The Conclusion OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

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The Believers—Their Present (cont.)

Witness Lee

THE CONCLUSION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

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MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED FIFTY-SEVEN

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (41)

We have seen that, in the progressing stage of God's full salvation, the stage of transformation, the believers experience and enjoy the processed Triune God in His triune dispensing, they experience God's redemption continuously, and they enjoy the dispensing of the divine Trinity in the divine transformation for the divine conformation. With this message we shall begin to consider the believers' experiencing the dispensing of the divine Trinity corporately.

4. Experiencing the Dispensing of the Divine Trinity Corporately

a. By Entering into the Kingdom of God

In the New Testament the kingdom goes with God's salvation, and God's salvation goes with the kingdom. However, we may pay attention to God's salvation but not to the kingdom, regarding the kingdom as something strictly in the future. But the kingdom is related to our present salvation, for it is a part of God's salvation. If we have not been saved, we cannot be in the kingdom. Likewise, if we have not entered into the kingdom, we have not been saved.

According to our natural, religious concept, repentance and regeneration are for us to receive salvation. But according to the New Testament, repentance and regeneration are mainly for us to enter into the kingdom of God. John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, preached repentance for the kingdom. He said, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (Matt. 3:2). At the beginning of His ministry, the Lord Jesus also charged people to repent because the kingdom of the heavens had drawn near (Matt. 4:17). John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus did not say, "Repent, for salvation is here." Rather, they said, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near." Furthermore, to Nicodemus the Lord Jesus said, "Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). If we believe in the Lord, we shall be born again, and by being born again we shall enter into the kingdom of God. In John 3 the kingdom was already

present, and every regenerated believer in Christ could enter into it. The New Testament indicates that repentance and regeneration through believing in the Lord are not first for salvation but for the kingdom. Nevertheless, as we have pointed out, God's salvation and the kingdom are interrelated.

The kingdom is related both to the present and to the future. However, some Bible teachers say that the kingdom is a matter only of the coming age. They teach that Christ came with the kingdom and presented it to the Jewish people. Then these teachers go on to say that because the Jews rejected the kingdom, it has been suspended and postponed. According to these teachers, the present age is not the kingdom age but the church age. They completely separate the kingdom from the church. But the New Testament indicates that where salvation is, there the kingdom is. The New Testament also reveals that where the church is, there the kingdom is also. For instance, Romans 14:17 says, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Because the context here deals with the church life in the present age, this verse is a strong proof that the church in this age is the kingdom of God. Furthermore, in Revelation 1:9 John says, "I John, your brother and joint partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus." Here we see that John and the other believers were in the kingdom already for the exercise in tribulation and endurance. From these verses we see that the kingdom is present today. The kingdom is here with God's salvation and with the church.

(1) Having Been Regenerated into the Kingdom of God

As believers, we have been regenerated into the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5). This means that our regeneration was the entrance into God's kingdom. To be regenerated, therefore, is to enter into the kingdom of God. We have repented, we have believed in the Lord Jesus, and we have been regenerated into the kingdom. All believers in Christ have entered the kingdom of God by being regenerated into it.

In John 3:3 the Lord Jesus says, "Unless a man is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." In verse 5 He goes on to say, "Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." These words are a clear revelation that regeneration is the unique entrance into the kingdom of God. In order to enter into the kingdom of God, we need to be born again. There is no other way for us to enter into the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is the reign of God. It is a divine realm to be entered into, a realm which requires the divine life. Only the divine life can realize the divine things. Hence, for us to see or enter the kingdom of God requires regeneration with the divine life.

A kingdom is always related to life. The vegetable kingdom is related to the vegetable life, and the animal kingdom is related to the animal life. In order to share in a certain kingdom, we first need the life of that kingdom. If we did not have human life, we could not enter the human kingdom. Only human beings can participate in the human kingdom because only they have a human life. Likewise, if we did not have the divine life, the life of God, we could not enter the kingdom of God. Without the life of God we cannot share the kingdom of God. If we are to enter the divine kingdom, we must have the divine life. Because through regeneration we receive the divine life, the life of God, regeneration is the entrance into the kingdom.

The kingdom of God is not only the reign of God but also the divine realm or sphere. In order to participate in the reign of God and to be in the divine realm, we need the divine life. Only those who have the divine life can be in the divine realm and share the divine kingdom. Thus, we need to be regenerated that we may have the divine life, the life which enables us to enter into the divine realm and participate in the divine kingdom. No matter how good, clean, and pure our human life may be, it is not able to realize the things of the divine realm, and it is not qualified to enter into the divine kingdom. Only the divine life is qualified to be in the divine realm.

We were all born into the human kingdom. No one has ever been naturalized into the kingdom of man. The principle is the same with the kingdom of God. The divine life brings us into the kingdom of God. This is the reason the Lord Jesus says that we must be born into the kingdom of God. We cannot enter into the kingdom of God by learning or by being naturalized. We enter the kingdom of God only by regeneration.

When we were regenerated, we were transferred into the kingdom of God. Colossians 1:13 tells us that God has “delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.” We were transferred into God’s kingdom by being regenerated, and now we are in the kingdom of God. When we believed in the Lord Jesus and called on His name, the divine Spirit came into us, regenerated us, and caused us to be born into the kingdom of God.

(2) To Have a Rich Entrance into the Eternal Kingdom of Their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

After we have entered into the kingdom of God through regeneration, we need to go on to have a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:5-11). On the one hand, we have entered the kingdom; on the other hand, we still need a rich entrance. We may use the birth of a child into a family as an illustration. By birth a child enters his family. Nevertheless, the child needs to grow and develop unto maturity in order to enter into the family in a full way. Birth is the initial entry into the family, but growth, development, and maturity produces a rich entry. The principle is the same with entering into the kingdom of God. The initial entry into the kingdom is regeneration, but the rich entrance is by our experiencing the full development of the divine life, a development revealed in 2 Peter 1:5-11.

Second Peter 1:11 says, "For so shall be richly and bountifully supplied to you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." The bountiful supply we enjoy in the development of the divine life and nature will bountifully supply us a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord. It will enable and qualify us to enter into the coming kingdom with all the riches of the divine life and nature as our excellent virtues unto the splendid glory of God.

The eternal kingdom in 2 Peter 1:11 refers to the kingdom of God given to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Dan. 7:13-14), which will be manifested at His coming back (Luke 19:11-12). It will be a reward to His faithful believers, who pursue the growth in His life unto maturity and the development of the virtues of His nature, so that they may participate, in the millennium, in His kingship in God's glory (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:4, 6). To enter thus into the eternal kingdom of the Lord is related to the entrance into God's eternal glory, to which He has called us in Christ.

(a) Having Received of God's Divine Power All Things Relating to Life and Godliness

We may have a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord because we have received of God's divine power all things relating to life and godliness.

Second Peter 1:3 says, "As His divine power has granted to us all things which relate to life and godliness." In this verse the word "divine" denotes the eternal, unlimited, and almighty divinity of God. Hence, divine power is the power of the divine life related to the divine nature. The word "granted" here means imparted, infused, planted. All things which relate to life and godliness have been imparted to us, infused into us, by the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit who has regenerated us and who indwells us (2 Cor. 3:6, 17; John 3:6; Rom. 8:11). The divine power has afforded us all things pertaining to the growth in life.

All things relating to life and godliness are the various aspects of the divine life typified by the riches of the produce of the good land in the Old Testament. These are the substance of our faith's substantiation allotted to us by God (2 Pet. 1:1) as our portion for our inheritance. Life is within for us to live, and godliness is without as the outward expression of the inward life. Life is the inward energy, the inward strength, to bring forth the outward godliness, which leads to glory and results in glory.

(b) Having Received Precious and Exceedingly Great Promises for Them to Partake Of, to Enjoy, the Divine Nature

The believers' having a rich entrance into the Lord's eternal kingdom is also related to their having received precious and exceedingly great promises for them to partake of, to enjoy, the divine nature. Second Peter 1:4a says that God "has granted to us precious and exceedingly great promises, that through these you might become partakers of the divine nature." According to this verse, God has granted to us precious and exceedingly great promises for a specific purpose. This purpose is that through the promises we become partakers of the divine nature. Through the precious and exceedingly great promises, we, the believers in Christ, become partakers of His divine nature in an organic union with Him. To partake of the divine nature is to enjoy what God is. In order that we may enjoy all that He is, God will do many things for us according to His promises. This will enable us to enjoy His nature, what He is.

To be a partaker of the divine nature is to be a partaker of the elements, the ingredients, of God's being. The divine nature refers to the riches of what God is. Whatever God is, is in His nature. Therefore, when we partake of the divine

nature, we partake of the divine riches. Having received the divine life through regeneration, we must go on to enjoy what God is. When we partake of God, the aspects of what He is become our enjoyment. For example, we partake of His righteousness, holiness, kindness, love, compassion. This is to enjoy the constituents of the divine nature. God's purpose in giving us the precious and exceedingly great promises is that we may become partakers of the divine nature.

As believers in Christ, we have the position, the ability, and the provision to become partakers of the divine nature. As we enjoy God's nature, a part of this nature becomes our holiness, and other parts become our humility, love, kindness, and other virtues. Eventually these excellent virtues will consummate in glory.

In 2 Peter 1:5-11 we have the development of excellent virtues through the enjoyment of the divine nature for a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Second Peter 1:5 says, "And for this very reason also, adding all diligence, supply bountifully in your faith virtue, and in virtue knowledge." The Greek word rendered "adding" literally means "bringing in besides." Besides, along with, the precious and exceedingly great promises given to us by God, we should bring in all diligence to cooperate with the enabling of the dynamic divine nature for a rich entrance into the Lord's kingdom through God's fulfillment of His promises.

In verse 5 Peter urges us to supply bountifully in our faith virtue. What the divine power has given us in verses 3 and 4 is developed in verses 5 through 7. To supply virtue in faith is to develop virtue in the exercise of faith. The same principle applies to all the other items. The word "supply" in verse 5 actually means develop. Peter is telling us to develop what we already have. We have faith, and now in our faith we need to develop virtue.

The faith Peter mentions in 1:5 is the like precious faith allotted to us by God (v. 1) as the common portion of the New Testament blessing of life for the initiation of the Christian life. This faith needs to be exercised that the virtue of the divine life may be developed to reach its maturity.

Faith in 2 Peter 1 may be compared to a seed. In chapter one of 1 Peter the seed is the word with Christ in it as life. Here in 2 Peter 1 this seed becomes our faith, which is the like precious faith. This faith is one with Christ as the seed.

After a seed has been sown in the soil, it needs to be developed. The principle is the same with the development of the seed of faith. In our faith we need to develop virtue. Literally, the Greek word for virtue means excellency; it denotes the energy of the divine life issuing in vigorous action. If faith is regarded as a seed, virtue may be considered a root that comes out of this seed.

The virtue in verse 5 refers to that mentioned in verse 3, where Peter speaks of the One who has "called us to His own glory and virtue." Furthermore, this virtue is related to the divine nature, which denotes the riches of what God is. The virtue in verses 3 and 5 is the issue of the experience of the divine nature in verse 4. When we partake of the divine nature, the different aspects of the riches of what God is, these riches become our virtues. God is love, light, holiness, righteousness, kindness. All these are God's attributes. Each divine attribute is also a virtue. When we enjoy what God is, we enjoy His holiness. Then this holiness becomes a virtue in us and with us. The principle is the same with the enjoyment of other divine attributes.

The essence or element of virtue is contained in faith as a seed. This seed is actually Christ Himself, and Christ is God in all that He is. This Christ has become our inheritance. The response to, or the reflection of, Christ as the embodiment of God to be our inheritance within us is faith. Within faith as a seed are included all the divine attributes, all the riches of what God is. Because we have this seed of faith with the divine nature, we must go on to develop this seed. The first thing that comes forth in this development is virtue.

In 1:5 Peter also tells us to supply "in virtue knowledge." Virtue, the vigorous action, needs the bountiful supply of the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord (vv. 2, 3, 8) regarding the all things related to the divine life and godliness and the partaking of the divine nature for our enjoyment in the development described in verses 5 through 7. The knowledge which we should develop in our virtue includes the knowledge of God and of our Savior, the knowledge of God's economy, the knowledge of what faith is, and the knowledge of the divine power, glory, virtue, nature, and life. Actually, this is the knowledge of all things related to life and godliness.

The knowledge spoken of in 1:5 is the full knowledge of God and of our Lord. We need a full knowledge not of the unprocessed God, the "raw" God, but of the processed God, the God who became a man through incarnation,

who lived on earth for thirty-three and a half years, who died on the cross and was buried, who was resurrected, and who has ascended to the heavens. Incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension are all a part of a long process. Because Christ has passed through such a process, no longer is He merely God with the element of divinity; He is also man with the element of humanity. Our Lord is both God and man; He has both the divine nature and the human nature. Moreover, He also includes the elements of human living, His all-inclusive death, and His life-imparting resurrection. We need to supply bountifully in our virtue this knowledge of the processed Triune God. Without such knowledge, we cannot have the development described in 1:5-7. It is not possible to have this development apart from the full knowledge of God.

We must have this knowledge developed in our virtue. It is not adequate to have virtue without knowledge. The knowledge in 1:5 is also a primary root that develops out of the seed of faith. Therefore, with virtue and knowledge we have the growth of the seed.

In 1:6 Peter continues, "And in knowledge self-control, and in self-control endurance, and in endurance godliness." Self-control is the exercise of control and restraint over the self in its passions, desires, and habits. This needs to be supplied and developed in knowledge for the proper growth in life.

Once we have acquired knowledge, it is easy for us to become proud. For this reason, we need to develop in our knowledge self-control, which implies restriction. Along with the development of virtue and knowledge, we need the restriction that comes with self-control.

According to Peter's word in verse 6, in our self-control we need to develop endurance. Self-control is related to the self, but endurance is related to others and to our circumstances. As to ourselves, we must have self-control, and as to our circumstances, no matter what they may be, we need endurance. In order to live a proper Christian life, we need endurance toward those around us and also toward our environment and circumstances.

In verse 6 Peter also says that in our endurance we need to develop godliness. Godliness is a living that is like God and expresses God. As we exercise control over the self and bear with others and with circumstances, godliness needs to be developed in our spiritual life so that we may be like God and express Him. The Christian life should be a life that expresses God and bears God's likeness in all things.

In verse 7 Peter concludes, “And in godliness brotherly love, and in brotherly love love.” The Greek word rendered “brotherly love” is philadelphia, composed of phileo, to have affection for, and adelphos, a brother; hence, brotherly affection, a love of delight and pleasure. In godliness, the expression of God, this love needs to be supplied for the brotherhood (1 Pet. 2:17; 3:8; Gal. 6:10), for our testimony to the world (John 13:34-35) and for the bearing of fruit (John 15:16-17).

The Greek word for love in verse 7 is agape, the word used in the New Testament for the divine love, which God is in His nature (1 John 4:8, 16). It is nobler than phileo; it adorns all the qualities of the Christian life (1 Cor. 13; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13-14). It is stronger in ability and greater in capacity than human love (Matt. 5:44, 46), yet a believer who lives by the divine life and partakes of the divine nature can be saturated with it and express it in full. Such a love needs to be developed in brotherly love, to govern it and flow in it for the full expression of God, who is this love. Faith may be considered the seed of life, and this nobler love, the fruit (2 Pet. 1:8) in its full development. The six developments in between are the stages of its growth unto maturity.

In 1:5-7 we have the development from faith to love. This development includes virtue, knowledge, self-control, endurance, and godliness. Eventually, we have the full development and maturity from the seed of faith, through the roots of virtue and knowledge, the trunk of self-control, and the branches of endurance and godliness, to the blossom and fruit of brotherly love and love.

In 1:8 Peter goes on to say, “For these things, existing in you and abounding, constitute you neither idle nor unfruitful unto the full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” “These things” refer to all the virtues covered in verses 5 through 7, from faith to love. The Greek word for “existing” is huparcho. It denotes the existence of certain things that belong to someone from the beginning and thus become his rightful possession to the present. This indicates that all the virtues mentioned in verses 5 through 7 are the possession of the believers and exist in them forever through their experience of partaking of the divine nature in all its riches.

Peter speaks of these virtues not only existing in us but also abounding. The divine virtues are not only existing in and possessed by the believers, but are also abounding and multiplying in them in the development and growth of the divine life. All the virtues already exist in the seed, and now they are waiting for the opportunity to abound. In order for the virtues in the seed to

abound, the seed needs to be sown in the soil and then grow and develop until it blossoms and bears fruit.

Peter says that if these things exist and abound in us, they shall constitute us neither idle nor unfruitful unto the full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. This indicates that the virtues of the divine life and nature are the constituents, the elements, of our spiritual constitution, our spiritual being, making us persons without the elements of idleness and unfruitfulness. Whereas idleness and unfruitfulness are constituents of our fallen being, working, the energizing of life, and fruitfulness are the constituents of our spiritual constitution. Peter's use of the word "unfruitful" in verse 8 indicates that what is covered in verses 5 through 7 is the development of the growth of the divine life unto its maturity.

Second Peter 1:9 and 10 say, "He in whom these things are not present is blind, being shortsighted, having forgotten the cleansing of his past sins. Wherefore, brothers, be the more diligent to make your calling and selection firm, for doing these things you shall by no means ever stumble." Here to be diligent is to develop the spiritual virtues in the divine life, to advance in the growth of the divine life. This makes God's calling and selection firm.

If we are diligent to develop the virtues mentioned in verses 5 through 7, we shall confirm, make sure, our calling and selection. We shall never doubt that we have been called by God and selected by Him. However, some may question whether God has chosen them. The reason for doubt concerning this matter is the lack of the virtues listed by Peter. But if we develop these virtues and are constituted of them, we shall have the confirmation that we have been called and selected. This is to make our calling and selection firm. Furthermore, in doing these things we shall never stumble, because we have been thoroughly constituted.

Verse 11 indicates that, as a result of developing the divine seed unto maturity, the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly and bountifully supplied to us. In this eternal kingdom we shall not be subjects—we shall be kings. But in order to be kings in the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we need maturity in life.

According to Peter's word in 1:5-11, to grow to maturity is to develop what we have already received. We have been allotted the like precious faith, and this faith is an all-inclusive seed. All the divine riches are in this seed, but we must be diligent to develop them into virtue. Then we need to develop in our

virtue knowledge; in knowledge, self-control; in self-control, endurance; in endurance, godliness; in godliness, brotherly love; and in brotherly love, love. By developing these virtues we grow, and eventually we shall reach maturity. As a result, we shall be full of Christ, and, in Paul's words, we shall arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13). Then we shall be qualified and equipped to be kings in the coming kingdom. We shall have a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED FIFTY-EIGHT

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (42)

In the progressing stage of God's full salvation, the believers experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity corporately by entering into the kingdom of God. We have entered into the kingdom through regeneration (John 3:3, 5), but we still need a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ through growth in the divine life (2 Pet. 1:5-11). Now we need to see that, having entered into the kingdom of God, we need to live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 5—7). In order to develop in the divine life that we may have a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we need to live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens.

(3) To Live in the Reality of the Kingdom of the Heavens

The kingdom of the heavens is a specific term used by Matthew. This indicates that the kingdom of the heavens differs from the kingdom of God, a term used in the other Gospels. The kingdom of God refers to God's reign in a general way, from eternity past to eternity future. The kingdom of the heavens is a special section within the kingdom of God, composed only of the church today and the heavenly part of the coming millennial kingdom. For this reason, the kingdom of the heavens, a section of the kingdom of God, is also called the kingdom of God in the New Testament, especially in the other Gospels.

According to Matthew, there are three aspects of the kingdom of the heavens: the reality, the appearance, and the manifestation. The reality of the kingdom of the heavens is the inward content of the kingdom of the heavens in its heavenly and spiritual nature, as revealed in chapters five through seven. The appearance of the kingdom of the heavens is the outward condition of the kingdom of the heavens in name, as revealed in chapter thirteen. The manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens is the practical coming of the kingdom of the heavens in power, as revealed in chapters twenty-four and twenty-five. Both the reality and the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens are with the church today. The reality of the kingdom of the heavens

is the proper church life (Rom. 14:17), which is within the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens, known as Christendom. The manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens will be the heavenly part of the coming millennial kingdom, which is called the kingdom of the Father (Matt. 13:43). In this part of the millennial kingdom, which will be the kingdom of the heavens manifested in power, the overcoming saints will reign with Christ a thousand years (Rev. 20:4, 6). Today, as believers in Christ, we need to experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity corporately by entering into the kingdom of God and then living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens.

Matthew 5—7 describes the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. The word spoken by the Lord Jesus in these chapters is the revelation of the spiritual living and heavenly principles of the kingdom of the heavens. These chapters are composed of seven sections (5:1-12; 5:13-16; 5:17-48; 6:1-18; 6:19-34; 7:1-12; 7:13-29). Let us briefly consider each of these sections in order to see the believers' living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens.

(a) In the Heavenly Nature of the Kingdom People

If we would live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, we must live in the heavenly nature of the kingdom people. Matthew 5:1-12 depicts this nature under nine blessings. Those who live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens are poor in spirit, they mourn for the present situation, they are meek in suffering opposition, they hunger and thirst for righteousness, they are merciful toward others, they are pure in heart, they make peace with all men, they suffer persecution for righteousness, and they are reproached and evil spoken of.

Matthew 5:3 says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens." The spirit here refers not to the Spirit of God but to our human spirit, the deepest part of our being, the organ for us to contact God and realize spiritual things. To be poor in spirit is not only to be humble but also to be emptied in our spirit, in the depth of our being, not holding on to the old things but unloaded to receive the new things, the things of the kingdom of the heavens. We need to be poor, emptied, unloaded, in this part of our being so that we may realize and possess the kingdom of the heavens. If we are poor in spirit, the kingdom of the heavens is ours. We are in its reality now in the church age, and we shall share in its manifestation in the coming age.

In verse 4 the Lord Jesus says, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” The entire situation of the world is negative toward God’s economy. Satan, sin, self, darkness, and worldliness predominate among all people on earth. God’s glory is insulted, Christ is rejected, the Holy Spirit is frustrated, the church is desolated, self is corrupted, and the whole world is evil. Hence, God wants us to mourn over such a situation. If we mourn according to God and His economy, we shall be comforted by being rewarded with the kingdom of the heavens. We shall see God’s heavenly ruling over all the negative situation.

Matthew 5:5 says, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Those who are poor in spirit in verse 3 and who mourn in verse 4 are now the meek in verse 5. To be meek does not simply mean to be gentle, humble, and submissive. To be meek means to not resist the world’s opposition but to suffer it willingly. To be meek means not to fight or to resist. If we are meek, willing to suffer the world’s opposition in this age, we shall inherit the earth in the coming age, as revealed in Hebrews 2:5-8 and Luke 19:17, 19.

In verse 6 the Lord says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” Righteousness here is to be right in our behavior. We need to hunger and thirst for this righteousness, to seek after such a righteousness, that we may enter into the kingdom of the heavens (vv. 10, 20).

This righteousness is related to what we are inwardly. This is indicated by the fact that we are told to hunger and thirst for righteousness so that we may be satisfied. If we hunger and thirst for righteousness, God will grant us to be satisfied with the very righteousness we seek.

Matthew 5:7 continues, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” To be righteous is to give one what he deserves, whereas to be merciful is to give someone better than he deserves. For the kingdom of the heavens we need to be not only righteous but also merciful. To receive mercy is to get better than we deserve. If we are merciful to others, the Lord will grant us mercy (2 Tim. 1:16, 18), especially at His judgment seat (James 2:12-13).

The promise for us in verse 7 is that those who are merciful will receive mercy. If we judge our brother without mercy today, we shall not receive mercy at the judgment seat of Christ. Because we judge others unmercifully, Christ will judge us unmercifully. But if we have mercy on our brother, the

Lord will have mercy on us at His judgment seat. Therefore, we should be strict in dealing with ourselves but very merciful in dealing with others. This also is a matter related to our inward being.

In verse 8 the Lord goes on to say, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." To be pure in heart is to be single in purpose, to have the single goal of accomplishing God's will for God's glory (1 Cor. 10:31). This is for the kingdom of the heavens. Our spirit is the organ to receive Christ (John 1:12; 3:6), whereas our heart is the ground where Christ as the seed of life grows (Matt. 13:19). For the kingdom of the heavens we need to be poor in spirit, empty in our spirit, that we may receive Christ. We also need to be pure in heart, single in our heart, that Christ may grow in us without frustration. If we are pure in heart in seeking God, we shall see God. Seeing God is a reward to the pure in heart. This blessing is both for today and for the coming age.

Matthew 5:9 says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." Satan, the rebellious one, is the instigator of all rebellion. For the kingdom of the heavens, under its heavenly ruling, we must be peacemakers with all men (Heb. 12:14). The sons of the Devil cause discord, but the sons of God make peace. As the Son of God, the Lord Jesus made peace with God and man. Now, as the sons of God, we should follow Him to be peacemakers.

Our Father is the God of peace (Rom. 15:33; 16:20); He has a peaceful life with a peaceful nature. As those born of Him, if we would be peacemakers, we must behave in His life according to His nature. Then, expressing the Father's life and nature, we shall be called sons of God.

In verses 10 and 11 the Lord speaks about the believers being persecuted and reproached. Verse 10 says, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens." The whole world lies in the evil one (1 John 5:19) and is filled with unrighteousness. Every aspect of the world is unrighteous. If we hunger and thirst for righteousness, we shall be persecuted for the sake of righteousness. This indicates that we need to pay a price for the righteousness we seek for the kingdom of the heavens. If we are righteous, we shall be condemned, opposed, and persecuted.

Matthew 5:10 says that those who are persecuted for righteousness are blessed, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens. If we seek righteousness at a

cost, the kingdom of the heavens becomes ours. We are in its reality now, and we shall be rewarded with its manifestation in the coming age.

Concluding His word concerning the nature of the kingdom people, the Lord Jesus says in verse 11, "Blessed are you when they reproach and persecute you, and say every evil thing against you, lying, for My sake." The persecution in verse 10 is for the sake of righteousness, because of our seeking for righteousness, whereas the persecution in verse 11 is directly for the sake of Christ, because of our following Him. When we live a life for the kingdom of the heavens in its spiritual nature and according to its heavenly principles, we shall be reproached, persecuted, and evil spoken of, mainly by the religious people who hold on to their traditional religious concepts.

In verse 12 the Lord Jesus speaks an encouraging word to those who are persecuted for His sake: "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in the heavens; for thus they persecuted the prophets before you." This reward indicates that the results of all the foregoing blessings are also rewards. This reward is great and is in the heavens, a heavenly reward, not an earthly one.

(b) As the Salt of the Earth to Restrict Its Corruption, and as the Light of the World to Enlighten It

In speaking of the believers' influence upon the world, the Lord Jesus tells us that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (vv. 13-14). There is a difference between the earth and the world. What was created by God is the earth, and what came in through the corruption of Satan is the world. To the God-created earth we are salt, but to the Satan-corrupted world we are light.

Matthew 5:13a says, "You are the salt of the earth." Salt by nature is an element that kills and eliminates the germs of corruption. To the corrupted earth the believers living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens are such an element, keeping the earth from being fully corrupted. This means that we exercise our influence over the earth created by God. Through its killing and preserving function, salt brings the earth back to its original condition or keeps it in its original condition. Hence, the function of salt is to preserve what God has created. As the salt of the earth, the believers have the salting

function of killing germs, eliminating corruption, and keeping things in their original condition or bringing them back to their God-created condition. Eventually, when the millennial kingdom comes, all the germs on earth will be killed, and the whole earth will be not only regained by Christ but also brought back to its God-created condition. In the present age, wherever the believers are, they should exercise a salting influence over those around them.

For the earth there is the need of salt, but for the world there is the need of light. The darkness is not upon the earth; rather, it is in the world, which denotes human society, a system of Satan. The world, Satan's system, the dark human society, needs light. Hence, the Lord Jesus says, "You are the light of the world" (v. 14a). To the darkened world the believers are a light effacing its darkness.

In verses 14b and 15 the Lord goes on to say, "A city situated upon a mountain cannot be hidden; neither do men light a lamp and place it under the bushel, but on the lampstand, and it shines to all who are in the house." Here the Lord refers to both the outward and inward shining of the believers. The light as a city on a mountain shines over the outsiders, whereas the lighted lamp on the lampstand shines over those who are in the house. As the city, the light shines upon people, but as the lamp in the house, the light shines into people. This indicates that our influence over others should be both outward and inward. The outward shining is general, but the inward shining is particular. With the city situated upon a mountain there is a general shining from outside, but with the lamp on the lampstand there is a particular shining from within. This inward shining penetrates the inward being of others and convinces them.

Eventually, both aspects of our shining will give glory to the Father. "Thus let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in the heavens" (v. 16). The good works here are the behavior of the believers living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens through which others may see God and be brought to Him. Our shining will glorify the Father because it expresses what God is. Glory is God expressed. When we express God in our behavior and good works, others will see God and give glory to Him. If we have such a shining, God will be expressed in it, and those around us will see the glory, God expressed. When others see God in our shining, that is the glory of God. Outwardly as a city and inwardly as a lamp we shine to express God, to let God have glory in the eyes of others.

(c) Practicing the Higher Law of the Heavenly Kingdom to Have the Surpassing Righteousness

Those believers who live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens practice the higher law of the heavenly kingdom to have the surpassing righteousness. In 5:17-48 the Lord Jesus decrees the law of the kingdom people. Now as children of the Father, we need to fulfill this new law, the higher law, by the resurrection life, which is the eternal life of the Father.

In verse 20 the Lord says, "Unless your righteousness surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens." Here "righteousness" does not refer to the objective righteousness, which is the Christ we received when we believed in Him that we may be justified before God (1 Cor. 1:30; Rom. 3:26). Instead, it refers to the subjective righteousness, which is the indwelling Christ lived out of us as our righteousness that we may live in the reality of the kingdom today and enter into its manifestation in the future. This subjective righteousness, according to the new law of the kingdom, surpasses the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. It is impossible for our natural life to gain this surpassing righteousness; it can be produced only by a higher life, the resurrection life of Christ.

In 5:48 the Lord says, "You, therefore, shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." For us to be perfect as our Father is perfect is to be perfect in His love. We are the Father's children, having His life and nature. Hence, we can be perfect like the Father. The demands of the new law of the kingdom can be met only by the divine life, not by the natural life. The kingdom of the heavens is the highest demand, and the divine life, the life of the Father, is the highest supply to meet this demand.

(d) Doing Righteousness and Contacting God in Secret, Not Making a Show of It

Matthew 6:1-18 concerns the righteous deeds of the kingdom people. The Lord says, "Take heed not to do your righteousness before men to be gazed at by them; otherwise, you surely have no reward with your Father who is in the heavens" (v. 1). Man's flesh, seeking to glorify itself, always wants to do good deeds before others to be praised by them. But those believers who live in the

reality of the kingdom of the heavens, who live in an emptied and humble spirit and walk in a pure and single heart under the heavenly ruling of the kingdom, are not allowed to do anything in the flesh for the praise of men, but must do all things in the spirit for the pleasing of their heavenly Father. They do their righteous deeds not to gain man's glory but to receive the Father's reward.

The living of the believers should be by the Father's life according to their spirit. Thus, they are required to do good things in secret, not in public (vv. 3-4). Any public exhibition does not correspond to the mysterious hidden nature of the divine life.

Regarding the three matters of giving alms, praying, and fasting, the Lord Jesus uses the word "secret" (vv. 4, 6, 18). We must do our righteous deeds in secret, for our Father is in secret. As children of the heavenly Father, we need to live in the presence of the Father and care for the Father's presence. Whatever we do in secret for the Father's kingdom, the Father sees in secret. The heavenly Father's seeing in secret must be an incentive to doing our righteous deeds in secret. Eventually, the Father will repay us, either in this age (2 Cor. 9:10-11) or in the coming age as a reward (Luke 14:14).

(e) Not Loving Mammon and Serving It, but Loving God and Serving Him

In 6:19-34 we have the Lord's word concerning our dealing with riches. In these verses the Lord charges us not to love mammon and serve it but to love God and serve Him. In verse 20 He says, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." This is to give material things to the poor (Matt. 19:21) and to care for the needy saints (Acts 2:45; 4:34-35; 11:29; Rom. 15:26) and the Lord's servants (Phil. 4:16-17).

In verse 21 the Lord says, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." We need to send our treasure to heaven so that our heart can also be in heaven. Before we go there, our treasure and our heart must go there first.

In 6:22 the Lord continues, "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is single, your whole body will be illuminated." Our eyes can focus on only one thing at a time. If we endeavor to see two things at once, our sight will be blurred. If we focus our eyes on one thing, our sight will be single, and our whole body will be illuminated. But if we lay up our treasure both in

heaven and on earth, our sight will be blurred. If we would have single sight, we must lay up our treasure in one place.

In verse 24 the Lord tells us that we cannot serve two masters: "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." The word "mammon" is an Aramaic word signifying wealth, riches. Here mammon, standing in opposition to God, indicates that wealth or riches are the opponent of God, robbing God's people of their service to Him. As those living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, we should not allow mammon to replace God in our living. Instead of loving money and serving it, we should love God and serve Him. This is an aspect of living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens.

In verse 33 the Lord Jesus says, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." The Father's kingdom is the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today and its manifestation in the coming age; the Father's righteousness is the righteousness by keeping the new law of the kingdom. If we seek first the kingdom and righteousness of our heavenly Father, not only will His kingdom and righteousness be given to us, but also our necessities will be added.

(f) Dealing with Themselves More Than with Others

As we live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, we shall deal with ourselves more than with others (7:1-12). The Lord Jesus says, "Do not judge, lest you be judged; for with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you" (vv. 1-2). If we live in a humble spirit under the heavenly ruling of the kingdom, we shall always judge ourselves, not others. Under the heavenly ruling of the kingdom, the believers will be judged with what they judge. If we judge others with righteousness, we shall be judged by the Lord with righteousness. If we judge others with mercy, we shall be judged by the Lord with mercy.

Matthew 7:3-5 says, "Why do you look at the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not consider the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, Let me remove the splinter from your eye, and behold, the log is in your eye? Hypocrite, first remove the log from your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye." Here we see that if we

live in a humble spirit under the heavenly ruling of the kingdom, we shall consider the log in our own eye whenever we look at the splinter in our brother's eye. The splinter in our brother's eye must remind us that we have a log in our own eye. Then we shall deal with ourselves more than with others. We must be more strict in dealing with ourselves than in dealing with others.

(g) Taking the Way Which Leads to Life and Taking the Words of Christ as the Ground for Their Living and Work to Do the Will of the Father

Finally, if we live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, we shall take the way which leads to life, and we shall take the words of Christ as the ground for our living and work to do the will of the Father (7:13-27). In 7:13 and 14 the Lord Jesus says, "Enter in through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter through it. For the gate is narrow and the way is constricted which leads to life, and few are those who find it." In verse 13 destruction does not refer to the perdition of the person but to the destruction of his deeds and work (1 Cor. 3:15). In verse 14 life refers to the ever blessed condition of the kingdom, which is filled with the eternal life of God. This life is in the reality of the kingdom today and will be in the manifestation of the kingdom in the coming age (Matt. 19:29; Luke 18:30).

The "gate is narrow and the way is constricted" because the new law of the kingdom is stricter and the demand of the kingdom is higher than that of the old covenant. It deals not only with outward conduct but also with inward motive. The old man, the self, the flesh, the human concept, and the world with its glory are all excluded. Only that which corresponds to God's will can enter in. If we would live in the reality of the kingdom, we first need to enter such a narrow gate and then walk in such a constricted way. To enter the gate is to begin walking the way, a way which is lifelong.

We should not only take the way which leads to life but also take the words of Christ as the ground for our living and work. All that we do in our living and work should have the words of Christ as the ground. The Lord says, "Every one therefore who hears these words of Mine and does them shall be likened to a prudent man, who built his house on the rock" (v. 24). Here "rock" does not refer to Christ but to His wise word, the word that reveals the will of

His Father. Our living and work must be founded on the word of Christ for the accomplishment of the will of the heavenly Father. To take the words of Christ as the ground for our living and work is actually to enter the narrow gate and walk the constricted way which leads to life.

Concerning the house founded on the rock, the Lord says, "The rain descended, and the rivers came, and the winds blew and fell on that house; and it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock" (v. 25). The rain is of God, descending from the heavens; the rivers are of man, coming from the earth; and the winds are of Satan, blowing from the air. All these will test our living and work. Although the rain may descend, the rivers may come, and the winds may blow, the house built upon the rock will not fall, because it is built according to the constricted way, the way of doing the will of the Father. The house which is built on the rock and which does not fall is like the building work of gold, silver, and precious stones, which can stand the testing fire (1 Cor. 3:12-13). However, the house built on the "sand" of human concepts and natural ways will fall (vv. 26-27). If we do not take Christ's words as the ground for our living and work, eventually all that we do will pass into destruction.

We take the way which leads to life and we take the words of Christ as the ground for our living and work so that we may do the will of the Father. In verse 21 the Lord Jesus says, "Not every one who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he who does the will of My Father who is in the heavens." To enter into the kingdom of the heavens we need to call on the Lord and do the will of the heavenly Father. To call on the Lord suffices for us to be saved (Rom. 10:13), but to enter into the kingdom of the heavens we also need to do the will of the heavenly Father. Because entering into the kingdom of the heavens requires doing the will of the heavenly Father, it is clearly different from entering into the kingdom of God by being regenerated (John 3:3, 5). The latter is by the birth of the divine life; the former is by the living of that life.

If we live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, we shall do the will of the Father who is in heaven. We are not for anything other than doing the will of the Father. We are here for the accomplishment of the Father's will. In order to do the will of the Father, we need to walk in the constricted way, the way that leads to life. Our Father has a will to accomplish, but we can accomplish it only by His life. Therefore, we need to live in the life of the

heavenly Father and by His life. This kind of living is for doing the Father's will.

In chapter sixteen of Matthew we see that the Father's will is to build the church upon the Son as the rock. This is fully developed in the Acts, the Epistles, and the book of Revelation. The New Testament reveals that the Father's divine, eternal will is to build up the church. Those believers who live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, corporately experiencing the dispensing of the divine Trinity, will take the way which leads to life and will take the words of Christ as the ground for their living and work to do the will of the Father to build up the church for the corporate expression of the Triune God.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED FIFTY-NINE

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (43)

In this message we shall cover some further matters related to the believers' experiencing the dispensing of the divine Trinity corporately by entering into the kingdom of God.

(4) To Live the Kingdom Life in the Church

Today the believers live the kingdom life in the church, for the church is the kingdom of God in this age (Matt. 16:18-19; 1 Cor. 6:10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5). This is a very practical matter involving much exercise. In one sense, the church is God's family, God's home (Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15). In this home we enjoy grace and receive the life supply. In another sense, the church is also the kingdom. The word "kingdom" denotes ruling. On the one hand, the church is a family, a home, full of grace and life; on the other hand, the church is a kingdom, a government, to rule. The church as the kingdom is a matter of exercise. The church is our family and also our kingdom. In our family we have the enjoyment of love, the supply of grace, and the riches of life. In the kingdom we have rule, government, exercise, and discipline.

A verse that strongly proves that the church in this age is the kingdom of God is Romans 14:17. "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." According to some Bible teachers, the kingdom has not yet come. They say that now is the dispensation of the church, and the next dispensation will be that of the kingdom. But in 14:17 Paul does not say that the kingdom of God shall be; he uses the present tense and says that the kingdom of God is. According to the context of Romans 14, which speaks of receiving the believers, the kingdom is today's church life. The reality of the church life is the kingdom. Romans 12 speaks of the Body life and Romans 14, of the kingdom life. This indicates that, in Romans, the kingdom life is the reality of the Body life.

In Romans 14:17 we see that the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. When the authority of God's kingdom is allowed to operate in us, righteousness, peace, and joy will characterize our daily life.

Righteousness, peace, and joy mean a great deal, for these items are the expression of Christ. When Christ is expressed, He is our righteousness toward ourselves, and our peace toward others, and our joy with God.

(a) Righteously toward Themselves

As the believers live the kingdom life in the church, they live righteously toward themselves. This means that, in the practical kingdom life in the church today, we must be strict with ourselves and make no excuses for ourselves. Toward ourselves we must be strict and righteous in everything we do.

(b) Peacefully toward Others

Furthermore, to live the kingdom life in the church means that we live peacefully toward others. This means that our relationships with others must be characterized by peace. Toward others we must endeavor to pursue peace, continually seeking to be at peace with them. We must be careful to maintain peace with everyone related to us. This peace is actually Christ lived out from our being. Hebrews 12:14a says, "Pursue peace with all men." In Ephesians 4:3 we have the charge to be "diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace."

Peace and righteousness are always related. If we do not have righteousness, we cannot have peace. Righteousness must come first, and then peace will follow. If we are righteous toward ourselves, then we shall be at peace with others.

(c) Joyfully to God in the Holy Spirit

Finally, living the kingdom life in the church requires that we live joyfully to God in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of joy. If we are not joyful, this indicates that we are defeated and are not in the Holy Spirit. If we are truly living the kingdom life, we shall be joyful with God, praising Him.

If we lack joy in the Holy Spirit, something has gone wrong with us. This is a sign that we have cast off the divine restraint. As a result, our spirit is weighed down so that we cannot rejoice. However, if we live righteously toward ourselves and peacefully toward others, we shall live joyfully to God in the Holy Spirit. Then the kingdom will be manifested in our daily living in the church life.

(5) To Work for the Kingdom of God

In Colossians 4:11 the Apostle Paul, in his fellowship with the Colossian believers, told them that his fellow workers are the workers for the kingdom of God, indicating that what they were doing in the gospel work for the establishing and building up of the churches was for the kingdom of God today. This means the kingdom of God is actually the reality of the church today established and built by the apostle with his fellow workers.

(6) To Partake in the Kingdom

Revelation 1:9 says, "I John, your brother and joint partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus." This verse indicates clearly that we are partakers of the kingdom today. John knew that he was in the kingdom. To him, the kingdom was not merely a future dispensation but also a present reality. Therefore, he could say that he was a joint partaker in the kingdom.

The kingdom into which we are reborn in John 3:5 is the kingdom mentioned by John in Revelation 1:9. If we had not been born into the kingdom of God, we could not be joint partakers in the kingdom. Having been reborn into the kingdom, we should now remain in it and partake of it.

The kingdom of God is the heavenly rule in the divine nature. We have been regenerated with the divine life. In this life there is the divine nature, and with the divine nature there is a ruling, a governing, that is both divine and heavenly. As regenerated ones, we are under this reign today. The divine life has brought us into the divine kingdom, and we are partakers of this kingdom.

Although Revelation 1:9 speaks of the kingdom, in the first few chapters of this book the lampstands, the churches, are revealed. This indicates that, in a practical way, the churches are the kingdom. The practical church life is the reality of the kingdom. For this reason, John did not say that he was one of the members of the Body of Christ, but that he was our brother and joint partaker in the tribulation, kingdom, and endurance in Jesus. Tribulation is needed for the kingdom, and endurance is needed for tribulation. To bear the suffering that is required for the kingdom, we need the endurance in Jesus.

(a) In Tribulation

Today the kingdom in Jesus is a kingdom of suffering. In Matthew 5:10-12 the Lord Jesus said that His believers suffer persecution for the sake of the kingdom. If we suffer for the sake of righteousness, we are in the kingdom. Suffering persecution for the kingdom proves that we are in the kingdom today. The more we are in the kingdom, the more we shall suffer and be persecuted. Hence, for us to be in the kingdom today is not a matter of glory but a matter of bearing shame and suffering persecution. Although we are joint partakers in the kingdom in Jesus, we are not yet co-kings with Christ. When the Lord Jesus comes back, we shall be His co-kings in the kingdom in Christ. That will be the time for glory. Today, however, is not a reigning day but a suffering day. Now we are not in the reigning kingdom but in the suffering kingdom.

Because the kingdom today is a matter of suffering, of tribulation, in Acts 14:22 Paul and Barnabas told the disciples that "through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God." The tribulation mentioned here was mainly the persecution at the hands of the Jewish religion. All believers in Christ undergo persecution from religion. If there were no religion in the world today, we would not suffer as much persecution. Much of the trouble, persecution, and opposition can be traced to one source—religion. While we are suffering today, we are in the kingdom where we are being exercised, trained, prepared, and qualified to reign in Christ's kingdom as His co-kings.

The kingdom of God was a main subject of the apostles' preaching in Acts (8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). It is not a material kingdom visible to human sight but a kingdom of the divine life. It is the spreading of Christ as life to His believers to form a realm in which God rules in His life. The kingdom of God is actually Christ Himself (Luke 17:21) as the seed of life sown into His believers (Mark 4:3,26) and developing into a realm in which God may rule as His kingdom in His divine life. To enter into the kingdom of God is to enter into the full enjoyment of Christ as the kingdom.

However, the whole world opposes the entering of God's people into the full enjoyment of Christ as the kingdom. Throughout the centuries, religion in particular has been used by God's enemy to keep God's people from entering into the full enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ as the kingdom of God. For this reason, it is through many tribulations that we enter into the kingdom of God.

We should expect opposition and be prepared for it. Through tribulation we must endeavor to enter into the realm of the full enjoyment of the resurrected and ascended Christ as the kingdom of God. When we have the enjoyment of such a Christ, we shall be under the divine rule. Then we shall become the kingdom of God today, and this kingdom is the proper church life. The kingdom of God is the church life, and the church life is a realm of the enjoyment of the resurrected and ascended Christ.

(b) In Endurance

We partake in the kingdom not only in tribulation but also in endurance. In Revelation 1:9 John says that he was a joint partaker in endurance in Jesus. For both tribulation and the kingdom we need endurance. If we do not have endurance, we shall be able to withstand persecution only for a limited time. As we live in Christ, we partake not only of His life and holiness but also of His endurance. When we abide in Christ, we partake of His endurance and have the endurance to bear suffering and opposition. The Lord's word is even called the word of endurance (Rev. 3:10).

The world is opposing and rejecting the Lord Jesus, but He does not fight back. He simply endures it all. Now as we have fellowship with Him and abide in Him, we partake of His endurance. As His followers, we should follow Him with endurance (Heb. 12:1). In this way we can endure persecution and opposition. This endurance is a strong indication that we are those waiting for the Lord's coming back. We wait for His coming back by being joint partakers in His kingdom, tribulation, and endurance.

(7) To Inherit the Kingdom of God

Eventually, if we live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens and partake in the kingdom, we shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor, 6:9a, 10b; Gal. 5:21b; Eph. 5:5b). Inheriting the kingdom of God is different from entering into the kingdom of God through regeneration. Having entered into the kingdom by being regenerated, we now need to grow and develop in the divine life. Then, as a result of this growth and development, we shall inherit the kingdom of God. Therefore, we should not think that simply because we have entered into the kingdom of God we shall inherit the kingdom. We cannot inherit the kingdom unless we grow to maturity in the proper development in the divine life.

First Corinthians 6, Galatians 5, and Ephesians 5 all speak of inheriting the kingdom of God. In 1 Corinthians 6:9a Paul asks, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" To inherit the kingdom of God in the next age is a reward to the saints who seek righteousness (Matt. 5:10, 20; 6:33). Believers who are not righteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. According to the Lord's word in Matthew, we must be absolutely righteous if we are to inherit the coming kingdom as a reward. The Lord even says that our righteousness must surpass that of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). Because God's kingdom is established upon righteousness, we must be righteous in order to inherit it.

In 1 Corinthians 6:9b and 10 Paul speaks of different kinds of persons who will not inherit the kingdom of God. Once again, Paul does not speak of entering the kingdom of God but of inheriting the kingdom of God. To enter the kingdom of God we simply need a new birth (John 3:3, 5), but to inherit the kingdom of God we need to live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens now. No sinful person or unrighteous person can have any part in the coming kingdom of God.

The word "inherit" in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 10 implies enjoyment. To inherit a certain thing is to enjoy that thing. Thus, to inherit the coming kingdom means to enjoy the kingdom. The coming kingdom will be a joyful inheritance to the overcomers. According to Matthew, the manifestation of the kingdom will be a reward to the overcoming saints as their enjoyment with the Lord. To inherit the kingdom is not simply to enter the kingdom; it is to receive the kingdom as a reward for our enjoyment. This should be an incentive for us to live an overcoming life, a life that is sinless and righteous. By living a righteous life we shall be qualified to inherit the coming kingdom.

The overcomers, the victorious ones, will inherit the kingdom of God when the Lord Jesus comes back. Today the kingdom is not an enjoyment but an exercise. However, when the Lord Jesus comes back, the kingdom will be our enjoyment. At that time we shall enjoy the kingdom, and we shall be kings ruling with the Lord Jesus. Then the kingdom will be our inheritance.

In Galatians 5:21 Paul, referring to the works of the flesh, says, "Those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." The inheritance of the kingdom of God refers to the enjoyment of the coming kingdom as a reward to the overcoming believers. It is not related to a believer's salvation.

Those believers who practice the works of the flesh listed in Galatians 5:19-21 will not inherit the coming kingdom as a reward.

In Ephesians 5:5 Paul again speaks of those who have "no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." The kingdom of Christ is the millennium (Rev. 20:4, 6; Matt. 16:28) and also the kingdom of God (Matt. 13:41, 43). The believers have been regenerated into the kingdom of God and are, in the church life, living in the kingdom of God today (Rom. 14:17). Not all believers will participate in the millennium; only the overcomers will. The unclean, defeated ones will have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God in the coming age.

According to John 3, all those who are regenerated are in the kingdom of God. Romans 14:17 indicates that in the church life we are in the kingdom of God today. However, the millennium will be the kingdom in a way that is more practical than what we are experiencing in the church today. Only in the millennium will the kingdom of Christ also become the kingdom of God. Therefore, the term "the kingdom of Christ and of God" refers not to the kingdom today in the church life but to the manifestation of the kingdom in the coming millennium. Today all believers are in the kingdom of God, but not all of them will have an inheritance in the coming millennial kingdom. Both the defeated ones and the overcoming ones may be in the church as the kingdom of God, but only the overcoming ones will inherit the kingdom during the millennium.

(8) To Be Saved into the Lord's Heavenly Kingdom

Shortly before Paul was martyred, he had the assurance that the Lord would bring him into the heavenly kingdom. Therefore, to his spiritual son, Timothy, he said, "The Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will save me unto His heavenly kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:18). The heavenly kingdom is the kingdom of our Father (Matt. 13:43), the kingdom of the Father (Matt. 26:29), the kingdom of Christ and of God (Eph. 5:5), and the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:11), which will be a reward to the overcoming saints. It equals the crown of righteousness in 2 Timothy 4:8, and it is an incentive to the believers to run the heavenly course. Paul had the assurance to make the triumphant declaration that he would be saved into this heavenly kingdom.

God's salvation goes with the kingdom, and the kingdom goes with salvation. Salvation is a matter of enjoyment and supply. Through God's salvation with its enjoyment and supply we are able to live the kingdom life, which in the present age is not an enjoyment but an exercise and a discipline. In salvation God gives us enjoyment, but in the kingdom He often disciplines us. In the kingdom we need to use what God has given us in His salvation in order to be exercised in the kingdom nature and in the development of the divine life.

At present, the kingdom is an exercise and a discipline to us, but in the future the kingdom will be either a reward to those who are faithful to take the Lord's way or a punishment to those who are deviated or distracted from the central lane of God's New Testament economy. As a future reward, the kingdom is an incentive encouraging us to be faithful in the Lord's way. As a punishment, the kingdom is a warning not to disobey the vision we have seen.

The teachings of the Lord Jesus and the apostles concerning the kingdom should warn us not to be careless or indifferent. One day the Lord Jesus will come back, and we shall appear before His judgment seat to be judged by Him. If we are faithful, we shall receive a reward—the reward of entering into the coming manifestation of the kingdom, which is a matter of entering into the Lord's joy (Matt. 25:21). If we are not faithful, we shall be assigned a certain amount of discipline or punishment. Such discipline, however, will not cause a believer to perish; rather, it will be used to perfect him.

Believers who are indifferent and unfaithful will not receive the same reward when the Lord Jesus comes back as the faithful ones. If the Lord gave the same reward to both the faithful and the unfaithful, He would not be righteous. Realizing that the Lord is the righteous Judge, Paul said, "There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me in that day; and not only to me, but also to all those who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8). The crown is a symbol of glory given as a prize, in addition to the Lord's salvation, to the triumphant runner of the race (1 Cor. 9:25). This prize is neither of grace nor by faith as salvation is (Eph. 2:5, 8-9), but of righteousness through works (Matt. 16:27; Rev. 22:12; 2 Cor. 5:10). Such a reward will be awarded to the believers, not according to the grace of the Lord but according to His righteousness. Hence, it is the crown of righteousness. The One who awards it is the Lord not as the merciful God or the gracious Redeemer but as the righteous Judge. Whereas salvation is prepared in His love and grace, the reward is prepared in His justice, in His

righteousness. For this reason, the Lord cannot righteously give the same reward both to those who are faithful and to those who are unfaithful.

Once we have been saved, we are saved eternally. Our salvation cannot be lost. However, we should not think that because salvation is eternal, we shall not have any problems with the Lord at His coming back. The question remains whether we shall receive a reward. Paul says, "If anyone's work which he has built upon it shall remain, he shall receive a reward. If anyone's work shall be consumed, he shall suffer loss, but he shall be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:14-15). The reward is based upon a believer's work after being saved. It differs from salvation, which is based upon faith in the Lord and His redemptive work. The loss mentioned in verse 15 is the loss not of salvation but of the reward. The salvation which we have received in Christ is not by our works (Titus 3:5) and is eternal, unchangeable in nature (Heb. 5:9; John 10:28-29). Hence, those believers whose Christian works will not be approved by the judging Lord and who will suffer the loss of reward will still be saved. God's salvation to all believers as a free gift is for eternity, but the Lord's reward to those whose Christian works are approved by Him is for the kingdom age. The reward is an incentive for their Christian work.

Although those believers whose Christian works will not be approved by the Lord at His coming back will be saved, they will be saved "so as through fire." This surely indicates punishment. However, it is altogether not the purgatory heretically taught by Catholicism in its superstitious quoting of this verse. Nevertheless, this word should be a solemn warning to us today concerning our Christian works. We have received the unique, eternal, common salvation (Titus 1:4), but we need to be faithful in taking the Lord's way in order to receive the reward of entering into His joy and of reigning with Him over the nations in the coming kingdom.

As those who are under the divine dispensing of the divine Trinity, we need to live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today. We need to live a kingdom life in the church, developing ourselves in the divine life until we reach maturity. Then we shall have a rich entrance into the coming kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Those who are faithful and reach maturity will receive a reward from the Lord, but those who are not faithful will suffer dispensational punishment. The incentive of the reward and the warning concerning punishment should encourage us to live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today, to be faithful in taking the Lord's way, and to be diligent to grow and mature in the divine life.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SIXTY

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (44)

In the foregoing messages we saw that, in the progressing stage of God's full salvation, the believers experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity corporately by entering into the kingdom of God. In this message we shall begin to see that the believers experience this dispensing corporately also by living in the church.

b. By Living in the Church

Through regeneration we have entered into the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5) to live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. This is a corporate matter experienced by enjoying the dispensing of the divine Trinity in a corporate way. First, we experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity corporately by entering into the kingdom of God and living in the kingdom. Then we experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity corporately by living in the church life (1 Tim. 3:15-16).

The Christian life has two aspects: the aspect of the individual Christian life and the aspect of the corporate Christian life. The divine dispensing is first for our individual Christian life and then for the corporate Christian life. The individual Christian life is a personal matter, but the corporate Christian life is a church matter.

According to the New Testament, the church is intimately related to the kingdom. In Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus declared, "On this rock I will build My church." In verse 19 the Lord goes on to speak of the kingdom of the heavens. The words "the kingdom of the heavens" in verse 19 are interchangeably used for the word "church" in verse 18. This is a strong proof that the genuine church is the kingdom of the heavens in this age. This is confirmed by Romans 14:17, which refers to the proper church life. Therefore, the church today is the kingdom.

Although the church and the kingdom are interrelated, there is nonetheless a difference between them. Because any kind of life is a kingdom, the kingdom is the life itself. For example, the animal life is the animal kingdom, and the human life is the human kingdom. In the same principle, the life of

God is the kingdom of God. The church, however, is not the life, nor is the life the church. Rather, the church is the product of life. The divine life is the kingdom, and this life produces the church.

The New Testament concept is that the gospel brings in the kingdom. The gospel does not bring in the church, but the gospel brings forth the church. The gospel brings in the kingdom of God, and the gospel also brings forth the church of God. For this reason, in the New Testament the gospel is called the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14). But there is not a verse telling us that the gospel is the gospel of the church. The gospel of the kingdom brings forth the church because the kingdom is the life itself, and the church is the issue of life.

Without the kingdom as the reality of life, the church cannot be produced or built up. To produce the church and to build up the church, we need the kingdom. The kingdom is the reality of the church. We cannot say, however, that the church is the reality of the kingdom. We can say only that the kingdom is the reality of the church.

Where the reality of the kingdom is lacking, there the building of the church will be lacking. A believer who does not live in the reality of the kingdom can at best be a saved person; he cannot be built into the structure of the church.

In the first preaching of the New Testament gospel people were told to repent because the kingdom of the heavens had drawn near (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7). This meant that the time had come for God to dispense Himself as life into people. The gospel brings God as life, and this life is the kingdom. The kingdom is the realm of life for life to move, work, rule, and govern so that life may accomplish its purpose. The kingdom as the realm of life is actually the life itself. The gospel brings in the divine life, and the divine life has its realm. This is the kingdom. The divine life with its realm produces the church.

Because the kingdom is the reality of the church, according to the New Testament revelation, we cannot live the church life apart from the proper kingdom life. This is why we have emphasized the fact that the gospel preached at the beginning of the New Testament concerns not salvation but the kingdom. To enter the kingdom of God is to be regenerated. We may talk about regeneration without realizing that regeneration is for the entry into the kingdom. We are regenerated into the kingdom. This means that regeneration results in the kingdom, for regeneration issues in an entrance into the kingdom. When God regenerated us, He regenerated us into His kingdom.

Just as the kingdom and the church are interrelated, so the kingdom and God's salvation also are interrelated. If we do not participate in God's kingdom, it will be difficult for us to enjoy His salvation. Of course, we cannot realize the kingdom life unless we receive God's salvation, a salvation that becomes the supply to us for our enjoyment. The enjoyment of this supply is for us to live a kingdom life in the church.

We need to be deeply impressed with the fact that the reality of the kingdom of the heavens is the content of the church life. This means that without the reality of the kingdom, the church is empty. The reality of the kingdom is actually Christ Himself as our life. Christ as life is the essence, the substance, for us to live a proper life so that in this life we may be built up with other believers to bring in the real church life, which is a glorious expression of Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God. Because Christ is the embodiment of the Triune God, when Christ is expressed, the entire Triune God is expressed. This expression depends on whether or not the believers live a life that is the reality of the kingdom, a reality that is fully revealed and described in chapters five through seven of the Gospel of Matthew. These chapters are a complete message on the constitution of the kingdom of the heavens, and this constitution is the reality of the kingdom life. This reality is the genuine content of the church life.

In the four Gospels the Lord Jesus mentioned the church twice, both times in the Gospel of Matthew, a book that proclaims the kingdom. Each time the Lord Jesus spoke of the church, He mentioned it in relation to the kingdom. This indicates how intimately the kingdom and the church are related. In Matthew 16:18 He speaks of the church in a universal way, indicating that the universal church is intimately related to the kingdom of the heavens. Then in Matthew 18:17 He speaks of the church in the local sense, indicating that the local church is also related to the kingdom of the heavens. In particular, the local church is related to our life as brothers in the kingdom. This is proved by the fact that Matthew 18 is concerned with the proper relationship between brothers in the kingdom. This relationship involves the local church life.

If we would have the reality of the kingdom as the content of our church life, we need Christ to be our life and our life supply. Through the dispensing of the Triune God into our being, we need to experience and enjoy Christ as our life.

The first stanza of Hymns, #841 speaks of Christ as our life for the building of the church:

Thou art all my life, Lord,

In me Thou dost live;

With Thee all God's fullness

Thou to me dost give.

By Thy holy nature

I am sanctified,

By Thy resurrection,

Vict'ry is supplied.

In this hymn the word "give" actually refers to the divine dispensing. All the fullness of God is given to us in Christ, and this giving is simply the dispensing of all that the Triune God is, has, and does into our being.

This hymn also tells us that we are sanctified by the Lord's holy nature. This sanctification is not so-called sinless perfection; it is the sanctification by the holy nature that has been imparted into our being. The holy nature imparted into us is the holy nature of the Triune God. This imparting of God's holy nature is not once for all; it is a matter that continues day by day and hour by hour. Continually the holy nature of the Triune God is being imparted into us. This impartation causes us to be saturated with the holy essence of the divine Trinity for our sanctification.

This hymn also tells us that by Christ's resurrection victory is supplied to us. In ourselves we cannot overcome anything or be victorious. In ourselves we are sinful and even dead in our spirit. But we have received the resurrected Christ as our life. Now, in His resurrection, He is dispensing Himself into us. Therefore, when we enjoy Him, we also enjoy Him as resurrection life and resurrection power. This resurrection life and power give us subjectively the victory over all negative things. Furthermore, by this life, which is Christ Himself, we live a life according to the constitution of the kingdom of the heavens. This means that we live a life which corresponds to the reality of the kingdom nature. This reality is the content of the church life. If we would live in this reality and express it in the church life, we need to receive the divine dispensing.

It is crucial for us to see that we experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity corporately by living in the kingdom. As we live corporately in the kingdom life, we spontaneously live the church life. The kingdom life issues in the church life.

We may talk about the church in an objective, doctrinal way. The church, however, is not a doctrinal matter but a practical matter, for the church is something related to our experience in the Christian life. Moreover, the church is not a social organization. This means that the church is not something that can be organized by putting people together, forming them into an entity, and calling them a church. The New Testament reveals that the church is the organic Body of Christ. For the church to be the organic Body of Christ the church must be constituted of the Christ who is the life of the believers.

The church is a pure product out of Christ. This is typified by Eve in the book of Genesis. Eve was fully, completely, and purely produced out of Adam (Gen. 2:21-24). Within Eve there was nothing except Adam. Beside the element of Adam, there was no other element in Eve. Eve, therefore, was a full reproduction of Adam. Adam and Eve are a type of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:30-32). This type shows how the church is related to Christ. The church must be of one element—the element of Christ. Anything that is other than Christ cannot be the church.

Let us consider the type of Adam and Eve in more detail. According to the book of Genesis, God did not create man and woman at the same time and in the same way. First, God formed man's body from the dust of the ground. Then He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul (Gen. 2:7). After God created man, He said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18). The animals and the fowl were brought to Adam, and Adam named them. But for Adam "there was not found a help meet for him" (Gen. 2:20). Within Adam there was the desire to have a counterpart, to have someone to match him. Among the cattle, the beasts, and the fowl, there was no counterpart to Adam. In order to produce such a counterpart, "the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam" (Gen. 2:21). While Adam slept, the Lord took one of Adam's ribs and used it for the building of a woman (Gen. 2:22, lit.). In life, nature, and form the woman was the same as the man. Therefore, when God brought the woman to Adam, Adam exclaimed, "This time it is bone of my bones, and

flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23, lit.). Adam knew that at last he had found his counterpart.

Because there was no counterpart for Christ in the created universe, God caused Christ to die on the cross. As He "slept" there, His side was opened, and blood and water came forth (John 19:34). Because in Genesis 2 the problem of sin had not come in, that chapter mentions only the rib that was taken out of Adam; it says nothing about blood. But John 19:34 speaks of blood, which solves the problem of sin. The water signifies the flowing life of Christ, the eternal life, which produces the church. This life is also typified by the rib. According to John 19, not one of the Lord's bones was broken when He was on the cross. This was a fulfillment of the Scripture which said, "Not a bone of Him shall be broken" (Psa. 34:20). The unbroken bone of Christ typifies Christ's unbreakable eternal life. Hence, Adam's rib typifies the unbreakable eternal life of Christ. It is with this eternal life that the church is built up as the counterpart prepared for Christ. In this way Christ gains the church as a match for Himself.

Just as Eve had the same life and nature that Adam had, the church has the same life and nature that Christ has. Therefore, the church is part of Christ.

The church has come into existence by the flowing out of the life of the crucified Christ. This life is the source and the substance of the church's being. Whenever we talk about living the church life, we need to have a clear vision of how the church is produced. The church is produced by the outflow of the divine life. Now we should live this life, a life that is Christ Himself. Christ is the element that constitutes us into a proper church to match Him. Therefore, if we would have the church life, Christ must be our life and our living.

We need to see the vision of the church produced from the element of Christ and then have a spiritual experience that corresponds to this vision. We also need to present this vision to others so that they too may see it. When the believers see this vision, the Triune God in His all-inclusive riches will be dispensed into them. If the believers cooperate with the Triune God, more and more of the rich essence and holy element of the Triune God will be transmitted into them. Spontaneously this transmission, which is actually the divine dispensing, will issue in the living of the church life. This is not merely a matter of teaching. It is a matter of seeing a divine vision that brings us into the divine dispensing.

In these messages on the conclusion of the New Testament, we have emphasized the dispensing of the processed Triune God again and again. We need to participate in this dispensing and enjoy it. We need to experience more and more of the dispensing of the processed Triune God, whose embodiment is Christ and whose ultimate consummation is the all-inclusive, sevenfold, life-giving Spirit. Today we have the processed Triune God with Christ as the embodiment and the Spirit as the consummation. Day by day we need to open to Him, call on Him, stay in His presence, fellowship with Him, and allow Him to work within us to dispense all that He is, all that He has, all that He has done, and all that He is doing into our being. As the spontaneous issue of this dispensing, we shall have the kingdom life, and this kingdom life will be our church life.

The individual Christian life and the corporate church life both issue spontaneously from the dispensing of the processed Triune God into us. Here in this divine dispensing we are holy, spiritual, and victorious. Here we grow until we reach maturity. To experience and enjoy this dispensing of the processed Triune God is to live the reality of the kingdom in the church life. We all need to see this vision.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SIXTY-ONE

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (45)

In the previous message we saw that as the spontaneous issue of our experience of the dispensing of the divine Trinity, we have the kingdom life, and the reality of the kingdom life is the content of the church life. We experience the dispensing of the processed Triune God corporately by entering into the kingdom and also by living in the church. In this message we shall consider some matters related to our living in the church.

(1) As Their Family and Home

The church is God's house (1 Tim. 3:15), and this house is our family and home. As members of the household of God, we are God's family, even God's house. All believers have been born of God into His house to enjoy His riches. The Greek word rendered "house" in 1 Timothy 3:15 may also be translated household, as in 1 Timothy 3:4,5, and 12. The household, the family, of God is the house of God. The house and the household are one thing—the assembly of the believers (Eph. 2:19; Heb. 3:6). The reality of this house as the dwelling place of the living God is in our spirit (Eph. 2:22). God is our Father, and we, the believers in Christ, are His children. Being His children, we are the "folks" of God's family. Therefore, Ephesians 2:19 says that we are "members of the household of God." The Greek word for "household" here refers both to the house, the dwelling place, and to the household, the family. Ephesians 2 reveals the household as the habitation of God. Verse 19 mentions the household, while verse 22 says that we are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit. The household is the dwelling place, the habitation.

Physically speaking, a household cannot be the dwelling place of a father. However, spiritually speaking, God's children are His family and also His dwelling place. God's habitation is built with His children. Hence, the family is the dwelling place. We are both God's family and God's house. Corporately, we, the believers, are the house of God and the folks of God, His dwelling place and His family. Therefore, to say that we live in the church means that we live in the dwelling place of God and in the family of God.

(a) The House of the Living God

First Timothy 3:15 says, "If I delay, that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth." As God's dwelling place, the church is both God's house and His household, His family. In the Old Testament the temple and God's people were two separate things, but in the fulfillment in the New Testament the dwelling place and the family are one. According to God's New Testament economy, God's family is His house.

In speaking of the church as the house of God, Paul specifically refers to God as the living God. The living God who lives in the church must be subjective to the church rather than merely objective. An idol in a heathen temple is lifeless. The God who not only lives but also acts, moves, and works in His living temple, the church, is living. Because He is living, the church is also living in Him, by Him, and with Him. A living God and a living church live, move, and work together. The living church is the house and the household of the living God. Therefore, in our meetings, service, and ministry we must give people the impression that the living God is living, moving, speaking, and acting among us.

The church, the house of the living God, is living in the Father's name and in the Father's life. This means that the church is living in the Father's reality. God's house is a living composition of His many children in the Father's life and reality. Where the house of God is, there is the family of God, and where the family of God is, there is God the Father with His life and reality. This is similar to the church being the Body of Christ. Christ is not separate from the members of the Body, for, as the Head of the Body, Christ indwells all the members. Christ should not be counted as a separate member of the Body, because He is in all the members of the Body. The principle is the same with the church as God's house and family. The Father is not a separate member of the household but is in all the children.

(b) The Pillar and the Base of the Truth

In 1 Timothy 3:15 Paul tells us that the church of the living God is "the pillar and base of the truth." The pillar supports the building, and the base holds the pillar. The church is such a supporting pillar and holding base of the truth. In this verse truth refers to the real things which are revealed in the New Testament concerning Christ and the church according to God's New Testament economy. The church is the supporting pillar and holding base of

all these realities. A local church should be such a building that holds, bears, and testifies the truth, the reality, of Christ and the church.

God's New Testament economy is composed of two mysteries: Christ as the mystery of God (Col. 2:2) and the church as the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4). Christ and the church, the Head and the Body, are the contents of the reality of God's New Testament economy. As the pillar which bears the truth and the base which upholds the pillar, the church testifies the reality, the truth, of Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ.

We may also say that the truth in 1 Timothy 3:15 denotes the divine realities, the realities of our God. These divine realities are revealed in particular in chapters fourteen through sixteen of the Gospel of John. According to these chapters, the truth, the reality, is revealed especially as the truth of the Spirit. The Spirit is the Spirit of all the divine realities. Today as the pillar and base of the truth, the church holds the realities of the divine Being. God's realities are testified by the church as the pillar and base of the truth.

(c) God's Manifestation in the Flesh— the Mystery of Godliness

First Timothy 3:15 and 16 indicate that the church is also God's manifestation in the flesh—the mystery of godliness. God is manifested in the church, the Body of Christ, as the enlarged, corporate expression in the flesh. First Timothy 3:15b and 16 say, "The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth. And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness, who was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory." In Greek, the antecedent of "who" is omitted but easily recognized, that is, Christ, who was God manifested in the flesh as the mystery of godliness. The transition from "the mystery..." to "who" implies that Christ as the manifestation of God in the flesh is the mystery of godliness (Col. 1:27; Gal. 2:20). This mystery of godliness is the living of a proper church, and such a living is also the manifestation of God in the flesh.

These verses imply that not only Christ Himself as the Head but also the church as the Body is the manifestation of God in the flesh. When a church grows in Christ with the growth of God (Col. 2:19), it will function as the house and household of the living God for His move on earth and as the supporting pillar and holding base of the truth, bearing the divine reality of

Christ and His Body as a testimony to the world. Then the church becomes the continuation of Christ's manifestation of God in the flesh. This is the great mystery of godliness—Christ lived out of the church as the manifestation of God in the flesh.

Such a church is the continuation, enlargement, and expansion of God manifested in the flesh. This manifestation of God is the church as the house of God and the pillar and base of the truth. The church is, then, the increase, the enlargement, of the manifestation of God in the flesh. This is God manifested in the flesh in a wider way. This is according to the New Testament principle of incarnation, which is God manifested in the flesh.

First Timothy 3:16 begins with the words, "And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness." The conjunction "and" here indicates that the speaking about the church in verse 15 is not yet finished, and that the church is something even more than the house of the living God and the pillar and base of the truth. The church is also the mystery of godliness. According to the context, godliness refers not only to piety but to the living of God in the church, that is, God as life lived out in the church to be expressed. The church life is the expression of God. Both Christ and the church, the Head and the Body, are the mystery of godliness, expressing God in the flesh. This is the great mystery confessed universally by believers in Christ. The church as the manifestation of God in the flesh is a mystery, the mystery of godliness.

The mystery of godliness is the living of a proper church, and such a living is the manifestation of God in the flesh. When a church is well taken care of according to the instructions given in 1 Timothy, with the oversight of the elders and the service of the deacons fully established, the church will function as the house of the living God and as the pillar and base of the truth and will be the continuation and enlargement of the manifestation of God in the flesh. This manifestation began with Christ when He was on earth, and now it continues in the church. The church, therefore, as the manifestation of the invisible God is the mystery of godliness. If we have the proper church life through the reality of the kingdom, the manifestation of God, which began in Christ, will continue in the church.

(2) In Their Localities Respectively

The believers live in churches that are in their localities respectively. Acts 8:1, for example, speaks of "the church in Jerusalem." This was the first

church established in a locality within the jurisdiction of a city, in this case the city of Jerusalem. It was a local church in its locality, as indicated by the Lord in Matthew 18:17. It was not the universal church, as revealed by the Lord in Matthew 16:18, but only a part of the universal church, which is the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). The record of the New Testament concerning the establishment of the church in its locality is consistent throughout (Acts 13:1; 14:23; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 8:1; Gal. 1:2; Rev. 1:4, 11).

The second mention of a particular local church in the New Testament is in Acts 13:1a. This verse says, "Now there were in Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers." In Antioch there was another local church, another expression of the church. Hence, in Acts 8 and 13 we can see one church with two expressions: one is at Jerusalem, the other at Antioch. All local churches are the expression of the one universal church.

In 1 Corinthians 1:2 Paul addresses "the church of God which is in Corinth." This reveals that the church is not the church of any person, practice, or doctrine but of God. The church is the church of God because it is constituted of the universal God. Such a church existed in Corinth, a definite locality. In nature the church is universal in God, but in practice the church is local in a definite place. This means that the church has two aspects: the universal and the local. Without the universal aspect, the church has no content; without the local aspect, it is impossible for the church to have any expression and practice. For this reason, the New Testament emphasizes the local aspect of the church.

The description of the church in 1 Corinthians 1:2 is marvelous. The church is of God, for it is constituted of the element of God. But the church which is of God is also local. Hence, in this one verse we see both the universal aspect and the local aspect of the church. The universal aspect refers to the constitution, nature, and content of the church; the local aspect refers to the expression and practicality of the church. If we have only the local aspect but not the aspect of the church being of God, we shall have only an outward formality. We shall be lacking the inward reality. But if we have only the universal aspect but not the local aspect of the church in a particular locality, we shall have the reality but not the practicality. On the one hand, the church is constituted of God; on the other hand, the church is expressed in a particular locality. The universal church is expressed and practiced in particular localities.

The universal church as the Body of Christ is expressed through the local churches. The local churches, as the expressions of the one Body of Christ, are locally one. The book of Revelation was written to local churches, to "the seven churches which are in Asia" (1:4). Asia was a province of the ancient Roman Empire in which were the seven cities mentioned in Revelation 1:11. The seven churches were in those seven cities respectively, not all in one city. The book of Revelation does not deal with the one universal church but with the local churches in many cities. The church is first revealed as universal in Matthew 16:18 and then as local in Matthew 18:17. In Acts the church was practiced in the way of local churches. Except for a few Epistles written to individuals, all the Epistles in the New Testament were written to local churches. Not one was written to the universal church. Without the local churches there is no practicality and actuality of the universal church. The universal church is realized in the local churches. Knowing the church universally must be consummated in knowing the church locally. It is a great advance for us to know and practice the local churches. Concerning the church, the book of Revelation is in the advanced stage, for it is written to local churches.

In Revelation 1:11 the voice said to John, "What you see write in a book and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, and to Smyrna, and to Pergamos, and to Thyatira, and to Sardis, and to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." This verse is composed in a very important way. In this verse we see that the sending of this book to the seven churches equals the sending of it to the seven cities. This shows clearly that the practice of the church life in the early days was that of one church for one city, one city with one church. In no city was there more than one church. This is the local church, local with respect to city, not with respect to street or area. The jurisdiction of a local church should cover the whole city in which the church is; it should not be greater or lesser than the boundary of the city. All the believers within that boundary should constitute the one unique local church within that city. Hence, one church equals one city, and one city equals one church. This is what we call the local churches.

(3) Obeying the Church

Matthew 18:17 reveals that the believers are to obey the church. If a brother sins, we first need to deal with him in love (v. 15), then by two or three witnesses (v. 16), and finally through the church with authority. Verse 17 says,

“If he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to hear the church also, let him be to you as the Gentile and the tax collector.” If a believer refuses to hear the church, he will lose the fellowship of the church and become like the Gentile, the heathen, and the tax collector, sinners who are outside the fellowship of the church. A Gentile or tax collector is someone who does not have the fellowship in the kingdom life or in the church life. To consider a believer a Gentile or a tax collector does not mean to excommunicate him. On the contrary, it means that he is considered as one cut off from the fellowship of the church. The offending brother who will not listen to the church may not require excommunication. Instead, he should be cut off from the fellowship of the church in order that this loss of fellowship may encourage him to repent and to recover his fellowship with the church.

The church which the believers should obey is certainly the local church, not the universal church. The church revealed in Matthew 16:18 is the universal church, the unique Body of Christ, whereas the church revealed in Matthew 18:17 is the local church, the expression of the unique Body of Christ in a certain locality. Matthew 16 concerns the universal building of the church, but chapter eighteen concerns the local practice of the church. Both chapters indicate that the church represents the kingdom of the heavens, having the authority to bind and to loose.

In order to be in the kingdom of the heavens in a practical way, we need to be in a local church. According to the context of 18:17, both the reality and the practicality of the kingdom are in the local church. In a chapter dealing with relationships in the kingdom, the Lord Jesus speaks eventually of the church. This indicates that the practicality of the kingdom today is in the local church. Without the local church, it is impossible to have the practicality and reality of the kingdom life. The local church is the reality both of the kingdom and of the universal church. Therefore, it is crucial for believers to obey the church. The more we realize how independent our natural self is, the more willing we shall be to submit to the church and to obey the church. Because of our independent self, we all must learn to obey the church. The church has the authority, and we must listen to the church and submit to the church. If we do not submit to the church, we are through with the kingdom, for the kingdom life is a life of submission to the church.

The context of Matthew 18 indicates that the reality of the church is the Lord’s presence (v. 20). The Lord’s presence is the authority of the church. The church must be certain that it has the presence of the Lord as its reality;

otherwise, it has no genuine authority. The real and practical authority of the church is the Lord's presence. If a believer does not listen to the church, he actually rebels against the Lord's presence. The church then has the ground to exercise authority in the presence of the Lord over such a case of rebellion.

(4) Meeting with the Church

If we would live in the church, we need to meet with the church. In 1 Corinthians 14:23a Paul speaks of the whole church coming "together in one place." This refers to a church meeting. In verse 26 Paul again refers to the believers coming together in a church meeting. Any believer who does not meet with the church spontaneously takes himself out of the church life.

First Corinthians 14 reveals that a meeting of the whole church actually is the church. After speaking in verse 23 of the whole church, Paul in verse 28 mentions a case when a person should "be silent in the church." This clearly indicates that the church meeting is the church. When the whole church comes together, that is the meeting, and that is also the church because the meeting is the church. Such a meeting is not only part of the church—it is the church.

The proper way for believers to meet is to meet either as the church or as a part of the church. If the whole church comes together, then we meet as the church. If we meet in small groups in our homes, all those different meetings should be parts of the one church in our locality. All the meetings of the believers in a city should be constituents of the unique local church in that city. This is the proper way to meet. If we would experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity corporately by living in the church, we need to meet with the church, meeting either as the church or as a part of the church.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SIXTY-TWO

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (46)

The believers experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity corporately by living in the church. In this message we shall consider more aspects of the believers' living in the church.

(5) Serving in the Church

The believers not only obey the church (Matt. 18:17) and meet with the church (1 Cor. 14:23a, 26a) but also serve in the church. To serve in the church is to serve in the spirit and in coordination for the building up of the Body.

(a) As Elders

In the church certain brothers serve as elders. In the first local church, the church at Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), there were elders taking care of the government of the church (Acts 11:30; 15:2, 4, 6, 22; 16:4; 21:18). Acts 14:23 says that eventually elders were appointed in every church. Thus, there were elders in the church at Ephesus (Acts 20:17). Afterward, Paul ordered Titus to appoint elders in every city (Titus 1:5). The New Testament indicates that the elders were not voted in by their congregations, but were appointed by the apostles according to their maturity of life in Christ. They were charged by the apostles to care for the leadership and the shepherding in their churches.

In 1 Peter 5:2 Peter gives the elders a charge concerning shepherding: "Shepherd the flock of God among you." Literally, the Greek word rendered "flock" is little flock. This refers to the church of God (Acts 20:28), which is small in number (Luke 12:32) compared to the world. According to 1 Peter 5:2, elders are not rulers; they are shepherds. Sometimes a shepherd may have to rule the flock, but that is not the ruling of a king. It is a ruling of someone who cares for the flock. Shepherding is a proper care exercised over the flock. The flock needs to be cared for, protected, led in the right direction, and brought to a place where they can eat and drink. This is shepherding.

In 5:2 Peter does not tell the elders to shepherd their own flock. Instead, he charges them to shepherd the flock of God. The flock is not the elders'

possession but is God's possession. In a sense, the elders are employed by God to shepherd His flock.

In the New Testament elders are also called overseers (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1; 1 Pet. 5:1-2). The Greek word translated "overseer" is episkopos, from epi meaning over and skopos meaning seer; hence, overseer (bishop, from Latin episcopus). An overseer in a local church is an elder (Acts 20:17, 28). The two titles refer to the same person: elder, denoting a person of maturity, and overseer, denoting the function of an elder. When an elder is carrying out his responsibility in the church, he is functioning as an overseer. When an elder functions he exercises oversight. The overseers, therefore, are not a group of people different from the elders. It was Ignatius in the second century who taught that an overseer, a bishop, is higher than an elder. From this erroneous teaching came the hierarchy of bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and the pope. This teaching is also the source of the Episcopal system of ecclesiastical government. Both the hierarchy and the system are abominable in the eyes of God.

(b) As Deacons and Deaconesses

In the church some brothers serve as deacons (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8) and some sisters serve as deaconesses (Rom. 16:1). The word "service" in Romans 12:7 denotes the service of the deacons and deaconesses in the local churches. The English deacon is an anglicized form of the Greek diakonos, which means a serving one. Deacons and deaconesses are the serving ones in a local church under the direction of the overseers, the elders. The overseers take care of the church, and the deacons and deaconesses serve the church by taking care of many practical matters. Those who serve as deacons and deaconesses need to have a serving spirit and a serving attitude, and they should keep themselves always in service.

(c) As Prophets and Teachers

Acts 13:1a says, "Now there were in Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers." This verse indicates that in the church some saints who have the adequate growth in life serve as prophets and teachers. The prophets and teachers speak the word of God, releasing the divine revelation and teaching the saints. The prophets and teachers are very useful, especially in the church meetings. In the church meetings we need the proper speakers to speak the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge. The word of wisdom

is spoken mainly by the prophets, and the word of knowledge is taught mainly by the teachers.

In order to understand the service of the prophets and the teachers, we need to know the difference between prophesying and teaching. In the Bible as a whole and in the New Testament in particular, the word "prophesy" does not mainly mean to predict. In both the Old and New Testaments to prophesy means to tell for, that is, to speak for others; to tell forth, that is, to speak things forth; and to foretell, that is, to predict, to speak things before they happen. Mainly prophesying is a matter of speaking for the Lord and of speaking the Lord forth. It is the speaking for God under His direct inspiration. In his Word Studies in the New Testament (vol. 3, p. 156) Marvin Vincent says, "In the New Testament, as in the Old, the prominent idea [concerning prophecy] is not prediction, but the inspired delivery of warning, exhortation, instruction, judging, and making manifest the secrets of the heart. See 1 Corinthians 14:3, 24, and 25. The New Testament prophets are distinguished from teachers by speaking under direct inspiration," Therefore, the main idea of prophecy in the New Testament is not prediction but speaking for the Lord and speaking forth the Lord under His direct inspiration, that is, to speak according to the revelation the Lord has imparted.

To prophesy in the sense of telling for and telling forth requires much growth in life. For this, we need to know God and we need to experience Christ. If we do not have the adequate knowledge of God and experience of Christ, we do not have anything to say for Him, and we cannot speak Him forth. To prophesy in the sense of foretelling, of predicting something before it happens, is miraculous and does not require the growth in life.

Teaching is different from prophesying. Teaching is the speaking based upon prophesying. Certain brothers may take what is given in others' prophesying and teach the saints according to it. This is teaching. The prophets are those who speak for God and speak forth God by God's revelation and who sometimes speak with inspired prediction (Acts 11:27-28). Teachers are those who speak the truths according to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42) and the prophets' revelation. Both prophets and teachers are needed in the church.

(d) As Good Stewards of the Varied Grace of God,

Ministering It to One Another

Whereas only certain saints serve in the church as elders, deacons, deaconesses, prophets, and teachers, all the believers should be good stewards of the varied grace of God, ministering it to one another. First Peter 4:10 says, "Each one according as he has received a gift, ministering it among yourselves as good stewards of the varied grace of God." According to the New Testament, grace is what God is to us for our enjoyment (John 1:16-17; 2 Cor. 12:9). Grace is not mainly the work God does for us; grace is the processed Triune God Himself dispensed into our being and experienced by us as our enjoyment. In brief, grace is the Triune God experienced and enjoyed by us. In 1 Peter 4:10 the varied grace of God, as the all grace in 1 Peter 5:10, is the rich supply of life, which is the Triune God ministered into us in many aspects (2 Cor. 13:14). As good stewards, by the gift we have received we should minister to the church and the saints such grace, not merely doctrine or any vain thing. In the church we all should serve as good stewards of the varied grace of God, ministering this grace to one another.

(6) Functioning in the Church Meetings

If we are those who experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity corporately by living in the church, we shall function in the church meetings. The proper church life depends on the proper church meetings. A proper church meeting must be unique in two things—in mutuality and in speaking. This means that whenever we come together, we should have speaking in mutuality, not the speaking of only one or two. Every saint should have the equal right and opportunity to speak concerning Christ, to speak for Christ and to speak forth Christ. For example, we may tell the saints how we have received the Lord as our life in our daily living. Relying on others to speak, to pray, and to call hymns is a tradition that kills the church life, for it annuls the function of the members of the Body of Christ. Instead of following the traditional practice, we all should function in the church meetings in the way of mutuality. This will edify, improve, and develop the functioning ability of all the attendants of the church meetings.

In every meeting of the church we should keep the principle of mutuality. According to the New Testament, the Christian meeting is altogether a meeting in mutuality. In 1 Corinthians 14:26 one has a psalm, another has a teaching, another has a revelation, another has a tongue, and another has an interpretation. All these are in mutuality. There is not simply one or a few

who function; on the contrary, all function in mutuality. Hebrews 10:25 encourages us not to stay away from the meetings but to be "exhorting one another." This indicates that the Christian meetings should be in mutuality. Mutuality is a basic principle of the church meetings. A church meeting that does not involve mutuality is wrong. In our meetings the speaking of the divine Word should be mutual, not individual. Mutuality, not individuality, should be prevailing.

The way to meet by mutuality in speaking is the way God invented and ordained. This is God's created way, and no one can improve it. Therefore, we must turn from the traditional practice of having only one or a few speakers and recover the Lord's ordained way of mutuality. We need to fully come back to the God-invented and God-ordained way to meet.

Even when the whole church meets together we must practice mutuality. First Corinthians 14:26 indicates that when the whole church comes together in one place, we should practice mutuality. Mutuality in speaking is clearly revealed in 1 Corinthians 14. There is not a hint in the New Testament that in a church meeting there should be just one or two persons speaking. The church meeting must be open to all attendants so that all may function.

In 1 Corinthians 14:26 Paul says, "Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up." In this verse the word "has" is very important. According to Paul, whenever we come together to meet, we should have something. Paul does not say "shall have" or "should have"; he speaks in the present tense to denote the fact and says that each one of us has something. Furthermore, he does not say that just a few have, that many have, or that most have; he says that "each one has" something. He then mentions five things in the following sequence: a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, an interpretation. This list is not all-inclusive; it is illustrative.

(a) With a Psalm

In 14:26 Paul first mentions a psalm, which is somewhat equivalent to a hymn and is for praising the Lord. The fact that Paul mentions a psalm first indicates that in the meetings of the church praising the Lord must be primary.

(b) With a Teaching

After saying, “Each one has a psalm,” Paul goes on to mention a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, and an interpretation. The teachings must be according to the teachings of the apostles. In the church meetings we need a word of teaching. This teaching should minister Christ with the church as His Body.

(c) With a Revelation

Whereas one has a teaching, another has a revelation. A revelation must show something which has been hidden but is now revealed. Such a revelation should be centered on Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ, not on other things. In the church meetings a teaching comes from a teacher, and a revelation comes from a prophet.

(d) With a Tongue

Here a tongue should be a proper language or dialect (Acts 2:4, 6, 8, 11) either of men or of angels (1 Cor. 13:1), not meaningless voices or sounds. The genuine and proper speaking in tongues is one of the many gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4), one of the many aspects of the manifestation of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:7). The New Testament makes it very clear that speaking in tongues is only one of the many gifts of the Spirit, and not all the believers have it. Furthermore, according to the context of the entire book of 1 Corinthians, a book which speaks of Christ as the wisdom and power of God and the deep things of God, and of the church as the Body to express Christ and as the means to carry out God’s administration, the proper tongue-speaking should be concerning Christ and the church.

(e) With an Interpretation

Finally, in 1 Corinthians 14:26 Paul says that one “has an interpretation.” The interpretation of tongues is the ability to make unknown tongues known, understandable.

According to the emphasis of 1 Corinthians, all five things listed in 14:26 should be focused on Christ as God’s center for our portion and the church as God’s goal for our aim. The psalm should be the praise of God for giving Christ as wisdom and power to us for our daily life and church life. The teaching from a teacher and the revelation from a prophet should teach and minister Christ with the church as His Body to others. A tongue and its interpretation should also have Christ with the church as its center and content. Any emphasis on things other than Christ and the church will

confuse and distract the church from the central lane of God's New Testament economy.

(f) For Building Up

At the end of 14:26 Paul says, "Let all things be done for building up." Whatever we do in the church meetings must be for the building up of the saints and the church. To exhibit Christ and to enjoy Him in our meetings for the building up of His Body must be our unique purpose and goal.

(g) Prophesying, Mainly Speaking For and Speaking Forth, with the Word of Wisdom and the Word of Knowledge Is the Best Gift for the Building Up of the Church

First Corinthians 14 reveals that prophesying, mainly speaking for the Lord and speaking forth the Lord, with the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge (1 Cor. 12:8), is the best spiritual gift for the building up of the church. Paul says, "Pursue love, and desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but rather that you may prophesy" (v. 1). Since to prophesy is to speak for the Lord and speak forth the Lord, that is, to minister Christ to others, which is the main thing in the church meeting, it requires the divine life as its content. Love is the excellent way to experience the divine life and make it the content of the gift of prophecy for the building up of the church. Hence, we must pursue love and desire earnestly this greater gift.

In 14:3 Paul goes on to say, "He who prophesies speaks to men for building up and encouragement and consolation." Because prophecy, in speaking forth the Lord, ministers Christ to others, it builds them up and gives them encouragement and consolation.

In 14:4b Paul continues, "He who prophesies builds up the church." From this verse we see that to prophesy, to speak forth the Lord, builds up not only the individual saints but also builds up the church.

In 1 Corinthians 14:12 Paul says, "Since you are zealots of spiritual gifts, seek that you may abound to the building up of the church." Here we see that Paul is fully occupied with the consideration of building up the church. He is

fully church-conscious and church-centered. Paul fully realized that prophesying is the best gift for the building up of the church (1 Cor. 14:5).

(7) Growing in the Church

The believers also grow in the church. Just as children grow in a family, so the believers grow in the church life. To grow in the church is to have the genuine growth of life, which is the increase of the element of God, the increase of the stature of Christ, and the expansion of the ground of the Holy Spirit within us. The increase of the element of God means that more of God Himself is blended into us, is gained by us, and becomes our element. The more we love Christ, seek Christ, and allow Christ to live in us, the more the stature of Christ increases within us. Furthermore, the more we grow, the more we allow the Holy Spirit to gain ground within us.

In 1 Corinthians 3:6 Paul says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God made to grow." Here the believers are symbolized by plants. With plants there is the need of planting, watering, and growth. The planting and watering are done by the apostles, but the growth is given only by God, who is the source of life.

The believers, as God's plants, are planted in the church, which is God's farm (1 Cor. 3:9). In the farm of the church God gives growth to the believers. According to the first three chapters of 1 Corinthians, the life with which the believers grow in the church is the crucified and resurrected Christ. The more we experience and enjoy Christ in the church, the more we grow in the divine life as God's plants.

(8) Having Their Material Possessions in Common

In the church life the saints have their material possessions in common. This is not the practice of a so-called communism; it is the sharing with our needy fellow saints what God has given to us. Out of love we care for one another and also for the church's general expenses.

Acts 2:44 and 45 say, "All those who believed were together and had all things common; and they sold their possessions and properties and divided them among all according as anyone had need." In these verses having all things common is not merely a sign of love; it is a sign of Christ's dynamic salvation that saves the believers from greediness and selfishness.

Acts 2:45 tells us that the believers sold their possessions and properties and divided them according to need. This also is an evidence of the Lord's dynamic salvation, which caused the believers to overcome their earthly possessions, which occupy, possess, and usurp fallen mankind (Matt. 19:21-24; Luke 12:13-19, 33-34; 14:33; 16:13-14; 1 Tim. 6:17). Although the dynamic salvation of God caused the believers to forget about earthly possessions, having all things common did not become a formal practice in the church life.

(a) Sharing Their Abundance with Those Who Lack That There May Be Equality

In 2 Corinthians 8:12-15 Paul says that we should give willingly according to what we have. Those who gather much will have no excess, and those who gather little will have no lack. The result of such giving and receiving is what Paul calls "equality": "At the present time your abundance for their lack, that their abundance also may be for your lack, so that there may be equality" (v. 14). Equality equals having everything common. God's principle is to have equality. Even in the Old Testament there was the divine way to balance social wealth. None of the Jews could sell their property forever. At the most, they could sell it only for fifty years. In the year of jubilee everything was returned to the original owner (Lev. 25:8-17). God's way is to keep equality.

(b) Those Who Gather Much Have No Excess, and Those Who Gather Little Have No Lack

The principle of equality is illustrated by the receiving of manna in the Old Testament (Exo. 16:18). Paul refers to this in 2 Corinthians 8:15, saying, "As it is written, He who gathered much had no excess, and he who gathered little had no lack." If an Israelite gathered more, God sovereignly arranged for him to have no excess. If someone gathered less, by God's sovereignty that one had no lack. Those who were rather feeble and were not able to gather much manna did not have any lack. In the case of those who gathered an excess of manna, perhaps wanting to store it up for days and weeks to come, God caused the excess to be taken away (Exo. 16:20). The divine way is that those who gathered little had no lack and those who gathered much had nothing over. This is the principle of equality, God's heavenly way of balancing the supply among His people. We should follow this principle today concerning material possessions. Those who have been favored by God with material

things should be faithful to use them to care for the needy saints and for the full-time workers. As the saints share their abundance with others, there will be equality.

(c) A Strong Sign of Their Overcomin of the Usurping Power of the Enticing and Deceiving Riches

Having material possessions in common, following the principle of equality, is a strong sign that we have overcome the usurping power of enticing and deceiving riches (1 Tim. 6:9-10, 17-19; Matt. 13:22). Riches are very enticing and deceiving. However, by Christ as our victory in His overcoming life, we can overcome the usurping power of enticing and deceiving riches.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SIXTY-THREE

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (47)

In this message we shall cover the remaining aspects of the believers' experiencing the dispensing of the divine Trinity corporately by living in the church.

(9) Loving the Brothers and Loving One Another in the Church

As we live in the church, we love all the brothers; that is, we love one another. The reason for this is that, as Romans 12:9-21 indicates, in the church the believers live a life of the highest virtues of the divine life and love. In verse 9a Paul says, "Let love be without hypocrisy," and in 10a he continues, "Love one another warmly in brotherly love." This corresponds to Peter's word about loving "one another from the heart fervently" (1 Pet. 1:22).

In John 13:34 and 35 the Lord Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men shall know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." This commandment is the message which we "heard from the beginning, that we should love one another" (1 John 3:11). We should not try in a natural way to fulfill this word. We may realize that God is love (1 John 4:8) and that we are commanded to love one another. Then in a natural, religious, and ethical way we may try to love others, imitating God's love. In our nature as human beings there is the tendency to love in this way. This kind of love is ethical, natural, and even cultural. However, real love is the issue of enjoying the processed Triune God in the divine dispensing. When we are in the fellowship of the divine life, that is, in the enjoyment of the Triune God, this enjoyment will have a certain issue or outcome. The outcome of the enjoyment of the Triune God is the divine love. When we enjoy the Triune God, this enjoyment issues in the divine love. With this love we spontaneously love others. In particular, we love all those who are organically related to our begetting Father (1 John 5:1). We have been begotten of the Father, and many others also have been begotten of Him. If we enjoy Him, the result will be that we love all His children. Therefore, loving the brothers is the issue of enjoying the Triune God.

Instead of trying to imitate the Lord's love, we need to be constituted of the Triune God who is love. This One abides in us and wants to impart Himself into our being and saturate us with Himself so that we may enjoy Him inwardly as love. This love should saturate us until it becomes the love with which we love the brothers.

The revelation concerning love in the New Testament is different from our natural concept of love. The very God who is love abides in us, and we abide in Him. According to 1 John 3:24, "We know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He gave to us." This Spirit keeps us in an organic union with the Triune God who is love, causing this God to become our life and even our being. Furthermore, this Spirit is saturating us with the substance of the God who is love. Eventually, the fibers of our being will be constituted of the loving essence of God. This means that the divine love becomes us. Then spontaneously we love others. However, we do not love them by our own love; we love them by God as our love. What a great difference there is between this kind of love and the love that is simply a human attempt to imitate the love of God!

According to the New Testament, the love the believers have for one another is actually a triangular love, a love that involves three parties. As a child of God born of Him, we surely love our Father, the One who has begotten us. Since we love the begetting Father, we shall also love those who have been begotten of Him. Here we have a triangular love, a love involving God, ourselves, and all those born of God. This triangular love is in the organic union with the Triune God who is love.

How is it possible for believers to love God and to love one another? This is possible only because we have had the divine birth (John 1:12-13; 1 John 5:1; 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:4, 18). We have been born of God, begotten of Him, and because of this birth we are able to love one another. Therefore, the triangular love is related to the divine birth. Now we love not only the One who has begotten us, our begetting Father, but also the ones begotten of Him. This is the love with which the believers love one another in the church life.

(10) Forgiving the Brothers and Forgiving One Another in the Church

In the church life the believers forgive one another. Peter asked the Lord, "How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Until seven

times?" (Matt. 18:21). The Lord replied, "I do not say to you until seven times, but until seventy times seven" (v. 22), and then He gave a parable as an illustration (vv. 23-35). Matthew 18:35 says, "So also shall My heavenly Father do to you if you do not forgive each one his brother from your hearts." If we do not forgive the brother who sins against us, we shall be disciplined by the Lord until we forgive him from our heart. Then the Lord will forgive us.

If we do not practice the way of repentance and forgiveness, the longer we stay in the church life, the more offenses there will be. Eventually, the accumulation of offenses will cause us to forfeit the church life. May the Lord grant us the grace we need. If you offend someone, you need to go to that one and repent. If someone offends you, you need to look to the Lord for grace to forgive that one from your heart. And once you have forgiven an offense, you should forget it and never mention it again. If we do this, we shall maintain a proper church life.

Another verse that speaks of forgiveness is Ephesians 4:32: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as also God in Christ forgave you." Only the enjoyment of Christ as our life supply and as our joy can make our hearts tender. If we are tenderhearted, we shall forgive others.

In our daily walk we need both to forgive others and to ask others to forgive us. This is necessary because we are easily offended and we easily offend others. If we have offended someone, we need to ask for forgiveness. If we have been offended, we need to extend forgiveness to others, even as God in Christ has forgiven us.

In Colossians 3:13 Paul says, "Bearing one another and forgiving one another, if anyone should have a complaint against any; as the Lord forgave you, so also should you forgive." The forgiving Lord is our life, and He lives within us. Forgiving is a virtue of His life. When we take Him as our person and live by Him, forgiving others will be a spontaneous virtue of our Christian life.

If we have truly forgiven someone, we shall also forget the offense. Once we have forgiven someone in a matter, we should not mention it again. To make mention of an offense indicates that we have not released the one who offended us. According to the New Testament, to forgive means to forget and to release. We need to forget the offense and release the offender. Once we have done this, we should never speak of the matter again.

To forgive means not to be offended. As soon as we forgive someone, we shall not be offended by him. But if we do not forgive, we shall be offended. The point here is that forgiving annuls offending. If we do not forgive others, we shall be offended by them. But if we forgive them, we shall annul the offense.

Suppose a certain brother offends you and you forgive him. Your forgiving of him will annul his offending of you. Then there will be no problem between you. However, suppose this brother offends you and you are not willing to forgive him and forget the offense. This will cause trouble, especially to you, for you will become entangled as the result of being offended. In the church life we should avoid stumbling others, and we should also avoid being offended by others. We should always be careful and cautious not to offend others. At the same time, we should always be willing to forgive.

(11) Being Built in the Church

As the believers experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity corporately by living in the church, they are built in the church. Referring to Christ, the cornerstone, Paul in Ephesians 2:22 says, "In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit." The word "you" refers to the local saints. Furthermore, the word "also" indicates that the building in this verse is local. According to the context, the dwelling place of God in 2:22 is local, whereas the holy temple in the preceding verse is universal. In verse 22 Paul is saying that the local saints, the saints in Ephesus, were being built together in Christ into a dwelling place of God. Therefore, in verses 21 and 22 Paul covers both the universal aspect and the local aspect of the church. All the building is growing—this refers to the universal aspect. The believers in a particular locality are being built together—this is the local aspect.

In 2:22 Paul is careful to point out that it is in Christ that the local saints are built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit. They are not built in ordinances, in practices, or in opinions. We can be built up only in the all-inclusive Christ, who is our peace, foundation, and cornerstone.

In 2:22 Paul also tells us that we are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit. The spirit here refers to the believers' human spirit indwelt by God's Holy Spirit. God's Spirit is the Dweller, not the dwelling place. The dwelling place is the believers' spirit. God's Spirit dwells in our spirit. Therefore, the dwelling place of God is in our spirit.

Verse 21 says that the holy temple is in the Lord, and verse 22, that the dwelling place of God is in spirit. This indicates that the Lord is one with our spirit and that our spirit is one with the Lord. To be in our spirit actually is to be in the Lord. Also, to be in the Lord is to be in the spirit. "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17). We cannot separate our spirit from the Lord. Hence, our spirit is the place where the building of the church is. The building is not in our mind, emotion, soul, or heart. The building is absolutely a matter in our spirit.

In order for us to be built up locally, our disposition, our being, must be dealt with. Nothing tests our spiritual maturity as much as this matter of building. Furthermore, the local building is a great help in our spiritual growth. If we are willing to be built into the church in our locality, we shall have the abundance of the growth in life.

(12) Building the Church

In the church life the believers build the church. Paul emphasizes this building in 1 Corinthians 14:4b, where he says, "He who prophesies builds up the church." Those who prophesy build up not only the individual saints but also the church. In verse 12 Paul goes on to say, "Since you are zealots of spiritual gifts, seek that you may abound to the building up of the church." This verse indicates that, like Paul, we all should be fully occupied with the building up of the church.

The New Testament reveals that God's goal is the building. Christ as life is for the building, the ministry of the gifted persons (Eph. 4:11-12) is for the building, and the functioning of all the members also is for the building. Everything is for the one purpose of the Body of Christ being produced and built up.

The building up of the Body of Christ is not carried out directly by the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherd-teachers; rather, this work of building is done directly by all the believers as members of the Body. Hence, the believers are the building members. Furthermore, the work of the ministry, which is the work of building up the Body of Christ, mentioned in Ephesians 4:12, does not refer merely to the work of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherd-teachers but even the more to the work of the saints. Hence, the building up of the Body of Christ is accomplished by the perfected saints. The gifted persons should learn how to perfect others and,

after finishing the perfecting work, they should leave the building up of the church to all the members of the Body and let the members build up the Body directly.

(13) To Be Overcomers in the Church

The believers may also be overcomers in the church. In the seven epistles to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 the Lord Jesus charges the saints to be overcomers (2:7b, 11b, 17b, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21). To overcome in these chapters does not mean to overcome sin, the world, the flesh, the self, and even Satan. Rather, according to the context of these chapters, to overcome is to overcome the degradation of the church.

(a) Overcoming the Degradation of the Church

To overcome in the seven epistles in Revelation 2 and 3 is to overcome the degraded situation of the churches. The reason we need to be overcomers is that the church has become degraded. Today degradation is prevailing, and we need to overcome it.

In Revelation 2:7b the Lord says, "To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." In this epistle, addressed to the church in Ephesus, to overcome means to recover our first love toward the Lord (v. 4) and to hate the works of the Nicolaitans (v. 6), the hierarchy which the Lord hates.

In 2:11b the Lord says to the church in Smyrna, "He who overcomes shall by no means be hurt of the second death." To overcome in this epistle means to overcome persecution by being faithful unto death.

In 2:17b the Lord says to those in Pergamos, "To him who overcomes, to him I will give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which no one knows but he who receives it." To overcome here means specifically to overcome the church's union with the world, the teaching of idolatry and fornication (v. 14), and the teaching of the hierarchy (v. 15).

In 2:26-28 we have the Lord's word to the church in Thyatira: "He who overcomes, and he who keeps My works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will shepherd them with an iron rod, as

vessels of pottery are broken in pieces, as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star." Whereas Pergamos signifies the worldly church, Thyatira prefigures the apostate Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, to overcome in the epistle to the church in Thyatira is to overcome Catholicism, to overcome the apostate Roman Catholic Church.

In 3:5 the Lord says to the church in Sardis, "He who overcomes, he shall be clothed in white garments, and I will by no means erase his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels." As a sign, the church in Sardis prefigures the protestant church from the time of the Reformation to the second coming of Christ. The reformed protestant church has been considered by many to be living, but the Lord says that she is dead (v. 1). To overcome in this epistle means to overcome the deadness of the protestant churches, that is, to overcome dead Protestantism.

In 3:12 the Lord says to the church in Philadelphia, the recovered church, "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall by no means go out anymore, and I will write upon him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which descends out of heaven from My God, and My new name." The recovered church has already gained the crown (v. 11). However, if those in the recovered church do not hold fast what they have in the Lord's recovery until the Lord comes back, their crown may be taken away by someone. Therefore, to overcome here means to hold fast what we have in the recovered church.

Finally, in the last of the seven epistles, the epistle to the church in Laodicea, which prefigures the degraded recovered church, the Lord says, "He who overcomes, to him I will give to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (3:21). In this epistle to overcome means to overcome the lukewarmness and pride of the degraded recovered church (vv. 16-17), to buy the needed items—gold refined by fire, white garments, and eyesalve (v. 18)—and to open the door for the Lord to come in (v. 20).

i) By the Sevenfold Intensified Spirit of God

The believers may overcome the degradation of the church by the sevenfold intensified Spirit of God. Revelation 1:4 speaks of "the seven Spirits who are before His throne," and 3:1, of "the seven Spirits of God." The seven Spirits are undoubtedly the Spirit of God, because they are ranked among the Triune

God in Revelation 1:4 and 5. As seven is the number of completion in God's operation, so the seven Spirits—the sevenfold intensified Spirit—must be for God's move on earth. In substance and existence God's Spirit is one; in the intensified function and work of God's operation God's Spirit is sevenfold. At the time the book of Revelation was written, the church had become degraded. Therefore, the sevenfold intensified Spirit of God was needed for God's move and work.

In 1:4 and 5 the seven Spirits of God are listed in the second place instead of the third. This reveals the importance of the intensified function of the sevenfold Spirit of God. This point is confirmed by the repeated emphasis on the Spirit's speaking (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; 22:17). At the opening of the other Epistles, only the Father and the Son are mentioned, from whom grace and peace are given to the receivers. However, in Revelation 1:4 and 5 the Spirit also is included, from whom grace and peace are imparted to the churches. This further signifies the crucial need of the sevenfold intensified Spirit for God's move to counteract the degradation of the church. If we would be overcomers in the church, we need the sevenfold intensified Spirit of God.

ii) Through Eating Christ as the Tree of Life, the Hidden Manna, and the Feast

The believers may be overcomers also through eating Christ as the tree of life, the hidden manna, and the feast (Rev. 2:7b, 17b; 3:20b). In the Bible the tree of life refers to Christ as the embodiment of all the riches of God (Col. 2:9) for our food (Gen. 2:9; 3:22, 24; Rev. 22:2, 14, 19). In Revelation 2:7b the tree of life refers to the crucified and resurrected Christ who is in the church today. To eat of the tree of life, that is, to enjoy Christ as our life supply, should be the primary matter in the church life. The content of the church life depends on the enjoyment of Christ. The more we enjoy Him, the richer the content will be.

In Revelation 2:17b the Lord speaks of the hidden manna. This refers to the eating of manna by the children of Israel in the wilderness (Exo. 16:14-16, 31). Manna is a type of Christ as the heavenly food enabling God's people to go His way. The open manna was for the enjoyment of the Lord's people in a public way; the hidden manna, signifying the hidden Christ, is a special portion reserved for His overcoming seekers who overcome the degradation of the worldly church. While the church goes the way of the world, these overcomers

come forward to abide in the presence of God in the Holy of Holies, where they enjoy the hidden Christ as a special portion for their daily supply.

In Revelation 3:20 the Lord Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me." The Greek word translated "dine" literally means to take the principal meal of the day at evening. To dine is not merely to eat one food but the riches of a meal. This may refer to the eating of the rich produce of the good land of Canaan by the children of Israel (Josh. 5:10-12).

The Lord's word in 2:7b, 17b; and 3:20 indicates that He desires to recover the eating by God's people of the proper food, as ordained by God and typified by the tree of life, the manna, and the produce of the good land, all of which are types of the various aspects of Christ as food to us. The degradation of the church distracts God's people from the eating of Christ as their food to the teaching of doctrines for knowledge. But in Revelation 2 and 3 the Lord comes to recover the proper eating of Himself as our food supply. We must eat Him not only as the tree of life and the hidden manna but also as a meal full of His riches. Through eating Christ as the tree of life, the hidden manna, and the feast, we shall be overcomers.

iii) By Hearing the Spirit's Speaking

Moreover, the believers overcome by hearing the Spirit's speaking (Rev. 2:7a, 11 a, 17a, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Revelation 2:7a says, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." At the beginning of each of the seven epistles in chapters two and three, it is the Lord who speaks (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). But at the end of all seven epistles it is the Spirit speaking to the churches. This not only indicates that the Spirit is the Lord and the Lord is the Spirit; it also emphasizes the vital importance of the Spirit in the darkness of the church's degradation as indicated by the sevenfold intensified Spirit in 1:4.

In Revelation 2 and 3 Christ is the speaking Spirit. If the speaker here were only Christ without being the Spirit, He could not speak words into our spirit, and His speaking would not be very subjective and touching. However, the speaker here is not the objective Christ but the subjective Spirit. If, as we read these epistles, we are open in our spirit to Him, the Spirit will immediately speak something of Christ into us. Once we hear His speaking, something

indelible will be wrought into us, and nothing will be able to take it away. Christ today is the speaking Spirit, and we may be overcomers by hearing the Spirit's speaking.

(b) As the Man-child

In the church life we may be overcomers either as the man-child (Rev. 12:5) or as the firstfruit (Rev. 14:1-4). Revelation 12:5 says, "She brought forth a son, a man-child, who was about to shepherd all the nations with an iron rod; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne." In the Bible, woman (v. 1) signifies the weaker one and man the stronger one (1 Pet. 3:7). Hence, the man-child in 12:5 signifies the stronger part of God's people. The fact that the man-child "was about to shepherd all the nations with an iron rod" indicates that the man-child consists of the overcomers, as mentioned in 2:26-27. Furthermore, "brought forth" in 12:5 signifies resurrection, as in Acts 13:33 and 34. The man-child is composed of the dead overcoming saints resurrected. This is proved by the words "unto death" in Revelation 12:11. The man-child brought forth in verse 5 is composed of the brothers in verse 10 who have been opposed and accused by Satan, the enemy of God. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of their testimony, and by not loving their soul life even unto death (v. 11).

(c) As the Firstfruit

Whereas the man-child in Revelation 12 is composed of the dead overcomers resurrected, the firstfruit in Revelation 14 consists of the living overcomers, those who live until the Lord's coming and are raptured to the throne of God in the third heaven before the great tribulation. Revelation 14:1 says, "I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on mount Zion, and with Him a hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads." Verse 4b explains, "These were purchased from among men as firstfruit to God and to the Lamb." These living overcomers will be the first ripe ones in God's field. Hence, they will be reaped before the harvest as firstfruit to God and to the Lamb. The harvest will be reaped later (vv. 14-16). This indicates that the firstfruit will be raptured to the heavens before the harvest, just as the firstfruits of the good land were reaped and brought into the temple of God before the harvest (Lev. 23:10-11; Exo. 23:19). The first overcomers as the firstfruit will be raptured before the great tribulation, and the harvest, which comprises the majority of believers, will be raptured toward the end of the great tribulation.

(14) To Be the Bride of Christ at His Wedding

Eventually, the overcomers in the church will be the bride of Christ at His wedding (Rev. 19:7-8). The ultimate consummation of our living in the church will be that we become the bride, the counterpart of Christ, at His coming back. As the bride of Christ at His wedding, we shall receive the reward of entering into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens, that is, to enter into the Lord's joy (Matt. 25:21, 23) and to reign with Him as His co-kings for a thousand years.

Revelation 19:7 says, "Let us rejoice and exult, and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has made herself ready." The marriage of the Lamb is the issue of the completion of God's New Testament economy. God's economy in the New Testament is to obtain for Christ a bride, the church, through His redemption and divine life. By the continual working of the Holy Spirit through all the centuries, this goal will be attained at the end of this age. Then the bride with the overcoming believers will be ready.

"His wife" in 19:7 refers to the church (Eph. 5:24-25, 31-32), the bride of Christ (John 3:29). However, according to Revelation 19:8 and 9, the wife, the bride of Christ, in verse 7 consists only of the overcoming believers during the millennium, whereas the bride, the wife, in 21:2 is composed of all the saved saints after the millennium for eternity. The readiness of the bride depends on the maturity in life of the overcomers. Furthermore, the overcomers are not separate individuals but a corporate bride. Therefore, building is needed. The overcomers are not only mature in life but are built together as one bride.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SIXTY-FOUR

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (48)

We have seen that, in the progressing stage of God's full salvation, the stage of transformation, the believers experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity corporately by entering into the kingdom of God and by living in the church. The believers experience the divine dispensing corporately also by living in the Body of Christ.

c. Living in the Body of Christ

In order to experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity corporately, the believers need to take three steps. First, we need to enter into the kingdom and live a kingdom life. Second, by living the kingdom life we may live in the church. Third, by living in the church we need to live in the Body of Christ. The sequence of these three matters is the kingdom, the church, and the Body of Christ. According to the sequence of the New Testament revelation, the kingdom comes first and the church follows. The issue of the kingdom and the church is the Body of Christ. This New Testament revelation indicates that no one can live in the Body of Christ without first living in the kingdom and in the church. This has been fully proved and confirmed by our experience.

If the kingdom, the church, and the Body of Christ were taken away from the New Testament, very little would be left. Taking away the kingdom, the church, and the Body from the New Testament would be like taking away the skeleton and the intrinsic life element from the human body. The kingdom, the church, and the Body of Christ are both the framework and the intrinsic elements of our Christian life. Without the kingdom, the church, and the Body, God's New Testament economy would have neither a framework nor the organic life essence, an essence that corresponds to what God is. Both the framework of God's New Testament economy and its organic life essence are wrapped up with the three crucial matters of the kingdom, the church, and the Body.

In the New Testament the first one to speak of the kingdom was John the Baptist. In Matthew 3:2 John said, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near." The Lord Jesus repeated the word of John the Baptist (Matt. 4:17) and then went on to speak concerning the church. In Matthew 16:18 the

Lord said, “I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church.” Immediately, the Lord went on to speak again concerning the kingdom, saying to Peter, “I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens, and whatever you bind on the earth shall be what has been bound in the heavens, and whatever you loose on the earth shall be what has been loosed in the heavens” (v. 19). Here the Lord was indicating that He would give to Peter the keys of the kingdom of the heavens so that he might open the door for people to come into the kingdom in order that the Lord may build them into the church. First we come into the kingdom. Then we are made ready, qualified, and available for the Lord to put us into His church.

The book of Acts has much to say concerning the kingdom and the church. The kingdom is mentioned first. Acts 1:3 tells us that to the apostles the Lord Jesus “presented Himself alive after His suffering by many convincing proofs, through a period of forty days, appearing to them and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God.” This indicates strongly that the kingdom of God would be the main subject of the apostles’ preaching in their coming commission after Pentecost. Before the Lord Jesus ascended to the heavens and poured out Himself as the all-inclusive Spirit to establish the church, He taught His disciples about the kingdom. If they did not have any knowledge or realization concerning the kingdom, it would be difficult for the Lord Jesus to bring them into the church. Therefore, in the first chapter of Acts the kingdom was taught thoroughly.

In the following chapters the church is brought in. The first mention of the church in Acts is in 5:11. Acts 8:1 refers to the church in Jerusalem. Throughout the book of Acts the church is mentioned again and again (8:3; 9:31; 11:22, 26; 12:1, 5; 13:1; 14:23, 27; 15:3, 4, 22, 41; 16:5; 18:22; 20:17, 28). However, after the church comes in, the kingdom is still preached. In Acts 8:12 Philip brought the good news concerning the kingdom of God to the Samaritans. Acts 14:22 says that “through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God.” According to 19:8, Paul spoke boldly in the synagogue concerning the kingdom of God, and 20:25 tells us that he went about proclaiming the kingdom. Finally, in 28:23 Paul “expounded and solemnly testified the kingdom of God” to those who came to him in his lodging. From this we see that the book of Acts begins and ends with the kingdom of God. Furthermore, Acts shows us that the kingdom and the church are a pair. Without the kingdom there is neither the beginning nor the conclusion of the church life. The church life is intimately related with the

kingdom because the kingdom is the life-pulse of the church. Therefore, the kingdom is absolutely crucial to the church life.

God works to have the kingdom so that the church may be built up. Then the church will become the organism of Christ, the Body of Christ, expressing the Triune God in His embodiment in Christ. This is the New Testament revelation.

Paul is the unique one in the New Testament to speak concerning the Body. He mentions the Body in four of his Epistles: Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians. It was through Paul that the thought, the concept, the revelation, of the Body of Christ was brought in. Neither Peter nor John uses this term.

If we do not have the church with the kingdom coming before it and the Body of Christ coming forth with it, we have neither the framework nor the life-pulse of the New Testament revelation. Therefore, it is crucial that we see the New Testament revelation and understand the New Testament teaching concerning the kingdom, the church, and the Body.

If we mean business in this age to follow the Lord Jesus for His interest on earth, we must enter into the kingdom of God. We need to have not only the truth, the doctrine, of the kingdom but also the reality and practicality of the kingdom. This means that we need to live in the kingdom. Furthermore, we need to be in the church and live in the church both in reality and in practicality. This means that we need to have the practice of the church life. We need to be a church people, living in the reality of the church according to the truth and also living in the practicality of the church, practicing the church life wherever we may be. If we live in the kingdom and in the church, then we shall also live in the Body. If the believers live in the kingdom, the church, and the Body, corporately experiencing the dispensing of the divine Trinity, the Lord will have a way to accomplish His eternal purpose, and we shall receive a reward from Him at His coming.

God planned the church for the purpose of expressing Christ. Hence, the church is the expression of Christ. How can the church be Christ's expression? The only way for the church to be Christ's expression is for it to be the Body of Christ. If we consider ourselves, we shall realize that our body is our expression. If we did not have a body, we could not express ourselves. In like manner, there is no way for Christ to be expressed by the church except by it being His Body.

Some Christian teachers say that, in the New Testament, the Body of Christ is merely a parable illustrating how close we are to Christ. According to this teaching, just as the members of the body are close to the head, so we are close to Christ. However, it is not correct to teach that the Body of Christ is a parable, for it is a fact, a reality, not a parable. Just as our body is a fact, so the church as the Body of Christ is also a fact. We may consider the vine in John 15 a parable, but we should not say that the church as the Body of Christ is a parable.

The church as the Body of Christ is not an organization—it is an organism. The church is an organic Body constituted of all the believers, who have been regenerated and have God's life, for the expression of Christ the Head. The Body is the fullness of the Head, and the fullness is the expression of the Head. Christ, as the One who fills all in all (Eph. 1:22-23), needs a great Body to be His fullness. This Body is His church to be His expression.

The church is the Body of Christ, and Christ is the Head of the church (Col. 1:18). Hence, the church and Christ are one Body, the mysterious universal great man, having the same life and nature and sharing the same position and authority.

(1) Baptized in One Spirit into One Body

The first step of the believers' living in the Body of Christ is to be baptized in one Spirit into one Body. First Corinthians 12:13 says, "In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit." As the Spirit is the sphere and element of our spiritual baptism and in such a Spirit we were all baptized into one organic entity, the Body of Christ, so we should all, regardless of our races, nationalities, and social ranks, be this one Body. Christ is the life and constituent of this Body, and the Spirit is the reality of Christ. It is in this one Spirit that we were all baptized into this one living Body to express Christ.

The believers of Christ are baptized through water and in the Spirit into Christ, the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3), the name—the Person of the Triune God (Matt. 28:19), and the Body of Christ. Baptism ushers the believers into an organic union with Christ and the Triune God, making them living members of the Body of Christ.

We may talk a great deal about the baptism in the Spirit but not nearly as much about being baptized into the Body. The baptism of the Spirit is not for

individuals; it is for the Body. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 Paul clearly says, “In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” This Body is an organic entity. We know from Matthew 28:19 and Galatians 3:27 that we have been baptized into the Triune God and into Christ. The Triune God and Christ are organic and living. From Romans 6:3 we know that we have been baptized not only into Christ but also into His death. Positively, we have been baptized into the Triune God and into Christ; negatively, we have been baptized into the death of Christ. This negative aspect of baptism clears away such negative things as sin, the flesh, the self, and the old creation. The ultimate issue of baptism is that we are put into the Body.

We have been baptized into the Triune God, into Christ, into the death of Christ, and into the Body of Christ. The destination of such a baptism is not the Triune God, Christ, or the death of Christ; the destination is the Body of Christ. Our baptism begins with bringing us into the Triune God, but it ultimately leads us into the Body of Christ. Since the Body of Christ is the destination of baptism, we should remain in this destination. Today we are not only in the Triune God, in Christ, and in the death of Christ—we are in the Body of Christ, the church. The Body of Christ is our destination, and in the Body we should live, move, serve, worship, grow, act, work, and have our being.

(2) Drinking One Spirit

In 1 Corinthians 12:13 Paul tells us not only that in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body but also that we “were all given to drink one Spirit.” To be baptized in the Spirit is to get into the Spirit and be lost in Him. To drink the Spirit is to take the Spirit in and have our being saturated with Him. By these two procedures we are mingled with the Spirit. To be baptized in the Spirit is the initiation of the mingling and is once for all. To drink the Spirit is the continuation and accomplishment of the mingling and is perpetual, forever.

After being baptized in one Spirit, we need to drink of one Spirit. Let us all be immersed in this Spirit. We need to be saturated, permeated, and soaked in this Spirit. We should always live in this reality—whatever is outside of us is the Spirit, and whatever is inside of us is the Spirit. We should all be wrapped up with the Spirit in the Body.

First Corinthians 12:13 shows us where we can drink one Spirit. We drink the Spirit in the Body. If we were not in the Body, there would not be any flow, and there would not be anything to drink. The flow is in the Body. According to the book of Revelation, in eternity the flow will be in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:1-2). Today, the flow, the river, is in the Body. In one Spirit we have all been baptized into one Body to drink one Spirit. The Holy Spirit is in the Body of Christ. As long as we stay in the Body, the destination of our baptism, we may drink the Spirit. Those who are seeking the filling of the Holy Spirit should come into the Body of Christ, for here, in the Body, we drink the one Spirit who is in the Body.

To be baptized in the one Body is to experience something once for all, but to drink one Spirit is a continuing experience. We may compare baptism to a wedding and drinking to married life. The real experience of married life does not take place at the wedding. The wedding is a procedure to acknowledge the fact of marriage. The experience of married life continues day by day. The same is true of baptism and drinking. Many Christians have only the "wedding"—baptism; they do not have the "married life"—the daily drinking of one Spirit. In the Lord's recovery we have both baptism and drinking, both the wedding and the daily married life. We have the procedure to receive and accept the fact, and we have the moment-by-moment experience. Now we are in the Body to drink. In one Spirit we have all been baptized, and now we are in the Body drinking of one Spirit.

(3) Being Constituted of Christ to Be His One Body

As believers in Christ, we are being constituted of Christ to be His one Body. Not only are we baptized into one Body—we are constituted of Christ to be His Body. First Corinthians 12:12 says, "Even as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of the body being many are one body, so also is Christ." In Greek Christ here is "the Christ," referring to the corporate Christ, composed of Christ Himself as the Head and the church as His Body with all the believers as its members. All the believers of Christ are organically united with Him and constituted of His life and element to be His Body, an organism, to express Him. Hence, He is not only the Head but also the Body. As our physical body has many members, yet is one, so is this Christ.

The church can be the Body of Christ only as the members are constituted of Christ, possessing His life and nature. If we consider our physical body, we

shall realize that anything that does not have our life and nature cannot be part of our body. Just as our body is part of us, so Christ's Body, the church, is part of Him. As members of the Body, we are part of Christ, constituted of Him.

Because the reality of Christ is the Spirit, the way to be constituted of Christ to be His Body is to drink the Spirit. The Body has been formed by the baptism in the one Spirit. In one Spirit we have all been baptized into one Body. The baptism into the one Body has positioned us all to drink, and by drinking of the Spirit we are constituted to be the Body. By drinking the Spirit we experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity into our being. By drinking the Spirit we are constituted to be the Body.

The building up of the Body of Christ is a matter of constitution. The Body is an organic entity constituted of the divine element of the processed Triune God. It is through such a constitution that we become the Body of Christ. Therefore, what the Body of Christ needs is not organization but a unique constitution, a constitution which consists of the divine element wrought into our inner being through our drinking of the one Spirit. The more we drink the one Spirit, the more the divine element becomes our constituent to make us the one Body.

Like the vine tree in John 15, the church as the Body of Christ is the organism of the Triune God. Because the Body of Christ is an organism constituted of Christ, it cannot be damaged by anything or anyone. Not even the Devil can damage the Body, for it is God's constitution, God's organism. In the book of Revelation the church, the Body, as the embodiment of the Triune God, is illustrated by the golden lampstand, which signifies the embodied Triune God. The Body of Christ is a divine constitution, an organism constituted of the Person of the Triune God. We all need to see that we become the Body of Christ by being constituted of Christ.

(4) Tempered Together by God

In the Body we are being tempered together by God. In 1 Corinthians 12:23 and 24 Paul says, "Those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, these we clothe with more abundant honor, and our uncomely members have more abundant comeliness; but our comely members have no need. But God has tempered the body together, giving more abundant honor to the member that lacked." The Greek word translated "tempered" here

literally means blended; hence, mixed, compounded, adjusted. The Amplified Bible supplies several words for the word tempered in this verse—adjusted, mingled, harmonized, and subtly proportioned the parts of the whole. God has blended all the different members of Christ together into one Body. We need much transformation (Rom. 12:2), from the natural life to the spiritual, by the Spirit for the practical Body life.

To be tempered together in the Body is to be blended, mingled. By this blending we have coordination, balance, and adjustment. To temper something is to make it balanced by dealing with the extremes. For example we cannot drink water that is either boiling hot or ice cold. But if hot water is tempered with cold water, the tempered water will be the right temperature for drinking. In the local churches there are many different saints, believers with many different dispositions. Some are very spiritual; others are not so spiritual. The spiritual ones need to be tempered with those who are not spiritual. Then the spiritual ones will be spiritual in a proper way. The weaker ones are necessary to test the genuineness of our spirituality.

We should not expect every saint in the church life to be a spiritual giant. This will never be the situation in the church. According to the Bible, we all must be tempered, the hot ones with the cold ones, the quick ones with the slow ones, and the spiritual ones with those who are not spiritual. In the proper church life there will always be the weaker members, the less honorable members, and the comely members. Nevertheless, because all are being tempered together, these are not three divisions.

The Body is built up with all the different members: the comely ones, the less honorable ones, and the weaker ones. This does not mean, however, that all the different members are arranged in distinct groups. No, all are blended together so that the Body may be tempered. When we are tempered, the uncomely ones share comeliness with the comely ones, and the weaker ones are nourished and supported by the stronger ones. Then we have the Body.

Without being tempered together in the Body, there is no way for us to be built up together. Without tempering, a quick person cannot go along with a slow one, and there cannot be any building between them. Without being tempered, we cannot be coordinated with others. A quick person and a slow person cannot be coordinated unless both of them are willing to be tempered. There is no way for two believers to be one in a practical way without being tempered. In our experience many times the tempering comes out of practical

situations in working together in coordination. In practical work together such as this there are many lessons for us to learn. The church life is a life of being tempered all the time. God has not only set the members in the Body; He has tempered the Body together.

In the church life we have those of all colors, races, nationalities, and social rank. Nevertheless, we are one Body. This is possible only through God's tempering of the members of the Body. God tempers us together by the inner life and through His indwelling.

Whatever the Lord does in the Body is a matter of His dispensing. Hence, the tempering of the Body is a matter of the divine dispensing of the divine Trinity. The more God tempers us, the more He adjusts us and balances us, the more He dispenses Himself into us. Balancing, adjusting, coordinating, tempering—all are related to the divine dispensing of the processed Triune God into our being.

(5) Caring for One Another

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul is tempering the Body. If we read this chapter carefully, we shall see that to temper the Body is to uplift the inferior ones and lower the superior ones, to encourage the weaker ones, and to adorn the uncomely ones with more honor. Furthermore, to temper the Body is to practice mutual care. In all the churches we need to uplift the inferior ones and somewhat limit the superior ones. We need to strengthen and encourage the weaker ones and to adorn the uncomely ones. If along with all this we practice mutual care, we shall have the Body in a practical way.

God has tempered the Body together, giving more abundant honor to the member that lacks so that "there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another " (1 Cor. 12:25). In the Body life the same care should be given to all the different members. Differences in care cause divisions. Therefore, in the Body we need to have a mutual care for one another.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SIXTY-FIVE

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (49)

In the progressing stage of God's full salvation, the believers experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity corporately by living in the Body of Christ. We have covered certain aspects of this living that are found in 1 Corinthians 12. In this message we shall cover other aspects that are found in Romans 12.

(6) Being Members One of Another

Romans 12:5 says, "We, being many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another." The phrase "in Christ" is very significant, for it indicates the believers' organic union with Christ. The phrase "in Christ" always implies the thought or the fact that we are organically one with Christ, that we have a life union with Him. We were born in Adam, but we have been transplanted into Christ. Because we have been organically united with Christ, we have been planted into Christ's Body organically. Now, in Christ, we have an organic union with the Body of Christ, and we are organic parts of the Body.

In the organic union with Christ there is life. This life joins us not only to Christ but to all the members of Christ. The Body of Christ is altogether a matter of life that keeps us in an organic union with Christ. When we remain in this organic union, we are in the Body. But if we do not remain in this organic union, we are out of the Body. The actuality of the Body is in or remaining in the organic union with Christ. If we would live in the Body, we must stay in the organic union with Christ. In other words, we must remain in Christ. The more we stay in the organic union with Christ, the more in actuality we are living in the Body of Christ.

The Body life is a corporate life. We can realize this by considering our physical body, which is a corporate entity composed of many members, all of which have their life and function in the body. If a member becomes separate or detached from the body, it loses its life and function. This indicates that no member of the body can be independent of the body or become individualistic. The principle is the same with the Body of Christ. None of us as members of the Body is a complete entity; rather, each of us is a member of the Body. Therefore, we need to remain in the Body for life and function.

Romans 12 reveals the importance of the practice of the Body life. Verse 5 reveals that we are members of one another in one Body. We, being many, are one Body, one entity. In the Body we can function and express Christ in a corporate way. We are many members, not many separate units. As members, we need to coordinate with each other so that we may be a living, functioning Body. If we do not cooperate with each other, then we are detached members, and the Body life cannot be realized in a practical way.

In 12:5 Paul tells us that we are "severally members one of another." The word "severally" here does not mean separately; it means differently. This word indicates that we are different kinds of members of the Body. Hence, we are severally members one of another.

(7) By Presenting Their Bodies as a Living Sacrifice

The believers live in the Body of Christ by presenting their bodies as a living sacrifice. In Romans 12:1 Paul says, "I beg you therefore, brothers, through the compassions of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, well-pleasing to God, which is your most reasonable service." In order to have the Body life, we need to have our body presented both to the Lord and to the Body. We should present our body to the Lord for the Body. In His salvation the Lord has released our body from the usurping hand of the enemy, Satan. Now, in the organic union with Christ, we need to present our released body to the Lord for the Body life.

Presenting our bodies to God is the practical side of consecration. Because our being exists in the body, we must present the body so that our whole being may be given over to God in a practical way. Many believers have a heart to consecrate themselves, but because their physical body has not been offered, their consecration is useless. Real consecration means that our body has been presented; it is neither a mere desire nor a verbal yieldedness, but a giving of ourselves entirely and practically to God.

In 12:1 Paul begs us to present our bodies a living sacrifice. In 6:13 and 19 he encourages us to present the members of our body as weapons for fighting and as servants for serving because Romans 6 is a matter of warfare and service. However, the Body life is a matter of sacrifice, a matter of offering ourselves to God for His satisfaction. The Body life as a whole is an offering for the satisfaction of God. Although many bodies are presented, the sacrifice

is one. Because the many members are one Body and the many believers are one church, the many bodies presented to the Lord for the Body are one sacrifice.

Paul says that this sacrifice is a living sacrifice. Here Paul is comparing this sacrifice with the sacrifices of the Old Testament. The sacrifices offered in Old Testament days were all slain, but the Body life is not a slain offering; it is a living offering full of Christ as life. Romans 8 reveals that the believers should be filled with Christ as the life-giving Spirit. Now in Romans 12 the believers are encouraged to offer themselves as a sacrifice to God, as a living offering filled with the Spirit of life.

Furthermore, this sacrifice is holy. This means that the presenting of our bodies as a living sacrifice is separate from common things and possesses God's nature. God is holy, absolutely different and separate from all other things. God's holy nature has been wrought into the members of the Body of Christ. Hence, the Body also is holy and unique. Nothing common can be brought into it.

(8) Through Transformation by the Renewing of Their Mind, Not Conformed to This Age, to Know the Will of God

Romans 12 indicates that after our body has been presented to the Lord for His Body, we need to be transformed in our soul by the renewing of the mind so that we may prove the will of God, which is to have a body for Christ produced out of the organic union. In verse 2 Paul says, "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, that you may prove by testing what the will of God is, that which is good and well-pleasing and perfect." The mind, the main part of the soul, represents our soul. Therefore, in verse 2 transformation refers to the transformation of the soul for the Body life. The body needs to be presented, and the soul needs to be transformed. To practice the Body life, we first must have our body offered to God. Then we need to have our soul transformed by the renewing of the mind.

Transformation does not merely denote a change; it means that a substance is changed both in nature and in form. This kind of change is a metabolic change. It is not merely an outward change; it is a change in inward constitution as well as in external form. This kind of change takes place by the process of metabolism. In metabolism an organic element comes into our being and produces a chemical change in our organic life. This chemical

reaction changes the constitution of our being from one form into another. This is transformation.

To be transformed is to have Christ added into our being to replace what we are so that Christ may increase and our natural life may decrease. As the process of transformation takes place within us, the old element of our natural being is carried away and the new element—the resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit—is added into us to replace the natural element. We need to be deeply impressed with the fact that this transformation is a metabolic process, a metabolic change, that involves our whole being—life, nature, essence, element, form, and appearance. Transformation is not outward correction or adjustment; transformation is an inward, metabolic change of our being. Therefore, we may define transformation as a divine, spiritual metabolism wherein a new element is added to the old to discharge the old and to produce something new.

According to Romans 12:2, we are transformed by the renewing of the mind. It is quite possible for us to be regenerated in the spirit but still be old in the mind. If our mind remains old, we are not being transformed in the soul, and there is no change in our thinking. However, if our mind is renewed, our soul will be transformed.

The mind in Romans 12 is different from the mind in Romans 7 and 8. In Romans 7 the mind is alone, acting independently. In Romans 8 the mind is dependent, being set on the spirit. The mind, however, should not only be dependent—set on the spirit—but also renewed. For this reason, 12:2 tells us that we need a renewed mind.

The mind is renewed not only by outward teachings but by the element of Christ being added to it. As the Lord Jesus spreads Himself from our spirit into our mind, our mind is renewed. Then by the renewing of the mind our soul is metabolically changed. After we are renewed in the mind, we shall automatically be renewed in the emotion and in the will, for the mind adjusts the emotion and the will is influenced by the mind. Furthermore, if our mind is saturated and occupied by the Lord, He will certainly take over our emotion and possess our will. This is the reason Paul tells us that the transformation of the soul is by the renewing of the mind.

In 12:2 Paul charges us not to be conformed to this age but to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. The age is the present, practical world life, which is in opposition to and is a substitute for the Body life. The

entire world is a satanic system, and an age is part of this world system. We cannot touch the world unless we touch the present age of the world. To be conformed to this age means to adopt the modern fashions outwardly; to be transformed is to have an organic element wrought into our being to produce a metabolic change inwardly. Because the present age opposes the church, we must not be conformed to this age. If we want to live in the Body of Christ, we should not follow this age nor be conformed to it.

We need the renewal of our mind and the transformation of our soul so that we "may prove by testing what the will of God is, that which is good and well-pleasing and perfect." Here the will of God does not refer to the matter of our personal human situation such as marriage, employment, and housing. According to Romans 12, the will of God is to have the Body life. As we are transformed by the renewing of the mind, we prove, discern, the will of God to have the Body.

(9) By Being Burning in Their Spirit, Not Slothful in Zeal, to Serve the Lord as a Slave

Romans 12:11 says, "Not slothful in zeal, burning in spirit, serving the Lord as a slave." This refers to the exercise of the human spirit, the mingled spirit, for the Body life. If we would live the Body life in a practical way, our spirit must be burned and burning, on fire all the time. For the Body life our spirit must be set on fire.

For the Body life we need a body that is presented, a mind that is renewed in the transformation of the soul, and a spirit that is burning. Our whole tripartite being—spirit, soul, body—is therefore included in the Body life. For the sake of the Body life our body needs to be presented, our soul needs to be transformed, and our mind needs to be metabolically changed. Our mind must be renewed, not simply by being taught but by being transformed, having the element of Christ spread into it to produce a metabolic change. The transformation of our soul primarily depends on the renewing of our mind. If we are serious about practicing the Body life, we need to present our body, we need to have our soul transformed, and we need to be burned and burning in our spirit. If we have a heart for the Body life but fail to present our body to the Lord for His Body, we are impractical. However, we may present our body, but our mind may be filled with old concepts, thoughts, and

traditions. Such an unrenewed mind is a great problem to the Body. Hence, after our body has been presented, our mind must be renewed. In addition, our spirit must be burning. Suppose, by the Lord's mercy, our body has been presented and our mind has been renewed, but our spirit remains cold. That will not work for the Body life. After the presenting of the body and the renewing of the mind, we need the burning of the spirit.

We long to see that all the saints in the Lord's recovery would have three characteristics: a body that has been absolutely presented for the Body life; a mind that has been completely renewed by metabolic transformation in the soul, a mind that is free from worldly, natural, and religious thoughts, wholly saturated with the Lord's mind and purely for the Lord; and a spirit that is set on fire. If all the saints in the Lord's recovery are like this, how wonderful the Body life will be.

Both in Romans 8, which speaks of the dispensing of the divine Trinity into the tripartite man, and in Romans 12, which speaks of the Body life, Paul mentions the body, the mind, and the spirit. Paul's word concerning the body, the soul, and the spirit in these chapters links chapter eight to chapter twelve. This indicates that the enjoyment of the divine dispensing in Romans 8 issues in the Body life in Romans 12. This matter is very experiential. If we do not have the adequate experience of what is revealed in chapter eight and do not enjoy the divine dispensing of the divine Trinity into the three parts of our being, we shall not realize the Body of Christ in a practical way. Rather, the teaching concerning the Body will merely be a doctrine to us, and our talk regarding the Body will be vain. But when we experience and enjoy the divine dispensing in Romans 8, a dispensing that involves our body, soul, and spirit, this experience and enjoyment will issue in the realization of the Body life in chapter twelve. The more we enjoy the dispensing of the Trinity into our tripartite being, the more we desire to be in the Body. The enjoyment of the dispensing of the processed Triune God makes us living members of the Body of Christ in a practical way.

(10) By Functioning in Different Gifts

The believers practice the Body life also by functioning in different gifts. We need to realize that the many members of the one Body (Rom. 12:4-5) have different functions. If we realize this, we shall not think too highly of ourselves but shall respect others. We should be able to say to one another,

“What I can do, you cannot do, and what you can do, I cannot do.” We all have different functions.

Paul lists a number of different functions in Romans 12:6-8. “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them accordingly: whether prophecy, according to the proportion of faith; or service, in the service; or he who teaches, in teaching; or he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, in simplicity; he who leads, in diligence; he who shows mercy, in cheerfulness.” In verse 6 Paul says that the gifts we have “differ according to the grace given to us.” Grace is God in Christ as our life and our enjoyment. This means that grace is the divine element coming into our being to be our life for our enjoyment. Grace is not outward; it is the element of the divine life which is wrought into our being and which gives us some skill or ability. When this grace, the divine element, which is the divine life, comes into our being, it brings with it certain skills and abilities, and these are the gifts. Therefore, the gifts, the spiritual abilities, come from the divine element which we have enjoyed. As we enjoy the processed Triune God, receiving and assimilating His divine element into us, out of this element proceeds some gift, skill, or ability. These gifts differ according to the divine element which we have enjoyed and which we have assimilated into. our being. The grace given to us refers to the grace we have enjoyed and assimilated. Since the gifts in 12:6-8 are according to the grace given to us, these gifts are of grace in life.

The fact that the gifts in Romans 12 are according to grace means that these gifts are granted according to the measure of life. If we have enjoyed the life of God to a high degree, we shall receive a higher gift. However, if our enjoyment of the life of God is limited, our gift also will be limited, for the measure of our gift is limited by the extent to which we have enjoyed the divine life as grace within us. The gifts enumerated in 12:6-8 are not miraculous gifts which come to us suddenly. On the contrary, the gifts here may be compared to the abilities of the members of our human body. The measure of ability depends on the amount of life in the body. If the body is mature with considerable growth of life and with a great amount of life, it will have an abundant overflow of life, and this overflow of the inner life of the body will produce abilities. These abilities resemble the gifts in Romans 12. All the items included in 12:6-8 are gifts of grace in life and include prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, and showing mercy.

The first gift mentioned by Paul in Romans 12 is prophecy, which is according to the proportion of faith. Prophecy in Romans 12 does not mainly

denote prediction. Even in the Bible as a whole, the word "prophesy" does not mainly mean to predict. In both the Old and New Testaments to prophesy means to tell for, that is, to speak for others; to tell forth, that is, to speak things forth; and to foretell, that is, to predict, to speak things before they happen. The main idea of prophecy in Romans 12 is not prediction but speaking for God and speaking God forth under His direct inspiration.

The word "service" in 12:7 denotes the service of deacons and deaconesses in the local churches (Rom. 16:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-13; Phil. 1:1). As serving ones, the deacons and deaconesses need a serving spirit and a serving attitude. The practice of the Body life needs this kind of service.

After referring to the service of the deacons and deaconesses, Paul goes on to say, "He who teaches, in teaching; or he who exhorts, in exhortation." Whereas prophesying is to speak for the Lord according to the revelation He has imparted and under His direct inspiration, teaching is the speaking based on prophesying. In the Body life some brothers take what is given in others' prophesying and teach the saints according to it. This is teaching. Exhortation is based both on prophecy and teaching. Based on the direct speaking under God's inspiration and the teaching according to this inspiration, certain ones in the Body may exhort. This is exhortation. Prophesying, teaching, and exhorting are three kinds of speaking for the building up of the Body; they minister the life supply to the saints so that they may grow together by God's word.

The ability to give in simplicity is also a gift of grace in life. This denotes the giving which supplies and takes care of the needy ones in the church. In the Body life we need those who are able to impart material possessions to help the needy ones, to speed the Lord's work, and to care for the church's practical needs. We need many saints with such a measure of life that they may have the giving gift and be able to give in simplicity.

In 12:8 "he who leads" signifies the leading brothers in the church. The first quality of leadership is diligence. A leading brother, that is, an elder, needs to be diligent in everything and in every way all the time. The elders' ability, function, and gift in taking the lead depend on their diligence.

According to verse 8, the ability in life to show mercy is also a gift. To show mercy in cheerfulness is not a matter of natural generosity. To show mercy in cheerfulness is a quality that is formed in us by transformation. As we grow in the life of Christ and come to love the Lord more, a certain quality will be

formed in us, and we shall be burdened to take care of others and show mercy to the unworthy ones. This is not a characteristic of our natural birth; it is a quality developed in us by our growth in life through the process of transformation. Hence, showing mercy is also one of the gifts in life.

The gifts mentioned in 12:6-8 are all necessary for the practicing of the Body life. In the Body life we first need the speaking for God under His direct inspiration. Based on this inspired speaking we may have the teaching, and based upon both prophesying and teaching we may have exhortation. Along with this we have the leadership of the elders and the service of the deacons. In addition, we have those who are able to give material things to the church, care for the needy, and further the Lord's work. Finally, there are those who show mercy to others. These seven gifts are adequate for practicing the Body life.

(11) By Living a Life of the Highest Virtues of the Divine Life and Love

Finally, the believers live in the Body of Christ by living a life of the highest virtues of the divine life and love (Rom. 12:9-10, 12-21). In the Body life we first should have love toward others. In verse 9 Paul says, "Let love be without hypocrisy," and in verse 10 he continues, "Love one another warmly in brotherly love." We need the Holy Spirit to work in us and to give us an amount of transformation in love that we may practice love toward others. Love is not merely an outward behavior; love is the expression of life. Trying to love without the supply of life does not work. In order to love others, we need the life supply and the transformation in life. Our natural life is not a life of God's love. We need to be transformed in life that we may have God's nature of love to love others.

In verse 10 Paul speaks of "vying with one another in showing honor," and in verse 13, of "communicating to the needs of the saints, pursuing hospitality." In the matter of showing honor we must move quickly and be the first to show honor to others. Furthermore, we need to communicate to the needs of the saints and to pursue hospitality.

In verse 15 Paul says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." In order to rejoice and weep with others, we need to be transformed. This indicates that in the Body life we need to be emotional in a proper way, able both to rejoice and to weep with others.

In verse 16 Paul admonishes us saying, “Be of the same mind toward one another, not minding high things, but being led away to the lowly. Do not be wise in yourselves.” We should not be so high but be led away to lowly things. We should seek to be led away to whatever is lowly.

In addition to the virtues that we need to have toward others, Paul also mentions virtues that we should have toward ourselves. Verse 12 says, “Rejoicing in hope, enduring in tribulation, persevering in prayer.” As believers, we should be a rejoicing people because we have the enjoyment of the Lord. If we enjoy the Lord in His riches, we shall not only be joyful inwardly, but we shall be rejoicing outwardly. Even in times of trouble we shall be able to rejoice in hope. We should also be able to endure tribulation. By rejoicing in hope we are able to endure tribulation. However, in order to endure tribulation, we also need to be persevering in prayer. Praying persistently will enable us not only to endure tribulation but also to remain in the enjoyment of the Lord, in His presence and in His will.

In addition, as God’s holy people we need to “abhor what is evil” (v. 9), “conquer the evil with the good” (v. 21), and “cleave to what is good” (v. 9). We Christians, who are separated unto God, must maintain the highest standard of behavior, a standard above that of moral and ethical people.

Paul also indicates that we need to live a life of the highest virtues of the divine life and love even in relation to our persecutors and enemies. He says, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse” (v. 14). No matter how others may treat us, our mouths should express only blessing, not cursing. How the Lord blessed us when we were His enemies! Now we should bless our enemies and persecutors in the same way.

In verse 17a Paul says, “Repaying no one evil for evil.” Under the law it was eye for eye and tooth for tooth. Today we are not under law but under grace. Therefore, instead of paying evil for evil, we should repay good for evil, as the Lord has done to us.

In verse 19 Paul goes on to say, “Not avenging yourselves, beloved, but giving place to the wrath of God, for it is written, Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” As we are practicing the Body life, living a life of the highest virtues of the divine life in love, we should not avenge ourselves in any way. Instead, we should be willing to suffer people’s wrongdoing and the loss of everything. We should leave the entire situation in the sovereign hand of

the Lord and give Him the place to do whatever He likes according to His sovereignty.

In verse 20 Paul continues by saying, “But if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty give him a drink; for in doing this you will heap coals of fire upon his head.” This is actually loving our enemies. Our love to them will be coals of fire heaped upon their heads to turn them to the Lord.

Romans 12:18 says, “If possible, as far as it depends on you, living in peace with all men.” We need to live in peace with others, as far as it depends on us to do so. Sometimes it is not possible to live in peace with all men because the other parties are not willing to have a life of peace. In such a situation there is nothing we can do. Therefore, Paul says that we should live in peace with all men “if possible.”

In 12:17b Paul gives us a general word: “Taking forethought for things honorable in the sight of all men.” We should be very thoughtful before all men about honorable things, and we should be thoughtful beforehand. In order to keep from offending others we should not oppose anything that is honorable. Because we are living not only before God but also before men, we need to take forethought for things honorable in the sight of men.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SIXTY-SIX

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (50)

We have seen that the believers experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity corporately by entering into the kingdom of God, by living in the church, and by living in the Body of Christ. In this message we shall see that, in the progressing stage of God's full salvation, the believers experience this dispensing also by putting on the new man.

d. Putting On the New Man

The believers experience the dispensing of the processed Triune God corporately by putting on the new man (Eph. 4:22-24). The new man is of Christ. It is His Body, created in Him on the cross (2:15-16). It is not individual but corporate (Col. 3:10-11).

The book of Ephesians first reveals that the church is the Body of Christ (1:22-23), the kingdom of God, the household of God (2:19), and the temple, the dwelling place of God (2:21-22). Then in 4:24 this book reveals further that the church is the new man. The Greek word for church, ekklesia, means those called out for a gathering; hence, an assembly. This is the initial aspect of the church. From this, Paul goes on to the aspects of fellow citizens of the kingdom of God and members of the household of God. These are higher than the initial aspect, but not as high as the aspect of the church as the Body of Christ. Yet the new man is still higher than the Body of Christ. Thus, the church is not just an assembly of believers, a kingdom of heavenly citizens, a household of God's children, nor even a Body for Christ. In an even higher aspect the church is a new man to accomplish God's eternal purpose. As the Body of Christ, the church needs Christ as its life, but as the new man the church needs Christ as its person. This new corporate person should live a life as Jesus lived on earth, that is, a life of truth, expressing God and causing God to be realized as the reality by man.

We need to put on the new man who has already been created in Christ (Eph. 2:15). Christ created the one new man, the church, with God's nature wrought into humanity. This action was something new. In the old creation God did not work His nature into any of His creatures, not even into man. In

the creation of the one new man, however, God's nature has been wrought into man to make His nature one entity with humanity.

The phrase "in Himself" in Ephesians 2:15 is very significant. It indicates that Christ was not only the Creator of the one new man, the church, but also the sphere in which and the essence with which the one new man was created. Christ is the very element of the new man. Nothing of our old man was good for the creation of the new man, for our former essence was sinful. But in Christ there is a wonderful essence, in which the one new man has been created. This new man, which is the church, is corporate and universal. There are many believers, but there is only one new man in the universe. All the believers are components of this one corporate and universal new man.

As those who have been saved and regenerated, we now must put off the old man and put on the new man. Although the new man has already been created, we still need to put him on. However, few believers know how to put off the old man, much less how to put on the new man. We may think that to put off the old man is to put off the old nature or the old self and that to put on the new man is to put on the new nature. This concept is utterly mistaken. Since the new man in 2:15 is a corporate man, the new man in 4:24 must also be corporate. According to 4:24, we need to put on the very new man that has already been created in Christ.

(1) By Putting Off the Old Man with Its Corrupted Living in the Lusts of the Deceit

The believers put on the new man by putting off the old man with its corrupted living in the lusts of the deceit. Ephesians 4:22 says, "That you have put off, as regards your former manner of life, the old man, which is being corrupted according to the lusts of the deceit." The old man is of Adam, created by God but fallen through sin. This old man was crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6) and was buried in baptism (Rom. 6:4a).

In Ephesians 4:22 the article before the word "deceit" is emphatic and indicates that the word deceit is personified. Hence, deceit refers to the deceiver, the Devil, from whom are the lusts of the corrupted old man. The old man is corrupted according to the lusts of the Devil, the deceiving one. Outwardly the manner of life of the old man is a walk in the vanity of the

mind (v. 17). Inwardly, the old man is corrupted according to the lusts of the Devil, the lusts of the deceit.

To put off the old man is not merely to put off the old nature; it is to put off the old way of life, the former way of living. Our old way of living was not entirely an individualistic way of life, for it involved our social life, our community life. No human being can be altogether individualistic. Human nature is inherently social. To be a human being is to live in society and to have some kind of community life. Therefore, in particular, to put off the old man is to put off our worldly social relationships. A believer who continues to live in his old social relationships is still living the life of the old man. The living of the old man is mainly in social relationships. Hence, to put off the old man means not only to put off the self of the old man but also his worldly social relationships.

The Lord's intention today is not simply to gather us together but to cause us to put off the life of the old man. We must put off not only our old nature, but also our former manner of life. Our way of life must become absolutely new in nature, manner, and practice. The church life is the daily living of the new man in the new nature and manner.

(2) By the Renewing in the Spirit of Their Mind

The believers put on the new man by the renewing in the spirit of their mind. In Ephesians 4:23 Paul says that we are being renewed in the spirit of our mind. To be renewed is for our transformation to the image of Christ (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). The spirit in verse 23 is the regenerated spirit of the believers mingled with the indwelling Spirit of God. Such a mingled spirit spreads into our mind, thus becoming the spirit of our mind. It is in such a spirit that we are renewed for our transformation. In this way our natural mind is conquered, subdued, and put under the spirit. This, of course, implies a process of metabolic transformation. As this process takes place, the mingled spirit enters our mind, takes over our mind, and becomes the spirit of our mind.

By the spirit of the mind we are renewed to fulfill in experience what was accomplished in the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man through baptism. The putting off of the old man and the putting on of

the new man are actually accomplished facts. Now we need to experience and realize these facts by being renewed in the spirit of our mind.

The way to put on the new man is for our spirit, which is mingled with the Spirit, to become the spirit of our mind. Our mind dominates and directs our whole being. For the spirit to become the spirit of our mind means that the spirit directs, controls, dominates, and possesses our mind. Instead of our mind being the mind of our spirit, our spirit should be the spirit of our mind. If the mind is the mind of the spirit, it means that our mind dominates, controls, and directs our spirit. But if our spirit is the spirit of our mind, it means that our spirit dominates, controls, and directs our mind. When the spirit directs our mind, it governs our whole being. When this is the case, our being is under the control of the spirit. It is in this spirit of our mind that we are renewed, and by means of this spirit we put on the new man experientially.

We need to see that the new man has already been created and, by regeneration, has been put into our spirit. The need now is for our spirit to become the dominant part of our being. This means that our spirit mingled with the Spirit of God must become the spirit of our mind. If our spirit is the spirit of our mind, then all our living will be by the spirit. Whatever we do will be according to the spirit. This spirit of our mind will then become the renewing spirit. As we are renewed by this spirit, we put on the new man.

How much in experience we put on the new man depends on how much our spirit directs our being. Therefore, experientially speaking, putting on the new man does not take place once for all. On the contrary, it is a life-long matter, a gradual process that goes on throughout our Christian life. When we were regenerated, the new man, created with Christ as the divine essence, was put into our spirit. Now day by day we need to put on this new man by permitting the spirit to control our being and renew our mind. Every time part of our being is renewed, we put on a little more of the new man. Hence, the more we are renewed through the spirit controlling our mind, the more of the new man we put on. Eventually, this process of putting on the new man will be completed.

(3) According to God in His Image Who Created the New Man in Righteousness and Holiness of the Truth

Ephesians 4:24 says that we "have put on the new man, which according to God was created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." The old man was created according to the image of God outwardly without God's life and nature (Gen. 1:26-27). But the new man was created according to God Himself inwardly, with God's life and nature.

Because the new man has been created in Christ and with Christ according to God, the new man bears the image of God. Eventually, the new man will bear the image of God in holiness and righteousness of the reality.

Ephesians 4:24 tells us that the new man was created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Righteousness is being right with God and with man according to God's righteous way, whereas holiness is being separated unto God from anything common and being saturated with God's holy nature. Outwardly everything related to the new man is righteous, and inwardly everything related to the new man is holy.

In 4:24 righteousness signifies God's deeds, and holiness signifies His being. Whatever God does is righteous, and whatever God is, is holy. The new man is created according to God in both of these respects.

The righteousness and holiness of the new man are of "the truth." The article before "truth" in verse 24 is emphatic. As the deceit in verse 22, related to the old man, is the personification of Satan, so truth here, related to the new man, is the personification of God. This truth was exhibited in the life of Jesus, as mentioned in verse 21. In the life of Jesus righteousness and holiness of truth were always being manifested. It was in the righteousness and holiness of this truth, which is God realized and expressed, that the new man was created.

Dean Alford says that in 4:24 truth denotes the very essence of God, for God is truth. This is in contrast to the lusts of the deceit mentioned in verse 22. Deceit is the essence of Satan, who is a liar, but truth is the essence of God, who is truth. Thus, the lusts are of Satan, who is the deceit, whereas righteousness and holiness are of God, who is the truth. M. R. Vincent points out that in these verses deceit and truth should be personified. The new man is created according to God in righteousness and holiness, two aspects of God's essence.

Colossians 3:10 says that the new man "is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him." The image here

refers to Christ, God's Beloved, as the expression of God (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3a). It was God the Creator who created the new man in Christ (Eph. 2:15).

Whereas Ephesians 4:24 says that the new man was created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the truth, Colossians 3:10 says that the new man is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him. The image of God in Colossians 3:10 is the righteousness and holiness of the truth in Ephesians 4:24. Christ is the image of God and the embodiment of God (Col. 1:15; 2:9). When He was on earth, He was a man who was righteous and holy and full of love and light. This was God's image expressed in a man. Today the church as the new man bears the image of God; that is, the new man bears God's righteousness and holiness and also His love and light.

Ephesians 4:24 indicates that the new man was created according to God directly. But Colossians 3:10 reveals that the new man is being renewed unto full knowledge, which is according to the image of God. Because the new man was created according to God, in a very real sense it is the same as God. Nevertheless, in our experience the new man must be renewed unto the full knowledge, that is according to the image, the expression, of God who created him. The creation of the new man according to God has already been completed, but in our experience the new man is renewed unto full knowledge little by little. In this way the new man experienced by us becomes the expression of God.

The more we are renewed in the spirit of our mind, the more the new man with the divine element will spread from our spirit into our soul. This spreading within us is according to Christ, who is the image of God, God's expression. The more renewing that takes place in our soul, the more we shall be able to express God. In other words, the more renewing we experience in the soul, the more we shall have of the image of Christ.

(4) Having Christ as All the Members and in All the Members, Leaving No Room for Race, Religion, Culture, or Social Status

The new man has Christ as all the members and in all the members, leaving no room for race, religion, culture, or social status. After referring to the new man in Colossians 3:10, Paul goes on to say in verse 11, "Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian,

slave, freeman, but Christ is all and in all." The word "where," referring to the new man in verse 10, means in the new man. There is no natural person in the new man. Furthermore, there is no possibility, no room, for any natural person. Vincent says that in the Greek language the words rendered "cannot be" are very strong and mean that there is no possibility. In the new man there cannot be Greeks, who are for philosophical wisdom, and Jews, who are for miraculous signs (1 Cor. 1:22). There cannot be circumcision and uncircumcision. Circumcision refers to the observers of the Jewish religious ritual; uncircumcision refers to those who do not care for the Jewish religion. Furthermore, in the new man there cannot be barbarian, Scythian, slave, or freeman. A barbarian is an uncultured person, the Scythians were considered the most barbarous people, the slaves were those sold into slavery, and the freemen were those who had been freed from slavery. In the new man there is room only for Christ, not for any kind of natural person.

In the new man "Christ is all and in all." In the new man there is room only for Christ. He is all the members of the new man and in all the members. He is everything in the new man. Actually, He is the new man. In the new man Christ is the centrality and universality.

The word "all" in verse 11 refers to all the members who make up the new man. Christ is all these members, and He is in all the members. Because Christ is all the members of the new man, there is no room in the new man for any race, nationality, culture, or social status. For us to experience the reality of Christ being all the members of the new man, we need to take Christ as our life and person and live Him, not ourselves. If Christ is the living of all the saints, then in reality only He will be in the new man. When all the saints, whatever their nationality may be, live Christ, then in a way that is real and practical, Christ will be all the members of the new man. Christ will be you, and Christ will be me. Because we all live Christ, not ourselves, Christ will be all of us, every member of the new man.

In 3:11 Paul says not only that Christ is all but also that He is in all. On the one hand, Christ is all the members; on the other hand, He is in all the members. We may wonder what need there was for Paul to say that Christ is in all. If Paul did not say that Christ is in all, only that He is all, we may think that in the new man Christ is needed and that we are not needed. We should not think that, because Christ is all the members in the new man, we are nothing and are not needed. On the one hand, the Bible does say that in the new man there is no place for the natural person because Christ is all the

members. Nevertheless, Paul says that Christ is in the members. The fact that Christ is in the members of the new man indicates that the members continue to exist.

When we take Christ as our life and person and live together with Him, we shall have the sense deep within that we are one with Christ and that Christ is us. But simultaneously we shall have an even deeper sense that Christ is in us. Therefore, it is true to say that Christ is both in us and that He is us. We are part of the new man with Christ in us. We continue to exist, but we do not exist without Christ; we are those indwelt by Christ. In the new man Christ is everyone, and He is also in everyone.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SIXTY-SEVEN

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (51)

In this message we shall see that in the progressing stage of God's full salvation, the stage of transformation, the believers experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity corporately also by wrestling against the Devil and his spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies (Eph. 6:10-20).

e. Wrestling against the Devil and His Spiritual Forces of Evil in the Heavenlies

In Ephesians 1:1 to 6:9 we have the revelation on the positive side concerning the church for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. In 6:10-20 we see that, on the negative side, the church is a warrior to defeat God's enemy, the Devil and his spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies. In verse 11 Paul refers to the stratagems of the Devil, and then in verse 12 he explains, "Our wrestling is not against blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies." "Blood and flesh" refers to human beings. Behind men of blood and flesh are the evil forces of the Devil, fighting against God's purpose. Hence, our wrestling, our fighting, must not be against men but against the evil spiritual forces in the heavenlies. The principalities, the authorities, and the world-rulers of this darkness are the rebellious angels who followed Satan in his rebellion against God and who now rule in the heavenlies over the nations of the world. "This darkness" refers to today's world, which is fully under the dark ruling of the Devil through his evil angels. The world-rulers of this darkness are the princes Satan has set up to rule the various nations. Because of the working of Satan, who is the authority of darkness, the earth and its atmosphere have become "this darkness."

In verse 12 Paul also speaks of "the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies." Here the heavenlies refer to the air (2:2). Satan and his spiritual forces of evil are in the air, but we are seated in the third heaven above them (2:6). Therefore, Satan and his evil forces are under us, and their fate is to be defeated by us.

We need to realize that our warfare is not against human beings but against the evil spirits, the spiritual powers in the heavenlies. Thus, the warfare between the church and Satan is a battle between us who love the Lord and who are in His church and the evil powers in the heavenlies. We must fight against these spiritual forces.

(1) Empowered in the Lord and in the Might of His Strength

In Ephesians 6:10 Paul says, "Be empowered in the Lord and in the might of His strength." The Greek word rendered "empowered" here has the same root as the word "power" in 1:19. To deal with God's enemy, to fight against the evil forces of darkness, we need to be empowered with the power that raised up Christ from the dead and seated Him in the heavens, far above all the evil spirits in the air. First we are empowered by the power that raised Christ from among the dead and made Him to be the Head over all things, and then we know God's might and strength.

In 6:10 we are charged to be empowered "in the Lord." The fact that we are to be empowered in the Lord indicates that in the spiritual warfare against Satan and his evil kingdom we can fight only in the Lord, not in ourselves. Whenever we are in ourselves, we are defeated.

(2) Putting on the Whole Armor of God to Stand against the Stratagems of the Devil

In Ephesians 6:11 Paul says, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the stratagems of the Devil." To fight the spiritual warfare we need not only the power of the Lord but also the armor of God. Our weapons do not avail, but God's armor, even the whole armor of God, does.

The whole armor of God is for the entire Body, not for any individual member of the Body. The church is a corporate warrior, and the believers together make up this unique warrior. Only the corporate warrior can wear the whole armor of God; no individual believer can wear it. Therefore, we must fight the spiritual warfare not individually but in the Body.

The charge to put on the whole armor of God is an imperative, a command. God has provided the armor for us, but He does not put it on for us. Rather,

we ourselves must put on the armor God has provided. For this, we need to be empowered. Although God can empower us, we still must exercise our will to cooperate with Him. In the same principle, we must cooperate with God's command to put on the armor.

We need to put on the armor of God so that we "may be able to stand." In Ephesians 6 the word "stand" is crucial. To sit with Christ (2:6) is to participate in all His accomplishments; to walk in His Body (4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15) is to fulfill God's eternal purpose; and to stand in His power is to fight against God's enemy.

By putting on the whole armor of God we are able to stand against "the stratagems of the Devil." These stratagems are the Devil's evil plans. Not only does the Devil have an evil will, but he also has subtle stratagems to work out his will. Even now Satan is busily working and plotting to carry out his evil, subtle stratagems.

Ephesians 6:13 says, "Take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." In verse 11 we are told to put on the armor of God, and in verse 13 we are charged to take it up. The armor of God has been prepared and provided by God for us, but we need to take it up and put it on; that is, we need to use and apply God's provision. Some items of the armor, such as the sword and the shield, we take up. But other items, such as the breastplate, the helmet, and the shoes, we put on. Whether we put on the whole armor of God or take it up, we must exercise our will in a strong way to apply God's provision.

In verses 11 and 13 Paul specifically speaks of "the whole armor of God," not just a part or some parts of it. In order to wage the spiritual warfare, we need the whole armor. This requires the Body of Christ, not only individual believers, to take it up. This armor is not for the believers as individuals; it is for the church corporately as the Body. Only the corporate warrior, the Body, can wear the whole armor of God.

By taking up the whole armor of God we shall be able "to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." To withstand is to stand against. In fighting, the most important thing is to stand. In this fighting we need to stand to the end. Having done all, we still must stand.

According to Ephesians 6, Christ is the armor that we put on for our protection. In verses 14 through 17 there are six aspects of Christ as the armor:

the girdle of truth, or reality, the breastplate of righteousness, the firm foundation of the gospel of peace (the shoes), the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. Of these six aspects of Christ as our armor, only the sword is for offensive warfare. All the other items are for defense.

(a) Girding Their Loins with Truth

Ephesians 6:14 says, "Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth." For us to gird our loins is to strengthen our entire being. For the purpose of standing, our whole being needs to be strengthened with truth.

Truth in 6:14 refers to God in Christ as reality in our living, that is, God realized and expressed by us as our living. This is actually Christ Himself lived out by us (John 14:6). Such truth, such reality, is the girdle which strengthens our being for spiritual warfare.

(b) Putting On the Breastplate of Righteousness

Ephesians 6:14 also speaks of the breastplate of righteousness, which covers our conscience, signified by the breast. In fighting against Satan, our accuser, we need a conscience void of offense. But no matter how good we may feel our conscience is, we still need to have it covered with the breastplate of righteousness. The righteousness which covers our conscience and which guards us from Satan's accusations is Christ Himself (1 Cor. 1:30). Hence, we are covered by Christ as our righteousness. Furthermore, the breastplate of righteousness is related both to Christ and to His blood. In experience we cannot separate the blood from Christ. Apart from His blood, Christ cannot cover us. Under the cleansing of His blood, He becomes our righteousness to cover our conscience.

(c) Shoeing Their Feet with the Firm Foundation of the Gospel of Peace

Ephesians 6:15 says, "Having shod your feet with the firm foundation of the gospel of peace." Our feet need to be shod in order to strengthen our stand in the battle. The phrase "the firm foundation of the gospel of peace" means the establishment of the gospel of peace. Christ made peace for us on the cross both with God and with man, and this peace has become our gospel (Eph. 2:13-17). This has been established as a firm foundation, as a readiness for our

feet to be shod with. Thus, we shall have a firm footing that we may stand to fight the spiritual warfare. The peace for such a firm foundation is also Christ (Eph. 2:14). We fight in peace and with peace; we fight by standing in peace. Christ is the peace for us to be one with God and with the saints. This peace is the firm foundation that enables us to stand against the enemy.

(d) Taking Up the Shield of Faith

Ephesians 6:16 continues, "With all these, having taken up the shield of faith, with which you shall be able to quench all the flaming darts of the evil one." Flaming darts were used by fighters in the apostle's time, and the apostle uses this as an illustration of Satan's attacks on us. The flaming darts are Satan's temptations, proposals, doubts, questions, lies, and attacks. In order to quench all these flaming darts of the evil one, we need to take up the shield of faith. The shield is not something we put on; it is something we take up in order to protect ourselves against the attacks of the enemy.

Faith comes after truth, righteousness, and peace. If we have truth in our living, righteousness as our covering, and peace as our standing, we shall spontaneously have faith. This faith is a safeguard against the flaming darts of the enemy. Christ is the Author and Perfecter of such faith (Heb. 12:2).

(e) Receiving the Helmet of Salvation

In 6:17a Paul says, "Receive the helmet of salvation." This is for covering our mind against the negative thoughts directed at us by the evil one. Such a helmet, such a covering, is God's salvation. Satan injects into our mind threats, worries, anxieties, and other weakening thoughts. God's salvation is the covering we take up against all these. Such a salvation is the saving Christ we experience in our daily life (John 16:33).

(f) Receiving the Sword of the Spirit, Which Spirit Is the Word of God, by Means of All Prayer

In verse 17b Paul also tells us to receive "the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God." The sword is the one item of the armor that is used for attacking the enemy.

In verse 17 the antecedent of "which" is Spirit, not sword. This indicates that the Spirit is the word of God, both of which are Christ (2 Cor. 3:17; Rev.

19:13). Paul speaks of "the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God." Is the sword here the sword of the Spirit or the sword of the word? The Spirit is the sword itself, not the one who uses the sword. The word of God also is a sword. The sword is the Spirit, and the Spirit is the word. Here we have three things that are one: the sword, the Spirit, and the word.

In our Christian experience the word and the Spirit must always be one. Christ is both the Spirit and the word. He is not the Spirit without being the word, nor the word without being the Spirit. As we engage in spiritual warfare against the enemy, our only weapon is the Spirit-word, which is the sword.

Verse 18 begins with the phrase "By means of all prayer and petition." This phrase modifies the predicate "receive" in verse 17. By prayer we receive both the helmet of salvation and the word of God. This indicates that we need to receive the word of God by means of all prayer and petition.

The modifier "by means of all prayer and petition" in verse 18 actually is related to all six items of the armor covered in verses 14 through 17. It is by means of all prayer and petition that we gird our loins with truth, put on the breastplate of righteousness, have our feet shod with the firm foundation of the gospel of peace, take up the shield of faith, and receive the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Prayer is the unique way to apply the armor of God. Therefore, prayer is crucial and vital.

(3) Praying in Spirit and Watching in All Perseverance for All the Saints and the Apostles

The believers wrestle against the Devil and his spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies not only by being empowered in the Lord and in the might of His strength and by putting on the whole armor of God but also by praying in spirit and watching in all perseverance for all the saints and the apostles. In verse 18 Paul speaks of "praying at every time in spirit." To pray at every time corresponds to Paul's word in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to pray without ceasing.

In Ephesians 6:18 Paul says specifically that we are to pray in our spirit, that is, in our regenerated spirit indwelt by the Spirit of God. This is the mingled spirit, our spirit mingled with God's Spirit. Whenever we are in our spirit, we are also in the Holy Spirit, for our spirit is one with the Lord (1 Cor.

6:17). Therefore, Paul's charge to pray in spirit implies that we should pray in the Spirit of God, for the Spirit and our regenerated spirit are mingled in us.

In verse 18 Paul goes on to speak of "watching unto this in all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints." This indicates that we need to be watchful, on the alert, for this prayer life. We need to be on guard lest we be robbed of time that should be devoted to prayer. Furthermore, we need to watch unto prayer in all perseverance. To keep a prayer life we need all perseverance, a constant, persistent prayer.

In verse 18 Paul also speaks of "petition concerning all the saints." This indicates that we need to pray for the saints. Much time is required to pray for the saints in our locality and for the saints in other cities and countries.

Ephesians 6:19 and 20 indicate that we also should pray for the apostles. In these verses Paul asks the saints to pray on his behalf "that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth to make known in boldness the mystery of the gospel," and that "in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." Here Paul was asking the believers to pray that utterance would be given to him and that he would open his mouth with boldness to make known the mystery of the gospel. This mystery is Christ and the church for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. This mystery implies the entire New Testament economy. Christ is the mystery of God, and the church is the mystery of Christ. Both Christ and the church are for God's economy, which also is a mystery. All these mysteries are related to the gospel. Therefore, Paul asked the saints to pray for him that utterance would be given to him concerning the mystery of the gospel and that he would speak the gospel with boldness.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SIXTY-EIGHT

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (52)

We have seen that, in the progressing stage of God's full salvation, the stage of transformation, the believers experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity corporately by entering into the kingdom of God, by living in the church, and by living in the Body of Christ. The believers experience this dispensing also by putting on the new man and by wrestling against the Devil and his spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies. With this message we shall begin to consider the believers' experience of the dispensing of the processed Triune God in other aspects.

5. Experiencing the Dispensing of the Divine Trinity in Other Aspects

The believers experience the divine dispensing of the divine Trinity in various other aspects, including serving and worshipping God, working and laboring for the Lord, not loving the world, overcoming Satan, fighting the good fight, running the course of the race, being profited by all things in their circumstances and environments, having the best attitude toward others, and watching and praying. For all of these matters we surely need the dispensing of the divine Trinity. However, few Christians realize this. We need to see that in order to carry out these matters, we need God's divine supply, which comes to us through His divine dispensing.

For all the requirements related to the believers revealed in the New Testament we need to receive the divine supply through the divine dispensing of the processed Triune God. Without this dispensing we cannot receive the supply, and without this supply we cannot fulfill the requirements mentioned in the New Testament. If we would meet what the New Testament requires of the believers, we need the divine supply, even the very essence of the Triune God.

In ourselves we cannot meet any of the divine requirements. For example, we cannot fulfill the requirement to worship God. Some may think that to worship God is easy and natural. Actually, no one can truly worship God without God's dispensing of His element into him. We cannot render to God

the worship that satisfies Him, that is accepted by Him as a real pleasure to Him, apart from the dispensing of the divine essence into our being. But through this divine dispensing we can worship God in a way that satisfies Him.

In like manner, apart from the divine dispensing of the processed Triune God, we cannot be humble or meek. The meekness required in the New Testament is much higher than that required by human teachings concerning morality, ethics, and human virtues. In society there are many teachings concerning such matters as humility, meekness, gentleness, and love. It may be easy to have these virtues in a way that is according to the natural, human concept. But to meet the requirements of humility, meekness, gentleness, and love as revealed in the New Testament is impossible by our natural being. We need another being—the being of the processed Triune God dispensed into our being and even constituted into our being. Then through this dispensing and constitution we shall be able to meet the requirements of humility, meekness, gentleness, and love as revealed in the New Testament. Therefore, it is altogether necessary for us to contact the processed Triune God that we may receive His supply through His dispensing of Himself into our being. We need to be reminded repeatedly of our need for the dispensing of the processed Triune God.

a. Serving and Worshipping God

In the New Testament serving God is actually the same thing as worshipping God. You cannot serve God without worshipping Him. Neither can you worship Him without serving Him. For instance, in Matthew 4 the Lord Jesus was tempted by the Devil concerning worship. Referring to the kingdoms of the world and their glory, the Devil said to Him, "All these will I give You if You will fall down and worship me" (v. 9). The Lord Jesus answered, "It is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve" (v. 10). Here we see that to worship actually means to serve. Hence, to worship God is to serve God. Without serving God we cannot render real worship to Him.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:9b Paul says that the believers at Thessalonica "turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God." Literally, the Greek word rendered "serve" here means to serve as a slave. As used in verse 9, the word serve is all-inclusive. It includes everything we do in our daily living.

God is living because He is true, not false. Thus, in 1:9 Paul speaks of serving a living and true God. The church of the Thessalonians was made up of believers serving a living God who is true. This is also what we are doing today. The fact that we are serving a living God proves that we are in God the Father (1 Thes. 1:1). If we were not in the Father, we would not be serving a living God.

In 1:9 the word "living" is mentioned before the word "true." It is rather easy to serve a true God; it is not so easy to serve a living God. Nevertheless, we need to serve a living God. God must be living to us and in us in our daily life. He should be living in our speech, in our behavior, and every aspect of our daily life.

By our daily life we prove that God is living. If God were not living, our daily life would be very different from what it is. Our present living is a testimony that the God whom we serve is living. He is living in us, and He controls us, directs us, and deals with us. He will not let us go. Rather, in many matters He corrects us and adjusts us. The fact that God controls us and directs us, even in such small things as our thoughts and motives, is a proof that He is living. We live under the control, direction, and correction of a living God. As believers in Christ we must live a life which bears the testimony that the God we worship and serve is living in the details of our life. The proper Christian life should bear a testimony that God is living. The reason we do not do or say certain things should be that God is living in us. The God whom we worship and serve is living not only in the heavens but also in us. We have turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God. No doubt, when God is living to us in our experience, He is also true.

(1) With Their Conscience Purified from Dead Works

When we come to serve God, or worship God, we need to have a pure conscience, a conscience purified from dead works or from any kind of offense. Hebrews 9:14 says, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God." On the cross, Christ offered Himself to God in a human body, which is a matter of time. But He offered Himself through the eternal Spirit, who is of eternity, without any limit of time. Because Christ offered Himself by the eternal Spirit, His blood

has an eternal efficacy to purify our conscience so that we may serve and worship the living God.

The blood of Christ purifies our conscience to serve the living God. To serve the living God requires a blood-purified conscience. To worship in dead religion or to serve any dead thing rather than God does not require our conscience to be purified. The conscience is the leading part of our spirit. The living God, whom we desire to serve, always comes to our spirit (John 4:24) by touching our conscience. He is righteous, holy, and living. Our defiled conscience needs to be purified so that we may serve Him in a living way. To worship God in our mind religiously does not require this.

Hebrews 9:14 speaks of "dead works" and "the living God." Because we were dead (Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13), whatever we did, bad or good, was dead works in the sight of the living God. The book of Hebrews does not teach religion; it reveals the living God (3:12; 9:14; 10:31; 12:22). To touch this living God we need to exercise our spirit and to have a blood-purified conscience. The blood of Christ was shed for the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28), and the new covenant was consummated with it (Heb. 10:29; Luke 22:20). It has accomplished eternal redemption for us (Heb. 9:12; Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18-19), and now it washes us from our sins (Rev. 1:5; 1 John 1:7) and purifies our conscience so that we may serve and worship the living God.

(2) In Their Spirit in the Gospel of God's Son

The believers serve and worship God in their spirit in the gospel of God's Son. Paul says, "God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son" (Rom. 1:9a). The Greek word translated "serve" here means to serve in worship of God, as used in Matthew 4:10; 2 Timothy 1:3; Philippians 3:3; and Luke 2:37.

If we would serve God and worship Him, we must do this in our spirit for the preaching of the gospel. The New Testament service and worship are carried out in the preaching of the gospel. This gospel is not concerned with anything other than God's Son. The gospel of God's Son refers to the all-inclusive Christ. Therefore, to serve God in the gospel is to serve Him in the all-inclusive Christ. In the New Testament the gospel is simply Christ Himself. This is the reason Acts 5:42 says that the apostles were "bringing the good news of Jesus as the Christ."

In Romans 1:9a Paul said that he served God in his spirit. This indicates that in order to preach the gospel of God's Son, we must be in our spirit. Preaching the gospel depends on our spirit. Whenever we preach the gospel, we should exercise our spirit.

Only in the book of Romans does Paul say that he serves God in his spirit. The reason is that in Romans Paul is arguing with religious people who invariably are in something other than the spirit—in letters, forms, or doctrines. In Romans Paul indicates that whatever we do toward God must be done in our spirit, that whatever we are must be in spirit, and that whatever we have must be in spirit. In 2:29 he says that the genuine people of God must be in spirit, that true circumcision is not outward in the flesh but in the spirit. Then in 7:6 he says that we should serve God in newness of spirit. Finally, in 12:11 Paul says that we must be burning in spirit. Preaching the gospel of God is absolutely a matter of our spirit.

The gospel of God in which we serve God in our spirit is actually the subject of the book of Romans. In the very first verse of this book Paul says that as a slave of Christ and a called apostle he was "separated to the gospel of God." This indicates that Paul's intention in Romans is to write concerning the gospel. The entire book unfolds the gospel, the glad tidings of God, in its fullest way.

Paul refers to his Epistle to the Romans as a gospel. In 2:16 he says, "God shall judge the secrets of men according to my gospel by Jesus Christ." Paul also believed that God would establish the saints according to his gospel: "Now to Him who is of power to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ" (16:25). Therefore, the book of Romans may be regarded as the fifth gospel.

The gospel in the first four books of the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—concerns Christ in the flesh as He lived among His disciples before His death and resurrection. The gospel in Romans concerns Christ as the Spirit, not Christ in the flesh. In Romans 8 we see that the Spirit of life who indwells us is simply Christ Himself. Christ is in us. The Christ in the four Gospels was among the disciples; the Christ in Romans is within us. The Christ in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is the Christ after incarnation and before death and resurrection. As such, He is a Christ outside of us. The Christ in Romans is the Christ after His resurrection. As such, He is the Christ within us. Hence, the gospel in Romans concerns Christ as the Spirit in us

after His resurrection. This Christ is deeper and more subjective than the Christ in the four Gospels.

If we have only the gospel concerning Christ as revealed in the first four books of the New Testament, our gospel is too objective. We need the fifth gospel, the book of Romans, to reveal the subjective gospel of Christ. Our Christ is not merely the Christ in the flesh after incarnation and before resurrection, the Christ who was among His disciples. Our Christ is deeper and more subjective. He is the Spirit of life within us. Although John 14 and 15 reveal that Christ will be in His disciples, that was not fulfilled before His resurrection. The book of Romans is the gospel of Christ after His resurrection, revealing that He is now the subjective Savior in His believers. Therefore, this gospel is deeper and more subjective.

The gospel of God concerns God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Of course, the gospel includes forgiveness and salvation, but they are not the central point. The central point of the gospel is the very person of Christ, the Son of God. The gospel is not a doctrine nor a teaching nor a religion—it is a wonderful person, Jesus Christ, the Son of God with His divinity and His humanity.

The central message of the book of Romans is that sinful, fleshly people can be made sons of God and conformed to the image of the Son of God. In this way Christ becomes the Firstborn among many brothers (8:29). Thus, the central point of the gospel is not forgiveness of sins. It is the producing of the sons of God, many brothers of the Son of God. God desires to transform sinners in the flesh into sons of God in the spirit. If we would serve God in the gospel, we all should make this same matter our goal. We preach the gospel not simply that people may be saved or be forgiven of their sins or become spiritual, but that they may become sons of God. This is our aim. In Romans 15:16 Paul says, "That I should be a minister of Christ Jesus to the nations, ministering as a priest the gospel of God." For Paul, the preaching of the gospel, the serving of God in the gospel of His Son, was a priestly ministry, a priestly service. As believers, we all should serve God in such a priestly way in the gospel of His Son.

If we would serve God in the proper way, we need to serve Him in the gospel. To do this, we first need to know what the gospel is, and then we need to experience all that the gospel includes. We also need to learn how to minister the gospel to others, that is, how to function as priests in ministering

the gospel of God. Whenever we contact anyone, whether a believer or an unbeliever, we need to know his need as far as the gospel is concerned. If a person is not clear about salvation, we should help him to be clear and even joyful in God's salvation. We need to serve him with the gospel. Others may be clear about salvation but not about other aspects of the gospel. Thus, we must minister something to meet their needs.

The crucial point in serving God in our spirit in the gospel of His Son is that we minister Christ to others in the gospel. For this, we need to learn the elements and details of the gospel, we need to experience the full content of the gospel, and we need to exercise our spirit. This is to serve God in our spirit in the gospel of God's Son.

(3) By the Spirit of God

The believers not only serve God in their spirit but also serve Him by the Spirit of God. In Philippians 3:3a Paul says, "We are the circumcision, who serve by the Spirit of God." Literally, the Greek word translated "serve" means to serve as priests. All New Testament believers are priests to God (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6). Hence, our ministry to the Lord, in whatever aspect, is a priestly ministry, a priestly service. As priests, we must serve God and worship Him in our spirit and by His Spirit. Whenever we get into our spirit, we also get into the Spirit of God. Likewise, when we worship God by the Spirit of God, we also worship Him in our spirit.

Philippians 3:3a indicates that the only acceptable service and worship we can render to God is not by the flesh but by the Spirit of God. The Spirit is the means for the believers to serve and worship God. The Judaic worship and service, on the contrary, involve the flesh and the various regulations related to it. Such regulations include the dietary laws, the keeping of the Sabbath, and circumcision. The service and worship rendered to God by the Judaizers in the flesh cannot be acceptable to God. As New Testament believers, we serve and worship God in our spirit by the Spirit of God. We are the circumcision, for we have been genuinely circumcised by Christ's crucifixion. Whereas the Judaizers serve by ordinances of law related to the flesh, we serve by the Spirit of God.

(4) In Spirit and Truth

The believers serve and worship God in spirit and truth. "An hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and

reality; for the Father seeks such to worship Him. God is Spirit; and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and reality" (John 4:23-24). In typology the worship of God should be in the place chosen by God to set His habitation there (Deut. 12:5, 11, 13-14, 18) and with the offerings (Lev. 1—6). The place chosen by God for His habitation typifies the human spirit, where God's habitation is today (Eph. 2:22). The offerings typify Christ. Christ is the fulfillment and reality of all the offerings with which God's people in the Old Testament worship Him. Hence, the Lord's word in John 4:23 and 24 about worshipping God the Spirit in spirit and reality means that we should contact God the Spirit in our spirit, instead of in a specific place, and through Christ, instead of with the offerings, for now, because Christ the reality has come, all the shadows and types are over. God is Spirit, and worshipping God is to contact Him. Contacting Him is not a matter of place but a matter of the human spirit.

In John 4:23 the Lord Jesus said, "An hour is coming, and now is." This means that the age has changed. In the past, according to the law of Moses, God ordained that His people worship Him at a specific place where He would establish His habitation with His name (Deut. 12:5). God's worshippers had to go to that unique place. That was a type. Now the age has been changed, and the type has been fulfilled. Typically speaking, the place of worship should no longer be a place; rather, it must be the human spirit, where God will set up His habitation with His name.

A crucial matter we need to see is that genuine worship, the worship God the Father is seeking, is not in a certain place but in the human spirit. In the Old Testament Mount Zion, the place of God's habitation and the place of His name, was a type of the human spirit. According to the New Testament, God's habitation is not on any mountain, nor even in the heavens. God's habitation is in our spirit. Actually, our spirit is both God's habitation and the place of God's name. If we go elsewhere to worship God, this indicates that we have given up God's name. There is only one place where we can be preserved in God's name, and that place is our spirit. When we come to our spirit, we keep God's name and we are preserved in His name. The genuine worship of the Father, the worship He desires, is the worship of Him in our spirit.

The genuine worship of God the Father is also in reality. In the Old Testament the children of Israel were required to worship God on Mount Zion with the offerings. The offerings typify Christ as reality. Christ is the fulfillment and the reality of all the offerings with which God's people

worshipped God. Christ is the genuine sin offering, trespass offering, burnt offering, meal offering, and peace offering. Today we worship God in our spirit with Christ as the reality of all the offerings.

(5) Having No Confidence in Their Flesh

Finally, in serving and worshipping God the believers should have no confidence in their flesh. Paul says that those who serve by the Spirit of God "have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3b). The flesh here comprises all that we are and have in our natural being. The fact that the Judaizers had confidence in their circumcision was a sign that their confidence was in their flesh. They trusted in their natural qualities and qualifications, not in the Spirit. By contrast, Paul says strongly that we who believe in Christ serve by the Spirit of God, boast in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

We may think that to trust in the flesh simply means to trust in the fallen human nature. But this is actually not the meaning of "flesh" in Philippians 3:3b. After saying that we should not have any confidence in the flesh, Paul goes on to say that he was circumcised on the eighth day, that he was of the race of Israel, that he was of the tribe of Benjamin, that he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, that according to the law he was a Pharisee, that according to zeal he persecuted the church, and that according to the righteousness of the law he was blameless. All these things were aspects of Paul's flesh. However, we may think that the flesh includes only evil things but not good things. Nevertheless, the honorable, lovable, and superior aspects of our natural being are still the flesh. Everything Paul did according to the law and according to zeal was flesh and of the flesh. Even his righteousness according to the law was flesh. All the characteristics listed by Paul in Philippians 3:4-6 are aspects of the flesh because they are all natural and are neither of Christ nor of the Spirit of God. Anything natural, whether it is good or evil, is the flesh. The Judaizers trusted in their flesh, trusting in what they were by their natural birth. But as believers in Christ we should not trust in anything we have by our natural birth, for everything of our natural birth is part of the flesh. In order to render genuine service and worship to God, everything we do must be by the Spirit of God, in Christ, and with no trust in the flesh.

Although we are not Judaizers, in principle we may actually be the same as the Judaizers were. Even though we have been regenerated, we may continue to live in our fallen nature, boast in what we do in the flesh, and have confidence in our natural qualifications. Therefore, it is important that we be

deeply and personally touched by these verses in Philippians 3. We need the Lord's light to shine on us concerning our nature, our deeds, and our confidence in the flesh. If we are enlightened by the Lord, we shall confess that although we have been regenerated to become children of God with the divine life and nature, we still live too much in the flesh. One day, when the light shines on you concerning this, you will want to prostrate yourself before the Lord and confess how unclean your nature is. Then you will condemn everything you do by your fallen nature. You will see that in the eyes of God whatever is done in the fallen nature is evil and worthy of condemnation. Formerly, we boasted in our deeds and qualifications. But the time will come when instead of boasting in the flesh with its qualifications, we shall condemn it. Then we shall boast in Christ alone, realizing that in ourselves we have absolutely no ground for boasting.

Only when we have been enlightened by God shall we be able to say truly that we have no trust in our natural qualifications, ability, or intelligence. Only then shall we be able to testify that our confidence is wholly in the Lord. After we are enlightened in this way, we shall truly serve and worship God in our spirit and by the Spirit.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SIXTY-NINE

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (53)

We have seen that the believers experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity in serving and worshipping God. Now we need to see that they also experience this dispensing in working and laboring for the Lord.

b. Working and Laboring for the Lord

The believers serve and worship God, and they work and labor for the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 16:10 Paul says of Timothy, "He is working the work of the Lord, even as I." In 15:58 Paul says to the Corinthians, "Wherefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." The context of this verse is Paul's dealing with the matter of resurrection (15:1-58). Disbelief in the truth of resurrection disappoints us concerning our future, thus discouraging us in the work for the Lord. Faith gives us a strong aspiration that we may abound in the work of the Lord with the expectation of pleasing the Lord in resurrection at His coming back.

(1) By the Lord's Resurrection Life and Power

The believers work and labor for the Lord by the Lord's resurrection life and power. Because 1 Corinthians 15 deals thoroughly and absolutely with the matter of resurrection, Paul's word in verse 58 implies resurrection life and resurrection power. Our work and labor for the Lord is not by our natural life and natural ability but by the Lord's resurrection life and power.

First Corinthians 15:10 indicates how Paul worked and labored for the Lord by His resurrection life and power: "By the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace unto me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me." Grace, mentioned three times in this verse, is actually the resurrected Christ becoming the life-giving Spirit (v. 45) to bring the processed God in resurrection into us to be our life and life supply that we may live in resurrection. Thus, grace is the Triune God becoming life and everything to us. It was by this grace that Saul of Tarsus, the foremost of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15-16), became the foremost apostle laboring

more abundantly than all the other apostles. His ministry and living by this grace are an undeniable testimony to Christ's resurrection.

"Not I, but the grace of God" equals "not I, but Christ" in Galatians 2:20. The grace that motivates the apostle and operates in him is not some matter or thing but a living person, the resurrected Christ, the embodiment of the Triune God becoming the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, who dwells in him as his everything. By this grace Paul could be what he was and labor more abundantly than all the other apostles. Throughout the centuries, all the living servants of the Lord have had this resurrected Christ living in them. We can testify that He lives in us, enabling us to do what we could never do in ourselves.

(2) Not in Vain

In 1 Corinthians 15:58 Paul encourages us by saying that our "labor is not in vain in the Lord." Our labor for the Lord in His resurrection life with His resurrection power will never be in vain, but will result in fulfilling God's eternal purpose through preaching Christ to sinners, ministering life to the saints, and building up the church with the experiences of the processed Triune God as gold, silver, and precious stones (1 Cor. 3:12), and will be rewarded by the returning Lord in the day of the resurrection of the righteous (1 Cor. 3:14; Matt. 25:21, 23; Luke 14:14).

We need to realize that 1 Corinthians 15:58 speaks of something in resurrection and is closely related to resurrection. If we are in resurrection, this verse applies to us. But if we are not in resurrection, we may have the mistaken idea that this verse encourages us to strive and to be energetic. The fact that this verse is related to resurrection is indicated by the word "wherefore" at the beginning of the verse, a verse that refers to all that Paul has said in this chapter. Based upon what he has written in 15:1-57, Paul encourages the believers to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. According to the natural life, we can be shaken even by a small thing. How, then, can we be steadfast? We can be steadfast only by the resurrection life within us. Resurrection makes us steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord. Furthermore, it causes us to know that our labor in the Lord is not in vain. Without resurrection, whatever we do is vain. But in resurrection our labor in the Lord is not vain. Therefore, resurrection is not only an encouragement; it also motivates us to the work of the Lord.

(3) Preaching Christ as the Gospel to Sinners by Preaching the Word

As they work and labor for the Lord, the believers preach Christ as the gospel to sinners by preaching the word. Acts 5:42 says that the apostles did not cease "bringing the good news of Jesus as the Christ," that is, they did not cease preaching Christ as the gospel. Acts 8:4 tells us, "Those therefore who were scattered went about the land bringing the good news of the word." It was sovereign of God that the scattering of the believers from Jerusalem to other localities through persecution should carry out the spreading of the gospel for the fulfillment of the Lord's word in Acts 1:8. For the believers to bring good news of the word is to bring good news of the Lord Himself.

One of the scattered ones who went about bringing the good news of the word was Philip. Acts 8:5 says, "Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ." Acts 8:12 says, Philip brought "good news concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ." These verses are a further indication that the believers should preach Christ as the gospel to sinners by preaching the word.

In 2 Timothy 4:2a Paul gives a charge to Timothy: "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season." The word Timothy was to preach included what he had learned both of Paul and of the Old Testament (2 Tim. 3:14-15). Timothy was not merely to teach a word about salvation from hell to heaven. He was to speak a completing word regarding God's revelation concerning Christ and the church. Such a healthy word is the truth, the reality of the contents of God's New Testament economy. Timothy was charged to be ready to preach this word in season and out of season. To preach in season and out of season means to preach whether the situation is opportune or inopportune, whether it is convenient or inconvenient, whether you are welcome or unwelcome.

(4) Casting Out the Demons in the Lord's Name and Healing the Sick by Laying Their Hands on Them

In Mark 16:17 and 18 we see that those who work and labor for the Lord should cast out the demons in the Lord's name and heal the sick by laying their hands on them. We should not think that because we are not in favor of

the Pentecostal movement we do not care for the casting out of demons and for the healing of the sick. On the contrary, we should care for these things, but we should not practice them as particular items in our work. The particular items of our work are Christ and the church with the Spirit and the divine life. Nevertheless, as we preach the gospel in certain places, we shall encounter cases of demon possession. It is our duty to cast out the demons, to drive away the devilish power. There is no need for us to be asked to cast out a demon. Immediately, without being asked, we should fulfill our duty to cast out demons. However, when we meet those who are sick, we should wait to be asked before we lay hands on them for healing. If a sick person asks us to heal him by the laying on of hands in the name of the Lord and prayer, we should do this, leaving the matter of healing to the Lord. Quite often we shall see the healing. Sometimes, however, we shall not see the healing. Therefore, we should leave the matter of the actual healing to the Lord. Furthermore, we should be reminded not to allow the two items of casting out demons and healing the sick to surpass the main items of the gospel, which are Christ and the church.

(5) Ministering Christ as Life to the Saints with the Nourishing Words of the New Testament Faith

Now we come to the very important matter of ministering Christ as life to the saints with the nourishing words of the New Testament faith. In 1 Timothy 4:6 Paul says, “Laying these things before the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, being nourished with the words of the faith and of the good teaching which you have closely followed.” A minister of Christ does not mainly denote a minister who belongs to Christ but a person who ministers Christ to others. A minister of Christ is one who serves others with Christ, ministering Christ as Savior, life, life supply, and every positive thing. He differs from the teacher of law and of other things (1 Tim. 1:7, 3).

Today there are a great many ministers who belong to Christ, but very few of them minister Christ to others. To be a minister of Christ does not primarily mean to preach Christ, teach Christ, or tell others about Christ. The main significance of this term is ministering Christ to others.

Paul’s use of the expression “being nourished” indicates that his concept is that of supplying life to others. It is significant that in 4:6 Paul does not say

“being taught” but “being nourished.” If we would minister Christ to others, we ourselves must first be nourished. Being nourished with Christ, we shall have Christ as food, as life supply, to minister to others. The words “being nourished,” therefore, give us the ground to say that a good minister of Christ does not merely teach others about Christ but ministers Christ into others as food. Others should be able to testify of us that we have nourished them with Christ.

Being nourished, a matter of life, is for growth. This differs from being merely taught, which is a matter of knowledge. As we minister to others, we need to exercise our spirit not just to pass on knowledge, but, while giving forth a certain kind of knowledge, to supply something nourishing to them. Our desire should be to minister the riches of Christ as food that the saints may be nourished.

If you have a heart to care for others in the Lord’s recovery, you should not give them mere teaching. Whenever you fellowship with others concerning Christ, you may give them some knowledge. But while you are teaching them, you need to exercise your spirit to minister spiritual food that they may be nourished. If you do this, you will be a good minister of Christ.

With Paul and Timothy we see an excellent pattern. Before Timothy could minister to others, he first had to feed on the words of the faith himself. He had to digest them, assimilate them, and allow them to saturate his inner being. Then he would be able to lay these things before the brothers. Today we should follow Timothy’s example and lay before the saints the things with which we have been nourished by the Lord through the ministry. How wonderful the church life would be if we all did this!

I am deeply burdened by the fact that many who love the Lord Jesus and seek Him have been deceived and frustrated. We must find a way to share with them the spiritual riches the Lord has provided us. Many who truly love the Lord are starving. We must take up the burden to supply them with food. We all need to be good ministers of Christ, serving others with His riches. Let us first be nourished ourselves and then minister this nourishment to all the people of God.

In 4:6 Paul specifically speaks of “being nourished with the words of the faith and of the good teaching.” The words of the faith are the words of the full gospel concerning God’s New Testament economy. The words of the good teaching are the sweet words that contain and convey the riches of Christ to

nourish, edify, and strengthen His believers. Actually, the words of the faith and the words of the good teaching refer to the same thing. If we would teach others, we ourselves must follow these words closely. Following them closely and being nourished with them, we shall then be able to feed others. For example, if a mother does not know how to nourish herself properly, she will not know how to feed healthy food to her children. Through her own experience of being nourished, she will know what food is best for her children. This is especially true of a nursing mother. The nourishing food she eats and digests will then become the milk with which she nourishes her baby. This illustrates the fact that as good ministers of Christ, we must first be nourished ourselves with the words of the faith and of the good teaching which we have closely followed, and then we shall be able to nourish others by ministering Christ as life to them.

(6) Shepherding the Saints as the Flock of God according to God, That Is, according to God's Nature, Desire, Way, and Glory

Through their experience of the dispensing of the divine Trinity, the believers may also shepherd the saints as the flock of God according to God, that is, according to God's nature, desire, way, and glory. In Acts 20:28 Paul says to the elders in Ephesus, "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood." The main responsibility of the elders as overseers is not to rule over the flock but to shepherd the flock, to take all-inclusive tender care of the flock, the church of God. Shepherding the flock of God requires suffering for the Body of Christ as Christ did (Col. 1:24). This kind of shepherding with suffering will be rewarded with the unfading crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:4).

First Peter 5:2a says, "Shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not by way of compulsion, but willingly, according to God." To shepherd according to God means according to God's nature, desire, way, and glory, not according to man's preference, interest, and purpose. The elders should not shepherd the flock according to their opinion, concepts, or likes or dislikes. Instead, they should shepherd according to God's choice, desire, intention, and preference. The elders must shepherd the saints as the flock of God altogether according to God's thought, feeling, will, and choice. They must shepherd according to God's likes and dislikes.

(7) Building Up the Church with the Experiences of the Processed Triune God as Gold, Silver, and Precious Stones

The believers build up the church with the experiences of the processed Triune God as gold, silver, and precious stones (1 Cor. 14:4, 12; 3:12). In 1 Corinthians 3:12 Paul speaks of building "on the foundation gold, silver, precious stones." Gold signifies the nature of the Father with all its attributes; silver, the redeeming and life-secreting Christ with all the virtues and attributes of His person and work; and precious stones, the transforming work of the Spirit with all its attributes. These precious materials are the products of our experience of the dispensing of the processed Triune God.

It is significant that Paul mentions only three categories of precious materials—gold, silver, and precious stones—for these correspond to the three of the divine Trinity. Gold, the first of the precious materials mentioned by Paul, refers to the first of the Trinity, God the Father. Gold signifies neither redemption nor transformation; instead, as a precious element, it signifies something that does not change or become corrupt in nature. Hence, gold, which always remains the same, signifies the nature of God the Father. Silver signifies the redemption accomplished by Christ the Son, the second of the Trinity. Therefore, the silver in 3:12 refers to the redemption of Christ. The precious stones are related to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Every precious stone is a transformed substance. Thus, precious stones indicate transformation. According to 2 Corinthians 3:18, we are transformed by the Lord Spirit. This reveals clearly that transformation is the work of the Spirit. Therefore, the third item of the precious materials mentioned in 1 Corinthians 3:12 refers to the third of the Trinity, the Spirit. We need to experience the processed Triune God as these precious materials. Then we shall be able to build the church.

The reason there is so little building among Christians today is that few believers experience the dispensing of the processed Triune God in the way of being transformed and conformed. Because the believers do not care for this experience, they are not able to build up the church. Instead of building the church, they organize denominations and groups. Although a good number of believers are in the denominations and are actually members of the church, those members have been usurped and misused to form an organization. Therefore, we need to discern the difference between the denominations,

which include brothers and sisters in the Lord, and the church. Because the denominations are organizations, they are a substitute for the real church. In the Lord's recovery we are not building up any kind of organization. We are building an organism—the Body of Christ—by being constituted of the Triune God, experiencing Him as gold, silver, and precious stones.

(8) With Prayer and Fasting

The believers work and labor for the Lord also with prayer and fasting. Sometimes we must fast in order to deal with the power of darkness by casting out certain demons that insist on remaining. In Matthew 17:21 the Lord Jesus told the disciples, "This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." To deal with the power of darkness there is the need of the exercise of the authority of the heavenly King. We can exercise this authority only through prayer and fasting. As the heavenly King, the Lord Jesus has such authority, but we need to pray, even with fasting, to execute the Lord's authority.

Concerning prayer, Acts 1:14 says, "These all were persevering with one accord in prayer." The disciples were burdened to pray perseveringly with one accord. God needs His chosen people to pray regarding what He has promised to do in His New Testament economy. As God in heaven He needs men on earth to cooperate with Him for the carrying out of His plan.

Acts 6:4 says, "We will continue steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the word." To pray is not only to entreat the Lord to do things for His move; it is also to cause our spirit to be exercised and strengthened. Hence, prayer should precede the word. Without such prayer, the ministry may not be enlivened and empowered.

In Acts 13:2 we see that the prophets and teachers in Antioch "were ministering to the Lord and fasting." These prophets and teachers were not conferring with men and organizing; rather, they were ministering to the Lord and fasting. They were ministering to the Lord directly. This means that, spiritually speaking, they were not at the altar in the outer court but were at the incense altar in the Holy Place. In the Old Testament the priests ministered at two places. When they served the people, they ministered at the altar in the outer court, offering sacrifices to God for the people. But when they served the Lord directly, they were at another place—at the altar in the Holy Place burning incense. The prophets and teachers in Antioch were at the

incense altar at the Holy Place, ministering directly to the Lord through their prayers.

(9) To Be Rewarded by the Returning Lord in the Day of the Resurrection of the Righteous

The believers who work and labor for the Lord will be rewarded by the returning Lord in the day of the resurrection of the righteous. This reward is fully related to the kingdom. To be rewarded actually is to be given a rich entrance into the kingdom. Those who are rewarded with this rich entrance will enter into the kingdom and into the joy of the Lord, and as they enjoy eternal life in the coming age they will reign as co-kings with Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 3:14 Paul says, "If anyone's work which he has built upon it shall remain, he shall receive a reward." The work that remains must be that of gold, silver, and precious stones, the product of faithful ministers of Christ. Such a work will be rewarded by the coming and judging Lord. Reward is based on the believer's work after being saved. It differs from salvation, which is based on faith in the Lord and His redemptive work.

In Matthew 24:45-47 the Lord Jesus says, "Who then is the faithful and prudent slave, whom the master has set over his household to give them food at the appointed time? Blessed is that slave whom his master when he comes shall find so doing. Truly I say to you, that he will set him over all his possessions." Faithfulness is toward the Lord, whereas prudence is toward the believers. The household spoken of in verse 45 refers to the believers (Eph. 2:19), who are the church (1 Tim. 3:15). To give them food is to minister the Word of God with Christ as the life supply to the believers in the church. To be blessed in these verses is to be rewarded with ruling authority in the manifestation of the kingdom. The faithful slave of the Lord will be set over all His possessions as a reward in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens.

Another verse that speaks of the believers' reward is Matthew 25:21: "His lord said to him, 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 lord." The same word is found in verse 23. "A few things" signifies the Lord's work in this age; "over," the ruling authority in the coming kingdom; "many things," the responsibilities in the coming kingdom, and "the joy of your lord," the enjoyment of the Lord in the coming kingdom. This enjoyment is the inward

satisfaction, not the outward position. To participate in the Lord's joy is the greatest reward, better than the glory and position in the kingdom.

In Luke 14:14 the Lord Jesus speaks of being rewarded in the resurrection of the righteous: "You will be blessed, because they do not have anything with which to repay you; for it will be repaid to you in the resurrection of the righteous." The resurrection of the righteous is the resurrection of life (John 5:29; Rev. 20:4-6), when God will reward the saints (Rev. 11:18) at the Lord's return (1 Cor. 4:5).

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTY

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (54)

In this message we shall see that the believers experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity in the matters of not loving the world and of overcoming Satan the Devil.

c. Not Loving the World—the Evil Satanic System

First John 2:15 says, "Do not love the world, neither the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." The Greek word for "world," kosmos, has more than one meaning. In Matthew 25:34; John 17:15; Acts 17:24; Ephesians 1:4; and Revelation 13:8 it denotes the material universe as a system created by God. In John 1:29; 3:16; and Romans 5:12 it denotes the fallen human race corrupted and usurped by Satan as components for his evil world system. In 1 Peter 3:3 it denotes adorning, ornament. Here in 1 John 2:15, as in John 15:19; 17:14; and James 4:4, it denotes an order, a set form, an orderly arrangement, hence, an ordered system (set up by Satan, the adversary of God), not the earth. God created man to live on the earth for the fulfillment of His purpose. But His enemy Satan, in order to usurp the God-created man, has formed an anti-God world system on this earth by systematizing men with religion, culture, education, industry, commerce, and entertainment through men's fallen nature in their lusts, pleasures, pursuits, and even in their indulgence in living necessities, such as food, clothing, housing, and transportation. Everything, everyone, and every matter have been systematized by the evil one, the adversary of God, and made a part of his world system. The whole of such a Satanic system lies in the evil one (1 John 5:19). Not loving such a world is the ground for overcoming the evil one. Loving it just a little gives the evil one the ground to defeat us and occupy us.

Satan not only employs the necessities of life to preoccupy man; he also organizes them into numerous individual systems in order to intensify his grip upon man. We may say that the satanic world system is a "university," in which there are many different "departments," such as food, clothing, transportation, housing, marriage, money, entertainment, and fame—more

than we can enumerate. The aggregate result is a world university, occupying man with many "courses." One by one, these courses enslave and possess man, causing him completely to forsake and forget God and go along with the current of the world. People believe that they are handling and enjoying all these, but, actually without realizing Satan's deception, they have fallen into the hands of the evil one and are deceived and controlled by him. Therefore, the world denotes the enemy's scheme, system, and organization to usurp the place of God in man and eventually to gain full possession of man.

(1) To Keep the Love of God in Them

First John 2:15b says, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." The love of the Father here is our love toward Him generated by His love within us. We love Him with the love by which He has loved us.

To not love the world, which is against the Father, is to keep the love of God in us. But if we do not keep the love of God in us, we shall love something other than God. If we keep the love of God with which He has loved us, we shall not love anything in place of God. Then we shall not love the world.

(2) Not Loving All That Is in the World—the Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eyes, and the Vainglory of Life

First John 2:16 says, "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." The world in verse 15 denotes an evil, Satanic, anti-God system that is constituted of the things created by God. Satan has used these things to form his system. However, these things are not the contents of the satanic world system. This system comprises the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of the present life. Love of the world is comprehensive, but love of the things that are in the world is a more practical term.

The lust of the flesh, the passionate desire of the body, is mainly related to the body. Because the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil entered into the human race, our body became fallen and corrupted. Adam and Eve, our first parents, partook of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As a result, an evil element came into the human race, and now this element is in our physical body. From experience we know that an evil, satanic element dwells in man's nature.

The lust of the eyes is the passionate desire of the soul through the eyes. When the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil came into the human body, the body became flesh. Because the body encompasses the soul, the soul fell under the influence of the fallen body. As a result, our soul also has been corrupted. Therefore, the soul, our psychological being, has become lustful due to the influence of the fallen body.

The fallen soul and body now work together. Our body influences our soul, and our soul influences our body. The body and the soul work together whenever we do something sinful. Because of this mutual operation of body and soul, it is difficult to say whether it is the body or the soul that takes the initiative to commit sin. Therefore, on the one hand, we have the lust of the flesh; on the other hand, we have the lust of the eyes. Apparently, the lust of the eyes is simply part of the lust of the flesh. Actually, this refers to something within our body. Our eyes are lustful because our soul is lustful. The lust in our eyes, therefore, comes from our soul.

The vainglory of life is the empty pride, boast, confidence, assurance, and display of material things of the present life. The Greek word rendered "life" in 2:16 is bios, a word that refers to the physical life and also to the present life. It differs from the Greek word zoe used in 1 John 1:1-2, a word that refers to the divine life.

In the New Testament three Greek words are used for life: zoe, which refers to the divine life, the life of God; psuche, which refers to our human life, our soulish or psychological life; and bios, which refers to physical life. The Greek word bios also denotes the present life. Hence, the vainglory of life means the vainglory of the present life. Whatever takes place in human society is the present life. With the present, earthly life there is vainglory. This vainglory includes empty pride, boast, confidence, assurance, and display of material things.

(3) Practicing the Will of God

First John 2:17 says, "The world is passing away, and its lust, but he who practices the will of God abides forever." As the world is against God the Father, so the things in the world, which are its lust, are against the will of God. On the positive side, we have the Father and His will. On the negative side, we have the world and all the things in the world. The world is against the Father, and the things in the world are against the will of the Father.

According to verse 17, the world is passing away and its lust, but he who practices the will of God abides forever. To practice the will of God is to do the will of God habitually and continually, not merely occasionally. The world, its lust, and those who love the world are passing away. But God, His will, and those who do His will abide forever.

Because God is so great, we cannot contact Him as a whole but only a portion of Him. This portion which we contact is called the will of God. Whenever we contact God, we contact only the portion emanating from Him, which we call the will of God. The world is in opposition to God, and the things that are in the world are in opposition to the will of God.

(4) Not Conformed to This Age—the Present Part of the World

In Romans 12:2 Paul charges the believers not to be "conformed to this age." The age is the present, practical world life. The combination of all people, activities, and things outside of God is called the world. The age designates that part of the world which we contact at the present. The world is the entire organization used by Satan to usurp man, whereas an age is a fraction of this organization, a part of this world system. There are many ages within this organized world. Therefore, Ephesians 2:2 refers to "the age of this world." "This world" refers to the satanic system composed of many aspects. "The age" refers to a part, a section, an aspect, the present and modern appearance, of the system of Satan, which is used by him to usurp and occupy people and keep them away from God and His purpose. Therefore, the world signifies the whole, and the age, the part. We can contact only the age, a part, but not the world, the whole. Usually we say that the world possesses us. In reality, only part of the age possesses us, not the whole world.

The Greek word for "age" in Romans 12:2 can be translated "modern." To be conformed to this age means to adopt the modern fashions outwardly. The believers should not be modern according to the present age.

We have seen that everything, everyone, and every matter have been systematized by Satan and made a part of his world system. In such a situation, where shall we go? The answer is that we need to go to the Triune God for His dispensing. Only the Triune God has not been systematized by Satan. Along with going to the Triune God, we also need to go to the Word of

God. Therefore, because everything, everyone, and every matter have been systematized by Satan, we need to flee to the Triune God and His Word.

d. Overcoming Satan the Devil

Through the dispensing of the processed Triune God the believers can overcome Satan, the Devil. "Satan" in Greek means adversary. He is not only God's enemy outside of God's kingdom but also the adversary within God's kingdom, rebelling against God. The Greek word for "Devil" means slanderer. The Devil, who is Satan, accuses us before God and slanders us before men. If we still love the world, we shall have no way to overcome Satan. But if we do not love the world, we shall have the position to overcome him.

(1) Because of the Blood of the Lamb

According to Revelation 12:11, we can overcome Satan "because of the blood of the Lamb." The blood of the Lamb, which is for our redemption, answers before God all the accusations of the Devil against us and gives us the victory over him. We need to apply this blood whenever we sense the accusation of the Devil.

To overcome Satan because of the blood of the Lamb means to apply the blood of the Lord Jesus as our covering and to take the Lord's blood to counter Satan's accusations and attacks. Because we are still on earth and in the body of flesh we cannot help but have some defilement, corruption, weakness, shortcoming, and other undesirable conditions. When we fight with Satan, the first thing he does is to point out all the weaknesses and shortcomings in our conscience and then accuse and attack us. At such times we need to know the power and effectiveness of the blood of the Lamb. We can apply the blood to answer all of Satan's accusation, and thus we can be strong and of good courage before the enemy and fight with him.

As we wage war against Satan, we must see the blood and declare that we are under its covering. This blood is the prevailing blood, and it speaks and implies a great deal. Only God and, to some extent, the Devil know how much the blood implies. But whether or not we know all that the blood implies, as long as we apply it, we shall have all it implies. Therefore, we can overcome Satan because of the blood of the Lamb.

(2) Because of the Word of Their Testimony

Revelation 12:11 also tells us that we can overcome Satan because of the word of our testimony. The word of our testimony is the word testifying that the Devil has been judged by the Lord. Whenever we sense the Devil's accusation, we should verbally testify how the Lord has already dealt with him. We must declare the Lord's victory over him with the uttered word. We must declare what the Lord has accomplished, the victory of the cross, the attainment of resurrection, and the position of ascension. This is not a matter of preaching but of testifying.

The blood is the fact, and the word is our testimony. The blood implies the fact that our sins have been forgiven and taken away, that we have been crucified, that Satan has been judged, and that his head has been bruised. When we apply the blood, we apply all these facts. After applying the blood, we must declare the facts to Satan. This is the way to overcome the enemy.

(3) Because of Their Not Loving the Soul Life Even unto Death

Revelation 12:11 tells us that those who overcome the Devil do "not love their soul life even unto death." Due to Adam's fall, Satan has joined himself to man's soul life, man's self (Matt 16:23-24). Hence, to overcome Satan we should not love our soul life but rather hate it and deny it (Luke 14:26; 9:23). We should not love our soul life unto death, that is, even unto the point of being martyred. Those who do not love their soul life are willing to be martyred.

If we would overcome Satan, we must have no self-love or self-care. Loving ourselves and caring for ourselves will cause us to lose the position of warfare and to be unable to fight against the enemy. Therefore, in order to overcome Satan, we must not love our soul life. As long as we love our soul life, we are dust, good to be food for Satan. But if we do not love our soul life, our self, there will be no dust, and Satan will be killed. When our soul life is killed, Satan is killed also. This is the way for us, through experiencing the dispensing of the divine Trinity, to overcome Satan.

(4) To Withstand the Devil

James 4:7 says, "Be subject therefore to God; but withstand the Devil, and he will flee from you." To be subject to God is to be humble toward God (James 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:6). To be proud toward God is to side with God's enemy,

the Devil. To be humble toward God, that is, to be subject to God, is to withstand the Devil, that is, to stand against the Devil. This is the best strategy to fight God's enemy; it always causes him to flee from us.

First Peter 5:8 and 9 say, "Be sober; watch. Your adversary, the Devil, as a roaring lion walks about, seeking someone to devour; whom withstand, firm in the faith." Literally, the word "adversary" in Greek means an opponent in a lawsuit. Here this word refers to Satan, who is our accuser. An adversary is different from an enemy. An enemy is an opponent who is objective to us, outside of us. An adversary is a subjective opponent, an opponent within us. Satan is not only the enemy outside of us; he is also the adversary within us.

Peter says that the Devil is as a roaring lion walking about, seeking someone to devour. The word "roaring" indicates that this lion, the Devil, is howling in hunger. The words "walks about" indicate the Devil's constant and aggressive activity in seeking prey. There is a proverb which says that the Devil never sleeps. He is always busy and aggressive, seeking someone to devour.

Peter charges us to withstand our adversary, the Devil. In verse 9 to withstand does not mean to resist or to struggle against. Rather, it is to stand firmly as a rock on the ground of our faith before the roaring Devil. In this verse "the faith" actually means our faith. It refers to the believers' subjective faith, their faith in God's protecting power and loving concern.

(5) Not Giving Place to the Devil

In Ephesians 4:27 Paul says, "Neither give place to the Devil." This immediately follows Paul's word, "Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your indignation" (v. 26). According to the context, to continue in anger is to give place to the Devil. In nothing should we give any place to him. If we hold on to our anger, we are actually welcoming the Devil. But if we relinquish our anger, we close the door to the Devil and give him no place.

(6) Not Taken Advantage Of by Satan, Not Ignorant of His Devices

In 2 Corinthians 2:11 Paul says, "That we may not be taken advantage of by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his thoughts." This verse discloses that the evil one, Satan, is behind the scenes in everything and works in everything. The Greek word translated "thoughts" here means plans, plots, devices, schemes, designs, wiles, intentions, purposes. Even in the church life Satan

may be behind the scenes. As the context indicates, even a matter such as forgiving a brother may involve not only the church but also the devices of Satan. Even behind a matter such as this, Satan may be crouching, looking for a way to execute his evil plans and devour the weak ones. Therefore, we need to be aware of the subtlety of the enemy.

Satan is subtle in taking advantage of the believers. He often comes to us through someone else. When Satan came to Eve, he came in a serpent. When he came to the Lord Jesus in Matthew 16 he came through Peter. However, the Lord was on the alert and realized that Satan was right in front of him. For this reason the Lord said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan!" (v. 23). Just as Satan came to the Lord Jesus through Peter, Satan may come to us through a certain person. Therefore, we need to be on the alert and know the devices of the Devil.

(7) Guarded by the Faithful Lord from the Evil One

The believers can overcome Satan because they are guarded by the faithful Lord from the evil one. In 2 Thessalonians 3:3 Paul says, "The Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one." We are guarded by eternal encouragement and good hope (2 Thes. 2:16-17). Only the eternal life can guard us from the evil one. The whole world lies in the evil one (1 John 5:19), but the divine life with which we have been born of God keeps and guards us from him (1 John 5:18, 4; 3:9). We have a part within us that has been regenerated, born of God. That part, which is actually the Lord Himself, always guards us from the evil one.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTY-ONE

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (55)

In this message we shall consider two further aspects of the believers' experience of the dispensing of the divine Trinity: fighting the good fight and running the course of the race.

e. Fighting the Good Fight

In 2 Timothy 4:7a Paul says, "I have fought the good fight." This good fight is against Satan and his kingdom of darkness for the interest of God's kingdom. In 1 Timothy 6:12 Paul refers to this fight as "the good fight of the faith," that is, a fight for the contents of the complete gospel according to God's New Testament economy.

(1) By Receiving the Apostle's Charge

The believers fight the good fight by receiving the apostle's charge. First Timothy 1:18 says, "This charge I commit to you, child Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that in them you might war the good warfare." We need to consider Paul's use of the word "charge" here in the context of the chapter as a whole. The charge in verse 18 covers the main points presented in the previous seventeen verses. On the positive side, the main point of these verses is God's dispensation; on the negative side, it is the differing teachings. Hence, the charge given by the apostle to his spiritual son concerns the dispensation of God positively and the differing teachings negatively. Because of different teachings, the church had already become degraded, and a deviation from the faith had taken place. Paul charged Timothy to fight against this deviation from the faith, that is, to fight the good fight for the faith.

In verse 18 Paul says that he committed the charge to Timothy "according to the prophecies previously made" concerning him. It may be that some prophetic intimations were made concerning Timothy when he was admitted into the ministry (Acts 16:1-3). Paul charged Timothy to war the good warfare in the prophecies. This means in the sphere, support, and confirmation of the prophecies.

Paul told Timothy that in the prophecies previously made he "might war the good warfare." To war the good warfare is to war against the differing teachings of the dissenters and to carry out God's dispensation (1 Tim. 1:4) according to the apostle's ministry concerning the gospel of grace and eternal life for the glory of the blessed God (vv. 11-16).

On the one hand, Timothy was to war against the differing teachings of the dissenters. On the other hand, he was to carry out God's dispensation according to the apostle's ministry. If we wish to carry out God's dispensation, we must not do it according to the teachings of traditional Christianity nor according to systematic theology but according to the apostle's ministry. All true apostles teach and preach the same thing, even the one thing—God's New Testament economy. The focus of our preaching and teaching is Christ and the church. To teach and preach God's economy concerning Christ and the church is to war a good warfare.

(2) By Laying Hold on the Eternal Life

First Timothy 6:12a says, "Fight the good fight of the faith." To fight for the faith means to fight for God's New Testament economy. In particular, it is to fight for Christ as the embodiment of God and for the church as the Body of Christ.

In 6:12b Paul goes on to say, "Lay hold on the eternal life to which you were called." The eternal life here is the divine life, the uncreated life of God, which is eternal. Eternal denotes the nature more than the time element of the divine life. To fight the good fight of the faith in the Christian life, especially in the Christian ministry, we need to lay hold on this divine life and not trust in our human life. Hence, in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus the eternal life is stressed again and again (1 Tim. 1:16; 6:19; 2 Tim. 1:1, 10; Titus 1:2; 3:7). To bring forth God's dispensation concerning the church in 1 Timothy, to confront the process of the church's decline in 2 Timothy, and to maintain good order in the church life in Titus, this life is a prerequisite.

We have been called to the eternal life of God. We were born of the human natural life, but we were reborn of the divine eternal life when we were called by God in Christ.

We fight the good fight of the faith not only objectively but also subjectively by laying hold on eternal life. We should not do anything apart from this life. As those who would fight the good fight, we need to lay hold on eternal life.

We need to realize that we have been called to eternal life. This eternal life does not mainly refer to blessings in the future. To be called to eternal life does not mean that we have been called to enjoy blessings in heaven. Eternal life should be our life today, a life for our present daily living. By our first birth, the physical birth, we received the Adamic life. But because we have been called to eternal life, we should no longer live by the Adamic life, the natural life. Although we should be truly human, even Jesusly human, we should not be human in our natural life. On the contrary, we need to live a human life by the eternal life. We have been called to this life, and now we need to live it.

As believers in Christ, we have been called uniquely to eternal life. This life, the divine life, is actually the Triune God Himself. Having been called to eternal life, we now should lay hold on this life, live this life, and have our whole being according to this life.

The subtlety of the enemy in bringing deviation from the faith is to keep the believers from the eternal life. Therefore, we, the genuine believers, must lay hold on the eternal life. Without the eternal life we are nothing. This eternal life is actually the processed Triune God being life to us.

Not only heretical teachings but even fundamental teachings may be used by the enemy to keep us from enjoying the eternal life. Teachings that are scriptural, fundamental, good, ethical, and moral, teachings about the improvement of character and about making up our mind to do good things, keep the believers from the experience of the processed Triune God as eternal life to them.

It is crucial for us to see that all the matters in the New Testament concerning the believers are related to the dispensing of the processed Triune God into us. To experience this dispensing is to enjoy eternal life. Some may teach according to the Bible without teaching the believers how to contact the processed Triune God and to receive His dispensing, which becomes the vital factor of our Christian life. Because even fundamental teachings may be subtly used by the enemy to keep us from enjoying eternal life, we need to lay hold on the eternal life. Then we shall be able to fight the good fight for the faith.

(3) For the Faith

Once for All Delivered to the Saints

In 1 Timothy 6:12a Paul says, “Fight the good fight of the faith,” and in 2 Timothy 4:7c he says, “I have kept the faith.” Furthermore, Jude 3b tells us that we should “contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.” In these verses “the faith” refers not to our subjective believing but to our objective belief, that is, to what we believe. The faith denotes the contents of the New Testament as our faith (Acts 6:7; 1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9; 4:1; 5:8; 6:10, 21; 2 Tim. 3:8; Titus 1:13), in which we believe for our common salvation. This faith, not any doctrine, has been delivered once for all to the saints. For this faith we should contend.

In the New Testament faith has both an objective meaning and a subjective meaning. When used in a subjective sense, faith denotes our action of believing. Used in an objective sense, faith denotes the object of our belief. In 1 Timothy 1:19 the word faith is used in both a subjective and objective sense. Here Paul says, “Holding faith and a good conscience, which some thrusting away have become shipwrecked regarding the faith.” The first reference to faith in this verse is subjective; it denotes our capacity to believe. The second use of faith is objective; it denotes the object of our faith.

The faith—our belief—is constituted of certain basic truths. First, we believe that God is one yet triune—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Second, we believe that our God became incarnated in the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Third, we believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnated as man, lived on earth and died on the cross for our sins to secure our redemption. On the third day He was resurrected from the dead both physically and spiritually, and today He is our Savior, our Lord in resurrection, and our life. Because we believe in Him, our sins have been forgiven, He has come into us as our life, and we have been regenerated. Eventually, the Lord Jesus will come back to receive all His believers to Himself. These are basic truths, basic doctrines, that constitute the faith for which we should contend. Because every sound, genuine believer holds these basic truths, they are called the common faith (Titus 1:4).

The faith in the objective sense is equal to the contents of God’s will given to us in the New Testament. The law includes the contents of the Ten Commandments and all the subordinate ordinances. The law was given in the Old Testament, but what God gives in the New Testament is the faith that includes all the items of God’s new will. This will even includes the Triune God. However, it does not include such matters as head covering, foot washing, or methods of baptism. Nevertheless, some believers contend for

such things, thinking that they are contending for the faith. But that is not the correct understanding of what Jude means by contending for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

To contend for the faith is to contend for the basic and crucial matters of God's new will. One of these basic matters is Christ's death for our redemption. Someone may tell you that Jesus died on the cross not for redemption but because He was a martyr and sacrificed Himself for His teachings. This understanding of the death of Christ is heretical; it is contrary to one of the basic items of the faith. Therefore, we need to contend for the truth concerning Christ's redemption. This illustrates what it means to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. The faith, the common faith, has been delivered to the saints once for all, and what we need to do now is to contend for it.

f. Running the Course of the Race

The believers also experience the dispensing of the processed Triune God by running the course of the race. In 1 Corinthians 9:24 Paul says, "Do you not know that those who run in a race-course all run, but one receives the prize? So run, that you may lay hold." This verse reveals that the believers are runners in a race. The Christian life is a race that we must run successfully. The prize is a reward as an incentive; to "lay hold" is to obtain the prize.

First Corinthians 9 reveals that the Christian course involves the preaching of the gospel. To preach the gospel is to dispense Christ into others. By dispensing Christ into those who are receptive to our preaching we run the Christian course. However, because many believers today are not running the race, we need Paul's word, "So run, that you may lay hold."

To run in a race-course is to labor, but to receive the prize is to have enjoyment. As we preach the gospel today, we are running the course. But to receive a reward, a prize, at the coming of the Lord Jesus is to have a particular enjoyment.

Hebrews 12:1 says, "Therefore let us also, having so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, putting off every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, run with endurance the race which is set before us." The race we are running is actually Christ Himself. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the way" (John 14:6). A race is a way, a course. Because Christ is the way, He is also the race. The race we are running is Christ. Our way is our race. These

are not two things, one the way and the other the race. No, the way we are walking is the race we are running. Therefore, Christ, who is the way, is the race.

As believers, we should not stand still in Christ. Even walking in Christ is not adequate. We must run the race. We should not take the time to consider or look around, to stand still or walk slowly. We need to run the race, which is Christ Himself as our way. Although Christ is our way, we should not take this way as a way; rather, we should take the way as a race to run.

In 2 Timothy 4:7b Paul could declare, "I have finished the course." Paul began to run the course of the heavenly race after he was taken possession of by the Lord, and he continually ran (Phil. 3:12-14) that he might finish it (Acts 20:24). Then at the end he triumphantly proclaimed, "I have finished the course." For this he will receive from the Lord a reward—the crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8).

(1) To Obtain the Prize—the Incorruptible Crown

Because the Christian life is a race, the believers must run the race to win the prize (1 Cor. 9:24), which is not salvation in a common sense (Eph. 2:8; 1 Cor. 3:15) but a reward in a special sense (Heb. 10:35; 1 Cor. 3:14). The prize we win for running the race is an incorruptible crown (1 Cor. 9:25). The prize in 1 Corinthians 9:24 is a reward as an incentive, and this reward is an incorruptible crown, which the Lord will award His overcoming saints who win the race. This reward is in addition to salvation. Eternal salvation is by faith, having nothing to do with our work (Eph. 2:8-9), whereas reward is for our work after we are saved (1 Cor. 3:8, 14). We may not receive a reward but rather suffer loss, even though we are saved, because we are void of the work which the Lord would approve (1 Cor. 3:15). The reward will be given to us according to our works at the Lord's coming back (Matt. 16:27; Rev. 22:12; 1 Cor. 4:5). It will be decided by the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10) and enjoyed in the coming kingdom (Matt. 25:21, 23). The Apostle Paul strived to gain the reward (1 Cor. 9:24-27; Phil. 3:13-14; 2 Tim. 4:7-8).

We, the believers in Christ, have all received His salvation through faith in Him. This has been settled once for all. But whether we shall be rewarded by the Lord depends on how we run the race. In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul was running the race. In Philippians, one of his last Epistles, he was still running (3:14). It was not until the last moment of his running, in 2 Timothy 4:6-8,

that Paul had the assurance that he would be rewarded by the Lord at His coming. With this reward in view, Paul charged the believers to run the race so that they may obtain the reward, the prize, an incorruptible crown.

(2) Not Uncertainly

In 1 Corinthians 9:26a Paul says, "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly." Paul did not run the race uncertainly but with a definite goal in view. Today we must run the race with a definite goal; we should not run uncertainly.

(3) Putting Off Every Encumbrance and the Entangling Sin

In order to run the course of the race, we need to put off every encumbrance and the entangling sin (Heb. 12:1). The Greek word translated "encumbrance" in Hebrews 12:1 may also be rendered weight, burden, impediment. The runners in a race must strip off every unnecessary weight, every encumbering burden, that they may have no impediment to running the race. It is easy for us to pick up unnecessary burdens. But if we would run the Christian race, we need to put off every encumbrance, every unnecessary burden or impediment.

From Hebrews 12:1 we see that we also need to put off "the sin which so easily entangles us." Here the sin refers mainly to the thing that entangles us from running the race. Both the encumbering weight and the entangling sin frustrate us in running the race. The encumbrances are outward, but the sin is inward, for it involves our sinful nature. Within our sinful nature there is something that often entangles us. In order to run the course of the Christian life, we need to put off the entangling sin.

(4) With Endurance

At the end of Hebrews 12:1 we are charged to "run with endurance the race which is set before us." We need to run with endurance because there is much opposition to the Christian race. In order to run this race, we must suffer the opposition with endurance, never growing weary or fainting in our souls (v. 3).

(5) Looking unto Jesus Who Is Now Seated at the Right Hand of the Throne of God

in the Heavens

The believers run the course of the race also by "looking away unto Jesus" (Heb. 12:2). The Greek word translated "looking away unto" means to look with undivided attention by turning away from every other object. The runners in a race should turn away from everything else and look at the goal with undivided attention. We need to turn away from everything other than Christ and look to Him with undivided attention. This is the way to run the race.

Hebrews 12:2 tells us to look away unto Jesus, "the Author and Perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." In the book of Hebrews Paul points us particularly to the Christ seated in heaven with so many aspects to care for us in every way. If we would enjoy this heavenly Christ, we need to look away from all things on earth unto Him who is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. By His death and resurrection He accomplished everything that is needed for both God and us. Now in His ascension He is sitting in the heavens as the Son of God (Heb. 1:5) and the Son of Man (2:6), as the appointed Heir of all things (1:2), the anointed One of God (1:9), the Captain of our salvation (2:10), the Sanctifier (2:11), the instant Helper and constant Succor (2:18), the Apostle from God (3:1), the High Priest (2:17; 4:14; 7:26), the Minister in the true tabernacle (8:2) with a more excellent ministry (8:6), the surety and the Mediator of a better covenant (7:22; 8:6; 12:24), the Executor of the new testament (9:16-17), the Forerunner (6:20), the Author and Perfecter of faith (12:2), and as the great Shepherd of the sheep (13:20). If we look unto Him as such a wonderful and all-inclusive One, He, ministering heaven, life, and strength to us, will transfuse and infuse us with all that He is to enable us to run the heavenly race and to live the heavenly life on earth, carrying us through all the lifelong pathway and leading and bringing us into glory (2:10).

The wonderful Jesus, who is enthroned in heaven and crowned with glory and honor (2:9), is the greatest attraction in the universe, like an immense magnet drawing all His seekers unto Him. It is by being attracted by His charming beauty that we look away from all things other than Him that we may run with endurance the race which is set before us.

(6) Not in Vain

Our running the course of the race is not in vain. Paul was concerned about running in vain (Gal. 2:2). We do not run uncertainly or in vain; instead, we run with a definite goal and in reality.

(7) By Obeying the Truth—
the Reality in Christ Preached by the Apostle

The believers run the Christian race by obeying the truth, the reality in Christ preached by the gospel. Galatians 5:7 says, "You were running well; who hindered you that you should not obey the truth?" Truth here does not refer to doctrine but to the reality in Christ, as preached to the Galatians by Paul.

(8) To the End

The believers need to run the course of the race to the end. This is indicated by Paul's word in 2 Timothy 4:7b: "I have finished the course."