

**DO YOU KNOW
THAT YOU ARE SAVED?**

WATCHMAN NEE

DO YOU KNOW THAT YOU ARE SAVED?

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CHAPTER ONE

CAN MAN BE SAVED BY DOING GOOD?

(CAN MORALITY SAVE US?)

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(The translation of the Chinese title for this message is "Can Man Be Saved by Doing Good." The title above was given by the author on the English cover of the original magazine.)

Can man be saved by doing good? The world's answer is yes. But God's answer in the Bible is no. The authority to decide our salvation is in the hand of God. Salvation is not according to our will. Our salvation is related to God; we cannot make any decision on our own. We cannot be saved just because we think we are. Nor can we be unsaved just because we think we are. Readers, listen to the voice of God. You have to listen to what He has to say. Do not think that as long as you can do good, you will be saved. You have to know that this matter is decided by God.

Can morality save men? No. Absolutely no. Blessed is the man who knows this fact. Today men think that exhorting others to believe in Jesus is the same as exhorting them to do good. Little do they realize that exhorting men to believe in the Lord Jesus is really proving to them that they cannot do good. Even many believers do not realize that man is not saved by doing good. Their thought is to try their best to keep God's Word, attend services, offer money, help the church, and strive to be good, hoping that by so doing, they will be saved. Little do they realize that these things are all vain! These things do not help at all in the matter of their salvation. (Of course I do not mean that we should not keep God's Word, offer money, etc. I am saying that we cannot be saved by these things.)

It is most vain to argue and reason with man's words. Let us then turn to God's Word. Whatever God says is fixed. "For we account that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law" (Rom. 3:28). The meaning of "works of the law" here is to try to do good. The law was enacted by God. It

shows men what they ought to do. If a man could keep God's law, he would be the best person on earth. But God says here through the apostle that He has reckoned, that He is perfectly clear, that man is not justified by keeping the law and doing good. What is the meaning of justification? It means that God not only forgives your sins, but reckons you righteous. In other words, to be justified is to be saved. A justified person is a saved person. God teaches that you cannot be saved or justified by keeping the law. For this reason, my dear sinners, do not trust in your works, and do not think that you can be saved by doing good. Stop your own work! Confess that you are a hopeless sinner! Accept the Lord Jesus as your Savior, and you will be saved.

God is worthy of man's praise because His salvation of man is not based on man's good works. He says, "Where sin abounded, grace has superabounded" (Rom. 5:20). Readers, do you know that you are sinners? Does not your conscience condemn you? Do you not think that men such as you are helpless? Do not be deceived in thinking that you can be saved by doing good, or that you can be saved by joining a church, singing in a choir, praying, or attending services. Do not try to mend your transgressions by human ways. You are sinners, and no matter how much you mend yourselves, you are still sinners. It is like a black man from Africa. No matter how much he tries to put on powder or paints himself with white paint, he is still a black man. Do not try to do good by yourselves anymore! No matter how much you have sinned, the blood of the Lord is able to cleanse you. Come!

Mr. Spurgeon of England was an evangelist who was greatly used by the Lord. Once he said that if the Lord would save him only if he did good, he would never want to be a Christian. He gave an illustration. Suppose he had done many good things, and then presented this goodness before God and asked, "Since I have done so much good, can I be saved?" Since God is the God of all goodness, surely He would not approve of Spurgeon's goodness. He would shake his head and say, "You have not done enough!" Spurgeon said he would then go away in discouragement and would try to do better. After a few years, he would present his goodness before God again, asking God if his goodness was good enough, and if he could be saved. God would answer again, "You are still not good enough. You still cannot be saved." This could go on for two or three more times, and God would still not be satisfied. How then could he be saved? If God expected him to do good before he could be saved, He would probably never be satisfied, and Spurgeon would not be saved even if he worked himself to death. Is this not a pitiful thing? Spurgeon concluded

that if God expected him to do good before he could be saved, then he would not want to be a Christian in the first place because he would find out after striving for many years on earth that God would not be satisfied with him and whatever he would have done would have been in vain. We have to thank the Father because we do not have to do good. All we need to do is to believe in God's Son, and we shall be saved. Although it is true that God is not satisfied with our works, and although it is true that we do not have any merit of our own, He is pleased in His Son, the Lord Jesus. He is satisfied with the righteousness that the Lord Jesus accomplished on the cross. Although we cannot and will not do good by ourselves, the minute we believe in His Son and accept the merit of His Son's shed blood on the cross, we will be saved.

Dear readers, do not be deceived by Satan into thinking that you will be saved by doing good. You must realize that just as you cannot build a ladder that reaches heaven, you cannot secure God's salvation through doing good. We do not obtain God's justification through good works. Rather, we are "being justified freely by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). "If by grace, it is no longer out of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace" (11:6). Are not these two verses very clear? We are justified and saved by God, not because of works, but because of His own grace. Grace and work are two principles that are completely opposite. Grace means that God is willing to save whether a man is good or bad. Man is not worthy to be saved, but because of mercy, God gives him salvation freely. Work, on the other hand, is very different. Work means that only good people will be saved, while bad ones will perish. In other words, man has to do good to save himself, and all those who cannot save themselves will perish. We know that we are all sinners. Although we may not have committed the sins of murder or arson, our nature is corrupted; our thoughts and conduct are full of deceit. We are truly sinners! How can we be saved through works? Thank and praise God that He does not save us because of our work. He is saving us because of His free grace, a grace which we do not deserve.

Many people today think that even though salvation is of God's grace, we should, nevertheless, have our work. They think that God's grace should be supplemented with our work before we can be saved; otherwise, we will still perish. Alas, the man in the flesh always wants to be saved by his own self! We should remember the words in Romans 11:6: "But if by grace, it is no longer out of works..." Grace and work cannot stand side by side. Either we have grace or we have work. We can never have grace and work at the same time.

"Otherwise..." Here the apostle speaks from the negative angle. If one mixes grace with work, then "grace is no longer grace." God's boundless, incomparable, royal grace, if supplemented by man's ragged works, will become something unseemly and awkward. Man's work will not accomplish God's grace. On the contrary, it will make grace "no longer grace." Therefore, sinners, if you want to be saved, you must never think that you should do good, or that doing good will help you to be saved. You should humble yourselves and acknowledge that you are helpless sinners. You should accept God's grace with faith and thanksgiving; by His Son's accomplishment on the cross, you will be saved. Wonderful grace is given freely to sinners!

We can look again at God's Word to see how good works cannot save. "A man is not justified out of works...we might be justified...not out of the works of law, because out of the works of law no flesh will be justified" (Gal. 2:16). "For as many as are of the works of law are under a curse" (3:10). "By law no one is justified before God" (v. 11). I have told you that the meaning of keeping the law is to do good. To be justified by the law means to be saved through works. What do these few verses say? Those who are saved are not saved through doing good. Not only will they not be saved through doing good, but they will be cursed if they want to be saved through good works! The Bible tells us explicitly that no one is saved through good works. If that is the case, why struggle to do something that can never be achieved? Friends, here is the Lord Jesus' accomplished work. He has paid all the price, and has been crucified on the cross for your sake. You do not need to mournfully seek for salvation. He has accomplished His work. If you receive what He has accomplished, you will be saved. Why struggle in your own ways? Believe in Him! After you believe in Him, praise Him because He has so loved you and has prepared salvation for you!

There are two verses which explain the question of salvation clearly. We can take a look at them. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works that no one should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). After reading these two verses, we should realize that they concern the question of salvation. This is why in the first sentence there is the expression "you have been saved." This clearly concerns salvation.

How are you saved? Is it by good works? No. Is it because you are stronger than others? No. How then is man saved? The Bible tells us that salvation is by two things: God's grace and man's faith. "By grace you have been saved

through faith" (2:8). Grace is given by God. God has prepared a Savior for us. He has "caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (Isa. 53:6) by sending Him to the cross to die and bear all the punishment for our sins. Through His suffering and bearing pain for us and by drinking the cup of God's righteous wrath, He accomplished a full salvation for us. How great is this grace! This is God's grace; it is the basis of salvation. Man can render no help; He has accomplished everything on our behalf. God has now prepared salvation and presented it before us. Salvation is placed before every sinner—it is placed before you.

We have seen God's grace manifested on the cross of Calvary. But how can we be saved? It is not by doing good or by mortifying ourselves. Neither is it by improvement or by attending church services. "By grace you have been saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8). Now we come to another aspect of salvation. No doubt God gives grace. Even though God gives grace, we cannot be saved unless we believe. The immense grace of God prepared a death-substituting salvation on the cross of Calvary for us. We must believe in Him before we can be saved.

What is the meaning of believing? To believe is to receive (John 1:12). God has prepared the grace. When we receive it, we are saved. If a man gives you something precious, it is yours when you receive it. When you receive the grace of salvation which God gives you, grace will be yours, and you will be saved. I must persuade you not to delay but to receive Him now. I wish that you would stretch out the hand of faith and accept God's great grace to you. Here is an illustration: a rich man saw many poor people about to die of cold in snowy winter weather. He became very charitable and began to investigate the names and addresses of many of the poor people. Then he ordered his servant to go out with a carriage full of coal to give to them. His servant accordingly took the carriage, and when he reached the first door, he asked if that house was the right number on the right street and if the name of the person living there was so-and-so. When the person who opened the door said yes, the servant told him that his master had sent him to offer coal. The poor man thought that this was a mistake; he thought that he did not have such a kind friend. As a result he closed his door to the servant. The servant could not do anything but go to another door. The man at the second door also thought that he did not have such a kind friend. Although the servant used many words to convince him, he was still doubtful and would not accept the coal. The servant had to go to another house. This happened at the next

few houses. None of the people in those houses had faith. They all thought that there could not be such a kind person who would buy coal and give it away for free. They would not accept the coal. Later the servant went to the house of a widow. When she learned of the intention of the servant, she gladly received the coal and thanked the master. With the coal she was able to pass through that winter. Friends, this is the way with God's grace; it is absolutely free. Now the servant of the master has sent the Lord's salvation to the door of your heart. If you would receive it, you will enjoy the joy of this salvation. Do not follow the example of the doubting ones, who simply inflicted sufferings on themselves and lost their opportunity forever! You only need to receive. You do not need to do anything else. Once you receive, it is yours.

Ephesians 2 does not stop at the teaching that salvation is of grace and through faith; it goes on to teach about the nature of salvation. "This" salvation is first "not of yourselves; it is the gift of God"; and second "not of works that no one should boast" (vv. 8-9). "This" refers to the great grace of salvation because the previous sentence speaks of salvation. There are also two types of "not" in salvation: first it is not of ourselves, and second it is not of works. How clear this is! Notice that salvation is not of ourselves. It does not matter whether you think you are more intelligent than others or more ignorant than others. It does not matter whether your morality is above others or below others. It does not matter whether you are very rich or penniless. These things have nothing to do with your salvation. If you receive God's grace, whether you are wise or foolish, moral or immoral, you will be saved. If you do not receive, no matter what kind of person you are, you will still perish. Salvation is not based on your condition. It is based on God's free gift. Salvation is not of works either. It does not depend on what kind of person you are, or your conduct. God did not say that those who do good will be saved. God said that salvation is not of works. You cannot be saved even if you are the best person on earth, and neither can you perish because you may be the worst person on earth. Perdition or salvation do not depend on your work, but on whether or not you will accept God's grace. My dear sinners, do not consider all your goodness! Consider rather your sins! Why would you not come before God with a contrite heart, confessing that you are a sinner, that you have no goodness to boast of, no merit to depend on, and trust solely in the grace that God has given you through the cross of His Son? I invite you to come quickly. While you are reading this, please kneel down and pray. Tell

God that you will now receive the Lord Jesus as your Savior. Ask Him to forgive your sins, and be a saved person!

Why will God not save man according to his works? There are many reasons, but one is "that no one should boast" (2:9). If man is saved by his works, he will surely boast in himself and not give glory to God. The greatest sin of man is to forsake God, to be independent, not trusting in God. The same is true with respect to salvation. Why would someone want to be saved by his own works and not by the salvation that God has prepared? The reason is man's pride. How humbling it is for one to trust in God! There is nothing for that one to boast in! Man wants to be saved through his own works so that he can boast in himself. But God does not want man to be saved this way, for He does not want man to boast in himself. If one can boast in himself, his salvation is not the true salvation.

Let us look at another passage of the Scriptures. "Not out of works in righteousness which we did but according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5). After reading this verse, we see that even if we think that we have done much righteousness, God will not save us because of it. Do we really have any righteousness? "For all of us became like him who is unclean, / And all our righteousnesses are like a soiled garment" (Isa. 64:6). We think that our righteousnesses are worth much. But in God's eyes, they are nothing! If God is to save us according to our righteousness, we would all perish because all our righteousnesses, without exception, are as filthy rags. What kind of righteousness can this be considered as? How can it save us? Can God save us by our filthy, rag-like righteousness? No. No. Thank God that He has given us His grace. He saved us because He has mercy on us. He did not save us because of our righteousness. If He saved according to our righteousness, none of us would be saved. We cannot be saved through good works! The meaning of mercy is to give grace to a person who does not deserve it, despite his unworthiness, and to do so through love. We were the sinners. How could we have deserved God's salvation? Yet He has loved us without a reason. He passed over our sins and caused the Lord Jesus to die for us on the cross, bestowing grace to us. "According to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5).

Therefore, readers, do not think that you can be saved by your good works! You should hurry to believe in the Lord Jesus. He does not want you to do good. He wants to save you. He will save you. You do not have to do good. You only have to believe in Him. Although you have not done any good and

although you are most sinful, His crucifixion on the cross was a substitutionary death for you to redeem you from sin. He has borne your evil works and the sin of your evil works. You can now come just as you are before Him, in your condition of failure in doing good works. Receive Him as the Savior. He will save you. He will receive you, and He will change you.

Perhaps you are a so-called member of a church already. Perhaps you have been baptized and have been received into the Holy Communion. Perhaps you are a leader of a church. But you should know that none of these will save you. If you do not believe in the Savior who has died for you and has borne your sins, whatever good you have done and whatever position you occupy will not change you from being a perishing man. You are still no different from anyone else! Before God, nothing will shelter a man from the wrath of God except the blood of the Lord Jesus. Any kind of good work will fail. Only the saving work of the cross of the Lord Jesus is trustworthy. Every way to salvation that depends on your own work is from the bottomless pit and is destined for hell. God has established only one way of salvation, which is to accept the grace which comes from the cross. There is no other way to be saved than to take God's way.

Finally, let me read you one verse from the Scriptures, "I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness is through law, then Christ has died for nothing" (Gal. 2:21). Salvation does not come through good works. If a man can be saved through good works, then Christ has died in vain! If a man can satisfy God's heart by doing good himself, God would not have been so foolish as to send His Son to the world to die in vain and give up His life for nothing. If you think that doing good will help you be saved, you are nullifying the grace of God. Sinners, God may be foolish, but He is still wiser than you. If a man can be saved by good works, God would surely not have given up His Son in vain. Since He has caused His Son to die for us and bear our sins, this proves that we cannot do good and cannot be saved by doing good. He has established the way of salvation. If you will receive the Lord Jesus as the Savior, you will be saved. Alas, we are truly sinners! God indeed loves us! He is willing to receive us! Though we have no goodness to boast of and no righteousness to call our own, His salvation does not diminish. On the contrary, it is made more manifest. How wonderful this is! I wish that His love would touch you to come to Him in faith, saying, "O God! I am truly a sinner! I know that none of my good works are worth anything before You. I

pray that You will receive me and save me because of the substitutionary death of the Savior Jesus Christ."

"Him who comes to Me I shall by no means cast out" (John 6:37).

CHAPTER TWO

DO YOU KNOW THAT YOU ARE SAVED?

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Scripture Reading: Heb. 10:19-22

In the Scriptures that we have just read, the portion after the phrase "let us" tells us what we should do, while the portion before it tells us what the Lord has accomplished. Since we have obtained so much, we need to draw nigh unto God with a true heart and in full assurance of faith.

Here is something that deserves our special attention. There is a great difference between the New Testament and the Old Testament. In the New Testament one starts from a position to which he has already attained and proceeds step by step onward, whereas in the Old Testament one starts by advancing step by step until he attains to a certain position. In other words, in the Old Testament men did not have any position at all. It was like students taking an entrance examination for a school; there was no assurance that they had been accepted. Those in the Old Testament had no assurance before God at all; everyone was under the test. This is why they had to try their best to worship God and please Him, hoping that one day they would receive a position before God and have eternal life.

The reverse is true in the New Testament. Blessed is the man who knows that the New Testament is the reverse of the Old Testament! The New Testament is entirely different from the Old Testament. The Old Testament requires that man try his best to draw near to God and win a position. The New Testament begins by giving men a position. Furthermore, that position never changes. Every New Testament believer has received his position in Christ; he has received eternal life. After this he draws nigh to God. In the Old Testament one has to try his best to draw nigh to God before he can secure a position for himself. In the New Testament a position has been secured, and one comes to God with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

Brothers and sisters, today I wish to point out one thing. We should stand in the position that God has given us. A while ago many people were saved. Please remember that the first work a newly saved person has to do is to clearly recognize the position in which he is standing. I can tell you today that God's Word has made it plain that everyone who is in the Lord has obtained a position. This means that he is a child of God and can draw nigh to the Lord. All the work we have at present is based on the fact that we have obtained a position. We do not work hard before we become saved. All those who have this kind of concept do not know God and do not know His Word.

I would like to tell you a few stories. Once I was preaching the gospel at one place for about six to seven days. I asked the audience at the end, "Do you believe in Jesus?" Many people answered boldly, "Yes, I do." I asked further, "If you have believed, what have you received?" Many of them could not answer. Later on I said, "Whosoever knows that he is saved, please raise up his hand." There were about six hundred people in the congregation. But only three hands were raised. The three persons were not actually from that locality. They were saved through my preaching elsewhere, and I had brought them there with me. There were six hundred people who believed in the Lord, but there were not even three who were saved. This was indeed strange.

In 1924 I preached in Changchow for more than ten days and asked the same question. I asked if they had believed in Jesus as their Savior. More than a thousand hands were raised. But when I asked again, "Now that you have believed, do you know that you have eternal life, that you will not perish, and that once you believe, you are saved forever?" It was most amazing! Just a minute before, a thousand hands were raised. But now not a single hand was raised from the audience. Only my translator on the platform raised his hand. I told them, "The Lord says that he who believes has eternal life. You have believed. Why do you not know that you have eternal life?"

Another time, at a meeting with more than a thousand people, I asked if they believed in the Lord. Over a thousand hands were raised simultaneously. When I asked again if they were saved, there were only twelve to thirteen hands. Why was there such a big difference in the number of hands? There were over a thousand believers, but only slightly more than ten thought they were saved. Does this mean that Christ is not dependable? Suppose a doctor posted a sign saying, "All patients will be cured." If you ask him, "How many patients do you have?" he may say, "Over a thousand." If you ask him again,

"How many have been cured?" and he says, "Eleven or twelve out of a thousand were cured," you will surely say that this doctor is not dependable. Many consulted him, but few were cured. If more than a thousand believed in the Lord Jesus but only eleven to twelve are saved, this means that He is not dependable.

Another time I was holding meetings in a certain county around Swatow. I found that even many elders, pastors, deacons, and those who were supposed to be teaching others were themselves ignorant of this fact. They preached salvation to others, yet they themselves did not understand or know their own position. They did not know that once a person believes, he has eternal life and will not perish. They did not have any assurance about this matter.

Not only in public but also during private conversations, I have met many such people. Once when a woman discussed this matter with me, I asked if she believed. She was not an eloquent person and did not have much knowledge. She told me that her grandparents and her parents were all believers and that she herself was also a believer. Having said that, she recited to me the Ten Commandments, just to show me that she knew something about religion. Then I told her, "We believers have nothing that we cannot say. May I ask you a question? If you were to die now, could you say that you are saved?" She answered, "I dare not say this. I am trying my best to behave well, help others, and serve the Lord. When that day comes, if the Lord is merciful to me and lets me go to heaven, it will be wonderful. If He is not merciful to save me, I will not be saved." I began to explain many things to her. After some time she began to understand. Had I not explained all this to her, she would still be saying, "I will try my best to behave, sacrifice, and suffer, hoping that one day I will be saved."

Once I was talking to a young, knowledgeable seminary student. He was not clear concerning the matter of salvation. He said, "I am trying my best to work and do good. In the future if God says that I am worthy to go to heaven, I will be saved. Saying that I am saved while I am on the earth today is too boastful and proud." I had to spend much time with him before he was brought to an understanding of his position in salvation.

In my public and private meetings with people, I have met many believers who dare not say that they are saved. They refuse to believe that the Bible is the Word of God. Whatever God says, it is so. Whatever God says will not

change; it will definitely come to pass. Many people think, "I should try my best to work and to do good, hoping that God will save me in the future." However, hoping is not believing. Please remember that every time the Bible mentions faith, it is in reference to accomplished facts in the past and not to things in the future. All those who hope to be saved have a problem with their faith concerning the Lord's accomplished salvation. They hope to receive God's promise and grace, but they will not believe in Him. God is not pleased with such an attitude.

Now we want to examine another matter. Can a believer know that he has eternal life? Can he know that he is already saved? Concerning this matter, I would not say anything and would not ask you to say anything. Let this book—the Bible—speak to us. Let us now read a few portions of the Scriptures to see if we can know that we have eternal life.

First, please read 1 John 5:13: "I have written these things to you that you may know that you have eternal life, to you who believe into the name of the Son of God." We have to grasp the last sentence of this verse. Does it tell you to hope? Not at all. It says that we should know that we have eternal life. To whom does John write the letter? To those who believe into the name of the Son of God. Who is the Son of God? He is Christ. What did John say when he wrote to those who believe in Jesus Christ? He wrote so that they may know that they have eternal life. Does a believer have eternal life? The Bible says that we can know this. John's purpose in writing is to let those who believe into the name of the Son of God know that they have eternal life.

Next let us look at Acts 13:38-39: "Therefore let it be known to you, men, brothers, that through this One forgiveness of sins is announced to you; and from all the things from which you were not able to be justified by the law of Moses, in this One everyone who believes is justified." What does the first sentence say? Does it say, "Brothers, be hopeful"? or "Brothers, you should believe"? Not at all. It does not say to hope or to believe; rather, it says, "Let it be known to you, men, brothers, that through this One forgiveness of sins is announced to you; and from all the things from which you were not able to be justified by the law of Moses, in this One everyone who believes is justified." Can we know that we are justified and forgiven? Paul's word says that we can. He says that we should know that we are justified and forgiven. Those who believe should know this and should not need others to tell them this.

Let us see 2 Corinthians 5:1: "For we know that if our earthly tabernacle dwelling is taken down, we have a building from God, a dwelling not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens." Unlike the last verse in Acts, which says that we should know, this verse is a command. It says clearly that we know. It seems to be telling us that no one needs to explain, there is no need to struggle to understand, and the matter should be very apparent. What is it that we should know? Paul says, "For we know that if our earthly tabernacle dwelling (our physical body) is taken down, we have a building from God, a dwelling (our resurrected body) not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens." Paul knew assuredly that if our earthly bodies die, we will have resurrected and eternal bodies in the heavens. In other words, Paul knew that we are saved. The words here are stated most clearly; there is no ambiguity at all. Paul was very careful in saying these words. Otherwise, others may misunderstand, saying, "Since Paul is an apostle and has worked so well, surely he will go to heaven when he dies. But I am not that fervent, and I do not love the Lord that much. If I die, I may not have a resurrected body." Paul was very careful in saying what he said. He did not say, "I know if my earthly tabernacle dwelling is taken down." Paul used we. This includes not just you and me, but all those who believe in the Lord. If our earthly tabernacle dwelling is taken down, we have a building from God, a dwelling not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens. This shows us once more that whoever believes may know that he has eternal life and is saved.

Following this, verses 6 and 8 say, "Therefore being always of good courage and knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are abroad from the Lord...we are of good courage then and are well pleased rather to be abroad from the body and at home with the Lord." Paul had no doubt concerning where he would go after he departed from his body; He was certain that he would not go to the eternal dreadful place. He knew that he would be with the Lord forever. Therefore, he was confident and was not afraid of death at all. This shows us again that we do not have to wait for the future; we can know today whether we are saved.

Read again 2 Timothy 1:12: "For which cause also I suffer these things; but I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard my deposit unto that day." Why did Paul say, "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard my deposit unto that day?" What did Paul commit to the Lord when he believed in Him? He committed his future eternal salvation to the Lord. Paul was

persuaded that the Lord was able to keep that which he had committed unto Him unto that day. He knew very clearly and understood very well that all the matters that he had committed to the Lord would be kept and not be lost unto that day.

The few passages that we have read testify that we can know that we have eternal life and that we can know that we are saved while we are still on earth. Anyone should know today if he is saved. Friends, please do not take the excuse that we do not know whether we will go to heaven or to hell until we are judged before God in the future. Let me repeat: we can know today whether we are saved and whether we will go to heaven.

Now let me mention a few things. How do we know that we have eternal life and are saved? First, we have to know how one can have eternal life. If we know the way of justification and the forgiveness of sins, we will know whether or not we have passed that way. If we have passed that way, we have eternal life; if not, we do not have eternal life. Let me now tell you the way to obtain eternal life. Many people know this way, and many have heard this from others. But I still want to repeat it.

The New Testament mentions at least one hundred fifty times that those who believe will have eternal life; they will have life and not be condemned but will be saved. What does John 3:16, a verse most familiar to us, tell us? It tells us that God loves the world. How does He love? To what extent has He loved? He loved to the extent that He gave His only begotten Son. God has given His only begotten Son to the world, and Jesus has died for sinners and accomplished the work of redemption. What happens after this? It goes on to say that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life. This verse has three main points. It mentions a great fact, a great condition, and a great result. The great fact is that God has sent Jesus to the world to redeem men and to be their Savior. The great condition is the one thing that everyone should do—believe. The great result is too good; it is something man has never thought of: whoever believes will not perish, but have eternal life. The great fact is that God so loved the world. To what extent did He love? He loved to the extent that He gave His only begotten Son to the world to die on the cross for men's sins and save all the sinners. This is the great fact. Nothing is greater and truer than this. Now there is a great condition, a great demand placed before every man. Man has to fulfill this condition. What is this condition? Everyone should believe that God has accomplished such a fact

and should believe in God's accomplishment. This is the unique condition and something that everyone should fulfill. The great fact is accomplished by God, and the great condition is to be fulfilled by man. What then is the great result? It is that we would not perish but have eternal life. This is to be saved. Since the Lord has said that those who believe in Him would not perish but have eternal life, do you think that after we have believed, that we will still perish? Even if the Lord could be unrighteous, He could not be unrighteous to such an extent. Of course, our God is a righteous God! Whoever believes will surely have eternal life and will not perish. God will accomplish this according to what He says.

Once there was a medical doctor who was a very good believer in the Lord. He took care of his patients well, and whenever there was the opportunity, he would preach the gospel to them. Once he was treating a widow's sickness. In the course of their conversation, he asked if she was a believer. She answered, "Yes, I truly believe in Jesus and have accepted Him as my Savior." The doctor asked again, "If you have truly believed and accepted Jesus as your Savior, do you have eternal life? Suppose this sickness does not get cured and you die, will you go to heaven or to hell?" She said, "Sir, I dare not say. I have been a Christian for many years, and I try my best to do good works. If God sees me fit to be saved and go to heaven, it will be wonderful; otherwise, there is nothing that I can do." The doctor said, "Wait. Let me ask you a question. Since you have been a Christian for so many years, surely you have memorized some verses by heart." She said, "Of course, there are many Scripture verses I can recite. The most familiar one is John 3:16. Even when I was in kindergarten, my teacher had me memorize it. I have known this verse by heart for the last fifty to sixty years." Then she recited: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that every one who believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life." The doctor said, "Very good, but now do you have eternal life?" She answered, "Sir, I just told you that I try my best to do good, hoping that in the future God will approve me and give me eternal life. Then I will know if I have eternal life. Only good Christians like you, doctor, have the boldness to say that you have eternal life. I would not dare to say it." The doctor said gently, "Madam, you have memorized John 3:16 incorrectly." She said, "This cannot be. I have had this verse memorized for fifty to sixty years. How can I be wrong?" The doctor said, "Please recite it again," and she recited it in the same way again. When she finished, she asked to the doctor, "What did I say wrong?" The doctor

immediately asked her, "Do you have eternal life?" She replied anxiously, "I have told you two to three times that I dare not say that I have it; I only endeavor to do good, hoping that on that day God will say that I have eternal life. While I am on the earth today, I dare not say that I have it." The doctor said gently again, "You have still recited John 3:16 incorrectly." She said, "I have just recited it to you without any error. Yet you say again that I am wrong. Please do not make fun of me. How can I be wrong after having known it for fifty to sixty years? It is you who have memorized it wrong." Then she stood up to look for a Bible and placed John 3:16 in front of the doctor, saying, "I will recite it again. Please look at it word by word to see if I am wrong." After she had recited it, she said, "Sir, who is wrong? Was I not correct?" The doctor said, "Please calm down. I just want to ask if you have eternal life." She answered in a furious way, "You said that I recited John 3:16 incorrectly; why do you ask me about this matter again? Have I not told you three to four times that I dare not say whether I have eternal life, and that I only hope God will say I have it in the future." The doctor said again, "You have recited John 3:16 incorrectly." She answered, "I give up. Would you please recite it for me." The doctor said, "Fine," and he went on to recite John 3:16. Then the woman said, "How is yours different from mine? Check and see that what you have recited was exactly what I recited." He said, "They are not the same; now let me recite your John 3:16 for you: `For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that every one who believes into Him and endeavors to do good, and after whose death God will judge and say that he may have eternal life, because God has delighted in him, such a one will have eternal life and will not perish.' My John 3:16 says, `That every one who believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life.'" The woman then understood what the doctor meant. She had thought that John 3:16 had two parts with the first part ending after "believes into Him," after which one could insert any word before proceeding to the second part "would not perish, but would have eternal life." Now she knew that John 3:16 is only one sentence. Everyone who believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life.

O brothers and sisters, please remember that every one who believes has eternal life. God cannot lie. What God has said must be. Whenever you believe, you have eternal life. Many years ago there was an evangelist, Mr. Chapman, who saved many souls during his preaching and was very well known. He is now with the Lord. I mention him because the story of his salvation has

something to do with what we are speaking today. He was a doctor of philosophy, a highly educated man. Once he heard Mr. Moody's preaching. Mr. Moody was an uneducated laborer. When the two conversed with each other, Mr. Moody asked him, "Are you a Christian?" Mr. Chapman answered, "Sometimes I am good and sometimes not. When I am zealous I am the most zealous of all men; but when I am cold there is no one colder than I. When I am zealous, I can boldly say that I am a Christian, but when I am cold, I dare not claim that I am a Christian." Mr. Moody did not say anything but asked him to read John 5:24: "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." After reading the verse, he asked Mr. Chapman, "Are you a saved Christian?" Although Mr. Chapman had a doctorate degree, he responded the same way as that old widow: "I have told you that when I endeavor to do good, I am a Christian, but when I am cold and am not doing good, I am not a Christian." Moody said, "What does this verse say? What do you have after you have heard the gospel and believed in the One that sent Christ, that is, after you have believed in the heavenly Father? Does not the Bible say that this kind of person has eternal life and has passed out of death into life? Mr. Chapman, since you are a believer in the Lord, you are a saved Christian." Mr. Chapman stopped and considered doubtfully. Then he said, "I still cannot say that I am a Christian. How terrible a person I am! Many times I am indeed zealous, but many times I am cold." Moody took the Bible in his hand and said, "Dr. Chapman, whose word is it that you are doubting?" Right then, Mr. Chapman realized that he was doubting God's word. Later, he testified in his sermon that from that time on, he knew he had eternal life.

For one who believes in the Lord to say that he does not have eternal life is not humility, but unbelief. It is to doubt God's words and God's righteous and unchanging character. Everyone who is in the Lord has eternal life and is not condemned but has passed out of death into life. The day when we believe, we are regenerated and have a new life. This is the gospel! I present this matter before everyone, to let you know that you have eternal life.

Read again John 6:47: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life." If the whole Bible were taken away and only this verse remained, it would still be sufficient to solve the matter concerning salvation. Believing is not hoping; it is not waiting for the future, or doing anything. The Bible says, "He who believes has eternal life." God's Word will not change.

Let me tell you another very simple story. Some years ago there was a very well-known servant of the Lord who was also a medical doctor. He did profound research in the medical field. In addition, he had a strong faith. At his work, he always exhorted people to believe in the Lord. One time he went to a hospital and saw lying in bed a sick young lady, whose life was almost over. He was an aged person, and he went over and asked her, "Are you happy?" She said, "No, I do not have any joy at all." He asked, "Why are you not happy? Have you believed in Jesus?" She said, "Yes, I have truly believed in Jesus as my Savior, and I have committed all my sins to Him." He then asked, "Do you have eternal life? Are you saved?" She said, "This is the very question I cannot resolve. The doctor said that my temperature is very high and that I do not have long to live. I still do not know how God will treat me when I see Him. I am very sad and am not happy at all. If a man has done good all his life, made sacrifices, endeavored to work and save people, and deserved some special merits, he may have eternal life. But I do not have many days on earth, and I have not spent much effort to save people. How can I be saved?" The doctor said to her, "Salvation is by the blood of the Lord and the redemption He has accomplished. We have no strength to save ourselves." He asked her to read John 6:47: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life." The doctor then said, "The Lord's word can never be false. He even says 'truly, truly,' which means it must be true. What does He say those who believe in Him will have?" The young lady said, "Eternal life." He asked her again, "Since you have believed, do you have eternal life?" The young lady waited for a long time and then said, "The Bible says that I have eternal life, but I say I do not have eternal life." He said, "Which is more reliable, what you say, or what the Bible says?" At last she said with tears on her face, "I believe I have eternal life." From that time on, she became a happy person. Not long afterward, she passed away to the Lord who gave her eternal life.

O friends, I present this matter before you. The Lord Jesus was crucified on the cross in order to save sinners. He shed His precious blood to cleanse us from our sins. All those who believe in Him will not perish but will have eternal life. All your problems can be solved here. Today I only ask you, "Do you believe in Jesus?" All those who believe have eternal life.

Once I met a sister in Southeast Asia and asked if she believed in the Lord. She said, "I believe that Jesus can save me." I asked again, "Are you saved?" She said, "Sometimes I am saved; sometimes I am not. When I had a very

good time reading the Bible, I considered that it would be wonderful if I would die then, because I believed at that time that I was saved. After a while when I got angry with my mother or quarreled with my younger brother, I felt that I had sinned, and I said to myself that I must not die. If I died then, I would certainly perish. Day after day, I switched between moments of good and bad, being saved and not being saved." I said to her, "Sister, you really must be the most capable person in the whole world. Within a day, you can go back and forth between heaven and hell many times. You are indeed capable. Who can be as capable as you are?" She said, "Do you mean to say that once I believe, I am a saved person?" I said, "What does God say in the Bible? God says those who believe have eternal life. No one can alter this Word, not even God. If you do not believe this Word, it means you do not believe that the Bible is the Word of God."

If a person does not understand the way to be saved, he cannot know whether or not he is saved. A person who wants to be saved must first know the conditions and the basis of salvation. If you do not understand the basis of salvation you cannot know whether you are saved. Once I was in Amoy discussing the matter of salvation with a great merchant there. We discussed it from nine o'clock in the evening to half past eleven o'clock, but the matter was still not settled. All the time he dared not say that he had eternal life. He said, "Three months ago, someone came here to preach the gospel and said that those who believe have eternal life. At that time I believed, and I put aside my sins; I thought that I was saved. But a month later my faith was gone, and I fell into great sins again. Does this not mean that I became unsaved? Now you are here. When I heard your preaching, I was revived again. But I am afraid that after you leave, in one or two months, I will become cold and backslidden again and become unsaved like before. Therefore, I cannot say that I am saved." I showed him many verses from the Scriptures and told him that the Word of God cannot be wrong and that one only has to believe. He was still not clear. In the end, I stood up to say goodbye to him, "Sir, I have to leave now because tomorrow I have meetings and some guests are waiting to see me. Therefore, we cannot continue. But let me say a final word. Are you saved by yourself or by the Lord Jesus?" Having said that, I began to walk away. After taking two steps, he called me back. I asked him why. He said, "We have talked for three to four hours, and I was not clear. But now I am clear. Being saved does not depend on good deeds in the past, nor on the good deeds in the future, but rather on whether or not one believes that Jesus bore

his sins and died for him. No matter how many sins one has, these sins have all been put upon Him. As long as a man will believe, he will be saved. We are not saved by ourselves. We cannot save ourselves. It is the Lord Jesus who has saved us. Why then should I still say that I am not saved?" Finally, this man knew that he was saved. How happy we both were! The few hours spent in discussions and reading of the Scriptures were all useless. But the one word at the end gave him the understanding.

Many believers do not say that they are saved because they do not understand the basis of salvation. They think that all the misconduct in the past is put on Jesus, but that if one misbehaves after he has believed, he will perish. This is to revert back to the Old Testament position. In the New Testament, one is first given the standing; by faith one is first filled with the new life and then one comes before God with a true heart in full assurance of faith. One does not come to God by doing good. Rather, one comes to God based on the position he has received. This position will never be lost. Today many do not have the joy of salvation because they are trying to preserve their ongoing salvation with good works. Salvation does not come through a lifetime of labor; that will not save a person. If you ask a genuinely saved person how he is saved, he will definitely answer, "It is Jesus who saves me. I do not have any ability to save myself. It is all from the Lord." Only this kind of person will always rejoice.

The thief who was crucified at the same time as Christ was being crucified was saved right there on the cross immediately after he accepted the Lord. His salvation was based fully on the substitutionary death of Jesus. Suppose he did not die right after he was saved; suppose he lived fifty more years and did the best work like Paul, stood firm like Peter, or had the greatest love like John. Suppose he had all the virtues of Paul, Peter, and John added together. Could any of these virtues render help to his salvation to paradise at all? Would they make him more worthy of his salvation? No, they would not. Even if the thief stopped being a thief, even if he lived to do good and save others, and even if he became as good as the apostles, that still would not form the basis for his salvation. The only basis is the Lord Jesus; salvation does not depend on the behavior of the believers. This is why a believer can say that he is saved. It is after a man is saved that he conducts himself like the Lord did, being good and holy.

Suppose a person falls into water and others on the banks save him and bring him up with great difficulty. They give him artificial respiration, a change of clothes, a burning fire to warm him, and something to eat so that he can live. Suppose you were to ask him, "Where are you now? Are you on the ground?" If he answers, "Though I am not in the water, I still feel that I am in the water. If I say I am now on the ground, it is too proud. I can only hope that I am on the ground!" Would you say that such a person is humble? This is not humility. Christ has saved the believers, yet if we still say, "I dare not say that I am saved; I still feel that I am in hell," we are too unreasonable!

When a person genuinely believes in Jesus as his Savior and in God's putting all his sins upon Him, but still says that he is not saved, this person is not humble; he is rather ungrateful for the exceeding grace of the Lord! He does not acknowledge the great work of the Lord's redemption and is saying that the Lord cannot fully save him! A Christian with this kind of thought will never praise God! I have never seen such a one utter thanks and songs of praises from his mouth! He does not know where he is going. No wonder he cannot praise or give glory to God. A person going to hell or a person who does not know that he has eternal life surely cannot praise God. It is pitiful that the praises that are due do not exist in the mouths of many Christians! Only those who know that they are saved can praise and thank the Lord! Who will praise God in Hades? Hell is filled with curses! It never has a word of praise. If you do not praise God now, when will you praise Him?

Some people say, "There is a danger in saying that once a person believes, he has eternal life and is saved and will never perish, because if a person knows that he is saved anyway, he may do whatever he wants, not be careful about anything, or not have a fearful heart." Those who say this do not know God's way of salvation and grace. Please note that the salvation as recorded in the Scriptures includes objective and subjective aspects. The Lord was crucified on the cross. God said that those who believe in Him will not go to hell but are justified and fully saved because all their sins have been put on the cross, and their sins are fully forgiven. This is the objective aspect. At the same time, within the Lord's salvation, there is also the subjective work. He has crucified on the cross the life which once loved sin, filthiness, and uncleanness. At the same time, He has given us His life—the new life. This is subjective salvation. The Lord not only saves us objectively, but He Himself also regenerates us. We are not only forgiven but also regenerated. God has put a new life and a new spirit inside us. Every believer has the Holy Spirit

living within him, so that he knows what is good, what should be done, and what is right. His life is a good and joyful one. There is no one whose sins have been forgiven and who has the life of God who will feel that a holy life is a suffering and is not good. Formerly he dared not commit evil openly because he was afraid of having a bad name or reputation. Now he does not commit evil because he knows that these are sins, and that the sins themselves and their nature are stinky and filthy. Now he sees sins as something repulsive. In addition, he has the Holy Spirit dwelling within him, and he dares not do evil.

If a person has believed in the Lord and continues to sin without any hatred towards sin, this shows that he has not yet been regenerated. An unregenerated person does not have life and is not saved. God has not only given us objective salvation, but He has also given us subjective salvation. If any man thinks he has a new life and is regenerated, yet continues to sin, his faith is not genuine, and he is not really regenerated. God's life causes us not to sin. Therefore, a believer does not have to sin. Please grasp these words firmly. A believer not only has objective salvation, but also the subjective life that does not sin.

No traveler would decorate and furnish his temporary lodging beautifully and perfectly only to stay for a few days or months and then leave it to go to another place. Men only decorate, furnish, beautify, and make comfortable a permanent home; no one would furnish a temporary lodging too well, because he will not live there for long. I had a classmate who never dressed properly. His hair was very long, his face was not washed, his whole body was dirty, and he never put on proper shoes. Everyone said that he was eccentric, and those who walked with him were disgusted with him. Two years later I met him on the street. He was clean-shaven and wearing a proper suit, and his hair was nicely combed. I hardly recognized him, and I said to myself, "Is this my ex-classmate?" We had been classmates for seven years; I knew that he dressed very poorly and did not care for his appearance. Later he talked with me and asked me about life in some foreign countries and the etiquette of those countries. I was really amazed that a most casual person wanted to start learning foreign etiquette. I could not help but go to his uncle to ask the reason. I found out that he was going abroad to study very soon. This was why he started to dress well and learn etiquette. A person going to a foreign country to study would stay there for only two or three years; he would not stay there forever. Yet this person would dress up in a suit, speak with an accent, care for manners, and inquire about life in a foreign country. He was

only going there to study for a few years, yet he had such a good preparation. How about us believers who will in the future live eternally in the bright, glorious, beautiful, and excellent heavenly home? Should we not all the more prepare and learn the heavenly life and manner? Is there such a person who would purposely make Chinese long gowns when he is getting ready to go to a foreign country because he thinks that, after he is in the Western country, he will not have the chance to wear this kind of clothes anymore and that he must therefore take all the opportunities to wear them while he can? Needless to say, we all know that there is not such a thing.

Every believer knows that he is saved, and it will not be long before he will be back to his home in heaven where he will see his heavenly Father. Would he still think, "There will be no more opportunity to sin in heaven, so while I am still on earth, I had better sin more and taste sins more. I had better be bound by sins more and suffer the bitterness of sins more"? Do you think that this is reasonable? This is surely unreasonable. Let us realize that we will all go to the heavenly home and will dwell in that beautiful city. Since we are saved now, we should surely forsake the pleasures of sin and the lusts of the flesh; we should not allow these things to hinder us or obstruct our way. May we know that since we are saved and have the life of God, we should express God's life and should let others know that we are saved. May we testify much before man so that more people can be saved.

CHAPTER THREE

GOD'S WAY OF REDEMPTION

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Scripture Reading: Gal. 4:4-5; Rom. 10:17; Heb. 11:6; Gal. 4:6; John 14:26;
16:13

Deep within me I feel the need to give a message on the significance of faith. Hebrews 11:6 says, "But without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing to Him." The most important thing in the entire life of a Christian is to please God. If a Christian does not have faith, he cannot be well pleasing to God. Why is faith so important? I recently looked into a Bible concordance regarding the word faith and found that almost everything was through faith; this is by faith and that is by faith. All of the grace that God has prepared for man is received through man's faith. Faith is so important. God does not grant grace with respect of persons. Many people are obedient and well-behaved, yet God does not grant them much grace. Why is this? We need to see that there are four steps involved in God's way of redemption.

First, there is the work of Christ. God caused Christ to accomplish redemption for us. Through the death and resurrection of Christ, God accomplished redemption for us.

Second, God proclaims what He has done through His Word. The Word of God proclaims Christ's accomplished facts.

Third, man believes in God's Word. We first believe in the Word of God, not the work of Christ. Christ's work satisfied God's heart. Christ fulfilled God's desire. We rely on the work of Christ and believe in the Word of God. Without the Word of God, we cannot believe the work of Christ. Without the Word of God, we cannot understand the work of Christ. Therefore, believing in the Word of God is believing in the work of Christ.

Fourth, the Holy Spirit applies the accomplishments of Christ to the believers. When the Bible mentions the Holy Spirit, it pays particular

attention to His fellowship. The Holy Spirit applies to us what Christ has accomplished. The Holy Spirit is leading us into God's truth. Truth is reality, the reality of all spiritual things. In the Bible, truth indicates Christ and His accomplishments. The Lord says, "I am...the reality" (John 14:6). Truth also refers to the Word of God. The Lord says, "Your word is truth" (17:17). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. The Holy Spirit ushers us into Christ and His accomplishments. The Holy Spirit also makes the Word of God real to us.

This is God's way of redemption. If we do not have faith, we do not have anything. Although Christ has accomplished everything and God has spoken, if we do not believe, the Holy Spirit can do nothing and we cannot obtain anything.

What does Christ's work include? A few weeks ago I spoke on the riches in Christ and mentioned that sanctification, perfection, freedom from condemnation, deliverance from sins, holiness, pleasing God, etc. are all included in Christ's accomplishments. When Christ died, we died in Him; when Christ resurrected, we resurrected in Him; and when Christ ascended, we ascended in Him. A certain magazine once said, "When Christ was on the cross, not only was His physical body there, but the spiritual body was also there. The body He obtained from Mary was there, and even the mystical body was on the cross." We should not seek to die or look for death, because Christ has accomplished this for us. If we are weak, someone may tell us that we should die, that if we die, we will not sin. But the Word of God tells us that we died nineteen hundred years ago. We have no choice; God has accomplished this for us.

Sinners cannot be saved through works. Once we realize that salvation is through the work of Christ, we will be at peace. Today many Christians appear to be dead even though they are not dead. They fail today and again tomorrow; all of their efforts are in vain. Brothers and sisters, we are hearing a wrong gospel if it requires us to work. The Bible says that "in Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ" (Col. 2:11). Christ did this for us. This is the work of Christ. We should see what has been accomplished in Him.

Christ's accomplishments are for our perfection in Him. The Holy Spirit puts whatever is in Him into us. Christ not only died, but also resurrected.

When Christ died, we died; when Christ resurrected, we also resurrected; and when Christ ascended, we also ascended. Our inheritance in Christ is beyond our imagination.

When we read the Bible, we ought to pay attention to one question: should we pursue the things that are in Christ, or have we already obtained them? Once I asked a brother, who was reading Romans 6, how much he needed to do and how much had already been done concerning death and resurrection. He answered, "I need to die and resurrect." I responded that my Bible did not say that; rather, Romans 6 says that we have died and resurrected. All we need to do is just consecrate.

Men in the world talk about death and resurrection, but their talk is not based on Christ's accomplishments. Therefore, they can never experience it. Thank God that Christ has died and resurrected. Even though Christ has accomplished this, without God telling us so in the Bible, how could we believe? Without God's Word, none of us would know that Christ died and resurrected. God's Word tells us the facts in Christ. Therefore, we believe in God's Word, not just the work of Christ. How can we believe if we did not see the death of Christ with our own eyes, and some of us do not even know where Israel is. The Word of God, however, has told us that Christ died and resurrected for us. God commanded His servants to write down the accomplishments of Christ so that we could believe.

It is extremely important to believe in the Word of God. The Bible says, "Every one who believes into Him may have eternal life" (John 3:15). It also says, "Believe into Me," "Believe into My name," etc. What do we believe in? Is believing in the Lord Jesus just believing in His works? Romans 10:17 says, "So faith comes out of hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." If we do not have the word of Christ, what can we believe? The Word of God brings what is far away near to us. If a person has not laid hold of the Word, I would say that he has not believed in Christ. Without God's Word, what is the basis for our believing? Without God's Word, we only have psychological activities.

What is the difference between faith and psychology? Psychology is thinking that something exists when nothing, in actuality, has been said. Faith is believing because something has been said. For example, if no one invites me for dinner tonight, I may still say, "I believe that someone will invite me for dinner." This is psychology. It is not faith because no one has invited me.

But if someone said that he would like to invite me for dinner tonight and I believe his word, then this is faith, because someone has said it already. Brothers and sisters, we must have the Word of God before we can believe. Without God's Word, we cannot believe. We have never actually seen God putting us on the cross; this is something that God has done. We can believe only if God tells us that we have been crucified.

How do we know that God's Word is true? We know because what God has done is a fact. What God says is what He has done. If I went to the park yesterday and later said that I had gone to the park, my words would be true because I was at the park. Christ has accomplished His work. The Word of God tells us what Christ has done. As long as we believe, all these works become ours. We do not have to do anything; we only need to believe in God's Word. Without the Word of God, there is no faith.

Faith is to believe in God's Word. Believing in God's Word is harder than anything else; yet at the same time, it is easier than anything else. This seems contradictory. Yet it is true. So many times we cannot believe. But once we do, we have everything instantly. Our experience confirms this.

When Mr. Chapman came to Shanghai to preach the gospel, his work was very prevailing. Before he was saved, he was a doctor of divinity. Once after a meeting, Mr. Moody talked to him. Mr. Moody asked him, "Dr. Chapman, are you a saved Christian; are you of Christ?" He answered, "I dare not say so, but I hope that I am of Christ." Mr. Moody read John 3:16 with him. Then Mr. Moody asked him again, "Dr. Chapman, are you a saved Christian; are you of Christ?" He again replied, "I dare not say so, but I hope to be one." Mr. Moody then read John 3:16 once again. When he finished reading, he looked at Dr. Chapman, who was embarrassed by Mr. Moody's stare. He said, "I really wish I could say that I am of Christ." Mr. Moody responded in a severe tone, "Dr. Chapman, whose word are you doubting here?" Right then Dr. Chapman realized that he was doubting the Word of God. For the rest of his life, he testified that whatever God's Word says is true. Dr. Chapman thought that he needed to behave before he could go to heaven. But God's Word says that those who believe have eternal life. In Christ, God has accomplished this for us. When we believe the Word, we have the accomplishments. Believing in God's Word is nothing other than believing whatever God has said.

A president of a Bible school in the United States once said that he could overcome many things. However, there were four or five sins that he committed again and again, and he repented again and again. He told others that his history was a history of repentance. One day he read Romans 6:14, which says, "For sin will not lord it over you, for you are not under the law but under grace." He said to God, "Your Word says that sin will not lord it over me, but my condition shows that sin always has dominion over me. However, today I believe in your Word. I declare that I have overcome my sin." Later, when the same temptation came, he realized that he was about to fall. But he looked to the Word of God, and said to God, "Your Word is true." In this way he overcame those sins for the rest of his life. Brothers and sisters, it is very important to lay hold of the Word of God. When you look at yourself, you are just as corrupted as you were before, and when you look at the circumstances, they are still as difficult as before. But if you believe in God's Word, you will overcome.

There was a woman whose health was very weak. Her sixteen-year-old son was very naughty and would not behave properly. One day she prayed to God and told Him that she could not bear such a burden. She asked God for a promise, and the Lord gave her the words in Philippians 4:6-7. She believed that what God had said would be accomplished. However, her son became worse year after year. One day a policeman notified her that her son was at the police station because he had been injured by a car. She went there and found her son with blood all over him. Her husband even fainted when he arrived. Some relatives came too. But in the midst of the situation, she was still able to smile. When others asked why her heart was so insensitive, she replied, "God's Word promised me the peace that passes all understanding. Today I encountered something that passes my understanding, and I received the peace that passes all understanding. This is why I can behave this way." Faith is to lay hold of a certain word of God.

Once I met a patient, and I asked him how he was doing. He said that God would heal him. I said that God would not heal him because he did not have His word. There was another nearsighted brother who needed to get corrective glasses, but someone told him that he should believe God and not get the glasses. He thought that his faith might be bigger than that of others, so he went to pray instead. Later he was asked to preach in an evangelistic meeting. He thought that his eyes would be healed after his preaching, and he asked me to pray for this. I told someone that God would not heal him. He

asked me why, and I said because he did not have the Word of God. His faith was not faith, but feeling. What he had was not actually faith, but hope. Without God's Word, how can we believe?

Christ's work is real. But without the Word of God, everyone in the world will still perish. However, if we have God's Word, the whole world will not be able to overthrow our faith. Once the Lord said to His disciples, "Let us go over to the other side" (Mark 4:35). The Lord slept in the stern of the boat. Suddenly there arose a great windstorm, the waves beat into the boat, and it began to fill up. The disciples woke Him and said to Him, "We are perishing" (v. 38). The Lord arose and rebuked the wind and sea. The wind ceased and there was a great calm. What did the Lord say to the disciples? The Lord said, "Why are you cowardly in this way? How is it that you do not have faith?" (v. 40). Since the Lord gave the order to pass over to the other side, He took the responsibility, regardless of the wind and waves along the way. If the Lord has spoken and we still do not have faith, we are casting His word aside. Suppose I give you a ten dollar bill to make change. How do you know that it is ten dollars? You know because it says so on the bill. Whatever God has said is so. God says it, and it is so. If the Lord orders you to pass over to the other side, all you have to do is go. You can speak to the wind, "Blow as much as you will," and tell the waves, "Beat as much as you can." But when the Lord says to pass over to the other side, you will surely pass over to the other side. If you think that the Lord's word only seems to be true and is not quite true, you will sink to the bottom of the sea with the wind and waves.

Only the Word of God is true. Even when the environment is against you, the Word of God remains true. You may have difficulties with your family, school, business, or even your self. If you do not believe in God's Word, it is useless for you to pray, even if you pray for several hours. If you do not pray, you will not get anything; and if you pray without believing in God's Word, you still will not get anything. If you cannot believe in God's Word, you need not pray, because the prayer will be a vain effort. If you want to obtain God's grace, it is very important to lay hold of the Word of God. Take care of the believing, and God will take care of the working. If a matter is put before you, you have to pray that God will give you a word concerning this matter. Once you have His word, you can use it to confront any difficulty. The Word of God that you have acquired is the sword of the Holy Spirit. Everything mentioned regarding the armor in Ephesians 6 is defensive; only the sword of the Holy

Spirit is offensive. As long as you have the Word of God, everything will be overcome. As long as you have His Word, every hardship will pass away.

One of my friends once spent all the money she had. While reading the Bible, she spoke to God, "O God, please give me a word. I do not ask that You put a thousand dollars in front of me. I only ask You to give me a word." God reminded her of a passage in Psalm 23. The word she got was, "My cup runs over!" At that moment she was far from running over; she was completely empty. Nevertheless, she had the Word of God, and she wrote a hymn in English, a few lines of which read:

With Jehovah as my Shepherd,
There is always something over!
Though we have much hardship,
There is always something over!
With God as my Treasurer,
There is always something over!

She wrote this hymn and sent it to one of her friends. After a while her friend wrote her a letter in return, saying, "After reading your hymn, I realize that God has really blessed you, seeing that you have so much surplus." The friend did not realize that she was in fact penniless. Meanwhile, was God's word in vain? No. After a couple of days, God supplied her through other people. If we have the Word of God, we have many sources. The raven will supply us; the brook will supply us; a widow with only a handful of meal will supply us. Even without all of these, God can open a heavenly window to supply us from above. This is faith.

Christ's work has been accomplished, and God has said it in His Word. Once you believe, you have everything. The essence of God's word is the Holy Spirit. When you believe in His word, the Holy Spirit will take the responsibility to apply the reality of this word to you. Once you believe, the Holy Spirit will lead you into Christ and into all that He has accomplished. Christ's work is accomplished, and God has spoken. However, if you do not believe, the Holy Spirit will have no way to apply Christ's accomplishment to you.

Brothers and sisters, you are clear about what God has done in Christ, and you understand it. But why do you still not have it? It is because you do not

have faith. You say you have believed and wonder why you still do not have? But I say that you have not yet believed. If you have faith, the Holy Spirit is responsible for making what you have believed a reality. Knowledge is not sufficient. You need faith in addition to knowledge. How many times have we read a whole chapter of the Bible without believing in one verse? In many things, we lack faith. Once you have faith, the Holy Spirit applies to you what you believe.

"And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Gen. 1:3). Whatever He said, He accomplished. In this universe whatever He says, He will accomplish. In the beginning He spoke, and the universe obeyed Him. Today whenever God speaks, the universe still has to obey Him because no word of God is without His power. This power is the Holy Spirit. Whenever God speaks, the Holy Spirit accomplishes it immediately.

This is the way a sinner is saved. Whenever a sinner believes the Word of God, the Holy Spirit immediately will give him what Christ has accomplished. Some who were addicted to opium or alcohol experienced an immediate deliverance from these things when they believed in God's word. The only explanation for this is that the Holy Spirit has granted them the power to overcome. I had a classmate who was by nature very tactful; he manipulated the whole class under his hands. Many classmates were afraid of him. Later he was saved, and now he is even one of my co-workers. If one did not know his past, one could never imagine what kind of person he was before. He is what he is today through nothing other than resurrection. The most amazing thing in the world is for a dead person to receive the life of God. After one believes, the Holy Spirit will add what Christ has accomplished to him. Perhaps while he was listening to God's Word, he said, "I believe." Perhaps while he was sitting in the last row, he said, "I believe." Or perhaps while he was walking on the street, he said, "I believe." When he believes, the Holy Spirit adds what Christ has accomplished to him.

Brothers and sisters, my responsibility is to share this message with you. It would be wonderful if you could believe it. If you would read to God the verse that you heard last week, "In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands" (Col. 2:11), and if you would read the same verse to yourself, you would gain something. You may think that you have already overcome a few times and that you are now trustworthy. But I have to say, "No." Only the Word of God is trustworthy; your experience is not

trustworthy. May God work among us, so that we can believe in what His Word says literally. The more we believe in what He says, the more we gain what He says. May the Lord bless us.

CHAPTER FOUR

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

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Every time I go to a place to preach God's gospel of grace, I always ask the local Christians one question. I believe all those who can answer me with a clear "yes" are joyfully enjoying the grace of God. The question is, "Are you already saved?" In other words, do you really know that you are saved? Among a thousand people, one can only find two or three who know that they are saved. Sometimes, among a whole congregation, one cannot find one person who knows that he is saved. Then I ask these ones, "You have received the Lord Jesus and have accepted Him as your personal Savior. You have trusted in the blood of His cross to wash away your sins. Why do you still not know that you are saved? If a man falls into the water, and another man pulls him out, after the first man comes to his senses, he will surely know whether he is still in the water or safe on the shore. You should know whether you are a perishing man or a saved man who has obtained God's grace." Many people would not respond clearly with words, but their answer always seems to be, "I do not know if I have been saved. How can I say that I am saved while I am still living on earth?"

I think many of the readers of this message would answer this way! This is exactly where our mistake lies. Our belief in the Lord Jesus is not like gambling, winning when we are lucky and losing when we are not lucky. The salvation that comes through believing in the cross of the Lord Jesus is fully guaranteed. We do not have to wait until we die before we can know if we are saved or not. We can know this now. This is the clear teaching of the Bible. Please read a few verses:

"Therefore let it be known to you, men, brothers, that through this One forgiveness of sins is announced to you; and from all the things from which you were not able to be justified by the law of Moses, in this One everyone who believes is justified" (Acts 13:38-39).

We cannot obtain justification by God through our own work. We have many sins, which make our heart sad whenever we think about them and cause us to think that we are not saved. But although we can fail, the Lord Jesus is still trustworthy. If we believe in Him, our sins will be forgiven. All those who believe in Him will be justified. How great is the Lord's salvation! God's Word says, "Let it be known to you." We should know what? We should know that once we have believed in the Lord Jesus, our sins are forgiven, and we are justified. You are saved! When God says, "Let it be known to you," we can know if we are saved or not. We should not refuse Him. We should commit our sins to the Savior and believe in His accomplished salvation for us. We will then be saved.

"This is the testimony of God that He has testified concerning His Son. He who believes into the Son of God has the testimony in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar because he has not believed in the testimony which God has testified concerning His Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave to us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. I have written these things to you that you may know that you have eternal life, to you who believe into the name of the Son of God" (1 John 5:9-13).

He who has the Lord Jesus has life. He who does not have Him does not have life. Have you accepted the Lord Jesus as your Savior? If you have, you have life already, and you are saved. The Lord Jesus said Himself: "He who believes has eternal life" (John 6:47). God has testified for His Son that He has given to us eternal life. This passage of the Scripture says that if we do not believe in the testimony that we have eternal life, then we are making God a liar. God says all those who have trusted and accepted the Lord Jesus have eternal life. Would God lie? We should believe that we who have been washed by His blood are saved already. God said, through the apostle John, that He wrote these words that we may know that we are saved.

The testimony of the Bible is that we can know if we are saved. This is not something that happens only after we die; we do not have to wait until the coming age before we know. While we are living on earth today, we should know if we are saved or not. If we are not, we should make haste to believe in Jesus Christ and come to God through trusting in His saving accomplishment for us. If we are saved, we should give much thanks to God's grace and should

live on earth like saved persons. "Behold, now is the well-acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). God accepts us now and saves us now, rather than after we die.

Sometimes, when I ask a person if he is saved, he answers, "I am only trying my best to do good and to serve God, hoping that I can eventually be saved." Alas, this is also wrong. This means that he does not understand the way of salvation. Do you think that you can be saved in the future by trying your best to do good and to serve God? We have to know that none of our merits and works are acceptable before God. "All our righteousnesses are like a soiled garment" (Isa. 64:6). Do you think that merit and work will save you? No, ten thousand times no! The Bible clearly says, "You have been saved...not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works that no one should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). Salvation comes through trusting in the Lord Jesus, "who Himself bore up our sins in His body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24), "the Righteous on behalf of the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God" (3:18). He has accomplished the work of salvation. All you have to do is to believe and obey Him. "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31). Do not try to be saved by your own work. No matter how good your works are, they cannot save you, for "you have been saved...not of works" (Eph. 2:8-9). If you trust in the accomplishment of the substitutional death of the Lord Jesus on the cross, you will be saved. If you do not accept the Lord Jesus as the Savior, there will be no hope for your salvation because you cannot save yourself. If you accept the Lord Jesus as the sin offering, you do not have to hope to be saved because you have eternal life already.

We only hope for things that we have not yet obtained. If we have them already, we do not need to hope for them anymore. When a child's father leaves his home, the child hopes very much to see the father. But when the father returns home, the child is extremely glad. If the mother asks the child, "Do you still hope to see your father?", the child will answer, "I have seen my father already. Why do I still have to hope to see him?" Indeed, if we have obtained something already, we do not need to hope for it anymore. Either the world believes in Jesus and is saved and has eternal life, or it is not saved and is perishing. There is no middle ground between the two things. "Every one who believes into Him...[has] eternal life...he who does not believe has been condemned already" (John 3:16-18). The Bible divides humanity into two classes: those who are saved and those who are perishing. There is not a third class of those who hope to be saved. If you have indeed believed in Jesus

Christ as your Savior and have believed in His death on the cross where He bore your sins for you, you are saved already. You do not have to hope to be saved anymore. If some would ask a man who has been rescued out of the water, "What do you want?", would he say, "I hope to get on shore"? Is such an answer sensible? Brothers, if you have believed in the Lord Jesus, you have eternal life already. Why are you still doubting? You have received it already. Why still hope for it? Simply praise the Lord instead!

There are others, when I ask about the question of salvation, that answer, "While I live on earth today, I indeed trust in the accomplished work of the redemption of the Lord Jesus. But I dare not say whether I am saved or not. I have to wait until I die and go before the Father to be judged as either a goat or a sheep. If He says that I am a sheep, then I will be saved and be most happy. If He says that I am a goat, then I will perish and go to hell in misery."

Alas, is this future not a pitiful one? Speaking truthfully, if I did not know that I was saved, I would be afraid that I would be unable to take my meal today; and I would not be able to sleep tonight. Thank the Father, for He has accepted us and has given us the eternal life! Do you really believe in the merit of the Lord Jesus' redemption? If we have believed in Him, do we have to wait until we die before we know whether we are saved or perishing? Please look at the word of the Bible. The Lord's own words are the most trustworthy of all.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that every one who believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life" (John 3:16). Is not this verse very clear? "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." This is what God has done. He has loved and He has given. He has given the Lord Jesus to the world, to die for the world and accomplish salvation on the cross, so that everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus would have eternal life and not perish. If you have believed in the Lord Jesus, you have eternal life already and will no longer perish. John 3:16 is the most recited verse. But unfortunately, many people are not familiar with John 3:16 after all. John 3:16 clearly says that as soon as you believe in the Lord Jesus, you do not perish, but have eternal life. But many believers change John 3:16! If they have believed in the Lord as their Savior but consider that they are not yet saved, they change John 3:16! They change it without knowing about it! They change John 3:16 to something like this:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that every one who believes into Him will perhaps not perish, and perhaps have eternal life after a month, two months, a year, ten years, a few decades, or after they die."

Thank God that the Bible is not written this way. The Bible has not put those words there. The Bible links "every one who believes into Him" with "would not perish, but would have eternal life." Whenever we believe in the Lord Jesus and have our sins washed by the blood; at that moment, we do not perish, but have eternal life. "Every one who believes into Him...would have eternal life" (John 3:16), without waiting until they die to have it.

The parable of the goats and the sheep has been misinterpreted by the church throughout the centuries. It has been applied to the believers. The word "nations" in Matthew 25:32 refers to the Gentiles. God has divided the world into Jews, Greeks, and the church of God (1 Cor. 10:32). The church has nothing to do with the Gentiles anymore. The judgment of the goats and the sheep refers to the judgment of the Gentile nations at the coming of the Lord Jesus with His saints. We the believers will not be judged there.

Those who have believed in the Lord Jesus will not be judged with respect to salvation and perdition. The Lord Jesus' crucifixion on the cross has borne the judgment of their sins for them. He has taken the punishment of their sins. He has solved the problem of sin for them. Those who have believed in Him have accepted Him as their substitute. He has been judged and has died for them. Of course, they do not need to be judged or to die anymore. "There is now then no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Please read again the words of John 5:24. "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."

How sweet are the Lord's words! No one can speak like Him! These clear words are like music to a sinner's ears. Since He said "truly, truly," can they be untrue? Surely they cannot be. The Lord Jesus says that the one who hears and believes "has eternal life." This is a "truly, truly" saying. He says that such a one "does not come into judgment." This, of course, must be "truly, truly" also. He also says that such a one "has passed out of death into life." This also must be "truly, truly." When He says that such a one "has passed," it surely means that it "has passed." When do we use the words "has passed" in our

daily life? Does not "has passed" mean that something has already been accomplished and is over? The Lord says that a person who has believed in Him "has passed out of death into life." Why do we say that we have to wait until we die before we can know that we are saved? Brothers, those who have believed in Him have already passed from death into life even in this age. This is truly the gospel! Truly, truly I say unto you, a person who has believed "has passed out of death into life." He who does not believe "has been condemned already" (John 3:18). Both times that the word "has" is used in John 5:24 and 3:18, it refers to something that is decided now.

Perhaps when you read up to this point, you will think like many other believers, "Would it not be too proud of me to say that I am already saved? I am not better in any way in my conduct than others. How can I say this?"

Dear readers, for us to know that we are saved is not to be proud. The words "to be saved" are in the passive voice; they show that we are being acted upon. What is there for us to be proud of? To say that we do not need to be saved or that we have no need of salvation is indeed proud; it is indeed to consider ourselves better than others. But to say that we are saved indicates that we were sinners and were to perish, but that we are now saved by Him through trusting in Him. This shows how deep the Lord's grace is to us and how great is the saving work of the Lord. It shows how great the Lord's power is. It is not an exaltation of ourselves. If we know that we have received grace and are saved, of course, we will all the more praise the Lord. To sing of the Lord Jesus in our songs all the time is an exaltation of the Lord; it is not a self-boasting. The more we see the depth of our sins and the immensity of the Lord's forgiveness, the more we will love the Lord. We should say as Paul said: "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10).

God says that we have eternal life already—that we are saved. Therefore, for me to say that I am saved is not boasting; it is to believe and to acknowledge that God is right. God is pleased when we believe in His Word. We must believe in God's Word.

It is true that our works are no better than others. But we are not saved because of our good works. The Lord Jesus did not come to save the righteous but the sinners. "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost" (Luke 19:10). "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15). Paul said that he was the foremost of all sinners, but that he had

obtained mercy. If it is up to us, we will not be able to say that we are saved. Even the world cannot find one who can say that he is saved. If salvation is due to our merits and excellence, there will be no possibility for us to be saved. Those who trust in their works are shaky all the time. Sometimes their conduct is better, and they will hope that they can be saved. Sometimes their conduct is not as good, and they think that they will perish. These ones have never fully trusted in Christ. Dear readers, we are not saved because of our good works. We are saved because Christ has saved us. How great is His grace!

Many say: "I know that if one trusts in the accomplishment of the Lord Jesus on the cross, he is saved. But I do not feel anything. Am I saved just like this?"

Brothers! The Bible does not say: "I give these happy feelings to you that you may know that you have eternal life, to you who believe in the name of the Son of God." If the Bible were written in this way, one would not be saved if he did not feel anything. But the Bible says, "I have written these things to you that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13).

"These things." What are these things? They are the words of the Bible, the Word of the Father. We know that we have eternal life and are saved, not by the way we feel, but by what the Word of God says. The Bible says that we who have believed in the Lord are saved. We are, therefore, saved. When God says that we are saved, surely we are saved, whether we feel that we are saved or not. We have believed in the Lord Jesus and have been washed of our sins by His blood. Therefore, we are saved because God's Word says so.

For example, a poor man may be very poor and cannot make ends meet; he may be living in extreme sufferings. He decides to write a letter to one of his friends, who is quite well off, to ask for help. After a few days, he does not receive any reply. He may think that his friend despises him and is not willing to help him, and his heart is in distress. The more he thinks about it, the more it seems unlikely that his friend will help him. He decides then to tell this matter to his neighbors. Some say that a friend should always help one in financial difficulties and has no reason to refuse to help. Others say that this may not necessarily be true because it is a compassionless age. When the man hears the hopeful words, he rejoices, and when he hears the discouraging words, he is in distress. The next day his friend sends someone to give him a

reply. When he opens the letter, his heart jumps within him; he does not know if a promise is within. After he opens the letter, he shouts to his family, "The matter is now settled. He has written a letter to me saying that, from now on, he will take up all my expenses. All right. The matter is decided. I do not care if others think that it is hopeful or hopeless any longer. He has said himself that he will bear all the responsibilities. I can live now in peace."

Are not many believers like this poor man? What a pity that many children of God listen to others' talk and to their own feeling; they are drifting back and forth. The poor man was assured once he had a word from his friend. The children of God are likewise assured when they have the Word of God. God says that if we believe in Jesus Christ, we shall be saved. He has said it Himself, and everything is settled. What more is there to worry about? What are our feelings worth? What are man's ideas worth? If God says that we are saved, it is enough. His Word is the final verdict. Since God has graciously declared His faithfulness, we should accept His Word without doubt.

Some may say, "What was said may be true. But I am afraid that my faith is not perfect, and therefore, I cannot be saved."

The Bible only makes a distinction between "believing" and "not believing." The Bible does not know what an incomplete faith means. We should know that there is no merit in our believing in the Lord Jesus. God does not save us because we have attained the merit of believing. This cannot be farther from the truth! To believe is to receive (John 1:12). John 3:16 says that God "gave" us His Son. When we "receive" Him, everything is done. One gives and the other receives. There is no merit of the sinner involved. Salvation is fully accomplished by the Lord Jesus.

Who among us is not a sinner? We were dead in trespasses and sins. How pitiful we were! The Holy Spirit came and caused us to realize our sins. How terrible is the punishment for sin! One cannot help but tremble at the thought of the future. It is all the more pitiful when we realize that there is no way for us to save ourselves. We were wallowing in the mud and yet had no way to rescue ourselves! What an unspeakable deprivation! Thank and praise the slaughtered Lamb! He came and died for us on the cross. He stood on the ground of us the sinners. He loved us and gave Himself for us. While we were yet sinners, He died for us. He accomplished the salvation. When He died, He proclaimed, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). How precious is this word! O Lord!

I can never thank You enough for Your great grace! To believe in the Lord Jesus means nothing other than a willingness on the part of us, the helpless and destitute sinners, to be saved by Him. He came to save, and when we are willing to be saved, the matter is settled. There is no question of complete or incomplete faith.

He says Himself, "Him who comes to Me I shall by no means cast out" (John 6:37). Since we have come, there is now only one question: "Has He cast me out?" Praise God, for Christ is faithful and trustworthy. There is no guile found in His mouth! He will never cast out those who come to Him. He will save all those who realize their sins and who will accept Him as their Savior. "Come to Me all who toil and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37). This is the Lord's invitation.

Brothers, it is not just our faith that is saving us. Rather, it is His grace and faithfulness. God desires to save us. He will bestow grace on us. Will we not believe? What else is there to doubt? The Lord's love should fill our hearts and should drive out all drifting thoughts!

After some have understood this teaching, they may have a doubt in them: "If a man already knows that he is saved and has eternal life and is guaranteed heaven, will he not then sin at will? Will he not think that he is saved anyway and that he can, therefore, unbridle his lusts and sin at will? Will he not think that he is saved now, and that it does not matter anymore if he sins again?"

This is only a hypothesis. Many people think that if they know that they are saved, they will still want to sin. But this is only a hypothesis. In reality, something exactly opposite happens. If a man knows that he is saved, he will not want to sin anymore, and he will also bear heavenly characteristics in his thought and conduct. I can give you an illustration here. Today in China we are sending a few hundred people to study abroad every year. Most of them go to the United States. Suppose there is a father who wants to send his son to America. How should the son be dressed? Should he pay attention to the Chinese gowns and consider the latest fashion? Does he need to study Chinese etiquette and manners? Does he need to know all the things associated with the Chinese culture? Surely he does not. He is about to go to America. He does not need to know more about China, but he needs to learn the customs and fashions of the other country. He should learn to eat with a fork and knife,

to shake hands, and to doff his hat. He should study in detail the tastes, likes and dislikes, and individual habits of the Americans. He should study the mind and characteristics of the Americans. When he speaks in English, he should have an American accent with it. When he walks, he should walk like the Americans walk. He should pursue after American fashion in his dress and attire. In other words, all those who are about to go to America have a natural tendency to act and move like an American. If a believer realizes that he has eternal life already, and is a citizen of heaven, he will surely learn the heavenly pattern in everything, in word, conduct, and walk. Those who do not know that they are saved will imitate the world and try to be conformed to it. Brothers, there is no danger of sinning carelessly for those who know that they are saved. On the contrary, those who know this will set their minds daily on the things which are above. This can be fully confirmed by the spiritual experiences of the believers. Just like those who are going to America try to be Americans, those who are going heavenward will surely learn to be heavenly persons.

Dear brothers! You have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ already. This is the most important thing on earth. This is also the greatest blessing in eternity for man! You should know that the Lord has saved you. What a comfort and joy it is for us to know that we are persons with eternal life in us. "Rejoice that your names are recorded in the heavens" (Luke 10:20). What a precious message! This is indeed the glad tidings. We can know that we are saved in this age! Formerly we were the sinners. Now we have received grace. Should we not rejoice? What gratitude and affection we have to realize that the Lord has saved us from perdition and has given us eternal life. If we know this, we will praise God all the more. We know that we cannot save ourselves. As a result, all the authority, riches, wisdom, power, honor, glory, and praise be unto the slain Lamb for now and evermore!

Now you can see how much God loves us! Since He has loved us and saved us, we should love Him out of a sense of gratitude and should live as saved persons on earth. Since He has begun the good work in our heart, He will surely complete this work until the day of Christ Jesus (Phil. 1:6). We cannot please Him by ourselves, because "those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8). We can only allow His Spirit to work in us to effect a holy living. Although sometimes we may unfortunately fail, this does not mean that we will perish again. What the Lord has given us is an eternal life. When

we fail, we should not be discouraged. We should rise up and ask for the Lord's forgiveness. He will surely lead us on.

Once I was preaching in a place. After a brother there understood this truth, he said to me, "I did not know before that I was saved. As a result, I lived carelessly in the world. I was afraid that if I gave up everything in this life for the Lord, and then the Lord apportioned me perdition at the time of the judgment, I would as the saying goes, 'lose one's case before both the magistrate and the mandarin.' I was afraid that I would have neither the joy of this world, nor the blessing of heaven! But now that I know this truth, heaven is guaranteed. Since I am a citizen of heaven already, I do not want to live foolishly in this world anymore." Indeed, if we know that our life is hid with Christ in God, we will surely set our mind on the things above. How wonderful this is! We have a wonderful Savior, and we have received a wonderful salvation. Is this not a cause for joy? Let us sing Hallelujah!

CHAPTER FIVE

BAPTISM AND SALVATION

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Scripture Reading: Mark 16:16; Rom. 10:9-10

In the mind of many people, Mark 16:16 reads, "He who believes and is saved shall be baptized." They think that as long as they believe in the Lord, they will be saved, and that after they are saved, they should be baptized. But my Bible does not say this. It says, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved." This means that it is not enough for a person to believe; he must also be baptized before he can be saved. What does this mean? You have to realize that there are many meanings to the word salvation. One meaning refers to the blessing in the kingdom. Another meaning refers to our departure from the world when the Lord comes back. Still another meaning refers to our present overcoming, and a fourth refers to our going to heaven. Romans 10 and Mark 16 mean none of the above. They do not refer to the blessing in the millennium. Neither do they refer to the redemption of our body at the coming of the Lord, nor to the salvation of our soul-life in the future. They refer to something else, something special. Every believer can experience the various aspects of salvation mentioned above. I cannot speak on all these today. When I heard that someone would be baptized today, I thought about the matter of salvation. I wonder how many people understand the salvation that is spoken of in Romans 10 and Mark 16. Therefore, we will spend some time to consider this matter today.

There is a common thought that one is baptized when he has believed and been saved. But the Bible clearly says that he who believes and is baptized is saved. Baptism comes first, and then salvation. You may ask what this salvation refers to. Please recall how a person receives eternal life. He receives life through believing. He receives eternal life through accepting the Lord Jesus into his heart as his life. The gospel of John clearly speaks of this. Although you may have believed, how do I know that you have believed? Although you say that you have received eternal life, how do I know? Suppose

a man has believed, but he never comes to the meeting, never breaks bread with us, and has not been baptized. He continues to be a Christian in secret and lives like the worldly people, without letting anyone know that he is a Christian. I would say that he has life, but that he is not saved. Truly, he is saved before God. But he is not saved before us and before the world. Therefore, you have to remember that one aspect of salvation has to do with our separation from the world. A man can be a Christian in secret and go to heaven when he dies. Although he may not know what will happen when the Lord comes to judge the believers, he knows that he will have eternal salvation. But during the fifty or sixty years of his life on earth, he is not saved. In the eyes of the Lord, he is saved. However, in the eyes of man, he is not saved because even though he has believed, he has not been baptized. Therefore, he is still not saved to others. Our salvation before the Lord merely gives us His life. But we must live out this life so that others can see His life; then we are saved in their eyes. After doing this, other believers will recognize us as brothers, and the Gentiles will call us Christians. The world will realize that we no longer belong to it, and the brothers will say that we belong with them. Then we will have a change. We will be freed from the old realm and enter a new realm, and others will sense that we are really separated from them. This is what is meant by salvation through believing and being baptized. I will take this opportunity today to say a few words while some of you are being baptized. As long as a person believes in the Lord, he has life. But he must be baptized before he can be saved. There are many Moslems who are Christians in secret. No one bothers them if they only believe in the Lord. But the minute they are baptized, they may even be poisoned to death, because the minute they are baptized, they are saved and separated from the others, and others see a difference in them. They have proven in an outward way that they are Christians and demonstrated the faith that is in their hearts. Therefore, they can no longer be tolerated. To believe is to have life within, while to be baptized is to be saved without. When a person is baptized, he demonstrates in an outward way that he belongs to Christ, and others realize that there is a difference in him. This is why baptism is not a small thing.

Romans 10 says the same thing: "With the mouth there is confession unto salvation" (v. 10). Does this mean that as long as one confesses with his mouth he can go to heaven? Must one confess with his mouth before he can go to heaven? No, there are many dumb ones who can go to heaven. Confession with the mouth merely shows those in the world that you are

different from them, and that you have been delivered out from their midst. Therefore brothers, let us pay attention to this aspect of salvation. Numerous Christians have life within, but this life cannot be seen outwardly at all. Although they are saved before the Lord, before their friends, brothers, family, and colleagues, they are not saved. I can illustrate this with an example. The last time I took a boat on a journey, I talked with many passengers on the boat who asked me what my line of business was. It was difficult for me to explain to them. What could I say? I could not say that I was a preacher, because I do not recognize this as a profession or as a special class of people. I could not say that I was a Christian, because a Christian is not a profession or business; saying this would not be answering what they had asked. Later, I thought about the fact that I wrote many articles, and I told them that I was a writer. But the minute I said this, I became as one who was not saved among them, because I did not show others my difference. I became the same as they were. One could be a reporter, another a cashier or bookkeeper, while I was a writer. In this way, all of us became the same. In their eyes, I was not a person being delivered from among them. I could have been different from them by following my statement with the words: "I am a Christian." This would have marked a clear boundary between them and me, and would have shown them that they were sinners, while I was saved. They and I were totally different. Truly, we may be saved, but others may not know that we are saved; they may think that we are the same as them. This is the meaning of the verse, "With the mouth there is confession unto salvation."

The question today is not whether you have believed, but whether or not you have been baptized. We are not asking if you have received the Lord, but if others have seen this change in you. Believing involves a breakthrough in your spiritual life and passing from death unto life inwardly. Being baptized involves a breakthrough in the physical realm and passing from death unto life outwardly. Believing is to pass from death unto life before God, while being baptized is to pass from death unto life before men. Believing is to inwardly receive the eternal life, while being baptized is to outwardly announce to others that from now on, you have opened up yourself to showing others that you are a Christian, that you are hidden no more. Prior to this, you were a hidden Nicodemus, but now you are telling others openly that you are saved and different from them.

A baptized person is like a person who has entered the grave. The ultimate destination of our most loved ones is the grave. Marriage lasts until the grave.

The grave is one's final destiny. When a man dies, his corpse can still be seen, but after he enters the grave, he is gone forever and never seen again. Baptism means to be seen no more. It is not a "See you tomorrow," but a "See you never again." The water is a symbol of the grave. When we enter the grave symbolized by the water, we are separated from the world; the world will acknowledge that we are delivered out of it, and that we no longer belong to it. This is why Acts indicates that saved persons are added to the church, because the local church is the outward gathering of all the saved ones. "The whole church" in Acts 15:22 means the gathering of all those who are called by the Lord.

Let me ask you once more. What are you doing when you are baptized today? You are telling others that from now on, your coming and going will not be the same as before; your view toward the world has changed. Although you have taken the same way as others for many years, that relationship is over today. From now on, you stand in a different place; you have been delivered out of them, and are no longer among them. To believe is an inward deliverance, while to be baptized is an outward deliverance. To believe is a deliverance in the spirit, while to be baptized is a deliverance in the body. To believe is to be delivered from the world morally, while to be baptized is to be delivered from the world in one's conduct. This is the salvation spoken of in Mark 16 and Romans 10.

You must also remember that you are not the only one who is saved in this world. There are many others who are also saved. Most of the ones who are sitting here today are saved. There are many saved people, and you are only one of them. In the past, you were in the world; you helped the world, tried to improve the world, and exercised your strength to serve in the world community. Now you have been delivered from it, and you belong to another community. As before, you have many companions. They are the believers, and they are now joined to you. Therefore, you can no longer be an individual Christian and no longer act independently. Because you are joined to them, everything that you do represents your brothers and sisters. After we are baptized, we become one Body. Wherever you are, the church is there. If there is a place where someone should not go, yet he goes there, he damages the oneness. If we are restricted in every way by the oneness, we will be preserved in our footsteps and avoid many problems. Therefore, we should remember that whenever we do anything, we should take the brothers with us. One Western brother once related a story. A sister went to listen to a modernistic

theologian's blasphemous preaching. When she came back from the meeting, she told an elderly brother that even though the teaching was wrong, his English was good. The elderly brother said, "If you went, I was there also." She said that it was impossible for him to have been there. He said, "Indeed, I did not want to go, but you carried me along with you." This is very true. We all are related to one another as members of the Body. When one member goes somewhere, the other members go along with him. When you are baptized today, you are declaring to others that from now on you are separated from the world and are choosing to live with the Christians. Whatever you do now, all the other brothers are included in your actions. Therefore brothers, please do not carry me to places where I do not want to go, and please do not do what I do not want to do. This may be a difficult thing to practice at times. But we must always wait to see if our brothers agree to our actions.

I hope that all the brothers and sisters would know that being saved is not just going to heaven, but being different from the world and being separated from among them. May the Lord bless His word, and may we have a clear vision of it. May we know that the border of our garments should be fringed with blue. Every one of us should be heavenly and belong to the Lord; all of our actions and walk should express this blueness. Brothers and sisters, baptism is just the beginning of this journey; there is much ahead of us! May we be encouraged to go on.

CHAPTER SIX

FORGIVENESS OF SINS

The Normal Christian Faith, Sect. 3, Chap. 9

In accomplishing His work in man, God does not deal with individuals. He includes the whole of humanity in Christ. Whatever He executes in Christ is carried out in us. The doctrine of salvation is found in Christ. God also gives man a new life in Him.

God has no desire to change our outward behavior; He only wants to change our life. His one intention is to replace our old life with a new one. He can only accomplish this in Christ Jesus. When we are in Christ, this work of replacement is automatically applied to us.

A FEW PREREQUISITES

However, before God can dispense a new life to us, some matters need to be taken care of. If these things are not settled, God can never give life to us, and we will never have the right to receive anything from Him. We know that the most crucial matter in the Christian faith is the possession of a new life from God. But there are a few prerequisites, without which it is impossible to partake of this life. Therefore, these items occupy an important position and rightly demand our attention.

FORGIVENESS OF SINS

The first item is the forgiveness of sins. This provides God with a proper standing to dispense life to us.

We all know that the manifested behavior of our natural life is extremely evil. It is hopeless beyond measure. Our corrupt behavior is made known by the sins we commit. Some commit rash and ugly sins, while others indulge in more refined and subtle ones. In either case, all these sins have to be forgiven. They have to be forgiven justly and properly before we can receive the life of God.

THE SOLUTION TO THE OLD LIFE

Second, the very life which activates sins must be dealt with thoroughly. Unless this life is removed from its root, the possibility of sin remains; it will continue to bear corrupt fruit. Sin will still be manifested in our thoughts and actions. God must give a final solution to our old life. It must be terminated once and for all.

After these two things are taken care of, God can freely dispense a new life to us in Christ. Then we can walk according to it day by day. We will also be able to live a God-like life on earth and fulfill His purpose.

TO REPENT IS NOT ENOUGH

How does God forgive our sins? Many people have an erroneous concept concerning this matter. They think that although they have committed many sins, the sins can all be pardoned if they repent of their evil conduct.

But repentance can never remit a sin that you have committed. No matter how much you repent, your sins are still there. You may regret your sins as much as you want, but they will not be removed simply by your repentance.

When I was preaching in Kaifeng, some government officials were present. I told them, suppose a bandit committed many crimes and murdered many, but was not caught for a long time. Then one day he appeared before you, saying, "I repent of all my past misconduct. From now on I am going to reform. I have determined to be a law-abiding citizen and a good man." Please tell me, would his repentance annul his former crimes, the cases brought up against him by his victims, and the prosecutions conducted against him by the law? Would they be nullified? Would the law let him go?

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD MUST BE MAINTAINED

The Bible shows us that all sins incur certain kinds of judgment. Nothing we do is lightly passed over. The outward manifestation of our life is sinful. Not only do we sin against ourselves, but we sin against others and, above all, against God. God is righteous. He cannot evasively bypass our sins. His righteousness does not permit Him to do so.

I remember a true story. Once a man murdered someone and stole a sum of money. He then took refuge in another town. There he married and had some children. The people in that place knew nothing of his past.

One day, three detectives came to look for him. They found the man and were about to take him away. The man turned to his wife and asked, "For all these years that I have been with you, have I not been a good husband?" The wife agreed. Then he turned to his children, saying, "Am I not a good father to you?" The children also nodded. Finally he turned to his neighbors: "In all these years, have I ever intruded upon your property or done any wrong to you? Would you not consider me a good neighbor?" They all consented unanimously that he was a fine person.

He then turned around to the three detectives and defended himself, saying, "See, I have been a good man all these years. Here are all these witnesses testifying to my goodness. You should let me go!" The three replied, "You may be justified before everybody, but you are not justified before the law. Your repentance may guarantee your future innocence, but it can never remove your past guilt, nor can it deliver you from the judgment of the law." In the end, he had to face his trial in court.

THE CONSCIENCE WILL NOT LET GO

When we sin, our conscience also does not let us go. Sometimes when the conscience is hushed, we do not sense too much guilt. But though the conscience may sleep, it never dies! The minute the conscience awakes, it convicts us of our sins and makes us feel very uneasy. Perhaps it is silent today, but it will not shut up forever. It will never let go of what we have done in the past.

FORGIVENESS BASED ON RIGHTEOUSNESS

Furthermore, God cannot forgive our sins lightly. If we sin carelessly and God forgives our sins irresponsibly, then God Himself falls into sin in His forgiveness. This does not mean that God does not have the power to forgive sins, but it means that God can only grant forgiveness when it comes up to His dignity. He cannot degrade Himself to a state of unrighteousness in the process of forgiving our sins. God is forever the righteous God.

In Kaifeng, I met a Christian by the name of Wen. He was the chief officer of a certain department in the government. One day he invited me to dinner and mentioned a difficult situation that confronted him. Within his department a few persons were known to have engaged in a fraud that involved more than ten thousand dollars. The act was brought into the light, and the guilty persons were arrested. The law of the department said that anyone involved in a fraud that exceeded five thousand dollars was to be executed. According to the law, such men had to die.

Wen said to me, "As a Christian, I am very reluctant to put people to death. If I forgive them, I myself become guilty of breaking the law. However, I cannot bear the thought of executing men. This is my dilemma. What would you say?" I could not think of any way to save them either. The law is absolute! There is no way around it. As Christians we cannot violate the law and fall into unrighteousness. Yet, if we uphold our righteousness, we sacrifice others' lives.

GOD HAS JUDGED CHRIST

How then did God forgive our sins? The Bible shows us that we not only received forgiveness in our salvation, but we obtained justification as well. Many times the Bible puts forgiveness and justification together. These constitute the two initial steps towards the receiving of a new life.

Let us take a closer look at the matter of forgiveness and justification. We have to come back to Christ because He is the key to all these matters. God regards Christ as the Head of a new race. He is the second man. He is also the last Adam. The first Adam was a huge man incorporating the whole of humanity. When he sinned, the whole human race was corrupted. God executed His judgment on one person, Christ, because Christ also is a huge corporate man. Those who are included in Him bear all the judgment of God in Him.

For this reason, the Bible says that when Christ died, He died for us. We do not die as individuals; we die in Christ. His death included all of us. With this death our sins can be forgiven. Hence, God's forgiveness is based upon His judgment in Christ. This is not irresponsible forgiveness. Rather, this is very just.

THE PROCEDURE OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS

Once a man argued with me concerning this point. He said, "Mr. Nee, if God wants to forgive our sins, why can He not just say so? Why did He have to send His Son to be crucified on the cross? This is too cumbersome!" He thought that God is a nice fellow who writes off our sins unscrupulously without any concern for the law! He did not realize that God had to go through many steps before He could issue forgiveness.

A few years ago, I was preaching on this matter in a girls' school in Nanking. However, the students could not quite grasp the idea. There was a little table before me with a beautiful vase on top. I asked the principal of the school, "Suppose someone broke this vase. According to the rule of the school, what would you do?" The principal replied that reparation would have to be made. I asked, "What would happen if one of your favorite students had done it?" She answered that the same rule would apply. I pursued on and asked, "What if she could not afford to pay?" The principal repeated that the rule would still hold.

The next day, during the meeting, the vase was gone. It was broken by one of the principal's favorite students who also happened to be very poor. I took the opportunity to preach once more the doctrine of salvation by the death of Jesus. The principal could not release the student from her responsibility on the basis of love. Yet the student had no way to make reparation. In this dilemma there was only one way to take: the principal had to use her own money to repay for the student. On one hand, this fulfilled the law of the school; on the other hand, it showed the love of the principal for her students.

Christ came to earth to bear the judgment of our sins and suffer their consequences in order that we may be forgiven. The coming of Christ was the very coming of God Himself. He came to repay for us. By doing so, He did not degrade Himself in unrighteousness; rather, He proved Himself to be just and righteous.

FORGIVENESS IS TO SUFFER LOSS

I believe we have to see one more aspect of the meaning of forgiveness. Forgiveness implies bearing the transgressor's loss by the transgressor. For example, if someone has stolen my pencil and I have forgiven him, it means

that I have suffered the loss of a pencil. What then is unforgiveness? It simply means to take back the pencil from the thief in order that I may not suffer a loss. Hence, to forgive is to suffer a loss.

When the student broke the vase, she should have been the one to make reparation. Unforgiveness means that she would have to suffer a loss by payment. Forgiveness, on the other hand, means that the transgressor, who was the principal, had to take up the loss by paying for it herself. Therefore, when God forgives our sins, it means that He takes up the loss incurred by our sins. No third party can forgive our sins. Only the transgressor can suffer the loss of the transgressor. Christ is God, the One against whom we sinned. His forgiveness is the suffering of the loss of our sins.

CHRIST AS A MAN

This is not all. We have to realize that Christ is a man. He bore our sins as a man. God looked at Christ as a man and included all of us in Him. When God judged Christ, He judged us also. Hence, God has judged us in Christ and also forgiven us in Christ. This forgiveness is perfectly just.

Second Corinthians 5:14 says, "Because we have judged this, that One died for all, therefore all died." The "One" here refers to Christ, and the "all" refers to us. When Christ died, we all died with Him because we were all included in Him. It is said that all Chinese came from the one man Hwang-ti. If in the very beginning, somebody had killed Hwang-ti, he would have killed the whole Chinese race. In the same way, we are in Christ. When Christ passed through the judgment, we passed through the same. His death became our termination.

Verse 21: "Him who did not know sin He made sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." The One "who did not know sin" is again Christ. He was made to be sin for us. What does it mean to be "made sin"? It means that when Christ was hung on the cross, God regarded Him as the sin of you and me. He looked at Christ as sin representing the whole human race. When Christ died, sin was all-inclusively terminated and removed. Now all of us who are in Him have our sins terminated; we become the righteousness of God in Christ.

IT IS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

TO FORGIVE US

Why does it say "become the righteousness of God," rather than "become righteous"? What is the difference between the two? To become righteous implies that we have done a good work, whereas to be made the righteousness of God declares that God Himself is righteous. There is a big difference between the two. God did not forgive our sins in an unrighteous way; He forgave in a very righteous way. He has punished Christ. As a result of this punishment, He can forgive us in Christ. God has not glossed over us. God is not an evasive God. When He grants forgiveness, He does so in a just manner.

Once I was going to Chiu-kang on a boat with a friend. A Moslem was reading on the deck of the same boat. After beginning a conversation with him, I told him that I would like to know if his scripture mentioned any way of salvation. He said, "All that one needs to do is repent of one's past evil deeds. The sin will then be forgiven. Why is there the need for salvation?" I replied that if God forgives in this way, He Himself sins in His forgiveness.

He was very surprised at what I said. It seemed that he had never heard such a thing before. I asked, "Do you think that it is righteous for a man to be forgiven of his sins once he repents of them? For example, when a criminal is brought before a judge, is it right for the judge to release him merely on the basis of his repentance?" After thinking for a while, he admitted that this was not just. Unfortunately, I had no time to explain to him the death of Christ. The salvation of God is based on the judgment of His Son. We receive our forgiveness in the Son.

SETTING JESUS AS THE PROPITIATION COVER

Romans 3:25-26: "Whom God set forth as a propitiation place through faith in His blood, for the demonstrating of His righteousness, in that in His forbearance God passed over the sins that had previously occurred, with a view to the demonstrating of His righteousness in the present time, so that He might be righteous and the One who justifies him who is of the faith of Jesus." This portion of the Scripture is not easily understood. However, there are two points which we need to notice.

God set forth Christ as a propitiation place. In the original language the words "propitiation place" mean propitiation cover. In the Old Testament, the

ark of the covenant was covered by a golden lid called the propitiation cover (translated by the King James Version as "mercy seat"). Man's prayer passed through this cover to reach God, and God's answer went through the same to meet man. That was a meeting place between God and man. Now Jesus has become this propitiation cover. He is the focal point of God and man. Both can now meet in Him on the basis of His blood. Jesus has died for us. He has shed His blood and forgiven our sins. Now He has become our propitiation cover.

Before Jesus died, "God passed over the sins that had previously occurred, with a view to the demonstrating of His righteousness in the present time." From Adam to Jesus, for more than four thousand years, countless sins were committed by man. Although God passed over them, He did not let them go by. This shows His righteousness in former times. In the present time, He has sent His Son. We are now justified in Him. In itself this very justification is a just act. This passage tells us the different ways that God handled these two things. First, He passed over the sins committed formerly, reckoning that Jesus would come; in this He proved Himself righteous. Second, He forgives all the sins committed now, basing this upon the judgment of Christ; in this He also declares Himself righteous. By the death of Jesus, God has both declared us sinless as well as Himself righteous.

HOW CAN GOD BE UNRIGHTEOUS?

Once I met a sister in the Lord. She said that she was an evil person and had committed many sins. She had indulged in all a woman could ever commit. Because of this, she thought that she could never be forgiven. I checked to see whether she believed that Jesus shed His blood for the sins of man, that is, for man's redemption. She said that she knew all these doctrines, but having been a Christian for so many years, and committing the multitude of sins as she did, it was impossible to be forgiven anymore.

I was sitting in front of her. At that point I stood up and solemnly looked into her eyes, saying emphatically, "I do not care whether your sins are forgiven or not! But the way you talk implies that God has sinned. This I do care! On the one hand, you believe that you are in Christ. Yet, on the other hand, you do not believe that your sins can be forgiven. If God does not forgive you, does that mean that God is unrighteous? If He is unrighteous, then He sins. How can God ever sin? I do not care if you are condemned and

are going to perish. But God loved you and sent His Son to pay all the debts of your sins. His Son's death is now your death. All your sins are on His shoulder. If what you say is true, then God has indeed taken back His words. He is coming again to collect the debts of your sins! You are saying that God cannot forgive your sins and that He has become an unrighteous God! What kind of talk is this? For this I have to stand up! My God can never be unrighteous!"

On that day, tears streamed from her eyes. She exclaimed, "I am sinful, but God is righteous! He has to forgive me in Christ. Although my sins are numerous, thank Him; He is bound to forgive me! He would be unrighteous if He did not do so."

SAVED ACCORDING TO THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

It is true that God is full of grace, but you do not have to be saved by His grace. You can be saved by His righteousness. The grace of God is based upon His love towards us. It makes Him willing to save us. But His righteousness is based upon His Son's death for us. It makes Him unable not to save us. Before Jesus died, God was free either to save or not save us. But once Jesus died, God was bound! He is absolutely obligated to save whoever comes to God by the blood of Jesus! Have we read this? It is impossible for Him not to forgive us!

This is salvation according to His righteousness. Before the death of Christ, if He had forgiven any of our sins or had acquitted us from the punishment for sin, He would have made Himself a sinner. Now He has caused His Son to be crucified on the cross. The judgment of sins has been accomplished. The problem of sin is solved. God can no longer reject anyone who comes to Him by the blood of Jesus. Now He will make Himself a sinner and an unrighteous one if He does not forgive.

IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD NOT TO SAVE US

Some may think, "Is it that easy to be saved? I am afraid that I need to pray more. I have to pray to an extent that God softens His heart and has favor upon me. Only then will I be saved!" There is no such thing. Today, even if God would not soften His heart, He still has to forgive your sins! Even if God is absolutely disgusted with you, He still has to grant you this forgiveness. It does not matter whether you pray for a long time or not. Rather, it depends

on the fact that redemption has been accomplished. Even if God does not want to save you, it is too late for Him to change His mind. It would be all right if it were two thousand years ago. However, God has accepted the sacrifice of Christ; now it is impossible for Him not to save you. A sinner can suffer judgment only once! He cannot be judged twice.

In order to forgive our sins, God has taken all the trouble to accomplish the salvation in Christ. Now He has commissioned us to go to the whole world to show others that God has accomplished this work of salvation. He can now forgive sins without placing Himself in an improper standing.

GOD FORGIVES UPRIGHTLY

Others may say, "Why don't I feel saved? Why is it that after I believed, nothing special seemed to happen? I don't feel the peace inside." Please remember that it is not a matter of whether you have the peace or not. Whether or not you have the peace is immaterial. The important thing is for God to have the peace. He has to grant a forgiveness that is just and honest. When God forgives you in Christ, He does so righteously, uprightly, and openly. All you need to do is receive it.

A passage that is quite familiar to many people is Mark 10:45: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve." Unfortunately, many only read up to this part. They cut off the remaining half. The word "and" following this phrase should be translated as "even to the extent that." To what extent did the Lord Jesus come to serve? He came to serve to the extent that He gave His life as a ransom for many.

In Matthew 26:28 the Lord Jesus said, "For this is My blood of the covenant, which is being poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Hence, the shedding of His blood is for the forgiveness of our sins and for our redemption. We can only obtain forgiveness in Christ. Outside of Him, whatever kind of forgiveness you have is not just.

CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS

We will select a few more passages to see how Christ accomplished redemption for us.

Romans 5:6-8: "For while we were yet weak, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will anyone die, though perhaps for the good man someone would even dare to die. But God commends His own love to us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Romans 5:9-10: "Much more then, having now been justified in His blood, we will be saved through Him from the wrath. 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 shows us clearly that the death of Christ was not the death of a martyr. He did not die for a belief or a cause. He died for sin, in order for a way to be opened for sinners to be declared guiltless! Hence, 1 Corinthians 15:3 says that Christ "died for our sins."

Hebrews 9:22b: "Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." Sin can only be forgiven after judgment.

First Peter 2:24: "Who Himself bore up our sins in His body on the tree, in order that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness; by whose bruise you were healed." Then 3:18: "For Christ also has suffered once for sins, the Righteous on behalf of the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God, on the one hand being put to death in the flesh, but on the other, made alive in the spirit."

First John 1:7: "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin."

ALL THE SINS ARE UPON JESUS

Isaiah 53:6: "We all like sheep have gone astray; / Each of us has turned to his own way, / And Jehovah has caused the iniquity of us all / To fall on Him." The words "fall on" here can also be translated as "placed upon." All of our sins have been placed upon Jesus. A brother who is an accountant said once that this is like transferring an account. Originally, sin was in your account. Now it has been transferred to the account of Jesus Christ.

One time a person asked a Christian about the way of forgiveness. The Christian showed him this passage in Isaiah and told him that if he would get in through the first "all" and come out through the second "all," he would be

saved. We all are like sheep gone astray. Yes, I am included. I am a sinner that has gone astray. The Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to be placed upon Him. Yes, all my iniquities are upon Him.

There is a hymn which well describes the joy of this salvation:

Why should I worry, doubt and fear?
Has God not caused His Son to bear
My sins upon the tree?
The debt that Christ for me has paid,
Would God another mind have made
To claim again from me?

Redemption full the Lord has made,
And all my debts has fully paid,
From law to set me free.
I fear not for the wrath of God,
For I've been sprinkled with His blood,
It wholly covers me.

For me forgiveness He has gained,
And full acquittal was obtained,
All debts of sin are paid;
God would not have His claim on two,
First on His Son, my Surety true,
And then upon me laid.

So now I have full peace and rest,
My Savior Christ hath done the best
And set me wholly free;
By His all-efficacious blood
I ne'er could be condemned by God,
For He has died for me!

Hymns, #1003

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CRUCIFIXION OF SINNERS WITH CHRIST

The Normal Christian Faith, Sect. 3, Chap. 10

The highest goal in the salvation of God is the dispensing of His life into man. This is God's ultimate desire. Only by partaking of the divine life can we have a divine living. It is impossible to have a God-like living with our human life. The manifestation of our life is nothing but sin. In this respect God dealt with our sins and iniquities in a way that would maintain His righteousness. We have seen that the Son of God was judged for this purpose. Those who are in Him have been forgiven of their sins.

THE SOURCE OF SIN

But the salvation of God did not stop with the forgiveness of sins; it went deeper to deal with the source of sin. We have said that man's sins are not caused by his environment. Rather, they originate from the person. The mode of living is merely a natural consequence of the kind of life that is possessed. Since man's life is corrupted, his outward behavior cannot help but be evil.

For example, when I knock on the stand before me with my fingers, a certain sound is produced. You can tell at once that this is a sound produced by wood. If I knock on a piece of metal, it will give a different kind of sound, and you can readily tell the difference between the two. The contrast in sound is caused by the difference in constitution. No matter how I change my manner of knocking, I cannot make a piece of wood sound metallic. Nor can it be done vice versa.

The same is true of the behavior of man. Our environment cannot precipitate something that does not exist within us. A slow person is slow under any kind of circumstance. But a quick disposition is readily detected under the slightest stress in the environment. All outward conduct is a direct result of our inward life. Hence, temptations in the environment are merely catalysts to hasten the exposure of our inner substance. They can never bring forth anything that has not hitherto existed in man.

OUR ENVIRONMENT EXPOSES OUR LIFE

A friend told me once that the human life is programmed by its environment. A good environment will produce fine personalities, and an unhealthy environment is the cause of all vices. All that one needs to do is control the environment, and proper personalities will automatically follow.

I said, "According to what you have proposed, it would mean that salt-water fish have become what they are because of living in the sea, and fresh-water fish are the direct product of the river water. This is surely not true. The environment can never govern what is not in us. The environment only exposes what lies dormant within us!"

Of what does the human life consist? It consists of all kinds of evil and corruption. Give it a gentle knock, and everything will fall out into the open. Many moralists say that all we need to do is suppress ourselves. Many have tried it. They held themselves tightly by the reins, fearing that their evil nature would break loose once they let go even a little. This kind of person is most miserable. Daily they repress their desires. But we know that they can never succeed for long.

GOD NEVER CHANGES OUR LIVES

Can we change the human life? Never! Not only are we unable to change it; even God cannot change it. The life of man is like a sin factory that daily manufactures hundreds of products. Therefore, in addition to the work of forgiveness, God had to deal with the source of sin. Since He is not going to change our life, what basic solution did He provide to save us? We have to look at the second aspect of His salvation.

Romans 6:7: "For he who has died is justified from sin." If a man wants to be delivered from sin, the only way is for him to die. He who has died is freed from sin; it is no longer possible for him to sin.

I know a friend who had an insatiable appetite for card games. Day and night he was obsessed by them. When he could not find partners for a game, he felt tormented beyond measure. Even when he did not have cards in his hands, he would feel better just looking at them. His whole life was governed by cards. However, he is dead now. After he died, he no longer loved cards.

Even if you stuffed cards into his hands, he would not take them anymore. Death has delivered him from his cards.

Consider another example of a very arrogant person. He boasts of everything about himself. There is no way to remove or suppress his pride. One day he dies. If the whole world gathered around him to eulogize and extol his glorious deeds, what would he do? Would he still be proud of himself?

DEATH DELIVERS US FROM SIN

God's salvation for man is death! He who is dead is freed from sin. We have to see the verse that precedes the one we just read.

Romans 6:6: "Knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin as slaves." We have to take a closer look at this passage. The Greek word "annulled" has two meanings: one is unemployed; the other is paralyzed or crippled. The idea of unemployment is stronger in this passage. Hence, we can translate this as "that the body of sin might be unemployed."

SIN, THE OLD MAN, AND THE BODY

There are three important agents in this passage. The first is sin, the second is the old man, and the third is the body. Sin is personified; it is a master. This sin does not refer to individual sins. Rather, it is a powerful lord that binds, entangles, and compels man to commit all of the particular sins. Man becomes the slave to sin, being subject to such a tyrant and carrying out all its dictates.

Under ordinary circumstances, man does not feel too much pressure from this master. But the minute he makes up his mind to overcome it, he will find that no matter how much energy he summons, he can never succeed in overturning its power. The more he tries to control his temper, the more he will lose it. Sin is the master. It forces man to submit.

The old man mentioned in the Bible is our own person. Deep in man there is a love for sin. When temptation comes, man rejoices to hear its call and gladly succumbs to its sway. It is true that sin is a powerful agent, but when it is met by the old man, the result is an instant collaboration.

In such a setting, the two go about searching for an instrument and discover the body. The body is thus employed. They will either tell the eyes to look, the ears to listen, or the hands to move. In this way the body executes the order dictated by sin and seconded by the old man. Sin is the director, the old man submits to its orders, and the body carries them out practically in the form of transgressions. These three are one. They agree with one another. The product of this collaboration is the multitude of sins that we commit.

ERADICATION OF SINS

God's salvation is different from our human concepts. His way is deliverance from sin. We think that everything would be all right if sins were uprooted from our being. But God's salvation is not the eradication of sins. He does not pull out our sins like uprooted trees.

The eastern mind always thinks that perfection is attained as soon as one has all sins repressed. But our person is one that loves to sin. It does not even want to suppress sin. Even when it tries grudgingly, there is no lasting result. The way of God is not a subjugation of sin, nor is it a mortification of the body. It is an exchange of person. The old man that was attached to sin is removed, and a new life that abhors sin is put in its place. When temptation comes, this new life naturally shuns it. In this way, the body loses its function in regard to performing sins.

GOD ONLY DEALS WITH THE OLD MAN

Hence, God's salvation is entirely different from the concepts of other religions. God does not deal with sin, nor does He touch the body. All He takes care of is the old man within. This old man is just our life. When the old man is put to death, it means that the old life is terminated, and a new life is put in its place. The two ends, sin and the body, are left untouched, but the middle agent is taken away. Sin can now no longer communicate with the body.

The man that is constituted with this new life is called the new man in the Bible. When temptation comes again, the new man reacts very differently from the old one. He no longer hearkens to those lures. He never seconds the motion of sin, and he never actuates the body to commit evil. The new man is diametrically opposed to sin. He is deaf to the suggestion of sin.

UNEMPLOYED IN REGARD TO SIN

What about the body? At this point, although the body is still willing to be a slave to sin, the power of the latter is blocked by the new man from being transmitted to the body. This new man no longer obeys sin or agrees with its proposals. Under these circumstances, the body has nothing more to do; it becomes unemployed. Formerly, my mouth constantly cursed. Now it does not function that way anymore; it has lost its job. My hands that used to fight with others have been discouraged by the new man. Now they no longer fight; they are likewise unemployed. My eyes, my ears, and even my whole body have become unemployed in regard to sin.

This is what the Bible means when it says, "Knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with Him." It clearly tells us that God deals with the old man. The result is that the body of sin is unemployed, that we should no longer serve sin as slaves. That means we will no longer come under the sway of sin. We have nothing more to do with it.

We can see that the basic strategy in God's salvation is the removal of our life. Our life is just the old man. In God's eyes this has to die. If it does not die, it will produce millions of sinful offspring. It will give birth to jealousy, pride, murder, adultery, and so forth. It has an inherent and insatiable love for sin, and no matter how much you suppress it, it will still run after sin. It takes no effort for it to perform evil, but it is impossible for it to be patient, loving, and holy. There is no other way for God to take but to pronounce death for this life. Its last breath has to be taken from it. It must be utterly terminated. When this happens sin will lose its partner forever.

KILL IT

One time I was at the home of one of my friends. He had a maid who gave him much trouble. Not only was she lazy, but she had the habit of stealing. She possessed every vice that a maid could have. My friend asked for my advice. His intention was for me to preach to her some in the hope that she might change. I told him an extremely simple answer: Give her up and hire another! This is the same way that God deals with us. The human life can never be improved through preaching. God says, "I do not need you anymore." With that He simply kills it. This is God's salvation.

This is the difference between God's provision and our concept. We hope to suppress sin in order to tame the wild desires of it. But what result have we obtained? Many unbelievers have changed their conduct at different times. They were sinful and repulsive; now they are mild and gentle. But this is not the salvation of God. The salvation of God does not depend on how many sins you have committed in the past or how much you have improved. It is not a matter of changing from violence to gentleness. God sees sin as something related to our life. He deals with the problem at its root by removing the life. As long as this life continues, sin remains. But the day that this life is put to death, sin ceases.

NOT A MENTAL RECKONING

This death, furthermore, is not the death that some people talk about, where one merely considers everything in the past to be gone for good. The amazing thing is that you can consider as much as you want that your temper is gone and dead, but in actuality it always comes back. You can only have a psychological reckoning. In reality it is still very alive. It follows you everywhere you go. Whenever you turn around it is there. You can never rid yourself of your temper, no matter how hard you try.

DIE IN CHRIST

How can we die? The answer again goes back to this one fact: God has put us into Christ. God has caused Christ to die, and when we are in Him we died also. We have said that the forgiveness of sin is because we are in Christ. God has put us into Christ. God has caused Christ to die, and since we are in Him, we died also. When God judged Christ, He judged us also. By this judgment our sins are forgiven. We cannot put ourselves to death. The death of Christ, in which God has included us, makes us dead with Him.

Let us read again Romans 6:6: "Knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin as slaves." There is no alternative for our old man but to die. There is no choice left for him to take. However, it is not a simple matter to die. God had to include us in Christ and then crucify Him on the cross. When Christ died on the cross, we were all included. From that moment on, we were no longer ourselves; we no longer existed. We never can

or will crucify ourselves. It is our co-crucifixion with Him that took care of the old man. This is the basic solution to the problem of sin.

CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

Not only in Romans, but other places in the Bible say that we are crucified with Christ. Galatians 2:20 says, "I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." It is no longer I who live, because the "I" has been crucified with Christ on the cross.

Read Galatians 5:24 again. "But they who are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and its lusts." We do not do the crucifying; we are crucified already with Christ.

We have seen that Christ bore our sins on the cross. Now we see that He also bore our very person on the cross. He has become a substitute for our sins as well as our person. On that day on the cross, there were not only our sins, but also our person. God has included both our sins and our person in Christ. When Christ was crucified, so were we. If we see this one point, the rest will be clear.

A hymn describes well this fact:

I am crucified with Christ,
And the cross hath set me free;
I have ris'n again with Christ,
And He lives and reigns in me.
Oh! it is so sweet to die with Christ,
To the world, and self, and sin;
Oh! it is so sweet to live with Christ,
As He lives and reigns within.

Hymns, #482, verse 1

CHRIST IS A CORPORATE MAN

We can see from the Bible that Christ is not an individual person. He is a corporate man. This is like a legal term, a "juristic person." Everyone is incorporated into such a corporate person. Whatever the juristic person does signifies the act of everyone else. Using our previous analogy, it is the same as

saying that if Hwang-ti had died, all of his descendants would have died; the whole Chinese race would have been terminated there. We are included in Christ. When Christ died on the cross, we who are in Him died on it as well. By the judgment of Christ we are forgiven; by His death we are set free from ourselves. On the negative side, we receive the forgiveness of sins outwardly and the termination of the old life inwardly. On the positive side, we start afresh in Christ with the new life obtained from God.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE EXTENT OF THE BELIEVER'S SALVATION

CWWN, The (Set 1) Vol. 8:

The Present Testimony (1), Issue No. 15

We all know that we are sinners and that we have eternal life through faith. Today we want to see to what extent God saves us through Jesus Christ. In other words, to what extent will our person be saved by God through Jesus Christ?

In the last two or three years, I have noticed one thing: I have felt that there is definitely something wrong with my personal Christian life. When I read the Bible, I confess that I do not have what the Bible says. Although the Christian life of some seems to be worse than mine, and although some who have deeper experiences have answered my questions by saying that I have already attained, I still feel that I do not have what the Bible says. Thank God! Now I know! Indeed there are better things in Christ. Indeed these better things can be obtained and can be obtained even now.

So, today what I want to talk about is the extent of our heritage in Christ Jesus. This is not about the future heritage in heaven—something which we will have in the future. We are not talking about eternal life—something which we have through regeneration. We are not talking about the glory in the kingdom—something which will be ours in the millennium to come. Rather, we want to emphasize the extent to which God can save us as persons today.

Let us read some verses in the Bible. We will read them one by one as we move along. We want to see the extent to which God can save us today.

I. CONSCIENCE

Hebrews 9:14 says, "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" This verse speaks of the extent to which Christ saves our conscience. His blood can purge our conscience from dead works.

Brothers and sisters! Please ask yourselves today if there are still accusations in your conscience. If from time to time there are still accusations in your conscience, then what you have obtained is not yet complete. The Lord saves us, and His blood purges our conscience. Our conscience can be purified by His blood from every kind of self-accusation. When we gather together, we pray, "O God! We thank You that our hearts have been sprinkled from an evil conscience." But many times we still feel uneasy. What we have done is just a cover-up and a mental gloss-over. But the blood of God's Son does purify. If your conscience still accuses you, it does not mean that God's salvation cannot save you to that extent. It merely means that the salvation which you have received is not yet complete. Thank and praise God! He can save us to such an extent! It is possible for our conscience to be purified.

II. HEART

Mark 7:21-23 says, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil reasonings, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, foolishness. All these wicked things proceed from within and defile the man." Also Matthew 5:8 says, "Blessed are the pure in heart." These two verses speak of the original defiled condition of our heart. They also tell us how Christ can save our heart to the extent of being pure.

Brothers and sisters! The heart mentioned in Mark is our natural heart. What about this heart? The Lord said that all evil things come from men's heart. All these evils are from the heart. But the Lord said, "Blessed are the pure in heart." The Lord is able to save such a bad heart to the extent of being pure.

The salvation of our heart does not mean the suppression of the inward evils so that they do not break loose. The salvation of our heart means that our heart is cleansed from within. If we plan to cover up or seal up, this is not salvation, because we have not been saved by God to the extent of being pure. We have to ask God, "How many evil thoughts are there in my heart? How much deceit? How much jealousy? How much pride?" If all these are merely suppressed inside us and we are merely covering them up tightly, our heart has not been saved. What God says is, "Blessed are the pure in heart!"

Today our shortcomings, problems, and lack of testimony are due to the fact that our heart has not been cleansed to that extent. Many times we see someone sin, but we dare not reproach him, because we realize that this person's outward condition is but the blossoming of sin; the seed of this blossom is also in his heart. Although we do not love the world like some, our hearts are nevertheless affected. We are no different from others. When we do not have a pure heart, we do not have a testimony.

God would not leave any filthiness in our heart. Even a heart that is as evil as the one mentioned in Mark can be saved by God to the extent of being clean. God can save us until we have a pure heart. We praise and thank God that He can save us to such an extent! He can deliver such an evil heart to become a pure heart.

III. HEART, SOUL, MIND, AND STRENGTH

Mark 12:30-31 says, "And you shall love the Lord your God from your whole heart and from your whole soul and from your whole mind and from your whole strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" These verses say that God can save us to such an extent that we love God with all. He can also save us to the extent that we love others unselfishly.

How difficult it is to love God with all! Oftentimes we want to love God, but we secretly want to love the world as well. We want to serve God, and we also want to serve mammon. Oftentimes the love in our heart toward God is distracted by many people and many things. But God can save us to the extent of loving God "with all." We can love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind and with all our strength. God can even save us so that we not only love God, but we also love others without any selfishness at all.

Brothers and sisters! If we cannot love God to the extent of "with all," if there are still other persons, other objects, or other things besides God as the center of our love, and moreover, if we cannot love others as ourselves in addition to loving God, then the salvation we have obtained is not complete. Christ can save us to such an extent that we can love God "with all" and we can love others unselfishly. This is possible. We praise Him!

IV. MIND

Second Corinthians 11:3 says, "But I fear lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your thoughts would be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity toward Christ." This verse implies that our mind can be saved to the extent of being "simple and pure."

Many times we want to obey the Lord, consecrate to the Lord, and only love the Lord. But how difficult this is! It is very, very difficult because we do not have the strength. We often find ourselves failing. We wish we could love the Lord with all our love. We wish our heart towards the Lord would be simple, without corruption, and single and pure. How good such a condition would be! We hope for this experience, but it seems that it can hardly be realized. However, God can save us to such a degree. This is possible. This can be done. Our heart must be simple and pure. If we are always double-minded, we will be like Eve. On the one hand, Eve saw that the fruit was good for food and, on the other hand, she was reminded of what God said about not eating the fruit. On the one hand, she saw that the fruit was pleasant to the eyes and was to be desired; on the other hand, she thought of God's commandment of not eating. Her heart was moved, and once she loved the fruit, she ate it. For just an instant and by a slight deviation, Eve lost her simplicity and purity toward Christ.

Brothers and sisters! Do we want a simple and pure heart toward Christ? We should love Him! We should not be afraid of loving Him too much. We should love Him unreservedly and love Him without reasoning. Praise and thank God that He can save us to such an extent that we have a simple and pure heart toward Christ! This is possible!

Romans 12:2 says, "And do not be fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well pleasing and perfect." This verse tells us that God can save our mind to the extent that we are transformed by its renewing and that we can prove the will of God.

Brothers and sisters! Have you ever thought about this? A renewed mind is able to prove the good, well pleasing, and perfect will of God. Many times, this seems to be God's will, and that also seems to be God's will. Many times we take John for Jack and Jack for John. Only a renewed mind can rightly discern God's will. If our mind is not renewed, we cannot prove what the will of God is, and the salvation we gain will not be complete. Not only did God

save us to what we are today, God will also save us to the extent of being perfect. We should desire after this. Praise and thank God! This is possible. This can be done.

V. THOUGHTS

Second Corinthians 10:5-6 says, "As we overthrow reasonings and every high thing rising up against the knowledge of God, and take captive every thought unto the obedience of Christ. And we are ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled." These two verses speak of God being able to save our thoughts unto the obedience of Christ. God can save our thoughts, all our thoughts, unto the obedience of Christ.

Brothers and sisters! Every one of us should ask ourselves, "Can we control our thoughts?" We know that there are many thoughts which we cannot control. God does not allow us to have confusing and disorderly thoughts; God intends to bring our many thoughts to the obedience of Christ.

Brothers and sisters! Let me ask you, "Have all your thoughts been brought to the obedience of Christ?" We should not have any wandering thoughts, filthy thoughts, or world-craving thoughts. If we still have these thoughts, we have not obtained a full salvation. God's salvation can bring the thoughts of every believer to the obedience of Christ. This can be done. We can surrender all our thoughts to the Lord, that is, to the obedience of the Lord. This is the salvation which is prepared for us in Christ. Not only does God save us unto eternal life or to heaven, but He also wants to save our whole being, that is, all our thoughts, to the obedience of Christ. Praise and thank God! This can be done. This is possible. He can save us to such an extent.

First Peter 1:13 says, "Therefore girding up the loins of your mind and being sober, set your hope perfectly on the grace being brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." "The loins of our mind" refer to our thoughts. This verse tells us that God is able to save our loose mind to the extent that it is focused.

I have mentioned before that the Jewish garment was like the garment worn in the Ming Dynasty. It was loose and buttonless. Whenever the people worked, the loins had to be girded up to facilitate movement. Our loose

thoughts are like an ungirded loin. But just as a person can gird up his loins, God can save our loose thoughts and bring them into focus.

Many times, though our thoughts are not filthy, they are loose and wandering. We pray a little, and then we find that our mind wanders away. We read the Bible a little, and again our thoughts are lost. It is true that the thoughts may not be bad. But minds set on good or tasteful things, if not done at the proper time, also indicate a looseness of the loins of our mind and lack of concentration. God can save us to such an extent that we can control our thoughts and focus our mind. How loose are our thoughts! If we cannot concentrate in our mind, we have not obtained the complete salvation. If we have not obtained it, we should know that Christ can save us not only to our present state, but He can save us to the state of perfection. Praise and thank God! He can also save our loose thoughts to the extent of being focused. This is possible. This can be done.

VI. HEART AND MIND

Philippians 4:6-7 says, "In nothing be anxious, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses every man's understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus." These two verses say that God can save a person's heart and thoughts, delivering him from anxiety. To what extent is the Lord's authority able to save a person? He is able to save a person to the extent that the peace of God guards his heart and thoughts.

The word guard has a special meaning in the original language. The most accurate translation for this word is a special term used in military science. It can be translated as "garrison." The verse means that the peace of God guards our hearts and thoughts in a way similar to a curfew set up in a locality. During a curfew, the army is empowered to garrison the curfew area, making the area safe and free from danger. God's peace can guard our hearts and thoughts in the same way as an army guards a locality to keep it peaceful. God can deliver us from all anxiety. The peace of God garrisons our hearts and thoughts.

I have not yet seen many Christians who are without anxieties about something. The majority of them are full of worries. There was a mother who had seven sons. She said, "I worried about each son until he grew up and got

saved. There are two who are now in heaven, so I don't have to worry about them anymore. But I still worry about the remaining five sons." A brother told her that worrying in this way was a mistake; it was a sin. But she said, "A mother ought to worry for her own children. If she does not worry, that is sin." The brother pointed out Philippians 4:6-7, but she thought that the anxiety mentioned there did not apply to her kind of worry. According to her, the wife must worry about the husband, the parents must worry about the children, and the businessman must worry about his business. But the Bible says, "In nothing be anxious." It does mean that we can worry about a few things. It means to not worry about anything.

I have not seen many brothers or sisters who are anxious in nothing. This is not full salvation. If you worry about your whole family and are anxious about so many things—about this and about—the peace of God is not guarding your heart and thoughts. Such a person cannot testify, saying, "My Lord is the One who bears my burden day by day."

Anxiety is a sin. God can save you from all anxiety. No matter how big or small, heavy or light a thing is, you ought to be anxious for nothing. If you still have not experienced the peace of God keeping your heart and thoughts, the salvation you have obtained is not complete. If you have seen this matter clearly, you will say, "O Lord! I have gained too little of what You have given me." Praise and thank God! He can save us from all worry, to the extent where we are anxious for nothing. His peace is sufficient to guard our hearts and thoughts. This is possible. We must praise Him!

VII. WILL AND MIND

First Peter 4:1-2 says, "Since Christ therefore has suffered in the flesh, you also arm yourselves with the same mind (because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin), no longer to live the rest of the time in the flesh in the lusts of men, but in the will of God." These two verses say that God can save our mind to the extent that we are willing to suffer as Christ did.

Are we afraid of suffering? Yes. We all want to have an easy daily life that is free from suffering. Whenever we have a little difficulty, we ask God to remove it. When we really submit to God and our future becomes difficult and hard, we ask God not to allow the difficulty to come to us. But God can save us

to such an extent that we are not afraid of difficulty or hardship, that we arm ourselves with a mind for suffering.

What is our armor? Herein is the best armor: a mind to suffer just like Christ's. Whenever you submit to God, man may tell of difficulties and may set ways to deal with you. But by thinking of the suffering of Christ in the flesh and resolving to do the same, you are armed. Now you are able to say, "The Lord came to suffer. Suffering was not only His portion but also His duty. Suffering was His business. He wished to suffer." You can overcome all things if you arm yourself with such a mind. Not only will you not be afraid of suffering, you will welcome suffering. Not only will you not turn away from suffering, you will let suffering come looking for you. If you fear and shrink back whenever you think of suffering, your salvation is not complete. God can save you to the extent that you can have a mind to suffer. If you have a mind to suffer, you are living the rest of your time in the will of God. Praise and thank God! This is possible! He can save you to such an extent.

VIII. SPEAKING

James 1:26-27 says, "If anyone thinks himself to be religious and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this one's religion is vain. This is pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." James 3:8-10 also says, "But the tongue no one among men is able to tame; it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made according to the likeness of God. Out of the same mouth come forth blessing and cursing. These things, my brothers, ought not to be so." These two passages talk about the tongue which no man can tame. But God can save an untamed tongue to the extent that it becomes a tongue that can be bridled by us.

I met a person who said, "James said clearly that no man can tame the tongue. Therefore, it is excusable for Christians to be unable to tame their own tongues." But we need to know that James 3:10 plainly says, "These things, my brothers, ought not to be so." Moses could not enter Canaan for one reason: he said a quick word. The words Moses spoke were unbecoming of a learner. Not only do we need a learner's ear, but we need a learner's tongue as well. Only then will we know how to speak. God can save not only our heart, mind, and thoughts to a full extent, but He can also save our tongue

to a perfect extent. If we cannot bridle our own tongue, I say again, we are not fully saved. Praise and thank God! He can save our tongue to a perfect extent. This can be done. It is possible.

IX. THE LUST OF THE BODY

Romans 8:12 says, "So then, brothers, we are debtors not to the flesh to live according to the flesh." This verse says that God can save us to the extent that we can overcome the demand of the fleshly nature and be released from the demand of the fleshly lusts.

Here, I want to mention specifically three things concerning man's body. Generally speaking, the functions of our body are in three areas: first, the area of nourishment for man's sustenance; second, the area of reproduction for man's continuation; and third, the area of defense for man's protection. Before man's fall, these three things were proper; sin was not in them. But after man sinned and inherited a sinful nature, these three things became the carrier of sins.

Because of the need for nourishment, the world tempts us with eating and drinking. The very first temptation that man faced was regarding food. As the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil tempted Eve that day, the enjoyment of eating and drinking has become a sin of the flesh for us today. We should never underestimate the matter of eating and drinking, because many fleshly believers have failed because of this. The fleshly Corinthians caused many brothers to stumble because of eating (1 Cor. 8). For this reason the elders and deacons of the churches in those days had to be those who had overcome in the matter of eating and drinking (1 Tim. 3:3, 8).

Second, after man's fall, reproduction became a matter of lust to man. In the Bible, the body and lust are particularly related. Even in the garden of Eden, the sin of indulgence in eating immediately aroused lust and shame. Paul also related these two things together (1 Cor. 6:13, 15); he also considered drunkenness and defilement to be related (vv. 9-10).

Another area is man's self-defense. After sin assumed authority, the power of the body stepped up its strength in order to survive, and anything that threatens its peace and comfort becomes its enemy. Man's temper with the resultant anger and strife all arise from the flesh and are sins of the flesh.

From the matter of self-defense, countless sins are produced directly or indirectly. This is because of the presence of an inward motivation of sin. For the sake of preserving one's profit, existence, reputation, opinion, and a thousand other things related to oneself, many of the darkest sins in the world are committed.

If we analyzed all the sins in the world one by one, we would see that, generally speaking, they are all related to the above three things. A fleshly Christian is one who is controlled by any one or all of the above three things.

But Paul said that we are not debtors to the flesh, not at all. Every one of us does not have to live according to the flesh. Christ can save us from the demands of the fleshly nature and fleshly lust. What is lust? As human beings, we have two needs. First, we have the natural physical need. Second, because of this natural need, a craving is produced, and we try by devious means to satisfy this natural need. This second craving is lust. Our Lord Christ, however, can save us from this lust.

The Lord can save each one of us to the extent that we are free from this lust. Moreover, the Lord can save each one of us to the point that we can overcome the natural demand. Do not be mistaken. The Lord is not saving us so that we have no natural need; He is only saving us so that we can overcome it. The Bible does not tell us that the flesh will disappear. It only tells us that we are not debtors to the flesh; we are only free from its demands. For if we are debtors, we still have to pay back. But if we are no longer debtors, we have power over ourselves.

For example, if a person is hungry, he has to eat; this is man's natural need. But if he has no money to buy food, and he wants to use some illegal means, that is, he wants to steal to buy food to satisfy this natural need, he is in reality satisfying the demand of the lust of his flesh. When man has a natural need, he can only satisfy it according to the way of the Bible. When you are hungry, and if you have money, you can buy food to eat. This is not sin. All the natural needs can be attended to according to the teaching of God. Anything more than this is the demand of lust. When we say that God can save us so that we can overcome the natural need and be free from the demand of lust, we mean that if we are hungry and without money, we can overcome the demand of hunger and refuse any illegal means of satisfaction. Hunger is inevitable, but we can be free from the demand of lust.

Not only in food, but also in reproduction and self-defense, the principle is the same. We can only take care of the natural needs; anything more than this is sin. It is not sin for us to have natural needs, but we are not debtors to the flesh—there is no need for us to pay back anything. In these two aspects, God can save us to be free from the demand of lust and overcome the natural needs.

Not being a debtor to the flesh is not limited to only these things. Even when we are sick, we are still not debtors to the flesh. Though we may be slightly fragile mentally, we need not lose our temper. Though we may have physical problems that bring about psychological problems, we can also overcome them. God's Word says that we are not debtors to the flesh. Is God unable to save a Christian because he is handicapped in a certain area? Certainly not. We are not debtors to the flesh.

Brothers and sisters! Have you ever been ensnared by some troubles in your body? Are you trapped by some problem of eating or drinking? Know for sure that Christ's salvation can match all the circumstances and difficulties. As much as your difficulty abounds, God's salvation also abounds. If a Christian starves for one day, two days, or even three days, do you need to tell him that he need not steal to satisfy his hunger? Suppose he says that he is hungry and that he is obligated to steal. Can he say that? Oh! There is no need for anyone to be obligated to sin. God can save each one of us so that we do not live according to the flesh. Romans 6:6 says, "Knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin as slaves." Brothers and sisters! Before God I can say this: "God, I thank You! All that is in my old man is crucified with Him." No matter what it is—envy, pride, filthy thoughts, a confused mind, worries, or the flesh—Christ can save us from all of these things. Praise and thank the Lord!

X. MEMBERS OF THE BODY

Romans 6:13 says, "Neither present your members as weapons of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as alive from the dead, and your members as weapons of righteousness to God." Verse 19 also says, "I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to uncleanness and lawlessness unto lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness unto

sanctification." These two verses say that God can save our members to the extent of being sanctified.

Our members were slaves to sin, slaves to uncleanness and lawlessness unto lawlessness, but how about now? Have we been freed from the sins of every member of our body? Does every member yield itself to be the slave of righteousness? If we have not yielded our members as slaves to righteousness, we are still the slaves of sin, and the salvation which we have received is not complete. The salvation Christ renders is a salvation that saves us to the extent that we yield all the members of our body as slaves to righteousness unto sanctification. This is possible; this can be done. We praise and thank Him!

XI. I

Galatians 2:20 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, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." We are very familiar with this verse. Many of us can even recite it. This verse says that God is saving us not only to the extent of being crucified with Christ, but also to the extent of having Christ living in us right now.

The word here is not that we should be like Christ or that we should imitate Christ. It says that Christ has become me. Now it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. God saved Paul to such an extent; He will also save us to the same extent.

Brothers and sisters! If we still do not have Christ living in us, the salvation we have received is not complete. Praise and thank God! He saves us to the extent that for us to live is Christ. This is possible. This can be attained by every Christian.

Brothers and sisters! We need to pay attention to one thing: the full salvation which God has prepared for us must be received in full and obtained in full. I do not believe in perfection in sinlessness, perfection in eradication of sin; but I believe in the perfection to which God can save me. I believe that the cross is not an eradication of me, but a substitution of me through the Lord's death. God is not uprooting my sin or evil; rather, He is giving me a Christ who lives in me. Formerly, it was Christ who died for me on the cross.

Now it is He who lives for me within. Before it was the substitutionary death; now it is the substitutionary living. The extent of my receiving salvation is the extent of God's salvation to me. We do not have to remain in any temper, worry, filthiness, or lust. God can save us and set us free from all of these things. He will deliver us not only from what is bad but also will impart what is good into us.

Now we can see how great God's salvation is and how great the extent of our salvation is! It is as if we have selected some merchandise. Now we must ask, "How do we obtain it?" We know that a price must be paid. Concerning this, there are several conditions which we will talk about next time. But today I will just ask you to do one thing: believe in God's Word. God's Word says that He can save us to such an extent. If we believe it, we will have it. We ought to believe that this is possible. The biggest problem lies in the fact that we do not believe in what the Bible says. God will fulfill according to our faith. If we do not believe in it, we will not have it.

This is a most solemn matter! God has spoken His word! Now if we say that we can do it, then we can do it. But if we say that we cannot do it, then we cannot do it. We must believe in God's Word; only then can God accomplish what we believe.

Mr. Andrew Murray was a very deep person in the Lord. I purposely studied the notes of his sermons. Each time he mentioned the victorious life, the sanctifying life, or the resting life, he always listed some conditions. There was a common condition that he mentioned each time: "one must believe that it is possible." Indeed if you think it is impossible, God will have no way to fulfill it for you. If you believe in what God has said and that He will do it in you, you will see His accomplishment of what He has said in you.

Brothers and sisters! What do you think of your own Christian life? If you confess that your present situation comes short in so many ways, are you ready to see God's full salvation fulfilled in you? If you are, you should right now believe that this is possible and that this can be done; you must also allow God to accomplish His work in you.

CHAPTER NINE

SALVATION OF THE SOUL (1)

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The question we wish to bring up today is one to which many, as far as I know, have not paid attention. It is the matter of the salvation of the soul. Concerning salvation, we should emphasize very much that there is a great difference between the spirit and the soul. First Thessalonians 5:23 says, "Your spirit and soul and body." This word clearly divides man into three parts. Simply put, the spirit is the part of man which fellowships with God. Lower animals do not have this; therefore, lower animals cannot worship God. The soul is the organ of man's thought, will, and emotion. Lower animals also have this part. The soul is just the life we have as an animal. The body is the part of man which communicates with the material world. Man is of three parts, spirit and soul and body; therefore, the meaning of salvation is that all three parts have to be saved.

First Corinthians 5:5 says, "His spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord." This speaks of the salvation of the spirit. Romans 8:23 says, "The redemption of our body." This speaks of the salvation of the body. Today we wish to examine the salvation of the soul. We will look carefully into every place in the New Testament where the salvation of the soul is mentioned so that we may understand what the salvation of the soul is, and what its significance is.

Matthew 16:24-28 says, "Then Jesus said to His disciples, If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his soul-life shall lose it; but whoever loses his soul-life for My sake shall find it. For what shall a man be profited if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul-life? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul-life? For the Son of Man is to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will repay each man 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."

"Then Jesus said to his disciples." From this word, we know that the Lord Jesus spoke the following words to his disciples, not to outsiders. Since they were the disciples, they were saved people. Therefore, we should remember that the following words were spoken to saints who were already saved, not to sinners who were not saved.

"If anyone wants to come after Me." "Anyone" means anyone among the saved ones who will come after the Lord. "Anyone" still refers to the saved disciples, those who particularly want to follow the Lord. The words "come after Me" indicate that the words which follow are the conditions of coming after the Lord.

"Let him deny himself." To deny the self does not mean to conquer the self. It does not mean to ignore oneself or renounce one's rights. To deny the self means to not follow one's own mind in everything and not consider oneself the center. It means putting oneself aside and seeking God's mind. The Lord says that only this kind of person can come after Him. This is very obvious because in order to follow the Lord, one surely cannot follow himself.

"Take up his cross and follow Me." This is even deeper than denying oneself. To deny oneself is to forget about oneself, but to take up the cross is to submit to God. To take up the cross is accepting all that God has arranged and being willing to suffer according to God's will. If we deny the self and take up the cross, we will be able to follow the Lord.

"For whoever wants to save his soul-life shall lose it; but whoever loses his soul-life for My sake shall find it." The word "life" is *psuche* in the original text, which means "soul." This verse speaks of the matter of saving one's soul and losing one's soul. This sheds light on the question we are about to examine.

"For." This is a continuation of what was said before. The word "for" shows us that the denying of the self and the taking up of the cross to follow the Lord in the last verse is the same thing as saving and losing of the soul spoken of here.

"For whoever wants to save his soul-life." This means that though a person wants to follow the Lord, he is not willing to deny himself or take up the cross. From this, we can understand to some extent the meaning of saving one's soul. It means to be unable to disregard oneself or renounce one's rights; it means

to be unable to allow oneself to suffer and submit to God. This word shows us that saving the soul is opposite to denying the self and taking up the cross. Therefore, if a man understands what it is to deny the self and take up the cross, he understands what it is to save the soul.

The Lord tells us that if a man cares for himself so much and is unwilling to deny himself, take up the cross, suffer, or submit to God, the ultimate end of saving his soul will be losing his soul. Losing the soul means to suffer ultimately, losing what one delights in and failing to receive what pleases him.

"Whoever loses his soul-life for My sake." This is the denying of the self and taking up of the cross spoken of above. To lose the soul means the same as denying the self. The Lord reckons that if a man is willing to forsake all the pleasures of the soul for His sake and suffer according to God's will, he "shall find" his soul. This means that whoever is willing for the Lord's sake to forsake his own mind and what he takes pleasure in, to prohibit his heart from finding satisfaction in the things of the world, and to endure much pain and suffering, the Lord will cause him to gain what his heart takes pleasure in, obtain satisfaction, enjoy blessing, and become happy at another time.

After reading the above verse, we know what the meaning of the salvation of the soul is. This verse shows us that salvation of the soul means to make the soul happy, to follow what the heart desires, and to gain satisfaction. Losing the soul means to deprive the self of happiness, not following what the heart desires, and not having satisfaction.

Hence, to lose the soul is definitely not what we usually refer to as perdition. The Lord Jesus shows us that saving the soul means to be unwilling to deny the self or take up the cross, and losing the soul means to be willing to deny the self and take up the cross. It is obvious that this is not related to what we commonly know as salvation or perdition. If saving the soul means gaining eternal life, why does the Lord Jesus say that one should lose the soul for His sake? If losing the soul means going to the lake of fire, is it conceivable that the Lord Jesus wants us to go to the lake of fire for His sake when He told us to lose our soul? Therefore, this verse does not refer in the slightest to the matter of gaining eternal life and going to the lake of fire. Losing the soul in the first part of the verse must mean the same as losing the soul in the second part of the verse. If we take "whoever wants to save his soul-life shall lose it" to mean that whoever does not deny himself shall go to the lake of fire, then

the next part "whoever loses his soul-life for My sake shall find it" would have to mean that whoever goes to the lake of fire for His sake shall find eternal life. This is absurd. Therefore, the meaning is simply that if a saved Christian will not let his soul (all his senses) suffer, his soul will certainly suffer in the future. If he is willing to let his soul suffer for the Lord's sake, in the future his soul will certainly not suffer.

Moreover, if saving the soul means gaining eternal life and losing the soul means going to the lake of fire, what the Lord Jesus says here is not connected to what went before. This word was spoken to the disciples who had eternal life already. Furthermore, a non-Christian could never deny himself, take up the cross, or follow the Lord. If the Lord wanted them to gain eternal life, the Lord would certainly have told them to believe; He would definitely not have told them to deny the self in order to gain eternal life. Only one who has already gained eternal life possesses the possibility of denying the self, taking up the cross, and following the Lord. What a sinner, who is without eternal life, should do is not follow the Lord, but believe in Him so that he can gain eternal life.

"For what shall a man be profited if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul-life? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul-life?" Our Lord continues to speak of the unprofitability of a man losing his soul through saving it. He means that if a man does not deny himself, take up the cross, and closely follow Him, but acts according to the pleasure of his soul in order to give satisfaction to his soul, even to the extent of gaining the whole world, a time will come when he will lose his soul. A momentary saving of the soul with the result of losing it in the end is unprofitable in the Lord's eyes. Although a man can gain much happiness through going after his own desires, the Lord says that in the end he will lose his soul and lose all happiness. According to the Lord, gaining the soul at the end is much better than gaining the soul at the beginning. He says that there is nothing a man can exchange for the satisfaction of the soul at the end. This means that a man should lose his soul beforehand rather than to lose it at the end.

The Lord tells us that whoever will save his soul will lose it. At what time will he lose it? If a man saves his soul now, when will he lose it? The Lord says that whoever loses his soul for His sake will find it. When will this be? To answer this question, He goes on, "For the Son of Man is to come in the glory

of His Father with His angels, and then He will repay each man according to his doings."

"His doings" means his deeds in this life. "His doings" can be divided into two aspects: the saving of one's soul in this life and the losing of one's soul for the Lord's sake in this life. To "repay each man according to his doings" is to cause those who save their soul to lose it and to cause those who lose their soul for the Lord's sake to find it. According to the Lord's word, when will he who saves his soul lose it, and when will he who loses his soul for the Lord's sake find it? He says that it will be at the time of His coming. Therefore, we need to see clearly that if a man cares for himself now, makes himself happy, and is not willing to suffer for the Lord, at the Lord's coming, he will be rebuked by the Lord, not obtain the Lord's glory, and may even weep and gnash his teeth. If a man is willing to forsake his rights now, be totally separated from the world, and faithfully submit to the will of God, at the time of the Lord's coming he will win the praise of the Lord, enjoy the joy of the Lord, and be fully satisfied in his heart and mind.

The Lord's coming and His repaying particularly refer to His kingship in the kingdom because after the Lord tells us of His coming, He tells us where His coming is. Verse 28 says, "The Son of Man coming in His kingdom." Therefore, the Lord means that when He comes to earth to be king for a thousand years, some shall reign with Him, but some shall not.

The main point of this portion of the Word is that there are two kinds of disciples who have believed in the Lord and have eternal life. One kind denies the self and takes up the cross; the other kind is not willing to deny the self and take up the cross. The latter, seeking to gain the pleasures of the world for the self, are not willing to lose the soul; the former are willing to forsake all and lose their soul for the Lord's sake. A disciple is a person set apart from the sinners. But the Lord sets the self-denying disciples apart from the non-self-denying disciples. We should know that our future position in the kingdom will be determined by our deeds today. What is gained today is the same in nature as what will be gained in the future. What is lost today is also the same in nature as what will be lost in the future. If today's gain means gaining the world and the denial of suffering, then the future's gain must be the gaining of the world and freedom from suffering. If today's loss means forsaking the world and the denial of one's own will, then the future's loss must also be losing the world and the non-fulfillment of one's own will. The

Lord means that whoever receives full satisfaction from the world now will lose his reigning position with the Lord in the future. From this we see that the salvation of the soul is very different from what we usually refer to as the salvation of the spirit (which means the salvation of gaining eternal life).

How is the spirit saved? "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). John 3 tells us that "he who believes...has eternal life" (v. 36). Once a man believes, his spirit is saved. Hence, saving the spirit means gaining eternal life. How is the soul saved? This portion of the Word tells us that only when a man loses his soul for the Lord's sake can his soul be saved. The salvation of the spirit is the gaining of eternal life, while the salvation of the soul is the gaining of the kingdom.

My spirit is saved by Jesus bearing the cross for me, whereas my soul is saved through my bearing of the cross.

The spirit is saved because Jesus denied Himself for me, while the soul is saved by my denying of my self and following the Lord.

The salvation of the spirit is based on believing. Once a man believes, the matter is settled forever and cannot be shaken. The salvation of the soul depends upon a life-long matter and a journey which has been completed.

The salvation of the spirit is based on faith because "he who believes...has eternal life" (John 3:36). The salvation of the soul is based on deeds because "He will repay each man according to his doings" (Matt. 16:27). Even if all the demons rise up from hell to confound me, they cannot make me perish, and even if all the angels come down from heaven to smite me, they cannot make me perish either. Even the Triune God Himself cannot make me perish. Once the spirit is saved, eternal life is assured. But the salvation of the soul cannot be settled today; it can only be gained at the time of the Lord's second coming.

The salvation of the spirit is a matter of today because, once a man believes, he has eternal life. The salvation of the soul is experienced at the time of the coming of the Son of Man.

The salvation of the spirit is the gift of grace today because "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). The salvation of

the soul is a reward. It is a reward gained at the Lord's second coming by those who follow the Lord faithfully all their life.

For a man's soul to be saved, he must be one whose spirit is saved first. If the spirit is not saved, there is no possibility for the soul to be saved. We often speak of the salvation of the "spirit-soul" [a Chinese idiomatic expression]; actually, according to the Bible, it is the salvation of the soul.

MARK 8:31-38

The record in Mark 8:31-38 is largely the same as in Matthew, but there is a little difference, which I shall now point out.

"But whoever will lose his soul-life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it" (v. 35). Here three words are added, "and the gospel's." Most people think that this refers to those who preach the gospel for the Lord. But if this is the case, would it not mean that only the soul of the preachers will be saved? It does not say "the preaching of the gospel's"; it only says "the gospel's." What gospel is this gospel? It is the gospel spoken of in Mark 1:1: "The gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." This gospel is the great salvation mentioned in Hebrews 2:3-4, which is "in leading many sons into glory" (Heb. 2:10). This is not the gospel of leaving Egypt and being freed from the slavery of sin; it is the gospel of entering into Canaan to receive glory.

"Loses his soul-life for My sake" (Matt. 16:25), is the result of being constrained by love. To "lose his soul-life for...the gospel's [sake]" (Mark 8:35) is for the benefit of one's own future, which is for the sake of the kingdom.

"For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation" (Mark 8:38). This indicates that he who is not willing to lose his soul-life is not willing to suffer for the Lord and His words in this age. In an adulterous and sinful generation, witnessing for the Lord's words indeed requires the losing of the soul. Unless a man really loses his soul, he cannot, in such a generation, witness for the Lord, much less shamelessly witness for Him. Many of God's children are never willing, nor do they dare, to witness before man for the Lord who purchased them. The reason is that they want to save their faces and are afraid of others' ridicule. This is to save one's soul in this life. Such a person will definitely suffer loss at the time of the kingdom. Everyone who is not willing to lose his soul in this age will not see

the glory of the Lord. Everyone who will be a co-king with the Lord will have to lose his soul. Everyone who loses his soul in this age will find it in the coming age.

LUKE 17:26-37

"And even as it happened in the days of Noah, so will it be also in the days of the Son of Man: they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day in which Noah entered into the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, even as it happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; 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. In that day, he who will be on the housetop and his goods in the house, let him not come down to take them away; and he who is in the field, likewise, let him not turn back to the things behind. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to preserve his soul-life will lose it, and whoever loses it will preserve it alive. I tell you, In that night there will be two on one bed; the one will be taken and the other will be left. There will be two women grinding together; the one will be taken but the other will be left. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left. And they answered and said to Him, Where, Lord? And He said to them, Where the body is, there also will the vultures be gathered together."

These verses tell us the time when the soul is either saved or lost. The words in verses 34-35, "I tell you, In that night there will be two on one bed; the one will be taken and the other will be left. There will be two women grinding together; the one will be taken but the other will be left," refer to the time of rapture. The difference here is that one will be raptured and one will be left. The word "taken" means to be raptured to heaven (Gen. 5:24); therefore, what is spoken of in verse 33, "Whoever seeks to preserve his soul-life will lose it, and whoever loses it will preserve it alive," means that whoever saves his soul in this age will be left behind at the appearing of the Son of Man; whoever loses his soul in this age will be raptured at the appearing of the Son of Man. There is no difference between the two persons, neither any difference in their work nor any difference in the place. But in the matter of rapture, there is a difference! In an instant, there will be a tremendous difference!

This is a sober matter! If we wish to be raptured, to see the Lord and enter into the kingdom, we must first lose the soul in this age. We must forsake the world for the Lord's sake and forsake everything that is not in accord with the Lord's will; we must abandon all that entangles us and hinders our heart from going upward. If we want to save our soul and cannot bear to forsake everything, we will, like Lot's wife, not be able to arrive at the place where the Lord will rapture us, even though we will not perish in Sodom and Gomorrah together with the sinners. There may not be any difference in gaining salvation and receiving eternal life, but there has to be a difference in the matter of the rapture.

LUKE 12:15-21

What is the meaning of losing the soul? We can find the explanation from reading Luke 12:15-21: "And He said to them, Watch and guard yourself from all covetousness, for no one's life is in the abundance of his possessions. And He told them a parable, saying, The land of a certain rich man brought forth abundantly. And he reasoned in himself, saying, What shall I do, for I have no place where I may gather my crops? And he said, I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and I will gather there all my wheat and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; rest, eat, drink, be merry. But God said to him, Foolish one, this night they are requiring your soul from you; and the things which you have prepared, whose will they be? So is he who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." We can say that "to gain the soul" is to let the soul gain satisfaction and happiness and to let the soul have enjoyment, while "to lose the soul" is to let the soul be sorrowful, painful, and poor. Because of the abundance of his food and his goods, the soul of this rich man is already happy and satisfied in this age. He has already given his soul enjoyment; he has gained his soul in this age.

Therefore, to gain the soul is to let the soul have happiness in this age and to lose the soul is to leave nothing for the soul in this age. Our eyes see, our ears hear, and our hands and feet touch; but the one that is conscious of the happiness in them is the soul.

The soul is the seat of our natural desires. The soul causes us to have sentiments and enjoyment. The desires of the soul strongly demand satisfaction. Beautiful music can soothe emotions; literature and philosophy

can elevate thoughts. But if we gain satisfaction from these things in this age, we will lose satisfaction in the coming age. If we have already gained the comfort given by these things in this age, we will lose the glory of the kingdom in the coming age.

Therefore, the one who saves his soul in this age is a Christian believer who has gained in this age the joy of ears and eyes and the happiness of the heart and mind; in the coming age he will lose such joy and happiness. Whoever gains that which belongs to this age will not gain that which belongs to the coming age. If a man loses in this age, he will have gain in the coming age. We should now understand the meaning of the salvation of the soul. To gain all the glory, joy, and satisfaction in the kingdom is to gain the soul; to lose all the glory, joy, and satisfaction in the kingdom is to lose the soul.

After we are saved, we cannot be unsaved. But our deeds have much to do with our position in the kingdom. What are you now pursuing? It is very difficult for the young ones to forsake the pleasures of the world. Many want to get satisfaction from housing, food, clothing and entertainment. This is to save their soul today; hence, they will surely lose their soul in the future. A saved person will not go to hell, but in the kingdom there are blessings which he will miss!

The Lord does not teach us asceticism. However, the Lord does not want us to be attracted by these things. These things are all legitimate, but legitimate things are not all profitable. Therefore, Paul says, "All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable" (1 Cor. 10:23). Whether clothing, food, or housing, you should not have the consciousness that you are enjoying something. Instead you should realize that these things are just good for glorifying God. Whenever you have any enjoyment, there is a problem. All that gives enjoyment to your soul saves your soul. The important thing is that one should not enjoy any kind of happiness that is not proper.

The one who loves the world is the one who saves his soul. But sin has entered the world. You should not, therefore, gain anything from this sinful world.

CHAPTER TEN

SALVATION OF THE SOUL (2)

CWWN, The (Set 1) Vol. 17:

Notes on Scriptural Messages (1), Issue No. 7

MATTHEW 10:34-39

Verse 34: "Do not think that I come to bring peace on the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." Why did the Lord say this? It was because people held the concept that He came to bring peace to the earth. To counter such a thought, He told them clearly, "I have not come to bring peace." Later we shall see that "peace" here refers not to the absence of war but to a situation in the family.

"I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." The sword here does not refer to a sword used in battle; neither does it refer to causing warfare on earth. In the original text, it means to cast a sword to the earth. Many people do recognize this fact. In Luke 2:35, Simeon said to Mary, "And a sword will pierce through your own soul also." The word "sword" here signifies that we will not be happy throughout our entire lifetime and that something like a sword will pierce through our hearts and cause us to suffer. What the Lord meant is that He came not for our blessing but to cause us hurt.

Verse 35: "For I have come to set men at variance: a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." This verse begins with the word "for." This indicates that this verse explains the last verse; that is, it explains what it means "to bring...a sword." Initially, there was a sweet relationship between father and son; now, there is alienation. The daughter is against the mother, and the daughter-in-law is against the mother-in-law.

Verse 36: "And a man's enemies will be those of his household." There are enemies and there is bitterness. The loved ones within one's family have turned against him and have hurt him. Within the family there is enmity and malice.

Verse 37: "He who loves father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter above Me is not worthy of Me." "Not worthy" is mentioned twice in this verse. Have you ever wondered why one should love the Lord above his parents and children? If you love just one person in this whole world more than you love the Lord, you cannot be His disciple. You can only be His disciple on the condition that you love Him wholly. This is the condition for becoming the Lord's disciple. You cannot love equally the Lord and men at the same time; this is not possible.

Verse 38: "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." This verse sums up what has been said before—this is a cross! What is it to take the cross? The Lord did not say, "He who does not take up his burden and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." He said, "He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." A burden is not a cross. Burdens are unavoidable; taking the cross is optional.

How the first cross was, so will the hundreds and thousands of crosses thereafter be. Just as the first cross was the Lord's choosing, the crosses should be something that we choose.

Some people think that when they are in difficulties or in want, they are bearing the cross. Actually, this is not so because even if they were not believers, situations like these may naturally happen to them. Every cross must be of our own choosing. However, we must be careful that we do not create a cross for ourselves. We ought to take the cross, not make a cross.

It is a fallacy to regard everything which befalls us as a cross. It is just as wrong to create a cross by producing our own suffering. None of these are bearing the cross in reality.

What then is the cross? It must correspond to what the Lord Jesus said, "My Father,...Your will be done" (Matt. 26:42). The Lord asked the Father to not do according to what the Son wills but according to what the Father wills; this is the cross. To take the cross is to choose the Father's will. Let me say an honest word: if we do not choose the cross daily, there will be no cross for us to take. If the Lord were to wait for the cross to come to Him before He would bear it, how could a cross go to Him in heaven? The Lord chose the cross! He "emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming

obedient even unto death, and that the death of a cross." The Lord said, "No one takes it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again" (John 10:18). Accordingly, our cross must also be out of our own choice.

Concerning the necessities of life, we also have a choice. We can choose what to wear, what to eat, and how to dwell. However, we should seek these things only to the extent of meeting our physical needs. If our emotion expects to derive pleasure and satisfaction from these necessities, we are not taking the cross. We cannot impose on others what sort of dress to wear, what kind of food to eat, or what type of house to live in. Nevertheless, whoever intends to be satisfied through these things is not bearing the cross. No one dares to say what one should or should not have, but everyone should ask himself whether or not his clothing, food, and shelter are, in fact, affording him soul pleasure and satisfaction.

Anything that is for the supply of our needs, God sanctions. Clothing, food, and shelter are all necessary. Even the Old Testament shows us how God provided for the children of Israel. He was mindful of their needs, yet He never intended that His children should indulge in those things. If we indulge ourselves in the matters of clothing, food and shelter, we are not taking the cross.

Too often people dress and eat not to protect their body, or to fill their hunger, but for sheer pleasure. Indeed, our physical needs must be met. But we should not gratify our emotion and its demands in the least.

Does God really interfere with man's clothing, eating, dwelling, and all his dealings? Yes, He does. And this constitutes the cross. Let us cite an example. When Adam was in the garden of Eden, whatever he needed was supplied to him. He could freely eat of every tree, but he was not to eat of one tree, that is, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If one were to eat of that tree, not because he wanted to satisfy his need, but because the fruits were pleasant to the sight, good for food, and enabled one to know good and evil, that would be a lust. God allows whatever is within the bounds of the necessities of our human living and nothing more. Clothing, food, shelter, and all such things of the world must be for the purpose of supplying our needs, not for gratifying our lust! Regarding these matters, we should live absolutely according to God's will. If we do not, we may ill-treat our own bodies according to the

self-will of our flesh and may esteem ourselves holier than others when, in fact, we are practicing the doctrine of asceticism mentioned in Colossians 2, which is "not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh" (v. 23). At the same time, we should remember that God has not allowed us to indulge in the things of this world.

Verse 39: "He who finds his soul-life shall lose it, and he who loses his soul-life for My sake shall find it." This verse concludes this portion of the word. What is it to take the cross? It is to lose the soul-life for the Lord's sake and to be in sorrow and distress for the Lord's sake. Those who refuse to be sorrowful and do not restrain their emotions, choosing rather to gratify their souls, will lose their soul-lives. To lose the soul-life for the Lord's sake is to deny the soul its satisfaction, requests, and desires. If, on account of the Lord, we choose not to pursue the things which we naturally enjoy and the things which we earnestly desire, we are losing our soul-life for the Lord's sake.

The meaning of gaining the soul-life today must be the same as the meaning of gaining the soul-life in the coming age. Likewise, the meaning of losing the soul-life today must be the same as the meaning of losing the soul-life in the coming age. The meaning in both cases must be the same.

To lose the soul-life for the Lord's sake means not allowing the soul to have satisfaction and enjoyment in this age. To lose the soul-life in the coming age means that the soul will not find satisfaction and enjoyment in the kingdom. In that day, there shall be a kind of people whose soul-life will be satisfied and another kind whose soul-life will not be satisfied. Whoever has satisfied his soul-life in this age and has had all things his way, having taken a supply in excess of his needs and having enjoyed a great many things, will not find anything in the coming kingdom. Whoever loses all these things in this age for the Lord's sake will be satisfied by God in the kingdom. Everyone who overcomes the world will definitely have satisfaction in the kingdom.

The salvation of the spirit is determined at the time we believed on the Lord. The salvation of the soul is determined by how we walk in this age. If you dress, eat, make friends, and do everything the way you like, I will tell you by the Lord's authority that you will have no share of the glory in the kingdom. The Gospel of Luke says, "Blessed are those who weep now...Woe to you who are satiated now" (Luke 6:21, 25). Why is it woe to those who are full? It is because they have already been filled. Why are those who weep now blessed?

It is because they shall be filled in the coming age. Herein lies the distinction between woe and blessing.

LUKE 14:25-35

Verse 25: "And there were great crowds going along with Him, and He turned and said to them..." Why was there a great crowd with Jesus? It is because He had just preached the gospel by means of a parable (vv. 16-24). And just like the parable, many were invited, and whoever would eat came. The "many" are the Christians. It is a joy to be saved, and it is wonderful to continue in the enjoyment of God's grace. But to the very people who were with Him, the Lord turned and had a further word for them. He meant, "Yes, you are saved, but to follow Me there is a condition." The Lord raised the standard of the truth. Even such a great crowd was not enough reason for Him to lower the standard that God had prescribed. Therefore, though the truths concerning the kingdom and the kingship be high, neither should we refrain from speaking them on account of men.

The gate which opens to salvation through faith in Jesus is wide, but the gate which opens to following the Lord and being glorified with Him is narrow. "Him who comes to Me I shall by no means cast out" (John 6:37b). This is to be saved. However, to follow the Lord and be His disciple, there are certain conditions.

Verse 26: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, and moreover, even his own soul-life, he cannot be My disciple." The Lord brought up the matter of the soul-life again. First He mentioned the father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters. Finally, He mentioned the soul-life. If only man would not value his soul-life, all would be well. We should lay aside anything that brings our soul delight and pleasure.

The Lord did not say that you should cast out your father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters; rather, He said to do away with your natural life, that is, to channel all the love you have for these things to Him. This is absolutely necessary. When anyone follows Him, He specifically sets this huge obstacle in front of them. If they are able to go through it, they can go through anything in the future. The Lord does not wait for them to come through the

gate before placing the obstacle before them; He makes it difficult right from the start. They are qualified to be His disciples only if they get through.

After the Lord has saved a person, He lays down this condition at the gate. He does not give one the condition after he has become a Christian for three or five years. Whether or not one can be His disciple is determined from the very beginning.

Verse 27: "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." This verse explains the foregoing verses, which are on the bearing of the cross.

Following this, the Lord speaks of three parables, which explain the matter of the bearing of the cross.

A. The Parable of Building a Tower—vv. 28-30

Verse 28: "For which of you, wanting to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?" When the Lord spoke of "calculating the cost," do we not take it to mean that we should just forget about the building of this tower if we do not have the money? If that is the case, does it mean that He has not called many to follow Him? If they do not have sufficient funds, does it mean that they should give up building the tower? No, they should not give up, for if everyone were to put in every single penny he has, it would definitely be sufficient, and no one would dare to say that he does not have enough. What the Lord was saying was that when a man wants to build a tower, it is a question of whether or not he is willing to put in all his money for the building. For example, if five hundred dollars is required to build a tower, but the man is only willing to put in three hundred, keeping the remaining two hundred, one cannot say that his funds are inadequate. It is inadequate only because a portion of his money is kept for other use. If one keeps back a portion of his love for others, he will not be able to love Christ. He must hate his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters and must turn his heart away from them. The Lord does not ask how much you have given Him; He asks if you have given Him your all.

Verses 29-30: "Lest perhaps, once he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all those looking on will begin to mock him, saying, This man began

to build and was not able to finish." This is the end of him who would not wholly love the Lord. He can only lay a foundation without building the tower because he is holding back something from the Lord.

B. The Parable of War—vv. 31-32

Verse 31: "Or what king, going to engage another king in war, will not first sit down and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet the one coming against him with twenty thousand?" This does not mean that ten thousand soldiers are all the king has; it means only ten thousand are mobilized. If he is willing to send out the entire nation, he will certainly win.

Verse 32: "Otherwise, while he is yet at a distance, he sends an envoy and asks for the terms of peace." This means that if he is not willing to mobilize the entire force, it would be better for him to ask for terms of peace while there is still time and acknowledge defeat.

If everyone is willing to give his all, whether to build a tower or fight a battle, it will be enough; if everyone holds back a portion, it will come short. Suppose I go into the Bible Society with sixty cents, and the book I want costs sixty cents. If I pay ten cents for it, it will be inadequate. If I pay fifty-nine cents and keep one cent, it will still be inadequate. Whosoever does not bear his cross and follow after the Lord surely is not worthy of being, and cannot be, His disciple.

Whoever loves the world a little is not fit for the kingdom. But even those whose hands are on the plow are not fit for the kingdom if they look back.

It is not a question of being sufficient or insufficient, but a question of whether or not we have given our all. This is the cross. We must bear the cross. We must put our all on the cross. Some may ask, how do you know that this parable teaches us to lay our all on the cross? We know it from the Lord's own word in the next verse.

Verse 33: "In the same way therefore everyone of you who does not forsake all his own possessions cannot be My disciple." This verse is a continuation of the previous verse. The Lord said that the problem with the above two cases was not that they did not have but that they would not renounce all they had. Often we cannot make up our mind; we want both. On the one hand, we love

the world; on the other hand, we love the Lord. We cannot give ourselves to absolutely love the Lord, and yet we are ashamed to absolutely love the world for fear of offending the Lord. There is the unwillingness to commit everything for the building, and yet there is also a sense of misgiving if we do not at least put in a certain amount. The result of this is to lay a little of the foundation and leave the tower unfinished. If there is not the willingness to mobilize the entire force, one can only leave some to defeat or send an envoy to negotiate for peace. Those who are this way should not even consider being the Lord's disciples. To be His disciple, one must renounce all that he has. He cannot hold onto the world with one hand and hold onto the Lord with the other. He must abandon one—either the world or Christ.

C. The Parable of Salt—vv. 34-35

This parable shows us the outcome of the two kinds of persons previously mentioned. According to Matthew 5:13, which says, "You are the salt of the earth," the salt refers to the Christian.

Verse 34: "Therefore salt is good; but if even the salt becomes tasteless, with what will its saltiness be restored?" Salt is good and is beneficial to men. Taste signifies separation. It is most important that a Christian be separated from others. If the salt becomes tasteless, nothing will restore its saltiness. Suppose someone buys a piece of meat and wants to season it with salt. If he has the meat but has no salt, there is still the possibility of having the savor; but if he has both the meat and the salt, yet the salt has lost its taste, there is no possibility of having the savor.

Verse 35: "It is fit neither for the land nor for the manure pile; they will throw it out." If we lose our taste, that is, if we are not separated, the consequence will be what is in this verse; we will be thrown out.

The "land" signifies the kingdom. It is not fit to put the Christian who has lost his taste into God's kingdom.

The "manure pile" is a filthy and unclean place; it signifies Gehenna, which is the lake of fire. Neither is it fit to put the Christian who has lost his taste into the lake of fire, because he is already saved.

"They will throw it out." Since he is neither fit for the kingdom nor for the lake of fire, he is cast out, that is, cast outside of the glory of the kingdom.

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear." This is a warning. Anything which severs us from Christ also causes us to lose our taste. To preserve the taste is to have strength; to lose the taste is to lose strength. This is a serious matter! We must not love the world; we must wholly love the Lord. Otherwise, the kingdom will have nothing to do with us. It is not a question of how much we have done. Rather, is our all on the altar? Today is the time for consecration to the Lord; to consecrate on that day will be too late.

These three parables depict the life of a believer who is not willing to lose his soul-life in this age. The reason for his unwillingness to give his all to build and fight and the reason for his becoming tasteless salt as a consequence of mingling with the world is that he loves his own soul-life. He cannot bear to have the self suffer. He is not willing to forsake the pleasures of this world. He can only care for the present age because he has but a dim vision of the glory of the coming kingdom. If we are willing to renounce the demands of our soul, deny the self, bear the cross, and do God's will, it will not be difficult for us to build, fight, or hate our father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters. It will not even be difficult to be completely separated from the world and be the salt with taste. If we do not lose our soul-life but walk according to our likes and dislikes in this age, and if our consecration is not thorough, we shall be thrown out during the kingdom age and be mocked as those not befitting the Lord's discipleship.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SALVATION OF THE SOUL (3)

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Notes on Scriptural Messages (1), Issue No. 8

Scripture Reading: Luke 21:5-19

By reading through verses 5 to 19, we know that this portion of the word also speaks concerning the salvation of the soul. "In your endurance you will possess your souls" (v. 19). I have said before that the Bible always mentions faith when it talks about our salvation. However, here it says that by your endurance you will gain your souls. Hence, there must be a difference between the salvation of the soul and the salvation of the spirit.

If I remember correctly, the Gospel of John mentions the matter of receiving eternal life through faith on thirty-five occasions. In the whole New Testament, justification by faith, receiving eternal life by faith, and salvation through faith are mentioned one hundred fifty times. Here, however, it mentions endurance. To endure is not to believe; it is a work. So the salvation of the soul is very different from the receiving of eternal life.

Let us see how these verses talk about the salvation of the soul. Verses 5-7 say, "And as some were speaking about the temple, that it was adorned with beautiful stones and consecrated offerings, He said, As for these things which you are looking at, the days will come in which there will not be left a stone upon a stone which will not be thrown down. And they questioned Him, saying, Teacher, when therefore will these things be? And what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?" The temple is the holy temple in Jerusalem. "You" refers to the disciples. "These things" refers to what the Lord Jesus said in verse 6: "The days will come in which there will not be left a stone upon a stone which will not be thrown down." This signifies the coming destruction of the temple. Take note of verse 7. The questions asked are very similar to those in chapter twenty-four of Matthew; nevertheless, there is a difference. Let us compare the two.

Matthew 24:3: "And as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, Tell us, When will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming and of the consummation of the age?" Matthew is concerned not only with the destruction of Jerusalem but also with the Lord's coming and the completion of the age. Luke 21 is concerned only with the matter of Jerusalem's destruction. In Luke the disciples asked when these things (Jerusalem's destruction) would be and what would be the sign before these things take place. They did not ask anything about the Lord's coming back or the completion of the age. We should remember that three things were asked in Matthew. The first was, "When will these things be?" The second and the third were, "What will be the sign of Your coming and of the consummation of the age?" Only one thing was asked in Luke, that is, when would these things be and what would be the sign before these things take place? The questions recorded in Luke are identical to the first question in Matthew.

The destruction of Jerusalem was fulfilled in A.D. 70. The Lord's word about there not being one stone left upon another was fulfilled.

Verses 8-9: "And He said, See that you are not led astray, for many will come in My name, saying, I am the Christ! and, The time has drawn near! Do not go after them. And when you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be terrified, for these things must take place first; but the end does not come immediately." This is what the Lord instructed the disciples to watch for at the time when Jerusalem would be destroyed. Church history can attest to the fact that when the Lord ascended, some did come in His name saying, "I am the Christ." The Lord meant that when some come claiming to be Christ and when the disciples hear of wars and revolutions, they must realize that the end has not yet come.

Verses 10-12: "Then He said to them, Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all these things they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for the sake of My name." All these were fulfilled during the age of the apostles. They were apprehended, persecuted, scourged, and imprisoned, and they were brought before kings and governors.

Verse 13: "It will turn out to you for a testimony." They suffered so much, yet those sufferings became the very occasions for them to testify. They testified in synagogues, before Felix, and before those in Rome.

Verses 14-18: "Settle it therefore in your hearts not to take thought beforehand how to reply in defense, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all those opposing you will not be able to resist or refute. And you will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all because of My name, yet a hair of your head shall by no means perish." Here, the Lord prophesied concerning what they would experience.

Verse 19: "In your endurance you will possess your souls." The disciples are held responsible for this last matter. When all these sufferings and persecutions come, they must endure; in this way they will possess their souls.

To possess the soul means to reign with the Lord and share in His glory when He comes. If possessing the soul means the same as receiving eternal life, then the words "possess your soul" in verse 19 do not make sense. It is saying that if, in the midst of extreme hardship, we are able to endure, we will possess our soul. Through faith we have eternal life and are saved. But here we are told that to possess our soul we need to endure all these sufferings.

JOHN 12:25

"He who loves his soul-life loses it; and he who hates his soul-life in this world shall keep it unto eternal life." The Lord says here that it is possible for one to lose his soul-life. One loses his soul-life only because he loves it.

What is it to love the soul-life? It means to gratify our desires and please our emotions. For example, the Lord calls us to stay away from a certain matter; if we want to obey Him, we must lay down our self. Each time we want to obey the Lord, we must lay down the self. If we seek to do His will while loving our soul-life, we will fail. Perhaps the Lord wants us to drop something which we enjoy doing or give up a person or an object we like. If we love our soul-life, we will not succeed. Many times we are entangled with a person, thing, or matter. Many are beset by friends; they would rather have the friends than lose the soulish enjoyment in this age.

We recognize that many of the bad things are sins. However, we do not realize that we can also be entangled by the things we normally enjoy. We are aware that money is too base and contemptible a thing to be mentioned, yet many cannot part with it. Even a dress or a meal may ensnare a person. Why is it so difficult for man not to love his soul-life? Because not loving the soul-life means to cause it to suffer, while loving the soul-life means not to allow it to suffer. Such a person, however, will undoubtedly lose his soul-life because he has already cared for his soul-life and allowed it to enjoy!

When does one lose his soul-life? It will be when the Lord establishes His kingdom. Whoever loves his soul-life in this age will not enjoy glory or reign with the Lord at that time. To have eternal life through faith is certain; our going to heaven is certain. But to reign as a king and ensure that the soul-life will find enjoyment in the millennium requires that we do not love our soul-life today.

Brothers and sisters, I have said before and I say again: God gives sinners a choice between heaven and hell. If a sinner can see clearly, no doubt he will choose heaven. Now God gives Christians a choice between the kingdom and the world. Do we choose the kingdom? Or do we choose the world? How sad that although a sinner prefers heaven, many Christians prefer to have the world! We think that it is good enough to be saved, yet after we are saved, God still puts the coming kingdom before us for us to choose.

Those who are full now will not be filled in glory; they will lose their enjoyment. The Lord said that whoever loves himself shall lose his soul-life; whoever hates his soul-life in this world shall keep it unto eternal life. Our soul is linked to the world. To love the soul in this world means to care for ourselves in this world. Good food, nice clothing, friends, happiness, compliments, fame—all are desirable. However, they nourish the soul-life as food nourishes us. To nourish the soul-life now is to lose the soul-life in the kingdom.

To lose the soul-life is not to be cast into hell. It is to cause the soul to suffer in that it cannot reign with the Lord. In the kingdom age, the Lord will assign ten cities or five cities for us to rule. According to the Old Testament prophets, this will be such a pleasant time. How pleasant it will be to rule ten cities or five cities in such an atmosphere! However, whoever has already gained his soul-life in this world shall lose his soul-life in the kingdom. This is serious!

Whoever is full now and has satisfied his soul-life in the present age, will not gain anything in the kingdom. I have said this many times, and I will keep saying it: to hate the soul-life in this world is to not allow the soul-life to have satisfaction and enjoyment in this age. It is to turn your back to the world and your face to God, and to be armed with a will to suffer, whatever the situation may be. If one does this, he will gain his soul-life in the kingdom. If you gain something here, it follows that you will lose something there. Either you gain or you lose. To gain today is to suffer loss in the future. To gain in the future, you must suffer loss today.

Once a person believes, it is definite that he has eternal life, and it is definite that every believer will be in the New Jerusalem. But before heaven and earth pass away, some believers will have no part in the kingdom. "He who hates his soul-life in this world shall keep it unto eternal life." Therefore, please pay attention to this: the Lord hates two things. First, He hates our sins; second, He hates our soul-life, which is just our self. Because the Lord hates our sins, He died for us. By believing in Him, we receive eternal life. Because the Lord hates our soul-life, He wants to do away with it (that is, to eliminate the soulish life, not the function of the soul).

Here is the difference between the soul-life and sins: whatever the soul desires may not be sinful. Lying, pride, jealousy, etc., are sins. But to wear what you should not wear or eat what you should not eat is the soul-life. Nice clothing, good food, and extravagant spending cannot be considered sinful, but they certainly gratify the soul.

Madame Guyon was one who was very deep in the Lord during the seventeenth century. She clearly realized the difference between sins and the soul-life. She did not express it in the same way we do, yet her experiences verified the same thing. She was born and raised in France; her family was related to the class of nobility, and she had the title of "Madame." Each time she visited Paris, she was fearful because she knew very well that her heart would be moved by the things she saw. Later, she overcame this. However, she became fearful of another thing: to look into the mirror. She was very attractive; the more she looked at herself in the mirror, the more she was conscious of her beauty. She even thought that when she walked, she carried herself far more gracefully than all the other women. This is the soul-life. The soul is man's natural nature, that is, the nature he has as a creature.

If a person believes in the Lord and overcomes sins, he can enter heaven. But if he puts away the soul-life and overcomes it, he can enter the kingdom. The reason God does not allow us to indulge ourselves in the matter of clothing, food, and shelter in this age is that these things have already been infected with the world. To possess these things is to be contaminated with the world. Today even a dress or a meal readily causes us to fall into the world. However, when we are in the kingdom, no matter how much we appreciate the beautiful scenery, it will only cause us to praise God's creation the more. Even the appreciation of ourselves at that time will only motivate us to praise God for His salvation. There will be no trace of sin in the kingdom because Satan will be bound and sin will not be in this world.

When God's Son was on the earth, the only thing He took was the cross; the rest was borrowed. The manger was borrowed; the inn was borrowed; the donkey which carried Him into Jerusalem was borrowed; and the room where they kept the Passover feast was borrowed. Finally, even the tomb was borrowed. He had nothing that was not borrowed. How different we are from Him!

Those who overcome sins go to heaven; those who overcome the world go to the kingdom. This is certain. God is calling us for this one thing—to not love the world and only desire the kingdom. He wants us to hate our self and seek after the kingdom.

HEBREWS 10:38-39

Verse 38: "But My righteous one shall live by faith." The righteous ones here are us who have been saved through faith in Jesus. For the righteous ones to live by faith means that those who are saved shall live by faith day by day. Many have asked me, "If justification is by faith, and the justified ones still have to live by faith, are there then two faiths?" Well, I shall talk about the second faith later. For now, just remember that every justified person must live by faith.

"And if he shrinks back, My soul does not delight in him." "He" refers to the righteous one. "If he shrinks back." Only a believer has the possibility of shrinking back. Although a justified person is saved, it is still possible for him to shrink back. "My" refers to God. God has no pleasure in a justified person who shrinks back.

Verse 39: "But we are not of those who shrink back to ruin but of them who have faith to the gaining of the soul." What happens when one shrinks back? He shrinks back to ruin. Believers have eternal life and shall not perish. However, it is still possible for us to shrink back to ruin. What is ruin? It means that everything has become vain, destroyed, and finished. But we are "of them who have faith to the gaining of the soul." Here again, this word speaks of the salvation of the soul. To shrink back is to shrink back to ruin; to come forward is to come forward to the saving of the soul. We either shrink back to ruin or come forward to the saving of the soul.

Some think that since "shrink back to ruin" sounds so unpleasant, it must not refer to Christians. However, only a Christian has the possibility of shrinking back. Sinners have nowhere to shrink back to. Where can they shrink back to? Whoever does not believe in the Son, his sins are condemned already. Only a Christian has the possibility of shrinking back. A believer should actually be rewarded for his works on earth. But because he shrinks back, all is lost. Although he has preached the word in the Lord's name, cast out demons in the Lord's name, and performed many miracles, the Lord will not acknowledge any of those. Instead, He will say to him, "I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness" (Matt. 7:23).

However, "we are not of those who shrink back to ruin but of them who have faith to the gaining of the soul." Here it speaks of the salvation of the soul through faith. What is this faith? What is meant by "but of them who have faith to the gaining of the soul"? Let us read Hebrews 11:1. "Now faith is the substantiation of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." This is the faith for the salvation of the soul. This is the faith which the righteous ones live by. Chapter eleven should immediately follow the last verse of chapter ten. This faith is "the substantiation of things hoped for"; it is not the faith in Jesus. This faith can save your soul. This faith is "the conviction of things not seen"; it is not faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel of John mentions many times that one receives eternal life by believing in the Son. Those instances refer to the faith in the Lord. Here faith refers to a thing.

What is the thing? Let us read Hebrews 11:13-16. "All these died in faith, not receiving the promises but seeing them from afar and joyfully greeting them and confessing that they were strangers and sojourners on the earth. For those who say such things make it manifest that they seek after a country of their own. And if indeed they continued to remember that country from

which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return; but as it is, they long after a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." Have we seen it? What does it say this faith is? It is believing that God has prepared a city for them in the kingdom; it is believing that they are but strangers and sojourners on this earth, that this earth is not their country, and that everything they have is in the future and not in this present age. A city standing firmly cannot fall. The righteous ones believe in this daily, and they live by this faith. The soul is saved by this faith. Unfortunately, many believers forget that they are merely strangers and sojourners on the earth!

JAMES 1:17-21

Verses 17-18: "All good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variation or shadow cast by turning. He brought us forth by the word of truth, purposing that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures." Verse 17 mentions the gift; verse 18 says that God brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. These two verses go together. Verse 17 says that God gave a gift; verse 18 says that this gift is the eternal life which God has given us. This shows that those who received this Epistle of James already had the gift. They were already the firstfruits; they had already been brought forth of God by the word of truth and were already saved.

Verses 19-21: "You know this, my beloved brothers; but let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God. Therefore putting away all filthiness and the abundance of malice, receive in meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." That the hearers were addressed as the beloved brothers in verse 19 proves that they were saved already. It is as if James is saying, "You know that you have been regenerated and are saved, but this is not enough; you still need to `receive in meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.'" James shows us very clearly that even though a man is regenerated, his soul is not yet saved; he still needs to receive the word that is able to save his soul. The salvation of the soul is a matter which comes after regeneration. If a person is not regenerated, it is not possible for his soul to be saved. God has preached to us the word, which is the gospel of the kingdom. Now we must lose our soul-life today. I have already mentioned twice that there are many things which we ourselves are unable to do.

However, if we are willing to allow the Holy Spirit to work in us, He can do these things for us. Gaining the soul is similar to gaining eternal life; if a sinner refuses to be saved, God will not put him in heaven. Whoever will, may certainly drink freely the water of life. Nevertheless, if one is not willing to come to the Lord, He has no way to save him. Likewise, if we are not willing to lose our soul-life, neither will the Lord put us into the kingdom. We must ask the Lord to bring us to the point where we are willing to lose our soul-life; then the Lord can have a way.

1 PETER 1:3-9

Verses 3-4: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has regenerated us unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled and unfading, kept in the heavens for you." These two verses tell us that those who received this Epistle have been saved.

Verse 5: "Who are being guarded by the power of God through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed at the last time." What is the faith referred to here? It is the same faith which the righteous live by in Hebrews 10:38. Although they are saved, they still have not obtained the salvation which is ready to be revealed at the last time. It is good to be regenerated, but it is not sufficient. We still need to gain the salvation ready to be revealed at the last time.

Verses 6-8: "In which time you exult, though for a little while at present, if it must be, you have been made sorrowful by various trials, so that the proving of your faith, much more precious than of gold which perishes though it is proved by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; whom having not seen, you love; into whom though not seeing Him at present, yet believing, you exult with joy that is unspeakable and full of glory." These verses say that because of the salvation that is to come, one is able to rejoice in spite of the various trials.

Verse 9: "Receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls." Again, this verse clearly speaks of the salvation of the soul. Peter is also one who says that those who have been regenerated need a further salvation, the salvation of the soul. When will one receive this salvation? It will be received at the last time, which is the time of the Lord's manifestation on the earth. The final end

of every saved person is the same, but in the kingdom there are differences. It is true that once we believe on the Lord, we are saved. But our soul also must be saved.

1 PETER 2:11

"Beloved, I entreat you as strangers and sojourners to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." When the lusts war against the soul, the soul profits nothing.

1 PETER 2:25

"For you were like sheep being led astray, but you have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." Let us lay hold of this verse; we do have a Shepherd who oversees our souls.

Finally, I want to mention two more verses. Let us pay attention to them.

1 PETER 4:17-19

"For it is time for the judgment to begin from the house of God; and if first from us, what will be the end of those who disobey the gospel of God? And if the righteous man is saved only with difficulty, where will the ungodly and sinner appear? So then let those also who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well-doing to a faithful Creator." Let us lay hold of God's word. We are God's house already. Yet judgment begins from the house of God. Some of the righteous ones are scarcely saved! So brothers and sisters, we must suffer according to the will of God and commit our souls to the faithful Creator! We must not hold back anything for the soul-life or allow the soul-life to have enjoyment. Rather, let us suffer according to the will of God.

2 PETER 1:10-11

"Therefore, brothers, be the more diligent to make your calling and selection firm, for doing these things you shall by no means ever stumble. 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 fact that these ones were called brothers shows that they were saved. However, they still needed to be more diligent to make their calling and election firm. Eternal life, once received, cannot be shaken. But in the kingdom, some shall be shaken.

Let us compare the two phrases: "saved only with difficulty" and an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ being "richly and bountifully supplied." The one is scarcely saved and has not advanced any further than regeneration. It is like obtaining only a mark of 70 when the lowest passing mark is 70. This is a half salvation. We must be one unto whom the entrance into the kingdom is richly and bountifully supplied.

I will now relate a story to illustrate this point. At the end of the European War, there was a huge celebration in London. The turnout was unprecedented in the history of London. The war had just concluded, and the soldiers were having a victory parade and were there to be welcomed by the crowd. As the soldiers paraded through, the people cheered and applauded. In the minds of many, were it not for the courage of these soldiers, England could not have been saved. The applause persisted as the soldiers marched onward step by step. While the units passed by rank after rank, suddenly, there was a crescendo of applause; in fact, many started weeping. The nobility saluted, and even the king took off his crown. What had happened? Trailing behind was car after car of soldiers who had either broken arms, injured legs, missing limbs, or serious wounds. These were the ones who were wounded in battle. They were received with the greatest honor and respect. The soldiers who marched ahead of them made it; however, the glory they received could hardly be compared to that of these wounded soldiers.

Those who are scarcely saved will enter into heaven on that day, but they will not have a rich and abundant entrance into God's kingdom. If we have suffered on earth and forsaken things for the Lord's sake, on that day we will enjoy what those wounded soldiers enjoyed in their triumphant procession. The applause will be loud, the praises will be great, and the glory will also be great. Every one of us should endure pain and suffer loss for the Lord's sake. On that day, we will receive a crown on our head. Our soul must be saved. May we be poorer, may we suffer more, and may we forsake all for the Lord's sake. May God bless us.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE SALVATION OF GOD (1)

CWWN, The (Set 3) Vol. 62:

Matured Leadings in the Lord's Recovery (2), Chap. 44

Scripture Reading: Gen. 1:26-27; 2:7, 16-17; John 1:4, 12-13; 10:10b; 12:24;
Rom. 8:28-30, 6

Witness Lee: I still feel that Brother Nee should say something. This is why my burden is not that strong. However, I do have a feeling to say a word or two. When Brother Nee spoke a few nights ago, I had a strong feeling within myself. The brothers and sisters have not understood too much of what Brother Nee has said these days. They are still rather inexperienced in the spiritual things. They are like students who are not good at English and must start from the ABC's. Two nights ago it seemed Brother Nee could not quite release what he wanted to release in the first part of his message. Indeed, he was restricted by us. I must therefore start from something simple.

TAKING GOD'S SALVATION FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

I was saved twenty-five years ago. My salvation was a good one. It was thorough and strong. I was not only saved from sin but from the world as well. I was not saved from the world slowly. As soon as I was saved, I was released from the bondage of the world. In spite of this, it was ten years before I began to stand on God's side to see His salvation from His perspective. Prior to this, I looked at God's salvation from my perspective. God's perspective of salvation is far different from my perspective. In the past we spoke as ministers of God's word from God's perspective. But His children view salvation from their perspective. This is because they are occupied with their own preconceived ideas. Many Christians think that the work of the ministry of the word is to see things from their perspective. This is absolutely wrong; we should turn things the other way around. We do not speak from the believers' perspective but from God's perspective. The brothers and sisters often nod their head at whatever we say, but in reality they may not have seen

anything. May we drop our concepts about God's salvation and receive it from God's perspective.

THE WAY TO RECEIVE SALVATION

There are two ways to describe God's salvation. The first is an ascent from man to God. The second is a descent from God to man. The book of Romans takes the first way. Chapter one tells us about a sinful man who starts climbing up from his sinful condition. This ascent continues until 8:28-30, when it reaches the peak in glory. The Gospel of John takes the second way. It starts from God and descends to man. In speaking about experience, we start from man and move upward. But in speaking about the objective truth, we start from God and move to man. In speaking about the tabernacle itself, we see the ark and then move outward to the altar in the outer court. But in man's experience, he first touches the altar and then proceeds to enter the Holy of Holies to meet God. Today we need both aspects. We need revelation that starts from God, and we need revelation that starts from man. Under normal circumstances and in the normal way, a man first receives revelation from God and then has the experience of salvation. Then he ascends to God through the revelation he has received. The problem today is that many people start from man's side. This is the reason so many are groping in the dark and cannot find God's vision and revelation.

This is like a man looking for direction; there are two ways he can take. He can use a map to find where he is and which direction he is facing. After he is clear about these, he will proceed with little difficulty and much confidence. The other way is not to use a map but to search around, asking for the way as he moves along. People who take this way end up in the wrong place easily. They can go around in circles, or they can even be heading in the exact opposite direction.

THE REVELATION OF GOD'S SALVATION

In the past I thought that God's salvation was to save me from hell and sin, but these are actually not the first items of God's salvation. According to His plan and from His perspective, God's salvation primarily is not to deal with sin. Before 1934 I suffered much. I was painfully aware of my inward sins, my critical attitude, my jealousy, and my temper. The gross sins were gone from me the day I was saved. For a long time, however, I was living in the

experience of Romans 7. At that time I thought that God's salvation was primarily to deal with my sins. From 1934 onward I began to touch some light. During 1935 and 1936 I touched more. By 1940 I was quite clear. For a while I was so released that I would laugh, jump, and praise unceasingly.

The Revelation of Genesis 1 and 2— God's Image and God's Life

During the past few years, the light I have seen from God involves mainly two things. First, God created man to have His image (Gen. 1:26). Second, God wants man to have His life. According to Genesis 1:26-27, God created man with the intention that man would have His image. This is the first time the Bible speaks of God's relationship with man. The second time the Bible speaks of God's relationship with man is in Genesis 2:7. After God created man with the dust of the earth, He breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life. This means that God not only created man in His image; His intention was to dispense His life into man. The second time the Bible speaks of God's relationship with man is when it speaks about God's image and His life. What is God's purpose in man? He wants every one of us to have His image and His life.

According to our natural concept, we think that the goal of God's salvation is to save us from sin. God's salvation does include our deliverance from sin, but we have to realize that the main item in God's salvation is for us to have His image and His life. This is something very high and great. If the brothers and sisters have not seen this, and they only pay attention to their services, they have not yet reached the central goal of God's salvation. God's intention in creating man is for man to have His image and His life.

God's Goal Being Frustrated

Man was created, but he did not have God's life within him. God intended, anticipated, and ordained that man would eat the tree of life. This means that man would receive the life of God. However, before man received God's life, Satan came in to frustrate. Through his temptation, man ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. From that point forward, man deviated from the central goal; he sinned and fell. As a result, he was kept away from God's life. God sealed the way to the tree of life. He guarded the way to that tree with the cherubim (signifying God's glory) and the sword

(signifying God's holiness) of fire (signifying God's righteousness) which turned every way. In order to draw near to the tree of life for its fruit, a man must pass through the cherubim, the fire, and the sword. This means that in order for man to receive God into him as life, he has to meet God's requirements of righteousness, holiness, and glory. At the end of Genesis 3, man could not match God's righteousness and holiness, and he came short of God's glory. Hence, man could not receive God's life into him.

The Giving of the Law

From Genesis 3 we move on to Exodus 20. There we have the giving of the law. Twenty-five hundred years after man's creation, God gave His law on Mount Sinai. There God was surrounded by His righteousness, holiness, and glory. God was inside, and man was outside. Man could not draw near to Him. Because man did not realize his own depravity, there was the need to institute the law. But we have to know that in giving His law to man, God had no intention for man to keep it. On the contrary, He wanted man to break it. If man were to keep the law, God's plan would have been fully frustrated. Man, perhaps, would be in turmoil and be at Mount Sinai even today. Please remember that God does not expect man to keep the law. He wants to put His life into us. We want to be delivered from our temper, but God wants us to lose our temper. We want to be perfect, and we want God to help us, but God does not have such a thought at all. His salvation is not for making us perfect. His goal is for man to be like Him, to have His life and His image.

The story at Mount Sinai in Exodus is only a replay of the story in Eden in Genesis. In Eden there were two trees. One was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The other was the tree of life. After man was tempted by Satan to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and fell, there were cherubim, the sword, and the fire around the tree of life. This means that God's righteousness, glory, and holiness guarded the tree. In Exodus we also find fire on Mount Sinai, a sign of God's holiness. We have the law, which refers to God's righteousness, and we have God's glory itself. In Eden we have the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. On Mount Sinai we have the knowledge of good and evil in the law. Just as God had no intention for man to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, He had no intention for man to keep the law. This is God's consistent goal. Hence, the scene at Mount Sinai was merely a replay of the scene in Eden.

The Revelation in the Gospel of John—Life

Life Being in Christ

From Sinai we move forward for a thousand years to the New Testament. The apostle John saw that life is in Christ (John 1:4). I believe the purpose of John's word is to bring us back to Genesis 2 and 3. It shows us that the life represented by the tree of life in Eden is in Christ. The life which God spoke of at the beginning is in Christ.

The Lord Coming for Us to Have Life

The Lord declared in John 10:10: "I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly." The Lord's intention in coming to the earth is for man to have the life of God. Following this He shows us how we can have His life.

The above points are the most basic yet crucial things in the Bible. Every point requires seven or eight days to speak about it. Some people have said that all denominations do the same thing, which is to exhort men to believe in Jesus, love the Lord, follow Him, preach the gospel, and love one another. It is true that persuading men to believe in the Lord, live a good Christian life, love the Lord, and follow Him are all good things. But I hope that the brothers and sisters would spend time to study the more crucial things in the Bible.

How God's Life Can Come into Man

After the Lord spoke about His coming for man to have life in John 10, we see in chapter twelve the way His life gets into man. Verse 24 says, "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Within a grain of wheat is life. How can this life be released? It must die. If the grain does not die, it remains a single grain. But if it falls into the ground and dies and then resurrects, the life of this grain will get into many other grains. This means that in order for the Lord to enter into man as life, He must pass through the process of death and resurrection. Here we would like to point out that John's way of speaking about the Lord's death is different from ours. We think that the Lord's death is for our redemption, but this was not John's thought. He had no intention of telling us that the Lord's death was for redemption. When he spoke of the Lord's death, his

emphasis was not on redemption but on life. The falling of a grain of wheat to the ground has nothing to do with sin. It has to do with the release of life. Of the four Gospels, only the Gospel of John says that blood and water flowed out at the Lord's death. We know that the Lord shed His blood for the washing of our sins. The issue of water from the Lord's side, however, refers to the dispensing of life.

John 1:18 says that the Lord is the only Begotten in the bosom of the Father. But in chapter twenty, after the Lord resurrected from the dead, He told Mary, "I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God" (v. 17). Hallelujah, through the Lord's death and resurrection, life entered into many people. The one grain became many grains. The Father of One has now become the Father of many. These are the things that a servant of the Lord has to pay attention to in his pathway of service to the Lord.

How to Receive God's Life

John also shows us how we can receive God's life into us. John 1:12 says that as many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those who believe into His name. On the Lord's side He released His life through death. On our side we receive His life through believing. When we receive the Lord, His life enters into us, and we become the children of God. These children are begotten not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

The Peak of God's Salvation in Romans 8 and Its Experience

Romans 8:28-30 shows that God causes all things to work together in order that His life would shine out of us. Today God's children misapply Romans 8:28. They think that "all things work[ing] together for good to those who love God" means receiving blessing and peace, etc. For example, a man may try to catch a train but is delayed; he misses the train. But by missing it, he has avoided a train accident. Such a man would thank and praise God that all things indeed have worked together for him to have peace and blessing. I dare not say that the expression "all things work together for good" does not include peace and blessing. But this verse is not mainly on blessing and peace. God's central thought is not on blessing and peace but on our perfection

through the environment. The goal of this perfection is that we would be conformed to the image of His Son.

How different is man's view from God's emphasis! Man pays attention to blessing and peace, but God causes all things to work together for good for the purpose that the life within us would be released through us. For example, do we put a spoonful of lemon extract into water and leave it there? No, we stir the water with the spoon so that the lemon extract can dissolve into the water. In this way the cup of water becomes lemon juice. This stirring is the "working together of all things." God stirs up our environment in order that we can be mingled with God's life and that His life may be manifested through us. This is the reason verse 29 speaks of our conformation to the image of God's Son. If we cooperate with His life, we will have God's life within and His image without.

Romans 8:6 says, "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace." This tells us that we have God's life inwardly and have God's sovereign arrangements outwardly. The outward arrangements match the inward life. The life within issues from the mingling of God's Spirit with our spirit. God's Spirit lives within us. The life within us demands that our spirit cooperate with God's life. The main thing is that the spirit within us must follow the Holy Spirit. If we obey Him and follow Him, the result will be life and peace. Let suffering and blessing come as they may. We do not care for the outward environment. We only care for the operation of the Holy Spirit within us. The result of obeying and following is life and peace. When we say that we should touch the spirit, we are talking about touching this kind of spirit. If we set our mind on the spirit, we will have life and peace within. This life is very rich. I have only spoken of a few crucial points. In the future we will talk more about how we can go along with the operation of the Holy Spirit within us.

The Consummation of God's Salvation in Revelation— God's Life Shining Out from Man

In Revelation we find the same thing spoken of at the beginning of the Bible—the tree of life, the fruit of life, the glory of God, etc. In Revelation we find a group of people who are finally joined to God. They will see God.

Within them is the life of God. This life will shine out as the shining of God's glory. There God and man are fully mingled together. In the new heaven and new earth, temper and patience will no longer be a problem to man. God's life will shine out through man. When God's life shines out of man, there is no longer a question of sin. A Christian's goal is the New Jerusalem. For this reason, we should not have holiness and a good temper as the standard. God is not saving us from pride to humility, from unholiness to holiness, from a bad temper to a good temper. His intention is that His own life would shine out of us. This is not a matter of sinless perfection, but a matter of God's life shining out of us; it is God's glory expressed.

GOD'S GOAL BEING TO DISPENSE LIFE TO MAN

Watchman Nee: Sin occupies only a small place in the Bible. It takes up only a small part of it. We can say that sin in the Bible is incidental or accidental. Sin is not a big subject. Before man sinned, God placed him in front of the tree of life. God ordained man to have life before he ever sinned. Hence, it was not just a sinful Adam who had need of life. A sinless Adam had need of it as well.

We have the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. One supplies life and the other brings in vanity. Suppose there are two cups on this table. One is empty and the other is filled with water. If we take the cup with water, we will receive the supply. Otherwise, we will remain thirsty. In the same way, if we eat of the tree of life, we will surely receive the supply of life. Otherwise, we will remain empty. In the whole Bible only two books speak of the beginning. Genesis starts with In the beginning God., while the Gospel of John begins with In the beginning was the Word. The beginning in John precedes the beginning in Genesis. Both books are on life. This shows us that from the beginning, God's attention has been on life. To us, sin is the main problem. But to God, life is His emphasis. God gave us His Son primarily for the purpose of life, not for removing sins. We often confuse the focus and the emphasis. At times we miss the subject altogether.

God's purpose in creating man is for man to receive His life. But it is man's responsibility to take this life. God created man, yet man has to eat the fruit of the tree himself. God created Adam, but he did not create a fruit and put it directly in Adam's stomach. Man's responsibility is to eat of the fruit of the tree of life and to receive God's life into him. The basic problem with the

world is not sin, but the lack of life. In Genesis 2 God had only one concern, which was that man would eat of the tree of life and receive life. By Genesis 3 God had another concern; there was a twofold complication—sin plus the need of life. Today man's plight is that he only remembers the problem of sin; he forgets that there is also the matter of life. Nothing frustrates God's salvation as much as sin. God's salvation is for us to have His life and for God's only begotten Son to become His firstborn Son and our Brother.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE SALVATION OF GOD (2)

CWWN, The (Set 3) Vol. 62:

Matured Leadings in the Lord's Recovery (2), Chap. 45

Scripture Reading: John 1:14, 16-18; Rom. 8:6, 9-11, 13-14, 28-30

Witness Lee: The goal of God's salvation has always been to put His life into man and to make it man's life. This goal was foreordained by God before the foundation of the world. Before the world ever came into being, God planned to work His life into a group of people and to express this life through them.

COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF SALVATION

Unfortunately, during the past two thousand years of church history, very few people have seen this light clearly. Most people do not see this light. Perhaps you are one of them. Your view of God's salvation may be something like this: Our forefather Adam fell. He incurred a debt of sin before God and committed acts of sin within himself (Rom. 5:12). This fallen man could not remove his sinful debt or turn from sinful acts no matter how hard he tried. On the one hand, man has inherited the debt of sin in Adam; he is condemned by God. On the other hand, he has the life of sin within him, and spontaneously he commits acts of sin outwardly. The result is condemnation by God. But one day the Lord Jesus, the second man, came. He came as the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:47, 45). He died and shed His blood for us, thus settling our sinful debt. This is not all. His salvation saves us from a life of sin. This is a higher realization. Those who do not have such a high realization only know that they are sinners and that they cannot go to heaven if they do not believe in Jesus. If they believe in Him they will have peace, and the Holy Spirit will come upon them. When they die one day, they will enter blissful enjoyment in heaven.

Although our concept may not be that low, we have to admit that our view of God's salvation is not as high as God's. If our understanding of God's salvation is according to the above description, we have taken God's salvation as a crutch to solve only our problem of sin. If all we know is that man has

sinned and is suffering and that he can go to heaven and have joy through faith in Jesus, we have a very elementary, simple, superficial, and shallow understanding. Some may have seen something higher. They may see that a man has inherited nothing but sin and death in Adam. Once he is in Christ he is justified and liberated. But a person who knows God's salvation to this extent can only say that God's salvation delivers him from sin and death. In his daily living and in his dealings with God, he is concerned with one thing only— deliverance from sin. He deals with unclean thoughts, transgressions with the tongue, jealousy, pride, etc. But if we were completely delivered from sin today, would we still need God's salvation? Perhaps we think that we are justified before God as long as we have the right view and live a righteous, pure, and virtuous life, not losing our temper or casting evil eyes on others. If we have uninterrupted fellowship with the Lord and are meek, right in our words and conduct, and fully submissive to inner, spiritual feelings, have we reached God's goal? Suppose we are fully satisfied with our personal life and have fully realized our spiritual aspirations. Does this mean that God's salvation is fully realized in us?

AN ACCURATE UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S SALVATION

Brothers and sisters, this is a very serious matter. We think that we know God's salvation. Actually, we are far from God's perspective. Yesterday I said that Christians are like those who do not understand their ABC's yet who try to learn English. They do not understand even the basic teachings of the Christian life. In the word of one brother, they do not know the very first lesson of the human life. Even if a man can achieve an inward moral cultivation, like Wang Yang-ming [a Chinese philosopher], he is still acting in an outward way; he is a tree without roots and a river without a source. Even if we can be like Job, fearing God and eschewing evil, and even if Satan cannot accuse us, is this all God's salvation will do in us? Is this our only understanding of His salvation? This is the reason I have a heavy burden. I cannot let this matter go by easily. (Brother Nee: "That is right!")

Let me ask Brother Kwo-kwang, "Are you hoping that you will become blameless, upright, humble, and virtuous after you are revived? Are you hoping that what you think, what you see with your eyes, and what you say with your mouth will be right, and that your conscience will be fully at peace

in God? Do you think that it is enough to have all these things before God?" (Brother Kwo-kwang: "I have never thought of this.") This is probably true. Not only have you never thought of this; perhaps many of us here have never thought of this. This is the reason I have to tell you and everyone else that God's salvation is ultimately not for delivering us from sin but for imparting life to us.

It is true that in His salvation, our sinful history before God is dealt with on the objective side, and the sin within us is taken care of on the subjective side. But this is not God's final destination. The ultimate goal of God's salvation is to bring us into His life. What is God's salvation? God's salvation is for Him to come forth, to enter into us to be our life, and for us to live in His life and to remain there.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL AND THE TREE OF LIFE

Let me ask again: What is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and what is the tree of life? What is the difference between these two trees? Simply put, the difference is the difference between law and grace. The consequence of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is death, and the consequence of the tree of life is life. Within the tree of the knowledge of good and evil are good, evil, and knowledge. These things, together with the death that comes with them, are included in this tree. The skill that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil renders is the ability to know, and the end is death. But the tree of life is God, and the end is God coming to us as life. Once God comes forth, and man touches Him, he has life. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is something entirely outside of God. The result of touching this tree is surely death. As a Christian we are revived. Before we were revived, we touched evil. Now that we are revived, we touch good. But whatever we touch, we are still touching the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Please remember that good and evil belong to the same tree. Neither good nor evil belongs to life. The acts of the Chinese bandits are, of course, not life. But the virtuous acts of the Chinese sages such as Confucius, Mencius, and Wang Yang-ming are not life either. In Chinese Christianity, many sermons are Bible-based Confucianism. This is a grave error. If we only touch good, the result is nothing but death. Only by touching God Himself will we have life.

It was not that easy for Adam to touch the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because that tree was outside of him. Today it is easy for us to touch the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because this tree is inside us. Actually, we are almost this very tree itself. Today we have a harder job than Adam had in dealing with this matter. This tree is within us today; it is very subjective to us. At the beginning, Adam had to consider before taking of that tree; it was still objective to him. But this tree is very subjective to us. We can take it without any consideration at all. Thank the Lord that Christ's salvation is in the tree of life, not in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Brothers and sisters, please remember that touching good is not the same as touching the spirit. We should not think that as long as we have touched good, we have touched life. We should not presume that once we have touched good, we have touched God. Our pride is not life, and our humility is not life. Our rashness is not life, and our meekness is not life. Evil is not life, and good is not life. What then is life? Only that which is from God is life. Life is not a matter of good and evil. Life certainly is not evil, but neither is life good. Although life is bright, holy, and good, it is not the goodness of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; it is the goodness that belongs to God Himself (Matt. 19:17). Life is God Himself; life is Christ (John 1:4).

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LAW AND GRACE

Let me ask again: What is the difference between law and grace? First, let us consider what the law is. The law is something from God and yet apart from God. It tells us what is good and what is evil. For a man to touch the law is like touching the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. No one can have life through touching the law (Gal. 3:11, 21). On the contrary, condemnation follows the law. As soon as we touch the law, we touch condemnation. What then is grace? John 1:17 says that the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Grace is God received, and truth is God seen. The highest and ultimate definition of grace is God Himself (1 Cor. 15:10; Gal. 2:20). What is the law in the Bible? Everything that is outside of God is the law. This is the meaning of the word outwardly in the following verses: "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is of the heart, in spirit, not in letter" (Rom. 2:28-29). The Jews mortify their own flesh. They circumcise themselves and keep the law and the Sabbath, but these things are of the law and are letters. God is not in them. Grace is God

alone and nothing else besides Him. Therefore, receiving grace means that man receives God Himself.

THE GOAL OF GOD'S SALVATION

God's salvation saves us to the point where we can stand before God and say, "I do not know what is evil, and I do not know what is good. I will not do evil, but neither will I do good. Both good and evil are foreign things to me. I only know to receive God as my life. I want to live by God's nature." Outwardly in Romans 2 refers to all the good outside of God, and inwardly in this passage describes everything that issues from God; it actually refers to God Himself. A man must first be delivered from the self before he can be fully delivered from sin. We may not have a temper, but as long as we are not delivered from the self, we are not delivered from sin. Within us, there is no goodness, only sin (Rom. 7:14, 18; 3:12). Let us use the kerosene lamp as an illustration. When the kerosene lamp burns, it gives out smoke. The only way it will not give out smoke is when it does not burn. A Christian is someone who has an "electric light" installed within. God is not concerned about burning or smoking anymore. He only wants to know if we are using the "electric light" or if we are still using our "kerosene lamp." If we refuse to use the "electric light" and insist on the "kerosene lamp," we can only choose between burning with smoke or not having any light at all.

The entire Bible shows us that it is God's pleasure to enter into man, pass through man, and then come out of man. God likes to be touched by man. This is the reason life is in Christ. God is in life, and life is in Christ for us to receive (1 John 5:12). As soon as we touch the Spirit, we receive the life of Christ, which means we receive God Himself. Christ is the coming out of God (Heb. 1:3). When God enters into us, Christ enters into us, which is life entering into us. God has ordained this from the first day. He desires to join Himself to man so that His life, nature, mind, light, likes, dislikes, and preferences can become ours. The ultimate goal of God's salvation is to come into us to be our life. This means His mind, preferences, likes, and dislikes become our mind, preferences, likes, and dislikes. The goal of God's salvation is to bring us to the point where we can praise Him for delivering us not only from evil, but from good as well. We can proudly say that we do not know evil and we do not know good. We do not know hatred, and we do not know love. We only know God, and we only have God. In other words, we do not live in ourselves any longer; instead, we live in God. This is God's salvation.

God's salvation saves us from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to the tree of life. Even if Adam had not sinned, God would still have wanted him to take Him as life. He wants man to take His life as his life, His feeling as his feeling, His mind as his mind, and His preference as his preference. He wants to mingle Himself with man. When God's salvation has reached its goal and the work of salvation is complete in eternity, we will see a wonderful picture: God will be in man and man will be in God. In the New Jerusalem in eternity, there will be no other fruit except the fruit of the tree of life. All of us will eat the fruit of the tree of life; we will only be enjoying God's life.

God's salvation does more than save us from sinfulness to sinlessness or from evil to good. His salvation wroughts Himself into us to be our life and everything. In learning to serve and to know our spirit, we have to touch this point. Otherwise, everything will be outward, not inward. I hope that we all will see clearly the central goal of God's salvation so that our service and spiritual ministry will be calibrated according to this central goal.

GOD'S GOAL BEING TO DISPENSE LIFE TO MAN

Watchman Nee: If Adam had not sinned, would God have reached His goal? No! Adam was created by God, but he was not begotten by God. The angels were created by God. Cattle, sheep, trees, and, of course, man were all created by God. If man had not sinned, at the most he would have been the highest creature; he still would not have had God's life. God's goal is to dispense His life into the created man. Unless His life enters into man, His goal is not reached. Hebrews 2 says that God wants to bring many sons into glory. When He leads many sons into glory, God's goal is attained (v. 10). In Genesis 2 Adam did not lose his temper; he did not lie. He and Eve did not argue or fight as husband and wife, but even before they fell, they had need of life. They did not need life only after they fell. Whether or not Adam sinned, he still needed God's life. From the beginning God ordained that man would have His life.

ADAM'S FALL

What was Adam's sin? First, we have to know that Adam did not commit any sin of lying, reviling, stealing, envying, or arrogance. What he committed was the sin of knowing good and evil. When a man knows good and evil, he has sinned. The knowledge of good and evil is sin itself. Some may ask: Did

Adam know good and evil before he ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Of course he did. If a man does not know good and evil, he must be mentally deranged. Adam was not mentally deranged; he gave names to all the animals. He knew his zoology well. How then did he know good and evil? He knew it by asking God. His knowledge of good and evil came from God. He did not have any knowledge of good and evil in himself, but after he was tempted to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he could say, "Now I know good and evil. Now I can tell the difference between the two. I no longer have to ask God." Adam had confidence in himself. He did not need to ask God. He knew what was right and what was wrong. It was not a big sin to eat the fruit, but after he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he began to know good and evil in himself, and he began to live according to this knowledge. After man knew good and evil, he became evil in reality because he became independent from that day onward. The root of sin is independence.

EXPERIENCING GOD'S SALVATION IN LIFE

Because Adam sinned, all of his descendants have sinned. How can we remove sin today? Moreover, the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). How can we overcome death? Only life can deal with both sin and death. If we deal with our temper per se, we can never be freed from it. Paul was clear that he could never rid himself of sin by his own willing. He could keep nine of the Ten Commandments in the law. But he could not keep one—the law forbidding covetousness, because he was dealing with covetousness itself (7:7-9). This was the reason he was unsuccessful. In Romans 8, however, he declared in triumph that the law of the Spirit of life has overcome the law of sin and of death. He not only overcame the law of death, but the law of sin as well (vv. 1-2). Humanly speaking, sin is not the object of life's operation, but spiritually speaking, we counter evil with life, not with good. We cannot counter evil and sin with good because both evil and good are on the same side; they are products of the same tree. We cannot deal with one thing by using another thing of the same kind. The salvation in Christ has nothing to do with countering evil with good. Some have tried to counter pride with humility or rashness with meekness. This will never work.

On the one hand, the Lord died on the cross for the purpose of dealing with the frustration of the fall. On the other hand, He died for the purpose of dispensing His life to us. His death is not only the death of the Lamb for the

accomplishment of redemption but the death of a grain of wheat for the producing of many grains (John 12:24). This death is not just a redemptive death but a death that multiplies itself into many grains. With the Lord there is the redemptive aspect of His death and there is the non-redemptive aspect of His death. The Lord said that His death was like a grain of wheat that fell into the earth and died. A grain of wheat does not have blood. Hence, the death of the grain is not for redemption but for the dispensing of life. The Lord has dealt with sin already. Today He wants us to live by His life. Therefore, we should not live in the realm of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; we have to live in the realm of the tree of life.

Whenever we are conscious that we are doing good or that we are doing evil, we have need of God's salvation. If we can tell both good and evil, we know that we are still living under the principle of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because these are things from that tree. Of course, this does not mean that we should not do good. It means that God's life has entered into us and that we can live out this "good" spontaneously. What is the difference between the humility that flows from God's life and the humility that comes from us? Anything that we perform in ourselves is the result of good overcoming evil. We are very conscious of this overcoming. We may overcome a few times and after ten years still remember these experiences and testify about them. But these endeavors are from ourselves. They are things from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When a young brother or sister becomes conscious of his or her virtues before the Lord, we can tell that he or she is living in the realm of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Everything that God does within us is probably hidden from us; we do not know it, but anything that we do by ourselves is outward. Moses' face shone, but he did not know about it (Exo. 34:29). Today many people are conscious of their growth and their victory. I almost have to stomp my feet and shout, "You know too much! You know more than even God!" Those who are conscious that they are doing good are probably sunk in pride. When a man is touched by life, he will have nothing to be proud of. He will not know what is good and what is evil. He will only know God. Only the proud ones think that they know everything. Such ones are living in the realm of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God's goal is to deliver us from good and evil, as well as from the knowledge of good and evil. God wants to be our life within us. He wants us to be a channel of life and He wants to flow out of us. We do not know how this life works within us. We do not have to think about it or

know about it. When God's life breaks out of us, it is spontaneous, like a new natural law operating within us.

May we not live in besetting sin but in God's eternal plan and the flow of His life. As long as we live in the flow of life, temper, rashness, pride, jealousy, etc., will all disappear. Spontaneously, we will be able to say with Paul, "For the law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death" (Rom. 8:2). We will be delivered from a life of feelings and move on to a life beyond feelings, from a life of knowledge to life itself. God is saving us from more than the things we inherited from Adam, that is, sin and death; He wants us to inherit what He has prepared for us—His own life.