a brother was preaching the gospel in a certain place. He went and was saved and became a good Christian. Eventually, he also married a sister in the Lord. Because he was fearful of the Japanese, he decided to move to Shantung to practice medicine. There was a meeting in the place where he was, and he went and joined their meetings. When I was there last year, I met him. The first day I met him, I felt that there was something strange about him. He dressed well and was a nice man, but he seemed a little impolite. When he came into the room, he did not take off his hat. I became interested in him and took special notice of him. During those few days, I was conducting a conference on the subject of Christ as our life. One day after a meeting, he told me that he had something very important to discuss with me. I told him that he could come the next day. He asked if he could come at six in

the morning. I told him that I was staying at someone else's home and that it might not be convenient for the host to receive him so early. I suggested that he should come at seven instead. The next morning I went downstairs after my morning watch, and he was waiting for me at seven o'clock.

He was a husky and tall man, a typical northern Chinese. Yet he began to cry in front of me and said, "I have one sin which I have not been able to overcome for a long time. When I was in the army, others were smoking opium, but I chose to smoke cigarettes instead. Sometimes I would smoke over twenty cigarettes a day. Later, I became a Christian and married my present wife. I want very much to quit smoking. I have tried many times but failed again and again. I have been quitting and smoking, quitting and smoking, continually. I am very much bothered by this. It became worse when I moved to Shantung. If I smoke on the streets, I worry that some brothers may see me. If I smoke in the hospital, I am afraid that the nurses who are sisters may see and criticize me. If I smoke at home, my wife will bother me. The only way I can smoke is to smoke in secret. As soon as I hear someone coming, I hide my cigarette. This is a great suffering to me, but I can do nothing about it. In the past, I killed my enemies with a gun, but I could not stop my smoking, even if I had a gun. During the past few months, I have been very troubled by this matter. Mr. Nee, what should I do?"

While he was speaking, I looked at him and laughed. I said, "I am so happy to meet people like you." He said, "Mr. Nee, please do not make fun of me. I am desperate, and yet you are laughing." I said, "It does not matter if you smoke, and it does not matter if you cannot quit. All you need to do is one thing." He said, "What is it?" I said, "Suppose I come to your hospital today to be a patient and signed a contract with you to stay in the hospital indefinitely. What would you say?" He said, "If you are not sick, the hospital cannot admit you." I then asked, "What kind of people do you admit?" He answered, "Only those who are sick." I said, "That is right. Now you should go to the Lord and say, 'Lord, I thank and praise You because I smoke. I thank and praise You because I cannot quit smoking. I can quit for five days, but then I have to smoke again. I am qualified to come to You. Your Word says that a healthy person does not need a doctor; only those who are sick need a doctor. If I could make it by myself, I would not need You. But I cannot make it; therefore, I need You. I am a patient, Lord. I come to You. I thank and praise You.'" He replied, "I can praise Him for many other things, but I cannot praise Him for this. I have never thanked and praised Him according to your prayer."

I then showed him 2 Corinthians 12:9 and told him how Paul would much rather boast in his weaknesses so that the power of Christ might tabernacle over him. I said, "You weep for your weakness, but Paul boasted in his weaknesses. What a difference there is! You have to boast in your weakness. You have to say to the Lord, 'I have sinned, and I cannot overcome my sin. I cannot quit smoking by myself, and I will no longer resolve to quit. I commit myself to You.'" After this the two of us knelt down to pray. He prayed to the Lord saying, "I am a sinner, and I cannot overcome my sin. I will not try to make it, and I will not even think about making it anymore. I commit this matter to you. May Your power be manifested in me. Lord, I thank You. I cannot do it, but You can do it."

After he made such a prayer, he said nothing more, but picked up his hat and was ready to go. I called him back and asked, "Will you smoke after you go home?" He said, "By myself I will smoke and I cannot quit. But God will quit for me. If I quit, it is the Lord who is quitting for me." After he returned home, I was concerned for him and wondered if he was truly released. After two days I did not hear any news from him. Every day he stood up after the meeting and left. I sent men to inquire about his condition, but received no reply. One time after my message I saw him again and asked him, "Are you still smoking?" He answered, "No! But I argued with my wife for a whole day." I thought, "One sin has left and another is coming along the way!" He went on, "I argued with my wife and told her that I had tried quitting without success and that she had been grating on me for over two years without result, but this time God did it for me. I dropped it just like that." I said, "If that is what you were arguing about, it is all right." I stayed there for three more weeks. He testified at the end, "My addiction to cigarettes is completely gone. I have no desire to smoke any longer. Satan tempted me twice, but I did not tell him that I would not smoke anymore. I merely said that by myself I could still smoke, but that God could stop smoking for me. I do not have to be concerned about the matter anymore. It was wonderful. When I did not move, even when temptation came along, I found that I was able to overcome." Today he is still victorious. Some time ago, I received a letter from Shantung saying that this brother has indeed overcome.

Brothers and sisters, you must realize that you cannot make it, and you must not try to make it. Furthermore, you must boast of the fact that you cannot make it. If you do this, nothing will stop God's power from being manifested in you. If you move, you will frustrate God's power. Do not try to

make it. Let the temptation come and go. There is no need to resist the temptations. (Of course, resisting Satan is another thing that has to do with spiritual warfare.) There is no need for you to be concerned with anything. You only need to say, "Thank the Lord, I cannot make it. I cannot overcome." Many people like to put their titles on their name cards. We should write on our name cards "Specialist in Sin." We are experts at sinning. We cannot do anything other than committing sins. We have to say to the Lord, "I can only sin. I am weak and can do nothing. You are the One who can make it. Please be the One who makes it for me. I thank You that I have no way to help myself. You have the way. I am powerless, but You have the power to resist for me." If we stand on this ground, we will overcome all the time.

I can give a testimony concerning myself. At one time I had a bad temper. Two classmates of mine can testify concerning this. Many years ago when I was in Shanghai, Satan came to me again and again to tempt me. Sometimes others would say something that was irritating. I did not want to hear it, and I felt uncomfortable inside when I did. Satan would come and tempt me and stir up my temper. I knew that I could not control my temper; I wanted to lose my temper. Before I knew the overcoming truth, I would suppress my temper. Sometimes the temper was not in my mouth, but it would still be inside me. Even when I appeared calm and meek outwardly, I was still fighting the temptation. I was merely suppressing my temper with my own strength. Later Christ showed me a little of what victory is. He showed me that Christ within could overcome my temper. Every time I began to lose my temper, I told the Lord, "I can lose my temper. I enjoy losing my temper. I am about to lose my temper, and I even want to lose my temper. But Lord, You do not lose any temper. You are my victory within. I cannot make it, but You can. I cannot do it, but You can. I believe that You can overcome my temper." By praying this way, I experienced the overcoming life. Our victory is absolutely in Christ, not in ourselves. If we drop ourselves and do not struggle, strive, or come up with our own ways, and instead believe in Christ and trust in Him as our victory, we will experience the overcoming power of Christ continually.

BELIEVING

In order to receive and experience the overcoming life, there are four steps we have to take. First, we have to see that we cannot do anything. Second, we have to give up trying to do anything. Third, we have to boast in our weaknesses. Fourth, we have to believe that God is able, that is, we have to

believe that God can make it for us. As long as we act according to these four steps, no temptation can stand in our way. I grouped the first three things together under the heading of letting go. The last step is to believe.

Have you come to God once in a definite way and said to Him, "I know that I cannot make it. I cannot change myself and it is impossible for me to change. I do not intend to change anymore. I commit everything to Your hand"? Once you commit everything into the Lord's hand and let go, you have only taken the first step towards victory. The next step is to believe. Letting go is passive, whereas believing is active. In addition to letting go, you must still believe that God is able, that He can overcome for you.

Once I met a Western missionary who often joined us for breakfast when we were having meetings. She heard the teaching on the overcoming life, yet she still did not understand it. I asked her, "Others have overcome in a short time. Why have you not overcome after two weeks? Have you let go yet?" She said, "Yes, I have. I know that I cannot make it, but I still have not overcome." I said, "If you have let go, you should have experienced it. Have you offended anyone?" She said, "I dare not say that I can overcome any sin. I dare not say that I will overcome if I do this or that." I said, "You know sin very well, but you do not know the Lord enough." I opened the Bible and showed her in Romans that we will bear fruit unto sanctification if we offer up ourselves to God as those raised from the dead (6:13, 19). What is consecration? Consecration is presenting ourselves to God. It is offering up ourselves to God and allowing Him to do whatever He wants to do. God says, "You only deserve to die. I have crucified you on the cross. You do not have to do anything. All you have to do is to hand yourself over to Me. I can make you bear fruit."

She told me that she dared not say this. My face immediately became stern. I stood before her and pointed at her face, saying, "Do you know whose word you are doubting? God said that if you hand yourself over to Him and consecrate yourself to Him, He will make you holy. But even though you have consecrated yourself, acknowledged that you are unable to do anything, and have offered up everything to God, you say that God has not done His part. This verse says that man has his part and God has His part. If man has done his part, God will do His part. But even though you say that you have let go and done what you should do, you say that God has not given you the victory. Do you know what your word means? You are saying that God has made a contract with you and that you have done your part, but that God has not

done His part. You are saying that God is not righteous, that He is dishonest, and that He is unfaithful." She said, "How can I dare say this!" I said, "If that is not what you mean, then you have to say, 'God, I have committed myself into Your hand. I know that I will surely overcome because I have done my part, and You will surely do Your part. You will surely cause me to overcome because I have committed myself to You.'" After one lets go, he has to testify, saying, "Thank the Lord. I believe that He has done what I committed to Him." God will work in you only to the extent that you have committed yourself to Him. Once you believe, the matter passes into Christ's hand, and He will take over.

A Christian was riding a bicycle in a rural countryside. He reached an open deserted place, where there was an old well. He wanted to go to the bottom of the well, and so he tied a rope to the edge of the well and lowered himself down the well. When he reached the end of the rope, he could not feel the bottom of the well. He tried to climb back up, but did not have the strength. Hanging with his hands on the rope, he was unable to go either down or up. He cried for help, but the place was deserted, and no one heeded to his call. He hung on for a while, but the weight of his body became heavier and heavier. For two hours he was helplessly hanging there. Finally, he could stand it no longer. He was a Christian and he thought that he should pray. He said, "God, I am about to fall. Let me fall into eternity." After he prayed, he let go of the rope, thinking that he would certainly die. But he was only a few inches from the ground. After he fell to the bottom of the well, he regretted that he had suffered so much because he had not let go of the rope any sooner. This is the way we are towards Christ. We think that we will fall into Hades unless we struggle, strive, and make resolutions. Actually, if we would let go, we would not fall into Hades. We would fall on Christ the Rock. We have to believe that as we let go, God will take over. He will give us the power. He will make us overcome. We only have to believe in Him.

Friends, once our life runs out, God's life will operate. Once we let go, God will take over, and His life will be lived out of us. Whenever we stop living our own life, God's life will be lived out of us. As soon as we put ourselves aside, God's life will be lived out of us. If we want to experience Christ as our overcoming life, the first thing to do is to let go and see that we cannot make it, to give up trying, and to boast in our weaknesses. After we have completely let go, we have to believe that God is able to make Christ our overcoming life, and that He can manifest Christ's life and power through us.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE GUARDING OF THE OVERCOMING LIFE

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 41:

Conferences, Messages, and Fellowship (1), Issue No. xx

Scripture Reading: 2 Tim. 1:12; Phil. 1:6; 1 Pet. 1:5; Psa. 17:8; Jude 24-25

THE LORD HAVING BEGUN

A GOOD WORK AND COMPLETING IT

The work of overcoming is initiated by the Lord (Phil. 1:6). In fact, both the initiation, continuation, and consummation of the overcoming life are from the Lord Himself; we have nothing to do with them. The Lord's name is Alpha and Omega (Rev. 1:8). Alpha refers to the beginning, whereas Omega refers to the end. He is the only One from beginning to end. He is the beginning of everything and the end to everything. He is the initiation of the overcoming life, as well as the consummation of the overcoming life. Hence, the overcoming life is abiding. Someone asked once, "What is victory?" I responded, "Victory is just Christ." Let me ask: Does Christ remain the same? Of course He does. He is the One who remains the same from the beginning to the end. Everything will pass away, but the Lord will remain forever. This afternoon we have to declare that our experience is just Christ Himself. He has done everything. All our experiences are centered upon Christ. We experience victory through faith in Christ. Yet from beginning to end, even our faith is just Christ Himself. It has nothing to do with ourselves. All we have to do is praise and rejoice. As long as He is the One who begins the work, He will complete it.

GOD BEING ABLE TO GUARD US FROM STUMBLING

Jude 24 says that God is the One who is able to guard us from stumbling. How does He guard us? Jude does not say that God guards us by raising us up again after we stumble. Neither does it say that God will guard us from falling. It says that He will guard us from stumbling. There is a difference between falling and stumbling. Falling is tumbling over. If a Christian can walk in a

straight path for three years without falling, he should be considered as a top-class Christian. But this verse speaks of not even stumbling. The Lord will guard us from stumbling not for just three or five years, but forever. Of course, we cannot trust in ourselves or look at ourselves. If we do, we will fall tomorrow. Our eyes have to be set on the Lord and on Him alone, and we have to trust that He will guard us from stumbling.

THE LORD GUARDING US AS THE APPLE OF HIS EYE

How does the Lord guard us? The most sensitive part of a man's body is the pupil of the eye. How do eyelids protect the pupil of the eye? Whenever objects fly into our eye, there is no need to instruct the eyelids to close; they close automatically. When dust is blown into the eye, the eyelids close immediately to prevent the dust from entering into the eye. First Corinthians 15:52 mentions the twinkling of the eye. This is how God protects us. His protection comes instantly in the twinkling of the eye, just as our eyelids protect the pupil of our eyes. Before the Lord was crucified on the cross, Peter cried, "Lord, save me!" (Matt. 14:30). After the Lord's crucifixion, he did not cry for the Lord's help anymore because after His death and resurrection, He lived within Peter. As soon as temptation came, the Lord was there to protect him.

In Psalm 17:8 the psalmist prayed, "Guard me like the apple of Your eye;/In the shadow of Your wings hide me." We can all pray this same prayer. The Lord is both willing and able to guard us like guarding the apple of His eye. Many people incorrectly think that even though victory is a matter of the Lord's grace, the guarding of this victory is our own work. Please remember that just as victory is related to the Lord and not ourselves, the guarding of this victory is related to the Lord and not ourselves.

THE CONDITIONS FOR THE LORD'S GUARDING

Committing

What are the necessary conditions for us to be guarded by the Lord? There are two conditions. First, we must commit ourselves into the Lord's hand. Second Timothy 1:12 says, "He is able to guard my deposit unto that day." The Lord will guard us, but we have to commit ourselves into His hand. The degree to which we commit will be the extent to which He will guard. If we do

not commit ourselves into His hand, He cannot guard us in any way. Many people read the Bible and find that the Lord has preserving grace. Yet they also find that they cannot appropriate this promise. This is because they have not committed themselves to the Lord. Many people have known Jude 24 and 25 and Philippians 1:6 for many years, but they cannot believe that these words are real. They are satisfied if they can rise up after they have fallen. They have not committed themselves into the Lord's hand to allow the Lord to guard them from stumbling. They cannot experience the Lord's guarding this way. In order to experience the Lord's guarding, we must say to the Lord, "I commit myself to Your guarding. I believe in Your guarding power." A sister once asked me to rent a deposit box in the bank, and the bank charged six dollars. But our Lord's guarding is free as long as we are willing to commit ourselves to Him.

Believing

Second, we have to believe in the Lord's guarding power. First Peter 1:5 says that we are being guarded by the power of God "through faith." In order for us to experience the Lord's guarding, committing ourselves to Him is not enough. We also have to believe in God's guarding power. Suppose I asked Brother Luk to take a sum of money to another person. I have to believe that Brother Luk has the power to guard the money I committed to him. If I truly believe in him and commit the money to him, I will not need to go repeatedly to him and ask if my money is still in his hand. After we have committed ourselves to the Lord, we do not have to repeatedly ask Him what He is going to do. Will the God of the heavens and earth not guard us well? God's word upholds all things. Is He not able to uphold us? God does not guard us as if He were guarding a piece of worthless paper. No! He guards us like the pupil of His eye (Deut. 32:10). In the same way that a finger is joined to the body, He has joined us to Himself and constituted us members of Christ by His life. We have to believe that He is well able to guard us. Our eyes should be set on the Lord and not on our experience. The only things that are trustworthy are the Lord's power, His Word, and His love. Our experience is not trustworthy at all. "For I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard my deposit unto that day" (2 Tim. 1:12).

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

TEMPTATIONS, FAILURES, AND PROGRESS IN THE OVERCOMING LIFE

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 41:

Conferences, Messages, and Fellowship (1), Chap. 18

Scripture Reading: John 1:16

There are two things a believer should do before he can overcome: let go and believe. There are also two things he should do after overcoming: confess and consecrate. Victory is a gate as well as a path. The first two enable one to pass through the gate, whereas the last two sustain one in the path. How should a believer conduct himself day by day after he has passed the gate of victory? What should he do? How can the overcoming life be guarded, and how can he go on in the overcoming way? We have to consider these questions one by one.

THE LIFE ONE SHOULD LIVE AFTER PASSING THE GATE OF VICTORY

After we pass the gate of victory, our daily life should be no different than the first day we overcame. Every morning we should commit ourselves to the Lord and allow Him to guard, protect, and uphold us. At the same time, we should fill ourselves with thanksgiving and praise. We have to say to the Lord, "God, in Your eyes I am still weak and I still cannot do anything. I have not changed. But I thank You Lord because You are still my life today. You are still my holiness today, and You are still my victory today. I believe that You will live out Your life in me the entire day. God, I thank and praise You because everything is based on Your grace; Your Son has accomplished everything for me." No matter what our feelings may be, we have to believe that the Lord is living in us, and we have to stand on this fact. We should be very clear that the Lord is within us and that it is no longer we who are living, but the Lord who is living within us.

After we have passed the gate of victory, we have to maintain a proper posture. Every day we have to tell the Lord that there is no goodness in ourselves, that we are still as evil as we were before, and that we are full of sin. By ourselves, we are not able to do anything; only the Lord is able. Whenever we think we can do something, the Lord will not do anything for us, and we will immediately fall. We will overcome only when we do not overcome by ourselves. One line of a hymn says, "Whene'er my heart is lifted up, How very near I am to fall" (Hymns, #578). This is indeed true. Brothers, we have to realize that we are still the same; we have not changed at all. Our only stand before the Lord should be to declare that we cannot do anything. Simply put, after passing through the gateway of victory, our daily life involves (1) committing ourselves into the Lord's hand, (2) acknowledging that we cannot make it, (3) believing that the Lord is living in us, and (4) thanking and praising Him.

THE WAY TO OVERCOME THE TEMPTATIONS

An overcoming life is a life that overcomes temptations. After we have received the overcoming life, it is still possible for us to encounter temptations. The Lord also encountered temptations, but He overcame them. Similarly, we cannot avoid temptations, but we can overcome them. We encounter two types of temptations daily. The first kind are temptations that come suddenly; they do not give us a chance to think about them. Before we can think about or pray about them, we have already sinned. These temptations are not restricted to any time; they come haphazardly. The second kind are temptations that come slowly. We can consider them, and they come as incremental suggestions and proposals. One kind does not afford a person time to think, whereas the other kind gives a person time to think them over. We may think that temptations which give us a chance to think them over are easy to overcome, and that temptations which do not afford an opportunity to think over are difficult to overcome. Actually, we can overcome both kinds of temptations. There are two ways to deal with these two kinds of temptations.

The Way to Deal with Sudden Temptations

There is no time to prepare for sudden and instantaneous temptations. Therefore, we cannot deal with them on the spur of the moment. Long before this kind of temptation comes, we have to set up our defense. In warfare between two nations, one cannot prepare for battle only after the enemy has

started to attack. One has to set up a defensive line well ahead of time and ask for the Lord's deliverance ahead of time. Every morning, we have to pray to the Lord and ask Him to deliver us from sudden temptations. We have to ask Him to deliver us from temptations that do not afford us a chance to think about them. Often a person sins because he has not been put on alert ahead of time. Of course, the Lord sometimes allows temptations to come upon us suddenly. When such temptations come, what should we do? We have to remember that faith is a shield (Eph. 6:16). It is not a pair of pliers. Many people use faith as if it were a pair of pliers; they try to pull out the darts that have already been lodged into the body. But faith does not function like pliers. Faith is a shield. It is something placed between ourselves and Satan. When darts come, they hit the shield and bounce back. We do not put a shield behind us. If the shield is at our backs, it will be difficult to protect us from the darts.

Every morning you have to lift up this faith before God. Then you will withstand temptations without even being conscious of it. Very few Christians know what the shield of faith is. We need the shield of faith even before temptations come. If the first thing you do in the morning is to believe, you are holding up the shield of faith, and the darts from Satan will be knocked down. If you lift up your faith in this way to withstand the enemy day by day, you will find one day—that glorious day—that many darts were knocked away from you.

Romans 1—3 is on man's sin, while Romans 4—5:15 is on God's salvation. Romans 5:12 tells us that we sin because we share the life of Adam. This is why we sin without any effort of our own. There is no need for us to exert any effort to lose our temper. The minute we are provoked, we lose our temper. There is no need for us to make up our mind to sin, because we share the same sinful life as Adam. Romans 5:15 says, "But it is not that as the offense was, so also the gracious gift is; for if by the offense of the one the many died, much more the grace of God and the free gift in grace of the one man Jesus Christ have abounded to the many." In the past, our old man was joined to Adam, but today the Lord has made us one with Christ. In the past, we sinned without any consciousness of it, but today we can be patient, humble, and loving without being conscious of it. This proves the reality of our union with the Lord. Just as we sinned spontaneously and effortlessly when we were in Adam, we can overcome spontaneously and effortlessly when we are in Christ and joined to Him. In this way the life of Christ is lived out of us. We will

marvel at the transcendency and power of the Lord's life. If we believe, the life of Christ will be manifested in us day by day.

Dealing with Gradual Incremental Temptations

The second kind of temptations are gradual and incremental. Satan gives us suggestions gradually and a little at a time. These temptations are incremental in nature. There is no need to ask the Lord for strength to overcome this kind of temptation. The best way to deal with it is to stand on the ground of a sinner as soon as they come. We should take the stand of a patient who is looking for a doctor and who commits his whole being to the doctor. We should speak to the Lord like a patient: "My mind and thoughts are inclined toward sin. I am prone to lose my temper. I cannot resist anything. I am hopeless. I ask You to resist for me." We have to take the stand that we have died with the Lord. Satan may come with different kinds of temptations, but the principle is the same. He does not need to make us sin directly. The goal of his temptations is to instigate us to act by ourselves. Our position is in Christ; this is the only safe spot. If we remain in this position and allow the Lord to do everything, Satan will not be able to do anything to us. But once we move, even in things like praying, asking the Lord to strengthen us to resist the temptation, or making up our minds not to sin, we will find Satan prevailing over us and defeating us because we have moved out of the safety zone.

THE ATTITUDE OF AN OVERCOMING LIFE

The section above covers the steps one should take to live a life beyond the gate of victory. Now we have to know the attitude one should take toward maintaining an overcoming life. Many people have done the things we mentioned above, but they are constantly afraid that the Lord will not come to them, and they worry that they will fail if He does not come. In order to live an overcoming life, we have to pay attention to our attitude. We must remove all fear by faith and allow the Lord to take over everything. When the Lord was with the disciples by the sea, He told the disciples to go to the other side (Mark 4:35). He did not tell them to go to the bottom of the sea, but to the other side of the sea. Yet the disciples did not believe His word. When the storm arose, they were beside themselves with fear and were sore afraid. They did not have faith, and they begged the Lord to do something. Many times, the louder we pray, the less faith there is in our prayer. Sometimes the more

earnestly that we pray, the more it shows that we do not have faith. Faith is trusting in the Lord's word. The Lord said that the disciples were to cross to the other side, not to go to the bottom of the sea. If they had faith, they could have all gone to sleep. Having faith means sleeping with the Lord. If one does not have faith, he cannot sleep with the Lord. If a man has faith, even if he does not sleep, he can still go to the stern of the boat and speak to the waves. He can even mock the waves, saying, "You are not strong enough. You are not fierce enough." A person who has faith has peace; he has peace within and without. Satan cannot prevail over such a person. Hence, victory is believing in God's word and His power. The attitude of an overcoming life is being fully at peace through faith.

WHAT TO DO IF ONE FAILS

After a believer has overcome, he should not sin anymore in regard to God's work, provisions, and commandments. However, those who have passed the gate of victory may discover to their surprise that they can sin again. While it is clear to them that they sinned in the past, they wonder why they are still sinning after they have supposedly passed the gate of victory. Some may ask, "If a saved person who has overcome still sins, what difference does this victory make in him?" There is a big difference. There are three differences between an overcoming person and a person who has not yet overcome when it comes to sinning. First, before one overcomes, sin is a compulsory and imperative thing. One has no choice but to sin. There is a power within him which forces him to sin. After one overcomes, the situation is entirely different. Sin is accidental, and it is committed through oversight or carelessness. Second, before one overcomes, he commits the same kind of sins over and over again. He has some so-called private sins which are characteristically his own. He commits the same sin over and over again. Every person has only three to five kinds of recurring sins. These few sins entangle him constantly. But after a person has overcome, the situation becomes very different. He still sins, but only occasionally. Frequent sins do not bother him anymore; they only catch up with him accidentally. Third, before one overcomes, resuming a clear fellowship with the Lord after he sins is hard and takes time. But after he overcomes, he can recover his fellowship with the Lord quickly if he sins again. This is because he has faith, and he believes that the Lord's blood can cleanse him from all his sins (1 John 1:9). Those who have passed the gate of victory should confess their sins to the Lord immediately after they accidentally commit a sin, and they should

believe that the Lord can cleanse them with His precious blood. After this, they should immediately praise and thank the Lord, and apply His overcoming life continually. If we accidentally sin, we should not delay our confession for three or five days. If we do, we will commit more sins.

THE GROWTH OF THE OVERCOMING LIFE

Some may ask, "Since a person has overcome, how can he sin again?" We have to know what faith is. The overcoming life is a life of faith. The Lord wants us to set our eyes on Him all the time. No matter what the outward circumstances are, we should believe in Him. The Lord wants to deliver us out of a life of feelings into a life of faith. He wants us to go on step by step by faith and in grace. Now we need to see how we grow in the overcoming life.

Victory is a gate as well as a path. It is a crisis point first, and then a journey. If we continue on the path, there will be no limit to our future. Some have asked, "Since the Lord is my life, and since He is living in me already, how can I grow any more? Are you saying that this life is not perfect? And are you saying that there is the need for His life to grow?" It is true that the Lord does not change; He neither advances nor retreats. But we have a free will, and we have our own intellect and emotions. Our victory is overcoming the sins that we know of. It is not overcoming all the sins that we do not know of. This is like our consecration; we only consecrate the things we know of. There are many things which we do not know of, which we can only consecrate gradually. Even consecration does not have any absolute standard. For example, I may know that I am powerless in the matter of endurance. When I consecrate myself, the Lord's endurance will be expressed through me. As far as endurance itself is concerned, we cannot have any more growth because the Lord's endurance is perfect. However, growth means that in addition to endurance we can experience meekness. Growth simply means an expansion of sphere and a deepening of measure. There is no growth as far as meekness or endurance are concerned because meekness and endurance are just Christ. But as far as our experience of these things is concerned, it is possible to have a continual expansion and deepening in sphere and measure. This is the meaning of the growth of the overcoming life.

We have said that the Lord is our sanctification. But there is a verse that says that we are sanctified by the truth (John 17:17). This means that we may have a sin today which we are quite proud of and which does not bother our

conscience at all. Later, we may find from the truth of the Bible that this is wrong. In this way, we know one more sin, and we can confess such a sin. After the truth exposes our sin through God's enlightening and after we know that it is a sin, we have to deal with it. The way to deal with it is the same as before. We have to tell the Lord, "I have found another sin. Thank You that I now know one more sin and can experience more grace and know more of the overcoming life." The New Testament says that we should grow in grace (2 Pet. 3:18). What does it mean to grow in grace? Grace is God doing things for man. When man does things for God, this is the law, whereas when God does things for man, this is grace. Growing in grace is allowing God to do more things for us. When truth shines on us, our shortcomings are exposed. Then grace comes to supply us. Truth is God exposing our needs, whereas grace is God supplying us with strength. The more light we receive, the more needs we discover, and the more we receive and grow in grace.

GRACE AND TRUTH

How do we receive grace? There are three ways to receive grace. The first is through the Bible. The more we read the Bible, the more the Bible will increase our measure, and the more we will know ourselves. The more we know ourselves, the more we will sense our needs, and the more grace will increase. Second, we can receive grace directly from God. When we listen to a message, pray, or fellowship with God, we receive grace directly from Him through His enlightening. Third, we can receive grace through the help of other brothers and sisters. If a brother has dealt with a sin, and that same sin is entangling me, I can receive help from that brother to achieve victory. In this way I receive more grace. The grace which we receive is limited by the truth we have received. The amount of grace a man receives speaks of the amount of truth he has received. The more a man knows what sin is, the more grace he will receive.

For example, we may find from reading the Bible that we should be anxious for nothing. Once we have this truth, we realize that anxiety is a sin. A sister read Philippians 4:6, which says to be anxious for nothing, and concluded that this was impossible. Then she thought that this was God's Word which could not be wrong. If the Bible was not wrong, she must have been wrong. She brought up the matter with another sister who had nine children, two of whom had died. The second sister replied, "How can a mother not be anxious? Rather, it seems that it is a sin for a mother not to be anxious. My anxiety has

sent two children to heaven already, and I am left with seven to be anxious over." The first sister felt more confused after she heard this. Later, she was enlightened to see that anxiety is indeed a sin, and she prayed that the Lord would make her overcome such a sin. Eventually, she did overcome. This is the meaning of truth and grace. Truth tells us what sin is, and grace enables us to overcome such sin. Before we have the truth, we may not think too much of a certain thing. But after we receive the truth and are enlightened, we will know what sin is. In the past, the island of Kulangsu was ceded to the British. Later, more land was reclaimed from the sea, and the British territory subsequently increased. In the same principle, the more truth there is, the more grace there is. Truth shows us what sin is, and when we apply grace, we experience full victory over such sin.

A sister had a watch, which her mother had given to her on her twentieth birthday. On the watch was a golden cross. She kept the watch for eighteen years. One day she read 1 Timothy 2:9 which says that women should not adorn themselves with gold. She had thought that it was all right to have a little ornamentation on the watch. But that day God pointed His finger at the watch and showed her that she had to deal with it. She began to preach to God and argued that such a small thing did not matter, but eventually the Lord prevailed, and she dealt with that little matter. Today we should be bold to search out our sins and deal with them. In the past we might have dealt with gross sins, outward sins, obvious sins, and filthy sins. Today we have to deal with the small, fine, inward, and hidden sins that bring dishonor to God. These dealings will bring us more grace to experience more victories in our daily life.

RECEIVING THE TRUTH, ENJOYING GRACE, AND EXPERIENCING VICTORY

Whether or not you make any progress in your daily life depends on whether you have seen the truth. You must first find the kind of sins you have and then find how the Lord accomplishes an overcoming work within you. A Western woman missionary was working for the China Inland Mission. She was at odds with Miss Fischbacher and often publicly defamed her. When Miss Fischbacher would report one thing, the sister would deny it. When Miss Fischbacher would deny something, the sister would insist that such a thing happened. Once Miss Fischbacher wrote home to report on her work in China.

This sister tried to find to whom she was writing, and she wrote to the same person in an attempt to negate the things that Miss Fischbacher had said. It seemed as if she was going out of her way to prove to others that Miss Fischbacher was being dishonest. After this went on for a while, Miss Fischbacher could not help but harbor some bitterness against her. Later, she read 1 Peter 1:22, which says that we should love one another from a pure heart fervently. It is so easy for man to preach to God. She told the Lord, "It is impossible for me to love this sister. It is even more impossible for me to love her fervently." She prayed for two weeks without any success. She fasted for one whole day and was determined not to leave her room until she overcame this bitterness. However, she still could not get through. Later, she conceded that the most she could do was not to hate the sister. It was impossible to love her. She fasted for another day, but still to no avail.

Finally, she realized that she could not make it by herself, and she said to the Lord, "I should love this sister, but I cannot. This is a sin. I will not let You go unless You make me love her." The next day she prayed continuously for three hours. At about nine o'clock in the morning, the Lord's love filled her. The bitterness was gone, and love came unexpectedly. She felt that she could even die for this sister. She went on and prayed for her the entire night. When she saw the sister the next day, her feeling was entirely different. After another day the other sister also was turned. The overcoming life has God's Word as its standard. God has said many things. If we cannot obey what He has said, we have sinned. We live in this world for only a very brief time, but we encounter too many things during this life. It is in the midst of such a life that we express the victory of Christ.

There were three sisters in Shansi who were missionaries together. Two of them were unmarried by their own choice, and the third was engaged to a man. However, she was the most unhappy of them all. Often she felt lonely. Even though her Fiancé wrote her all the time, she still felt lonely when she was by herself in her room. One day she was weeping again. The other two sisters came in to console her, saying, "Why are you lonely? You have a fiancé who writes to you! We are the ones who should feel lonely!" Later, they went back to their rooms and were struck by loneliness as well, and they began to cry. While they were feeling sorry in this way, they thought of the Lord's Word: "In Your presence is fullness of joy;/At Your right hand there are pleasures forever" (Psa. 16:11). They realized that the feeling of loneliness is actually a sin. The Lord said that in His presence there is fullness of joy, yet they said

that they were lonely. This had to be a sin. They knelt down and prayed to deal with this sin, and the loneliness went away. Nine years have passed, and they have yet to feel lonely again.

Victory is for God to expose our sins continuously and for us to grow through such knowledge. We should not be afraid of others exposing our mistakes. This will afford us a chance to overcome. The more we know the truth, the more we will experience the victory of Christ. I hope that by next year, some will stand up to testify how the truth has come to them and how grace has also followed. This is something very precious. We should all receive the truth gladly so that grace can come to us more and more. In all the meetings, we need to stand up more and more to testify how a certain truth has produced an effect on us. We should not worry whether others will say that we are proud if it is the Lord's doing. We are merely describing the Lord's work in us and how He has won a victory in us. By doing this, those who are in similar trouble or who have not experienced the proper dealing as we have will be able to share the grace we have received.

An overcoming living is wonderful because the overcoming life is wonderful. The Lord can do everything within us. There is nothing that He cannot do. We do not have to be afraid of anything. We can just come to Him continually. We should allow Him to enlighten us with the truth and receive Him as our very victory. If we walk this way, there will be nothing that we cannot do. After a year we will realize that we have overcome some more, and we will be more able to follow the Lord's leading and go on in the way that is set before us.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE TONE OF AN OVERCOMING LIVING

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 41:

Conferences, Messages, and Fellowship (1), Chap. 23

Scripture Reading: Rom. 8:37; Psa. 20:5

We need to see another thing tonight—the tone of an overcoming living. Before we come to this matter, we have to review what we have seen. We first saw that the human method to attain victory is suppression, struggles, and prayers, etc. Actually none of these methods work. Second, we saw that Christ is our victory. Victory is just Christ Himself. The overcoming life that God has given us is just Christ Himself. Third, the most important characteristic of the overcoming life is that it is an exchange rather than a change. Fourth, we saw that there are two things we have to do—let go and believe. Fifth, we saw that there are also two things we have to do after overcoming—terminate all sins and fully consecrate. Sixth, we saw that the Lord is the One who guards us in living an overcoming life; the Lord continually overcomes for us. We have to commit ourselves into the Lord's hand daily. We have to trust in Him and hand ourselves over to Him day by day and moment by moment, allowing His victory to be manifested in us. If anyone has not done this yet, I hope that you will do it today.

Now let us consider the tone of an overcomer's daily life. When we sing a hymn, we have the words and the tune. Many people sing with the right words but with the wrong tune. Please remember that the overcoming life also has its tune. After a man has passed the gate of victory, he cannot overcome every day if he does not carry a tone of victory with him. If the tone is wrong, everything else is wrong. The Fukienese and the Amoyese all speak with different tones. But there is only one tone for the overcoming life. The kind of victory in the Bible is one which makes us more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37). It is not one which barely allows us to overcome. The word barely is my own word; the Bible never uses such a word. However, the fact is that many Christians only barely overcome. Their victory is not one that makes them more than conquerors. Such victory is not genuine victory.

SHOUTING IN VICTORY

Salvation and victory are the same word in Hebrew. Shouting and rejoicing are also the same word in Hebrew. Hence, Psalm 20:5 says, "May we shout victoriously in Your salvation," which can be translated as "May we rejoice in Your victory." What is the difference between victory and shouting for victory? Suppose two groups of students are engaged in a ball game and one team wins. This is victory; the team has won. Shouting for victory is for the cheering ones to shout loudly for the winning team. The students who actually play the game are the ones who won. The other classmates have not won, yet they can shout in victory. In the same way, victory is Christ; this has nothing to do with us. We are not responsible for His victory, but we are responsible for one thing—to shout in victory. The Lord has won the victory, and we are shouting in victory. This is the tone of an overcoming living. Every one of us should have this kind of overcoming tone in our daily life. If we have an overcoming tone, we have the overcoming living. Without an overcoming tone, our daily life is still one of failure. Being more than conquerors is being victorious continuously and having a tone of victory all the time.

The victory of many people is a reluctant one. It is a bare victory and a silent one. For example, when others revile, you may not react; instead, you keep your mouth shut. You may think that by keeping quiet in this way you are being victorious. It is true that this is victory, but it is a victory that is barely attained. It is not one which makes you more than conqueror, nor is it a shout of victory. The shout of victory which comes after a victory is one which rejoices, thanks, and praises continuously. It is not a reluctant effort, nor is it an act of repression or endurance. Shouting for victory is praising under any circumstance and for any reason. This is more than conquering. Most people think that keeping silent when they are being reviled is overcoming. But this is not real victory. Real victory is thanking and praising the Lord under all kinds of difficulties and hardships. This is not just victory, but the shout of victory. We have to remember that the cup that God has given us is a cup that runs over (Psa. 23:5). It is not a cup that only has a few drops of water. For our cup to run over is for us to shout for victory. If others ask me to go a mile, and I go a mile, this is not victory. More than conquering is for others to ask me to go a mile, and instead, I go two miles. If others ask for my tunic, and I give them my tunic, this is not victory. But if others ask for the tunic, and I yield the cloak as well, this is real victory. When others revile me, I do not merely try to suppress myself or try to be patient. Instead, I say

to God, "I thank You," and I say it without any reluctance or misgiving. This is the victory that makes us more than conquerors. We should say to the Lord, "All the hardships that have come upon me are Your gracious dealings with me. I thank You that I am able to suffer for You." This is the tone of victory. The Lord gives you the victory in order that you will thank and praise Him. Many people have seemingly overcome, but they do not have the tone of victory. For example, a man may be in difficulties and say to the Lord, "I am suffering." This means that he has lost the tone of victory. Those who cannot thank and praise in their sufferings are barely making it; they are not more than conquerors.

REJOICING ALWAYS

A few passages in the Bible speak of rejoicing. Matthew 5:11-12 says, "Blessed are you when they reproach and persecute you, and while speaking lies, say every evil thing against you because of Me. Rejoice and exult, for your reward is great in the heavens; for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." "Rejoice and exult" means "to greatly and jubilantly rejoice." James 1:2 says, "Count it all joy, my brothers, whenever you fall into various trials." What is our tone in the midst of trials? James said that we have to count them all joy. This is real victory. A fish has to be in the water before it can survive. In the same way, the overcoming life can only survive in an environment of thanksgiving and praise. If it is placed in an atmosphere of sorrow, it will die. Whenever our heart is stripped of thanksgiving and praises, it loses its victory. Philippians 4:4 says that we have to rejoice always. Rejoicing in the New Testament is unceasing rather than occasional. There should never be a time out for our rejoicing. Whenever we lose our joy, we lose our victory. Hence, we must rejoice in the Lord all the time. First Peter 4:13 says that believers should rejoice under all kinds of circumstances and be filled with thanksgivings and praises. Many believers do not have a smile on their faces. This is an expression of joylessness. On one occasion Paul and Silas were beaten and chained together by their hands and feet. Yet they were still able to sing. As they sang, their mouths might have faced downward, but their hearts were surely faced upward. This thanksgiving and praise shook the earth and rattled open the prison gate. Their spirits had gone out, yet their bodies were still there (Acts 16:22-28). This is the victory that the Lord is after. He wants to hear our song in the middle of the night because He knows that the sunrise is only hours away.

GIVING THANKS IN EVERYTHING

In what should we give thanks? Colossians 3:17 and 1 Thessalonians 5:18 say that we should give thanks in everything. We should have a habit of giving thanks. This means that whatever may happen—great things, small things, good things, or bad things—we have to give thanks. One brother was a railway worker. Once while he was working, a train came by and through an oversight one of his legs was cut off by the train. When he woke up at the hospital, he was asked how he felt. He answered, "Thank and praise the Lord." When he was asked, "How can you thank and praise the Lord at a time like this?", he answered, "I do not consider how many legs I have lost. I consider how many legs I have left." This is the tone of victory. The tone of victory is one in which we thank and praise in the midst of trials. Our hearts should yield to the Lord. We should accept whatever He gives us joyfully, and we should rest in His will. It is not enough for us to merely endure the trials. The kind of endurance described in the Bible is not a passive endurance. Colossians 1:11 says that we are empowered unto all endurance with joy. The kind of endurance that is sustained through the gritting of teeth is of little use to anyone. An overcoming endurance is one which endures with joy, and only those who fully embrace God's will can endure and suffer with joy.

THANKSGIVING AND PRAISE

BEING THE WAY TO VICTORY

Thanksgiving and praise are the tone of victory. They are also the way to victory. Second Chronicles 20:21-22 tells of the Israelites overcoming their enemies in battle through praises. Jehoshaphat the king of Judah appointed the Levites to give praise in holy array (v. 21, ASV) and to go before the army, giving thanks to Jehovah. They were in holy array; they were not in armor or carrying any weapons. Others might have marveled at them. On the one hand, they had to fight, and on the other hand, the victory was not theirs. They fought from the basis of victory. First they won, and then they fought—this is true victory. Fighting and then winning is not victory, but defeat. We first believe that we have overcome and then go forth to fight. We do not fight in order to overcome. There is a big difference between these two. The Bible says that we fight because we have overcome. If we see this, we will know how to apply this fact in the future. Suppose temptations come our way. If we see that the Lord is our victory and that He has overcome already, and if we go forth

into battle on the basis of this, we are shouting for victory. But if we fight in order to win, we are defeated already. True victory is knowing that we have overcome and then going to battle on the basis of that knowledge.

Such a battle of victory overcomes the enemy through thanksgiving and praises. Once we give thanks and praises, the enemy flees away. When we believe in God's Word, we can break forth into praises. Psalm 106:12 says that after God drowned the whole army of Pharaoh in the Red Sea, the Israelites believed in His words and sang His praise. Whenever we have the faith, we can overcome and sing God's praise. We have to learn to thank and praise Him unceasingly. We should not bury our thanksgiving and praises. If we thank and praise Him unceasingly, we will continuously live an overcoming life.