Witness Lee

Taking Christ as Our Person for the Church Life

LIVING STREAM MINISTRY

TAKING CHRIST AS OUR PERSON FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

by Witness Lee

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PREFACE

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CHAPTER ONE

EXPERIENCING THE POWER OF CHRIST AND THE PERSON OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:17-23; 3:16-21; 2:15-16, 18

THE TWO PRAYERS OF PAUL

Ephesians is a book on the church. The church is profound, wonderful, and mysterious. Just as the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—is a mystery and just as the person of the Lord Jesus—the One who is both God and man—is a mystery, the church is also a mystery. In writing Ephesians Paul included two wonderful prayers, the first in chapter 1, verses 17 through 23, and the second in chapter 3, verses 16 through 19. Both prayers are very deep.

The prayer in chapter 1 is related to our need for revelation in order that we might see the church as the Body of Christ, whereas the prayer in chapter 3 is related to our need for experience. Recently, however, the Lord has shown me something more, something deeper, related to these prayers, namely that Paul's first prayer is related to the power of Christ and that his second prayer is related to the person of Christ. The difference between the power of Christ and the person of Christ can be illustrated in relation to redecorating a house. In order to redecorate a house, there is a need to move furniture. In order to accomplish this, a woman will need help from those who have strength and power. When they move the furniture for her, she will experience the power of these helpers. All the decisions that she makes related to moving the furniture, however, should be based on her being one with her husband and on taking him as her person.

The prayer in chapter 1 concerns the power of Christ; the prayer in chapter 3 concerns taking Christ as our person. In addition to experiencing the power of Christ, we need to experience His person. We should not merely seek His help in certain matters; rather, we should let Him make His home in our heart.

THE SPIRIT AS AN ORGAN AND THE SPIRIT AS A PERSON

The proper organ for us to experience the power of Christ is our human spirit. When I want to drink water, I do not use my eyes, ears, or nose, because these are the wrong organs to receive water. Just as my mouth is the proper organ for drinking, my spirit is the proper organ to enjoy the power of Christ. Some think that the phrase *a spirit of wisdom and revelation* in 1:17 refers to the Holy Spirit, but this is not correct. Our mingled human spirit should be a spirit of wisdom and revelation. In order to receive wisdom and revelation, we must exercise our spirit.

In the prayer in chapter 3, however, our spirit is associated with the phrase *the inner man* (v. 16); that is, it is referred to as a person rather than as an organ. In chapter 1 our spirit is an organ, but in chapter 3 our spirit has become a person. The person of our inner man, however, is not ourselves but the Lord. We need our spirit as an organ to experience the Lord's power, and we need our spirit as our inner man in order to experience the Lord as our person. In chapter 1 the power of Christ is experienced through our spirit as an organ, but in chapter 3 the person of Christ is enjoyed through our spirit as our inner man.

EXPERIENCING THE FOURFOLD POWER OF CHRIST IN OUR SPIRIT

In order to experience the power of Christ, we must turn to our spirit and exercise our spirit. If we do not turn to our spirit but always remain in our mind, we will never touch the reality of the church. The church is something in spirit (2:22). In order to touch the church, we must be in spirit. In order to enjoy the power of Christ, we must turn to our spirit. When we remain in our mind, we cannot enjoy the power of Christ. As soon as we turn to our spirit, however, we enjoy the power of Christ.

We need to practice calling "O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!" because this helps us to turn from our mind to our spirit. If a sister does not learn to call "O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!" Satan will utilize trivial things to hold her in bondage, causing her to linger in the considerations of her mind. The more she thinks about her husband's faults, the more she will feel justified in criticizing his

words and actions. Instead of lingering in these thoughts, she should quickly call "O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!" After calling a few times, she will turn from her mind to her spirit, and she will forget about her husband's condition. As soon as she turns to her spirit, she will experience the power of Christ.

The first step in our experience of the power of Christ involves our experience of His resurrection power (1:20). A wife whose mind is focused on the faults of her husband is fully in death. The more she thinks about his faults, the deader she will become. If she stays in her mind when she comes to a meeting, she will be as silent as a person who is buried in a tomb. If, however, she begins to call "O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!" she will experience the resurrection power of the Lord.

While it is easy for husbands and wives to be abrasive in their dealings with each other, the same is true for parents and children. Children can bring their parents rather easily into death. Often when a child makes a fuss, the mother's response is one of anger. When she is alone, her mind will be filled with thoughts about her child's disrespect. The more she thinks in this way, the deeper she will descend into death. It is also easy for parents to bring their children into death. It is easy for a child to become angry with his parents when he is restricted in some way, and in some circumstances he can become quite angry and even throw things. If the child is saved but remains in his anger, he will experience only death. However, if parents are willing to call "O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!" they will return to their spirit, and if children are willing to call "O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!" they will be in their spirit, no matter how much they are misunderstood. Once we turn to our spirit, we spontaneously experience the power of Christ's resurrection. His resurrection power delivers us from death.

If we call "O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!" all day long, we will experience not only the resurrection power of the Lord but also His transcending power (vv. 20-21). In such a condition, it is easy for a wife to be transcendent over every fault of her husband. To be transcendent is to be on the throne, above all persons, matters, and things. If we continue to call "O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!" everything will be subdued, and we will enjoy the subduing power of Christ (v. 22). Then if we call "O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!" we will live in the spirit all the more, experience His ruling power, and reign in our spirit (v. 22). We will be able to say, "O Lord, I am seated with You on the throne. May You rule in our family so that the flesh has no ground." This is

the way to experience the resurrecting, transcending, subduing, and ruling power of Christ.

If a person experiences Christ in this way, he will surely desire to be in the meetings. Whenever a person experiences the power of Christ, he is ushered into the church. In contrast, a wife who is focused on the faults of her husband or a child who is angry with his parents will have no desire to be in the meetings. The church is in resurrection, and it is transcendent. All things are under the feet of the church as it reigns with Christ. If we are experiencing the power of Christ's resurrection, transcendence, subduing, and enthronement, we will spontaneously desire to be in the meetings. I often say that if we touch Jesus in the morning, He will bring us to the meeting in the evening. The experience of the power of Christ brings us to the church. The church is not an organization or simply a gathering of people with similar interests. The church is the joining together of people in spirit. As those who have received mercy, we have experienced the Lord's power and have been delivered out of death in order to transcend everything, subdue everything, and rule over everything. If a brother is subdued by money in his business, he will be only an observer in a meeting of the church, and if he is oppressed by money, he will have little thought of even coming to a meeting. However, when he turns and calls, "O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!" he will rise above the power of money, be transcendent over money, subdue the influence of money, reign over money, and come to the meetings. In order to experience the church, we need to experience the fourfold power of Christ. Once we experience the power of Christ, we will be ushered practically into the church. The church is produced by the resurrected Christ, the transcendent Christ, the subduing Christ, and the ruling Christ.

EXPERIENCING THE PERSON OF CHRIST TO LIVE IN THE CHURCH

Even though we can enter into the church when we touch our spirit according to Ephesians 1, we can have the church life only when we live according to the person of Christ in our inner man according to chapter 3. In chapter 3 our spirit is not only an organ but also our inner man (v. 16). Before we were saved, our person was centered in our soul because our life was in the soul. At that time, both our spirit and our body were organs. Our body was an outer organ, and our spirit was a deadened inner organ (2:5). Consequently,

our person was related to our soul. After we were regenerated, the Lord entered into our spirit to be our life. Now that our spirit has life, it is no longer just an organ but a person.

There are two persons within us: one that is related to our soul and the other that is related to our spirit. This creates a complication within every believer, because these two persons are in conflict with each other. The way to be delivered from this conflict is to allow the cross to deal with our soul-life, that is, with our old man. The only place for our old man, the person of our soul, is the cross (Rom. 6:6). Our old man has been crucified, and he needs to remain on the cross. When our soul-life is crucified, the inner man of our spirit will live. Regrettably, even though we have been saved and our spirit has become new, our inner man is not very strong; instead, the old man, our soul, is still very strong. This is the reason that Paul asked the Father to strengthen the believers with power through His Spirit into the inner man (Eph. 3:16).

A believer who loves to argue is strong in his soul but weak in his spirit. If I react to criticism of my speaking with defensiveness or even politeness, this is a sign that my soul is very strong and that my spirit as the inner man is very weak. Quarrelsome spouses are strong in their soul. If their spirit were strong, there would be no quarrels. If my spirit is strong, my soul will remain on the cross even if I am being criticized. Rather than reacting, there will only be an inner Amen and Hallelujah. If our spirit is strong, there will be no debates and no arguments. When we are strengthened with power into our inner man, the Lord will not only manifest His power but also make His home in our heart (v. 17).

Christ's making His home in our heart is not a matter of experiencing His power but a matter of taking Him as our person. Making a certain place our home involves our person. Is the Lord Jesus making His home in us? Perhaps He is merely sitting in our living room. Although this is not equal to His making His home in our heart, it is better than forcing Him into a small corner of our living room. On the day of our salvation, the Lord Jesus entered into our being as His home, but since then, we have often confined Him to a small corner because we have given Him no consideration in any of our decisions. When the Lord nudges a new believer within concerning the purchase of an item, he can easily ignore the Lord and give no ground to the Lord. This means that the Lord cannot make His home in the believer's heart.

In order for the Lord to make His home in our heart, He must have access to every room in our being, and He must be allowed to speak and move in our being.

We need to be strengthened into our inner man so that Christ can make His home in our hearts. Our heart includes our mind, emotion, will, and conscience. Hence, the Lord's making His home in our hearts means that He makes His home in our mind, emotion, will, and conscience. We should let Him be Lord in everything. As the Lord, He should rule over our mind, emotion, will, and conscience.

As the Lord Jesus makes His home in our hearts, we will enjoy His person. What does it mean to enjoy His person? This item of the truth is not easy to explain or to understand, but it can be illustrated with the matter of marriage. When a sister is single, she is her own person. If she likes salty food, she will eat salty food. If she likes bland food, she will eat bland food, and if she likes sweet food, she will eat sweet food. In addition, she can open and close her windows as it pleases her, and she can turn the lights on or off as it pleases her. In her living she takes herself as the person. When she gets married, however, her husband becomes her person because the two become one under the headship of the husband. This is signified by the fact that the head of the husband is exposed, but the head of the wife is covered. From the moment of her marriage, the sister no longer is her own person. It is quite marvelous that women cover their heads during both Oriental and Western weddings.

As the couple begins to live together, the wife should join herself to her husband. If the husband likes sweet soymilk, the wife should also drink sweet soymilk. If the husband wants to sleep with the window open, the wife should be willing to do the same. This is the meaning of a wife taking her husband as her person, and this is the way that we should take the Lord as our person. According to Galatians 2:20, it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. Although I live, I should not live according to myself but instead by Christ as my person. If we take Christ as our person, we will not only be strong in our spirit, but He will make His home in every part of our heart—in our mind, emotion, will, and conscience.

We have to learn to give up our tastes, preferences, and inclinations, and say, "O Lord, I take You as my person. Your taste is my taste; Your preference

is my preference; Your inclination is my inclination." This is much deeper than experiencing the Lord's power. When we do this, we will be joined with all the saints in coordination and apprehend the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ with them (Eph. 3:18). Then we will realize that Christ is limitless and immeasurable.

How broad is this breadth? How long is this length? How high is this height? How deep is this depth? None of these dimensions can be measured. The Lord Jesus is the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth that are immeasurable. When we take the Lord as our person, we will experience Him with all the saints and discover that He is without limit or measure. He is the breadth, length, height, and depth, who alone can fill us unto all the fullness of God (v. 19). When we take Christ as our person, we are not only brought into the church, but we will also live in the church and have the church life. At this point the church will become our living.

THE CHURCH BEING THE ONE NEW MAN

We often hear that the church is the Body of Christ, but we seldom hear that the church is a person. The church is not only the Body of Christ; the church is also a person. Ephesians 2:15-16 says, "Abolishing in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances, that He might create the two in Himself into one new man, so making peace, and might reconcile both in one Body to God through the cross, having slain the enmity by it." The Lord created the two—the Jewish and the Gentile believers—in Himself into one new man. According to verse 16, the new man is the Body of Christ. The church is the one new man, and the person of this new man is Christ.

In the church none of us is an individual person; we all are members. I am a member, and you are a member; we all are members. We are joined in one Body, and this one Body is a person. Even if there are five thousand people here today, are we five thousand persons or one person? We are one person, because even though we are many in number, there is only one person in the church—the Lord Jesus.

This is not easy to understand. In the church in Los Angeles there are many races and nationalities. The largest number of people are whites, but there are also blacks. There are Indians, Filipinos, Japanese, Mexicans, and Chinese. All kinds of people have been saved and are in the church, and everyone is a

member of the one Body. In American society, however, there is a tension between blacks and whites. If the person of the church in Los Angeles is based on being either white or black, there surely will be trouble and division in the church. Instead, the church in Los Angeles should take only Christ as its person. In the church there should be no white or black, no Indian, Filipino, Japanese, Mexican, or Chinese. Everything of race and nationality should be buried, and only Christ should be our person. Praise the Lord that when the saints visit the church in Los Angeles, they do not see a white church or a black church, a Japanese church or a Chinese church. The church in Los Angeles is none of these. It is only a church with Christ as its person.

When Christ is our person and we live by Him, the life in our spirit enters into our mind and rules in our mind. As a result, we are renewed in the spirit of our mind. When our mind is renewed, we put on the new man, which is the church (4:23-24). When we put on the church as the new man, the church grows unto maturity, becomes the bride of Christ, and displays the victory of Christ unto the glory of God. At this point, the church is glorious, mature, and rich. The Lord is longing for this, and we are waiting for this. In these last days, the Lord will take an accelerated way in order to arrive at this goal. The church is the new man with Christ as our person.

CHAPTER TWO

PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH IN EPHESIANS 1

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:17-23

TWO PROFOUND PRAYERS OF PAUL FOR THE CHURCH

The main point of the Lord's recovery is the church. Over the past two thousand years the inward nature and outward appearance of the church have changed completely. Today the church is equated with organized Christianity, but organized Christianity does not reflect the Lord's desire. Christianity is a religion associated with human communities, whereas the church is the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). The church is neither an organization nor a religion, much less a physical building. The church as the Body of Christ is different from any religious group. Before He returns, the Lord will recover the church life and the reality of the church. The Lord's way today is the way of recovery. The center, the focus, and the purpose of the Lord's work is to recover the church.

Although the Lord began to speak of the church in the Gospel of Matthew in a limited way (16:18), the book of Ephesians deals with the matter of the church in a thorough way. In this short book of only six chapters, Paul included two prayers related to the church. According to the record in the Bible, no other person had such deep and high prayers. His first prayer is in chapter 1, and his second prayer is in chapter 3. Both prayers are exceedingly deep.

PRAYING FIRST FOR WHAT GOD DESIRES

The first prayer in chapter 1 includes verses 17 through 23. None of the points in these seven verses are according to our concepts about prayer. According to our considerations, we pray, "O Lord, I thank You and praise You. Give us peace, be with us, and bless us so that we will not have any sickness and so that our heart may be full of peace and joy. O Lord, we need

Your abundant grace to protect us. Although we do not desire money, provide us with food and clothing." The sisters also pray concerning their husbands and children. Those who are more spiritual pray for the church, saying, "O Lord, now that I have prayed for my family, I will pray for Your family. Lord, grant the elders wisdom so that they can handle the church affairs appropriately. May You empower the co-workers so that people will repent when they preach the gospel. Enable the brothers and sisters to love one another, to come to the meetings regularly, and to have a regular morning watch." Our prayers rarely go beyond these considerations.

Paul's prayer, however, is entirely different. Every word of his prayer is a gem. We must forget about our kind of prayer. A sister must believe that the Lord will keep her husband in peace. Although she is concerned about him, the Lord loves him even more. The love of a wife for her husband cannot be compared to the Lord's love, and the love of a husband for his wife cannot be compared to the Lord's love. Even the love of parents for their children cannot be compared to the Lord's love, and the love of children for their parents cannot be compared to the Lord's love. The Lord wants us to pray, but the Lord does not want prayers based on our considerations. He wants our prayers to come out of His prayer. He told us not to ask about what to eat and drink or what to put on but to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. If we do this, all these things will be added to us (Matt. 6:31-33). A woman who receives a free pair of scissors when she purchases a sewing machine does not need to ask how much the scissors cost. When she buys the sewing machine, the pair of scissors will be added. If we seek God's kingdom and His righteousness, all that we need related to food, drink, and clothing will be added to us by the Lord.

When some say, "If Jesus takes care of my meals, I will believe in Him," I reply, "If you ask Jesus for food, He will not give it to you, but if you ask related to His kingdom and His righteousness, He will take care of your food." It is a shame that our prayers cover only our needs for food, drink, and clothing but not the Lord's desire for the church. The Lord wants to raise up local churches to testify of the living Body of Christ in place after place; He does not want religion or Christianity.

ASKING FOR A SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND REVELATION

In order to participate in the living Body of Christ, our prayers should match the apostle Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1. This does not mean that we should recite his prayer in a rote manner; rather, we need to touch our spirit and pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him (v. 17). Most people think that *a spirit of wisdom and revelation* refers to the Spirit of the Lord. However, the verse says, "May give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation." This spirit does not refer to the Spirit of the Lord but to the human spirit, our regenerated spirit indwelt by God's Spirit.

Every human being has a human spirit in addition to a physical body and a soul (1 Thes. 5:23). The human spirit is the deepest part of man and enables him to contact God. Our mouth is an organ for speaking and eating. Our eyes are organs for seeing, and our ears are organs for hearing. In order to eat, we cannot use our ears or eyes; we must use our mouth. In order to see, we must use our eyes, not our ears. Our ears are for hearing, not for seeing. In order to hear sounds, we need to use our ears. If we do not use our ears, we may hear nothing, even when someone is talking loudly. We cannot substantiate sound if we do not use the proper organ. Similarly, many people say that God does not exist, because they are not using their spirit to substantiate God. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit (John 4:24). Just as we need to use our eyes to see and our ears to hear, we need to use our spirit to touch and contact God.

In Ephesians 1:17 Paul prays that the saints would be given a spirit of wisdom and revelation because this was the need of the saints in Ephesus. When saints have a love feast full of many rich dishes of food, we need an appetite to receive the food. If we have an upset stomach, we will have no desire to eat. In order to eat, our stomach needs to have an appetite to eat. The riches in the church are like a lavish feast, but we must have an appetite for these riches, which comes out of a spirit of wisdom and revelation.

I have a limited understanding of big machines and even small devices like a camera. Someone can tell me how to put film in a camera, but I quickly forget. A brother who owns a large factory recently showed me the machines in his factory, but it was like he was playing music to a cow. His "music" was very impressive, but my appreciation was limited. As he explained the function of the machines, I became more and more confused. The things of the church can be compared to "music," whereas we are like "cows." If Paul

could speak to us concerning the church, we would probably not understand very much. For example, God desires to have an inheritance in us (v. 18), yet the thoughts of many, related to this inheritance, are focused on "going to heaven" to obtain an inheritance. Such a thought is meaningless, but it is prevalent because many believers do not use the proper organ—the regenerated human spirit—to touch the reality of God's inheritance. The church is vastly more mysterious than machinery in a factory; therefore, Paul prayed earnestly that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation. Wisdom is for us to know, and revelation is for us to see. We need a spirit of wisdom and revelation in order to know the church thoroughly and to see the church clearly.

We need to pray that the Father would give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation. Knowing the church is not a matter of exercising our mind. The more we use our mind to study the church, the more we will be confused. Knowing the church does not depend upon our mind but upon our spirit. When we turn to our spirit, we will be clear concerning the church. In today's Christianity there are many denominations, and all of them claim to be legitimate representatives of the church. Presbyterians say that the Presbyterian denomination is right, Baptists say that the Baptist denomination is right, and Roman Catholics say that Catholicism is right. If we try to determine which one to follow by using only our mind, we will be caught in a maze. The more we study, the more confused we will become. Rather than studying with our mind, we should exercise our spirit, calling, "O Lord Jesus!" When we call, we will turn from our mind to our spirit, and when we are in spirit, we will be clear concerning the way of the church and the practical expression of the church.

When we turn from our mind to our spirit, we should pray, "O Lord, make my spirit strong, make my spirit fresh, make my spirit living, and make my spirit open to You. I want to receive wisdom and revelation in my spirit to see the mystery of the church and to understand this mystery." We all need a spirit of wisdom and revelation.

Even though we may know that we have a spirit, we need to ask ourselves whether or not our spirit is healthy. Some of us may have a healthy spirit, but many do not. Paul realized that the problems of the believers were not related to outward things, such as jobs, finances, and family relationships, but rather

to the inward matter of their spirit. This is the reason he prayed that the Father of glory would give to us a spirit of wisdom and revelation.

The church is not a matter of doctrine or knowledge in our mind; the church is a mystery in the realm of the Spirit, and this mystery can be seen and understood only in our human spirit. The ability to understand the church is in our spirit. Our spirit needs to be strong and full of wisdom and revelation so that we may see the mystery of the church. We need to pray that the Father would make our spirit strong, living, and fresh, and we must also ask Him to remove any darkness and veils in our spirit so that we may receive wisdom and revelation.

BEING ENLIGHTENED TO KNOW THREE THINGS

We need a spirit of wisdom and revelation, and we also need the eyes of our heart to be enlightened (v. 18). Once the light of God shines in us, we will be enlightened to know three things. First, we will know the hope of God's calling. We all have been called by God, and this calling is a calling of grace. The hope of our calling is related to the hope of the Lord Jesus' coming again. When He comes, He will transfigure us and bring us into His glory. Our hope is the glorious Christ, who is the hope of glory in us (Col. 1:27). At His coming we will be glorified together with Him.

Second, we will know the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. The inheritance spoken of here is not what we inherit but what God inherits. God desires to gain an inheritance in all the saints. This inheritance is also a mystery. God wants to gain an inheritance in us because the Lord Jesus is in us. He is mingled with us, and He will transform us. Second Corinthians 4:7 says, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." We are earthen vessels, and the treasure in us is the Lord Jesus. Nevertheless, God cannot inherit vessels that are merely earthen; He can only inherit earthen vessels that have been transformed. Transformation is not a change in outward form but an inward change. Outward change is like a woman putting on makeup. If a woman's complexion is not fair, she can put on some powder, and if her complexion is not radiant, she can put on some rouge. However, after putting on makeup, her complexion is fair and radiant only outwardly. In contrast, inward change comes from eating healthy food. When a woman receives proper nutrients, there will be an inward change that produces a healthy complexion. Christ is

in us as a treasure, and this treasure is transforming us. The more we are transformed, the more God will inherit in us. God will not inherit a natural, earthen vessel but a vessel transformed by the treasure. The riches of the glory of God's inheritance in the saints come out of the treasure in us.

Glory is God expressed. The shining of the lights in a meeting hall is the glorification, the expression, of electricity. As the saints are transformed, God is expressed. This expression of glory can be seen in many aspects, including the expression of God's love, God's power, God's patience, God's holiness, and God's mercy. The saints' expression of the riches of God's glory is what God desires to inherit in the saints.

Third, we will know the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the operation of the might of His strength, which He caused to operate in Christ (Eph. 1:19-20). The surpassingly great power in us can be likened to a powerful engine. After we are saved, there is an engine within each of us, supplying us with great power. We need to let this engine run in our being. If we do not, we will become weak. If the operation in our being does not stop, we will experience the surpassingly great power that operated in the Lord Jesus.

EXPERIENCING THE OPERATION OF CHRIST'S FOURFOLD POWER

The surpassingly great power that operated in Christ is a fourfold power. First, this power raised the Lord Jesus from the dead (v. 20). This is resurrection power. Resurrection power causes the dead to rise up. Second, this power caused the Lord Jesus to be seated at God's right hand in the heavenlies, far above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every name that is named not only in this age but also in that which is to come (vv. 20-21). This is transcending power. Third, this power subjected all things under His feet (v. 22). This is subduing power. Fourth, this power caused Him to be Head over all things to the church (v. 22). This is ruling power.

When these four aspects are manifested—resurrection power, transcending power, subduing power, and ruling power—the church is produced. This fourfold power ushered in the church; the church was produced through this fourfold power. The church is the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (vv. 22-23). The One who fills all in all is Christ. The church as

His fullness was produced through His fourfold power. We need this fourfold power because it is easy for us to be troubled and deadened by many things related to our living. For example, it is easy to be bothered by the words and actions of our spouses. Similarly, we can be troubled and deadened by things related to the church. For example, when we were first saved, our sense of the love of the brothers and sisters for one another and our fellowship with all the saints was very sweet. After a period of time passed, however, the old problems of our flesh surfaced. Whereas we previously loved one another without any consideration, it is now easy to criticize the saints. This shows that we are deadened within and in need of Christ's fourfold power.

Many things inwardly deaden us. When a brother has an argument with others related to his business, he becomes deadened. When a young person watches television, the programs poison him, and he is deadened. Many saints in the church are deadened, and some are barely alive. Such a situation does not display the reality or the testimony of the church. However, if all the brothers and sisters had a strong spirit, nothing in our family life or church life would keep us from saying, "O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!" This is the resurrection life. Resurrection life causes the husbands and wives to rise out of death. In fact, with resurrection every situation becomes an opportunity to praise the Lord. When we experience the resurrection power of Christ, we are also transcendent and above all things with every form of oppression being under our feet. With our experience of the transcendent power of Christ, all things are subdued, and we rule over all things. In our experience of Christ's fourfold power, the church comes forth. The church comes out of Christ's resurrection power, transcending power, subduing power, and ruling power. The church that comes out of this fourfold power is the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

CHAPTER THREE

PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH IN EPHESIANS 3

Scripture Reading: Eph. 3:16-21

EXPERIENCING THE POWER OF CHRIST FOR THE PRODUCING OF THE CHURCH

In Ephesians 1 Paul prayed that the Father would give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation (v. 17). If we are fresh and strong in our spirit, we will be enlightened and receive revelation. With revelation we will be able to understand. This understanding, this wisdom, however, is not related to comprehending mere human knowledge but to knowing the church. The center of Paul's prayer is the church. He prayed that the Father would give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we would know the church. When we have a spirit of wisdom and revelation, we will also know the great power that can operate in us, which is the same power that God caused to operate in Christ.

This great power raised Christ from the dead (v. 20). Christ was crucified, buried, and even entombed behind a large stone. In death Christ was completely enclosed. However, the power of God operated in Him to raise Him from the dead, resurrecting and delivering Him out of the condition and realm of death. This great power also caused Christ to be seated in ascension at the right hand of God, far above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come (vv. 20-21). This great power also subjected all things under Christ's feet (v. 22). Lastly, this great power operated in Christ to make Him Head over all things to the church (v. 22). This fourfold power which operated in Christ is available to us today as resurrecting, transcending, subduing, and ruling power. When we experience this power operating in us, we are delivered from death, oppression, and difficulty, we transcend every negative element, and we experience the subduing and ruling authority of Christ. The church is produced by the operation of this great power, and the church is manifested by this power.

If we are deadened and subdued by our environment, by people, by things, or by events, the church cannot be manifested. It is easy to be buried in the tomb of business deals or in the tomb of family relationships. Some wives are tombs for their husbands, and some husbands are tombs for their wives. Some parents are tombs for their children, and some children are tombs for their parents. If we are in a tomb of any kind, the church will not be produced and manifested.

The church is produced through the saints' experience of this great power. If a sister has a problem in her home, the resurrection power of Christ can overcome the problem. If a brother is excessively burdened beyond his power, the transcendent power of Christ can lift him up. Today people are trying to go to the moon, but we are going to the third heaven. Those who go to the moon must depend upon rockets, but we can reach the third heaven with the resurrection power of Christ. With this power every difficulty is under our feet, and we are seated as kings above every stormy wave.

The church is produced by Christ. If we touch Christ in the morning, we will be in the meetings in the evening. Touching and enjoying Christ in the morning removes any lack of desire to attend the meetings. However, if we do not experience the Lord throughout the day, we will be deflated and have no desire to do anything in the evening other than to watch television. In this condition television becomes a "tomb" for us. However, if we touch and enjoy the Lord in the morning and throughout the day, even ten thousand televisions could not keep us from the meeting. When we experience Christ, we transcend television, and television becomes our footstool. When we transcend television and reign over it, we long to be in the meetings and to enjoy the church life. This shows that the church is produced out of the power of Christ.

However, if Christ's power is merely a doctrine, it will be useless; it must be experiential in order to be useful. We must experience the resurrecting, transcending, subduing, and ruling power of Christ. As soon as we experience the power of Christ, we become transcendent, and the church is brought forth.

If we do not experience the resurrection power of Christ, the church will not be expressed through us, even if we come to the meetings. If we are not transcendent, subduing, and reigning, the church cannot be expressed

through us. On the one hand, we may say Amen in the meeting, but on the other hand, we may be thinking about a television program. In the end, our Amen is a subdued Amen, not a subduing Amen. A sister may come to the meeting but still be thinking about a fashionable dress that she saw in a department store. If we are occupied with thoughts of such things, it is not possible for the church to be expressed through us. If we have been subdued by a television program or a fashionable dress, these things are "tombs" to us. Even if we say Amen in the meeting, our Amen will have the flavor of death. However, if we are in resurrection, if we are transcendent, if we are subduing, and if we are reigning, our Amen will have a fresh taste, and it will transport others into heaven. The church is produced through the experience of the power of Christ. This is the reason that Paul's first prayer ends with the church as the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (vv. 22-23).

THE MINGLED SPIRIT BEING THE INNER MAN

It is one thing to enter into the church, but it is another thing to have the living of the church. Not only do we need to enter into the church; we also need to have the church life. Knowing the church enables us to enter into the church, but we need to advance to living the church life. Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3 is related to our need to be in the church life. Paul's second prayer is related to having the church life. God desires to be glorified in the church, and being glorified is a matter of expression. When we all have the living of the church, God will be expressed through us. This is what it means for God to be glorified in the church.

Having the living of the church is higher and deeper than entering into the church. In Paul's first prayer we see our need for a spirit of wisdom and revelation in order to enter into the church and to know the church (1:17). Our spirit is the organ for us to know and enter into the church. However, the prayer for us to remain in the church and have the living of the church involves a further step in which our spirit becomes our inner man. Thus, our spirit must become our person, rather than just an organ.

We must differentiate between an organ and a person. The Bible tells us clearly that man is of three parts: spirit and soul and body (1 Thes. 5:23). Our body is on the outside, our soul is in between, and our spirit is our innermost

part. Our body enables us to contact the physical world, and our soul enables us to contact the psychological world, but our spirit enables us to contact God. God created our spirit as an organ for us to contact Him, but is our person related to our body, our soul, or our spirit? When a person dies, we often say that he has gone, even though his body is still present. This indicates that our person is not defined by our body; our body is but an organ. In contrast, the Bible speaks of our soul when it speaks of persons. For example, Exodus 1:5 says, "All the persons who came forth from the loins of Jacob were seventy persons." *Persons* in Hebrew literally means "souls." Thus, our soul is equivalent to our person. Genesis 2:7 says, "Jehovah God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." Hence, every man is a soul with a body and a spirit as organs. The soul is the person of every man. However, when a man believes in the Lord and receives Him, the Lord becomes life to him in his spirit. Before believing, man's spirit did not have life; it was merely an organ. However, once the Lord Jesus enters into a man's spirit as life, his spirit is no longer merely an organ but also an inner man.

DENYING THE SOUL-LIFE AND LIVING BY THE SPIRIT

Hence, there are two persons in every believer. Before a believer is saved, his person is in his soul, but after being saved, there is another person in his spirit. Hence, there are two persons in every believer. We need to ask if it is good to have two persons in us. When we are a guest in someone's home, we all prefer to be in a room alone rather than to share it with another person. We do not like to share a room with another person, because when there are two persons, there will be two opinions. Even in small matters such as opening or closing a window, it is not easy for two people to be in agreement with each other.

When we receive the Lord, it is a blessing, but it is also troublesome. For example, before we received the Lord Jesus, we could go to a movie whenever we wanted; there was no one in us expressing a different opinion. However, now that the Lord Jesus is in us, He does not always agree with our choices. While we are watching a movie, He will trouble us inwardly and give us no peace.

According to the Bible, one of the persons within us has been crucified and must be denied. Romans 6:6 says that our old man, that is, the person in our soul, has been crucified with Christ. The old man with his life in our soul has been crucified, and we should not allow him to live. If he lives, he will do great harm to us and be quite troublesome. Even though the person of our soul has been crucified and must be denied, the function of our soul has been preserved. This means that the life of the soul needs to be killed, but the faculties of our soul—the mind, emotion, and will—have to be renewed. Being crucified with Christ does not mean that we no longer use our mind or that we no longer express any emotion. Rather, it means that the corrupted life in our soul, our old man, has been crucified in order for the faculties of the soul to be renewed.

Formerly, our soul was our person, and our spirit was an organ. Now our spirit must become our person, and our soul must become an organ. When we call, "O Lord," we can deny our soul-life and utilize it as an organ to express our renewed mind, emotion, and will.

Husbands and wives often argue with each other. These arguments come from the soul. Hence, we must call, "O Lord." Calling on the name of the Lord keeps our old man in the tomb so that it cannot come out. When we call on the Lord, we do not have to listen to or live by our soul. Rather, we can live by our spirit through our continual denial of our old man.

The Chinese word for *soul* is composed of two radicals. The first radical means "devil," and the second radical means "speak." Thus, the Chinese word for *soul* literally means "devil speaking." We should not listen to the opinions of our soul. As soon as an opinion rises up in our soul, we should say, "Devil, stop talking!" This is not a laughing matter. Our fallen soul is actually linked to the devil. When we deny our soul, we are denying the devil.

We must be clear concerning this matter. Formerly, our soul was our person, but today our spirit is our person. Formerly, the spirit was an organ, but now the soul is an organ. We should not let our soul voice its opinions or take the lead. This is to deny the expression of our soul as our person. However, when we need to remember certain things, we can utilize the faculty of our mind as an organ related to memory. Thus, our soul is no longer our person but merely an organ. Our spirit is our person today.

EXPERIENCING CHRIST AS OUR PERSON IN THE INNER MAN

Our spirit is our inner man, and this inner man is a person—the Lord Himself. Formerly, the person in our soul was ourselves. Now the person in our spirit is the Lord Jesus.

In Ephesians 1 Paul prays that we would experience the power of Christ, and in chapter 3 he prays that we would experience the person of Christ. The power of Christ is one thing, whereas the person of Christ is another thing. Many brothers and sisters experience only the Lord's power. For example, a sister may pray, "Lord, my husband is harsh, and I cannot bear it anymore. I need Your resurrection power." After the Lord's resurrection operates in her, however, she may quickly forget about the Lord and even put Him aside. When she enjoyed the Lord's resurrection power, she was full of joy and testified in the meetings, but when she puts the Lord aside, she is outside of the church experientially and cannot live the church life. Those who experience only the Lord's power may see and know the church according to Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1, but they do not have the church life according to his prayer in Ephesians 3. Only when we experience the Lord as our person will we live the church life.

If we would take Christ as our person, we must see that our spirit is not merely an organ for us to contact God; we must see that our spirit is our person. Thus, we must deny our soul-life, our own person, and live by our spirit, our new person. The Lord Jesus is this new person. In Ephesians 1 our spirit is an organ; in chapter 3 our spirit is our inner man. In chapter 1 our spirit is an organ for us to experience the power of Christ; in chapter 3 our spirit is our inner man for us to take Christ as our person.

CHRIST MAKING HIS HOME IN OUR HEARTS

Ephesians 3:17 says, "That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith." Here the word *hearts* is crucial. Our soul has three parts: mind, emotion, and will. The heart also includes the conscience. Hence, the heart consists of the mind, emotion, will, and conscience. This shows that the heart is linked with both the spirit and the soul because the conscience is one of the three parts of the spirit. The other two parts of the spirit are intuition and fellowship.

In order for Christ to make His home in our hearts, He has to enter into our conscience, mind, emotion, and will. Many people leave Christ outside their conscience. We need to allow the Lord Jesus to touch us in our conscience. Sometimes, when He touches us in our conscience, we say, "Lord, please stop. You are in my spirit, but do not touch my conscience." Hence, our conscience is neither good nor pure (1 Tim. 1:5, 19; 3:9). With regard to our heart, we may treat the Lord as a guest rather than the host because we do not want Him to touch our conscience or our mind, emotion, and will. Thus, the Lord Jesus cannot make His home in our hearts.

In my travels I often stay in the saints' homes as a guest. I know the blessing as well as the restriction of being a guest. Staying in the saints' homes is a blessing because when I am a guest, I am treated very well. Nevertheless, as a guest, I am restricted because I cannot make their house my home. In the United States when I am received into the homes of the saints, they often say, "Please make yourself at home." Even though I politely reply, "Thank you," I am clear that I am only a guest and not the host. Consequently, I am more restricted than I am in my own home.

Although the Lord being a guest is not as good as the Lord being the host in our hearts, it is better than His being a "prisoner," who has no freedom whatsoever. Some people put the Lord Jesus into a "prison" so that He has no ground to touch them. It is as if they confine Him to a small corner in their living room, saying, "Lord, I have prepared this place for You. Do not step outside of this area, and do not interfere with my affairs. My affairs are my affairs, and I do not want to talk to anyone about them, including You."

This situation occurs because our inner man is weak. Therefore, Paul prayed that the Father would strengthen us with power through His Spirit into the inner man (Eph. 3:16). When our inner man is strengthened, the Lord Jesus will be released. We can be strengthened into the inner man simply by calling, "O Lord." When we call, "O Lord," the Lord Jesus gains ground in us and spreads in us. He will spread into our conscience, and from our conscience into our mind, emotion, and will. He can have a home in our hearts only when He occupies every part of our heart.

BEING ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN LOVE AND BEING FILLED

UNTO THE FULLNESS OF GOD

When Christ makes His home in our hearts, we will be rooted and grounded in love and be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints the breadth and length and height and depth (vv. 17-18). These four dimensions are the dimensions of Christ. How broad is the breadth? How long is the length? How high is the height? And how deep is the depth? They are all limitless. Christ is the breadth, Christ is the length, Christ is the height, and Christ is the depth. When we let Christ make His home in our hearts, we will be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints the limitless dimensions of Christ. Our Christ is unlimited in His breadth, in His length, in His height, and in His depth.

When we comprehend our unlimited Christ, we also will know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ and will be filled unto all the fullness of God (v. 19). Then we will have a church life that glorifies and expresses God in the church and in Christ Jesus (v. 21).

We all must learn to not only experience Christ's power but also to take Him as our person. Our former person, our old man, has been crucified. Now our spirit is our person so that we can take Christ as our person.

TAKING CHRIST AS OUR PERSON AND LIVING THE CHURCH LIFE

If we want to live the church life but do not take Christ as our person, we can never be blended together with others, because we are all different according to our nature. Each of us has our own tastes and preferences. We may experience the resurrection power of Christ when we are by ourselves, but when we come to the meeting hall, our tastes and preferences can easily rise up within us. We may experience the resurrection power before coming to the meeting hall, but when we are asked to clean chairs in a specific way, we can easily be bothered. For example, when a brother says to another brother, "Please do not wipe the chairs with a wet cloth," he may become angry and say, "I have many servants at home, and I never have to clean any of my chairs. I am doing you an honor by cleaning the chairs, yet you are not grateful. In the future I will not serve with you." It is not possible to have the church life when our old man is allowed to be our person. Those who want to have the church life must deny their soul-life, their self, their old man. We

should all cover our heads and take Christ as our person. Those from northern China should take Christ as their person, and those from southern China should also take Christ as their person. Eventually, in the church there will be no northern or southern Chinese; there will be only Christ. Although we are many, we are one because there is only one person in us.

The church is a man. The person of the church is neither a southerner nor a northerner and neither a Chinese nor an American. In the church there is only Christ as our person. When Christ is our person, the church will be one, and there will not be any problem for us to live the church life. We should not only experience the power of Christ so that we may know the church and enter into the church; we should also experience the person of Christ so that we may have the church life for God to be glorified in the church.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHRIST BEING THE PERSON OF THE ONE NEW MAN

Scripture Reading: Eph. 2:15-16, 18; 3:17-19; 4:22-24

THE CHURCH BEING A PERSON

Ephesians is a book on the church. It shows that the church is not only the Body of Christ but also the one new man. Ephesians 2:15 says, "Abolishing in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances, that He might create the two in Himself into one new man, so making peace." When the Lord was crucified, He abolished the law of the commandments in ordinances in His flesh so that the Jews and the Gentiles might be created in Himself into one new man. The ordinances in the Old Testament created a separation between the Jews, who were to be holy unto the Lord, and the Gentiles, who were considered unclean like pigs and dogs. These ordinances created enmity between the Jews and Gentiles, but Christ abolished the ordinances, which created the enmity, on the cross. By breaking down this middle wall of partition, the enmity (v. 14), He created the two in Himself into one new man. This new man is not an individual man, such as you or me, but rather a great corporate man. This new man is a great corporate man created by the Lord out of two peoples—Jews and Gentiles. In Himself Christ created the Jews and the Gentiles into one new man.

According to verse 16, He created the two in Himself so that He "might reconcile both in one Body to God through the cross, having slain the enmity by it." This shows that the new man is the church as the one Body of Christ. This new man is not merely an assembly or a body; the church is a man. What is the difference between a man and a body? Being a man is related to one's person and personality, whereas a body is merely an organ that serves as a vessel. On the one hand, the church is a vessel; on the other hand, the church is a person with a personality.

Beginning with the Reformation and especially for the last two hundred years, many Christians have spoken of the church as a vessel. The book of

Revelation reveals that the church is a lampstand to contain the Holy Spirit as oil (1:12, 20). As a golden lampstand, the church is a vessel to contain God so that God may express Himself through the church. The truth concerning the church as a vessel has been expounded clearly and thoroughly. This is the grace of God, and we have received much help from this light. Others also have seen that the church is the Body; this is higher than seeing that the church is a vessel. The lampstand depicts how the church contains God and expresses God, but this depiction does not touch the matter of life. The church as the Body implies life; hence, it is more advanced than the church being a vessel. However, even this understanding of the church does not touch the central goal of God. In recent years the Lord has shown us in the Bible that the church is not only a vessel or merely the Body but also the one new man.

TAKING CHRIST AS OUR PERSON

Before we were saved, our spirit was an organ, but when we were saved, the Lord entered us to be our life. Now our spirit is no longer only an organ but a man, the inner man. An organ by itself is not a person, because it has no personality, but a man is a person because he has a personality. When we experience the power of Christ, our spirit is an organ. However, our spirit is not merely an organ but a man. Hence, we must experience the person of Christ in our regenerated spirit. Concerning this matter, we may have some doctrine or knowledge, but we lack experience.

The Bible says that Christ is the Head. In particular, He is the Head of the church. However, as the Head of the church, Christ does not act as we would imagine a king or a lord would act. Consider the relationship between our head and our body. Our head does not dictate directions to our body as if it were a king or lord. Instead, our head mainly takes care of the body and expresses itself through the body. Ephesians 5:29 says clearly that Christ loves the church and nourishes and cherishes her. When a wife subjects herself to her husband, she should take her husband as her person and subject herself to him in love (v. 24).

When I was in Shanghai, I was invited to a home. In all my contact with this family, the wife took her husband as her person. When I commented that the colors of her walls matched very nicely with the furnishings of the house, she replied, “Thank you, these colors are my husband’s preference.” Later when I asked her about the time for breakfast, she replied, “My husband likes to have

breakfast at seven-thirty." Her response to every question, whether it concerned the meetings she attended, the food she served, or the things she bought, was always related to her husband's consideration. As a wife, this sister fully took her husband as her person. This does not mean that her husband was like a king, sitting on the throne and wielding power. It meant that this sister took her husband as her person completely. I know this sister quite well. She is very smart, capable, and thoughtful. However, when she goes to buy things, she does not buy according to her preferences; rather, she always takes her husband's taste into consideration. If she decorated their home by herself, I believe that she could do it very well; however, she decorated only according to her husband's taste. Her speaking always referenced her husband. Even though it is not easy for a person to reflect the tastes, preferences, feelings, and inclinations of someone else, this sister was willing to take her husband as her person.

It is rare to find a wife who does not love her husband or care for her husband. Nevertheless, it is equally rare to find a wife who cares for her husband not according to her own taste. If a wife were to care for her husband according to her husband's taste rather than her own, she would be the best wife in the world. Husbands are often bothered by the "care" they receive from their wife, because this "care" is according to their wife's taste. Such wives may regard their care as "candy," but to the husbands, it has the taste of "hot peppers." This occurs when a wife cares for her husband according to her own person, not according to her husband's person. If a sister takes her husband instead of herself as her person, she will be a wonderful wife. The sister I have spoken of regards her husband in this way in every detail of her living.

Taking Christ as our person means that we must put our person aside and take Him as our person. This is more than letting Him be our Lord or our Head in only a few matters. Ephesians 3:17-18 says, "That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are." When Christ is our person, we will know His immeasurableness and enter into the love of Christ completely.

TAKING CHRIST AS OUR PERSON AND THE ONENESS OF THE CHURCH

The church is not only a vessel and a Body; the church is also a man. As a man, the church is the one new man. This new man is not composed of scattered individuals; it is a great corporate man. This great corporate man is a man in the spirit, and the person of this man is Christ. The church must not experience merely the power of Christ and the life of Christ but also the person of Christ. This experience must become real to every saint.

After nearly two thousand years, the Lord Jesus has not returned. From the time of the apostles, many have felt that the Lord's return was imminent; however, nearly two thousand years have passed, and He has not returned. The Lord has not returned because the Bible reveals that His desire to return is related to His being a Bridegroom rather than a Judge (Rev. 19:7). He is coming back as a Bridegroom for His bride, and the bride is the church. Hence, the bride needs to be prepared so that the Bridegroom can return. But is the church ready? Today the church is still in a messy situation with some saying one thing and others saying another thing. The presence of so many opinions in the church proves that we have not taken Christ as our person so that we can be a proper bride for Him.

If we do not take Christ as our person, the Chinese and those who are not Chinese will not be able to get along. Even those from northern China will not be able to get along with those from southern China. Even if we were all southern Chinese, we would still not get along. For example, some brothers say that we should preach the gospel, others say that we should study the Word, and still others say that we should pursue the growth in life. Some are in favor of shouting in the meetings, and others are in favor of being quiet. There are many opinions. The genuine oneness in the church will be the issue of us all taking Christ as our person. When we all take Christ as our person, the church will be one.

I believe with my whole heart that the local churches will arrive at this point one day. The Lord will work continually among us until every one of us takes Christ as our person. When this happens, we will not preach the gospel, study the Word, or pursue the growth in life merely because it is our preference. We will do these things because Christ, our person, is doing these things. Even being loud or quiet in a meeting will come out of Christ being our person. When the Lord brings us to the point that He is our person, we will experience more than just His power and His life. When we experience His person, His taste will become our taste, His feelings will become our feelings,

His inclinations will become our inclinations, and His preferences will become our preferences. If we go on in this way in the Lord, we will see the sweet oneness of the church, and we will have no opinion and no expression of the self.

We should preach the gospel because the Lord Jesus is preaching the gospel. We should study the Word because the Lord Jesus is studying the Word. Our being quiet in a meeting should be the issue of the Lord Jesus being quiet, not because it is our preference to be quiet. Similarly, any shouting in a meeting should be an issue of the Lord Himself desiring to shout.

Our problem is that too often we take ourselves as our person instead of taking the Lord as our person. A brother may say, "I love the Lord, so I am going to the mountains to preach the gospel." Another brother may say, "I love the Lord, so I am going to start a Bible-study group." Still another brother may say, "I love the Lord, so I am going to pursue the growth in life." This kind of love is difficult for the Lord to bear. If we love the Lord and seek to follow Him according to our desires, His desire will be frustrated. Hence, we all have to practice taking Christ as our person. The church is not only a vessel and a Body; the church is also a person. We must reject our own person and take Christ as our person. We all must take Christ as our person. When this occurs, the church will be filled with glory. I absolutely believe that this will bring the Lord back. When the church reaches the stage of taking Christ as her person and is prepared as a bride, the Lord will return immediately.

TAKING CHRIST AS OUR PERSON BECAUSE OF LOVE

We should not think that taking Christ as our person is the same as enthroning Him as our King or submitting to Him as our Head. Often when we say, "O Lord, You are the Head and the Lord," He is not very happy because we are still not focused on His desire. However, if out of love we would reject our person and take Him as our person, we would not only follow the Lord but inquire of Him. For example, we would say, "Lord, are You going to the store? If You are not going, I will not go." If we go to the store because He is going, we should still inquire of Him before buying anything. Such a practice is not related to fearing the Lord but to loving Him and desiring to take Him as our person.

THE CHURCH BEING PREPARED AND READY

TO RECEIVE CHRIST IN HIS SECOND COMING

If we reach this stage, we will know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge, and we will apprehend the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth of our immeasurable Lord. Further, we will be renewed in the spirit of our mind, having put off the old man and having put on the new man. The new man is the church; we will put on the church practically and live the church life practically. To put off the old man is to put off our former manner of living in human society, and to put on the new man is to put on the church and live the church life (Eph. 4:22, 24).

This is the goal that the Lord desires to reach today. May He have mercy on us and lead us toward this goal. I believe that in the near future, the Lord will bring the churches in every place into a condition in which many lovers of Christ will experience not only His power, life, and grace but also His person. Thus, we will let Him make His home in our hearts. The Spirit of the Lord in our spirit will spread to our mind and become the spirit of the mind (v. 23). In this renewed spirit of the mind we will put off our former manner of living and put on the life of the new man, the church. When this occurs, the bride will be ready to receive the Bridegroom.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE TRIUNE GOD IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Scripture Reading: John 14:7-11, 16-20; 16:13-15; 17:21-23

THE MYSTERY OF THE TRIUNE GOD

In this chapter we will consider the matter of the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—in the Gospel of John. This matter is a great subject and a great mystery. We will pay attention to three points: first, the Father is the source; second, the Son is the expression; and third, the Spirit is the realization. This does not mean that there are three Gods. Our God is uniquely one. The Bible repeatedly declares that there is only one God (Isa. 45:5; 46:9; Psa. 86:10; 1 Cor. 8:4). Although God is three—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—there are not three Gods. Rather, God is one in three persons (Matt. 28:19).

In His aspect of being three, the Father is the source, the Son is the expression, and the Spirit is the realization. Please remember this sequence and these three brief statements. When the Spirit enters into us and is realized by us, the Son and the Father also enter into us, because the Father is in the Son and the Son has become the Spirit. Therefore, when the Spirit enters into us, both the Father and the Son enter into us. Although we can receive and speak of this sequence using the plain words of the Bible, it is difficult to give a detailed explanation. We cannot explain this matter thoroughly because it is a mystery. God is one yet three and three yet one. Although God is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the three are still one God, and although there is only one God, He is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

We should not be troubled when we hear that the infinite God is a mystery, because even human beings are a mystery. Humans are composed of three parts—spirit, soul, and body—which encompass both our outward visible form and our inward invisible life. It is difficult to explain the difference between the spirit and the soul and to explain life itself. For example, my moving and speaking certainly indicate that I am alive. However, without life, my body would cease to move, and this lack of movement would mean that I am dead. If a doctor inspected my body, he would not be able to say that

something was missing. All he could say is that I am dead, because I am no longer moving or speaking. It is possible to examine a defective typewriter and determine that a crucial part is missing, but it is not possible to open up a dead person and determine that any specific "part" is missing. All we can say about a dead person is that he is no longer alive. This speaks of the mystery of life.

Although the Bible reveals that God is one yet three, what is the biblical basis for saying that the Father is the source, the Son is the expression, and the Spirit is the realization? This conclusion is based on many years of studying the Bible in general and on studying the Gospel of John in particular. It is also based on comparing the Word with our own experiences. In the Gospel of John, the Father is the source, the Son is the expression, and the Spirit is the realization. The Lord Jesus said, "I have come in the name of My Father" (5:43), and "the living Father has sent Me" (6:57; cf. 5:36-37). This proves that the Father is the source. The apostle John also says, "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (1:18), and the Lord said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (14:9). This shows that the Son is the expression. Later, the Lord also said, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever, even the Spirit of reality...because He abides with you and shall be in you" (vv. 16-17). Therefore, the Spirit is the reality, the realization, of God entering into us. From the standpoint of God's relationship with man, the Father as the source is expressed through the Son in order to be received as the Spirit. From the standpoint of man's relationship with God, as soon as we touch the Spirit, we receive the Triune God who enters into us. Now we will look at some details concerning the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

The Father as the Source

Concerning the Father as the source (6:46; 7:29; 13:3), we need to see five points:

(1) No one has ever seen God the Father (1:18; 5:37; 6:46).

(2) All that the Father has is the Son's (16:15), and all that the Father has is in the Son. The fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily (Col. 2:9).

(3) The Father sent the Son (John 1:14; 7:29; 6:57). The Lord Jesus said many times that He was sent from the Father. The meaning of the word *from* in John 1:14 and 7:29 differs from our common understanding. Ordinarily, when we think of someone being sent, we think that the sender remains apart from the one being sent. However, the Greek word *para,* translated "from," means "by the side of," implying "with"; hence, it is, literally, "from with." This indicates that the Son was sent from the Father with the Father. When the Son came, the Father also came. The Son was sent by the Father, but the Father came with the Son and in the Son.

(4) The Father is expressed in the Son (14:7-11; 8:19). Hence, he who has seen the Son has seen the Father.

(5) The Father is working in the Son (14:10; 7:16). The Father is expressed in the Son so that he who has seen the Son has seen the Father; moreover, the Father is working in the Son.

The Son as the Expression

Concerning the Son as the expression (1:18), we need to see the following sixteen points:

(1) The Son is the Word who is God and who was with God in the beginning (vv. 1-2). He is God, and He was with God. On one hand, verse 1 says, "The Word was with God," but on the other hand, it also says, "The Word was God." This is truly a mystery.

(2) The Son is equal with God (5:18).

(3) The Son and the Father are one (10:30; 17:22). The Father and the Son are equal, and They are also one.

(4) The Son is the expression of the Father (14:8-9; 8:19). When the Son comes, the Father is expressed.

(5) The Son lives because of the Father (6:57). The Son does not live apart from the Father. The Father and the Son, the Son and the Father, cannot be separated.

(6) The Son came to carry out the Father's will (v. 38; 5:19-20, 30; 12:49). The Son did not do anything according to His own desire; He did everything according to the desire of the Father.

(7) The Son became flesh, bringing grace and reality (1:14, 16-17; 8:32, 36; 14:6). If the Son had not become flesh, both the Father and the Son would be too mysterious and abstract. The Son became flesh, passing from infancy through childhood into a man who was thirty years old when He began to minister. In the flesh God was expressed and made tangible to humanity. He was so tangible that He could even lie in a manger. Isaiah 9:6 says, "A child is born to us," and "A Son is given to us." The child was Jesus, but the Son who was given would be called Mighty God and Eternal Father. According to 1 John 1:2, the Word of life, who was with the Father, has been manifested, and we have seen, heard, and touched Him. John touched Him, Peter touched Him, and the other disciples touched Him.

When He became flesh, He brought grace and reality (John 1:14). Grace denotes enjoyment. The Son comes with God to be our enjoyment. At the same time, the Son comes also with reality. The incarnated Jesus is light, love, and life. He is the reality.

(8) The Son became a man to be the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world (vv. 29, 36). Not only did the Son become flesh, but He also became a man. As a man coming to be the Lamb of God, He had flesh and blood—a body. He bore our sins in His physical body, and He shed human blood to redeem us from our sins and to wash away our sins.

(9) The Son baptized people in the Spirit (v. 33). He not only took away the sin of the world but also baptized people in the Spirit. Sin was taken away, and the Spirit came. In the flesh through His incarnation the Son removed our sins, and in His resurrection He baptized us in the Spirit.

(10) The Son is life so that people may have life; He is also the bread of life so that those who eat Him will live because of Him (14:6; 11:25; 10:10; 6:35, 57). He not only takes away our sins and baptizes us in the Spirit but also enters into us as life so that we may have life. He is also the bread of life as our life supply. Without Him as the bread of life, our life could not be sustained. Thank the Lord that He is also the bread of life.

(11) The Son is a grain of wheat bearing much fruit (12:24). The Son as a grain of wheat fell into the ground and died. In His enlivening resurrection, He brought forth many grains. Today every one of us is one of the many grains; we all are grains produced by Him.

(12) The Son is the good Shepherd who will gain His flock (10:14-16). He is not only the grain of wheat that brings forth many grains but also the good Shepherd who cares for us. On one hand, we are many grains, and on the other hand, we are many sheep as one flock. Today the Lord is shepherding us as His one flock.

(13) The Son is the Bridegroom coming for His bride (3:29-30). We are not only the many grains and the flock; we are also the bride waiting for the Bridegroom to come and marry us. On the one hand, we are already married to Him, but on the other hand, we are waiting for Him to come and marry us. He is the Bridegroom, and we are His bride.

(14) The Son is the vine cultivated by the Father (15:1). To cultivate is to carry out an economy. God the Father has a great economy in the universe, and this great economy is centered on the Son as the vine. We are the many branches of this vine (v. 5).

(15) The Son died, shedding His blood, for the redemption of sins and flowed out as living water, even as the Spirit (7:38-39; 19:34). The Lord took away our sins through the shedding of His blood in death, and He baptized us in the Spirit through the release of the Spirit, as living water, from within Him in resurrection.

(16) In resurrection the Son was breathed into us as the Spirit (20:22). All the foregoing fifteen points speak of what He is and has done. All these items are in the Spirit. He became the life-giving Spirit in resurrection, and He was breathed into us as the Spirit. In John 1:1 He is revealed as the Word who was with God and who was God, but at the end of the Gospel, He is revealed as the Spirit of life, the breath of life, to be breathed into us (20:22). Today the Lord is the Spirit. He is the last Adam who became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). The last Adam, Jesus as the Lamb of God, accomplished redemption on the cross, and in His resurrection from the dead, He became the life-giving Spirit. When this life-giving Spirit is breathed into us, we receive the Spirit and life.

The Spirit as the Realization

Concerning the Spirit as the realization of God (John 14:17), we need to see the following eight points:

(1) The Spirit is the reality of the Son (vv. 16-20; 15:26). All that the Father has is in the Son, and all that the Son has is realized as the Spirit. Apart from the Spirit, we cannot touch the Son. Hence, the Son is the Spirit, and the Spirit is the Son. When the Spirit comes, the Son also comes. When the Spirit is in us, the Son is also in us. All that the Father has is the Son's, and the Spirit receives everything from the Son. Today, the Spirit is in us for our experience and enjoyment.

(2) The Spirit receives all that the Son is and has obtained and discloses it to us (16:13-15).

(3) The Father is in the Son, and the Son became the Spirit for us to drink so that He may become the living water flowing out of us (7:37-39; 4:10, 14).

(4) The Spirit enters into us to be with us so that we may enjoy the Son (14:17-18). The One who is with us is the Spirit, yet the One whom we enjoy is the Son, because the Spirit is the Son.

(5) The Spirit being in us is the Son being in us (vv. 17, 20; 17:23, 26).

(6) In the Spirit we are joined to the Triune God as one (vv. 21-23). In chapter 17 the Lord prayed to the Father, saying, "That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us...that they may be one, even as We are one; I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one" (vv. 21-23). This means that all those who believe into Him and have Him as life are joined as one in the Triune God and are joined to the Triune God as one. Hence, this oneness is not only horizontal but also vertical. It is horizontal because we, the many believers, are one; it is vertical because we, the many believers, are one with the Triune God. In the Spirit we are one with all the believers as well as with the Triune God.

(7) We worship God, who is Spirit, by this Spirit and with reality, that is, with the Christ whom we have experienced (4:23-24). Hence, we worship the Spirit by the Spirit. This is a mystery that cannot be explained.

(8) We are regenerated by the Spirit in our spirit, and we worship the Spirit in our spirit (3:6; 4:24).

FOUR MAIN POINTS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

These are the main points concerning the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in the Gospel of John. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are the three-in-one God; He is one God, yet He is Father, Son, and Spirit. In His economy the Father is in the Son, the Son became the Spirit, and the Spirit enters into us. When the Triune God comes into us, He regenerates us. Then, as the Spirit, He is breath for us to breathe, living water for us to drink, and food for us to eat. In 20:22, after His resurrection, the Lord breathed into His disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." He breathes out the Spirit so that we can breathe Him in. In 4:14 He said that He would give us living water that would become in us a fountain springing up into eternal life. In 7:38-39 He spoke of living water flowing out of the innermost being of those who would come to Him and drink. In 6:35 He said that He is the bread of life and that those who come to Him would by no means hunger. Furthermore, in verse 57 He said that those who eat Him would live because of Him.

We must remember these four main points concerning what the Triune God is to us: first, He regenerates us; second, He is breath for us to breathe; third, He is living water for us to drink; and fourth, He is food for us to eat. As soon as a baby is born, it will cry; if the baby does not cry, someone will spank it so that it will cry. This spanking causes it to begin to breathe. When Christians call on the Lord's name, they are breathing. Many can testify that they feel so happy when they call on the Lord's name. This indicates that they are breathing spiritually. However, it is not enough to just breathe; we also need to drink. When we first call on the Lord's name, we are breathing; when we call again, "O Lord! Amen!" a few more times, our breathing becomes our drinking. After drinking, we need to eat Him as bread in His Word. Hence, we have to pray-read the Lord's Word. If we breathe, drink, and eat the Lord every day, we will grow in the divine life.

FRUIT-BEARING BEING THE EXPRESSION OF LIFE

The matter of fruit-bearing is also mentioned in John 15. What is fruit-bearing? As the life in us becomes richer and increases, gradually it will

flow out and be expressed. This expression is fruit-bearing. The Lord said, "I am the vine; you are the branches" (v. 5). The function of a branch is to bear fruit. This is especially true of the branches from a grape vine, which are only good for bearing fruit. The branches of a grape vine cannot be used to make furniture; if they do not bear fruit, they are totally useless. Bearing fruit is not outward behavior or an outward act but the overflow of the inner life.

THE GROWTH AND SPREAD OF LIFE

Life is the Triune God as the Spirit. He has entered into our spirit to be our life. This life needs to grow and spread within us. Our problem is that we do not let Him spread, and He is restricted within us. On the surface, we go to the meetings, pray, and even pray-read the Word, but inwardly we do not let the Lord Spirit spread, and we do not surrender to Him. When He has an argument with us inwardly, we always win and He always loses. It is not a blessing but rather a loss when we win an argument with the Lord. Therefore, every time we argue with the Lord, we should learn to say to the Lord, "Lord, have mercy on me. Do not let me win. Please defeat me." If we desire to bear the fruit of life, we must let Him grow and spread in us. This is not a matter of being zealous outwardly. Neither is it a matter of improving ourselves outwardly. Rather, we need to let the Lord be victorious in us; we need to be overcome and subdued by Him. We need to let the Lord win in all arguments, whether great or small. If we are always defeated by Him, we will be blessed.

It does not matter how zealous we are for Him outwardly. The only thing that matters is how much we have been defeated and subdued by Him inwardly. Our work is not to stir people up to become zealous or to encourage people to work for Him. Rather, our work is to help people so that inwardly they will let Christ win, be subdued by Christ, and let the Spirit grow. Then the Lord will gain the full ground in us and be able to make home in us, and we will take Him as our person. Thus, for us to live will be Christ. As such, we will be full of His abundant life and will flow out this life; such a flowing out is fruit-bearing.

CHAPTER SIX

GROWING IN LIFE AND RECEIVING AND KEEPING THE LORD'S WORD

Scripture Reading: John 5:24; 6:57, 63; 14:15-16, 20-21, 23; 15:3, 7-8, 10; 17:8, 14, 17

THE TRIUNE GOD'S ENTERING INTO US AS A PERSON AND LIVING OUT OF US

The Gospel of John is a book that is very mysterious, rich, spiritual, and full of life. Its mysteriousness and richness are related to the revelation of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. In the Gospel of John there is hardly any teaching. This book shows how the Word, the Son, who was in the beginning with God, is God (1:1). As the Word, God became flesh and manifested grace and reality on the earth in the Son (v. 14). Eventually, the Son, who was both God and man, died on the cross, releasing the divine life, and as the last Adam in resurrection, He became the life-giving Spirit to enter into us (20:22). The Triune God enters into us as a person. We have received more than just God's life, nature, power, and attributes, such as holiness and love. We have received the Triune God Himself—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—into us as a person. The Father is in the Son, the Son became the Spirit, and the Spirit has entered into us. The Triune God as a person has entered into us.

God has come into us to be our life and nature and also to be our person. We live because of Him, and we also live Him. We should live out not only His love, His holiness, and His attributes but also His very person. We should live out the Lord, because He is in us as a person. Hallelujah!

TWO MEANS OF ENJOYING GOD—THE WORD AND THE SPIRIT

If we can only speak about Christ being our person, this will be merely a doctrine. The Gospel of John, however, shows that we can enjoy Him as a

person and touch Him through the Word and the Spirit. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word." *Word* in Greek signifies the full definition, explanation, and expression of God; hence, it is God defined, explained, and expressed. Thus, verse 1 continues, saying, "And the Word was God." Then in 4:24 the Lord said, "God is Spirit." God is the Word, and God is the Spirit. Hence, the Word and the Spirit are two means for us to experience the mysterious and rich Triune God.

TWO LINES IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN— THE WORD AND THE SPIRIT

We can identify two lines in the Gospel of John. The first is the line of the word, and the second is the line of the Spirit. Let us begin, however, by considering the line of the Spirit. John 3:6 says, "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit," and 4:24 says, "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit." Chapter 6 speaks of "the bread of life" (vv. 35, 48), and it also speaks of "the Spirit who gives life" (v. 63). In 7:37-39 the Lord said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes into Me...out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water. But this He said concerning the Spirit, whom those who believed into Him were about to receive." Chapters 14 through 16 are also focused on the Spirit. On the evening when the Lord was about to be crucified, He said to His disciples, "I am going to the Father...And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever, even the Spirit of reality...because He abides with you and shall be in you...I am coming to you" (14:12, 16-18). According to these verses, when the Spirit comes, the Lord also comes. The Lord said that the Spirit of reality would enter into the disciples and be with them forever, that He would guide them into all the reality, and that He would declare to them the things that were coming, for He would declare to the disciples what He received from the Lord (16:13-14). Following His death, the Lord ascended to the Father on the morning of His resurrection and came again to the disciples on the evening of His resurrection (20:17, 19-20). When He came to the disciples, He came as the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), and He breathed the Spirit into the disciples so that the disciples would receive Him as the holy breath, the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). This is the line of the Spirit.

Now we need to consider the line of the word. Verse 24 of chapter 5 says, "He who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life." This shows that the Lord's word is available and that we must touch His word and listen to His word. Verse 57 of chapter 6 says, "He who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me." We eat the Lord through His words, because as verse 63 continues, "It is the Spirit who gives life;...the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." The Lord's words are the bread of life, and the Spirit embodied in His words gives life. Later, in 14:21 the Lord said, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he is the one who loves Me." Commandments are words. When we keep His commandments, we are keeping His words, and He will manifest Himself to us (v. 21); not only so, both He and the Father will come to make an abode with us (v. 23). When we have a normal experience of His words, we will have His manifestation, and He and the Father will come to make an abode with us.

John 15:1-3 speaks of our being branches in the vine and of our need to bear fruit. In order to bear fruit, we need to be cleansed, and it is the Lord's word that cleanses us. If we allow the Lord's word to operate in us, His word will cleanse us, and if we abide in Him, His words will abide in us (v. 7). This is wonderful. First, we abide in Him, and He abides in us (v. 4). Then we abide in Him, and His words abide in us (v. 7). As a result of this abiding, we will bear much fruit in which the Father is glorified (v. 8). If the Lord's words can gain ground in us, we will enjoy His rich life, which will bear fruit. Finally, verse 10 says, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love." The Lord's commandments are surely the Lord's words.

In chapter 17 there are at least three verses that speak of the word. In His prayer to the Father, the Lord said, "The words which You gave Me I have given to them, and they received them" (v. 8). He also said, "I have given them Your word" (v. 14), and "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth" (v. 17). These verses are part of the line of the word in the Gospel of John. Hence, the Gospel of John has two lines—the line of the word and the line of the Spirit. The word and the Spirit are the two means through which we experience the Triune God.

GROWING IN LIFE AND RECEIVING THE LORD'S WORD

The initiation of life begins with the Spirit, but the word is needed for the growth, spread, and expansion of life. Although the initiation of life is through the Spirit, the growth of life is through the word. We know that the Lord is the Spirit in our spirit, and we can enjoy Him by calling on His name. As we call, we are breathing; that is, we are receiving Him as air. As we breathe more, our breathing becomes our drinking. Sister M. E. Barber wrote a hymn that says, "Just to breathe the Name of Jesus, / Is to drink of Life indeed" (*Hymns,* #73). As our breathing increases, it becomes our drinking. However, in addition to breathing and drinking, we must eat. Our physical body needs both air and water. However, in order to receive a rich supply of nutrients for our growth, we need food. Hence, we should not only breathe and drink but also eat in order to receive the necessary nutrients. We must have the Lord's Word in order to eat. Thus, eating is related to pray-reading the Scriptures.

Some have said mistakenly that we only need to call on the Lord's name, that we do not need to listen to messages or read the Bible. This is not true; we need the Bible more than anyone else. Many people read the Bible only with their eyes; others study it with their minds. However, when we pray-read the Lord's Word, we receive the words of the Bible into our spirit. We want and need the Bible very much. It is the Bible that we want, not man's nonsensical words. We also need the ministry of the Word. We do not reject the practice of ministering the Word; rather, we reject only messages that do not supply life.

THE CHURCH NEEDING LIVING MINISTRY

If the Lord has mercy, the churches in every place should receive several messages every week that are living, strong, and fresh. The church in Los Angeles does not reject the ministry of the Word. On the contrary, at least four messages are given every week. I am not boasting; I can testify that every message is a living message. We need the ministry of the Word, a ministry that is living. In the Gospel of John there is the Spirit, and there is also the word. It is not enough to have just the Spirit. It is not enough to just breathe and drink; there is a need to eat. We need to breathe moment by moment, drink seven or eight times a day, and eat at least three times a day.

In the church there should be at least two to three messages a week to supply God's children. Some may ask, "What if we do not have living messages?" If our messages are not living, we should go to Joseph to buy

grain. We may encounter a great famine, but there is enough supply in Joseph's storehouse. We should go to Joseph to buy grain. Who is Joseph? Joseph is the glorified Lord Jesus, the Christ on the throne.

We should not have our spirit merely enlivened or our thirst quenched. Our hunger also needs to be satisfied. The church needs solid food; all the local churches need this. We do not need to spend as much time eating as we do breathing, because we need to breathe every second. Hence, several messages a week will be adequate to feed and satisfy the saints with food. Everyone needs to bear responsibility in this matter; everyone needs to pray and ask the Lord to release His speaking among us, asking that His Word would be open to us.

ENJOYING THE LORD'S WORD DAILY BY EATING AND DRINKING

We must eat the Lord's Word. I once drew a diagram of a triangle with the words *God, Spirit,* and *Word* at the corners. God is Spirit (4:24), and God is also the Word (1:1). Furthermore, the Word is Spirit. The words that the Lord has spoken to us are spirit (6:63). Hence, the three are one. We cannot contact God without breathing in the Spirit. Neither can we contact God and breathe in the Spirit without dealing with the Word. None of us can live apart from the Bible. We should have more than one Bible so that we can have the Word with us at all times. We should never be separated from the Word. All day long we should eat the Lord's Word, because the Lord Himself is the Word, and His words are spirit and life. When we open the Bible, we should not focus on understanding but on eating and being nourished in our spirit. It is one thing to understand the food that we eat for breakfast, but it is another thing to eat and digest the food. In the same principle we need to digest the words of the Bible. Pray-reading the Bible is to eat the Lord's Word. As long as we take in the Lord's Word, our spirit will spontaneously digest the Word.

Two different Greek words are translated as "word" or "words" in the Gospel of John. For example, the Greek word for *words* in 6:63 is *rhema,* which is different from the Greek word for *Word* in 1:1, which is *logos.* The former refers to the instant word, and the latter, to the constant word. The Lord gives us both the instant word and the constant word. For example, John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that everyone who believes into Him would not perish, but

would have eternal life." This is an example of His constant word. However, when the Lord spoke to the man who had been impotent for thirty-eight years, saying, "Rise, take up your mat and walk" (5:8), He was speaking an instant word to him. All the words in the Bible are constant; however, when the Lord repeats a constant word to us, it becomes an instant word. Whether the Lord's words are constant or instant to us, we should receive His words constantly.

KEEPING THE LORD'S WORD AND EXPERIENCING ANOTHER COMFORTER

The Lord said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever" (14:15-16). *Commandments* refers to His words. As we keep the Lord's words, another Comforter comes. Although the Holy Spirit is already in us, when we receive a word from the Lord and keep that word, we have a deep sense of the Holy Spirit coming to us as another Comforter, because of the freshness of His taste. For example, as we are walking toward a department store, the Lord may tell us not to go into the store. At this point we have to either follow or disobey the Lord's speaking. Occasionally, we turn away out of our love for the Lord, but often we bargain with the Lord, saying, "Lord, forgive me. I am already here. Please let me go in just this one time." The Lord rarely responds by saying, "Absolutely not!" Rather, He indicates His feeling and leaves the decision to us. Most of the time, we follow our own feeling and do not turn away. Consequently, when we go into the store and make several purchases, we often have a sense of deadness within as if the Holy Spirit has disappeared. Yes, we still have the Holy Spirit in us, but our touch with the Lord is gone, and we even feel shameful before the Lord. At such a time, we do not have a fresh sense that there is another Comforter in us.

On the other hand, if we call, "O Lord!" when the Lord says, "Go home," and say Amen, we will sense the Holy Spirit within us as another Comforter. As we head toward our home, it will seem almost as if we were flying, because we sense the comforting presence of the Spirit. When we love Him and keep His commandments, another Comforter comes to us.

Verse 15 of chapter 14 says, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Then verse 16 says, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter." Ordinarily we separate these two verses, but actually

they are connected. If we desire to have another Comforter, we must love the Lord and keep His commandments. Then in our experience the Lord will become another Comforter, bringing us the fresh taste of the Holy Spirit as our enjoyment.

MANIFESTING HIMSELF AND MAKING AN ABODE WITH US BY OUR KEEPING OF THE LORD'S WORDS

Verses 20 and 21 of chapter 14 say, "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them, he is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him." If we arrive at a department store and the Lord says, "Go home," do you think that the Lord will manifest Himself to us if we do not listen to His word? Although He is still in us, He will hide Himself. The Lord will never forsake us or leave us, but He will not always manifest Himself to us. I do not encourage you to watch movies. However, if you go to a movie, the Lord will go with you. Nevertheless, He will go in a hidden way, and you will not be able to feel His presence or His manifestation.

After the children of Israel worshipped the molten calf, God told Moses to bring the Israelites to Canaan but that He would not go up in their midst with them (Exo. 33:3). However, Moses negotiated with God, saying, "If Your presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here" (v. 15). It was as if he said, "God, this will not do. I am not going. Your presence must go with us; otherwise, I will not go. I know You can exercise Your power to lead us into Canaan. However, if we cannot touch Your presence, we will not be able to endure the journey. Therefore, Your presence has to go with us." What does it mean for God's presence to be with us? Suppose three people are riding together in a train, but one of the three is unhappy and does not want to sit in the same train seat with the other two. Even though he is going with the other two, they do not have his immediate presence. Similarly, even though the Lord is in us, we will not have His immediate presence if we do not keep His words. As soon as we respond to the Lord's words, however, His presence with us is immediately manifested. It is a special blessing to know the Lord as another Comforter and have His manifestation by keeping His words.

In John 14:23 Jesus also said to His disciples, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him.” Since the Lord Jesus is in us already, why does He say that He will come to us and make an abode with us? Does this imply that He is not in us? No, He is in us, but in order for us to enjoy not only His manifestation but also His abiding in us, we must be those who love Him and keep His word. In such a condition we will have a special sense of the Lord’s abiding in us. Further, we will be practically one with the Lord, because He will be our person within, and we will be His manifestation without.

It is easy to call on the Lord’s name, but the greatest test is how we deal with the Lord’s word when it comes to us. Many times we let the Lord abide in us, but we do not let His word abide in us. For example, a sister may let her husband reside in their home but still not receive his words. Sometimes wives argue with their husbands, and husbands argue with their wives. Similarly, we often argue with the Lord. Although we may not openly defy the Lord’s words, we often ignore them. We are willing to let the Lord indwell us, but we are unwilling to let His words abide in us. This is our real situation.

KEEPING THE LORD’S WORD SO THAT WE MAY GROW IN LIFE

In these days many saints are calling on the name of the Lord, and our meetings are becoming more living. However, the growth in life in the saints is still slow. The Lord said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (v. 15). Do we really love Him? Do we really keep His commandments? His commandments are of two kinds—constant and instant. His constant commandments are found in the Bible, whereas His instant commandments often consist of only one word, *no*. If a Christian can always obey the word *no,* he will grow in life. For example, when we say, “Lord, I want to visit my relatives,” He may say, “No!” When we say, “Lord, I want to buy something,” He may say, “No!” The Lord says “No!” to us numerous times during a day, but we ignore His word because we want to do as we please. This hinders our growth in life.

Actually, outward exhortations are useless. It is useless for me to exhort you not to love the world or not to lose your temper. Instead, we should call on the Lord and receive His words because we love Him. The food that we eat must be digested in our stomach. Similarly, the words that we receive must be

allowed to operate in our being. If we do not digest the Lord's words, we will suffer from "indigestion" and become spiritually sick. Even though we call on the Lord's name and pray-read the Bible, there will be spiritual growth only if we allow His words to operate in our being.

We must look to the Lord for His mercy so that He may give us a heart that loves Him fervently and absolutely. When His word enters into us, it must be received and digested. This will provide us with the proper spiritual nutrients, and we will grow in life. This is our need today. We all need to pray for this. We should not only call on the Lord's name, breathe Him in, and drink Him, but we must also eat His Word in a genuine way, digesting His Word and allowing His word to operate in us. Then He will gain ground in our being, manifest Himself to us, and make an abode with us so that we will grow in life.

CHAPTER SEVEN

GROWING IN LIFE AND TAKING CHRIST AS OUR PERSON

Reality is the Triune God Himself. In this reality the Father is the source, the Lord is the expression, and the Spirit is the realization. The Spirit who enters into us is the reality of the Triune God. Apart from the reality of the Triune God, all things are but a shadow. For example, the expression of love is just a shadow. The reality of love in its nature and substance is the Triune God who indwells us and who is realized in us as the Spirit. This all-inclusive, life-giving Spirit is the reality of love. Not only is He the reality of love; He is also the reality of life, patience, power, and wisdom. He is the reality of all positive things.

Colossians 2:16-17 says, "Let no one therefore judge you in eating and in drinking or in respect of a feast or of a new moon or of the Sabbath, which are a shadow of the things to come, but the body is of Christ." A new moon is the new beginning of a month, which is merely a shadow; however, the Lord as the life-giving Spirit is our real new beginning. Every time we touch Him, we have a new beginning. The Sabbath is also a shadow, but the body, that is, the substance of the Sabbath, is the Spirit who indwells us as our rest. Everything is a shadow, but the reality, the body of all the positive things, is the life-giving Spirit who indwells us.

TAKING CHRIST AS OUR PERSON BEING THE SWEETEST EXPERIENCE

We must realize that the Spirit is not merely a power or an attribute; neither is He merely holiness and life. Rather, He lives in us as a person. I hope that we all can apprehend this matter in our spirit. This is the deepest, finest, and sweetest experience of the Lord. To experience the person of the Lord is the deepest experience and also the most complete, tender, and sweet experience of Him.

Many of our experiences of the Lord are not so tender and sweet. For example, when a sister decides to go shopping, she may remember to call on

the Lord, but as soon as she calls, the Lord says, “Go home!” When she calls again, the Lord repeats His words, “Go home!” According to our experience in similar circumstances, we try to bargain with the Lord so that we do not have to obey Him. If the Lord is merciful, we will obey, but our obedience is often with reluctance. Consequently, our experience is not so tender and sweet. Similarly, a sister with a disobedient child may scold her child, even though she has a clear sense that the Lord does not want her to discipline the child in anger. Although she may not fully vent her anger, her displeasure is also not fully covered. Her response to the Lord’s check on her anger can be compared to trying to turn an oxcart around. Although it is possible to turn the ox and the cart, it takes much effort, and the ox is not happy. These kinds of experiences are coarse, and they are not as tender and sweet as they could be.

Consider the experience of a sister who is shopping in a store. As soon as she picks up a piece of clothing, the Lord says, “Put it down.” Even though she puts it down, she does so reluctantly. Her reluctance is the result of her desire to purchase the piece of clothing. From her past dealings with the Lord, however, she dares not disobey, knowing that if she buys it and brings it home, she will be miserable for a whole week. Another sister in the same situation may disobey the Lord and buy the piece of clothing. When she tries to wear it, however, the Lord will give her no peace. Although these sisters have a limited experience of obeying the Lord, their experiences are not sweet.

A sweet experience of taking the Lord as our person involves experiencing Him as the One living in us. When a sister has to discipline a disobedient child, she should open to the Lord and learn to take the Lord as her person. When she opens to the Lord, she will not only have a deep sense of the Lord’s way, but she will also be able to follow this sense, even if it is not according to her concept. Following the Lord in this way has a very different taste.

When a sister wants to go shopping, she should not say, “Lord, is it Your will that I go shopping? Do You want me to go to the store?” This kind of prayer shows that she does not know the Lord as her person. Rather, she should take the Lord as her person and do what the Lord is doing. A sister who wants to be a good wife often will ask her husband if she can go to the department store. Although this seems quite good, it would be better if she took her husband as her person and only went to the store if he was going. A sister who asks her husband if she can go to the store is trying to follow the teaching of the Bible concerning wives submitting to their husbands, but her

submission is actually in the way of servitude. Her outward submission often causes an inner bitterness, because she feels the loss of freedom that comes with her self-imposed obligation to get her husband's permission. Just as there often is not a sense of sweetness associated with her confession of her husband as her head, there is not a sense of sweetness in our confession of the Lord as our Head. A sister may accept her husband as her head for a period of time, but if her confession is based only on an outward teaching, she will eventually rebel.

The proper way to take someone as our head is to take him as our person. A wife should not take her husband as her head by making him a king or master but by taking him as her person. If she takes her husband as her person, she will not live by herself but by her husband. When she puts aside her person and takes her husband as her person, she will not ask whether she can go to the store but whether he is going to the store. There is a great difference in taste in these two ways; the first way results in bitterness, but the second way issues in a sweet feeling.

Paul is one who took the Lord as his person. He says, "To me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). He does not simply say, "I live by Christ." It is one thing to live by Christ, and it is quite another to live Christ. Can the sisters say, "To me, to live is my husband"? I believe many sisters can say that they live by their husband and listen to their husband because their husband is their head. However, accepting a husband's headship in this way often results in bitterness. This can be seen in the fact that few wives pass up an opportunity to complain about their husband to others. If a sister truly took her husband as her person, there would be no bitterness and complaining, and everything would be sweet.

John 14:15 says, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Verse 23 says, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him." These words have such a sweet taste. A person who loves the Lord and keeps His word will take the Lord as his person. Then the Father and the Son will come to him and make an abode with him. When the Lord comes with the Father in this way, He is able to make His home in us rather than merely visit with us for a moment of enjoyment.

First Corinthians 6:19 says, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” The Holy Spirit is in our spirit, and our spirit is in our body; hence, our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is in us as a person; we need to take Him as our person.

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.” The phrase *no longer I* does not mean that our temper or preferences no longer exist; rather, it means that our person no longer lives. The phrase *Christ who lives in me* does not refer to the life of Christ, the power of Christ, the holiness of Christ, or the love of Christ; rather, it refers to the person of Christ. Christ Himself lives in us. Eventually, Paul says, “To me, to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21). This is the experience of Christ as our person.

TAKING CHRIST AS OUR PERSON BEING THE SHORTEST ROUTE TO GROW IN LIFE

The shortest route to the growth in life is simply to take Christ as our person. Concerning the experience of the growth in life, we have spent decades trying to find a short route but with only limited success. Now, however, we know that the shortest route is to take Christ as our person. If we had known of this way twenty years ago, we would have been able to help countless brothers and sisters. In those days many sisters came to me to ask how they should deal with their difficult husbands, and I would spend much time and effort to instruct and help them. Sometimes I would advise them, saying, “Sister, you should realize that God has arranged your circumstances very well. You need your husband very much. He is the best husband for you, and even his temperament is the most suitable for you. You should be patient and accept the environment that the Lord arranged for you.” At other times I would say, “This situation is a sweet cross that the Lord has given you. Your dear husband may seem like a difficult cross to bear, but if you receive this situation from the Lord, you will receive life from it.” I learned this response from Madame Guyon, and sometimes it was effective, but often it was not. Today if a sister comes to me about her husband, I say, “Sister, simply take your husband as your person! Even if he is odd, just take his person as your person. There is no need to try to be patient or to take up the cross. Simply take him as your person by taking the Lord as your person.”

I have followed the Lord in different ways for many years, and there has always been some benefit from my practices. However, today I simply take Christ as my person. I never bother to ask the Lord, “May I go to this place?” I only ask, “Lord, are You going to this place?” When a sister goes to the department store to buy a dress, she should not ask, “Lord, may I buy this dress?” When she picks up a dress, she should ask, “Lord, do You like this dress?” The purchase of a dress should not be related merely to the Lord’s permission but to the Lord’s preference.

I really do not want to speak too much concerning matters between husbands and wives, but sometimes it is unavoidable. Consider the matter of clothing. A sister who desires to be a good wife will ask her husband about a dress and say, “If you do not like it, I will not wear it.” Sometimes, however, a husband and wife will argue over what she should wear, because the wife likes a particular dress, but the husband does not. After arguing for a while, the wife may agree to not wear it, but in her heart she still wants to wear it. This situation exposes our real situation with the Lord, because the Bible often compares the relationship between a husband and wife to our relationship with the Lord. Although the sisters acknowledge that their husband is the head, sometimes an inner bitterness remains. Similarly, we also do not have a sweet taste when we “submit” to the Lord. May the Lord have mercy on us so that we can take the shortest way by taking Christ as our person. This is not a matter of receiving the Lord’s permission but a matter of knowing His preferences as a person. We are crucified with Christ, and it is no longer we who live, but it is Christ who lives in us (Gal. 2:20). Hence, to us, to live is Christ (Phil. 1:21).

If we really take Christ as our person, we will mature very quickly, and it will hasten the Lord’s return. In addition, our meetings will be full of the riches because our living is Christ. Since taking Christ as our person is the reality by which we live and for which we work, we will also worship God according to this reality. I absolutely believe that the Lord will work in us to this extent. If we are not willing to take this short route, the Lord may look for someone else. Nevertheless, I believe that the Lord’s grace is still with us and that He will take us on in a direct and quick way. In these days we do not need old religion, old doctrines, old ways, or old ordinances; we only need Christ as our person. As long as we learn to live in the spirit, taking Christ as our person, we will reach the stage of living Christ.

CHAPTER EIGHT

PUTTING ON THE NEW MAN AND TAKING CHRIST AS OUR PERSON

Scripture Reading: Eph. 2:15-16, 18; 3:16-19; 4:22-24

THE POWER OF CHRIST AND THE PERSON OF CHRIST

The church is the subject of Ephesians. Chapter 1 covers the initiation of the church, and chapters 2 through 6 cover the practical living of the church. In chapter 1 the apostle's prayer is related to the initiation of the church, and in chapter 3, which is the kernel of chapters 2 through 6, the apostle's prayer is related to the living of the church. It is one thing for the church to have a beginning, but it is quite another thing to have the church life. In a similar manner, it is one thing to begin a marriage with a wedding, but it is another thing to live a married life. In the book of Ephesians there is a revelation of both the initiation, the beginning, of the church and the living of the church.

The key points of difference between chapters 1 and 3 are highlighted below.

Chapter 1:
The Initiation of the Church
The human spirit as an organ,
needing wisdom and revelation
and receiving power,
resulting in the Body.

Chapter 3:
The Living of the Church
The human spirit as a person,
the inner man,
needing to be strengthened,
resulting in the new man.

For the initiation of the church in chapter 1, the organ of our human spirit needs wisdom and revelation, but for the living of the church in chapter 3, the

person of our spirit, our inner man, needs to be strengthened. For the living of the church, our spirit must progress from its function as an organ to being our person.

The difference between the spirit as an organ and a person can be illustrated by the difference between an electrical motor and a human being. When a motor is plugged into an electrical source, it will begin to run because it is receiving power. Nevertheless, it is only a machine, an instrument, which is different from a human being. Even though a human has power that comes from life, a human is superior to a machine because he has a personality in addition to power.

In chapter 1 our spirit—a spirit of wisdom and revelation—is spoken of as an organ. However, in chapter 3 our spirit is referred to as the inner man. As an organ, our spirit needs wisdom and revelation, but as the inner man, our spirit needs to be strengthened. Hence, knowing our spirit as the inner man is more advanced than knowing our spirit as an organ. In chapter 1 we can experience the power of Christ, but in chapter 3 we can experience the person of Christ. As an organ, our spirit needs the power of Christ, but as the inner man, our spirit needs the person of Christ.

Even though sisters know that their husband is a person, they often wish that their husband would automatically and obediently respond to their requests and suggestions as if he were a machine. However, whereas machines do things automatically and even "obediently," husbands do not. When a person touches the keys on a typewriter, letters are automatically printed on a piece of paper, but when a wife asks her husband to wake up at six thirty in the morning, he may not wake up until eight o'clock. Every wife would like to be in control of her husband's daily schedule, including when he goes to bed, when he wakes up, when he works, and when he comes home, but husbands are persons not machines. When a wife tries to touch a "key" on her husband, often nothing happens. She may remind him to come home at five thirty, but he may not come home until six o'clock. If she again reminds him to be home at five thirty the next day, he may not return until midnight. Even though wives would prefer that their husband follow their every instruction, their husband is not a machine; he is a living person.

Once when I was visiting a church in China, a married sister came to speak to me about her unbelieving husband's lack of response to her reminders.

Although she had tried to touch his "keys" in many ways, he would not respond. She asked, "What should I do with my husband?" Although I had not seen the light concerning the Lord being our person, the Lord had mercy on me and gave me a word of wisdom. I replied, "Sister, you need to change the source of your regulations. Do not touch him according to your regulations, but according to his regulations." She responded, saying, "But my husband does not have any regulations; that is the problem I am trying to correct." Then I said, "Even if he has no regulations, you should accept that as your regulation. Do not set a rule that he has to be home at ten thirty or even at one thirty. Just let him come home when he comes home, and no matter when he comes home, do not scold him. When he enters through the door, you should welcome him and even say to him, 'Some tea is ready. Please enjoy.' No matter when he returns, you should be waiting to receive him properly." She responded, "This truly will require the Lord's grace." I then reminded her of the Lord's sufficient grace, and she received my word. Shortly thereafter, her husband was saved.

We need the power of Christ, but even more we need the person of Christ. Our spirit is an organ that enables us to experience the power of the Lord. However, our spirit is also our inner man; it is a person. Since our spirit is a person, we can experience more than the Lord's power; we can experience His person. When we experience the power of Christ through our spirit as an organ, the issue is the church as the Body of Christ. When we experience the person of Christ through our spirit as the inner man, the issue is the church as the new man.

TAKING CHRIST AS OUR PERSON BY PUTTING ON THE NEW MAN

Christians who pay attention to spirituality often speak of the church as the Body of Christ. Even though this is a higher revelation, they do not see that the church is also the new man. For them the church may be the Body, but it is not a person. Nevertheless, a person is more than a body, because when a person dies, his body is present, but his person is not. This shows that a body is not the person himself but merely an organ of the person.

The church is a person, a man. According to Ephesians 2:15, Christ abolished the law of the commandments in ordinances on the cross and created the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers in Himself into one new

man. This new man is not an individual man but a corporate man, because Christ created two peoples into one new man. After the new man is spoken of in verse 15, verse 16 speaks of Christ's slaying on the cross the enmity created by the law of the commandments in ordinances, thereby making peace, and reconciling both the Jews and the Gentiles in one Body to God. This proves that the new man in verse 15 is the Body in verse 16. Both descriptions refer to the church.

According to position, every believer is saved and in the church. However, according to our actual living, many believers, including ourselves, are not in the church experientially. We should be like caterpillars who turn into butterflies by putting off the old man and putting on the new man. Many brothers and sisters, however, put on the new man only in a partial way, retaining some aspects of the old man. This is like a butterfly that comes only partially out of its cocoon. While a part of us is genuinely living in the church life, we retain some of our vestiges as a "caterpillar." With other brothers and sisters, however, there is an expression that indicates that the likeness of a "butterfly" is truly being manifested. In the coming years I believe that many saints will put off the old man and put on the new man in order to live in the reality of the church life.

We must know that our spirit is the inner man and that Christ is the person of this inner man. In the past we experienced the power of Christ, and for this, our spirit as an organ was sufficient. But now we need to experience the person of Christ, and for this, we must know our spirit as the inner man.

Many saints can testify of their experience of Christ, but most of their testimonies are related to experiencing the power of Christ. Few can testify of experiencing Christ as their person. Gradually, the Lord will lead us to experience Him as our person, which will be a much sweeter experience. To pray for the Lord's healing is to pray to experience the Lord as power. However, as the Lord leads us to experience Him as our person, our prayers will change. Instead of asking for healing, we will speak to the Lord in order to know His desire and intention for us during our time of illness.

One sister recently testified that her child was sick and crying continuously, so she called out to the Lord, and her child was healed. Thus, she experienced the Lord's power. However, the Lord is leading us to experience not only His power but also His person. Later, if her child becomes sick again, her calling

out to the Lord may not result in the manifestation of His power. With no seeming response, she may complain to the Lord that He has not been as faithful as He once was. She may even think that the Lord is not listening to her prayers. The Lord's lack of a response to her requests for healing is related to His desire that she experience His person. Rather than asking only for healing, she should seek the Lord to know His intentions related to the situation. If she inquires of the Lord in this way, she will know the Lord according to His person. When she inquires of the Lord, He may show her that His earlier healing was for her sake, that is, so that she would not be stumbled in her faith. But with her faith strengthened, she should now seek and accept the Lord's feeling in regard to the situation of her child's illness. In this way she will experience the Lord as her person.

DENYING OURSELVES AND TAKING CHRIST AS OUR PERSON

To take Christ as our person means to deny the self (Matt. 16:24). The self is our fallen person. We must deny our person and take Christ as our person. Many of us can testify that the Lord Jesus has listened to our prayers. If the Lord did not listen to prayer, we would not even be saved. However, after being saved for a period of time, it seems as if the Lord no longer listens to us. This is because He wants us to listen to Him. The Lord wants us to put ourselves aside and let Him be our person. We all want our children to be well behaved, respectable, smart, and well educated so that they bring honor to us. When testifying to others about our family, we may say, "The Lord Jesus is so wonderful. When I could not manage my children, I prayed to the Lord, and their behavior changed." This may be true in the beginning of our experience of the Lord. However, as time goes by, He will no longer merely bestow His power upon us according to our limited prayers. This is because He wants to train us to experience His person in addition to His power. Eventually, we will speak less about our needs and listen more to Him. At some point we will not even ask for things; we will only speak of our situation in prayer in order to hear His feeling and His leading as our person.

In John 11 Martha and Mary were worried when their brother Lazarus was sick. They sent people to inform the Lord of his illness, saying, "Behold, he whom You love is sick" (v. 3). This word was spoken with the intention to cause the Lord to come to heal him in Bethany. However, the Lord did not

listen. He remained where He was for two more days. He did not go to Bethany when Lazarus was sick, and He did not even go when Lazarus died. He waited until Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. The Lord took His time to go to Bethany because He wanted to train Martha and Mary to take Him as their person rather than commanding Him.

After remaining in the same place for two days, the Lord Jesus decided that it was time to go and see Lazarus (vv. 6, 11). When Martha and Mary heard that the Lord was coming, they were full of grievances. Martha went to meet Him and said, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (v. 21). Martha was complaining because she felt that He had not listened to her request to come earlier, and that because of this, her brother had died. When the Lord Jesus said, "Your brother will rise again" (v. 23), He was telling her that she should listen to Him. But even though she heard the Lord's word, she was not really listening, because her response, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection in the last day" (v. 24), showed that she misunderstood. This is an illustration of how we read and expound the Bible. When the Lord indicated that He would raise up Lazarus immediately, she expounded the Lord's word by postponing Lazarus's resurrection to the last day. When the Lord was not able to get through to them, He had to ask, "Where have you put him?" (v. 34). When the Lord came to the tomb and asked for the stone to be taken away, Martha said, "Lord, by now he smells" (v. 39). This shows that it is not easy for us to take Christ as our person. It was the people's inability to listen to the Lord that caused Him to weep (v. 35). The Lord was not weeping because Lazarus was dead, because He knew that Lazarus was about to be resurrected. He was weeping for the foolish people, for their foolish speaking, and for their not taking Him as their person.

TAKING CHRIST AS OUR PERSON IN ORDER TO HAVE THE CHURCH LIFE

In the beginning of our Christian life we will experience the Lord's power, but as we go on, He will train us to experience Him as our person. As we enter into these experiences, the church as the new man will be produced. The church today is not merely the Body as an organ to express the Lord's power. The church today is the new man, and the person of this new man is Christ Himself. We all must take Him as our person. In His person we will have the church life.

I hope that the Lord will show us this light and lead us into experiences of taking Him as our person. We should not only know the church as the Body, but we should also take a further step and see the church as the new man and the Lord as the person of the new man. When we reach this point, we will be rooted and grounded in the Lord's love and able to apprehend with all the saints the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth of Christ (Eph. 3:17-18). At this time we will also know the sweetness of His love, which surpasses all knowledge, and be filled unto the fullness of God (v. 19). Thus, we put off the old man and put on the new man daily (4:22-24). This new man is the church life.

I believe that the Lord's Spirit will speak a clearer word to us and cause us to have clearer light. We will see what it means to be in the church life and to have the living of the new man with Christ as our person. Only when our self is denied and rejected will Christ be lived out in us: "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20), and "To me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). This is the new man. This is the living of the new man. This is the church.

CHAPTER NINE

CONSECRATING OURSELVES AND EXPERIENCING CHRIST AS OUR PERSON

Scripture Reading: Rom. 14:6-9; 2 Cor. 5:13-17; 6:8-10

GOD GIVING HIMSELF TO US AND OUR GIVING OURSELVES TO GOD

God's way of salvation is not according to our thought, and His desire in His salvation is beyond our natural comprehension. In His salvation God desires to give Himself to us. Even though we may have heard this before, it still needs an explanation. The Lord's giving of Himself to us involves more than dying on the cross so that we might receive salvation. Actually, when He gives Himself to us, it is Himself that He gives to us; that is, He comes into us to be our person. When we receive the Lord, we not only receive His salvation through His vicarious death on the cross and many other blessings. We also receive the Lord Himself; that is, we receive the Lord as a person.

This is not a simple matter even though it can be presented with simple utterances. In His salvation God wants to give Himself to us. However, God also wants us to give ourselves to Him. God has given Himself to us, and now we need to give ourselves to Him. The extent to which Christ is our person in our experience depends on the extent to which we give ourselves to Him. Christ has given Himself to us, but have we given ourselves to Him? I believe that many brothers and sisters have given themselves to the Lord but not in a full way. This can be compared to writing a check but not allowing the check-holder to cash the full amount. For example, even though we have given the Lord a "check" in the amount of $2,800,000, we have only allowed Him to cash ten percent of the amount, defaulting on the remaining ninety percent. After being touched by the speaking in a conference, we may say, "Lord, forgive me. I wrote a check but would not allow You to cash it. Lord, I give myself to You again." At such a time we may write a "check" for an even larger amount, but we again ask the Lord to cash only ten percent of it. Since we wrote a larger "check," the Lord gains some ground in us, but we repeat this process again and again.

We should be willing to settle our account with the Lord in a full way. I hope that all the young brothers and sisters will settle their accounts before the Lord and before all the churches. If we have received the Lord, the Lord has given Himself to us. Now we need to give ourselves to the Lord. We even need to ask ourselves whether our "check" to the Lord is in the proper amount. When a person writes a check, he is legally responsible to pay it. If we have written a "check" related to our consecration, sooner or later the Lord will require payment. If we do not pay today, we will pay one day. No one can take back his consecration to the Lord.

According to the Old Testament, once a sacrifice was placed on the altar, it could not be taken back. Leviticus 27:9-10 says, "If it is for an animal which may be presented to Jehovah as an offering, anything which may be given to Jehovah shall be holy. He may not exchange it or substitute it, either a good one for a bad one or a bad one for a good one; but if he does indeed substitute animal for animal, then both it and its substitute shall be holy." Once an animal was offered, it could not be exchanged or substituted, indicating that once a sacrifice was offered, it belonged to God forever. Furthermore, the position of the original offering could not be changed as the result of an exchange or substitution. Once an offering was made on the altar to God, it could not be returned to the original owner. In fact, when there was an exchange, both the original sacrifice and the substitute became holy. This means that both the original and the substitute belonged to God.

If a person has not consecrated himself on the altar, it is possible for him to be in "default" to the Lord, but once he places himself on the altar, he cannot return to his former status. This is a serious word: Once a "check" has been written, that is, once a person consecrates himself to the Lord, a deal has been made, and a legal right has been given to the Lord. Even if a consecrated person tries to delay the payment of his "check," the Lord will find a way to receive payment. Sooner or later the Lord will work out a payment for the "check." Hence, it is better to pay fully and quickly. If a person does not fulfill his promise, he will suffer much. The more readily we "pay," the better it will be. The more we delay, the more suffering we will experience.

May the Lord have mercy on us. In God's salvation He has given Himself to us; however, if we are to enjoy Him, we have to give ourselves to Him. This is our problem: the Lord has given Himself to us, but we have not given ourselves to Him. Since we have our own desires, we hold back a part of

ourselves from the Lord. However, the extent to which we hold back something from the Lord is the extent to which we lose the Lord. The amount of our enjoyment of the Lord does not depend on Him because He has already given Himself to us; it depends on how much we are willing to give ourselves to Him. The more we give to the Lord, the more we will enjoy Him; the less we give to the Lord, the less we will enjoy Him.

In Christianity consecration is often understood as presenting ourselves to God in order to do something for Him. Actually, consecration does not involve our doing anything for God; consecration means that we give ourselves to the Lord. The Lord has given Himself to us, and we should give ourselves to Him. This is consecration.

CONSECRATION BEING MORE IMPORTANT THAN OUTWARD MATTERS

Romans 14:6-9 says, "He who regards that day, regards it to the Lord; and he who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who does not eat, does not eat to the Lord, and he gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself, and none dies to himself; for whether we live, we live to the Lord, and whether we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore whether we live or we die, we are the Lord's. For Christ died and lived again for this, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." Verse 8 says that "we are the Lord's." In speaking of outward matters, Paul was very wise in his spirit. At that time the believers were involved in confusing debates about whether or not to regard a certain day and whether or not to eat certain foods. Paul, however, did not deal with them from the standpoint of doctrine. He did not say, "According to doctrine, we are in the age of grace. We can eat anything, regardless of whether it is meat or vegetables. Furthermore, in the age of grace every day is the same. We should not have a special regard for any day." He did not speak according to doctrine. Instead, his speaking was based on our consecration to the Lord; that is, it does not matter whether we eat or do not eat certain foods. The only thing that matters is the basis for our eating or not eating. If we eat to the Lord, our eating is right. If our not eating is to the Lord, our not eating is also right. Hence, it does not matter what we eat; the only thing that matters is to whom we are eating. If our eating or not eating is not to the Lord, then our actions are wrong no matter what we do outwardly.

Paul did not consider these matters from the standpoint of doctrine but from the standpoint of life. If someone asks us why we do not eat a certain food, our answer should be that we do not eat it because the Lord is not eating it. If someone asks us why we eat a certain food, our answer should be that we eat it because the Lord is eating it. If we can answer in this way, there is no problem either with eating or not eating. Although in substance, certain days and foods are different, in life our response to them should be the same: whether or not we regard a certain day and whether or not we regard certain foods should be based on knowing the Lord as our person. If we regard a certain day, it should be the issue of the Lord regarding this day. Even going to the meetings should be an issue of taking the Lord as our person, not because we have a certain doctrine related to the meetings. We should go to the meeting because the Lord is going to the meeting. If we have given ourselves to Him, He should be our person.

According to the Chinese mindset, when a woman is married, she marries herself off to her husband; that is, she gives herself to her husband. Before she is married, she belongs to her parents, but on the day of her marriage, she gives herself to her husband, and her name is changed. If a woman does not give herself to her husband, there will be problems. The best marriage, however, is one in which the wife gives herself to her husband, and the husband gives himself to his wife.

Even though we desire the Lord, we have problems because we do not want to give ourselves to Him. For example, we have been in Taiwan for decades, and if we had fulfilled our consecration to the Lord, the gospel would have spread throughout all of Taiwan. It seems as if the Lord is moving very slowly here, but actually, it is our cooperation with the Lord's move that is slow. Year after year we renew our consecration to the Lord with a new "check," but we continue to not allow Him to fully cash our "checks." This is our problem: we have received the Lord, but we are not willing to give ourselves to Him.

Some of the co-workers who are involved in the students' work have told me that many young brothers and sisters in Taiwan are not able to successfully pass through three strategic points in their spiritual development. The first strategic point occurs at the time of graduation from college. While they are in college, many young people are able to make spiritual progress, but some fail to advance after they graduate. The second strategic point is related to marriage. As soon as some young saints are married, they stop

advancing. The third strategic point involves going abroad for further study. If young brothers and sisters can pass through these three strategic points, they will stand firm. However, this is not easy. It is possible that only twenty-five out of two hundred young saints will remain after graduating from college, being married, and studying abroad. When I heard this, I told the co-workers that they must change the way that they work in order to better lead the young saints to give themselves to the Lord.

One time after a meeting more than ten young saints, most of whom were college graduates, came to me to speak about many problems. I told them that even though they were trying very hard to solve their problems, the fundamental issue involved their consecration. I further told them that because the issue of whether or not they belonged to the Lord had not been settled, it was useless to try to solve their problems. When we give ourselves to the Lord, we will thank the Lord whether our environment is difficult or easy. We will thank the Lord whether or not we get married and whether or not we go abroad to study. If we have given ourselves to the Lord, our outward circumstances will not be a problem.

Rather than focusing on our outward circumstances, we need to consider our consecration. This applies not only to young brothers and sisters but also to older saints. A person who is truly consecrated has been gained by the Lord in his person. It is possible to come to meetings year after year and even to serve the Lord but still have not been gained by the Lord. What the Lord wants is us. Even though we have given many things to the Lord, we may still be holding back something of ourselves from Him.

Romans 14 says that whether we live or we die, whether we eat or do not eat, and whether we regard a certain day or not, we belong to the Lord and should do everything to Him. If this is the case, there will not be any problems. However, even though everything we do and everything we have may be for the Lord, we still have not given ourselves to Him.

The real love between a husband and a wife lies in the fact that the wife gives herself to her husband. This is the secret. Every wife must ask herself how much she has given herself to her husband. The extent to which a husband can be the person in a marriage depends on the extent to which a wife gives herself to him. In the same way the Lord can be the person in us only to the extent that we give ourselves to Him.

BEING BESIDE OURSELVES AND BEING SOBER-MINDED ACCORDING TO THE LORD'S LEADING

In Romans Paul uses the matters of eating and regarding a certain day as a test to see whether we have given ourselves to the Lord. In 2 Corinthians 5 he uses the matter of being beside ourselves or being sober-minded as another test. If we say that we have given ourselves to the Lord, can we be beside ourselves if that is what the Lord is doing? In verse 13 Paul says, "Whether we were beside ourselves, it was to God; or whether we are sober-minded, it is for you." If we have given ourselves to Him, when He is beside Himself, we will be beside ourselves. The expression *beside ourselves* means that we are "mad, crazy." If Christ is crazy in us, will we be crazy as well?

When Sister Peace Wang was a young woman, she was sent to study in Hangchow. While she was studying in a middle school, she was saved. She strongly believed in Jesus, but when her belief in a "foreign religion" became known, it brought great shame to her father who was the mayor in Chia-hsing County, Chekiang Province. Sister Wang not only believed in a "foreign religion"; she was beside herself for the Lord, even preaching the gospel in the streets. Her father said to her, "You have brought me great shame! I am the mayor here. How can you preach a foreign religion on the street?" She told her father, "I will preach Jesus for the rest of my life. I will preach Jesus my whole life." At that time she also was engaged to be married, but she broke off the engagement. When her parents asked her what she wanted to do, she said, "I want only Jesus, and I want only to preach Jesus." Nothing that her parents could say changed her mind, and one day, she announced, "I am going now to preach Jesus." When her parents could not prevail upon her to stay, they let her go. As she was leaving, they called her name from their front door, but she would not turn back. This is the extent to which she was beside herself.

We may say that we have given ourselves to the Lord, but have we really given ourselves to the Lord? When we encounter many different matters, we quickly discover that only one out of a hundred have been given over to the Lord; the remaining ninety-nine matters are still in our hands. We may say that we have consecrated ourselves, but we still keep something for ourselves. If something is not important to us, we may have consecrated it to the Lord. However, in other matters of more importance we may not have consecrated

them to the Lord at all. This is the reason that problems arise in the practical matters that we encounter.

All those who are working with young people and students must have a thorough dealing before the Lord. Only those who are serious can do a serious work. If we have not consecrated ourselves thoroughly, if we have not been gained by the Lord, if we have not been touched by the Lord with regard to a single practical matter, how can we lead others to do these things? It is no wonder that our work is not solid.

All our problems are related to the matter of consecration. Consequently, the extent to which we enjoy the Lord's person depends upon how much we have given ourselves to Him. Paul says that the Lord's love constrains us so that we might no longer live to ourselves (vv. 14-15). If the Lord is beside Himself in us, we should be beside ourselves. If He is sober-minded in us, we should be sober-minded. There is no rule, no law, and no ordinance related to being beside ourselves and being sober-minded.

The Lord must have the ground in us in order to be our person. He is the Lord who is beside Himself, and He is the Lord who is sober-minded. Our Lord Jesus is not predictable, because He is a living person. He can act one way in us one day and another way in us the next day. He is impossible to imitate. When the Lord is beside Himself, He can be beside Himself to the uttermost. When He is solemn, He can be extremely solemn. He is not predictable, and He does not have any set behavior. When we give ourselves to Him in a full way, He will be lived out of us more fully, but if we give only a little of ourselves to Him, He will be lived out of us only to a small degree. The extent to which He is lived out from us depends entirely upon the extent to which we give ourselves to Him.

Since Christ died for us, Paul says that we who live may no longer live to ourselves but to Him who died for us and has been raised (v. 15). This means that we should let Him live in us. In verse 16 Paul says, "So then we, from now on, know no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him so no longer." When a person gives himself completely to the Lord, allowing Him to be the person in him and to live in him, he becomes a different person, a person whom we can no longer know according to the flesh. If our knowing of a person who no longer

lives to himself is only according to his outward appearance, we will miss the fact that another person, Christ, is living in him.

For example, we may know a brother who is very cautious and very narrow. However, after meeting with the saints and enjoying the Lord, he may come to the realization that Christ must be his person and, consequently, gives himself completely to the Lord. For him this is a revolutionary change, because he is no longer living, but Christ is living in Him. Although he was cautious and narrow, the Lord Jesus in him is tolerant and broad. If we continue to know this brother based on our former appraisal of him, we will not truly know him. Once he takes Christ as his person by giving himself fully to the Lord, he is no longer the same, and his outward appearance is no longer an accurate reflection of his person. He is a different person because he no longer lives according to his old man and instead takes Christ as his person.

GIVING OURSELVES TO THE LORD THAT WE MAY BECOME NEW

Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "So then if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away; behold, they have become new." Although we are all familiar with this verse, have we become new? If we are not new, it is because we have not given ourselves to the Lord or taken the Lord as our person. When we give ourselves to the Lord and take Him as our person, old things pass away and all things will become new.

Old things are passing away and all things are becoming new in a person who has given himself to the Lord and who lets the Lord be the person in him. This contrast between old and new can be seen in Paul's repeating of *as* and *yet* in 2 Corinthians 6. In verses 8 through 10 he uses the phrase *as...and yet* seven times. When we give ourselves to the Lord and let Him be the person in us, we are persons who are "as...and yet." A brother may be as a native of Foochow, yet he is really Christ. Another brother may be as an aged man from Shangtung, yet he is really Christ. Still another brother may be as a respectable person from Shansi, yet he is really Christ. Similarly, we may be as spicy as a Hunan chili pepper and yet really be Christ. We may appear as this and yet be something else because we are different in our person. Consequently, with us there is both glory and dishonor, both evil

report and good report (v. 8). This is the issue of giving ourselves completely to the Lord and taking Christ as our inner man, our person.

Many years ago I visited a church in a village and met an old sister. She could not read or even count. However, when I spoke to her about the Lord, she was as keen as a person with a Ph.D. degree. Seemingly she was illiterate, but actually she had a Ph.D. in matters related to the heavenly kingdom. Outwardly she was a country woman, but inwardly she was Christ. It is regrettable that not all believers are like this. Some who are illiterate outwardly are also "illiterate" in the things of Christ inwardly. This is because they have not taken the Lord as their person, and they have not given themselves to the Lord.

Genuine change does not come from outward improvement; rather, it is the result of giving ourselves to the Lord and taking Christ as our person. If we practice this, our outer man will not be our person. Instead, our outer man will be one who is "as...and yet." Our real person will be Christ, who is in us as our person. We should be "as...and yet." Outwardly Paul was Paul of Tarsus, but inwardly his person was the heavenly Christ. Outwardly he seemed to be a person whose bodily presence was weak, but inwardly his person was really the crucified, resurrected, and glorified Christ. Paul was "as...and yet." This is the issue of giving ourselves to the Lord and of taking Him as our person.

OUR NEEDING TO DEAL THOROUGHLY WITH THE MATTER OF CONSECRATION

We all must go to the Lord and deal with Him concerning the matter of consecration. We should ask ourselves how much we have given ourselves to the Lord. Are we absolute in our consecration? It is difficult to know whether we are truly absolute, but if we feel that we are not absolute in a certain matter, we must deal with it. If we have any doubts about our consecration, we must deal with the Lord concerning it.

If we have a sense that we are holding back a certain matter from the Lord, we should deal with it immediately, because it will become a problem in our spiritual journey if we do not deal with it. This problem may not manifest itself for five years. It is possible for ten, fifteen, twenty, or even twenty-five years to pass before it is manifested. I am not making a groundless statement. I have seen this recently in a certain brother. Even though the source of his

problem was present thirty years ago, he encountered an environment that exposed the problem only recently.

In principle, we follow the Lord in the matter of our consecration, just as Abraham followed the Lord. In the beginning he was not absolute. When he came out of Ur of the Chaldeans, he was not absolute. Therefore, the Lord had to deal with Abraham's father when they arrived at Haran (Gen. 11:31-32). When he went down to Egypt, he had another dealing related to his wife (12:9-20). Later, the Lord had to separate him from his nephew, Lot, because he had not dealt clearly with Lot (13:5-11). All these dealings were related to the matter of Abraham's consecration. Even when the Lord gave him a son who was born according to grace, Abraham was tested by the Lord when he was asked to consecrate his son to Him (22:1-19). Only at this time was Abraham's consecration complete.

We may feel that our consecration to the Lord is complete, but it is not. We may feel that we have given everything to Him but have no realization that we are still attached to a "father," a "wife," and a "nephew." We may not be aware of these attachments, but the Lord is. When we follow the Lord, everything that we reserve for ourselves will be manifested sooner or later and become a source of problems to us.

If Abraham had taken care of the matters related to his father, his wife, and his nephew when he came out of Ur, he would not have encountered so many problems. These problems arose along the way only because he had not dealt with these matters clearly when he departed from Ur. Similarly, we may have consecrated ourselves to the Lord, but our consecration contains countless reservations. We may not even know what we have reserved. Eventually, however, the matters concerning our "father," our "wife," and our "nephew" will surface.

It is good that Abraham let the Lord win. When we encounter a problem with our consecration, we should never defeat the Lord. It is very easy for us to defeat the Lord in relation to our consecration. If we defeat Him, we will suffer loss. Whenever we encounter a problem related to our consecration, we should say, "Lord, defeat me. Have mercy on me and never let me go." May He have mercy on all of us.

CHAPTER TEN

TAKING CHRIST AS OUR PERSON THAT WE MAY GAIN ALL THINGS

Scripture Reading: Phil. 3:7-8, 12; 4:12

GOD DESIRING THAT WE GIVE OURSELVES TO HIM

In His salvation God gives Himself to us, but in order for us to enjoy Him, we must give ourselves to Him. We do not need to give ourselves to Him because we are useful, but rather because we are not useful in ourselves, and we need to be reduced. He has no need for what we are in ourselves; instead, He wants to be lived out through us. Hence, we must give ourselves to Him in order to enjoy Him.

God wants to be lived out through man so that He may manifest His greatness and His glory. When God created man, He made a whole and complete person. However, the Bible reveals that God does not want us to live by ourselves. He wants us to hand ourselves over to Him and live by Him. The marriage life is a good example of this. Although women are considered to be weaker vessels according to the revelation of the Bible (1 Pet. 3:7), they are still whole and complete persons. However, at the time of marriage God wants every wife to hand herself over to her husband and begin to live by her husband and no longer by herself. Although she is a person, she needs to give up her person and take her husband as her person.

When a man and a woman are married, one head must be covered. Sometimes I questioned why God created two persons, each with their own head, and then would ask the woman to give up her position. It seems as if it would have been simpler to create one head. It is hard to understand why He would create two heads when He only wanted one, but this is how He manifests His wisdom. God indeed created man and woman, each with their own head, and sometimes a woman is even wiser and smarter than a man. Nevertheless, at the time of marriage, God pays no attention to the intelligence or competence of a woman; instead, He asks a woman to cover her head and take her husband as her head.

Although women will typically cover their head during a wedding, very few keep their head covered after the wedding. Once the wedding is over, it seems as if the wife's head quickly comes out from under its covering. Sometimes it comes out so far that it even rises above the husband's head. However, the more her head comes out, the more the marriage will lose its sweetness and even become a source of friction. I would give some advice to the sisters who are wives. If you want a sweet married life, give yourselves to your husband and take him as your head. Some sisters may have difficulty with this and think that this means that women are inferior to their husband. But this is not the point. Even if a sister is smarter than her husband, God still wants her to be under the headship of her husband. A wife can do this only if she gives herself to her husband and takes him as her person.

Marriage is a picture that shows how we must give ourselves to the Lord and take Him as our person. This is God's wisdom. We were created by God as complete persons, and we are thoughtful and capable. God's way of salvation, however, is not related to a lack of capability on our part. Even if we were the most capable persons, God would still want us to give ourselves to Him and take Him as our person. Since our understanding of God's intention is not accurate, we often pray in an ineffective way, saying, "Lord, You have defeated me. You have dealt with me to such an extent that I am truly incapable of doing anything. You must supply me and fill up my lack." The thought that we should give ourselves to the Lord when all our capabilities have been brought to nothing does not reflect God's intention. We should not wait to reach such a point before we give ourselves to the Lord. Even if we seemingly have great capabilities, the Lord will still come to us and say, "Stop! Give yourself to Me, and let Me be the One who does everything in you."

GIVING OURSELVES TO THE LORD AND TAKING HIM AS OUR PERSON

God's way of salvation is that He would become one with us. Although we are living, He should be the person in us. This means that we should relinquish our own person and take the Lord as our person. The relationship between a wife and her husband provides many opportunities to either take or not take someone else as our person. For example, a wife may ask her husband to go to the store for her on his way to work. When he says that he must be at work on time, she may "gently" insist until he gives in. Even

though there has been no argument, the wife has not taken her husband as her person. If she takes her husband as her person, she would not be bothered if he said no or if he told her that she needed to wait. Such a reaction would show that she was not living for herself but for her husband and that she was not being a wife for herself but for her husband. After a period of time, the husband may say, "Let us go and get what you need." If the wife is not merely relying on her husband to do things for her and, instead, is taking him as her person, she will ask how he feels about the items they intend to buy. When they are in the store, the wife will ask, "Do you like the red garment?" If we rely on the Lord only to do things for us, we will limit our experience of Him to knowing His power but not His person. We need to advance in our experience. Instead of depending on the Lord to do things for us, we should take Him as our person.

When a wife takes her husband as her person, it does not mean that she is inferior to her husband. Even if she is smarter than her husband, she should be willing to hand herself over to her husband and take him as her person. It is good that we cannot match the Lord in terms of our capabilities. He is the most perfect and brilliant One, and we should take Him as our person.

Absolute consecration means to hand ourselves over to the Lord and to take Him as our person. Once we take the Lord as our person, we will have no problems: we can be either poor or rich, we can be abounding or be in want, and we can be either filled or hungry. In everything we can learn the secret of taking Christ as our person.

TAKING THE LORD AS OUR PERSON AND THE LORD BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL THINGS

A married sister should take her husband as her person, but this often is difficult when the husband is not proper in every regard. However, our Lord is a proper Husband in every matter. He is perfect, omnipotent, bountiful, and rich. As such, He is more than able to be a proper Husband to us, and we will not suffer any loss if we take Him as our person. Some may not agree with this and may point to the losses that the apostle Paul suffered, but such a view comes from not knowing what is the real gain in the universe. The real gain is Christ. Gaining other things has no meaning. Paul says, "I have suffered the

loss of all things and count them as refuse" (Phil. 3:8). Here the word *refuse* refers to kitchen discards, such as spoiled rice or fish bones, something that nobody wants. When we throw these things away as garbage, only dogs will eat them. Everything other than Christ is just like dog food. Even if we gained these things, what is the benefit?

Even though some say, "I cannot exist without material things," should we not trust the Lord's promise? In His eyes material things are not a problem. Once, someone said to me, "You have urged me to believe in Jesus. Will Jesus take care of my meals?" I can boldly guarantee that if we truly believe in Jesus, believing in Him with a proper heart, our meals will not be a problem, because Jesus takes care of our needs. No person who fears the Lord, loves Him, and follows Him will starve to death. Similarly, we do not have to worry about our children starving to death. On the contrary, history tells us that God has abundantly blessed the children of those who fear, love, and follow the Lord.

Everything is in the Lord's hand. Hence, we should not be concerned about material things. If we care for them, we will be deceived (Mark 4:19). Material things should not be a concern to us. As long as we hand over our future, our living, and our children and are persons who love and follow Him, the Lord will bless us for a thousand generations. This is His promise. In Exodus 20:6 the Lord said that He will show "lovingkindness to thousands of generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments." The promise in the New Testament is even higher than this word in the Old Testament.

For a person who genuinely loves the Lord and takes Him as his person, outward, material losses often are a great gain. Madame Guyon received grace to such an extent that she asked the Lord for more experience of the cross, because she knew that without the cross she would not gain God. In her sufferings she gained the Lord. Christians ordinarily ask the Lord to deliver them from afflictions, but Madame Guyon loved the Lord to such an extent that she was willing to suffer. She knew that in her sufferings she would gain more of the Lord.

In 2 Corinthians 4:7 Paul speaks of having a treasure in earthen vessels so that the excellency of the power might be manifested. This power was not manifested through his praise or his exaltation. Instead, he spoke of being pressed on every side, persecuted, and cast down (vv. 8-9). All these things

are related to adversity. However, in the midst of his difficult circumstances of being persecuted, oppressed, and cast down, the apostle experienced the Lord and manifested the excellency of His power.

It is not easy to be a young person in this day and age. A young person needs to be aggressive to advance, to have a good education, and to learn good skills; otherwise, he will have difficulties in his human living. Internationally, nations strive with other nations, and in society, people strive with one another. Striving is part of the trend of the age. To stand against this trend, the young brothers and sisters should take the Lord as their person. Then, if the Lord leads you to study, you should study diligently. You should put your future in the Lord's hand completely. You do not have to blindly follow the trend, drifting with the tide of this age. You will still have a future, even if you do not study abroad. In itself going abroad is not necessarily good; whether or not it is good for you depends entirely on Him. You do not have to spend much time considering this matter; rather, you should take the Lord as your person, caring for what He delights in and living together with Him. If He desires that you study, you should study. Live together with Him and be one with Him in this living. He is your person, and you live because of Him. You should commit all outward things into His hand and let Him bear the full responsibility.

There are no problems when we allow the Lord to bear the full responsibility. If there are problems, it is because we have not taken Him as our person. All our asking for outward things is an indication that we are not taking the Lord as our person. Rather than praying for outward things, we should be seeking His feelings and intentions. If we do not take the Lord as our person, we will be very busy asking for outward things. However, when we take the Lord as our person, we will not be influenced by outward things, and we will be unaffected by outward circumstances. Outwardly, we may not be in a situation in which there are no problems, but if we truly enter into the experience of taking Christ as our person, we will have an inward enjoyment of Christ that money cannot buy.

In Philippians 3:8 Paul says that he counted all things as refuse that he might gain Christ. When he was writing this word, he had been saved for many years, and he was full of experience. Nevertheless, he still says, "Not that I have already obtained or am already perfected, but I pursue, if even I may lay hold of that for which I also have been laid hold of by Christ Jesus" (v.

12). Paul was unwilling to say that he had already obtained Christ completely. Paul had obtained Him in part but not in full, so he pursued to lay hold of that for which he had been laid hold of by the Lord. The Lord laid hold of Paul so that Paul could lay hold of Him. Paul knew that there was more of Christ that he could lay hold of. The extent to which Paul laid hold of Christ depended on the extent to which he pursued Christ. The extent to which Paul laid hold of and enjoyed Christ depended on the extent to which he allowed Christ to be his person. Consequently, Paul said that he was still pursuing, and in his pursuit he was unwilling to be distracted by things that he once considered to be gain.

The young brothers and sisters should not be distracted. You should love the Lord and give yourselves to Him rather than worrying about your future related to education, marriage, and jobs. If you are filled with so many questions about what you should do, you will be finished spiritually, and Christ will not be able to be your person. All that He will be able to do is to let you try to take care of these matters yourself. Worldly people who neither have nor want the Lord have their futures all planned out; they plan to finish high school, finish college, and then go abroad to study to get a Ph.D. After completing their education, they will take the next step in their plan. I would ask those who love the Lord, what are the steps that you need to take? The first step is to take Christ as your person. The second step is to take Christ as your person, and the next steps are the same unto eternity, that is, to take Christ as your person.

Please try and see whether or not you will starve to death if you take Christ as your person. Please be at rest. You do not need to ask about food, drink, or clothing. These are the things that the Gentiles anxiously seek. Our heavenly Father knows that we need all these things. We should seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to us (Matt. 6:31-33). We should not be distracted by thoughts of food, drink, or clothing. This is especially true for mothers; there is no need to be distracted by thoughts of these things. Once we commit these matters to the Lord, we commit them to Him forever. We should declare, “I have committed these things to the Lord, and the Lord is my person. He is responsible for everything. If He wants me to starve, I will starve, because He is my person. Whether I live or I die, I am the Lord’s” (Rom. 14:8).

We have a co-worker in China who is more than ten years older than I am. When the churches in China were suffering from persecution, he was put into prison several times. However, he never prayed, “Lord, deliver me from the hands of these people! Lord, preserve me!” He never prayed this kind of prayer. When he was brought to be interrogated, there was no need to interrogate him. He began to speak to the interrogators, “There are only three things that you can do to me. If you want to kill me, do it right away. If you want to put me in prison, put me in prison right away. If you release me, I will go and preach Jesus. My Lord loves to preach the gospel the most; this is why I love preaching the gospel. He was not afraid to die, and neither am I. He is not afraid to be imprisoned; in fact, He likes being imprisoned. Hence, imprisonment is not a problem to me. Therefore, I repeat, there are only three things that you can do. You can kill me, put me in prison, or release me so that I can preach Jesus. It is that simple.” Although he was imprisoned for a period of time, his persecutors eventually released him because they did not know what to do. He had a thorough consecration, and he had the experience of taking Christ as his person.

Some young brothers and sisters, who are seniors in college, are asking the Lord, “Should I go to the United States, or should I stay here?” Others are asking, “What should I do now that I have graduated? Should I continue my studies or get a job? What about my marriage?” These are prayers by pitiful believers. If we have taken the Lord as our person, we will not be so pitiful. We will say with joy, “Hallelujah! I have taken Christ as my person. If He wants to study abroad, I will follow Him. If He wants to stay, I will stay here with Him.”

Many of our prayers are the prayers of pitiful believers. However, once we take Christ as our person, we will no longer be pitiful! We are the bride, and Christ is our Husband. The God of the universe is our Husband. The omniscient, omnipotent, all-sufficient, and all-enriching God is our Husband. Hence, we should not live as pitiful Christians. We should take the Lord as our person and enjoy Him as our Husband.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE LORD BEING A HARD MASTER

Scripture Reading: Matt. 25:14-15, 24-29; 1 Pet. 4:10-11; Rom. 12:1-2, 11

Before God, a Christian needs to pay attention to growth in life and usefulness in service. These are two important matters.

VIRGINS AND SLAVES

In Matthew 25 there are two parables: the parable of the ten virgins and the parable of the master distributing talents to his slaves. The parable of the virgins is related to life, whereas the parable of the talents is related to service. When we live before the Lord, we love Him, pursue Him, follow Him, fellowship with Him, and await His return; in this respect we are all virgins. According to chapter 25, the ten virgins have two characteristics: first, they have oil in their vessels with their lamps (v. 4); second, they go forth out of the world of darkness to meet the bridegroom (v. 6). Spiritually speaking, a believer should be full of oil, the Spirit, and apart from the world. We should be those who are going out of the dark world to meet our Bridegroom.

The parable of the talents is related to our need to be slaves who are faithfully serving the Lord. We are a virgin to the Lord on the one hand, and we are a slave to the Lord on the other hand. We are a virgin-slave. According to our life, our love for the Lord, and our relationship with Him, we are a virgin. According to our service to the Lord and our commission from Him, we are a slave. We should receive His commission faithfully, because He has delivered His possessions to us.

RECEIVING A REBUKE FOR BURYING OUR TALENT

The master gave talents in varying amounts, one receiving five talents, another two, and still another one, with the talents being given according to each one's ability (v. 15). In the church we can certainly see this. Every person has a different spiritual ability before the Lord. Some have a greater capacity, and the Lord entrusts more to them. Others have less capacity, but the Lord

still entrusts something to them. Still others have little capacity, but the Lord, nevertheless, entrusts a little to them. Although the amount that the Lord entrusts to each differs, the principle of being faithful to the Lord applies to all. If a believer is entrusted with five talents, he should be diligent and faithful to gain five more talents; if he is entrusted with two talents, he should gain another two, and if he is entrusted with one talent, he should gain another talent. The Lord is very fair. If those who are entrusted with five talents gain another five talents, they will receive a reward. If those who are entrusted with two talents, however, gain another two, they will receive the same reward. The Lord's reward of being "set...over many things" is the same for both the one who received five talents and the one who received two talents (vv. 21, 23). His reward does not differ even when the slaves who were entrusted with different amounts gained different amounts. This indicates that the Lord does not care about how much has been entrusted to us or how much we have gained. He cares only about our faithfulness. In other words, our faithfulness should not come short of what has been entrusted to us. As long as we are faithful to the fullest degree, our reward will be the same.

In this parable the one who received only one talent was the one most in danger of receiving the master's rebuke. When those who receive one talent see others receiving two talents and even five talents, they often think that they cannot do very much with only one talent. Hence, they "hide" their talent by not using it. The slave with one talent thought that his master was a hard man, one who reaps where he did not sow and gathers where he did not winnow. Consequently, he hid his talent in the earth in order to not lose it, and he was not faithful to use it (vv. 24-25).

After a period of time, the master returned to settle accounts with them (v. 19). We all should know that the Lord will indeed return and that we will need to give an account to Him. This parable shows how the Lord will settle our accounts with Him. The slave who was given five talents came to settle his account joyfully and said to the Lord, "Master, you delivered to me five talents; behold, I have gained another five talents" (v. 20). The Lord said, "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful over a few things; I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your master" (v. 21). On earth today the Lord has entrusted us with only a few things, but in the coming kingdom, the Lord will entrust us with many things.

The slave who was given two talents also came, and his situation was the same as the one with five talents. Thus, he received the same appraisal and reward from the Lord. However, when the slave who was given one talent came, he said, "Master, I knew about you, that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow" (v. 24). In effect, he was saying to the master, "You are a hard man because you demanded much even though you did not give me much." It is wonderful that the master did not deny this. He did not say, "You are completely mistaken. I am not a hard man." Rather, he said, "You knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not winnow. Therefore you should have deposited my money with the money changers; and when I came, I would have recovered what is mine with interest" (vv. 26-27).

THE LORD BEING A HARD MASTER

The slave with one talent said that his master was a hard man. In a certain sense the Lord is indeed hard. For example, the Lord has placed some young brothers and sisters in the universities. Because all their classmates want to be at the top of the class or to study abroad, very few have a heart to listen to the gospel or a heart to believe in Jesus. In such a situation the Lord is not sowing, and even if He were sowing, there would be no growth. Nevertheless, the Lord still says to these young saints, "Go and reap. If you do not reap anything, you will be disciplined when I return." Although they may respond to the Lord, saying, "You are hard. How can You ask us to reap where it is not possible to even sow?" He will reply, "Not only will I ask you to reap where there has been no sowing, but I will also ask you to reap where seeds cannot be sown. You must reap something." In principle, the Lord places such a demand on all of us.

Sometimes when I speak with the elders and responsible ones in the districts about preaching the gospel, they respond with excuses, saying, "It is not as easy to preach the gospel as it was twenty years ago. It is more difficult today. Twenty years ago Taiwan was not stable; many people who had fled from the mainland were in turmoil, and they were without possessions. They did not have much regard for the world, and it was rather easy for them to receive the gospel. It is different now. The political situation is stable, the society is prosperous, and everyone has the desire to make money and live in a nice house. Who is willing to listen to the gospel?" In response, I say, "You can give many reasons for not preaching the gospel, and even though I may

seem rather strict and harsh, I actually am very softhearted. When I hear people speak of these difficulties, I even become sympathetic. However, I am not the Lord, and He would never agree with these excuses. Instead, He would say, 'Since it is so difficult, you must work even harder in order to have a double return. Otherwise, you will fall short when you render an account to Me.' In 1949 three thousand people were saved in the church in Taipei. This year four thousand people should be saved." The Lord is indeed hard in His demands in our work.

Where is there an easy place to work? For example, the saints in Japan can find plenty of excuses for not preaching the gospel. They say that all the Japanese are wealthy and desire to follow today's worldly trends. Consequently, on the Lord's Day everyone is relaxing, and no one has a desire to listen to the gospel. It is even more difficult in the United States. Americans are constantly pursuing entertainment. Even though they work five days a week, they prefer to work only four days a week. They rest not only on Saturday and the Lord's Day but sometimes even have holidays that occur on Mondays. If possible, they would fill every day before and every day after the Lord's Day, including the Lord's Day, with things for their entertainment. There are movie theaters everywhere in the United States. So who is willing to listen to the gospel and receive the Lord? In Southeast Asia people are wasteful and idle with their time. They get up late in the morning and often put off work until a later day. Thus, there is seemingly no possibility for the Lord to work in Southeast Asia. If we use these difficulties as excuses to justify our lack of work, the Lord will say, "I am a hard man. I want you to work in Japan. You must work there even if you do not know how. I want you to go and work in America, and you must gain some return."

I am not joking. We all look for ways to excuse ourselves. The brothers from Panchiao say, "The situation in our locality is far worse than in Taoyuan. Taoyuan has a better environment for the gospel work." However, the brothers from Taoyuan say, "If only our situation were as good as it is in Panchiao." When you go to Kaohsiung, the brothers say, "Kaohsiung cannot be compared with Taipei. Taipei has so many excellent provisions for the preaching of the gospel. We do not have so many colleges, and our middle schools are also inferior." But the brothers in Taipei say, "My goodness! No one is willing to serve in Taipei. The church in Taipei is too large. There are elders, co-workers, and responsible ones in the districts, in the homes, and in the small groups." Some co-workers also say, "I dare not serve in Taipei

because it is too difficult to work with the older saints. When I take care of an older brother, another brother shakes his head. When one older sister is happy, another one is ready to quit. I dare not serve there." A co-worker who is asked to go to Keelung may say, "I cannot go to Keelung. I have arthritis. It rains in Keelung every day, and my body cannot handle it." The Lord, however, is not sympathetic toward these excuses. In Matthew 25:24 the evil and slothful slave said, "Master, I knew about you, that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow." The Lord never denied this. Instead, He said, "You knew," meaning that it was true that He was a hard man, but that since the slave knew, he should have worked more diligently.

NEEDING TO BE HARD IN SERVICE

When the Lord gives grace to people, He is broad and tolerant; however, in the Lord's arrangement for our service to Him, He is strict and without leniency. Some saints may say, "In the last two days the messages concerning taking Christ as our person were so good and so sweet; they touched us deeply. However, today's message is quite discouraging. We should all just go home and not serve the Lord." If you can go home, please go, but even if I encourage you to go home, you will discover that you cannot leave, because you have been chosen by the Lord before the foundation of the world. Where can you flee? There is no place for you to flee. You should simply submit yourself and say to Him, "Lord, You are hard, so I will be diligent to work even harder. If You are not concerned about my arthritis, why should I be afraid? You are my person. If You are not afraid, I will not be afraid. I am afraid of nothing except being unfaithful to You. As long as You like something, it is fine with me. If You want me to go to Keelung, I will go." The interesting thing is that the Lord truly can do wonderful things. Some actually were healed of arthritis after going to Keelung. It was as if the Lord said, "I do not like arthritis; therefore, you should not have it."

This is not a joke. If you want to argue with the Lord, you will not win the case. It will be more beneficial if you are less hesitant. Look at how Peter, John, and the other disciples followed the Lord Jesus. In John 11, when Lazarus died, the Lord told the disciples that He was going to Judea to see him. The disciples said to Him, "The Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and You are going there again?" (v. 8). In spite of their words the Lord still wanted to go, and the disciples could do nothing but follow Him. It often is

sweet to take the Lord as our person, but it is not always sweet. When the disciples followed the Lord Jesus to go and see Lazarus, they did not go in a sweet way. One of the disciples even said, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (v. 16). Thank the Lord, they did not die; instead, they rescued someone out of death.

We should not calculate everything according to our thoughts. The Lord is the Lord, and His work is never easy. If a brother says, "Hallelujah! The Lord took me to a certain place. The work there is so easy, and the brothers and sisters all welcomed me," we will all shake our heads in disbelief. The Lord's work is never easy. The Lord's work is difficult. We have to reap where nothing has been sown and gather where nothing has been winnowed.

If every brother and every sister in a church were like the angel Gabriel, there would be no need for elders. If every brother and sister in a district were like the apostle Paul, there would be no need for some to bear responsibility. There is a need for responsibilities to be borne because many brothers and sisters have needs. If people did not become sick, would there be a need for hospitals? There are so many doctors and hospitals because there are so many sick ones.

We should not look for an easy way in the service. I am speaking this word not only to co-workers but to every serving one. There is a small animal called a pangolin. Although a pangolin is not big, it has powerful front claws that can dig through many different kinds of surfaces in search for food, whether the surfaces are sandy or full of pebbles. Every serving one should be a "pangolin." If others say that there is no way, you should find a way. Everything depends on how you respond to the situation. If the condition of a district is dead but becomes full of life after you go there and serve for three months, it would be so good. Others may say, "There is no way that you can preach the gospel there." However, the Lord will say, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Why is the Lord so hard? He has to be hard because, by asking us to do the impossible, He forces us to experience Him. Hence, we should not say that it is impossible to preach the gospel in our locality. No matter what happens, we must preach the gospel.

My only burden today is to let you know that the Lord is a hard master. It does not matter whether the work in a particular place is difficult; we still must go and work. As long as we are willing to work, God's miracles will be

manifested. I dare not speak too much of my own experiences. However, I have been in this work for decades, and I have seen a great deal. Even if we do not include my years overseas, I worked for nearly twenty years in China, and I saw much there. Let me tell you this: Everyone who chooses his own work never has a good end. On the contrary, the simple ones, those who accepted whatever was assigned to them and went to wherever they were sent, received the Lord's blessing. These were the ones with whom the Lord's presence was manifest.

We should never judge things by the outward situation. If the Lord gives us one talent, we should utilize this one talent. Then in the end we will have at least two talents. If we do not use our talent, the Lord will say, "Evil and slothful slave, you know that I am a hard man and yet you would not work. That is enough! I will take away the one talent and give it to the one who has ten talents." This is a principle: those who use their gift receive more gifts.

NOT EXCUSING OURSELVES BUT WORKING HARD

Some brothers and sisters with low self-esteem think that they are completely useless because they seemingly have no gift or ability. Consequently, they only come to the meetings. They love the Lord, pursue Him, and do not love the world or compete with others in the work, but they only come to the meetings and listen to messages. This attitude is wrong because they are not as limited as they think. If they would go to the streets and work hard, I absolutely believe that they would be able to save at least one person a month. Even if they did not gain someone who was genuinely saved, at least those who did not believe would have heard the gospel. The Lord may not give some the capacity to give a message, but He has given everyone a mouth with which to preach the gospel. If we would use our "talent" every day, I guarantee that at least one person a month would be saved.

Today is December 29, 1970. In two days it will be 1971. Should we not save at least one person in the coming year? We should all try. In 1971 each of us should bring at least one person to the Lord. If a co-worker cannot lead a person to salvation, he should not continue to be a co-worker. We should be desperate to lead someone to salvation. If an elder cannot bring a person to salvation, he should not continue to be an elder. He should not wait until he is asked to leave; he should resign on his own. This applies to all the responsible

ones in the districts and the small groups and even to all the brothers and sisters in the church. Anyone who cannot save one person in a year should be ashamed to call himself a Christian. We do not have to wait to preach the gospel. If everyone who hears this word would rise up to preach the gospel, we would be able to lead one thousand people to salvation next year.

We need to be as hard as our Lord. We have been in Taiwan for more than twenty years, but the gospel has not reached the entire island. This is our responsibility, but we have not been hard enough. We have been too lenient on ourselves, too quick to offer excuses for ourselves. If we did not excuse ourselves, the situation of the church would change immediately. Since the Lord is hard, we should never excuse ourselves. We may excuse others, but we should never excuse ourselves. When we offer up ourselves, the Lord will have a way to go on.

CHAPTER TWELVE

SERVING ONES AND THE SERVICE

Scripture Reading: Rom. 12:1-2, 11; 1 John 5:16; John 15:4-5, 16a; 21:15-17

In this chapter we will fellowship concerning service. A Christian needs to pay attention to both life and service. In Matthew 25 there are two parables. The first parable, concerning the ten virgins, stresses life (vv. 1-13), whereas the second parable, concerning the distribution of talents, stresses service (vv. 14-30). In the aspect of life, we are virgins, loving the Lord, fellowshipping with Him, living a chaste, pure life, taking our lamps, and going out of this dark age to meet Him as our Bridegroom. At the same time, in the aspect of service, we are slaves of the Lord, who must be faithful with what He entrusts to us.

PRESENTING OUR WHOLE BEING FOR THE SERVICE

Romans 12 is a chapter on service in the church. If we read this chapter carefully, we will see that Paul is very wise in his speaking in the Holy Spirit. He first speaks of presenting our body, then of being transformed by the renewing of the mind, and finally of being burning in spirit (vv. 1-2, 11). His speaking corresponds to the three parts of our being. Our body should be presented, our mind should be renewed, and our spirit should be burning. All three parts of our being are involved in the service.

Some are burning in spirit, but their mind has not been renewed. In such a situation, a burning spirit cannot produce a proper result by itself. Some are burning in spirit and have been transformed in their mind, but their body is not presented. As such, their talk about service has no impact. Some have presented their body; that is, they attend every meeting and participate in various aspects of service. They pray, read the Bible, and fellowship with the saints, and they also help with cleaning, ushering, and visiting. However, their mind is old and in need of renewing. This is terrible. When such a person is not present, everything is peaceful, but whenever he is present, he disturbs the peaceful situation and causes the church to suffer loss. Honestly speaking, there are too many opinions in our service today. Without a doubt, these

opinions are related to a lack of renewing in our mind. When our mind is renewed and transformed, there is harmony and oneness in our service.

In the church in Los Angeles there are brothers and sisters from many different races. In such a church the minds of the saints must be renewed in order to avoid conflict. I am thankful that the situation in Los Angeles is marvelous and that the meetings are truly beautiful. This situation could not be achieved even through the United Nations, because the church is more than a "United Nations." We do not need to be united; we are simply one. We are one in the spirit. Furthermore, we need to be transformed by being renewed in our mind with the mind of Christ.

If we have presented our body and are renewed in our mind, we still need to be burning in spirit. We can use a steam locomotive as an illustration. A train may be at a station and its passengers can be properly seated, but the train conductor needs to fire up the boiler in the locomotive in order for the train to move forward. After we have presented our body and have been renewed and transformed in our mind, we still need to be burning in spirit. When we are burning in spirit, our entire being will move. We need to consider the condition of each part of our being.

Presenting Our Bodies in Time

We first need to consider whether or not our body has been presented. Presenting our body is a matter related to time. If we are unwilling to give our time, our body cannot be presented. When we consecrate our body, we are really consecrating our time. We live in our body, and our body lives in time. When we present our body, we are giving our time. If we say that we have a heart to love the Lord but are busy every day of the week, our body will not be presented. If we are very busy but agree to set aside half an hour a week to serve the Lord, we are presenting our body for half an hour. We need to see that presenting our body requires the giving of time.

Today the whole church should serve as priests. This is very practical. It is so practical that Paul says we should present our body. In order to present our body, we must set aside our time. For example, the Lord's word that we need to be fishers of men touches us all (Matt. 4:19). However, in order to fish for men we need time; we cannot merely shout and declare in the meetings that

we are fishers of men. Every fisherman knows that fishing is very laborious and time-consuming.

Many of us have told the Lord that we would lead one person to salvation in the coming year. However, without spending time, we will never lead one person to salvation. Time is required to carry this out. This does not mean that all our time, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, must be devoted to this. We still need to work, eat, do household chores, and many other mundane matters. Nevertheless, the consecration of our time must be specific. Every week we should set aside at least two hours for the gospel. This is a must in order for us to be effective in preaching the gospel. We should set aside two hours every week, and we should be strict on ourselves in order to keep this time. We must redeem the time, the opportunity, for the sake of the gospel. Some may wonder whether or not it is possible to give two hours each week. We should not be concerned about this; we only need to be strict with ourselves. Just consider how much time is wasted with idle talk. If we truly love the Lord, we will set aside a specific time each week for the gospel.

Additionally, we should spend two hours each week to care for the saints whose condition is weaker than ours. If we do this, we will spend two hours a week caring for unbelievers and two hours caring for the saints. This means that, in addition to the meetings, we should set aside four hours each week to serve the Lord. If we do this, many will be led to salvation, and many will be raised up.

Because we waste our time, the Bible speaks of redeeming the time (Eph. 5:16). In this verse the Greek word translated “time” implies “opportunity.” Opportunities are hard to come by, so we need to seize every favorable opportunity. This is to redeem the time. When Paul says that we should present our body, the first implication of his word is that we should set aside our time.

The second implication of presenting our body is that we need to be practical. The most practical part of our being is our body. Our spirit may be very living, but a living spirit cannot engage in practical things all by itself. Even the thoughts in our mind cannot produce practical things apart from the involvement of our body. Our body is needed in order to do practical things related to a burning spirit and a renewed mind. In the past some brothers who did not practically meet with us would say, “I am sorry that I cannot bear

the responsibility with you in the meeting. I will stand with you in my spirit." In the beginning I appreciated this kind of word. But eventually I realized that these words were not practical, so I said, "Brother, if you truly stand with me, come with me. If you do not come with me, your words mean little." Presenting our body requires service that is practical. There are seven days in a week, and we should set aside four hours a week to preach the gospel and care for the saints.

Being Renewed in the Mind and Not Following the Fashion of the Age

After our body is presented, it is essential that our mind be renewed (Rom. 12:2). There are many different kinds of people in the church, and according to our nature, we all have some peculiarities. The church involves the gathering of hundreds and even thousands of people. If our mind is not being renewed, the church will be in constant turmoil. Thank the Lord that we have one life and are one person. Hence, we have one mind; that is, we have the mind of Christ as our mind. Having the mind of Christ is related to being transformed by the renewing of the mind.

The Lord also requires us to not be fashioned according to this age (v. 2), that is, to not be overly fashionable. Whenever a saint pursues being modern or fashionable, he is finished with the church life. To put off the old man is to put off the fashion of this age; to put on the new man is to put on the church life. No saint who is fashionable can serve God in the church, because this fashionableness is just the devil in disguise. Whoever is fashionable is on the devil's side. It is very easy for saints who desire to be fashionable to damage the church.

The Lord has had mercy upon the churches, and the spirits of the saints have been strong. For this reason the church has not been influenced by fashionable things. Whenever something fashionable is brought in, the spirits of the saints do not respond. None of the saints should have the thought of being fashionable. Once they become fashionable, their experience of the church life is finished. However, this does not mean we will have the church life if we make ourselves look old-fashioned. We should not focus on not being modern and fashionable or on being old-fashioned. We should simply put on the new man. This will keep us from being fashioned according to this age.

Burning in Spirit

Finally, our spirit should be burning (v. 11). In order to be burning in spirit, we need to call, "O Lord!" If we call for ten minutes, our spirit will be burning. The Lord is the real and living Spirit. As we call, He, as a consuming fire, will burn in us, causing us to be on fire. Service involves our body being presented in time, our mind being transformed, and our spirit being burning.

SUPPLYING LIFE IN THE SERVICE

The principle of service is to supply others with life. Since life is Christ, to supply life means to supply Christ. When we visit and contact an unbelieving friend, we should supply him with Christ as if we were a conduit for electricity or a carrier of germs. This is not too much to say, because even the apostle Paul was accused of being a "pest" (cf. Acts 24:5). Paul was full of "germs"; wherever he went, he passed on "germs" to others. We should all be equipped with such a skill. If we have been teaching in a school for two years and our school has not caught a "Jesus-epidemic," we must not be proper Christians. If we are proper Christians, people around us will be supplied with the germs of a "Jesus-epidemic."

If there are ten colleagues in your office and nothing has changed for them related to the gospel in two years, you must be a defeated Christian. If you are a normal Christian, the colleagues in your office would be infected with a "Jesus-germ" after only a few months. We should be full of germs, but it seems as if our germs have been killed by the devil. Many Christians are so "sanitary" that they have no effect on others. Some have worked in an office for two years, yet their colleagues still do not know that they are Christians. Some have taught in a school for four years, but their students still do not know that their teacher believes in Jesus. Too many of our "germs" have been killed by the devil.

We should be full of spiritual "germs." We have the divine life, and we should supply this life to others; that is, we should impart this life as "germs" so that others will be "infected." Not only should we impart these "germs" to unbelievers but also to the saints. With only a little contact, some saints quickly become burning. This contact can include praying with them, fellowshipping with them, pray-reading with them, and inviting them for a meal. Such a result does not depend on our ability to speak but on the amount

of “germs” that we supply. Those who infect others with “germs” are usually unaware of it. It is not a matter of being eloquent but a matter of having an ample supply of “germs.”

EXERCISING IN THREE MATTERS IN OUR SERVICE

Since we have a desire to serve the Lord, I hope that we would exercise in three matters. First, we need to exercise in the matter of our meetings; this does not mean attending the meetings but knowing how to function in the meetings. We need to learn to sing hymns, read the Bible, pray-read, testify, share, and fellowship with one another. Second, we need to exercise to preach the gospel. This is the fruit-bearing referred to by the Lord in John 15:2 and 16. At the end of the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord Jesus said, “Go and disciple all the nations” (28:19); at the end of the Gospel of Mark, He said, “Go therefore into all the world and proclaim the gospel” (16:15); and at the end of the Gospel of Luke, He spoke of proclaiming “repentance for forgiveness of sins...to all the nations” (24:47). However, there is no similar command in the Gospel of John. This does not mean, however, that the Lord did not speak of preaching the gospel in the Gospel of John. Because the focus of the Gospel of John is on life, the Lord referred to the multiplication of life rather than speaking directly about preaching the gospel. In the Gospel of John, the Lord said that we are branches of the vine and that we should go forth to bear fruit. Hence, the fruit-bearing spoken of in chapter 15 is actually the preaching of the gospel, the supplying of life. The life of Christ, the life of the vine, is in us. When we go and impart this life to our friends and relatives, they will become a part of the vine tree; that is, they will become fruit on the vine tree. We all should exercise to bear fruit that remains.

If we set aside two hours each week for preaching the gospel and continue to come together related to this burden, we will learn how to best use this time. We may write to our relatives or friends, call them on the phone, pay them a visit, mail them some spiritual literature, or invite them for a meal. When we invite them, we can also invite some saints. There are many ways to proceed. In short, we must spend time on them. Of course, in regard to these ways, the indispensable point is our need for prayer in order to mention their names before the throne of grace.

Third, we must exercise to feed the Lord's lambs, which the Lord Jesus spoke of in John 21. Chapter 15 is on bearing fruit by preaching the gospel, and chapter 21 is on feeding the lambs by taking care of the young, tender saints. As far as preaching the gospel is concerned, the church is doing quite well. We baptize close to a thousand every year. Regrettably, however, after baptizing these ones, we fall short of feeding them. In other words, we have the bearing of fruit in John 15, but we do not have the feeding of the lambs in John 21. For this reason not many of our lambs remain over the years. We must learn to preach the gospel, and we must learn to feed the lambs.

In chapter 21, verses 15 through 17 say, "Then when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Feed My lambs. He said to him again a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love Me? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Shepherd My sheep. He said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love Me? Peter was grieved that He said to him the third time, Do you love Me? And he said to Him, Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You. Jesus said to him, Feed My sheep." In this portion the Lord responded to Peter's answers three times, and He emphasized different things each time. The first time He used the word *feed,* the second time *shepherd,* and the third time *feed* again. Similarly, in His first response He used the word *lambs,* the second time *sheep,* and the third time *sheep* again. Lambs need to be fed, whereas sheep are slightly larger and thus require shepherding as well as feeding.

Feeding is somewhat different than shepherding. Mothers know that young babies need only to be fed. As they grow, however, they need shepherding; that is, they need to be instructed and taught to perform some tasks. When people are saved, they need to be fed with the words of the Bible, the bread of life. However, as they grow, they need to be shepherded. Shepherding includes leading, guiding, and instructing. However, if we desire to lead them further, they will need more than just shepherding. This is the reason that the Lord ended by saying, "Feed My sheep." In our shepherding there should also be feeding. In this way new believers will proceed on the right track.

PAYING ATTENTION TO SHEPHERDING

Recently, we have had a heavy burden concerning how to take care of the many people whom we baptize each year. We could ask the elders to take care of them, but there are only a dozen or so elders and more than ten thousand saints in Taipei. The elders cannot care for all the saints. Hence, the elders suggested that we establish districts and let responsible ones in each district care for the saints. However, in principle, the responsible ones in a district cannot bear such a heavy responsibility alone either. Therefore, the districts were further divided into small groups. Even after all of this subdividing, the elders are still not shepherding and feeding. This is also true for the ones bearing responsibility in the districts and groups. Even though many of these ones are busy being "responsible," many of our lambs are not receiving proper care. Thus, many have run away, and many have died.

The situation in the church today is that there is neither feeding nor shepherding, and the church life is maintained only by the meetings. The elders and responsible ones for the districts and the small groups spend most of their time on administration, studying how to do this and that. Sometimes when I go to the business office and see so many forms and procedures, I get a headache. I do not like to criticize these methods, because there is the need for them. I have even said that in order to give people food and soup, we need to consider plates and bowls. However, today we are not taking care of the "food and soup" but only the "plates and bowls." Our "plates and bowls" are quite good, but there is no "food or soup" in them, and even when there is some food in them, it is not tasty. Outward things are merely accessories; we should not pay too much attention to them. As long as the "plates and the bowls" are clean, we should focus on putting food on the table. Our focus should be to feed and satisfy the saints.

From this time forward, I hope that the elders and responsible ones would simplify the administrative things. The activities of the business office should be simplified. This does not mean that we should not have an office, because in order to eat, we still need utensils such as chopsticks and bowls. Nevertheless, our focus should be on feeding and shepherding the brothers and sisters.

It is the Lord's mercy that the church in Taipei is a large church. However, we still need to advance. Recently, the Lord has done a number of things in the church in Hong Kong, which has opened up a new way. Formerly, the saints in Hong Kong were divided into several districts, but due to certain

circumstances they all had to come together to meet. Since this required that the saints spend more time to travel to the meeting hall, the saints had difficulty coming to every meeting. Therefore, the Lord led the saints to come together once a week for a longer period of time. Now they meet on the Lord's Day from ten thirty in the morning until three o'clock in the afternoon, that is, for four and a half hours. During these four and a half hours they do many things. In the first half-hour they sing hymns, pray, praise, stir up their spirit, and release their spirit. From eleven to twelve o'clock, a message is released. Through the message, the saints are supplied and instructed; the message also serves as the sound of a trumpet, helping the saints to know how to go forward in the coming week. From noon to one o'clock in the afternoon, the saints receive training, exercise, correction, and instruction; they also receive some encouragement to practice certain things at home in the coming week. From one to two o'clock in the afternoon, there is a love feast and fellowship. Each saint brings his own food, and they eat and fellowship together. Then from two to three o'clock they break bread in remembrance of the Lord. After remembering the Lord, they have a strong sense of the Lord's love when the meeting is dismissed; thus, every saint goes home well-fed and satisfied.

During the other six days of the week, they meet in small groups. When the Lord Jesus distributed loaves of bread to the crowd, He sat them down in groups (Mark 6:40; Luke 9:14). Hence, they were gathered into groups. The groups in Hong Kong vary in size. A small group consists of five people, two small groups form a medium group, and two medium groups form a large group. In Taiwan groups are formed with those who live close to one another. As a result, many of those who are listed in a group do not come to the group meeting. In Hong Kong, however, the groups are formed with those who sign up to be in a small group. Anyone who is willing to be in a group in order to pursue and serve together can sign up. Based on the sign-up list and according to their addresses, five saints are put together as a small group. The small groups do not have leaders. Every week the saints use one or two evenings to take care of personal affairs and house chores, and the rest of the week is spent serving the Lord. The service of the saints is based on the burden of the saints. Sometimes they come together to pray and read the Bible so that their spirits can be stirred up to be burning. Sometimes they go out in coordination to visit other saints or to preach the gospel. Under this leading, the impact of the meetings and the service in the church in Hong Kong have been uplifted. In Taiwan it is very convenient to meet, and there is

no need for everyone to come together only once a week. However, we need to consider and learn from the church in Hong Kong in regard to their way of meeting in small groups.

NEEDING THE SUPPLY OF LIVING MESSAGES

I would like to mention one thing as a supplementary point. The saints need messages that are living. A local church should be supplied with two to three living messages each week. If we are unable to provide such living messages, we can read and digest the messages from *The Ministry of the Word* magazine or from other ministry publications, and then we will be able to render some supply to the saints.

This way of digesting a message and then supplying the saints is often used by the churches in the United States. For example, the church in Houston, Texas, is quite strong, but the saints cannot produce living messages. Therefore, they obtain audiotapes and notes from the meetings in Los Angeles. Then four brothers, who are gifted with speaking the word, come together one night every week. They listen to a recording and then read the notes from a meeting in Los Angeles. Then they study and digest the message together. After the message has been digested, the four brothers serve together and speak the message to the saints when the whole church comes together. Before the meeting they print an outline of the message and ask the saints to pray-read the verses; then they speak what they have digested. After the message the saints all share their enjoyment. The situation is very living.

The church in Los Angeles also does this. Every year we hold conferences that often last for one month and result in many messages. After a conference the saints review the messages one by one. Their reviewing is not at all monotonous; it is very fresh and living. Consequently, every meeting is very strong and rich.

In addition to being supplied with living messages, we should stir up the habit of pray-reading spiritual books in small group meetings. For example, small groups can pray-read the messages in *The Ministry of the Word* magazine and in other booklets published by our bookroom. In this way we will not merely have a living spirit and a strong service but also a clear understanding of the truth.

I fellowship all these matters with you for your consideration. I hope that the elders in every place would bring these matters before the Lord and consider how to arrange the saints who meet regularly into groups so that they may be burning in spirit to incite one another to love and good works related to the spread of the church, the recovery of dormant saints, and the gaining of new believers.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE COORDINATION AND ONENESS OF THE BODY

Scripture Reading: Luke 22:24-26; Matt. 20:25-28; 23:8-12; 1 Pet. 5:1-5; Rom. 12:3-5

THE SERVICE OF THE CHURCH BEING CORPORATE, NOT INDIVIDUALISTIC

The service of the church is corporate, not individualistic. Strictly speaking, there is no individualistic service in the church. Individualistic service is not the service of the church. Once we are individualistic, we are no longer in the service of the church. Whenever we serve individualistically, the church is paralyzed, and our service has no value. For example, our preaching of the gospel to save sinners should be corporate. This means that we should preach the gospel from our standing as the Body. Furthermore, the result of our gospel preaching should be for the church. As the temple of God, the church needs all kinds of material; hence, we need to preach the gospel to collect material for the building of God's temple. Genuine service is entirely in the church, in the Body.

NOT BEING INDIVIDUALISTIC AS MEMBERS IN THE NEW CREATION

In the old creation we all are individual persons. In the old creation you are an individual, and I am an individual. You can eat with your mouth, and I can eat with my mouth. You have eyes and ears, and I have eyes and ears. We are individuals with the same internal organs and the same external features. This is our situation in the old creation. In the new creation, however, none of us is complete in ourselves. In the new creation we are members, and no member is a complete person. A member is not a complete person. Although a person can both see and hear, an eye can see but not hear. Similarly, an ear can hear but not see. A nose can smell but not eat. A hand can gesture but not walk, and an arm can hold an object but not stand. No member can fulfill every function that is needed in a body. In the old creation we are a complete

person; however, in the new creation we are members. The church is the one new man, and we who are many are the members of this one new man. There is only one new man, and we are only members of this one new man.

Romans 12:5 says, "We who are many are one Body in Christ, and individually members one of another." Even though this verse says that we are members of the Body, many in Christianity act as if they are members in a club. In the church, however, the Body has only members. A club member can act alone, but a member of the Body cannot. Members of a club can act independently, but as members of the Body, we must depend on one another. We should ask ourselves whether we prefer to be members of a club or members of the Body. Although we may respond that we want to be members of the Body, it is not too much to say that we prefer to be club members.

While members of the Body do not have any individual freedom, the members of a club can enjoy a great deal of freedom. Being a member of the Body requires coordination in oneness. A brother once said that he suffered very much as an elder. When he said this, I thought that his suffering was related to some problem or persecution, but after listening for some time, I realized that he was speaking of the suffering related to coordination in the service. His experience confirmed that coordinating with the saints and other elders is the most difficult thing for an elder.

When the Lord Jesus was living on earth, the question of who among them was the greatest rose up among the disciples in Luke 22:24-26. The disciples discussed and studied it, and in the end they began to contend with one another. When one said that he was the first, another one surely disagreed and said that he was first. This produced quite a contention among them. In chapter 20 of Matthew a similar situation of contention was triggered by the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee. When she came to the Lord Jesus, she asked Him to say that her sons would sit on His right and on His left in His kingdom (vv. 20-21). Upon hearing this word, the other disciples became indignant with James and John (v. 24). The Lord responded to the mother and the disciples by telling them that they should not follow the Gentiles, who had rulers and great men exercising authority over them, and that whoever wanted to become great among the disciples would have to be a servant (vv. 25-27).

DROPPING THE CONCEPT OF POSITION

IN COORDINATION

In the coordination of the church, the matter of position, such as who is greater or lesser and who is higher or lower, must be dropped. Nevertheless, this concept is among us. This thought comes from our environment, our background, and the world. In the church there should be no such thing as being higher or lower and greater or lesser. In our physical body the question of whether the eyes are greater than the eyebrows is not even a consideration. We may have a concept that the eyebrows are greater because they are above the eyes, but this is not an accurate concept.

Considerations of who is above and who is below or who is higher and who is lower come from the abyss; they have no place in the church. We should not think that a brother is wonderful because he is an elder. Although an elder should be more experienced and have more growth in life, we should not have the worldly concept that the elders are above the saints. This is not a proper understanding of the Body in which everyone has a function and a place.

We must completely drop any natural concept concerning position in which someone is higher and others are lower. We should not think that elders are higher than others or that they are lower than others. In the church there are many practical matters that need to be taken care of; hence, there is a need for administration. This does not mean, however, that the elders involved in this administration are higher than the other saints. The Lord Jesus said that this concept is practiced among the Gentiles. The Gentiles have rulers and great ones to lord over them, but it should not be so among us. On one hand, the elders should not consider themselves as being higher than the saints, and on the other hand, the saints should not have a concept of position.

We should honor the elders because of their labor and love in the church and because of their concern and service for the church, not because we think that they have a special position. Some saints have an attitude that when a certain brother becomes an elder, he should be treated differently and honored by all. Our honoring of an elder, however, should be pure; it should not be based on the thought that he is in a higher position as an elder. In a local church there are many business affairs that require practical management. Consequently, some saints receive grace and are willing and able to manage them. For this reason we honor them. There is no concept of position in this kind of honoring. I hope that all the serving ones in the local

churches will be clear concerning this. We need to drop the concept of position. The Lord Jesus said, “Whoever wants to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you shall be your slave” (vv. 26-27). We need to drop the concept of position so that there is no thought among us that certain ones are “officials.”

May the Lord cover me. More than twenty years ago I appointed all the elders in a local church in northern China. Prior to appointing these elders, I helped in the service by cleaning the toilets. After I appointed the elders, I continued to clean the toilets. We should never have the concept that some tasks are beneath us because we have some kind of position.

LEARNING TO SUBMIT TO ONE ANOTHER IN THE SERVICE

Furthermore, we should not have the thought that the elders, co-workers, or responsible ones are capable of doing everything. No one among us can do everything. The elders are not necessarily more capable than the other saints. Who can dare say that he is the most capable one among the saints? We should learn to submit to one another; in some situations I should submit to you, and in other situations you should submit to me.

Recently, a brother has been helping me with my needs related to transportation. On the one hand, he submits to me by taking me to a specific destination, but on the other hand, when I ride in his car, I submit to him. If he says, “Please, sit in the front.” I reply, “Yes,” and I sit in the front. If he says, “Please, sit in the rear,” I say, “Yes,” and I sit in the rear. I submit to him because he is driving the car, but he submits to me by driving where I need to go. Furthermore, if I were driving the car, he should submit to me.

There are problems in the church because everyone has an opinion about how to drive the car. This means that everyone wants to be the driver. As a result, the car remains idle because no decision can be reached concerning how to drive it. One person, for example, may say that we should take Highway 1, but another suggests Highway 2, and still another proposes Highway 3. In the end the car cannot move, because each insists on his own way. In fact, there may even be an argument that lasts longer than it would to make the trip. This illustration is not an exaggeration.

There are many different routes that can be taken to a particular destination. Some routes are shorter, while others are longer, and some routes are easier to navigate, while others are more strenuous. However, I would rather use more time on the road than waste it in an argument. The time that it takes for people to argue their points often is enough to complete two round trips. We should stop arguing. If the car is in your control, I will sleep while you drive, and when it is my turn to drive, you should sleep. The problem is that I want to direct when you are driving, and you want to direct when I am driving. Although this is just an example, it is quite applicable.

Today our service is not individualistic; instead, we should serve together. Consequently, we should submit to one another in the coordination. If three brothers come to the meeting hall to arrange chairs, there is a need for mutual submission. Without this, it will be impossible to arrange chairs for a thousand people. The brothers should be willing to follow the one who has been given the responsibility for arranging the chairs. Without submission, one brother may insist that the seats face each other, while another may insist that the seats face the podium. In the end, rather than arranging chairs, they will engage in an argument. We need to learn to submit to others. In arranging chairs we should not have our own preference or proposal; we should be willing to simply follow the one who has been given the responsibility of arranging the chairs. We must learn this lesson. In the church it is a fearful thing to have opinions.

Some saints may appear to submit, but inwardly they disagree. Such a one may keep silent in the meeting hall, but when he is at home, he will speak, saying, “The church does not allow people to speak; this is not democratic. I am not even allowed to give my opinion on how to arrange the chairs.” Such a critical attitude confines the Lord into a small corner of our being, and it is not possible for the Lord to be our person. Furthermore, we will not be able to touch life and supply others with life.

In the church the way that something is done is a secondary matter; the primary matter is whether others touch life in the church. For example, when the elders ask a brother to help arrange chairs, he may not carry out this responsibility in an adequate way. When the elders ask the brother to adjust the way in which he has arranged the chairs, it would be wonderful if the brother would simply say, “Okay, we will change the arrangement,” and then ask the saints to help him rearrange the chairs. The rearrangement of the

chairs may seem to be a waste of time and energy, but in terms of life, it is not wasteful at all. Even if the elders would ask him to rearrange the chairs once again, it can be done in a way of submission that brings in much life.

Such an experience of submission in life is not possible in society. If the way of arrangement is changed, some will complain loudly, saying, "What is the matter with you? If you wanted us to arrange the chairs so that they were facing each other, you should have said so in the first place. Why did you change your mind?" Then an argument will ensue. In society it is easy to complain and blame one another, but it should not be this way in the church. In the church every mistake is profitable in helping us to touch and supply life.

HAVING NO OPINIONS AND LOVING ONE ANOTHER IN ONENESS

In the Lord's service, the first lesson that we need to learn is to drop our opinions. It is a precious thing to have no opinions. Nevertheless, in the service of the church it is very difficult to genuinely have no opinions, that is, to have no complaints and not to speak critical words. It is good to hear messages concerning taking Christ as our person. However, when we exercise to practice this, we will see that even in small matters related to the service, our opinions come forth, exposing the fact that Christ is not our person.

The members of a body do not have opinions. If my hand had an opinion, it would cause a problem. Similarly, my eyes and ears do not have their own opinion. My eyes and ears are directed by my body. Neither our eyes nor our ears have opinions. The ears hear things and the eyes see things according to the direction of the body. If my body directed my eyes to look in a certain direction, it would be a terrible thing if my eyes said, "After some consideration, I do not feel that I should look in that direction." In such a situation my body would not be able to move.

Even though the younger saints should honor the older ones, we must learn to submit to one another. If an eighteen-year-old brother is taking the lead in cleaning, I should listen to his instructions on how to clean. If he tells me to use a dry cloth, I should use a dry cloth; if he tells me to use a wet cloth, I should use a wet cloth. Some sisters have difficulty receiving instructions from others. If a sister is told to clean the benches in a certain way, she may

quit rather than follow the directions. She may say in her heart, "I have many servants at home, and I never have to clean benches. My being here and cleaning the benches is a great honor to you. Who are you to give me directions? I will never come again." No matter what our social status is, we should submit to one another in the church service. If we submit to one another without any opinion, the life in the church will grow, and our preaching of the gospel will be powerful because we love one another in oneness.

When we love one another in oneness, unbelievers will know that we are the Lord's disciples and that the Lord was sent by God (John 13:35; 17:21-23). Thus, it will be very easy for them to believe. At the same time, when we help a new believer, it will be easy to lead him to grow in life. The most edifying thing for a new believer is to see all the brothers and sisters submitting to one another. If, as serving ones, we argue with one another and accuse one another, new believers will not see any difference between the church and society, and they will not receive any supply of life.

THE POWER OF THE CHURCH DEPENDING ON OUR LOVING ONE ANOTHER AND BEING IN ONENESS

Today, if the church is truly the kingdom on earth—in which all the saints have no concept of position, all the saints have no opinions, and all the saints love one another, submit to one another, and serve together in oneness—unbelievers will be greatly impacted, and the saints will be abundantly supplied. We should not think that the Lord needs spiritual giants to revive His work on the earth. He does not need spiritual giants, revivalists, evangelists, or dignitaries. A famous evangelist in America holds large gospel campaigns, but even though many names are taken of those who have received the Lord, it is hard to know how many of these have actually been gained.

Today the Lord's recovery is borne simply by the saints, none of whom are spiritual giants. However, when we are joined and coordinated in harmony with one another and when we love and submit to one another, there is a strong testimony that subdues unbelievers and edifies believers. This is what we need in the church life. This must become the controlling factor in our

service; it must fill our service in the church. The success of the service of the church does not depend on carrying out certain things but on the manifestation of life, and this manifestation of life depends upon loving one another, being in one accord with one another, and submitting to one another. We do not have position or opinions; we have only the Lord Jesus. This is the church service that we need.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SERVICE BEING IN THE CHURCH

Scripture Reading: Matt. 18:15-20; Acts 5:11; 9:31; 12:5; 15:41; 20:28; Rev. 1:11; 3:22

In the previous chapter we saw that Christians need to focus on two matters: life and service. In this chapter we will see that life and service are related to the church. The enjoyment of the Lord's life is for the church, and we can enjoy the Lord's bountiful life only in the church. Furthermore, our service should also be in the church. Our service is for the church and through the church.

RECEIVING THE LORD'S BLESSING IN THE CHURCH

Losing the Blessing by Leaving the Church

We have observed one thing over the years: when a person is in the church, he is blessed, but when he leaves the church, he loses the blessing. When I speak of the church, I am particularly referring to a local church that is standing on the proper ground. Although every believer is part of the church, most are not on the ground and have lost the nature of the church due to the desolation and confusion resulting from denominations, divisive sects, and free groups. These brothers and sisters belong to the church, but by not being on the ground of the church, they have lost the nature of the church. By His mercy, the Lord has led us to the ground of oneness; He is also leading us to live the church life in His life and by His Spirit in order to have the reality of the church. Hence, when we speak of leaving the church, we are referring to leaving the ground of the church and losing the practical living of the church.

When a person who belongs to the Lord leaves a denomination, a divisive sect, or a free group, he is not leaving the church; rather, he is breaking away from a division. This is similar to the situation of the children of Israel, who were taken into captivity in Babylon and later returned to Jerusalem. When they returned, they were leaving the ground of division and captivity and were returning to the ground of oneness originally ordained by God so that they might live in oneness with God's children. Hence, leaving denominations,

divisive sects, or free groups should not be construed as leaving the church. On the contrary, it is a proper departure, a departure from divisive grounds, in order to return to the ground of oneness. By the Lord's grace, we are on the ground of oneness. On this ground we have the practical living of the church in His life and by His Spirit. If we leave this, we are truly leaving the church. This is what I am referring to when I speak of leaving the church.

Over the past nearly forty years, every person who has left the ground and the practical living of the church has lost the Lord's blessing, even if his reasons were justifiable. In mainland China, in other countries in the Far East, and even in the West, we have been able to observe those who left the ground of the church and the practical living of the church. When they left, they would condemn the church for being wrong about something and claim that they were right. Often what they said sounded reasonable, even to the point that others could not clearly discern the situation. After a period of time, however, it became evident that the Lord was not with them, because they lost the Lord's blessing.

It is hard to regard these results as chance occurrences, because they have been repeated in many places over the years. Those who leave insist that they are right and that the church is wrong. As a matter of principle, those who are right should have the Lord's blessing, and as a matter of principle, if the church is wrong, it should lose His blessing. But this has not happened. We dare not say that we have never made a mistake; however, by the Lord's mercy, we can absolutely say that the ground of the church on which the Lord has led us to stand is one thousand percent right. Moreover, the life that we live on the ground, that we live in His life and by the Spirit, is truly the church life. Certainly, we are human beings with the element of the old creation, and more often than not, we make mistakes. In this regard we have the Lord's precious blood to cover us. However, over the past nearly forty years, according to our observation, there has been nothing of the Lord's blessing to confirm that those who left were right and that the church was wrong. Even in recent years, we have seen how the Lord's blessing has been a vindication to us. We should regard the matter of the ground and the living of the church as a serious matter.

Refusing to Hear the Church Being a Serious Matter

In Matthew 18 the Lord spoke about a matter related to the church: If a brother sins against us, we should go and try to recover him. If he refuses to hear us, we should go with one or two more, and if he refuses to hear them, we should tell it to the church. If he refuses to hear the church, the Lord said, "Let him be to you just like the Gentile and the tax collector" (vv. 15-17). In such a situation, it would be quite easy for the offending brother to say, "How can you treat me like a Gentile and tax collector? I have morning watch, and I pray every day. I love the Lord, and I fear Him. I do not allow myself to be defiled by immoral or filthy things, and I do not love the world. I merely have a small difference of opinion with you. How can you treat me like a Gentile and a tax collector?" In the Lord's speaking, however, He did not say anything about spirituality; neither did He speak about fearing God, pursuing Him, or loving Him. Even if such a one were very spiritual and loved the Lord very much, the Lord said that the church should treat him as a Gentile and a tax collector simply because he has refused to hear the church. This is a serious matter.

May we receive this word of fellowship before the Lord. We should never allow ourselves to come to a point that we feel we are right and the church is wrong, or that we feel we are more spiritual than the church and thus refuse to hear the church. This is an extremely dangerous matter. Regardless of how much we feel that we are right and that the church is wrong, once we separate ourselves from the church, there are serious consequences.

In His mercy the Lord has caused us to know the church, highly regard the church, respect the church, and hear the church more and more. Matthew 18 shows that the church is practical because we can tell our problems to the church. If we did not have the church practically, we would be miserable. It is a great blessing to be able to tell our problems to the church.

The Interceding of the Church Being a Blessing

According to Acts 12:5, when Peter was in prison, "prayer was being made fervently by the church to God concerning him." The interceding of the church is a great blessing. When we encounter problems, the prayers of the church are a great blessing. If we take actions by ourselves that limit the ability of the church to support us through prayer, this is a sad and pitiful situation. It is a great blessing that we can turn to our local church for prayer

when we have problems. However, if we have a problem with the church, we will limit the ability of the church to earnestly pray for us. This is a strong proof that we have lost the position of being blessed.

Enjoying Peace and Being Comforted in the Church

Verse 31 of chapter 9 says that the churches in various places "had peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit." It is quite marvelous that this verse does not say that the saints in various places had peace, being built up and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Rather, it says that the churches in various places had peace, being built up, and went on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. In other words, if we are not in the church, we will have no part in the peace enjoyed by the church. If we are not in the church, we will be excluded from the comfort received by the church. Only those who are in the church can enjoy the peace and the comfort received by the church. Only when we are in the church can we have a share in the church's blessings.

Being Confirmed in the Church

Verse 41 of chapter 15 says that the apostle Paul "passed through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches." This verse does not speak of confirming the saints but of confirming the churches. If we have a problem with the church and are divided from the church, we will have no part in the confirming that is to the churches. Without such a part, we can quickly fall to the point of opposing the apostles' testimony. If we blame and criticize the church, it will not be long before our situation is even more pitiful.

Recently, we have been blessed to see that Christ is our person, and we have been full of rejoicing concerning this matter. However, some have tried to pour cold water on this truth and have even left the church. They not only have lost the blessing of the church, but they have fallen to the point that they even oppose the blessings that God is bestowing on the church. In contrast, many saints have responded in their spirit and are exultingly praising, saying, "Hallelujah! We never saw that the Lord is our person. Now we see it. What a great blessing this is!" It is amazing that some are willing to pour cold water on this by blaming, condemning, and criticizing.

May the Lord preserve us so that we never fall to such a pitiful state! We are in the church. Whenever we see that the church is being blessed by God in His grace, we are joyful, and we leap with praises. However, once a person leaves this ground, he begins to oppose the blessings received by the church. It is a strange thing that when a person leaves the ground of the church, regardless of what the Lord has done in the church and regardless of what happens in the church, he can only criticize and oppose. This is a pitiful situation. May the Lord have mercy on us and keep us forever on the ground of the church and in the practical church life. If this is the case, we will have a part in every blessing that the church receives. Sometimes, even when we are sick or unable to attend the meetings, the blessing that the church receives comes upon us because we are standing on the ground of the church and living in the church life. However, once we lose this ground and oppose the church, we have no part in the blessings bestowed on the church.

RECEIVING THE LORD'S SHEPHERDING IN THE CHURCH

In Acts 20:28 Paul charged the elders in Ephesus to take heed to all the flock and shepherd the church of God, which God obtained through His own blood. The verse does not stress sheep but the flock. Paul did not say that the elders should shepherd the saints; he said that they should shepherd the church of God. This indicates that in order to receive God's shepherding, we must be in the church. Once we lose the church, we lose the Lord's shepherding. Hence, it is a serious matter when a person has a problem with the church and when a person loses the ground of the church and the life of the church.

HEARING THE LORD'S WORDS IN THE CHURCH

The last speaking of the Lord is in the book of Revelation. Although Revelation includes seven epistles to seven churches (1:11; chs. 2—3), the entire book of Revelation is an epistle. John received a command from the Lord to write this book. He did not write to one saint or even to all the saints but to the seven churches in Asia. We also know that a person's last words tend to be the most important and most precious. The last book of the Bible is Revelation, which is the Lord's last word, and this book was written to the churches, to seven local churches. If we are not in the church, it will be difficult for us to hear the last words of the Lord. In this book a specific charge

to the churches is repeated seven times: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

In order to properly hear someone’s speaking, we must stand in the right position and face the proper direction. If you are speaking over there, and my ears are not facing your direction, it will not be easy for me to hear your words. In order to hear, I need to turn and position my ears in the proper direction. In order to hear what the Spirit is speaking to the churches, we must be in the church. This is the proper position. If we are not in the church, how can we hear what the Spirit is speaking to the churches? This is not a small thing.

My heart leaps with joy that there are so many young people in the church. I was a young man at one time, and I was even saved before I was twenty. After I was saved, however, I was groping in the dark for seven years. I did not know the blessing that comes from being in the church as soon as a believer is saved. When I was saved, I did not have even one-tenth of the blessing that you have today. You are truly blessed because you are in the church. You were saved in the church, and you are receiving grace in the church. In contrast, a person loses the blessing when he loses the ground of the church.

I hope that we will all see this matter clearly. Facts are stronger than reasonings, which avail nothing. Time is the best test. With the passage of time, everything becomes manifest, including what is right and what is wrong, what is the church and what is not, and what is approved by God and what is not. God eventually manifests everything in a clear way.

Four years ago a small number of people went out from among us. They claimed that the Lord had left us and taken His glory with Him. I believe that many of us still remember this kind of speaking. Four years have passed, but has the Lord left us? I am not saying this to defend myself or to glorify myself; rather, I want you to see the true situation. When I returned to the Far East this time, I could see that the churches are very living and that the brothers and sisters are growing. I am truly thankful to the Lord and give all praise to Him. The Lord has done this, and He has done it in the local churches. The church is precious. When we are in the church, we receive His blessing.

HAVING POWER IF WE PRAY IN THE CHURCH

Matthew 18:19 says, “If two of you are in harmony on earth concerning any matter for which they ask, it will be done for them from My Father who is in the heavens.” Two brothers can have great power when their standing related to the church is proper. If, however, these two brothers have problems with the church, they will not be in harmony when they come together to pray, and even if they agree with one another, they will have no power because their standing related to the church is not proper. The two or three in Matthew have great power because they are connected to the church. Our hands do not have their own power; they have power only because they are connected to our body. When two of us pray, it may seem as if only two are praying, but actually the whole church is praying. In Acts 12 when Peter was imprisoned, prayer was being made fervently by the church to God for him (v. 5). When Peter was released from prison, however, he went to the home of Mary, in which there was a “considerable number assembled together and praying” (v. 12). It is not possible to say that those in Mary’s house were the entire church. Nevertheless, the believers there had great power because the whole church was behind them.

BEING STRENGTHENED IF WE PREACH THE GOSPEL AND VISIT THE SAINTS IN THE CHURCH

Sometimes the young saints preach the gospel with great zeal. However, in their preaching some tend to become proud, to strive with others, and to look down on older saints. If, as a result of such an attitude, a young saint leaves the church, he may still be able to shout, jump, and preach the gospel. However, in the depth of his being, the supporting strength of the church will be gone. Today, when our young saints go out, they are full of energy and zeal, not because of their youth but because of the supporting strength of the church.

Our service must be in the church. On the surface it may seem as if only two people are going out to preach the gospel, but actually the whole church is going out. This is not a simple thing. We may not have this realization, but the evil spirits know. The evil spirits know whether or not the church is supporting us. Once we lose the church, we will lose the power in our gospel preaching. Hence, when we go out to preach the gospel, we must not only believe that the Lord is with us and be filled with the Holy Spirit, but we must also have the assurance that comes from going in the strength of the church.

When we visit the brothers and sisters, we must also go in the church. Can there be any power in the visitation carried out by those who have left the church? There will not be much power, because those who are visiting have severed themselves from the Body. The visitation carried out by those who are in the church is powerful because there is a source of energy not only from the church in Taipei but also from the New Jerusalem in the third heaven. Thank and praise the Lord! We are truly connected to heaven. We have a heavenly source of energy that does not come from us but from God. I hope that all the brothers and sisters are clear concerning the importance of the church. Our service must be absolutely in the church.

PAYING ATTENTION TO THE WORK AMONG THE STUDENTS

I would like to fellowship concerning one more matter. I hope that the brothers and sisters would receive a burden in the Spirit to intercede for the work among the students. After much fellowship, the co-workers realize that the Lord has truly blessed the island of Taiwan. The Lord has blessed the church and the society here. He has blessed us in many aspects, especially in the area of education. In Taipei there are countless numbers of students. Even if we do not count the number of elementary schools, there are numerous junior high schools, high schools, vocational schools, and universities. This is also true in Taichung and Tainan. There are students everywhere, and before the Lord we have a very deep feeling that our gospel work must go directly to the schools in order to gain students.

I feel that in order to preach the gospel to the Taiwanese-speaking people, the shortest route is to preach the gospel to the students. Presently, I believe that over half of the students in the schools are from Taiwanese-speaking families. If a large number of them believe in the Lord, the next generation of Taiwanese-speaking people will become believers. Furthermore, many Taiwanese-speaking parents will listen to their children if the children finish high school or college, and the parents will follow the footsteps of their children. Therefore, if we gain the next generation, the previous generation also will follow. The Chinese have a saying that there are no considerate children, only considerate parents. In other words, parents listen to their children rather than the other way around. Therefore, when we bring children to salvation, their parents will follow them.

In the churches in every place, but especially in the three cities that are educational centers—Taipei, Taichung, and Tainan—our work must focus on the students. We should begin with junior high students as the base because thirteen- to fifteen-year-olds are at a period in life in which it is easy for the Lord to gain them. Then these ones will enter into high school and become gospel seeds there. They will have an effect and gain more high school students. Then they will enter the universities and be gospel seeds in the universities to gain more students. When they graduate from the universities, they will become gospel seeds in society and in families. I hope that we all see this goal clearly. Presently, the government and the authorities allow us to preach the gospel in the schools. We have an unprecedented opportunity, and we must grasp it and do our best to preach the gospel. Beginning from this year, it should not be surprising if the church in Taipei gains ten thousand students in two years. There are nearly seventy schools in Taipei, including junior high schools, high schools, and universities. If we gain one hundred forty students in each school, the total will reach nearly ten thousand. This number will not be difficult to reach as long as the co-workers put their mind to it, the young saints are willing to cooperate, and the whole church intercedes.

Once the work of the students produces fruit, the young saints can work with the children so that the number of children increases. If there are ten thousand students, there can be thirty thousand children. What a marvelous thing this would be. In three to five years these thirty thousand children will become young brothers and sisters in junior high schools, and in this way, the increase among us will multiply.

Our eyes need to be enlightened; we need to see that it is worthwhile to put all our resources into this matter. All the brothers and sisters should have this view. If we say that we love the Lord, we should share the Lord with the young people so that through these young people, we can share the Lord with many children. We should continue to work in this way until the schools are filled with brothers and sisters. I believe that the Lord will not only bless the churches through this work, but He will also bless this country and this society. May He have mercy on us to receive this burden and to pray for this burden.