The Conclusion OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

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The Believers—Their Present (cont.) and Future

Witness Lee

THE CONCLUSION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

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MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTY-TWO

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (57)

In the progressing stage of God's full salvation, the stage of transformation, the believers experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity in many aspects. These aspects include serving and worshipping God, working and laboring for the Lord, not loving the world, overcoming Satan the Devil, fighting the good fight, and running the course of the race. All these matters can be carried out only by the dispensing of the divine Trinity, by the infusing and transfusing of the riches of the processed Triune God into us. We may teach these matters without touching the source of the strength, energy, and capability to carry them out. The source is the enjoyment of the dispensing of the processed Triune God into our being. For this reason, we need to contact the divine Trinity. We need to stay in His presence, fellowship with Him, and even pray with fasting in order to receive more dispensing of the divine essence into our being so that we may serve and worship God, work and labor for the Lord, not love the world, overcome Satan, fight the good fight, and run the good course of the race. For all these things we need the dispensing of the Triune God, the transfusing of His riches into our being.

g. Profited by All Things in Their Circumstances and Environments

The six matters of serving and worshipping God, working and laboring for the Lord, not loving the world, overcoming Satan, fighting the good fight, and running the course of the race are all of one category. Now we come to a second category of other aspects in which the believers experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity—the believers' being profited by all things in their circumstances and environments. Day by day, we cannot stay away from circumstances and environments. In all our circumstances and environments we face many things, matters, and persons. According to God's design and arrangement, all these things, matters, and persons are used by God for our good. Therefore, we are profited by all things in our circumstances and environments.

(1) All Things Working Together for Them,

Those Who Love God and Who Are Called according to His Purpose

Romans 8:28 says, "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to the purpose." In Greek the word translated "all things" refers to all matters, all persons, and all things. God the Father is sovereign and He arranges everything. He knows what we need. In His sovereignty, He causes all things, all matters, and all persons to work together for good to those who love Him and who have been called by Him to the end that He may fulfill His purpose.

God has determined our destiny beforehand, and this destiny cannot be fulfilled without the divine arrangement that causes all things to work together for us. Our destiny is to be conformed to the image of the firstborn Son of God (Rom. 8:29). We are not yet fully in the image of the firstborn Son of God, but God the Father is causing all things to work together for good so that His purpose of having many sons conformed to the image of the firstborn Son may be fulfilled.

Because God's intention is to bring us into full sonship, we need to grow. No doubt, growth comes from inward nourishment, but this nourishment needs the coordination of the outward environment. Hence, there is the need of God's sovereignty to arrange our environment so that all things may work together for our good according to His purpose.

The believers have been called by God according to His purpose. In Romans 8:28 the word "purpose" is equal to a plan. God's purpose is His plan, and His plan is that we be conformed to the image of His Son that He should be the Firstborn among many brothers. God's firstborn Son is the prototype, and we are the mass production. Christ is the model, the mold, and the pattern. God has put us all into Him that we may be molded into the image of His firstborn Son. Eventually we all shall be conformed to the mold. We have been predestinated to be conformed to the image of God's Son that He may be the Firstborn among many brothers. This is God's purpose.

We have already been called by God according to His purpose. However, we still need to cooperate with God's calling by loving Him. If we do not love Him, all things will not work together for good, even though we have been called by God. This means that if we do not love God, everything is not good for us. For example, if you love God and become ill, your illness will work good for you.

But if you become ill and do not love God, your illness will not profit you. Whether or not the things, matters, and persons in our environment are good for us depends on whether or not we love God. If we love Him, He will cause all things to work together for our good.

(2) No One nor Anything, neither Tribulation,
nor Distress, nor Persecution, nor Famine,
nor Nakedness, nor Peril, nor Sword, nor Death,
nor Life, nor Angels, nor Principalities, nor Things Present,
nor Things to Come, nor Powers, nor Height,
nor Depth, nor Any Other Creature
Is Able to Separate Them from the Love of God—
the Love of Christ

In Romans 8:35 Paul asks, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" In verses 38 and 39 he declares, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." No one can separate us from God's love. Once He loves us, He loves us forever with an eternal love. Nothing can separate us from Him. Because He loves us and because we are His beloved, sooner or later we all shall be sanctified, transformed, conformed, and glorified.

In Romans 8 Paul guides us into the love of God. Ultimately, our security is not only God's righteousness, holiness, and glory but also His love. Love is the heart of God. God's love issues out of His heart. Righteousness is the way of God, holiness is the nature of God, glory is the expression of God, and love is the heart of God. Therefore, after speaking in the book of Romans of God's righteousness, holiness, and glory, Paul brings us into God's heart of love.

Before God exercised His righteousness, holiness, and glory, He loved us. Love was the fountain, love was the root, and love was the source of it all. God loved us before He predestinated us, He loved us before He called us, He loved us before He justified us, and He loved us before He glorified us. Before everything and anything else, He loved us. Our salvation originated with the love of God. Love is the source of all that God does for us, and this love is His

heart. Love was the source of God's eternal salvation, which includes redemption, justification, reconciliation, sanctification, transformation, conformation, and glorification. Salvation began with God's heart of love.

The love of God is not only the source of our salvation; it is also the security of our salvation. After God's salvation has been fully accomplished, His love will remain our security. Eternal security, therefore, is the love of God. God is for us because from eternity His heart loved us. Thus, His love is our security.

Like Paul, we may be persuaded that nothing can separate us from the love of God, for this love does not derive from us nor depend on us. This love derives from God and depends on God. Furthermore, this love was not initiated by us; rather, it was initiated by God in eternity. This was the reason Paul was convinced that nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The phrase "in Christ Jesus our Lord" in Romans 8:39 is very significant. Paul included this phrase because he knew that there would be a problem if the love of God had been shown apart from Christ Jesus. Apart from Christ Jesus, even a little sin such as losing our temper would separate us from the love of God. However, the love of God is not merely the love of God in itself but the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Because the love of God is in Christ Jesus, everything is insured, and we are assured that nothing can separate us from it.

(3) They Are Being Put to Death, Reckoned as Sheep for Slaughter; but in All These Things They More Than Conquer through Him Who Loved Them

Romans 8:36 and 37 say, "As it is written, For Your sake we are being put to death all day long, we have been reckoned as sheep for slaughter. But in all these things we more than conquer through Him who loved us." Instead of being defeated, we more than conquer because God loves us. We are being put to death and are reckoned as sheep for slaughter. Nevertheless, in all these things we more than conquer through Him who loved us. Our conquering is altogether a matter of God's love. Through our loving One we not only conquer—we can be conquerors. We conquer all negative things, even death.

(4) Nothing Can Put Them to Shame, but Christ Is Magnified in Their Body

Whether through Life or through Death

In Philippians 1:20 Paul says, "According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be put to shame, but with all boldness, as always, even now Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death." Paul expected that in nothing he would be put to shame, that is, that in nothing he would be defeated by his circumstances or environment. Paul also expected that Christ would be magnified in him, whether through life or through death. This indicates that no matter what the circumstances were, Paul expected Christ to be magnified in him.

In Paul's bodily sufferings Christ was magnified, that is, shown or declared great (shown to be without limitation), exalted, and extolled. Therefore, to magnify Christ is to express Christ without limitation. It is to make known to others that the Christ who lives in us is unlimited. Even when mistreated in prison, Paul could display the unlimited greatness of Christ. He expressed, exhibited, exalted, and extolled Christ. He was a living witness of Christ, testifying of His ability, power, patience, love, and wisdom, all without measure. As believers, we should be a magnifying glass in relation to Christ so that others may see Christ magnified through us.

In 1:20 Paul says that Christ would be magnified in him whether through life or through death. No matter what faced him—the opportunity to go on living or martyrdom—Paul expected to magnify Christ. In his living Paul magnified Christ. This is to magnify Him through life. As he was expecting to be martyred, he also magnified Him. This is to magnify Christ through death. Thus, whether through life or death, Christ was magnified in Paul's body. Likewise, as we experience the dispensing of the processed Triune God, nothing can put us to shame, but Christ is magnified in us.

(5) They Are Blessed by Persecution for the Sake of Righteousness, for Theirs Is the Kingdom of the Heavens

Matthew 5:10 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. 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. Hence, we shall suffer persecution.

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. According to Matthew 5:20, in order to be in the kingdom of the heavens, we need the surpassing righteousness, the righteousness on the highest plane. To enter into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens we need this kind of righteousness. Therefore, we need to hunger and thirst after it and to suffer persecution for it.

If we suffer persecution for the sake of righteousness, ours is the kingdom of the heavens. Suffering for the sake of righteousness is a condition for participation in the kingdom of the heavens. If we do not remain in righteousness, we are outside the kingdom. But if we stay in righteousness, we are in the kingdom because the kingdom is absolutely a matter of righteousness. As we seek righteousness, we should be prepared to confront persecution. We shall be persecuted for the sake of righteousness.

(6) They Are Blessed by Reproach, Persecution, and Evil for Christ's Sake, for Their Reward Is Great in the Heavens

In Matthew 5:11 the Lord Jesus says, "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; 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, mostly by religious people who hold on to their traditional religious concepts. The Jewish religionists did all these things to the Apostles in the early days of the kingdom of the heavens (Acts 5:41; 13:45, 50; 2 Cor. 6:8; Rom. 3:8). This is also true today. If we are seeking Christ and following Him, many in religion will rise up against us.

In Matthew 5:12 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 is great and is in the heavens. It is a heavenly reward, not an earthly one.

(7) They Are Blessed by Being Reproached in the Name of Christ, Because the Spirit of Glory and of God Rests upon Them

First Peter 4:14 says, "If you are reproached in the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." "In the name of Christ" is actually in the person of Christ, in Christ Himself, because the name denotes the person. The believers, having believed into Christ (John 3:15) and having been baptized into His name (Acts 19:5), that is, into Himself (Gal. 3:27), are in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30) and one with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). When they are reproached in His name, they are reproached with Him, sharing His sufferings in the fellowship of His sufferings (Phil. 3:10).

The reason the persecutions we suffer are the sufferings of Christ is that we suffer in the name of Christ. According to Peter's word, we are blessed if we are reproached in the name of Christ. Do not think that it is a curse to be reproached in the name of Christ. On the contrary, this is to be blessed.

If we are reproached in the name of Christ, "the Spirit of glory and of God" rests upon us. Literally, the Greek says in 1 Peter 4:14 "the Spirit of glory and that of God." The Spirit of glory is the Spirit of God. The Spirit of glory is the one through whom Christ was glorified in His resurrection (Rom. 8:11). This very Spirit of glory, being the Spirit of God Himself, rests upon the suffering believers in their persecution for the glorification of the resurrected and exalted Christ, who is now in glory. The more we suffer and are persecuted, the more glory there will be upon us. Therefore, we should rejoice when we are reproached in the name of Christ, because the Spirit of glory is resting upon us.

(8) They Rejoice That They Are Counted Worthy to Be Dishonored on Behalf of the Name of Jesus

When the believers experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity, they can rejoice that they are counted worthy to be dishonored on behalf of the name of Jesus. In chapter five of Acts, the apostles were beaten and charged not to

speak in the name of Jesus (v. 40). “They went from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be dishonored on behalf of the Name” (v. 41). To be dishonored on behalf of the Name is to suffer shame for the Name. It is a real honor to be dishonored on behalf of the Name, the very name of the man-dishonored but God-honored Jesus. Hence, the sufferers rejoiced that they were counted worthy of this.

(9) They Boast in Tribulations

Through the experience of the divine dispensing the believers can also “boast in tribulations” (Rom. 5:3). The Greek word rendered “boast” also has the meaning of exult and glory; thus, we may boast, exult, glory, in tribulations.

Because our natural being needs to be sanctified, transformed, and conformed, God brings in certain tribulations and sufferings for our good. This is clearly revealed in Romans 8:28 and 29, where we are told that God causes all things to work together for good that we may be conformed to the image of His Son. Hence, tribulation and suffering are for our transformation.

We may appreciate peace, grace, and glory but not tribulation. Tribulation is actually the incarnation of grace with all the riches of Christ. This is similar to the incarnation of God in Jesus. Apparently He was simply the man Jesus; actually He was God. Apparently our environment is tribulation; actually it is grace. If we read Romans 5 carefully, we shall see that tribulation does not stand on the same level as grace, for it is under grace. In reality tribulation is a visitation of grace. This means that to reject tribulation is to reject grace. Tribulation is the incarnation of grace visiting us. Grace—God as our portion for our enjoyment—often visits us in the form of tribulation. If we realize this and experience the dispensing of the processed Triune God, we shall boast in tribulations.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTY-THREE

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (58)

In this message we shall consider further the believers being profited by all things in their circumstances and environments through their experience of the dispensing of the divine Trinity.

(10) It Is Grace for Them to Bear Sorrows,
Suffer Injustice, and Endure Suffering for Doing Good;
to This They Have Been Called

First Peter 2:19 and 20 say, "This is grace, if anyone because of conscience toward God bears sorrows, suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if sinning and being buffeted you shall endure it? But if doing good and suffering you shall endure, this is grace with God." Here Peter is saying that if, due to our conscience toward God, we are willing to bear sorrows and suffer unjustly, that is, suffer unjust treatment, this is grace. The Greek word translated "grace" in verse 19 is charis, referring here to the motivation of the divine life within us and its expression in our life, becoming in our behavior gracious and acceptable in the eyes of both man and God. Grace is actually the Triune God becoming our life for our experience and enjoyment. With this understanding of grace as the basis, we can say that in verse 19 grace is the motivation of the divine life within us and its expression in our living. Therefore, this becomes in our living something gracious and acceptable in the sight of both God and man.

According to verse 20, if we endure buffeting because we have sinned, this is not a credit to us. But if we do good and yet suffer and endure, this is grace with God. Such a situation indicates that our living expresses the working of God's grace within us and through us. Therefore, concerning this matter of life Peter says, "This is grace with God."

In 2:21 Peter goes on to say, "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered on your behalf, leaving you a model that you should follow in His steps." God's calling includes not only enjoyment but also suffering. Our destiny in God's calling includes both the enjoyment of Christ as the

embodiment of the processed Triune God and also the suffering of Christ. We have been called to suffer with Christ, to suffer what He suffered.

In verse 21 Peter says, “To this you were called.” The word “this” refers to the unjust sufferings, the sufferings for doing good, mentioned in verses 19 and 20. This means that we have been called to unjust suffering so that in it we may have the enjoyment of God as grace and express Him. Whatever the circumstances may be, God is our grace, our inner enjoyment. This enjoyment motivates us and then becomes our outward expression, an expression visible to others. Those who observe this grace expressed from within us will be able to see something attractive on our face, in our attitude, or in the atmosphere around us. They will feel that what they see expressed is pleasant and acceptable. This is grace.

(11) They Were Appointed for Afflictions

As believers we have been appointed for afflictions. To suffer afflictions is our destiny because this is God’s ordination. God has appointed, ordained, that we should suffer afflictions.

In 1 Thessalonians 3:3 Paul encourages the believers not to “be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed for this.” If we are established in the faith, afflictions will do good to us according to God’s purpose in His appointment. Otherwise, we may be shaken by the tempter (1 Thes. 3:5) through the afflictions. The Greek word rendered “appointed” in verse 3 also means destined, set, located. God has destined, appointed, us to pass through afflictions. Hence, afflictions are God’s allotted portion to us, and He has set us, located us, in the situation of afflictions.

(12) They Do Not Need to Fear Those Who Kill the Body, but Are Not Able to Kill the Soul; Their Hairs Are All Numbered by Their Father in Whose Eyes They Are of More Value Than Many Sparrows, Not One of Which Shall Fall to the Earth without Their Father's Permission

In Matthew 10:28-31 the Lord Jesus says, “Do not fear those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but fear rather Him who is able to

destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them shall fall to the earth without your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore, do not fear: you are of more value than many sparrows." God is the only One who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. This word implies that if the apostles sent by the Lord fail in their suffering of persecution, they will be disciplined by God. This will take place in the coming age, after the judgment at the judgment seat of Christ, when believers will receive reward or punishment (2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 22:12).

(13) In Affliction They Enjoy the Peace of Christ Who Has Overcome the World

In affliction the believers, by experiencing the dispensing of the processed Triune God, enjoy the peace of Christ who has overcome the world. The Lord Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have affliction, but be of good courage, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). We have peace in the Lord. Although He has died and has been resurrected, we remain in the world where there is no peace. In this world we shall have only trouble. But the Lord Himself will be our peace, and we can have peace in Him. No matter how much this world troubles us and persecutes us, the Lord has overcome the world. We do not need to worry nor do we need to fear the world. Let the world persecute us and trouble us. The Lord is our peace. He has overcome the world.

(14) Their Suffering Ushers Them to Perfection and Glory

The believers' suffering ushers them to perfection and glory (1 Pet. 5:10). This suffering ushers us to perfection today and to glory in the future. However, we like to have perfection and receive glory without suffering. But God is sovereign; He knows how much suffering we need. Therefore, He arranges everything sovereignly so that we may suffer in order to be perfected in this age and glorified in the coming age.

First Peter 5:10 says, "The God of all grace, who called you into His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground you." In this verse "all grace" refers to the riches of the bountiful supply of the divine life in many aspects ministered to

us in many steps of the divine operation on us and in us in God's economy. The initial step is to call us, and the consummate step is to glorify us. Between these two steps are God's loving care while He is disciplining us and His perfecting, establishing, strengthening, and grounding work in us. In all these divine acts the bountiful supply of the divine life is ministered to us as grace in varied experiences. The God of such grace will perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground the persecuted believers after they suffer a little while. Therefore, the suffering believers should be encouraged by the fact that, although they are suffering, their God is the God of all grace. Furthermore, He has called us into eternal glory, a glory that is unlimited in both space and time.

According to what Peter says in 5:10, our sufferings are only for a little while, but God's glory is eternal. After we have suffered a little while, the God of all grace will personally perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground us. Through the suffering of persecution we are perfected, and eventually we shall be ushered into glory.

(15) They Count It All Joy When They Fall into Various Trials

James 1:2 says, "Count it all joy, my brothers, whenever you fall into various trials." The entire world lies in the evil one, Satan (1 John 5:19). Satan opposes God continually in every possible way. Satan is displeased whenever people turn to God, and he will not tolerate this. Once a person turns to God, Satan will instigate others to persecute that one. Paul once said that we Christians are appointed to suffer persecution (Phil. 1:29). Persecution, therefore, is the portion appointed to us as believers in Christ. Hence, an aspect of practical Christian perfection (the subject of the book of James) is the enduring of trials, a word that includes persecution.

Persecution is a suffering. However, trials are not merely a suffering, for trials are a suffering that serves the purpose of trying or proving us. Our heavenly Father arranges different trials for us. All these trials are good for us. Just as examinations are good for students, so the various trials we face as Christians are a profit to us.

Perhaps after you believed in the Lord Jesus you thought that in the Christian life there would be no sufferings or trials. You may have had the concept that, as a child of God, the Father would not allow anything bad to

happen to you. This is the concept of many believers. But eventually trials come. The various trials through which we must pass as believers serve the purpose of trying, testing, and proving us. These trials are a help in our practical Christian perfection, for God uses them to perfect us.

If we realize that God uses trials to perfect us, we shall thank God for perfecting us through trials. Trials not only help us in the matters of our spiritual education and the experience of life, but also help us with our character and our behavior in our daily living. Many believers can testify that through trials God has perfected them in a practical way in their Christian life.

James even encourages us to "count it all joy" whenever we fall into various trials. The reason we can count it a joy when we fall into trials is that these trials perfect us. Notice that in 1:2 James speaks not only of trials but of "various trials." This indicates that we should count all trials a joy, not just certain trials. On the one hand, we do not like trials, opposition, and persecution. But on the other hand, we should count it all joy when we experience such things because God, through the divine dispensing, uses them to perfect us.

(16) They Are Afflicted in Every Way, but Not Straitened; Their Outward Man Is Being Consumed, yet Their Inward Man Is Renewed; Their Momentary Lightness of Affliction Works Out for Them an Eternal Weight of Glory

In 2 Corinthians 4:8 Paul says, "We are afflicted in every way, but not straitened; perplexed, but not despairing." The Greek word rendered "afflicted" can also be translated "pressed down on every side." The word "straitened" also means cramped. Literally, "perplexed" here means unable to find a way out. The word translated "despairing" literally means "utterly unable to find a way out"; that is, the way is entirely shut up. Here Paul is saying that they were perplexed, unable to find a way out, yet not despairing, not utterly unable to find a way out.

In verse 9 Paul continues, "Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." The Greek word for "persecuted" also means pursued by enemies. To be forsaken is to be abandoned, deserted; literally, it means to be left

behind in some evil plight. “Cast down” also means struck down, and “destroyed” also means perishing, that is, killed.

In verse 10 Paul goes on to say, “Always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be manifested in our body.” The putting to death here means the killing, the deadening, that is, the working of death, the working of the cross, which the Lord Jesus suffered and endured. When the Lord was on earth, He was daily under the killing. Day by day He experienced being put to death. The apostles also experienced this. Daily they were under the killing; daily they were being put to death.

The apostles experienced this killing work “that the life also of Jesus might be manifested in our body.” The killing of the cross results in the manifestation of resurrection life. This daily killing is to release the divine life in resurrection. The life in verse 10 is the resurrection life, which the Lord Jesus lived and expressed through the working of the cross.

In 2 Corinthians 4:16 Paul says, “If indeed our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is being renewed day by day.” The outward man is our body and our soul, with the body as its organ and the soul as its life and person. The inward man is our regenerated spirit with our renewed soul. The regenerated spirit is its life and person, and the renewed soul is its organ. The life of the soul must be denied (Matt. 16:24-25), but the functions of the soul—the mind, will, and emotion—must be renewed and uplifted by being subdued (2 Cor. 10:4-5) to be used by the spirit, the person.

The Greek word rendered “decaying” also means being consumed, being wasted away, being worn out. By the continued killing, the working of death, our outward man, that is, our material body with its animating soul (1 Cor. 15:44), is being consumed and worn out.

The inward man is renewed by being nourished with the fresh supply of resurrection life. As our mortal body, our outward man, is being consumed by the killing work of death, our inward man, that is, our regenerated spirit with the inward parts of our being (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10; Rom. 7:22, 25), is being metabolically renewed day by day with the supply of resurrection life.

In 2 Corinthians 4:17 Paul says, “For our momentary lightness of affliction works out for us, more and more surpassingly, an eternal weight of glory.” The affliction here refers to the putting to death, the working of the cross. Literally, “more and more surpassingly” means excessively unto excess. The

eternal weight of glory is in contrast to the momentary lightness of affliction. Glory here is the expression of God as resurrection life and is in contrast to affliction. The momentary lightness of affliction works out for us an eternal weight of glory.

(17) They Accept with Joy the Plundering of Their Possessions, Knowing That They Have a Better and Abiding Possession

By experiencing the dispensing of the processed Triune God, the believers can accept with joy the plundering of their possessions. Hebrews 10:34 speaks of those who accepted with joy the plundering of their possessions, knowing that they themselves had a better possession, and an abiding one. This better and abiding possession is "the eternal inheritance" (Heb. 9:15) and the "inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled and unfading, kept in the heavens" (1 Pet. 1:4). Under the old covenant, the Jewish people inherited earthly things as their possession, but under the new covenant the believers inherit the heavenly riches as their possession. This better and abiding possession is a great incentive to the believers to suffer the loss of earthly things and even to accept this loss with joy.

(18) They Share the Kingdom of Jesus in His Tribulation and Endurance for the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus

Through the divine dispensing the believers also share the kingdom of Jesus in His tribulation and endurance for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 1:9). The believers share the kingdom of Jesus in His tribulation and endurance. Eventually, in the coming age, they will be rewarded by sharing the Lord's kingdom in glory and enjoyment. Today we share the kingdom in tribulation and endurance. At His coming we shall share the kingdom in glory and enjoyment as a reward.

The believers' sharing the kingdom of Jesus in tribulation and endurance is for the purpose of ministering the word of God and giving the testimony of Jesus. Whatever we do today must be for the purpose of ministering the word of God and giving the testimony of Jesus. If we do these two things, we shall surely be in the kingdom. Furthermore, for this purpose we shall suffer tribulation, and we shall need to exercise our endurance.

Revelation 1:9 says, "I John, your brother and joint partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." The phrase "in Jesus" governs the words "tribulation," "kingdom," and "endurance." When we talk about salvation, grace, enjoyment, and all the other good things, we say that we are "in Christ," for this phrase refers to everything on the positive side of God's salvation. But to say that we are partakers in the tribulation, kingdom, and endurance in Jesus means that we are suffering. According to the facts of the Lord's life on earth, His name, Jesus, denotes a suffering person, a man of sorrows (Isa. 53:3). Hence, when we say that we are in Christ, this means that we are saved, are enjoying God's blessing, have peace with God, and are under God's blessing. But when we say that we are joint partakers in the tribulation, kingdom, and endurance in Jesus, this means that we are suffering and are being persecuted as we follow Jesus the Nazarene.

If we are joint partakers in the tribulation in Jesus, then we are joint partakers in the kingdom. To partake of the persecution in Jesus is to partake of the kingdom. If we do not know what persecution is, then we do not know what the kingdom is. To be in the kingdom in Jesus today is not a glory. When the kingdom in Jesus becomes the kingdom in Christ, that will be the time for glory. Today, the kingdom in Jesus is a kingdom of suffering. In Matthew 5:10-12 the Lord said that His believers suffer persecution for the sake of the kingdom. The more we are in the kingdom, the more we shall suffer and be persecuted. But this suffering is a strong sign that we are in the kingdom. Being in the kingdom today is a matter of being in the suffering of Jesus.

Revelation 1:9 also speaks of being a joint partaker in the endurance in Jesus. For both the tribulation and the kingdom we need endurance. Many have heard of the power of Jesus, the love of Jesus, the holiness of Jesus, and the righteousness of Jesus but not of the endurance of Jesus. As we live in Christ, we partake not only of His life and holiness but also of His endurance. As we abide in Christ, we partake of His endurance and have the endurance to bear suffering and opposition for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

(19) They Are Blessed in Enduring Trials to Receive the Crown of Life, Which the Lord Promised to Those Who Love Him

James 1:12 says, “Blessed is the man who endures trial, because having become approved, he will receive the crown of life, which He promised to those who love Him.” James 1:2-12 deals with trials. Trials come from the believers’ environment to prove their faith (vv. 2-3) through suffering (vv. 9-11). The believers should endure the trials with all joy (v. 2) because of their love for the Lord that they may receive the blessing of the crown of life. In verse 12 the word “approved” refers to the approving of the believers’ faith (v. 3).

The crown of life is the glory, the expression, of life. The believers endure the trials by the divine life, and this will become their glory, their expression, the crown of life, as a reward to them at the Lord’s appearing for their enjoyment in the coming kingdom (James 2:5). James 1:12 says that the crown of life is promised to those who love the Lord. To believe in the Lord is to receive the divine life for our salvation. To love the Lord is to grow in the divine life for maturity that we may be qualified for a reward—the crown of life—to enjoy the glory of the divine life in the kingdom.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTY-FOUR

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (59)

In this message we shall consider further matters related to the believers' being profited by all things in their circumstances and environments.

(20) They Do Not Think the Fiery Ordeal,
Which Comes to Them for a Trial, Is Strange,
but Rejoice in Sharing the Sufferings of Christ,
That at the Unveiling of His Glory
They May Also Rejoice Exultingly

First Peter 4:12 says, "Beloved, do not think the fiery ordeal among you is strange, which is coming to you for a trial, as a strange thing happening to you." The Greek word for fiery trial, purosei, means burning, signifying the burning of a smelting furnace for the purification of gold and silver (Prov. 27:21; Psa. 66:10). Peter considered the persecution the believers suffer as a burning furnace used by God to purify their life. This is God's way to deal with the believers in the judgment of His governmental administration, which begins from His own household (1 Pet. 4:17-19).

The Greek word for strange in 4:12 is xenizo. Fiery persecution is common to the believers. They should not think it is strange or alien to them and be surprised and astonished by it. This persecution is a trial, a testing.

Peter's use of the metaphor of a burning furnace indicates that today the Lord is using persecutions and trials to serve a positive purpose—the purification of our life. We can be compared to gold and silver. However, we still have some amount of dross. Therefore, we need purification. As gold and silver are purified through burning, we also need to be purified in this way.

Peter tells the believers not to regard the fiery ordeal as strange. As Christians, we need to realize that fiery ordeals are common. Persecutions and trials are the common experience of Christians. Such things are not strange, alien, foreign, to us. On the contrary, they are common, for we have been appointed to them. It is our destiny to suffer in this age.

In 4:13 Peter continues, "But according as you share the sufferings of Christ, rejoice, that at the unveiling of His glory you may also rejoice exultingly." Although persecution is a trial that purifies us through burning, Peter says that by experiencing such a fiery ordeal we share, participate in, the sufferings of Christ. If we were not Christians, we certainly would not suffer the kind of persecution described in 4:12 and 13. Such persecutions are due to the fact that we are Christians, men of Christ.

Because we believe in Christ, love Christ, live Christ, and bear testimony to Christ, witnessing of Him in this age, the world rises up against us. This age is under the hand of the evil one, and for this reason unbelieving ones persecute those who believe in Christ and witness of Him. In the sight of God this kind of suffering is regarded as the sufferings of Christ. Christ lived a life of suffering. Now we are His partners (Heb. 3:14), living the same kind of life, cooperating with Him in living a life of suffering and following Him along the way of suffering. This means that what Christ suffered, we also suffer. Therefore, when we suffer for Christ in this way, our sufferings are counted by God as the sufferings of Christ.

We should not be discouraged because we must suffer as Christians. These sufferings are positive and very precious. Today we should be Christians, followers of Christ, who undergo the sufferings of Christ. We need to participate not only in the riches of Christ but also in the sufferings of Christ. If we take this view, we shall be encouraged whenever we suffer for Christ. We may face fiery ordeals, but these are the sufferings of Christ in which we have the privilege to participate.

In 4:13 Peter says that as we share the sufferings of Christ, we should rejoice so that at the unveiling of His glory we may rejoice exultingly. This means that we shall not only be joyful inwardly, but we shall sound out our joy. At the time of the unveiling of the Lord's glory, we shall exult. We shall be excited to the uttermost, beside ourselves with joy. Today we may rejoice, but when the Lord is unveiled we shall rejoice exultingly.

(21) They Are Not Ashamed of Suffering as a Christian but Glorify God in This Name

First Peter 4:16 says that if a believer suffers "as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name." In 4:14 and 16 we have two names. The first name is Christ, and the second name is Christian. If we suffer

because of these two names, that is glorious. This kind of suffering is a glory to God. It glorifies God because, when we suffer in the name of Christ and as Christians, the Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of glory, rests upon us. When we suffer for Christ, glory rests upon us, and that glory is actually the Spirit of glory Himself.

The Greek word for Christian is Christianos, a word of Latin formation. The ending -ianos, denoting an adherent of someone, was applied to slaves belonging to the great families in the Roman Empire. At Antioch (Acts 11:26) the believers were called Christians for the first time. This name, denoting adherents of Christ, was used as a nickname, a term of reproach. For this reason 1 Peter 4:16 says that we should not be ashamed of suffering as a Christian. This means that if any believer suffered from the persecutors who contemptuously call him a Christian, he should not feel ashamed but should glorify God in this name.

Today the term Christian should bear a positive significance, that is, a man of Christ, one who is one with Christ, not only belonging to Him but having His life and nature in an organic union with Him and who is living by Him, even living Him, in his daily life. If we suffer for being such a person, we should not feel ashamed but be bold to magnify Christ in our confession by our holy and excellent manner of life to glorify, express, God in this name. To glorify God is to express Him in glory.

(22) In Suffering according to the Will of God, They Are Judged by God First, That They Might Not Suffer the End of the Ungodly

First Peter 4:17 says, “It is time for the judgment to begin from the house of God; and if first from us, what will be the end of those who disobey the gospel of God?” The book of 1 Peter shows the government of God especially in His dealings with His chosen people. The sufferings they undergo in fiery persecution are used by Him as a means to judge them that they may be disciplined, purified, and separated from unbelievers and not have the same destiny as unbelievers. Hence, such disciplinary judgment begins from His own household.

The Greek word translated “house” in 4:17 also means household. Here the house, or household, refers to the church composed of the believers (1 Pet. 2:5; Heb. 3:6; 1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 2:19). From this house, as His own house, God

begins His governmental administration by His disciplinary judgment over His own children so that He may have a strong ground to judge, in His universal kingdom, those who are disobedient to His gospel and rebellious to His government. This is for the establishment of His kingdom.

Peter's use of the word "judgment" in 4:17 indicates that persecutions and sufferings are a kind of judgment. This judgment, however, is not for condemnation to eternal perdition. It is a judgment for discipline, a dispensational discipline to purify our life. This judgment is a fiery ordeal, a burning furnace, to purify us and remove any dross. We can be compared to gold, but we still have a certain amount of dross from which we need to be purified. No teaching or fellowship can accomplish this purification. The disciplinary judgment of the burning furnace is necessary to carry it out.

Suffering implies God's judgment. We need to realize that even in such matters as being bothered by our husband or wife or becoming ill there is an amount of God's judgment. God judges us because we are wrong in certain things, not pure in our motives, or not righteous in dealing with others. God judges us that we may be purified.

Often when believers suffer they ask why their situation is so poor when that of unbelievers is often prosperous. The reason believers suffer now is that God does not want us to suffer the end of the ungodly. Temporarily God may let them go, but eventually He will deal with them. First God judges His own children, His own house, His family, that His children may not suffer the same end as the ungodly.

In 4:17 Peter asks what will be the end of those who disobey the gospel of God if God's judgment first begins from us. This question indicates that the unbelievers, who disobey the gospel of God, will undergo a judgment more severe than that which the believers have undergone.

In 4:18 Peter goes on to say, "And if the righteous is saved with difficulty, where will the ungodly and sinner appear?" Here "the righteous" refers to the believers, who become righteous by being justified by their faith in Christ (Rom. 5:1) and by living a righteous life in Christ (Phil. 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rev. 19:8). The difficulty mentioned in 1 Peter 4:18 refers to persecution, suffering, and, mainly, to God's discipline.

In 4:18 "saved" does not mean saved from eternal perdition through the Lord's death, but saved from the coming destruction (1 Thes. 5:3, 8) through

the trials of persecution as God's disciplinary judgment. The believer, who has been disciplined by God through the sufferings of persecution to purify his life, is saved with the difficulty of persecution from the destruction of God's wrath toward the world. If God's children, the members of His own household, are saved with difficulty, surely the unbelievers will not escape God's judgment.

In 4:19 Peter goes on to say, "Wherefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in welldoing to a faithful Creator." The will of God here is that He wants us to suffer for Christ's sake and has appointed us to this (1 Pet. 3:17; 2:15; 1 Thes. 3:3).

Literally "commit" in 1 Peter 4:19 means to give in charge as a deposit, as in Luke 12:48; Acts 20:32; 1 Timothy 1:18; and 2 Timothy 2:2. When the believers suffer persecution in their body, especially as in martyrdom, they should commit their souls as a deposit to God, the faithful Creator, as the Lord did with His spirit to the Father (Luke 23:46).

The Creator in 1 Peter 4:19 does not refer to the Creator of the new creation in the new birth but to the Creator of the old creation. Persecution is a suffering in the old creation. God as our Creator can preserve our soul, which He created for us. He has even numbered our hairs (Matt. 10:30). He is loving and faithful. His loving and faithful care (1 Pet. 5:7) accompanies His justice in His governmental administration. While He is judging us, as His household, in His government, in His love He cares for us faithfully. In suffering His just disciplinary judgment in our body, we should commit our souls to His faithful care.

(23) They Suffer with Christ That They May Also Be Glorified with Him; Their Sufferings Are Not Worthy to Be Compared with the Coming Glory to Be Revealed to Them

Romans 8:17 and 18 say, "If children, heirs also; heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him that we may also be glorified with Him. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us." Here we see that the condition for being heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ is that "we suffer with Him that we may also be glorified with Him." We may not like suffering, but we need it. If we suffer with the Lord, we shall be glorified with Him.

Although I would not say that without suffering we shall not be glorified, it is certain that the degree of our suffering determines the degree of our glory. The more suffering we pass through, the more our glory will be intensified, for suffering increases the intensity of glory. We want to be glorified, but we do not want to experience suffering. However, suffering increases glory. In 1 Corinthians 15:41 Paul says that "star differs from star in glory," indicating that some stars shine more brightly than others. We all shall shine, and we all shall be glorified, but the intensity of our glory will depend on the amount of suffering we are willing to take. It is certain that the Apostle Paul will shine more brightly than all of us. We shall be glorified, but the intensity of our glory will differ according to our suffering. Therefore, Paul says that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory. The present suffering means nothing compared with the coming glory.

Suffering is also related to the growth of life. The genuine growth of any kind of life depends on hardship and suffering. Without hardship or suffering it is difficult for any life to grow. The suffering mentioned in verse 17 concerns not only outward glorification but also inward growth in life. The more we suffer, the more we grow and the faster we are matured. Therefore, if we expect to grow in life, we should not reject suffering, because suffering helps our growth. We should not expect a life that is free of suffering.

(24) They Shall Reign in the Coming Age with Christ through Endurance in This Age

The believers, by the experience of the divine dispensing, shall reign in the coming age with Christ through endurance in this age. In 2 Timothy 2:12a Paul says, "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him." Enduring is related to life in this age, and reigning with Christ, to the coming age. Endurance is the entrance into the coming reign with Christ. If we would reign as co-kings of Christ, we need to endure sufferings. The entrance into the coming reign is through the endurance of sufferings in this age.

(25) The Crown of Life Shall Be Given to Them for Their Suffering, Trial, and Tribulation

Eventually, the crown of life shall be given to the believers for their suffering, trial, and tribulation. Revelation 2:10 says, "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the Devil is about to cast some of you into prison

that you may be tried, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." To the church in Ephesus the Lord promises to give the overcomers to eat of Himself as the tree of life (Rev. 2:7). This is the divine life. To the church in Smyrna He promises to give the overcomers the crown of life. The eating of the tree of life is inward for supply, and the crown of life is outward for glory. Both promises are wrapped up with the divine life. This life must first be our food, and then it will be our expression and our glorification as the crown of life.

A crown in New Testament usage always denotes a prize in addition to salvation (Rev. 3:11; James 1:12; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 5:4; 1 Cor. 9:25). Eventually, life will become a crown; it will be the glory of the victorious martyrs. The crown of life as a prize to those who are faithful unto death in overcoming persecution denotes the overcoming strength which is the power of the resurrection life (Phil. 3:10). It also signifies that these overcomers have attained to "the out-resurrection from among the dead" (Phil. 3:11), that is, the outstanding resurrection.

Under God's sovereign arrangement, many trials, troubles, tribulations, and sufferings have been assigned to us. We may wonder why God assigns so many trials. Sometimes trials come one after another like waves in the ocean. However, we should not doubt. Rather, we should believe that our Father in the heavens is sovereign. All things, great and small, and all persons and matters are used sovereignly by God for our good. Although we are not able to see at present how this is so, we know from our reading and searching of the Word that, in principle, everything that happens to us is an assignment from our Father. We all need to believe this. We do not know what is best for us, and we do not know what is coming. Therefore, we must believe in God's sovereignty and leave our future with Him.

It is a basic principle that we should not try to escape trouble. Of course, we should not be foolish in dealing with people and in handling matters. On the contrary, we should be wise. Nevertheless, no matter how wise we may be, we still need to believe that our Father in the heavens is sovereign. He manages everything, and He assigns to us our portion.

The portion of sufferings assigned to us by God is for our maturity. Just as certain trees grow through the hardship of cold weather, we Christians grow through hardship. For this purpose God assigns to us certain circumstances

and a particular kind of environment. He knows that we need these hardships in order to grow.

Furthermore, sufferings afford us the best opportunity to enjoy the dispensing of the divine Trinity. God assigns sufferings to us, and these sufferings are needed for our growth. However, this growth will take place only as we remain under the divine dispensing. Therefore, we need to contact the processed Triune God all the time. Our contact with Him should be a continuous matter in our Christian life. It should be as continuous as our breathing and as the circulation of blood in our bodies. We need to keep ourselves always in the divine fellowship.

Furthermore, in our fellowship with the Lord we should be very fine, not rough. All those who grow to maturity in the divine life are fine. We need to receive and absorb the dispensing of the processed Triune God in a way that is fine. The Lord's dispensing is a fine matter, and we must learn to be fine in our fellowship with the Lord. Then we shall continually receive the divine dispensing from the Triune God deep within us. Actually, this dispensing comes from the heavens. By the nourishment we receive through this dispensing we shall grow.

The believers grow through trials, troubles, and sufferings. The Christian life does not grow without trouble. All the spiritual growth in the divine life is carried out through suffering. Without suffering the growth in the divine life is impossible.

A basic lesson that we all need to learn is that everything in our circumstances and environments depends not on us but on the sovereign Lord. Therefore, I would encourage you to be at peace and not to worry or be anxious. Your worry and anxiety does not help you at all. If you worry or are anxious, you simply waste yourself. Do not worry but simply be at peace, believing that you are not in your own hand but in the Lord's hand. Actually, you are not only in the Lord's hand but in the Lord Himself. He is the place in which we should remain, and He is also our destiny. He will accomplish whatever He desires, for our destiny is up to Him. Day by day we should simply remain in His dispensing to have the direct enjoyment of the divine supply of the processed Triune God in His embodiment, which is Christ, and through His ultimate consummation, which is the life-giving Spirit.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTY-FIVE

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (60)

We have seen that, in the progressing stage of God's full salvation, the believers experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity in the matters of 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, and being profited in all things in their circumstances and environments. In this message we shall see that the believers experience this divine dispensing also in having the best attitude toward others.

h. Having the Best Attitude toward Others

It is crucial that the believers have the best attitude toward others. We are in the church, yet the church is among human society. We cannot live a life outside human society. Hence, there is the need for us to know what kind of attitude we should hold toward others, that is, toward unbelievers.

(1) Being Subject to the Government

In having the best attitude toward others, the believers first need to be subject to the government. This is strongly charged in Romans 13:1-7. In 13:1a Paul says, "Let every person be subject to the authorities over them." A natural character is a rebellious character, but a transformed character is submissive. Subjecting ourselves to the government requires a certain amount of transformation. Therefore, if we are submissive to God's appointed authorities in the government, it is an indicator that we have a certain amount of transformation, because our natural character and disposition are rebellious. We were born rebellious, and our natural response to authority is to rebel. Subjection to authority requires transformation from the growth in life through the experience of the dispensing of the processed Triune God.

(a) Recognizing That the Authorities Are from God, Appointed by God, as Servants of God to the Believers for Their Good

We need to recognize that the authorities are from God, appointed by God, as servants of God to the believers for their good. Romans 13:1b says, "There is no authority except from God, and those which exist are appointed by God." Verse 4 says that the authority "is a servant of God to you for your good. But if you do evil, fear; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is a servant of God, an avenger for wrath to him who practices evil." The New Testament clearly teaches that all authorities are from God. Human government with its authority was established by God during Noah's time. After the flood, God gave man the authority to rule over others (Gen. 9:6). It was by this ruling authority among men that the nations were set up. Therefore, as Christians we must recognize that the authorities are from God and respect them.

As servants of God, the authorities have been appointed by God to the believers for their good. This means that through the authorities God will allow us to live on earth in peace to be His testimony. While we are living on earth, we surely need a peaceful situation. In order to maintain a peaceful situation there is the need of government with authority to rule over the people. Through this ruling a good environment and a peaceful situation can be maintained. This is for our good.

(b) Not Resisting Them

Because the authorities are from God, the believers should not resist them. "He who resists the authority opposes what God has appointed, and those who oppose will receive to themselves judgment. For the rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil. Would you have no fear of the authority? Do the good, and you will have praise from him" (vv. 2-3). It is not good to resist authority. Either the judgment will descend upon you from the authority or it will come to you directly from God.

In verse 5 Paul says, "It is necessary to be subject, not only because of wrath, but also because of conscience." Because of conscience, we need to learn, by being transformed through the divine dispensing, to be subject to authorities.

(c) Paying Taxes and Revenues to Them as God's Officers

In being subject to the government, the believers should pay taxes and revenues to the authorities as God's officers. In 13:6 Paul explains, "Because of this you also pay taxes; for they are God's officers, attending constantly to this very thing." Then in verse 7a he continues, "Render to all their dues: tax to whom tax is due, revenue to whom revenue." The Greek word rendered

“officers” in verse 6 literally means public servants. To pay tax and revenue indicates that we are subject to authority. In relation to the government the believers must be honest and pay whatever taxes are due. On the one hand, the believers are in a good condition, enjoying a good country with a good government; on the other hand, the believers need to pay for this by paying taxes and revenues to the authorities as God’s officers.

(d) Fearing Them and Honoring Them

In 13:7b Paul tells us to render fear to whom fear is due and honor to whom honor. All believers need to learn how to subject themselves to authorities, honoring them and fearing them. Rendering fear and honor to whom they are due also indicates that we are subject to the government.

(e) Being Ready to Do Every Good Work

In Titus 3:1-8 Paul charges the saints to keep a good relationship with the government. According to the healthy teaching in the New Testament, we must respect the government. Verse 1 says, “Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready unto every good work.” To be subject to rulers is to recognize God’s authority and to respect His government over men. To do every good work means to live a testimony for God.

Before Paul could teach the saints to respect the government, he himself had to experience a certain amount of transformation. When he was Saul of Tarsus, he was a patriotic Jew and wanted to be free from the yoke of the Roman imperialists. But in Titus 3:1 he instructs the saints to subject themselves to rulers and authorities, being ready unto every good work. According to Paul’s word in Romans 13, governmental officials have been appointed by God. Paul recognized that even those officials appointed by Caesar were rulers appointed by God, His deputy authority. If Paul had not been transformed from a natural person into a spiritual person with a spiritual understanding, it would have been difficult for him to give such instructions. In like manner, we need to be transformed through the divine dispensing in order to be subject to rulers and to be ready unto every good work. We have a proper relationship with the government not by ethical teachings, philosophical instructions, or by our natural life and ability but through our experience of the dispensing of the processed Triune God. We

have a heavenly, divine, and spiritual supply that enables us to be subject to the government.

(f) For the Lord's Sake according to the Will of God

Finally, the believers are to be subject to the government for the Lord's sake according to the will of God. First Peter 2:13-15 says, "Be subject to every human institution for the Lord's sake, whether to a king as supreme, or to governors as sent by him for vengeance on evildoers and praise of those who do good; because so is the will of God, by doing good to silence the ignorance of foolish men." Literally the Greek word translated "institution" here means creation, as in Colossians 1:15. It refers to anything made, as a creature, building, regulation, ordinance. In this verse the word institution means a regulation, an ordinance, an established principle, and it refers to the making of regulations or ordinances much like the enacting of laws by the legislature. According to the context, "every human institution" includes "a king as supreme" and also "governors as sent by him." Here Peter is telling the believers that for the Lord's sake, that is, for the expression and glorification of the Lord (v. 12), we should be subject to all human institutions according to the will of God.

(2) Loving Their Enemies

If the believers would have the best attitude toward others, they should love their enemies. This is the topmost attitude we should hold toward others.

In Matthew 5:43 and 44a the Lord Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, Love your enemies." This matter touches our being. The reason we love our neighbors is that they are good according to our feeling. Although our neighbors correspond to our feeling, an enemy does not. Instead, an enemy stirs up our temper. Hence, the matter of loving our enemies is a test.

If we read chapters five, six, and seven of Matthew, we shall see that the constitution of the kingdom of the heavens does not give any room to our natural being but instead kills all the "germs" within us. You hate your enemy because he does not agree with your natural choice, and you love your good neighbor because he suits your natural choice. If the Lord arranged for us to have only good neighbors and no enemies, we would not be put on the test.

But the Lord will use our enemies to expose what is within us. The reason we find it difficult to love our enemies is that they are against our being and our natural feeling. Therefore, the requirement to love our enemies is a test to prove whether we live by ourselves or by Christ. Through the divine dispensing of the divine Trinity the believers are able to love their enemies.

(a) Doing Good to Those Who Hate Them

The believers not only should love their enemies but also do good to those who hate them. In Luke 6:27 the Lord Jesus says, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you." To love our enemies and to do good to those who hate us is the highest standard of morality. In order to do this we need to be a God-man, a person saturated with God and mingled with Him.

Luke 6:35 says, "Love your enemies, and do good and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the unthankful and evil." In this verse we have the secret of loving our enemies and doing good to those who hate us. The secret is the life of God. If we would fulfill these requirements, we must have the life of God. We must be born of the Most High, born of God, and thereby become sons of the Most High.

As those who have been born of God, we are able to love our enemies. God loved us even when we were His enemies (Rom. 5:8). We need to be deeply impressed with the fact that God loved us while we were yet His enemies. Now His love has been dispensed into us. The love with which we love others, especially our enemies, is therefore the love of God our Father.

The New Testament tells us that God is love (1 John 4:8). As Spirit is the nature of God's person and light is the nature of God's expression, so love is the nature of God's being. Hence, if we have been born of God, we surely have been born of the nature of God's being, which is the divine love. As those born of God, we have His life and nature. Spontaneously we are now able to love our enemies even as God our Father loves them. This is the reason the Lord tells us to love our enemies so that we may be the sons of the Most High, the One who is kind to those who are unthankful and evil.

(b) Feeding Them and Giving Them a Drink

In Romans 12:20 Paul says, "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. It may be that by feeding our enemies and giving them a drink, we may, to at least some extent, move and turn their hearts and gain them for the Lord's sake.

(c) Not Conquered by the Evil, but Conquering the Evil with the Good

Romans 12:21 says, "Do not be conquered by the evil, but conquer the evil with the good." To be conquered by the evil is to repay evil for evil (v. 17). Suppose someone treats you evilly and you treat him evilly in return. This indicates that you have been conquered by the evil. We should not be like this. Instead, we should conquer the evil with the good. This means that if someone treats you evilly, you give him good treatment in return. This is to conquer the evil with the good.

(3) Praying for Their Persecutors

In the New Testament the believers are charged to pray for their persecutors. In Matthew 5:44b the Lord Jesus says, "Pray for those who persecute you." This is a wonderful attitude to hold toward the persecutors. Stephen had such an attitude in Acts 7. When he was being stoned, even unto death, he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" (v. 60). Stephen prayed for his persecutors in the same way as his Lord, whom he loved and lived (Luke 23:34).

(a) Blessing Them

Not only should we pray for our persecutors—we should also bless them. In Romans 12:14a Paul says, "Bless those who persecute you." It is even more difficult to bless a persecutor than to pray for him. Nevertheless, through the divine dispensing this was Paul's experience. Therefore, he could say, "Being reviled we bless" (1 Cor. 4:12b).

First Peter 3:9 says, "Not rendering evil for evil, or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, because to this you were called that you might inherit blessing." We have been called to bless others, so we, as a blessed people, should always bless others that we might inherit blessing. What we bless others with, we shall inherit ourselves (Matt. 10:13). Peter's word

corresponds to what the Lord Jesus says in Matthew 5:44 and to what Paul says in Romans 12:14 and 1 Corinthians 4:12.

(b) Not Cursing Them

After charging us to bless those who persecute us, Paul goes on to say, "Bless and do not curse" (Rom. 12:14b). It is very difficult for us not to curse one who is persecuting us. Even if we would not curse him with our mouth, there may be a cursing of him deep within us. Therefore, in order to bless our persecutors and not curse them, we need to be saturated with the processed Triune God through His dispensing.

(4) Pursuing Peace with All Men

The believers also need to pursue peace with all men. Hebrews 12:14a says, "Pursue peace with all men." To pursue here means to chase, even to chase vigorously. In having the best attitude toward others, we need to pursue peace, to chase peace vigorously.

(a) Living in Peace with All Men

The believers should not fight with anyone. Rather, we should pursue peace with all men. This means that we endeavor to keep a peaceful situation with everybody, living in peace with all men.

(b) As Far as It Depends on Them

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. This is the reason Paul says that we should live in peace with all men "if possible." As far as it depends on us, we should do our best to live in peace with everybody.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTY-SIX

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (61)

In this message we shall begin to see that, through the experience of the dispensing of the divine Trinity, the believers have the highest standard of morality and virtues.

i. Having the Highest Standard of Morality and Virtues

In the New Testament salvation is based on the principle of faith; it has nothing to do with the law. We all have been saved through faith, not through the keeping of the law. But after we are saved, we must live a life that has a standard of morality higher than that of the old law. We should not think that, just because God does not deal with us according to the principle of the law but according to the principle of faith, we should not care for the moral commandments of the law. On the contrary, after we have been saved, our standard of morality should be far higher than that of the requirements of the law.

It is important that we understand clearly what we mean by the highest standard of morality. In Genesis 1 we see that man was created in God's image and according to God's likeness. God is love and light. Love is the nature of God's being, and light is the nature of God's expression. Furthermore, God is holy and righteous. God is holy in His nature and righteous in His actions. These four attributes—love, light, holiness, and righteousness—are revealed in the law of God.

To say that man was created in the image of God means that man was created according to what God is. Man was created according to the God who is love and light and who is also holy and righteous. However, at the time of his creation man did not have God within him. For this reason, God placed the man created by Him in front of the tree of life. This indicates that it was necessary for the God-created man to take God into him as his life. If man had taken God into him as life, then the divine attributes of love, light, holiness, and righteousness would have come into man. The man created by God had only the appearance of God's love, light, righteousness, and holiness. Man

cannot have the reality of these attributes unless he receives God into him as life.

One day God Himself became a man named Jesus. This man was conceived of the divine essence and born of the human essence, the very essence God created in man. Therefore, the Lord Jesus, the God-man, was a composition of the divine essence with all the divine attributes and the human essence with all the human virtues. When He was on earth, He lived a life that was a composition of the divine attributes and the human virtues. This is the highest standard of morality.

When we speak of the highest standard of morality, we are not using the word "morality" in a traditional way. By morality we mean the standard of life God requires. The highest standard of morality is the living of the One—the Lord Jesus Christ—whose life was a composition of God with the divine attributes and man with the human virtues.

Although the man created by God failed to live a life in the highest standard of morality, the Lord Jesus lived such a life on earth with the attributes of God expressed in the virtues of man. God's intention in His New Testament economy is that all the believers in Christ become a reproduction of Christ, the God-man. In order to become such a reproduction, we need to be reborn of the pneumatic Christ in our spirit (John 3:6), and then we need to be transformed gradually by the pneumatic Christ in our soul (2 Cor. 3:18). Then spontaneously we shall live Christ (Phil. 1:21), the God-man, by the bountiful supply of His Spirit (Phil. 1:19), taking His mind (Phil. 2:5) and shining the word of life as luminaries reflecting His brightness (Phil. 2:15b-16a). We shall also be found in Christ (Phil. 3:9) as our surpassing righteousness in the power of His resurrection. Then we shall express Him in all the human virtues created by God for man. With the divine attributes of the God-man these virtues are strengthened, enriched, uplifted, and filled. This is what it means for the believers, through the dispensing of the processed Triune God, to have the highest standard of morality and virtues.

(1) Having Been Created in Christ for Good Works, Which God Before Prepared That They Should Walk in Them

Ephesians 2:10 says, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God before prepared that we should walk in them." The

Greek word “workmanship” here may also be rendered “masterpiece.” The Greek word poiema means something which has been made, a handiwork, or something which has been written or composed as a poem. Poetry does not consist only of poetic writings; any work of art that expresses the maker’s wisdom and design may be considered a poem. We, the church, the masterpiece of God’s work, are the highest poetry, expressing God’s infinite wisdom and divine design.

As God’s workmanship, we have been “created in Christ Jesus.” This means that as the masterpiece of God’s work, we are an absolutely new item in the universe, something newly originated by God. We have been created by God in Christ through regeneration to be His new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

Furthermore, the believers who compose God’s masterpiece are absolutely new because they are the mingling of God and man. God’s masterpiece, His greatest workmanship, is the working of Himself into man and the constituting of man into oneness with Himself to produce the church.

As God’s masterpiece created in Christ Jesus through the mingling of God and man, we have been created in Christ “for good works, which God before prepared that we should walk in them.” The good works for which God created us are not merely the good things according to our general concept but the definite good things which God pre-planned and previously ordained for us to walk in. These good things include the doing of His will to live the church life and bear the testimony of Jesus, as revealed in the entire book of Ephesians. Therefore, we need to do God’s will, live the church life, and bear the testimony of Jesus. These are the good works prepared beforehand by God for us, His masterpiece, to walk in. According to Ephesians 2:4-10, we have been saved by grace to be God’s masterpiece that we may walk in the good works prepared before by God.

(2) Having Been Redeemed from All Lawlessness and Purified to Christ a People as His Peculiar Treasure, Zealous of Good Works

In Titus 2:14 Paul tells us that Christ “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all lawlessness and purify to Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good works.” The words “for us” here mean on our behalf. They do not mean instead of us. To redeem means to buy with a price (1 Cor. 6:20; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:6). Christ gave Himself for us not only

that He might redeem us from all lawlessness but also that He might purify to Himself a people for His own possession. A people for His possession are a peculiar people. This expression is borrowed from the Old Testament (Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18) and denotes a people privately possessed by God as His peculiar treasure (Exo. 19:5), His own possession (1 Pet. 2:9). As such a people, we should be zealous of good works. We, the believers in Christ, have been created in Christ for good works and redeemed by Christ to be His people, zealous of good works.

(3) Being Regulated by the Governing Principles

Now we need to see that, in order to have the highest standard of morality and virtues, we need to be regulated by four governing principles.

(a) Concerning Things, All Things Are Lawful to Them, but Not All Things Are Expedient, Profitable

First Corinthians 6:12a says, "All things are lawful to me, but not all things are expedient." The Greek word rendered "lawful" here literally means "under my power of choice to do"; hence, permissible, allowable, lawful. The word for "expedient" means profitable (not merely convenient), advantageous, good, worthwhile. This Greek word means profitable, economical, convenient, helpful in reaching the goal quickly. It also refers to things that are good. Here Paul's thought may be that all things are lawful but not all things help us to remain in the central lane of God's economy. All things are lawful, but not all things help us in bearing the cross or are profitable in experiencing Christ.

If we would understand Paul's use of the word expedient here, we need to have a proper realization concerning the book of 1 Corinthians as a whole. All things are lawful to us, but not all things help us to gain the profit revealed in this Epistle. Not all things help us to live the Body life. Yes, you may be free to do certain things, but those things will not help you in the church life, and they will not strengthen your prayer life. If we apply what Paul says in 6:12a according to the context of the entire book of 1 Corinthians, we shall see that Paul's word here is all-inclusive. Paul is saying that all things are lawful to us, but not all things are good, profitable, convenient, or economical for us to live the Christian life, the church life, and the Body life.

(b) Concerning Themselves, All Things Are Lawful to Them, but They Will Not Be Brought

under the Power of Anything

In 1 Corinthians 6:12b Paul says, “All things are lawful to me, but I will not be brought under the power of anything.” In verse 12 Paul twice says, “All things are lawful to me.” The first use of these words is somewhat objective; the second use is very subjective.

Literally the Greek words rendered “be brought under the power of” mean to be brought under the authority of. All things are under my power, but I will not be brought under the power (authority) of anything. All things are permissible, allowable, lawful, to me, but I will not be ruled (enslaved) or brought under the authority, the control, of any.

When we consider whether or not to do a certain thing, we should ask if we are under the power or control of that thing. If a particular thing controls us or has power over us, we should not do it. For example, we may wonder if we should eat certain foods. It may be all right to eat those foods, but they should not have any power over us. We must fully deal with anything that has power over us.

(c) Concerning Others, All Things Are Lawful but Not All Things Build Up

First Corinthians 10:23b says, “All things are lawful, but not all things build up.” The parallel verse, 6:12, ends with not being under the power of anything. This verse ends with not building up. The former concerns ourselves; the latter concerns others. In 6:12 Paul’s concern is personal, but in 10:23 it is corporate. In 10:23 the words “build up” refer not only to the edification of individual believers but also to the building up of the corporate Body of Christ (1 Cor. 14:4-5, 12; Eph. 4:16). First Corinthians emphasizes the matter of building up (3:9-10, 12; 8:1).

In all that we do we must take care of things, ourselves, and others. Concerning things, everything we do must be a profit. Concerning ourselves, everything we do should not be a bondage, a slavery, to us. Concerning others, anything we do must build up others.

(d) Concerning God, Whatever They Do, They Do All to the Glory of God

First Corinthians 10:31 says, “Whether therefore you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Glory is the expression of God, God expressed in splendor. Whatever we do must be to the glory of God, that is, to God’s expression. This means that, in particular, we need to glorify God in our body (1 Cor. 6:20b). To glorify God in our body is to let God who dwells in us (1 John 4:13) occupy and saturate our body and express Himself through our body as His temple, especially in the two matters of eating and marriage, according to the context of 1 Corinthians from 6:13 through 11:1. For this, we need to exercise a severe and strict control over our body, bringing it into subjection (9:27) and presenting it to God as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1).

In 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23 and 31 we have four basic principles for regulating the conduct of the New Testament believers. First, all things are lawful to the believers, but all the things they do must be expedient. This means that the things must be profitable, that is, not causing the suffering of any loss. Second, the believers must not be brought under the power, the control, the authority, of anything. Third, all things the believers do must build up others. Fourth, whatever the believers do, they must do to the glory of God. Otherwise, nothing is permissible or acceptable. If a certain matter does not pass the test of these four principles, we should not do it.

As believers in Christ, we are free, for we are not under law. Nevertheless we still need to be regulated by the four governing principles. Concerning any particular matter, we need to consider if that thing is profitable, if it has power over us, if it builds up others, and if it glorifies God. In practice, we may find it very difficult to live according to these principles. This is why we need the dispensing of the processed Triune God. To live according to these principles is to take the narrow way that leads to life (Matt. 7:14). In order to walk this narrow way we need Christ. Therefore, we need to learn to take Christ and apply Him to every situation. Because it is difficult for us to be released from our habits, we need the Triune God, and we need His dispensing.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTY-SEVEN

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (62)

Through the experience of the dispensing of the processed Triune God the believers have the highest standard of morality and virtues. In this message we shall consider further aspects of the believers' standard of morality and virtues.

(4) Practicing the Surpassing Righteousness

In Matthew 5:20 the Lord Jesus says, "Unless your righteousness surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens." The surpassing righteousness is the condition of entering into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens in the millennium. By keeping the highest law to the highest standard we fulfill the condition for entering into the coming manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens.

In 5:20 righteousness does not refer to the objective righteousness, which is the Christ we receive when we believe in Him that we may be justified before God (1 Cor. 1:30; Rom. 3:26). 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 is not obtained merely by fulfilling the old law, but by completing the old law through the fulfillment of the new law for the kingdom of the heavens, the law given by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 5:17-48. This righteousness of the believers according to the new law of the kingdom surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees according to the old law. It is impossible for our natural life to gain this surpassing righteousness; it can be produced only by the divine life, the resurrection life of Christ.

(a) Not Getting Angry Surpassing Not Murdering

In Matthew 5:21 and 22 the Lord Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said to the ancients, You shall not murder, and whoever murders shall be liable to the judgment. But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to the judgment; and whoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be liable to the Sanhedrin; and whoever shall say, Moreh, shall be

liable to the Gehenna of fire." The law of the old dispensation deals with the act of murder, but the new law of the kingdom deals with anger, the motive of murder. Hence, the demand of the new law of the kingdom is deeper than the requirement of the law of the old dispensation. The word "brother" in verse 22 proves that the Lord's word here is spoken to believers.

The most difficult thing for us to do is to control our anger, our temper. It is also very difficult for us not to condemn others. In verse 22 the Lord speaks about saying to our brother, "Raca" or "Moreh." The word Raca is an expression of contempt, meaning stupid, good-for-nothing. Moreh, that is, fool, is a Hebrew expression of condemnation indicating a rebel (Num. 20:10). This expression is more serious than the expression of contempt, Raca. How difficult it is neither to condemn a brother nor to hold him in contempt! Therefore, we should have no confidence in our natural life but enjoy Christ's overcoming life through the divine dispensing.

(b) Not Lusting for a Woman by Looking at Her and Committing Adultery in the Heart Surpassing Not Committing Adultery

Matthew 5:27 and 28 say, "You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you, that every one who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." The old law, the commandment not to commit adultery (Exo. 20:14; Deut. 5:18), is in verse 27. The new complementing law regarding adultery is in verse 28. The law of the old dispensation deals with the outward act of adultery, whereas the new law of the kingdom deals with the inward motive of the heart.

In Matthew 5:21-22 the Lord Jesus speaks about anger, and in 5:27-28, about lust. Our temper and our lust constantly damage us and trouble us. In order to live up to a moral standard higher than that of the old law, we must overcome our temper and our lust. In order to do this, we need Christ, and we need another life—the divine life. How we need to stay with Christ! We must contact Him not only day by day but even hour by hour. Because of the anger and lust within us, we need to remain in constant fellowship with the Lord, continually experiencing the dispensing of the processed Triune God. Then we shall experience and enjoy the divine life, a life that can fulfill the highest standard and that overcomes our anger and lust.

We need to be very clear concerning the fact that actually we are not keeping the law. Rather, we are walking according to the spirit. Romans 8:4 tells us that when we walk according to the spirit, we spontaneously fulfill all the righteous requirements of the law. We are not trying to keep the law, for the more we try to keep it, the more we break it. This is fully revealed and recorded in Romans 7. Today we are neither under the law nor obliged to keep the law. We are free from the law, and now we are walking according to the spirit. Within the spirit there is Christ, who is our resurrection life. As we walk according to the spirit, we fulfill the requirements of even the highest law. Therefore, we do not need to keep the law in the sense of striving in ourselves, but we must walk according to the spirit. When we walk according to the spirit, we spontaneously fulfill all the requirements of the law, overcoming our anger and our lust, and have the highest standard of morality.

(c) Not Having Divorce Surpassing Putting Away the Wife with a Paper of Divorce

Matthew 5:31 and 32 say, "It was said: Whoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a divorce. But I say to you that every one who puts away his wife, except in a case of fornication, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries one that has been put away commits adultery." What the Lord Jesus decreed in 5:21-30 as the new law of the kingdom complements the law of the old dispensation, whereas what He proclaimed in 5:31-48 as the new law of the kingdom changes the law of the old dispensation. According to the old law, a man could divorce his wife simply by giving her a writing of divorcement. The law of the old dispensation concerning divorce was ordained because of the people's hardness of heart; it was not according to God's design in the beginning (Matt. 19:7-8). The Lord's new decree recovers marriage back to the beginning designed by God (Matt. 19:4-6).

The marriage tie can be broken only by death (Rom. 7:3) or fornication. Hence, to have a divorce for any other reason is to commit adultery.

In His original design for marriage, God ordained one wife for one husband. But due to the weakness and hardness of heart of the children of Israel, when the law was given, Moses gave a man permission to divorce his wife with a writing of divorce. But in Matthew 5:31-32 this law regarding divorce is changed, and the matter of marriage is recovered to God's intention at the beginning. Now only two things can break the marriage tie: the death of one

of the parties or adultery. Therefore, not having divorce surpasses putting away the wife with a paper of divorce.

(d) Not Swearing Surpassing Not Perjuring

Matthew 5:33-37 says, "Again, you have heard that it was said to the ancients: You shall not perjure yourself, but you shall render to the Lord what you have sworn. But I say to you, Do not swear at all, neither by the heaven, because it is the throne of God, nor by the earth, because it is the footstool of His feet, nor by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King. Neither shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your word be, Yes, yes; No, no; for whatever is more than this is of the evil one." The old law regarding swearing was that we should not perjure ourselves. The Lord's new law regarding swearing is not to swear at all. The new law forbids the believers to swear in any manner, by the heaven, by the earth, by Jerusalem, or by their head, because the heaven, the earth, Jerusalem, and their head are not under their control but under God's control.

Our word needs to be simple and true. Instead of trying to convince others with many words, we should be brief and clear in our speaking. We should be able to say, "Yes, yes; No, no." Whatever is more than a straight yes or no is of the evil one. Here we see the crucial matter that in our talking the evil one may be present. When we speak more words than are necessary, those words are not of us but of the evil one, the Devil. This indicates that in our talking the evil one is with us. The Lord's word in verse 37 indicates strongly that the evil one seeks an opportunity to express himself through our excessive talking. Therefore, we should not say too much but simply say as much as is needed. If we go further than is necessary, talking with excessive words, the evil one will be expressed.

(e) Not Resisting an Evil One, but Turning to Him the Left Cheek Plus the Right, and Letting Him Have Their Cloak Plus Their Tunic, and Going Two Miles Instead of One Mile in Compelling, Surpassing Practicing an Eye for an Eye and a Tooth for a Tooth

Matthew 5:38 and 39 say, “You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil; but whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.” The old law was “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” This is fair, just, and righteous, but it is too low. The new law, given by the Lord in verse 39, is not to resist one who is evil. Here the Lord says that when someone strikes our right cheek, we should turn to him the other also. To do this indicates that there is no resistance.

In verses 40 and 41 the Lord goes on to say, “To him who would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever shall compel you to go one mile, go with him two.” If someone claims your tunic, a shirt-like undergarment, give him your cloak also. This will prove that you have no resistance. To turn the other cheek to the striker, to let the one who sues have the cloak, and to go with the compeller the second mile prove that the believers have the power to suffer and to be meek instead of resisting and to walk not in the flesh, nor in the soul for their own interest but in the spirit for the kingdom.

The Lord’s word in these verses actually deals with our temper. To resist by claiming an eye for an eye means that we are releasing our temper. If someone demands your shirt, your anger may be aroused. Thus, it is not a matter of a shirt but of your temper. It is the same in principle with being struck on the right cheek or compelled to walk a mile. Through the divine dispensing we, the believers in Christ, must be above our temper, not resisting an evil one.

(f) As Sons of the Heavenly Father, Loving Their Enemies and Praying for Their Persecutors Surpassing Loving the Neighbor and Hating the Enemy

Matthew 5:43-45 says, “You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may become sons of your Father who is in the heavens, because He makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.” Legally speaking, the old law—to love our neighbor and hate our enemy—is fair and righteous, for a neighbor deserves our love and an enemy deserves our hatred. However, in order to touch our natural being and to reveal how much the divine life within us can

do for us, the Lord requires us to love our enemies and pray for our persecutors. This surpasses loving the neighbor and hating the enemy.

If we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, we behave as sons of the heavenly Father. The title "sons of your Father" is a strong proof that the Lord's word here is addressed to regenerated believers of the New Testament. As sons of our Father, we should deal with the evil and the unjust as with the good and the just (v. 45), love not only those who love us but those who do not love us (v. 46), and greet not only our brothers but also others (v. 47). To live in such a way is to be virtuous sons of the heavenly Father. Through the divine dispensing, we need to practice this high standard of morality and virtue and thereby live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, which is the constitution of the heavenly kingdom. If we intend to live in the kingdom, we need to practice the high standard of morality and virtue revealed by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 5.

(5) Being Perfect as Their Heavenly Father Is Perfect

Matthew 5:48 says, "You, therefore, shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." For the believers to be perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect is to be perfect in His love. They are the Father's children, having the Father's divine life and divine nature. Hence, they can be perfect as the Father.

The demand of the new law of the kingdom is much higher than the requirement of the law of the old dispensation. This higher demand can be met only by the Father's life, not by our natural life. The kingdom of the heavens is the highest demand, and the life of the Father is the highest supply to meet that demand. The Gospels first present the highest demand of the kingdom of the heavens in the Gospel of Matthew and then afford us the highest supply of the divine life, the life of the heavenly Father, in the Gospel of John so that we may live the life of the kingdom of the heavens.

All the requirements of the laws in Matthew 5 reveal how much the divine life within us can do for us. These laws are not merely a requirement; they are a revelation showing us that the divine life can even make us perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. We have this perfecting life within us. We have a life with such a divine nature that it can make us as perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.

We should not take the Lord's word in Matthew 5 as a teaching concerning how we should behave. We are not able to imitate the Father. This way of behaving does not work. The Lord's word was intended to touch our being and to expose what we are. When we have been exposed and subdued, we shall give the full opportunity to the divine life to live within us. This will make us perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.

Matthew 5:48 is an indicator that we have the Father's life and nature within us. We have been born of Him, and we are His children. Because we are the Father's children possessing His life and nature, there is no need for us to imitate Him or copy Him. As long as we grow in His life, we shall be the same as He is. Our only need is to be exposed so that we may give up all hope in ourselves. When we are exposed, we shall realize that our natural life is hopeless. Then we shall renounce our natural life, turn to the life of our Father, and stay with the divine nature. Spontaneously, this life will grow in us and fulfill the requirements of this highest law. It is crucial that we understand this matter, for it is altogether different from our natural concept.

As believers in Christ, we are not only God's creatures; we are also His regenerated children, possessing His life and nature. Thus, we are not God's creatures trying to copy and imitate Him; we are the Father's children living the Father's life. We became children of God when the Spirit of God came into our spirit to regenerate us and to make our spirit the habitation of God (Eph. 2:22). If we walk according to this regenerated spirit, we are the children of God living by God's life. Spontaneously we fulfill the righteous requirements of the law. In this way we shall be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. Eventually, through our growth in life we shall be the same as He is.

Since we are sons of the heavenly Father possessing His life and nature, it is logical that we, His sons, should be perfect even as He is perfect. In order for us to be perfect in this way, we need to enjoy the dispensing of the divine life and nature into us by enjoying the Father Himself. As believers, we may experience and enjoy the dispensing of God as the Father in His love. This involves God's eternal economy. In His eternal economy God sovereignly ordained that His sons should be like Him. Because we have been born of Him, there is no reason or excuse for us not to be like Him. The Father has begotten us, He has imparted His life into us, and He has given us His nature for our enjoyment. Now He is waiting for us to enjoy Him. The divine life brings us into His fellowship, and in this fellowship we enjoy the Father in His life and nature. Therefore, it is actually easy and normal for us, as sons of the

Father, to be perfect as He is perfect. The way to be perfect is to remain in the divine fellowship to receive and enjoy continually the dispensing of the processed Triune God.

(6) Being Established in Every Good Work and Word

Second Thessalonians 2:16 and 17 say, "Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal encouragement and good hope in grace, encourage your hearts and establish you in every good work and word." Here we see that the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father establish the believers in every good work and word. This establishing takes place as the believers experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity. In what we do and say we are being established by the dispensing Triune God.

(7) Proving All Things and Holding Fast What Is Good

In 1 Thessalonians 5:20 and 21 Paul says, "Do not despise prophecies; but prove all things; hold fast what is good." To despise here is to count as nothing, lightly esteem. The prophecies in verse 20 refer mainly to prophesying, to prophetic speech from a revelation. This does not need to be a prediction. To prophesy is to speak for the Lord and to speak forth the Lord. Only a small percentage of prophecy is related to prediction. We should not despise this kind of speaking. To prove all things includes to discern the prophecies (1 Cor. 14:29), to discern the spirits (1 Cor. 12:10), to test the spirits (1 John 4:1), to prove what is the will of God (Rom. 12:2), and to prove what is well-pleasing to the Lord (Eph. 5:10). On the one hand, we should not despise prophecies; on the other hand, we should not follow blindly. We need to prove things, to test them, and then hold fast what is good. We need to have the habit of proving everything that we intend to do and then to hold fast what is good.

(8) Abstaining from Every Form of Evil

First Thessalonians 5:22 says, "Abstain from every form of evil." The King James Version of this verse says, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." Using this translation, a number of Bible teachers have misunderstood this verse, thinking that it tells us to avoid not only evil but even the appearance of evil, anything that may be suspected of being evil. However, if we consider the

meaning of the Greek word rendered “form,” we shall have the proper understanding of this verse. Literally, the word is species, as subordinated to the genus; hence, kind. It denotes anything in view, anything in perception; hence, a sight. It does not refer to the appearance of evil, but the kind, the form, the shape, the sight, of evil. The believers who live in the divine dispensing should abstain from evil in any form and of any kind.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTY-EIGHT

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (63)

In this message we shall first cover two further matters related to the believers' having the highest standard of morality and virtues, and then we shall consider the matter of watching and praying.

(9) Enduring Suffering for Doing Good

The fact that the believers have the highest standard of morality and virtues is seen in their enduring suffering for doing good. First Peter 2:20 says, "What credit is it if sinning and being buffeted you shall endure it? But if doing good and suffering you shall endure, this is grace with God." Such a situation indicates that our living expresses the working of God's grace within us and through us. Here grace refers to the motivation of the divine life within us and its expression in our life, becoming in our behavior gracious and acceptable in the sight of both man and God.

(10) Taking Account of Considering Whatever Is True, Whatever Is Honorable, Whatever Is Righteous, Whatever Is Pure, Whatever Is Lovely, Whatever Is Well-spoken Of, If There Is Any Virtue, and Any Praise

In Philippians 4:8 Paul says, "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is righteous, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is well-spoken of, if there is any virtue and if any praise, take account of these things." In this verse we see the expression of a life that lives Christ. Furthermore, here we see a number of governing aspects of a life that lives Christ.

The first of these governing aspects is "whatever is true." The word "true" here means truthful ethically, not merely true in matter of fact. In the expression of the life that lives Christ there can be no falsehood, no lying. Everything we do or say must be truthful. No one who lives Christ should practice falsehood of any kind. A life that is the expression of Christ is a truthful one.

Another governing aspect of a life that lives Christ is "whatever is honorable." The Greek word translated "honorable" means venerable, worthy of reverence, noble, grave (1 Tim. 3:8, 11; Titus 2:2), implying the idea of dignity which inspires and invites reverence. A life that lives Christ will be honorable, noble, grave, solid, weighty, and dignified. If we live Christ, we shall have true dignity. When others see us bearing such a dignity, they will have a deep respect for us. The dignity implied in the Greek word for honorable always inspires a profound respect.

In verse 8 Paul also speaks of "whatever is righteous." This refers to what is right (not just) before God and man. Doing what is right is another governing aspect related to the living of Christ.

The word "pure" in the expression "whatever is pure" means single in intention and action without any mixture. To be pure in this way is to have no pretense. Purity is also a governing aspect of the life that lives Christ.

Yet another governing aspect of such a life is "whatever is lovely." The word "lovely" means lovable, agreeable, endearing.

Next Paul goes on to mention "whatever is well-spoken of." This means whatever is of good repute, renowned, attractive, winning, gracious. The Greek word means sounding well.

In Philippians 4:8 Paul does not mention kindness, patience, or holiness. Instead, he mentions six items which are governing aspects of a life that lives Christ. If we live Christ, we shall surely have a life that is an expression of all these aspects. In our living, there will be no falsehood, looseness, or lightness. Instead, our living will be honorable, pure, right, lovely, and well-spoken of.

On the basis of Paul's word, "To me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21), we can rightly say that the virtues in 4:8 are aspects of the expression of a life that lives Christ. Since Paul himself lived Christ, he certainly would not charge the believers to live something instead of Christ. Therefore, the virtues he mentions in 4:8 must be the expression of the reality lived by Paul and by other believers. This reality is Christ Himself.

If we consider carefully the virtues listed in 4:8, we shall realize that in ourselves it is impossible for us to have such a life with such an expression. Therefore, we must go on to 4:13, where Paul says, "I can do all things in Him who empowers me." To be so empowered is to be made dynamic inwardly. Christ dwells in us (Col. 1:27). He empowers us, makes us dynamic, from

within. By such inward empowering Paul could do all things in Christ. All the virtues in 4:8 are the expression of the very Christ in whom Paul could do everything.

Based on the whole context of the book of Philippians, we can say that the six virtues in 4:8 are the expression of the living of Christ. These are not merely human virtues but are the expression of the Christ whom we live.

Toward the end of 4:8 Paul changes his expression and says, "If there is any virtue and if any praise." The Greek word for "virtue" means excellence, that is, ethical energy exhibited in vigorous action. "Praise" here refers to things worthy of praise, as the companion of virtue.

The first six items in 4:8 are categorized as "whatever is"; the last two are categorized as "if any." This indicates that the last two are a summing up of the six foregoing items, in all of which are some virtue or excellence and something worthy of praise.

Virtue and praise are not two additional aspects but values of the six aspects already covered. Virtue is a general term rather than a specific aspect. There is virtue in truthfulness, dignity, purity, loveliness, rightness, and being well-spoken of. The principle is the same with praise: there is something worthy of praise in all these six aspects of the Christian life.

How excellent is the expression of the life that lives Christ! The six aspects in verse 8 certainly are excellent characteristics of the Christian life. It is excellent to be truthful, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and of good report. In each of these excellent aspects there is some virtue and something worthy of praise. We should "take account of these things"; that is, we should think on them, ponder them, consider them.

The items in 4:8 portray a picture that is much more virtuous than that portrayed in the Ten Commandments. These virtues produce excellency and praise. This praise is not only to God but also to us, for others will praise us for all these excellent virtues. Since Philippians is a book on the experience of Christ, this indicates that in our experience of Christ we must attain to the point that whatever we do is true, honorable, righteous, pure, lovely, and well-spoken of. These virtues will be an excellency in our behavior and will cause others to praise God and also to praise us.

j. Watching and Praying

In our enjoying of the dispensing of the divine Trinity we must learn to watch and to pray. We should not remain in any kind of sleepiness. Rather, we need to watch over the situation concerning ourselves, the brothers and sisters, the church in which we are, and even the Lord's recovery. We should watch and pray concerning the Lord's interest and His present move and also over the world situation and the things regarding the unsaved. As believers we should be concerned for these things. Therefore, we need to watch over them and pray about them.

The word "watch and pray" was given by the Lord Jesus to His disciples in Matthew 26:41. When He was about to be betrayed, He told His disciples that they should watch and pray.

(1) Not Entering into Temptation

Matthew 26:41 says, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is ready, but the flesh is weak." In spiritual things our spirit is often ready, but our flesh is weak.

We need to watch and pray so that we may not enter into temptation. If we would avoid entering into temptation, we need to watch and pray all the time. The Lord's word indicates that it is possible for us to be tempted in anything, at any place, and at any time. Because it is easy for us to enter into temptation, we must watch and pray.

(2) At Every Time

The believers need to watch and pray at every time. Luke 21:36a says, "Be watchful, at every time beseeching."

(3) To Escape All the Things of the Great Tribulation Coming upon Them Suddenly as a Snare

In Luke 21:34 and 35 the Lord Jesus says, "Take heed to yourselves lest at some time your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and anxieties of life, and that day come upon you suddenly as a snare; for it will come in upon all those dwelling on the face of all the earth." The Greek word rendered "dissipation" indicates a drunken hangover. The phrase "dissipation and drunkenness" refers to indulgence in the enjoyment of eating and drinking.

The Lord's word here is similar to that in Luke 17:27: "They were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day in which Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all." The generation of Noah was characterized by the indulgence of the lustful self. Today those who indulge their lust in eating and drinking and who are weighed down with the anxieties of life will become stupefied by their enjoyment and anxiety. Suddenly, unexpectedly, "that day" will come upon them as a snare, as a net cast over them. This snare will come upon all those dwelling on the face of all the earth.

In Luke 21:36 the Lord Jesus says, "But be watchful, at every time beseeching, that you may prevail to escape all these things which are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." To prevail here is to have strength and ability. The strength and ability to escape the great tribulation come from watchfulness and beseeching.

The word "escape" in 21:36 signifies being taken, raptured, before the great tribulation (Matt. 24:21), which will be a severe trial upon the whole inhabited earth (Rev. 3:10; Luke 17:34-36). To be thus raptured is to be kept "out of the hour of trial which is about to come on the whole inhabited earth, to try them who dwell on the earth" (Rev. 3:10). Furthermore, "all these things" are the things of the great tribulation.

In Revelation 3:10 the Lord promises the recovered church, the church in Philadelphia that He will keep her out of the hour of trial. He will keep her not only out of the trial but also out of the hour of trial, because she has kept the word of the Lord's endurance. This promise of the Lord, like that in Luke 21:36, indicates that the believers who have kept the word of the Lord's endurance will be raptured before the great trial. This implies that those who have not kept the word of His endurance will be left in the trial.

In 21:36 the Lord Jesus charges us to be watchful. Instead of being stupefied or drugged, we need to be vigilant. Furthermore, at every time we need to beseech. This is not to pray in a general way; it is to pray in a particular way that we may prevail, have the strength and ability, to escape the things of the great tribulation which are about to take place. We should not be caught in the trend of today's world. Instead, we need to escape this trend. The strength and ability to escape come from being watchful and from praying. If we pray in a particular way and are watchful, we shall prevail to escape all the things that are about to take place.

(4) To Stand before the Son of Man at His Throne in the Heavens

The believers need to watch and pray not only to escape from the great tribulation but also "to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36b). To stand before the Son of Man corresponds to the standing of those in Revelation 14:1. It indicates that the raptured overcomers will stand before the Savior on Mount Zion in the heavens before the great tribulation.

Before the great tribulation, the Lord Jesus will probably still be on the throne. The Lord's parousia (presence) will begin from the throne. This parousia will continue with His coming to the air and will end with His coming to the earth. Within His parousia there will be the rapture of the majority of the believers to the air (1 Thes. 4:15-17), the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), and the marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9). However, certain believers, such as the one hundred forty-four thousand firstfruit in Revelation 14, will be raptured to the throne of God and stand with the Savior on the heavenly mount Zion. This is what it means in Luke 21:36 to stand before the Son of Man. Therefore, to stand before the Son of Man is to be raptured to the throne in the heavens to stand before the Savior. After this rapture, the Savior will leave the throne with those who have been raptured to the heavens and descend to the air in order to take care of the other believers who will be raptured later.

Luke 21:34-36 helps us to realize that the downward trend on earth today is very strong. Actually, this trend has become a tide that carries everything and everyone along with it. It is extremely difficult for us as believers in Christ to stand in the midst of this tide. In order to stand, we need to be watchful and pray daily in a particular way so that we may receive the strength that comes from the resurrection life within us to stand against the trend, the tide, of the world. If we are strengthened, we shall not be caught by the trend of this age. Rather, we shall be full of Christ and shall be buoyant. As those filled with Christ as the divine air, we shall be raptured to stand before the Son of Man.

Whether or not we shall be raptured before the great tribulation and be taken away to meet Christ on the throne does not depend on Him. It depends on our watchfulness and on our praying in a particular way. Constantly we need to be watchful and praying that we may prevail to escape the great tribulation. We need to pray that we may have the strength and ability to

escape the things that will take place on earth and stand before the Son of Man.

(5) Not Knowing the Day and the Hour of the Lord's Coming

The believers need to watch and pray because they do not know the day and the hour of the Lord's coming. In Matthew 24:42 the Lord Jesus says, "Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord comes." In Matthew 25:13 He says, "Watch therefore, for you do not know the day nor the hour." Matthew 24:40-44 refers to the rapture of the living believers who are ready. Verse 43 says, "Know this, that if the householder knew in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have allowed his house to be broken into." The householder refers to the believer and the house to the believer's conduct and work which he has built up in his Christian life. A thief comes to steal precious things at an unknown time. The Lord will come secretly as a thief to those who love Him and will take them away as His treasures. Hence, we should watch. "Therefore," as the Lord says in verse 44, "you also, be ready, for the Son of Man comes in an hour that you think not." This refers to the Lord's secret coming to the watchful overcomers. To be watchful and ready is a very serious matter.

If we read Matthew 25:13 in its context, we shall see that to be watchful is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. If we are not being filled all day long, we are not being watchful. As believers, we should be those who are watching all the time by being filled with the Spirit. Every day our lamp is burning, and every day our soul, our being, is filled with the extra portion of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit is the saturating Spirit, whom we need to allow to saturate our entire being from within our spirit to reach and even to penetrate our soul. To be like this is to be a watchful person, one who is ready for the Lord's coming back.

Because we do not know the exact day and hour of the Lord's coming, we need to watch and pray. It is a serious mistake for any believer to think that he can know the exact day and hour of the Lord's coming. According to the prophecies in the Scriptures, we may know approximately the time of the Lord's coming. However, the prophecies do not tell us clearly and exactly the day and hour of the Lord's coming. If we think that we know the day and the time, we shall cheat ourselves.

Christ's parousia will begin from the throne before the three and a half years of the great tribulation, and it will probably last at least three and a half years. The overcomers, including the living ones as the firstfruit and the dead ones as the man-child, will be raptured to the throne before the tribulation. Then the Lord Jesus will descend with these overcomers from the throne in the heavens to the air. In the air, to which the rest of the believers will be raptured, the Lord will set up His judgment seat to judge the believers. It will also be in the air that the Lord will have His wedding. Although the Bible speaks clearly of these things, it does not tell us the day and the hour of the Lord's coming. Therefore, we need to watch and pray.

At this point we need to give a concluding word concerning the believers' experience in the progressing stage of God's full salvation, the stage of transformation. This stage includes five items: experiencing and enjoying the processed Triune God in His triune dispensing; experiencing God's redemption continually; enjoying the dispensing of the divine Trinity in the divine transformation for the divine conformation; experiencing 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; and experiencing the dispensing of the divine Trinity in other aspects. These five items constitute the progressing stage of God's full salvation. In this stage, the stage of transformation, the believers are saved from the power of sin, the law of sin and death, their old man, their flesh with its lusts, their self, their soul (their natural life), their individualism, Satan, the world with its present age and its religious aspect, the law of letters with its ordinances, and the degradation of the church with all its mixtures. These are the things from which we are being saved in the progressing stage of God's full salvation by the dispensing into us of the processed Triune God.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTY-NINE

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR PRESENT (64)

In this message we shall cover two matters: first, the believers' becoming, as the bride, one with the Spirit; second, the believers' looking to and waiting for the Lord Jesus' coming back to usher them into their future.

6. Becoming, as the Bride, One with the Spirit

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, they enjoy the dispensing of the divine Trinity in the divine transformation for the divine conformation, they 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, and they experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity in various other aspects. The issue of this experience and enjoyment of the divine Trinity is that the believers become, as the bride, one with the Spirit.

This oneness is indicated clearly in Revelation 22:17a, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come!" This verse reveals that the Spirit as the totality of the processed Triune God has become one with the believers, who are now fully matured to be the bride. Hence, the Spirit is the ultimate expression of the processed Triune God, and the bride is the ultimate expression of the transformed tripartite man. By the time of Revelation 22:17, the processed Triune God—the Spirit—and the transformed tripartite man—the bride—will be one and speak as one.

The consummation of the divine dispensing of the processed Triune God will be a universal marriage (Rev. 19:7-9; 21:2, 9). The Spirit as the consummation of the processed Triune God dispensed into His redeemed people will be the Bridegroom, and God's redeemed people as the consummation of the redeemed, regenerated, and transformed humanity will be the bride. In Revelation 22:17 the Spirit and the bride together as a couple say "Come." This verse does not tell us that the Bridegroom and the bride speak together but that the Spirit and the bride speak together. This is the

consummation of what John the Baptist told his disciples in John 3:29: “He who has the bride is the bridegroom.” The end of the New Testament eventually reveals to us that the One who has the bride is the Spirit. This Spirit is the all-inclusive, life-giving Spirit as the consummation of the processed Triune God who, in Revelation 22:17, has become one with the believers as the bride.

a. The Spirit, as the Consummation of the Processed and Dispensed Triune God, Becoming One with the Bride, the Aggregate of All the Regenerated and Transformed Tripartite Men

The Spirit, as the consummation of the processed and dispensed Triune God, becomes one with the bride, the aggregate of all the regenerated and transformed tripartite men. The Spirit is the consummation of the Triune God. However, this is not the Triune God apart from the process through which He has passed. The Spirit is the Triune God after He has passed through the process of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Having passed through this process, the Triune God is now this consummate Spirit. Therefore, in giving a full definition of the Spirit, we may say that the Spirit is the processed, compound, all-inclusive, life-giving, indwelling, sevenfold intensified, consummated Spirit as the ultimate consummation of the processed Triune God to be the eternal portion of His chosen, redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, transformed, and glorified tripartite people as their life, life supply, and everything.

The Spirit as the consummation, even the ultimate consummation, of the processed Triune God has been and is being dispensed into us. Eventually, this Spirit becomes one with the bride, the aggregate of all the regenerated and transformed tripartite men. This means that the Triune God, after being consummated as the Spirit, will “marry” the believers as the bride.

In Revelation 22:17 there are two consummations. First, the Triune God has gone through a process—through incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension—to become the Spirit, the totality, the consummation, of the Triune God to be the Bridegroom. Second, the believers also have gone through a process—redemption, regeneration, and transformation—to become the consummation of God’s chosen, redeemed,

regenerated, and transformed people to be the bride. The consummation of the processed Triune God and the consummation of God's chosen, redeemed, regenerated, and transformed people will become one in a universal marriage. Therefore, the processed tripartite man will match the processed Triune God forever for His full expression and satisfaction.

b. Forming the Universal Couple—the Mingling of the Processed Triune God with the Regenerated and Transformed Tripartite Man

In Revelation 22:17 we have the forming of the universal couple. This couple is the mingling of the processed and dispensed Triune God with the regenerated and transformed tripartite man. This couple is the ultimate consummation of the divine romance revealed in the Bible. According to the entire Bible, there is a divine romance between God the Creator, the Redeemer, who is the male, and His redeemed people who are the female. This is a basic matter revealed in the Scriptures. In the Old Testament God told His redeemed people Israel that He was their Husband and that they were His wife (Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:14; 31:32; Hosea 2:19). When the Lord Jesus came, John the Baptist told his disciples that Christ was the Bridegroom coming to take the bride, which is the church (John 3:29). In Ephesians 5 Paul tells us that the church is typified by the wife and Christ by the husband. Therefore, Christ is the Husband and the church is the wife. Paul also tells us that he has betrothed us as a virgin to one Husband who is Christ (2 Cor. 11:2). Furthermore, Revelation 19:7 says, "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has made herself ready." This wife is the aggregate of all the overcoming saints from Abel until the Lord comes back. Finally, the New Jerusalem will be the consummation of God's counterpart, the aggregate of all His redeemed and perfected people.

The Bible begins and ends with a marriage. The Bible begins with the marriage of Adam and Eve in Genesis and ends with the marriage of the Spirit and God's redeemed people in Revelation. This final marriage is the marriage of the processed, consummated, and dispensed Triune God as the Husband with His regenerated and transformed people as the bride. For eternity this universal couple will be the full manifestation of the Triune God expressed in all His glory. This is the conclusion of the New Testament and also of the

entire Bible. At the conclusion of the Bible is the Spirit, the consummation of the processed Triune God, with the bride as the aggregate and consummation of the redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified tripartite man. Here is an eternal, universal couple expressing the Triune God for eternity.

c. Expressing the Desire for the Lord's Coming as Revealed by Him

The Spirit and the bride express the desire for the Lord's coming as revealed by Him in Revelation 22:7 and 12. In verse 7 the Lord says, "Behold, I come quickly," and in verse 12 He says, "Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me to render to each one according to his work." "Come" (v. 17) is the response of the Spirit and the bride to the Lord's word concerning His coming. It is the desire for the Lord's coming. Whoever hears this response should also say, "Come," thus expressing a joint desire for the Lord's coming. All believers who love the Lord's appearing (2 Tim. 4:8) should express such a joint desire.

In the verses prior to Revelation 22:17 we have the Lord's word. Now in verse 17 the Spirit and the bride respond to His word. Their response is the desire of their heart for the Lord's coming. The word "Come!" spoken by the Spirit and the bride is certainly spoken to the Lord. The fact that the Spirit and the bride speak as one indicate that they have become one. In chapters two and three of Revelation the Spirit is the speaker, and the churches are the receivers of the speaking of the Spirit. But at the end of Revelation the Spirit and the bride, the bride and the Spirit, have become one. The believers are no longer merely the receivers of the divine oracle; they have become one with the divine Speaker and express with Him the desire for the Lord's coming.

d. Calling the Thirsty Ones to Come and Drink the Water of Life—the Flow of the Processed and Dispensing Triune God

The Spirit and the bride call the thirsty ones to come and drink the water of life—the flow of the processed and dispensing Triune God. This is indicated by the fact that in 22:17 the word "come" is found three times: "The Spirit and the bride say, Come! Let him who hears also say, Come! Let him who is thirsty also come; he who wills, let him take the water of life freely." The first

occurrence of this word refers to the coming back of the Lord Jesus. This is uttered by the Spirit and the bride. However, the one who hears the Spirit and the bride say this joins in saying, "Come!" The Spirit and the bride, on the one hand, desire that the Lord Jesus will come and, on the other hand, yearn that the thirsty sinner will also come to take the water of life for his satisfaction. When we have a sincere desire for the Lord's desire, we also have an earnest expectation for the sinner's salvation. Therefore, the third mention of "come" in this verse refers to the coming of the repenting sinners. Whoever is thirsty, let him take the water of life freely. Hence, 22:17 covers three matters: the response of the Spirit and the bride, the word of the one who hears the declaration of the Spirit and the bride, and the desire for the thirsty sinner, the unsaved one, to come and drink of the water of life.

Revelation 22:17 strongly implies that if we have a desire for the Lord's coming back, we shall be very concerned for others' salvation. Do you desire the coming back of the Lord Jesus? If you do, this desire will stir up within you a concern for the salvation of others. As you are saying, "Come, Lord Jesus," a burden may rise up within you for your family, neighbors, friends, and colleagues. We should say to the Lord, "Come," and then turn to the unbelievers and say, "The Lord Jesus is coming. Will you not come also? Come and be saved. Come to receive your salvation that you may be prepared to meet the coming Savior." In particular, we shall sound out a call to the thirsty ones to drink the water of life, the flow of the processed and dispensing Triune God, that they also may have a part in the aggregate of God's redeemed people to be His bride. Our experience testifies that this is the proper understanding of 22:17.

(1) To Participate in God's Central Goal

Anyone who would answer the above call and come to drink the water of life will participate in the central goal of God's economy, that is, to share the dispensing of the processed Triune God and to be a part of the bride of the Lamb for the satisfaction and expression of the processed and dispensing Triune God.

(2) For the Fulfilling of the Eternal Purpose of the Divine Economy of the Triune God

This is to fulfill the eternal purpose of the divine economy of the Triune God, according to His heart's desire for His pleasure (Eph. 1:9-11; 3:9-11), in eternity to come.

7. Looking to and Waiting for the Lord Jesus' Coming Back to Usher Them into Their Future

As a result of the progressing stage of God's full salvation and through the experience and enjoyment of the dispensing of the processed Triune God, the believers look to and wait for the Lord Jesus' coming back to usher them into their future. Our future is an eternal married life with the Triune God. Now we are waiting for the Lord's coming back; we are here looking to that glorious day.

Philippians 3:20 says, "Our citizenship is in the heavens, from which also we eagerly await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." The Greek word rendered "citizenship" may also be rendered commonwealth or associations of life. Our national life is not in any earthly country; it is in the heavens. Our real citizenship, our true commonwealth, is in the heavens. We need to remember, therefore, that since our citizenship is in the heavens, we are a heavenly people sojourning on earth, awaiting the Savior, who "will transfigure the body of our humiliation, conforming it to the body of His glory, according to the operation of Him who is able even to subject all things to Himself" (v. 21).

First Corinthians 1:7b tells us that, as believers, we are "awaiting the unveiling of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here "unveiling" refers to the Lord's appearing, His second coming. To await the appearing of the Lord is a normal sign of true believers.

According to 1 Thessalonians 1:9 and 10, the believers have turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God and "to wait for His Son from the heavens, whom He raised from among the dead—Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath which is coming." An important characteristic of our Christian life is that we are waiting for God's Son from the heavens. As Christians, we must live a life that declares to others that our hope is not on this earth or in this age. Instead, our hope is in the coming Lord, and our future is in Him. On this earth we do not have any destiny, destination, or future. Our future, our destiny, and our destination are altogether focused on the Lord who is coming. He will be our hope, our future, and our destination. We are going to the Lord,

and our destiny is to meet Him. Worldly people, on the contrary, have the kind of living that gives others the impression that their future is on the earth and that their hope, destiny, and destination are all in the present. Although their future is thoroughly related to this age, ours is not. Because we are waiting for the Son of God from the heavens, our future is focused on Him. As believers in Christ, we declare that we are waiting for the coming of the Son of God from the heavens.

Revelation 22:20 says, "He who testifies these things says, Yes, I come quickly, Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" The first part of this verse is the Lord's third warning in chapter twenty-two of Revelation regarding His soon coming. The last part is the Apostle John's prayer and response to the Lord's warning. It is also the last prayer in the Bible. After reading the book of Revelation, we also should have such a prayer and response—"Come, Lord Jesus!" This was John's desire expressed as a prayer. Therefore, the whole Bible concludes with a desire for the Lord's coming expressed as a prayer.

First Thessalonians 4:17 says, "We who are living, who remain, shall be caught up at the same time together with them in clouds into a meeting of the Lord in the air; and so we shall be always together with the Lord." According to this verse, both the dead and the living believers will be caught up to the Lord. First the dead will be raised (v. 16), and then together we shall be caught up to a meeting of the Lord in the air. According to the Word of God, when the Lord Jesus descends from heaven, the dead saints will rise up. Their spirit and soul will rise out of Paradise, their body will rise up from the tomb, and their spirit and soul with the body will make them perfect. They will then join the believers who are living, and together we shall be caught up to the Lord.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED EIGHTY

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR FUTURE (1)

In this message we shall begin to consider the believers' future. In the foregoing messages we have covered the believers' past in eternity, where they were foreknown, chosen, and predestinated by God, and also their past in time, where they were created by God and became fallen and dead in offenses and sins. We have seen that the believers' present comprises both the initial stage and the progressing stage of God's full salvation. In the initial stage, the stage of regeneration, the believers have been called by God and separated unto Him, they have repented, believed, and been baptized, and they have been joined to the processed Triune God, redeemed, made a new creation, and saved. Finally, in the initial stage, the believers have cleared the past. 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, they enjoy the dispensing of the divine Trinity in the divine transformation for the divine conformation, they experience the dispensing of the divine Trinity corporately, and they experience this dispensing in various other aspects. Eventually, at the end of the second stage the believers are conformed to the image of Christ, the firstborn Son of God, and look to and wait for the Lord Jesus' coming back to usher them into their future.

A. IN THE COMPLETING STAGE OF GOD'S FULL SALVATION, THE STAGE OF GLORIFICATION

The first aspect of the believers' future is their future in the completing stage of God's full salvation, the stage of glorification. The initial stage is the stage of regeneration, the progressing stage is the stage of transformation, and the completing stage is the stage of glorification. Here we have three crucial words that we should treasure: regeneration, transformation, and glorification. Many believers have experienced a good deal of transformation and are heading toward the goal of glorification. Glorification is the completing stage of God's full salvation.

Many believers hold strictly an objective concept of glorification. According to this concept, one day those who have been saved and regenerated will suddenly be glorified. The glorification of the believers, they claim, will take place instantaneously at the coming of the Lord Jesus. Certain verses seem to indicate this. For example, Colossians 3:4 says that when Christ our life is manifested, we shall be manifested with Him in glory. However, although our glorification may appear to be a sudden occurrence, it will actually be the consummation of a process of gradual growth and development in life. Just as the blossoming of a carnation flower is the issue of the gradual growth of a carnation plant, so our glorification will be the issue of our growth in the divine life unto maturity. A carnation does not blossom until it has reached maturity, and, in like manner, the believers will not be glorified until they reach maturity in life.

The seed of the divine life has been sown into our being, and now this seed is growing within us. As the seed grows, it develops gradually until it reaches full growth, the maturity in life. At that time there will be a "blossoming" of the divine seed within us. That will be our glorification.

The believers' glorification will not be an accident. Rather, their glorification will be the issue of their maturity in life. First, we are regenerated, and then we are organically transformed through the growth of the divine life within us. As the divine life grows in us, it saturates us with the divine element, and this element changes us metabolically. This metabolic change is what the New Testament calls transformation. Actually in our Christian experience transformation is simply the growth in the divine life. For example, as a plant grows it is transformed from one appearance to another. This growth and transformation continues until the plant reaches its maturity. In like manner, our regeneration is followed by transformation, and transformation will issue in glorification. Without regeneration there is no possibility to have transformation. Furthermore, if we are lacking in transformation, there will be no glorification. Glorification is the issue of transformation, and transformation is accomplished by the gradual and continuous growth in life. We praise the Lord that one day we shall reach our maturity, and then we shall be glorified, brought into the full expression of the Triune God.

1. To Be Glorified

Romans 8:29 and 30 say, "Whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He should be the Firstborn among many brothers; and whom He predestinated, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." God has predestinated and justified us, and now He is conforming us to the image of His firstborn Son. Eventually, we shall have full glorification.

Since glorification will take place in the future, we may wonder why Paul in Romans 8:30 uses the past tense and says "glorified." Although in our experience we have not been glorified, the Bible says that we have been glorified already. Everything mentioned in 8:30 is an accomplished fact—predestinated, called, justified, and glorified. The reason Paul speaks this way here is that, although we are subject to time, God is not. He is the God of eternity. With Him, as the eternal God, there is no time. Therefore, in the sight of God, we have already been glorified. With God everything is timeless. In His sight our predestination, calling, justification, and glorification are eternal matters. Hence, our glorification is secured and ensured in the eternal God Himself. Nevertheless, according to our experience, glorification will take place in the future.

Romans 8:30 does not say that we shall be put into glory; rather, this verse indicates that we shall be glorified. Glory is the expression of God. Christ, the hope of glory (Col. 1:27), has been sown into us as the seed of glory, and this seed will grow until it reaches the stage of blossoming, at which time the glory will come out. For God to glorify us means that the glory which has been sown into us saturates our whole being and is expressed through us. When our entire being has been permeated and saturated with the element of glory, that glory will come out of us. This is what it means for the believers to be glorified. When we experience this glorification, we shall be in the expression of the processed Triune God.

a. With the Incomparable Glory

The believers will be glorified with the incomparable glory. In Romans 8:18 Paul says, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us." Here we see that the coming glory is incomparable. The present suffering means nothing compared with the coming glory. Because we have not yet been glorified, we cannot imagine what this incomparable glory is. Nevertheless, according to

the revelation in the New Testament, we may be assured that this glory will come not objectively from without but subjectively and organically from within us.

b. Realizing the Hope of Glory Which Is Christ in Us

Colossians 1:27b speaks of, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Here Paul says not only that Christ dwells within us, but also that He dwells within us as our hope of glory. In Greek "glory" in this verse is "the glory." Christ is the mystery (v. 26) which is full of glory now. This glory will be manifested to its fullest extent when Christ returns to glorify His saints. Hence, it is a hope, the hope of glory. Christ Himself is this hope of glory.

Christ can be our hope of glory because He dwells in our spirit to be our life and our person. According to Colossians 3:4, when Christ our life is manifested, we shall be manifested with Him in glory. He will appear to be glorified in our redeemed and transfigured body (Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:21; 2 Thes. 1:10). When Christ comes, we shall be glorified in Him, and He will be glorified in us. This indicates that the indwelling Christ will saturate our entire being, including our physical body. This will cause our body to be transfigured and to become like His glorious body. At that time Christ will be glorified in us. This is Christ in us as the hope of glory.

Colossians 1:27 indicates that the glory with which we shall be glorified dwells in us right now. This glory is not a thing—this glory is a living person, the indwelling Christ, the all-inclusive embodiment of the processed Triune God. This very Christ is now the seed of glory within us. As the blossom of a carnation flower is in the carnation seed, so our glorification is in Christ as the seed of glory dwelling in us. Eventually, the growth of this seed will issue in the "blossom" of the believers' glorification.

Every believer in Christ, without exception, is like a carnation seed. Through regeneration, the life of glory has come into us, and now we have a seed of glory within us. The life that we have within us as a seed is the life of glory. This is Christ in us, the hope of glory. The Christ who is God's expression, the effulgence of God's glory (Heb. 1:3), is the One who has come into us to be our hope of glory. In the past we may have realized that Christ is the eternal life in us. Now, with Colossians 1:27 as the basis, we need to see

that the Christ who is in us is also the hope of glory. Our hope of glory is the indwelling Christ Himself.

This glory is still a hope to us because, as yet, it has not come out of us. Since the seed of glory has been sown into us, we all hope to see it blossoming. One day, at the right time, Christ will come to be glorified in us. This means that He will come out of us. On the one hand, Christ is coming from without; on the other hand, He is coming from within us, for He has been sown into us as the seed of glory. This seed will grow until it reaches the stage of blossoming, and then the glory within us will come out and be expressed. When we experience this glorification, we shall be fully in the expression of the Triune God.

c. Participating in the Goal of God's Predestination

When we have been glorified, we shall participate in the goal of God's predestination. First Corinthians 2:7 indicates that God has predestinated us to obtain His glory that we may express Him. God's glory is God expressed. We are vessels of mercy which He has before prepared unto glory (Rom. 9:23), and He has called us into this glory (2 Thes. 2:14; 1 Pet. 5:10). Christ Himself is our hope of glory, and today we exult and boast in this hope of glory (Rom. 5:2). When this hope, Christ, is manifested, we shall also be manifested with Him in glory (Col. 3:4). That will be the redemption of our body, the transfiguration of our body. At that time God's glory will be expressed from our spirit to our soul and through our body. The three parts of our being will be the same as Christ is and will be fully saturated with God's glory. This is what it means for the believers to be glorified, which is the ultimate consummation of God's full salvation. This glorification is also the ultimate goal to which God predestinated us in eternity.

In the completing stage of God's full salvation, the believers will reach the goal of God's predestination. This goal is our glorification. God has predestinated us for this glory. Hence, God's predestination becomes our destiny. In the future the believers will enjoy their eternal destiny—glorification—as the goal of God's full salvation.

d. In God's Eternal Glory, the Glory of Our Lord Jesus Christ

First Peter 5:10a tells us that the God of all grace has called us "into His eternal glory in Christ." "In Christ" indicates that the God of all grace has called us through all the processes of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension to accomplish the complete and full redemption so that He may bring His redeemed people into an organic union with Himself. Thus they may participate in the riches of the processed Triune God as their enjoyment. All the steps of the divine operation are in Christ, who is the embodiment of the processed Triune God becoming the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit as the bountiful life supply to us. It is in this Christ, through His all-inclusive redemption and based on all His achievements, that God can be the God of all grace to call us into His eternal glory and to perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground us in the Triune God as the solid foundation, thus enabling us to attain unto His glorious goal. What a miracle that fallen sinners can be brought into God's eternal glory!

In 2 Thessalonians 2:14b Paul tells us that God has called us through the gospel "unto the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." The glory of the Lord is that He is the Son of God the Father, possessing the Father's life and nature to express Him. To obtain the Lord's glory is to be in the same position as sons of God to express Him.

In John 17:22 the Lord Jesus said in His prayer to the Father, "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, even as We are one." The glory which the Father has given the Son is the sonship with the Father's life and divine nature (John 5:26) to express the Father in His fullness (John 1:18; 14:9; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:3). This glory the Son has given to His believers that they also may have the sonship with the Father's life and nature (John 17:2; 2 Pet. 1:4) to express the Father in the Son in His fullness (John 1:16).

The glory of the Lord Jesus is that the Father has given Him the Father's life and nature for Him to express the Father. This is the glory the Son has given to us. This means that the Son has given us the Father's life and nature so that we may be able to express God the Father. What a glory! God has called us unto the obtaining of this glory, the glory of the divine life and the divine nature to express the divine Being.

e. Enjoying the Glory of the Children of God with Its Freedom

When the believers are glorified, they will enjoy the glory of the children of God with its freedom. Romans 8:21b speaks of "the freedom of the glory of the children of God." All creation aspires to enter into this freedom. Even though the creation will not share the glory, the creation will enter into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Due to the fall of Adam, the entire creation is under bondage and corruption. Romans 8:19 through 21a say, "The anxious watching of the creation eagerly expects the revelation of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will also be freed from the slavery of corruption." The creation will be freed from the slavery of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For this, "the whole creation groans together and travails in pain together until now" (v. 22). The universe is groaning and travailing in birth, awaiting the revelation of the sons of God so that creation may be freed from corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. Although we are sons of God, we are still under a veil. One day this veil will be removed, and that will be our glorification. The sons of God will come out from under the veil and be revealed. Then the whole universe will behold the sons of God in glory and participate in the freedom of this glory. Therefore, we, the believers in Christ, shall be glorified, but the creation will only share in the freedom of that glory, not in the glory itself. In the future we shall enjoy the glory of the children of God with its freedom.

f. In the Glory of the Divine Sonship

Finally, when the believers are glorified, they will be in the glory of the divine sonship. Hebrews 2:10 tells us that the Father with the Son is bringing us, the many sons, into glory. We are sons of God, but we are not yet in glory. As a caterpillar is transformed into a butterfly, we are being led into glory. One day we shall all be in glory as the many sons of God. Our glorification will be our full sonship. We shall be glorified in the divine life and the divine nature to bear the glory of the Triune God for His expression.

All the sons of God will be brought into this glory. Then as the glorified sons of God, we shall shine with the glory of God. This is the full salvation of all who believe in Christ. Everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus will eventually become a glorified son of God bearing the righteousness of God outwardly, being saturated with the holiness of God inwardly, and shining in the realm of His full glory as one of His sons. In this glory God will be expressed in a full

way. This will be the ultimate issue of the dispensing of the processed Triune God.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED EIGHTY-ONE

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR FUTURE (2)

In this message we shall see that in the completing stage of God's full salvation, the stage of glorification, the believers will be redeemed in their body.

2. To Be Redeemed in Their Body

In Romans 8:23 Paul speaks of "the redemption of our body." To be redeemed in our body is to be glorified (Rom. 8:30c). Hence, glorification and the redemption of our body are synonymous. To be glorified is to be redeemed in our body. No matter how mature we may become in the divine life, as long as we have not been glorified, we have not been redeemed in our body. But when we are glorified, our glorification will also be the redemption of our body. Therefore, the believers will be glorified and redeemed in their body simultaneously.

First Corinthians 1:30 tells us that Christ has become "wisdom to us from God: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption." In God's full salvation Christ is righteousness (for our past), by which we have been justified by God, that we may be reborn in our spirit to receive the divine life (Rom. 5:18). Then He is sanctification (for the present), by which we are being sanctified in our soul, that is, transformed in our mind, emotion, and will, with the divine life (Rom. 6:19-22). Eventually, Christ will be our redemption (for the future), that is, the redemption of our body, by which we shall be transformed in our body with the divine life to have Christ's glorious likeness (Phil. 3:21). It is of God that we participate in such a complete and perfect salvation, making our entire being—spirit, soul, and body—organically one with Christ, and making Christ everything to us.

a. To Enjoy the Full Divine Sonship of Which the Holy Spirit Is the Foretaste (Firstfruit)

When the believers are redeemed, glorified, in their body, they will enjoy the full divine sonship of which the Holy Spirit is the foretaste, the firstfruit.

This firstfruit is the foretaste as a guarantee that in the future we shall enjoy the full taste, and that full taste will be the full sonship, which is the redemption of our body, our glorification.

Romans 8:23 says, "We ourselves also, having the firstfruit of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan in ourselves, eagerly expecting sonship, the redemption of our body." The firstfruit of the Spirit is the Spirit Himself as the firstfruit of the coming harvest of what God is to us. We enjoy the Spirit as the foretaste of the full blessing to come. Hence, to have the firstfruit of the Spirit is to enjoy the Spirit as the firstfruit. This firstfruit is the Holy Spirit as a sampling of the full taste of God as our enjoyment of all that the processed Triune God is to us. The full taste will come in the day of glory. But before that full taste comes, God has given us a foretaste today. This foretaste is the divine Spirit as the firstfruit of the harvest of the full enjoyment of all that the processed Triune God is to us.

The issue of the enjoyment of the Spirit as the foretaste is the redemption of our body, which is the full sonship. As we are enjoying the Spirit as the foretaste, we are still groaning for and eagerly expecting sonship. The sonship in 8:23 is the full sonship, the consummation of the sonship, not the initiation of the sonship as in Galatians 4:5. The full sonship is the redemption of our body. We have sonship in our spirit through regeneration, and we may also have sonship in our soul through transformation, but we do not yet have sonship in our body through transfiguration. Therefore, although we have received the sonship already, we shall not receive the full sonship until our body is transfigured and conformed to the glorious body of Christ (Phil. 3:21). In the future we shall have sonship in our body. This is full sonship, the redemption of our body, which is our longing and our expectation.

(1) For God's Purchased Possession to Be Redeemed, with the Holy Spirit as the Pledge of Our Inheritance

The redemption of the believers' body is for God's purchased possession to be redeemed, with the Holy Spirit as the pledge of our inheritance. Ephesians 1:14 says that the Holy Spirit "is the pledge of our inheritance, unto the redemption of the acquired possession." Redemption here refers to the redemption of our body, that is, the transfiguration of our body of humiliation into a glorious one. The Holy Spirit today is a guarantee, a foretaste, and a sample of our divine inheritance until our body is transfigured in glory, at which time we shall inherit God in full.

Ephesians 1:14 speaks of the redemption of the "acquired possession." We, God's redeemed ones, are God's possession acquired by His purchase with the precious blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). In God's New Testament economy, the processed Triune God becomes our inheritance, and we become God's possession. How marvelous! We give nothing, and we get everything! God acquired us at a cost, but we inherit God at no cost.

Through His redemption, God has acquired, secured, purchased us to be His possession. The redemption of our body, therefore, is for God's purchased possession to be redeemed. In His salvation God first gives Himself to us as our inheritance. Then we begin to enjoy Him as our inheritance. Actually, the divine dispensing of the divine Trinity is the enjoyment in a practical way of God Himself as our inheritance. As we enjoy the processed Triune God as our inheritance, His element comes into our being and transforms us to make us His inheritance. This means that through our enjoyment of Him we are infused and saturated with His element and transformed to become His inheritance for His enjoyment. Therefore, the coming glorification will be not only for us but also for God. The redemption of our body will be both for our enjoyment and God's enjoyment. The Holy Spirit within us is not only a foretaste but also a pledge guaranteeing that God is ours and that we shall be His. He is our inheritance for our enjoyment, and we shall become His inheritance for His enjoyment.

Through regeneration in the resurrection of Christ we have become heirs to inherit the Triune God, who is our inheritance with the Holy Spirit as the pledge. The Greek word for pledge in Ephesians 1:14 also means foretaste, guarantee, and partial payment in advance. God gives His Holy Spirit to us not only as a guarantee of our inheritance, securing our heritage, but also as a foretaste of what we shall inherit of God.

The Spirit is the pledge of our inheritance unto the redemption of the acquired possession. As God's possession, we still need the redemption of our body, for our body is still in the old creation. One day we, God's possession, will be redeemed in our body. The Triune God has put His Spirit into us as a pledge of Himself as our inheritance unto, or with a view to, the day when, as God's acquired possession we shall be redeemed into His glory for Him to enjoy us. On the one hand, the Triune God is our inheritance; on the other hand, we are His possession. The crucial matter in Ephesians 1:14 is that the Spirit is pledged into us as a guarantee that God will be our inheritance in full. Eventually, we shall be redeemed to be God's possession in glory. Then, in

glory, we shall enjoy the processed Triune God as our inheritance, and He will enjoy us as His possession.

Daily we enjoy the Triune God in the way of the Spirit's pledging. God pledges Himself as the Spirit within us for our enjoyment, guaranteeing that we shall eventually have the full taste of the Triune God. This enjoyment of God as our inheritance is the dispensing of the processed Triune God into us. The result of this dispensing is that we become God's inheritance, His purchased possession, for His enjoyment. We are God's inheritance not in ourselves or by ourselves but by His being our inheritance. Daily we participate in Him as He dispenses Himself into our being. Eventually we shall be saturated with Him and constituted of Him as our inheritance. This enjoyment and constitution will make us His inheritance. Thus, our enjoyment of the Triune God will consummate in our being God's inheritance for Him to enjoy eternally. This consummation will be the issue of God's dispensing Himself into us and constituting us of Himself. His dispensing makes us His inheritance, and through the enjoyment of Him as our inheritance we become His inheritance, His acquired possession, to be redeemed through the redemption of our body.

(2) The Issue of the Sealing of the Holy Spirit

The redemption of the believers' body is the issue of the sealing of the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 4:30 Paul tells us that we were sealed with the Holy Spirit of God "unto the day of redemption." Here the word "unto" indicates that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit resulting in, or issuing in, the redemption of our body. By this we see that the sealing of the Holy Spirit is for the redemption of our body. We were sealed with the Holy Spirit with a view to this redemption.

The sealing of the Spirit is not a once-for-all matter. Rather, the sealing is still taking place. The seal was put in us when we believed in the Lord Jesus, but the sealing has been going on from that time until now. The Holy Spirit is the seal and also the sealing. We were sealed, and we are still being sealed.

Many of us can testify from experience that when we believed in the Lord Jesus, we realized that we had been sealed in our spirit. However, in our mind, emotion, and will there was no sealing. Because the Spirit came into our spirit and sealed us at the time of our regeneration, the Bible says that we were sealed. However, not every part of our being was sealed but only one part, our

spirit. However, Ephesians 4:30 says that we were sealed in the Holy Spirit of God unto the day of redemption. This means that the sealing in our spirit is with a view to the redemption of our body. This implies that the sealing is spreading within us. It begins in our spirit, and it is spreading into our mind, emotion, and will. One day even our body will be sealed with the Spirit, for our body will be saturated with the Spirit. Hence, the redemption of our body is the issue of the sealing of the Holy Spirit.

Sealing, dispensing, and transformation are different aspects of one thing. The sealing of the Spirit is a matter of transformation and also a matter of God's dispensing. On God's side, the sealing is the dispensing of His element into us. On our side, the sealing is the receiving of the divine element through the divine dispensing to saturate us, to transform us, and to make us His inheritance.

(3) For the Praise of God's Glory—God Expressed in His Glory

Eventually, the redemption of our body will be for the praise of God's glory—God expressed in His glory. This is the reason Ephesians 1:14 says that the redemption of the acquired possession is "to the praise of His glory." God's glory is God Himself expressed. God will be glorified, expressed, in the New Testament believers. This expression is not visible today, but one day it will be visible. At that time God's expression through the New Testament believers will call forth the universal praise. Our God will be fully expressed and glorified through us and among us. Then the entire universe will praise His glory. We shall become a corporate body to express God, and that glorification will be praised by the whole universe.

b. To Have Their Body of Humiliation Transfigured and Conformed to the Body of Christ's Glory

For us to be redeemed in our body is not only to enjoy the full divine sonship but also to have our body of humiliation transfigured and conformed to the body of Christ's glory. Philippians 3:21a says that Christ "will transfigure the body of our humiliation, conforming it to the body of His glory." When the Lord Jesus returns, our body will be transfigured, fully redeemed, glorified. When we believed in Him, our spirit was regenerated.

During our Christian life our soul is gradually being sanctified and transformed. Then at the Lord's coming back our body will be transfigured. This transfiguration is the ultimate consummation of God's salvation. After we have been transfigured we shall be the same as Christ in all three parts of our being.

In 3:21 Paul refers to our body as "the body of our humiliation." This describes our natural body, made of worthless dust (Gen. 2:7) and damaged by sin, weakness, sickness, and death (Rom. 6:6; 7:24; 8:11). But one day this body will be transfigured and conformed to the body of Christ's glory. Christ's body of glory is His resurrected body, saturated with God's glory (Luke 24:26) and transcendent over corruption and death (Rom. 6:9).

Christ's resurrected body is a mystery. On the day of His resurrection, He appeared to His disciples with such a body. Although He had a body that could be seen and touched, He came into a room where the doors had been shut (John 20:19). No one can explain this. We simply believe what the Bible says concerning Christ's resurrected body. Furthermore, we believe that one day our body will be like His.

In the way of His full salvation, God first regenerates us in our spirit that we may have Him within us as our life. Then He begins to transform us in our soul that He may fill, saturate, and possess our whole being. Thus, we may be transformed into His image to be His expression even while we are living on earth. Then, at His coming back, He will transfigure our body.

Our spirit has been regenerated and our soul may be fully transformed, yet our body remains old. With all its physical weakness and illnesses, it is under the power of death. It is mortal and subject to infirmity and death. Though our body may be quickened by the Spirit who dwells in us (Rom. 8:11), yet it is a mortal body, subject to death and needing to be redeemed. Today, by cooperating with the Spirit in our spirit, we may experience the Lord's spreading of the divine life into our body to quicken and even to saturate it to a certain degree. Nevertheless, no matter how much our body may be quickened and even saturated by the Spirit, it still requires the Lord's full redemption. This is the reason we often groan within ourselves (Rom. 8:23). But we praise the Lord that when He comes back, He will transfigure the body of our humiliation. Then "we shall be like Him" (1 John 3:2) not only in our spirit and in our soul but also in our body. At that time we shall be in His full likeness both inwardly and outwardly, from the center of our being to the

circumference, from our innermost spirit to our outermost body. That will be the ultimate consummation of the Lord's salvation.

(1) According to the Operation of Christ
Who Is Able Even to Subject All Things to Himself

In Philippians 3:21 Paul says, that the Lord's transfiguring the body of our humiliation, conforming it to the body of His glory, will be "according to the operation of Him who is able even to subject all things to Himself." To transfigure our body of humiliation is a difficult matter and needs the operation of the One who is able to subject all things unto Himself. Therefore, the transfiguration of our body is by the great power which subjects all things to the Lord (Eph. 1:19-22). This is the almighty power in the whole universe.

(2) At Christ's Appearing from the Heavens

The transfiguration of our body will take place at Christ's appearing from the heavens (Phil. 3:20). At the time of the Lord's coming back, He will transfigure our body of humiliation. Thus, we are waiting for Christ to come back so that we may be brought into the ultimate consummation of God's salvation—the transfiguration of our body.

c. To Have Death in Their Entire Being Swallowed Up by the Resurrection Life in Victory

For the believers to be redeemed in their body is also to have death in their entire being swallowed up by the resurrection life in victory. The time is coming when the last enemy, death, will not only be destroyed but also swallowed up by resurrection life.

First Corinthians 15:54 says, "Whenever this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality, then shall come to pass the word which is written, Death has been swallowed up in victory." The word "whenever" refers to the time that our corrupted and mortal body will be resurrected or transfigured from corruption and death into glory and life. Then death will be swallowed up in the victory of resurrection life. This is the consummation of the resurrection we share in God's New Testament economy through redemption and salvation in Christ. This resurrection begins with the making alive of our dead spirit and is completed with the transfiguration of

our corruptible body. In between is the process of the metabolic transformation of our fallen soul by the life-giving Spirit, who is the reality of resurrection.

Literally, "in victory" is "into victory." Death means defeat to man. Through Christ's salvation in the resurrection life, death will be swallowed up into victory to us, the beneficiaries of Christ's resurrection life. In this verse victory is a synonym of resurrection. Resurrection is the victory of life over death.

(1) The Corruptible to Put On Incorruption

When death in our entire being is swallowed up by Christ's resurrection life, the corruptible will put on incorruption. Life is the divine element, even God Himself, imparted into our spirit; incorruption is the consequence of life saturating our body (Rom. 8:11). At present we have a corruptible body. But when our body is transfigured at the time of the Lord's coming, our body will become incorruptible. In this way the corruptible will put on incorruption.

(2) The Mortal to Put On Immortality, That Is, Be Swallowed Up by the Resurrection Life

Furthermore, when the death in the believers' being is swallowed up, the mortal will put on immortality, that is, will be swallowed up by the resurrection life. In 2 Corinthians 5:4 Paul says, "We who are in the tabernacle groan, being burdened, in that we do not desire to be unclothed, but clothed upon, that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." To be burdened here means to be weighed down, depressed, oppressed. The apostles groaned in the desire not to be unclothed, disembodied, that is, not to die but to be clothed upon, to put on the spiritual body. This is to have our body transfigured, to have it redeemed.

In 2 Corinthians 5:4 "what is mortal" denotes our mortal body (2 Cor. 4:11; Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:53). To have our mortal body "swallowed up by life" is to have it transfigured by resurrection life swallowing up the death in our mortal body.

Our fallen, mortal body is a great burden to us. Under the weight of this burden, we groan, not that we would be unclothed, or found naked, but that we would be clothed with a transfigured body. Like Paul, we should desire to have our body transfigured. When we are transfigured and clothed with the

heavenly, spiritual, and resurrected body, then what is mortal will be swallowed up by life.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED EIGHTY-TWO

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR FUTURE (3)

In the completing stage of God's full salvation the believers will be raptured. In this message and in the message following we shall consider in a brief and simple way the rapture of the believers, which is the third item of the believers' future in the completing stage of God's salvation, the stage of glorification.

3. To Be Raptured

Being glorified, redeemed in our body, and raptured are actually three aspects of one thing. To be glorified is to be redeemed in our body, and to be redeemed in our body is to be raptured.

The subject of the believers' rapture is a great matter in the Bible. Although the rapture is emphasized strongly in the New Testament, it is somewhat difficult for us to understand. During the past century and a half, the rapture has been a troublesome subject for many seeking Christians. Mainly there are three schools of understanding concerning the rapture: the school of pre-tribulation, the school of post-tribulation, and the school of the so-called partial rapture. Those of the pre-tribulation school say that our rapture will take place before the great tribulation which, strictly speaking, will be the last three and a half years of this age. (These three and a half years will be the second half of the last week of the seventy weeks revealed in Daniel 9.) The second school, the school of post-tribulation, says that the rapture will take place at the end of the great tribulation. Those in the school of partial rapture say that the overcomers will be raptured earlier than the majority of the believers. The Bible teachers in this school include G. H. Pember, Robert Govett, and D. M. Panton. Those in this last school have seen many details concerning the Lord's coming back and our rapture. These teachers say that, according to the New Testament, the believers who are overcomers and mature earlier will be raptured before the great tribulation, but the remainder of the believers will pass through most of the tribulation so that they may be helped to mature. Then those believers will be raptured close to the end of the great tribulation.

In the Bible there are two main aspects of the rapture: the rapture of the overcomers and the rapture of the majority of the believers. However, the fact that there are these two aspects of the rapture does not mean that there are only two raptures. With the rapture of the overcomers, for instance, there are at least three categories: the rapture of the man-child (Rev. 12:5), the rapture of the firstfruit (Rev. 14:1-5), and the rapture of the later overcomers, who will overcome Antichrist, his mark, the number of his name, and his image (Rev. 15:2-4).

The rapture of the overcomers is the first category of rapture, and the rapture of the majority of believers, considered in Revelation 14:15 as the harvest, is the second. In Leviticus 23:10 we have a type of the rapture—the type of crops ripening in the field. Some crops ripen earlier and others ripen later. Those that ripen first are considered the firstfruit. In Old Testament times the firstfruit was brought not to the barn but to the temple of God. Exodus 23:19 says, "The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord thy God." The firstfruit was brought from the field into the temple of God for God's enjoyment and satisfaction. When the field was completely ripe, that was the time of the harvest. After the harvest was reaped, it was brought into the barn. The crop is God's people (1 Cor. 3:9), and the first of the crop to ripen is the firstfruit, which will be brought directly to God's temple in the heavens. Later, after all the crop has ripened, the majority of the believers will be harvested and taken to the air (1 Thes. 4:15-17).

Although many Bible teachers have written about the rapture, most of them have not taken care of this matter of the ripening of God's crop. In Matthew 13 the Lord Jesus revealed that He came to sow seed into the field. Eventually, in Revelation 14 we have the firstfruit and the harvest. This gives us the basic concept with respect to the rapture—that there is a rapture of the firstfruit and the rapture of the harvest, the majority of the believers who are alive at the time of the Lord's coming back.

a. The Dead Overcomers through All the Generations, as the Man-child among Them, to Rise and Be Caught Up

The believers may be overcomers either as the man-child or the firstfruit. 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 the woman signifies the weaker one and the man the stronger one (1 Pet. 3:7). Hence, the man-child in Revelation 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. All the overcomers who die will be part of the man-child. By resurrection the man-child will come into full existence. Abel, who was the first martyr, the Apostles, and all the martyrs and deceased overcomers are waiting for the time of resurrection. The resurrection of all the dead overcoming believers will be the delivery of the man-child. Therefore, the man-child is composed of all the overcoming saints who die before the time of this resurrection.

A believer who is an overcomer today and lives until the Lord Jesus comes back will not be part of the man-child but may be among the firstfruit. However, a believer who is an overcomer and dies before the Lord Jesus comes back will be resurrected to be part of the man-child. The man-child in Revelation 12:5 does not represent the overcomers who live until the Lord comes back, but represents all the dead overcomers who will be resurrected before the Lord comes back. This resurrection will be their delivery as the man-child.

(1) To God and to His Throne

The dead overcomers through all the generations will be raptured to God and to His throne. Revelation 12:5 tells us that the man-child "was caught up to God and to His throne." To be "caught up" is to be raptured. The rapture of the man-child differs from that of the majority of the believers as mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. There, the rapture of the majority of the believers will be to the air, whereas the rapture of the man-child, the dead overcomers resurrected, will be to the throne of God in the heavens.

(2) Before the Three and a Half Years, Twelve Hundred and Sixty Days, the Period of the Great Tribulation

The dead overcomers will be raptured to God and to His throne before the three and a half years, twelve hundred sixty days, the period of the great tribulation. The rapture of the man-child is in Revelation 12:5. Verse 6b goes on to speak of "a thousand two hundred and sixty days," and verse 14b of "time, and times, and half a time," which denotes three and a half years. From this we see that the man-child, comprising the dead overcomers through all the generations, will be raptured before the great tribulation.

b. The One Hundred Forty-four Thousand Living Overcomers among Them, as the Firstfruit of God's Harvest on the Earth, to Be Raptured

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 goes on to explain, "These were purchased from among men as firstfruit to God and to the Lamb." The firstfruit to God and to the Lamb are those of God's crop who mature the earliest. These early 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. According to verses 14 through 16, the harvest will be reaped later. This means that the firstfruit will be raptured to the heavens before the harvest, just as the firstfruit of the good land was reaped and brought into the temple of God before the harvest.

In Revelation 14:1 and 4 there are one hundred forty-four thousand living overcomers. In the past many teachers have debated whether this number is literal or figurative. This number should be an actual number but with a symbolic meaning. Although the number is literal, it has a spiritual significance. One hundred forty-four thousand is one thousand multiplied by twelve times twelve. Twelve is the number of completion in God's eternal administration. One hundred forty-four (Rev. 21:17) is twelve times twelve, which signifies the completion of completions, the ultimate completion in the fullest way. Here it is one thousand times this ultimate completion. This is the significance of the number one hundred forty-four thousand. The one hundred forty-four thousand firstfruit are believers who are for the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose.

The crucial matter concerning the firstfruit is the principle that among the believers living on earth at the time of the Lord's coming back some will ripen early and, being the first to mature, will become the firstfruit in God's field. We have pointed out that, according to the type in Exodus 23, the firstfruit was brought not to the barn but to the temple and there was offered to God. If we see the principle of the firstfruit, we shall not pay attention to the erroneous teaching that all believers, regardless of their spiritual situation, will be raptured before the tribulation. Revelation 14 shows us that among God's people growing in His field a small part will be the firstfruit and a great part will be the harvest. Purchased from among men, the firstfruit are those who follow the Lamb absolutely.

(1) To Mount Zion in the Heavens Where Christ Is

In Revelation 14:1 we see that the one hundred forty-four thousand firstfruit are with the Lamb, Christ, on mount Zion. The Zion mentioned here is not the earthly one but the Zion in the heavens (Heb. 12:22). From this we see that the firstfruit will be raptured to mount Zion in the heavens, where God and His throne are and where Christ is.

(2) For God and Christ's Fresh Enjoyment

The one hundred forty-four thousand living overcomers, the firstfruit of God's crop, will be raptured to mount Zion in the heavens for God and Christ's fresh enjoyment. Here we see the difference between the man-child in Revelation 12 and the firstfruit in Revelation 14. The man-child is for fighting and for defeating Satan. Hence, the man-child deals with the enemy. The firstfruit is not for fighting but for the satisfaction of God and the Lamb. God and the Lamb need enjoyment. The living overcomers will be the firstfruit to satisfy this need for enjoyment. The enemy, the Devil, in heaven must be cast down by the man-child, who will execute the Lord's judgment over him. But there is another need in the heavens—God and Christ must be satisfied through having fresh enjoyment. God and Christ are hungry and thirsty, desiring some firstfruit to taste for Their satisfaction. If we realize this, we shall desire to ripen earlier for the satisfaction of God and Christ. Therefore, we need to pray, "Lord, I care for Your enjoyment and satisfaction. For the sake of Your satisfaction, I want to ripen early. Lord, I want to be taken to the heavens with the firstfruit to satisfy You." This is the attitude of the living

overcomers, those who satisfy the hunger and thirst of God the Father and the Lamb, the Redeemer. The earliest ones of God's crop to mature are for the first enjoyment of God and Christ.

(3) Before the Great Tribulation

The one hundred forty-four thousand living overcomers will be raptured to mount Zion in the heavens before the great tribulation. The events recorded in verses 6 through 13 of Revelation 14, all of which will take place during the great tribulation (Matt. 24:21), indicate clearly and prove strongly that the first overcomers as the firstfruit will be raptured before the great tribulation and that the harvest in Revelation 14:14-16, which includes the majority of believers, will be raptured toward the end of the great tribulation.

c. The Minority of Them, Who Will Be Living at the Lord's Coming Back, Signified by the Two Men Working in the Field and the Two Women Grinding at the Mill in the Day (Also by the Two on One Couch in the Night), to Be Taken

The rapture of the overcomers will include the rapture of the minority of the believers who will be living at the Lord's coming back. This is signified by the two men working in the field and the two women grinding at the mill in the day (Matt. 24:40-41) and also by the two on one couch in the night (Luke 17:34). In Matthew 24:40 and 41 the Lord Jesus says, "Then shall two men be in the field; one is taken, and one is left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; one is taken, and one is left." "To be taken" means to be raptured before the great tribulation. The two men in verse 40 must be brothers in Christ, and the two women in verse 41 must be sisters in the Lord. This is indicated by verse 42, which tells us to watch because we do not know on what day our Lord comes. Both "watch therefore" and "your Lord" prove that the two men and the two women in these verses are believers. The Lord would not charge the unsaved people to watch, nor is He the Lord of the unsaved.

Of the two men in the field, one is taken and the other is left; and of the two women grinding at the mill, one is taken and the other is left. The reason for this is that there is a difference between them in the matter of life. I believe

that the one taken is mature and that the one left is immature. The growth in life to maturity makes the difference.

In Luke 17:34 the Lord says, "I tell you, in that night there will be two on one couch; the one will be taken, and the other will be left." This indicates that the rapture of the overcoming believers will occur secretly and unexpectedly, at night to some believers who are sleeping and in the daytime to some sisters who are grinding at home and to some brothers who are working in the field.

In Luke 17:34 the Greek word for "taken" literally means "taken with." This word denotes the rapture of the overcomers. Those who are taken in this way will be raptured before the great tribulation, which will be a severe trial upon the whole inhabited earth (Rev. 3:10).

In Matthew 24:40 and 41 and Luke 17:34 we see that some who are sleeping will be raptured in the night, and some sisters grinding and some brothers farming will be raptured in the day. Here we see that the rapture will involve believers who are in different places at different times. When the rapture takes place, some will be raptured in the night and others will be raptured in the day, depending on where they live on earth. Furthermore, these verses reveal that not all those who are sleeping, grinding, or farming will be raptured. This indicates that not all the believers will be raptured at once. The Lord says that two will be on one couch, and one will be taken and the other will be left. The same will be true of the two grinding at the same place and of the two laboring in the field. In each case, the one who is left may not know the whereabouts of the one who has been taken. This is the rapture of the minority of the believers living at the Lord's coming back.

Certain fundamental teachers of the Bible do not believe in the rapture of the overcomers as distinct from the general rapture of all the believers. In other words, they do not believe in what has been called the "partial rapture." These fundamental teachers believe only in what is mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4. They do not believe that Matthew 24 and Luke 17 speak of the rapture of the watchful, overcoming believers. However, if we consider these chapters carefully and thoroughly, we shall realize that the only proper way to interpret such portions is to regard them as speaking of the rapture of the overcoming believers.

(1) To Stand before the Son of Man

in the Heavens

The minority of the living believers signified by those taken in Matthew 24:40 and 41 and Luke 17:34 will be raptured to stand before the Son of Man in the heavens. In Luke 21:36 the Lord Jesus says, "Be watchful, at every time beseeching, that you may prevail to escape all these things which are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." In Greek "to stand" in this verse is in the passive voice. Hence, it has the meaning of being put in a certain place. This refers to our being raptured to the presence of Christ. Furthermore, "to stand before the Son of Man" corresponds to the standing of those in Revelation 14:1. It indicates that the raptured overcomers will stand before the Savior on mount Zion in the heavens before the great tribulation. At the time of the rapture of the living overcomers, Christ will not yet have left heaven to come down to the air. Therefore, the minority of those who are taken, the living overcomers, will stand before the Son of Man in the heavens.

(2) To Escape All the Things

of the Great Tribulation

In Luke 21:36 the Lord Jesus speaks of our prevailing "to escape all these things which are about to take place." "All these things" are the things of the great tribulation. The word "escape" signifies being taken, raptured, before the great tribulation. Here the Lord promises that if we are watchful and beseeching so that we may overcome to escape (or, are counted worthy to escape) the coming tribulation, we shall be raptured to, will be placed in, His presence.

(3) To Be Kept Out of the Hour of Trial

Which Is about to Come on the Whole Inhabited Earth,

to Try Them Who Dwell on the Earth,

That Is, Kept Out of the Time of the Great Tribulation

In Revelation 3:10 the Lord Jesus says, "Because you have kept the word of My endurance, I also will keep you out of the hour of trial which is about to come on the whole inhabited earth, to try them who dwell on the earth." "Trial" in this verse undoubtedly denotes the great tribulation (Matt. 24:21). The Lord promises the overcoming believers that He will keep them "out of the hour of trial" (not just out of the trial but out of the hour of trial) because

they have kept the word of His endurance, the word of His suffering. This promise of the Lord, like His promise in Luke 21:36, indicates that the believers who have kept the word of the Lord's endurance will be raptured before the great tribulation. This implies that those who have not kept the word of His endurance will be left in the tribulation. Therefore, to be kept out of the hour of trial which is about to come on the whole inhabited earth, to try them who dwell on the earth, is to be kept out of the time of the great tribulation.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED EIGHTY-THREE

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR FUTURE (4)

In this message we shall cover further aspects of the rapture of the believers.

d. The Majority of Them, Who Have Died through All the Generations, Signified by the Ten Virgins, to Rise Up from the Dead

When the believers are raptured, the majority of them, who have died through all the generations, will rise up from the dead. This majority is signified by the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-12. Matthew 25:1 says, "Then shall the kingdom of the heavens be likened to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom." The number ten here represents the majority of the believers. The totality of the believers is signified by the number twelve. The remaining two are found in Matthew 24:40-42. When the Lord Jesus returns, the believers will be of two classes signified by the numbers two in Matthew 24 and ten in Matthew 25. Because the two men or two women are working, they represent the believers who will be alive when the Lord returns. The ten virgins, on the contrary, were all asleep, indicating that the majority of the believers will have died by the time the Lord returns. In Matthew 25:1-12 the Lord Jesus addresses what will happen to the majority of the believers, who will have died before His coming.

Virgins signify believers in the aspect of life (2 Cor. 11:2). The believers are like chaste virgins, bearing the Lord's testimony (the lamp) in the dark age and going out of the world to meet the Lord. For this they need not only the indwelling of the Spirit but also the infilling of the Spirit.

In Matthew 25:1 the lamps signify the spirit of the believers (Prov. 20:27), which contains the Spirit of God as the oil (Rom. 8:16). The believers shine with the light of the Spirit of God from within their spirit. Thus, they become the light of the world, like a lamp shining in the darkness of this age (Matt. 5:14-16; Phil. 2:15-16) to bear the testimony of the Lord for the glorification of God.

In 25:1 we see that the virgins "went forth to meet the bridegroom." This signifies that the believers are going out of the world to meet the coming Christ. The bridegroom signifies Christ as the most pleasant and attractive person (John 3:29; Matt. 9:15). Thus, the believers are the virgins going, and the Lord is the Bridegroom coming.

Matthew 25:5 says, "Now while the bridegroom delayed, they all became drowsy and slept." The Lord Jesus truly has delayed His coming. In Revelation He promised to come quickly, but nearly two thousand years have passed, and still He delays His coming. Because of this delay, the virgins "became drowsy and slept." Becoming "drowsy" signifies becoming sick (Acts 9:37; 1 Cor. 11:30), and going to sleep signifies dying (1 Thes. 4:13-16; John 11:11-13). While the Lord delays His coming back, the majority of the believers first become sick and then die.

Matthew 25:6 says, "But at midnight there is a cry, Behold, the bridegroom! Go forth to meet him!" Midnight signifies the darkest time of this dark age (night). That will be the end of this age, the time of the great tribulation. "Cry" signifies the voice of the archangel (1 Thes. 4:16).

Matthew 25:7 continues, "Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps." "Arose" signifies resurrection from the dead (1 Thes. 4:14). This is the resurrection predicted in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 1 Corinthians 15:52.

After the virgins arose, they "trimmed their lamps." This signifies their dealing with their testimony in life and indicates that after resurrection our life for the Lord's testimony will still need to be dealt with if it is not perfect before we die.

(1) The Prudent Ones Who Take Oil in the Vessels with Their Lamps and Who Are Ready Will Be Taken to the Marriage Feast of the Lamb

Matthew 25:2 says of the virgins that "five of them were foolish, and five were prudent." "Five" is composed of four plus one, signifying that man (signified by four) added with God (signified by one) bears responsibility. The fact that five were foolish and five prudent does not indicate that half the believers are foolish and the other half are prudent. It indicates that all believers bear responsibility to be filled with the Spirit of God.

Verse 4 tells us, "The prudent took oil in their vessels with their lamps." Man is a vessel made for God (Rom. 9:21, 23-24), and man's personality is in his soul. Hence, "vessels" here signifies the soul of the believers. The five prudent virgins not only have oil in their lamps but also take oil in their vessels. Having oil in their lamps signifies that they have the Spirit of God dwelling in their spirit (Rom. 8:9, 16), and taking oil in their vessels signifies that they have the infilling of the Spirit of God saturating their souls.

The New Testament reveals that our spirit is the place where the Holy Spirit dwells. According to Romans 9, we are vessels made by God. Our being, our personality, is in our soul. Therefore, the vessel in this verse signifies the soul. Through regeneration we have the Spirit of God in our spirit. This causes our lamp to burn. But the question is whether or not we have the extra portion of the Holy Spirit filling our soul. Although we have the oil in our lamp, we still need the extra portion of the oil in our soul. This signifies that the Spirit must spread from within our spirit to every part of our soul. Then in our soul we shall have an extra amount of the Holy Spirit. If we have this extra portion, we are prudent. Without this extra portion of the Spirit, we cannot be watchful or ready. In order to be watchful and ready, we need the infilling of the Holy Spirit, the spreading of the Spirit Himself from our spirit to every part of our inward being.

Matthew 25:10 says, "Those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut." "Those who were ready" must be those who are invited to the marriage dinner of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9). We should be ready (Matt. 24:44) by always having oil in our vessel, by always being filled with the Spirit of God in our whole being. The marriage feast in 25:10, the marriage dinner of the Lamb, will be held in the air (1 Thes. 4:17) during the Lord's coming. Hence, it will occur before the manifestation of the kingdom as a reward of mutual enjoyment with the Lord to the believers who are ready, who have been equipped with the infilling of the Holy Spirit before they die. After those who are ready go in with the Bridegroom to the marriage feast, the door is shut. This is not the door of salvation but the door to enter into the enjoyment of the Lord's marriage feast.

(2) The Foolish Ones Who Take No Oil in the Vessels Beside Their Lamps and Who Are Not Ready Will Also Come to the Lord but Will Be Rejected

from His Marriage Feast

Matthew 25:3 says, "The foolish, when they took their lamps, did not take oil with them." Oil signifies the Spirit of God (Isa. 61:1; Heb. 1:9). The foolish ones were foolish because they had oil only in the lamp but not the extra portion of oil in the vessel. In addition to the regenerating Spirit, they did not have the infilling Spirit, the extra portion of the Holy Spirit.

(a) They Need to Go to the Oil Sellers and Buy the Oil for Their Vessels

Verse 8 says, "The foolish said to the prudent, Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." This word implies that even after resurrection the foolish believers will still need the infilling of the Spirit of God. "Going out" proves that the lamps of the foolish virgins are lighted, having oil in them, but not having an adequate supply. The foolish virgins represent the believers who have been regenerated by the Spirit of God dwelling in them but who are not filled with the Spirit of God so that He may saturate their whole being.

Verse 9 goes on to say, "But the prudent answered, saying, Lest there be not enough for us and for you, go rather to those who sell and buy for yourselves." This indicates that no one can have the infilling of the Holy Spirit for others. We may borrow many things, but we cannot borrow the infilling of the Holy Spirit. This can be compared to eating. No one can eat for someone else.

The prudent virgins told the foolish ones to go to those who sell and buy for themselves. Those who sell must be the two witnesses during the great tribulation, the two olive trees and the two sons of oil (Rev. 11:3-4; Zech. 4:11-14). During the great tribulation, the two sons of oil, Moses and Elijah, will come to help God's people.

To buy indicates the need of paying a price. The infilling of the Holy Spirit is obtained at a cost, such as giving up the world, dealing with the self, loving the Lord above all, and counting all things loss for Christ. If we do not pay the price today, we must pay it after resurrection. Those who do not pay the price do not have the extra portion of the Holy Spirit. Eventually, the foolish virgins will realize that they need to love the Lord with all their heart and soul. They will see that they need to give up the world and deal with the self.

(b) They Will Miss the Marriage Feast

The foolish ones who do not take oil in their vessels and who are not ready when the Lord Jesus comes will miss the marriage feast of the Lamb. Matthew 25:11 and 12 say concerning the marriage feast, "Later the rest of the virgins came also, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us! But he answered and said, Truly I say to you, I do not know you." The later coming of the foolish virgins refers to the later rapture of the resurrected believers. They paid the price for the extra portion of oil, but they obtained it too late. Time means a great deal here, for when they came, the door was shut.

When the foolish virgins asked the Lord to open to them, He said, "I do not know you." To not know here indicates not to recognize, not to approve, as in Luke 13:25; John 1:26, 31; 8:19. The foolish virgins had their lamps lighted, went forth to meet the Lord, died, and were resurrected and raptured, but they were late in paying the price for the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Because of this, the Lord would not recognize or approve them for participation in His marriage feast. They miss this reward dispensationally, but they do not lose their salvation eternally.

e. To Be Raptured into the Lord's Parousia (Presence—Coming—Which Will Begin at the Rapture of the Overcomers and End with His Coming to the Earth)

In 1 Thessalonians 4:15 Paul says, "This we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are living, who remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall by no means precede those who have slept." The Greek word translated "coming" is parousia, which means presence. Christ's coming will be His presence with His believers. According to the New Testament, the Lord's parousia, His presence, will last a period of time. This parousia will begin from the time the overcomers are raptured to the throne, it will continue with the Lord's coming to the air (Rev. 10:1), and it will end with His coming to the earth (Matt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7). Within His parousia, there will be the rapture of the majority of the believers to the air (1 Thes. 4:15-17), the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), and the marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9).

(1) The Dead Ones among Them Signified

by the Ten Virgins Shall Rise Up First

First Thessalonians 4:16b says, "The dead in Christ shall rise first," The dead believers signified by the ten virgins will be the first to rise up and be raptured into the Lord's parousia.

(a) The Resurrection of Those Who Are Christ's

Speaking of the resurrection, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:23, "Each one in his own order: the firstfruit, Christ; after that those who are Christ's at His coming." Those who are Christ's are the believers in Christ, the just ones, who will be resurrected unto life at the Lord's coming back before the millennium (John 5:29; Luke 14:14; 1 Thes. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:52; Rev. 20:4-6).

(b) The Resurrection of Life

In John 5:28 and 29 the Lord Jesus says, "An hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth: those who have done the good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done the evil to the resurrection of judgment." Here we have two kinds of physical resurrections. The "resurrection of life" is the resurrection of the saved believers before the millennium. The dead believers will be resurrected to enjoy eternal life at the return of the Lord Jesus. Hence, this resurrection is called the resurrection of life. When the Lord Jesus comes back, all His dead believers will be resurrected and will be taken up with the living believers to the air (1 Thes. 4:17). However, all the dead unbelievers will be resurrected after the millennium to be judged at the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-15). Hence, that resurrection is called the resurrection of judgment. We, the believers, will enjoy and participate in the resurrection of life, but the unbelievers will suffer the judgment of eternal perdition at the resurrection of judgment.

(c) The Resurrection of the Righteous

In Luke 14:14 the Lord Jesus says, "It will be repaid to you in the resurrection of the righteous." The resurrection of the righteous is the resurrection of life, when God will reward the saints (Rev. 11:18) at the Lord's return (1 Cor. 4:5). Therefore, the resurrection of the righteous is a resurrection with a reward.

(d) The First (the Best) Resurrection

Revelation 20:4b speaks of those who "lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." Here the word "lived" means resurrected. In verse 5b this is called "the first resurrection." Then verse 6a continues, "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection." Here the Greek word translated "first" can also be rendered "best." The first resurrection is the best one. It is not only the resurrection of life but also the resurrection of reward (Luke 14:14), the out-resurrection, that is, the extraordinary resurrection which the Apostle Paul sought for (Phil. 3:11), the resurrection of kingship as a reward to the overcomers that they may reign as co-kings with Christ in the millennial kingdom. Therefore, "blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection." This is the highest blessing—to inherit the kingdom manifested on earth and even to be kings within it. Not only the resurrected overcomers, such as the man-child in Revelation 12:5 and the later martyrs in 15:2, but also the raptured living ones, such as the firstfruit in 14:1-5, will have part in this resurrection. We should not be content merely to be in the general resurrection; rather, we should aspire to be in the first, the best, resurrection.

(e) The Out-resurrection

In Philippians 3:11 Paul says, "If by any means I may attain to the out-resurrection from among the dead." To "attain" here means to arrive at. The out-resurrection from among the dead denotes the outstanding resurrection, the extra-resurrection, which will be a prize to the overcoming saints. This means that it is the resurrection set apart from the common resurrection, the resurrection with honor, comparable to a graduation with honors. This resurrection is a resurrection of kingship as a reward to the overcomers that they may reign as co-kings with Christ in the millennial kingdom. All believers who are dead in Christ will participate in the resurrection from among the dead at the Lord's coming back, but the overcoming saints will enjoy an extra, outstanding portion of that resurrection. This is the "better resurrection" mentioned in Hebrews 11:35. The better resurrection is not only the first resurrection, the resurrection of life, but also the out-resurrection, the resurrection in which the Lord's overcomers will receive the reward of the kingdom.

To arrive at the out-resurrection means that our entire being has been gradually and continually resurrected. God first resurrected our deadened spirit (Eph. 2:5-6). Then from our spirit He proceeds to resurrect our soul (Rom. 8:6) and our mortal body (Rom. 8:11), until our entire being—spirit,

soul and body—is fully resurrected out of our old being by His life and with His life. This is a process in life through which we must pass until we arrive at the out-resurrection as the prize. Hence, the out-resurrection should be the goal and destination of our Christian life.

(2) The Living Ones among Them, Who Are Left and Who Will Still Remain unto the Lord's Coming, Shall Be Caught Up at the Same Time Together with the Resurrected Ones

After the dead ones among the believers, signified by the ten virgins, have been resurrected, then the living ones among them, signified by one of the two men and one of the two women in Matthew 24:40 and 41 and the one of the two in Luke 17:34, who are left and who will still remain until the Lord's coming, shall be caught up at the same time together with the resurrected ones. First Thessalonians 4:17 says, "Then we who are living, who remain, shall be caught up at the same time together with them in clouds into a meeting of the Lord in the air; and so we shall be always together with the Lord." According to this verse, both the dead and the living believers will be caught up to the Lord. First the dead will be raised, and then together we shall be caught up to a meeting of the Lord in the air.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:15 Paul speaks of those "who are living, who remain unto the coming of the Lord," and in verse 17 he again refers to those "who are living, who remain." If we consider this matter carefully, we shall realize that this indicates, or at least implies, that there are some living ones who do not remain. Some living ones are gone. These living ones who do not remain are overcomers.

There is a difference between the rapture of the overcomers and the rapture of those believers who are alive and remain until the Lord's coming. The rapture of the overcomers will take place before the last three and a half years, a period known as the great tribulation. In other words, the overcomers will be raptured before the tribulation (Rev. 3:10). But those who are alive and remain will be raptured at the end of the tribulation, that is, at the last trumpet (1 Cor. 15:52).

(a) In Clouds

According to 1 Thessalonians 4:17, those believers who are alive and remain will be caught up "in clouds."

(b) Into a Meeting of the Lord in the Air

Those believers who remain unto the Lord's coming will be caught up "into a meeting of the Lord in the air" (1 Thes. 4:17). Here we see that there is a difference between the rapture of the overcomers and the rapture of those believers who are alive and remain until the Lord's coming not only regarding time but also regarding location. According to Revelation 12, the overcomers are raptured to the throne of God in the third heaven. But according to 1 Thessalonians 4, the rapture of those who are alive and remain will be to the clouds in the air.

(c) To Be Together with the Lord

The majority of the believers, both the dead and resurrected ones, and the living ones at the Lord's coming, after being raptured to meet with the Lord in the air, will be together with the Lord (1 Thes. 4:17) to enjoy the Lord's presence by seeing Him face to face (1 John 3:2). Then they will enjoy the Lord's presence much more than what they enjoy of His presence merely in their spirit today.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED EIGHTY-FOUR

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR FUTURE (5)

In this message we shall see that, in the completing stage of God's full salvation, the believers will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ, which is the judgment seat of God.

4. To Be Judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ—the Judgment Seat of God

We have seen that in the completing stage of God's full salvation, the stage of glorification, the believers will be glorified, redeemed in their body, and raptured. To be glorified, redeemed, and raptured will be a procedure that will bring the believers into the stage of glorification. After all the believers have been raptured, they will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ.

We may think that in the New Testament God's judgment of people is only of one kind—to decide whether they will perish or be saved. However, the truth revealed in the Bible concerning God's judgment is much more detailed. In the New Testament there are at least five kinds of judgment.

The first judgment is that exercised by God when the Lord Jesus was on the cross. The crucifixion of the Lord was a judgment, for the righteous God judged the Lord Jesus as our Substitute. Hence, the Lord Jesus was judged by God on our behalf.

Second, in the church age God exercises another kind of judgment, and this is God's judgment over His house. First Peter 4:17 says, "It is time for the judgment to begin from the house of God." God's house, or household, is the church composed of the believers (1 Pet. 2:5; 1 Tim. 3:15). God judges His people so that they may be disciplined, purified, and separated from the unbelievers and not have the same destiny as they. Such disciplinary judgment begins from God's own household. Therefore, if we are careless in doing things, we shall be judged. Instead of judgment, we may speak of being disciplined, chastised, or corrected. However, discipline, chastisement, and correction are actually God's judgment. God is always right and righteous,

and He will not allow anything under His rule to be wrong. For this reason, He sometimes judges us.

The third kind of judgment in the New Testament will be the judgment of the believers at the judgment seat of Christ. After all the dead saints have been resurrected and raptured and all the living ones have been raptured, a judgment seat will be set up for Christ to judge all His genuine believers. This judgment will determine whether a believer receives a reward or some kind of dispensational punishment. Paul says, "We must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for the things done through the body, according to what he has practiced, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). This judgment seat is where Christ will judge His believers at His coming back, not concerning eternal salvation but concerning their dispensational reward (1 Cor. 4:4-5; 3:13-15).

Another verse that speaks of the believers being judged is Romans 14:10, where Paul tells us, "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of God." This judgment is different from the eternal judgment of God mentioned in Romans 2:2, 3, 5, 16 and 3:8, which will be mainly carried out at the white throne revealed in Revelation 20:11-15. The eternal judgment at the white throne will be after the millennium, it will be to judge all the dead unbelievers, and it will be for eternal punishment in the lake of fire. However, the judgment at the judgment seat of God, or the judgment seat of Christ, will be before the millennium, immediately after Christ's coming back, it will be to judge all the resurrected and raptured believers, and it will be for reward in the millennial kingdom.

The fourth judgment revealed in the New Testament is the judgment of the living at Christ's throne of glory (Matt. 25:31-46). After the Lord Jesus defeats Antichrist and his army, many of the Gentiles will still be living on earth. The Lord will gather them to Himself and judge them. "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He shall sit on His throne of glory; and all the nations shall be gathered before Him, and He shall separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (vv. 31-32). Those that are regarded as sheep will be transferred into the millennium to be the people under the kingly ruling of Christ and the overcoming believers (Rev. 2:26-27; 12:5; 20:4-6) and under the priestly ministry of the saved Jews (Zech. 8:20-23). Those that are regarded as goats will go with their leader, Antichrist, "into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41).

The fifth judgment in the New Testament will be executed by Christ on the dead unbelievers after the millennium. Christ is the Judge of both the living and the dead (Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:1). Whereas the living will be judged before the millennium, the dead will be judged afterward, as revealed in Revelation 20:11-15, the judgment at the great white throne. The unbelievers will be condemned by the Lord because of their evil deeds, and then they will perish because of their unbelief, not having their names written in the book of life. Therefore, at the great white throne Christ will judge the dead unbelievers to determine their eternal perdition.

Three of the five kinds of judgment in the New Testament are concerned with the believers. First, we should put ourselves under the judgment that was carried out through the cross of Christ. As believers, we have already been judged eternally, for we were judged in Christ on the cross. Just as Noah and his family were judged by the water but were inside the ark, so we have been judged by God on the cross in Christ. Second, as members of God's family, we are under God's family judgment. God is judging His own house, and we are the members of His family. Every day we need to realize that we are under this judgment, a judgment that is neither for perdition nor salvation but for correction and transformation. We need this judgment, and we are under it today. Finally, we shall be judged at the judgment seat of Christ in the air. This judgment will determine our destiny in the millennium, for it will decide whether we shall be rewarded to enter into the kingdom to enjoy the blessing of eternal life or suffer some kind of punishment during that dispensation. Therefore, as believers we are involved with three kinds of judgment: the judgment on the cross, the judgment in God's house, and the judgment at Christ's judgment seat.

In all His judgments the Lord is righteous. He is wise and just, and He will not allow His people to be loose or wrong. We were sinners who were judged in Christ on the cross, and then we became children of God. As God's children, we are not free to do things in a loose way. God is very strict with His people. Today, in the house of God, He exercises His family judgment according to His will to correct us that we may grow and experience more transformation. Eventually, at the Lord's coming back, He will judge us to decide whether in the coming age we shall receive a reward or punishment. This judgment will take place after our rapture.

a. To Be Recompensed for the Things

They Have Done, according to What They Have Practiced, Whether Good or Bad

In 2 Corinthians 5:10, Paul tells us that every believer before the judgment seat of Christ will be "recompensed for the things done through the body, according to what he has practiced, whether good or bad." Alford points out that "recompense" is a technical word for receiving wages. While we are still at home in the body, we should do things through it to please the Lord, that we may be rewarded for them by the Lord at His coming.

b. Each One of Them Shall Give Account of Himself to God for the Lord to Settle the Accounts with Them

Before the judgment seat of Christ, each of the believers will give an account of himself to God for the Lord to settle the accounts with them. Matthew 25:19 speaks of this: "Now after a long time the lord of those slaves comes and settles accounts with them." "A long time" signifies the entire church age, and the coming signifies the Lord's coming to the air (1 Thes. 4:16) in His parousia. To settle accounts signifies the Lord's judgment at His judgment seat in the air (within His parousia), where the believers' life, conduct, and work will be judged for reward or punishment.

When the believers appear before the judgment seat of Christ, they will give an account of how they have lived before the Lord and what kind of work they have done for the Lord after they were saved. We shall have to tell Him what we have been doing and what we have been gaining for Him. This will be very difficult, for we shall have to relate to the Lord what we have done in our life as believers. This is to give an account of ourselves to God for the Lord to settle the account with us.

c. To Be Examined by the Lord, Who Shall Both Bring to Light the Hidden Things of Darkness and Make Manifest the Counsels of the Hearts, That the Praise May Be to Each One from God

At the judgment seat of Christ, the believers will be examined by the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 4:4b, Paul says, "He who examines me is the Lord." Then in verse 5 he goes on to say, "Therefore do not judge anything before the time, until the Lord comes, who shall both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the hearts, and then there will be praise to each one from God." "Before the time" means before the Lord's day (1 Cor. 3:13). We do not know what is hidden in our heart. But one day the things in our heart will be made manifest, so that praise may be to each one from God. If our heart is right, good, pure, and for God, then at the judgment seat of Christ we shall be rewarded with a praise from God. Today we can hide the things of darkness and the counsels of our hearts. But all this will be brought to light and made manifest at the Lord's coming back. Then every one of us shall receive a reward accordingly.

d. The Reward Is with the Lord to Render to Each One according to His Work

In Revelation 22:12 the Lord Jesus says, "Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me to render to each one according to his work." "I come quickly" is the Lord's repeated warning (vv. 7, 20) that we may consider His reward at His coming back. The Greek word translated "reward" means wages. At the Lord's coming, this reward will be rendered to each one of the believers, after their rapture, at the judgment seat of Christ.

e. Some Shall Receive a Reward

When the believers are judged by the Lord at His judgment seat, some will receive a reward. Many verses in the New Testament speak of this. First Corinthians 3:8b says, "Each one shall receive his own reward according to his own labor." Then in verse 14, concerning building upon Christ as the unique foundation, Paul goes on to say, "If anyone's work which he has built upon it shall remain, he shall receive a reward." According to the context, 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 the judging Lord. Reward is based on a believer's work after being saved. It differs from salvation, which is based on faith in the Lord Jesus and His redemptive work.

In 1 Corinthians 9:17 Paul speaking of preaching the gospel says, "If I do this voluntarily, I have a reward." The book of 1 Corinthians was written not

to help lost sinners to be saved, but to help saved believers to grow (3:6-7), to build with precious materials (3:10, 12-14), to care for the Lord's members (8:9-13), and to run the race (9:24). Hence, reward is mentioned repeatedly as an incentive to the believers' progress (3:14; 9:18, 24-25).

Revelation 11:18b says, "The time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to give the reward to Your slaves the prophets, and to the saints." The reward will be given by the Lord to His faithful ones at His coming back (Rev. 22:12; Matt. 16:27). The purpose of the judgment of the prophets and the saints will be to determine who among the saved persons will be worthy of a reward and who will need further discipline. The giving of the reward to the prophets and to the saints will occur after the resurrection and rapture of the saints.

In Matthew 16:27 the Lord Jesus says, "The Son of Man is about to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each man according to his doings." The context indicates that the Lord's rewarding of His followers at His coming back in this verse will be according to whether they lose or save their soul, as mentioned in verses 25 and 26. This means that the reward will be given according to how we have borne the cross. It will depend on whether or not we keep ourselves under the killing of the cross, on whether we save our soul life in this age or lose it. If we bear the cross to follow the Lord by losing the enjoyment of our soul in this age, He will reward us with the enjoyment of the soul in the kingdom.

In 16:27 the Lord says that He will reward "each man according to his doings," that is, according to whether or not we lose our soul life's enjoyment in this age. This will have nothing to do with our eternal salvation; however, it will have very much to do with the Lord's dispensational reward to us. The Lord's reward will be the entering into the kingdom, which will be at the manifestation of the kingdom. The manifestation of the kingdom in the millennium will be the reward to the followers who remain under the killing of the cross. All the believers who follow Christ in this way will be rewarded with the manifestation of the kingdom.

In Philippians 3:14 Paul declares, "I pursue toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." The prize here will be the uttermost enjoyment of Christ in the millennial kingdom as a reward to the victorious runners of the New Testament race. In this verse the goal is for us to gain,

whereas the prize is for us to enjoy. We may reach the goal in this age, but we shall enjoy the prize, the reward, in the coming age.

Hebrews 10:35 says, “Do not cast away therefore your boldness, which has great reward.” The reward spoken of here is the kingdom reward because it will be given to us for our enjoyment in the coming kingdom, not in this age. Today in the church life the kingdom is an exercise. If we are faithful in the kingdom exercise today, we shall be rewarded with the kingdom as an enjoyment in the coming age. Then it will be the kingdom reward.

The kingdom reward is in addition to eternal salvation (Heb. 5:9). Based on Christ’s eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12), eternal salvation has been given to us freely and eternally according to God’s eternal selection of us. This is eternally secure. However, after receiving this salvation, how we would behave ourselves is a problem. Hence, according to God’s wisdom, in addition to this eternal salvation, a reward is promised as an incentive to us that we may be faithful in our living by the Lord and in our working for Him.

Eternal salvation is by faith, having nothing to do with our work (Eph. 2:8-9), whereas the kingdom reward is for our work after we are saved. We may not receive the kingdom reward even though we are saved, because we are void of the work which the Lord would approve (1 Cor. 3:15). In Hebrews 10:35 the Hebrew believers in particular are charged not to miss the kingdom reward—the coming Sabbath rest (Heb. 4:9), the enjoyment of Christ and the reign with Christ in the coming age.

Two other portions of the Word that speak of receiving a reward are Matthew 24:45-47 and 25:21, 23. Matthew 24:45-47 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.” “Faithful” is toward the Lord, whereas “prudent” is toward the believers. “Household” 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 and Christ as the life supply to the believers in the church. To be “blessed” here 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.

In Matthew 25:21 the Lord Jesus says, “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 "few things" signify the Lord's work in this age, "over" signifies the ruling authority in the coming kingdom, and "many things" signify the responsibilities in the coming kingdom. The joy of the Lord signifies the enjoyment of the Lord in the coming kingdom. This 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 25:21 we see two aspects of the reward given to the faithful slave: authority and enjoyment. The faithful one will enter directly into the Lord's presence in the manifestation of the kingdom.

Matthew 25:23 reveals that the same reward is given to the two-talented one as to the five-talented one. When the two-talented one came and said that he had gained another two talents, the Lord said the same thing to him that He had said to the five-talented one. This indicates that although the gift given to the two-talented one is smaller than that given to the five-talented one, the Lord's appraisal and reward to both are the same. This reveals that the Lord's appraisal and reward are not related to the size and quantity of our work but to our faithfulness in using His gift to the fullest extent.

f. Some Shall Suffer Loss (Loss of Reward, Not of Salvation), but Shall Be Saved, yet So as through Fire (Relating to Certain Dispensational Punishment, Not to Eternal Perdition)

At the judgment seat of Christ some believers will suffer loss. This loss will not be of salvation but of reward. They will be saved, yet so as through fire. This fire is related to a certain dispensational punishment, not to eternal perdition.

First Corinthians 3:15 says, "If anyone's work shall be consumed, he shall suffer loss, but he shall be saved, yet so as through fire." The work of wood, grass, and stubble (v. 12) is fit only to be burned. This is the work which shall be consumed by the Lord's judging fire at His return.

When Paul says, "He shall suffer loss," he means loss of reward, not loss of salvation. To suffer loss here absolutely does not mean to perish. 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, whereas the Lord's reward to those whose Christian works are approved by Him is for the kingdom age. A reward is an incentive for their Christian works, and it is not given to all believers.

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." "Through fire" 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.

Two other portions of the New Testament that speak of the believers' suffering loss are Matthew 24:48-51 and 25:26-30. Matthew 24:48 and 49 speak of an evil slave who says in his heart, "My master is delaying his coming," and who begins to "beat his fellow slaves, and eat and drink with the drunken." Verses 50 and 51 say, "The master of that slave shall come on a day when he does not expect him, and in an hour which he does not know, and shall cut him asunder and appoint his portion with the hypocrites; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth." The problem with the evil slave is not that he does not know that the Lord is coming, but that he does not expect Him. He does not like to live the kind of life that is prepared for the Lord's coming. Moreover, the evil slave beats his fellow slaves, that is, mistreats the fellow believers, and eats and drinks with the drunken, that is, keeps company with worldly people, who are drunk with worldly things. Therefore, when the Lord comes back, He will cut asunder the evil slave and appoint his portion with the hypocrites. To "cut him asunder" means to cut him off. This signifies a separation from the Lord in His coming glory. The Lord will not cut the evil slave in pieces; rather, He will cast him off from the glory in which He Himself will be. Once again, the issue is not salvation but whether a believer will receive a reward to enter into the kingdom or lose the reward, miss the enjoyment of the kingdom, and suffer punishment and discipline where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

In Matthew 25:26-30 the one-talented one, who was not faithful in using his gift, is rebuked by the Lord and punished. Verse 30 says, "Cast out the useless slave into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth." Whoever is cast into outer darkness will be cut off from

the Lord, from His presence, from His fellowship, and from the glorious sphere in which the Lord will be. This is not to perish eternally but to be chastened dispensationally during the coming age of the kingdom.

In the New Testament there is a clear and strong revelation concerning the believers' future. The verses that we have covered in this message concerning the believers' being judged at the judgment seat of Christ are very serious. As a result of studying these verses, we should care about our future, in particular how we shall meet the Lord and give an account to Him.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED EIGHTY-FIVE

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR FUTURE (6)

In this message we shall cover two aspects of the believers' future in the completing stage of God's full salvation: first, the believers' being invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb and being His bride; second, the believers' being the heavenly armies following the Faithful and True, The Word of God, King of kings, and Lord of lords.

5. To Be Invited to the Marriage Feast of the Lamb and to Be His Bride

In the completing stage of God's full salvation, the overcoming believers, those who are rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ, will be invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb. These invited ones will also be Christ's bride. Therefore, at His coming back Christ will marry the overcoming believers. This is described in Revelation 19:7-9. Verse 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, consisting of the overcoming believers, will be ready.

The words "His wife" in Revelation 19:7 refer 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, here consists only of the overcoming believers during the millennium, whereas the bride, the wife, in Revelation 21:2 is composed of all the saved saints after the millennium for eternity.

As the Lamb, Christ needs a wedding. This matter is altogether unreligious. The Gospel of John reveals that Christ is the Lamb who came to take away sin (1:29) and also the Bridegroom who came that He might have the bride. Christ's goal is not to remove sin; it is to have the bride. In the book of Revelation we see that Christ our Redeemer is the Lamb and the coming Bridegroom. As the Bridegroom, He must have a wedding.

Although the concept of the marriage of Christ and His bride is foreign to religion, we need to emphasize it so that we may know that our position is that of the bride and the position of the coming Christ is that of the Bridegroom. We are on earth preparing to become the bride to meet Him, and He is on the throne in the third heaven prepared to come as the Bridegroom to meet us. Thus, He is coming as the Bridegroom, and we are going as the bride. The bride and the Bridegroom will meet neither in heaven nor on earth but in the air. When we meet Him in the air, we shall have a wedding.

The marriage of the Lamb will come after the rapture of the majority of the believers (1 Thes. 4:15-17) and also after the judgment (2 Cor. 5:10). After all the raptures and before the wedding, there will be the judgment at the judgment seat of Christ to determine which believers will be qualified for the marriage feast of the Lamb. If we are rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ, we shall be invited to the marriage feast. However, if we are not rewarded but instead are disapproved by the Lord, we shall not be invited to His marriage feast. Those who are chosen at the judgment seat to be invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb will be both the guests at the feast and also the bride. The guests will be the corporate bride.

a. The Bride Has Made Herself Ready

In John 3:29 John the Baptist declared, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom." Revelation 19:7b says, "His wife has made herself ready." 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. For this, building is needed. The overcomers are not only mature in life but are also built together as one bride.

b. The Overcoming Saints Are Clothed with Christ as the Fine Linen— Righteousnesses, Bright and Pure

Revelation 19:8 says, "It was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and pure; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints." "Pure" refers to the nature, whereas "bright" refers to the expression. The Greek word translated "righteousnesses" may also be rendered "righteous acts." These righteousnesses do not refer to the righteousness (which is Christ) we received for our salvation (1 Cor. 1:30). The righteousness we receive for

salvation is objective so that we may meet the requirement of the righteous God. The righteousnesses of the overcoming believers in Revelation 19:8 are subjective so that they may meet the requirements of the overcoming Christ. Hence, the fine linen indicates our overcoming life, our overcoming living. It is actually the Christ whom we live out of our being.

The fine linen with which the overcoming believers are clothed is equal to the marriage garment in Matthew 22:11 and 12. According to the revelation of the Scriptures, the believers need two garments—one for our salvation and one for our reward. For our salvation we need a robe to cover us. This robe is the robe put on the prodigal son in Luke 15. Upon his return, the prodigal son said to his father, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (v. 21). But the father said to his servants, "Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him" (v. 22). This robe signifies Christ as our righteousness, and it is for us to be justified by God in His presence. All believers in Christ have this robe, the first robe, Christ as our righteousness, our justification, which enables us to stand before the righteous God.

However, we also need the second garment, which is the wedding garment in Matthew 22:11 and 12 and the fine linen in Revelation 19:8. This garment is not for our salvation; rather, it is for our reward, qualifying us to attend the marriage feast of the Lamb. The first garment qualifies us to meet God for our salvation; the second garment qualifies us to meet Christ for our reward. The second garment is the work of the Holy Spirit within us. It is the very Christ whom we live and who is expressed through us in our daily living. This is the righteousnesses of the saints in Revelation 19:8.

The second garment is also the righteousness spoken of in Matthew 5:20, Here the Lord Jesus says, "Unless your righteousness surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens." This righteousness is not the objective Christ we receive as our robe for our salvation. This righteousness is the subjective Christ whom we live out as our daily living. In Christ, who is our righteousness, we have been justified and saved. But after receiving Christ we need to live Him out. We need to live by Christ so that He may become our subjective righteousness. This subjective righteousness, Christ lived out of us in our daily life, is the white linen, the second garment, the marriage garment, that qualifies us to participate in the marriage feast of the Lamb.

The second garment is referred to in Revelation 3:4, 5, and 18. In 3:4 and 5 the Lord told the church in Sardis that those who have not defiled their garments will walk with Him in white and that the overcomers will be "clothed in white garments." This is the garment for the marriage feast. In 3:18 the Lord advised the church in Laodicea to buy from Him "white garments." From these verses we see that in the book of Revelation the matter of the second garment is emphasized. If we do not have this garment—the fine linen, bright and pure—we shall miss the marriage feast of the Lamb.

c. Blessed Are the Overcoming Saints, Who Are Invited to the Marriage Feast of the Lamb as His Bride

Revelation 19:9 says, "Blessed are they who are invited to the marriage dinner of the Lamb." The marriage dinner of the Lamb is the marriage feast in Matthew 22:2. It will be a reward to the overcoming believers. Only the overcomers, not all the saved ones, will be invited to it. The foolish virgins in Matthew 25:8-13 will miss it. However, after being dealt with by the Lord in the kingdom age, they will participate in the New Jerusalem for eternity. Hence, to be invited to the marriage feast of Christ, which will usher the overcoming believers into the enjoyment of the millennium, is to be blessed. The overcoming believers invited to the marriage dinner of the Lamb will also be the bride of the Lamb. This means that the bride and the guests will be the same persons. Therefore, at His coming back Christ will marry the overcoming believers as His bride.

6. To Be the Heavenly Armies Following the Faithful and True, The Word of God, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords

In the completing stage of God's full salvation, the overcoming believers will also be the heavenly armies following Christ as the Faithful and True, The Word of God, King of kings, and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:11-21). Verse 11 says, "I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sits on it called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war." Verse 14 goes on to speak of the overcoming believers as the armies: "The armies

which are in heaven followed Him on white horses, dressed in fine linen, white and pure."

The overcoming believers follow Christ as "Faithful and True." Christ will be faithful in destroying Antichrist and true in carrying out God's economy.

As the One who defeats Antichrist, Christ is called "The Word of God" (v. 13). The Word of God is the definition, explanation, and expression of God. As the Word of God, Christ speaks for God not only by imparting life as grace to God's chosen people but also by executing God's judgment upon Antichrist and his followers. Even as the Lord fights, He speaks for God and expresses God. God is righteous and sovereign; He is also a God of order and cannot tolerate disorder and rebellion. As Christ fights against Antichrist, He will declare that God is sovereign, righteous, and orderly, that God is over everyone and that He does not tolerate rebellion against His authority. Therefore, Christ's fighting against Antichrist will be a powerful speaking.

Revelation 19:16 says, "He has on His garment and on His thigh a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords." The fact that this name will be written upon Christ's garment and thigh indicates that it will be openly revealed and known to all. The garment signifies Christ's attributes, especially His righteousness in His humanity, and the thigh signifies His standing strength, His stability. His title "King of kings and Lord of lords" is exhibited in His righteousness and stability.

a. As His Called, Chosen, and Faithful Ones and as His Bride Invited to His Marriage Feast

Revelation 19:14 speaks of the Lord's armies following Him. These armies are His called, chosen, and faithful ones. Revelation 17:14 says, "He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and they who are with Him are called and chosen and faithful." Here we see that those with the Lamb are called, chosen, and faithful. Notice that "chosen" is mentioned after "called." To be called is to be saved, but to be chosen is to be approved by the Lord on the basis of an overcoming life. Many are called today, but few will be chosen in the future (Matt. 22:14). We all have been called. In order to be among the chosen in the future, we need to live an overcoming life today. In Revelation 17:14 the chosen ones are those faithful to the Lord who will become His army.

We need to be impressed with the fact that to be called is one thing and to be chosen is another. Those who will follow the Lord as the King of kings and Lord of lords will not only be called but also chosen. Although we have the assurance that we have been called, we do not yet have the assurance that we have been chosen. This will be decided at the judgment seat of Christ. After we have been raptured, we shall stand before the Lord at the judgment seat, and He will decide whether or not we are qualified to be chosen. Only those who are chosen will be His armies to fight against Antichrist.

According to Revelation 19, the armies consist of those who are both the bride and the guests invited to the marriage dinner of the Lamb. The guests invited to the wedding feast and the bride are the same. The bride consists of the invited guests, and the invited guests make up the bride. After the wedding, all the guests will become the army.

Revelation 19:14 tells us that those in the Lord's armies are "dressed in fine linen, white and pure." This fine linen is the garment of the overcoming believers that qualifies them both to attend the marriage dinner of the Lamb and to fight with the Lord against His enemy. This fine linen is the second garment of the overcomers. Thus, the wedding garment becomes the fighting garment. The second garment qualifies us not only to attend the wedding but also to be in the army. The overcomers who follow Christ to fight against His enemy will be a properly formed heavenly army.

b. To Fight against Antichrist and the False Prophet and Their Armies, and Destroy Them

The heavenly armies following the Lord will fight against Antichrist and the false prophet and their armies and destroy them. Revelation 19:19 speaks of Christ's enemies: "I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war with Him who sits on the horse and with His army." Christ's enemies are the beast, Antichrist (undoubtedly including his associate, the false prophet), and the kings of the earth and their armies. The kings of the earth especially include the ten kings under Antichrist (Rev. 17:12-14), and the armies include the two hundred million cavalry troops from the rising of the sun (Rev. 9:16; 16:12). Christ and His armies will defeat Antichrist and his armies. Revelation 19:20 says, "The beast was seized, and with him the false prophet....These two were cast alive into the lake of fire

which burns with brimstone." Antichrist and the false prophet will be the first to perish in the lake of fire. All the rest will be killed "with the sword which proceeds out of the mouth of Him who sits on the horse" (v. 21). This is Christ as the King of kings and the Lord of lords with His armies defeating Antichrist, the false prophet, and their armies.

c. At Armageddon

Antichrist and his false prophet and their armies will be the strongest people against God, fighting directly with God. God Himself in Christ as His embodiment will come with all His chosen and faithful ones to fight physically against Antichrist, the false prophet, and their armies. This will take place at Armageddon. Revelation 16:14 says, "They are spirits of demons, doing signs, which go forth to the kings of the whole inhabited earth, to gather them to the war of the great day of God the Almighty." By means of the signs they perform, these spirits of demons will gather the kings of the inhabited earth for war. Verse 16 says, "They gathered them to the place which in Hebrew is called, Armageddon." At the end of the great tribulation, three unclean spirits out of the mouths of Satan, Antichrist, and the false prophet (v. 13) will go forth to stir up the rulers of the whole inhabited earth and gather their forces, including the two hundred million cavalry mentioned in Revelation 9:14-16, to the war at Armageddon, which will be the last war among mankind before the millennium. In that war Satan's intention will be to destroy Israel (Zech. 14:2) and to fight against Christ and His army. For this he will use all rebellious mankind (Rev. 17:12-14; 19:11-19). Christ and His chosen overcomers will defeat and destroy them all (Rev. 19:20-21; Zech. 14:3,12-15; 12:4, 9) at Armageddon and save the nation of Israel (Zech. 12:3-8; 14:4-5; Joel 3:14-17). This is the treading of the winepress recorded in Revelation 14:17-20, Isaiah 63:1-6, and Joel 3:9-13.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED EIGHTY-SIX

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR FUTURE (7)

We have seen that in the progressing stage of God's full salvation, the stage of glorification, the believers will be glorified, redeemed in their body, raptured, and judged at the judgment seat of Christ. Furthermore, the overcoming believers will be invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb and will be the heavenly armies following the Lord to fight against Antichrist. In this message we shall see that, as the last aspect of the believers' future in the completing of God's salvation, the overcoming believers will participate in the coming kingdom.

7. To Participate in the Coming Kingdom—the Manifestation of the Kingdom of the Heavens

After Christ and His heavenly armies fight against Antichrist, the false prophet, and their armies, the kingdom will be brought in. Then the overcomers will participate in the coming kingdom, which will be the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens during the millennium.

With the kingdom of the heavens there are three aspects: the reality, the appearance, and the manifestation. The reality of the kingdom of the heavens is the inward contents of the kingdom of the heavens in its heavenly and spiritual nature, as revealed in Matthew 5—7. The appearance of the kingdom of the heavens is the outward state of the kingdom of the heavens in name, as revealed in Matthew 13. The manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens will be the practical coming of the kingdom of the heavens in power, as revealed by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 24 and 25. Both the reality and the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens are with the church today. The manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens will begin with the coming back of the Lord Jesus. When the Lord comes back, the kingdom of the heavens will be manifested. Whereas the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens includes all of the false believers, only the victorious, overcoming believers are in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. After the Lord Jesus comes back, these overcoming believers will participate in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens.

a. In the Kingdom of Their Father—the Heavenly Part of the Millennium

The millennium will have an earthly part and a heavenly part. The earthly part will be the kingdom of the Messiah (2 Sam. 7:13), the tabernacle of David (Acts 15:16), the kingdom of the Son of Man (Matt. 13:41; Rev. 11:15). The heavenly part of the millennium will be the kingdom of the Father. This is the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens as a reward to the overcomers. In the millennium the overcomers in the heavenly part of the kingdom will reign with Christ over the earthly part, which will be the restored kingdom of David, where Christ as the Son of Man, David's royal descendant, will be the King over the children of Israel.

(1) As the Righteous, the Sons of the Kingdom, the Overcomers, Shining Forth as the Sun

Matthew 13:43a says, "Then the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Today the believers shine as lamps, but in the coming age the overcomers will shine as the sun.

Those who will shine as the sun are the sons of the kingdom (Matt. 13:38) as the righteous. According to Matthew 5:20, these sons of the kingdom will have the surpassing righteousness. They will be righteous to such an extent that their entire being will shine. This righteousness is the indwelling Christ lived out of us that we may live in the reality of the kingdom today and enter into its manifestation in the future.

The overcomers as the righteous, the sons of the kingdom, will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, the heavenly part of the millennium. We are sons of God the Father, and God is light (1 John 1:5; 1 Tim. 6:16). The divine light, which is God Himself, is, of course, much greater than the light of the sun. When in the millennium the overcoming believers enjoy the Father as light, they will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

(2) Drinking the Cup of the New Covenant Anew with Their Lord

In the heavenly part of the millennium the overcoming believers will drink the cup of the new covenant anew with their Lord. In Matthew 26:29 the Lord Jesus said, "I will by no means drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until

that day when I drink it new with you in the kingdom of My Father." This word was spoken when the Lord was establishing the table (Matt. 26:26-30). By speaking this word, He made it clear that from the time He established the table He would be physically away from the believers and not drink the fruit of the vine with them until He drinks anew with them in the Father's kingdom. After His coming back, the Lord will drink the cup of the new covenant anew with the overcoming believers. Therefore, the Lord's promise in Matthew 26:29 will be fulfilled with the overcomers in the kingdom of the Father during the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens.

(3) Feasting with the Old Testament Overcomers

In the kingdom of their Father the overcoming believers will also feast with the Old Testament overcomers. The Lord Jesus speaks of this in Matthew 8:11: "I say to you that many shall come from the east and the west and shall recline at the table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of the heavens." This refers to the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens. It will be in the manifestation of the kingdom that the overcoming Gentile believers will feast with the Old Testament overcomers, including Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

b. To Inherit the Kingdom as a Reward

In 1 Corinthians 6:10b Paul speaks of inheriting the kingdom of God. The word "inherit" in this verse 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 just 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. By living an overcoming life today we shall be qualified to inherit the coming kingdom as a reward.

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 will not inherit the coming kingdom as a reward.

In Ephesians 5:5b Paul speaks of a believer's "inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." The kingdom of Christ is the millennium (Rev. 20:4, 6; Matt. 16:28); it is also the kingdom of God (Matt. 13:41, 43). The believers have been regenerated into the kingdom of God (John 3:5) and in the church life, are living in the kingdom of God today (Rom. 14:17). However, not all believers will participate in the millennium; only the overcoming ones will. The defeated believers will have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God in the coming age.

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. The millennium will be a 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. 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.

James 2:5 says, "Listen, my beloved brothers: Has not God chosen the poor in the world, to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which He promised to those who love Him?" The kingdom of God here is also the kingdom of Christ, which will be inherited by the overcoming believers in the coming age. We cannot receive the kingdom as a reward simply by believing. Receiving this reward requires that we love God. In order to receive salvation, it is adequate that we believe in the Lord. But if we would receive the reward of the coming kingdom, we need to love God.

In Luke 12:32 the Lord Jesus says, "Do not fear, little flock, because your Father delights to give you the kingdom." The Father delights to give the believers the coming kingdom as an inheritance reward.

c. To Inherit the Eternal Life, to Have a Fuller Enjoyment of the Divine Life

When the overcoming believers participate in the coming kingdom, they will inherit eternal life and thereby have a fuller enjoyment of the divine life (Matt. 19:29b; cf. Matt. 19:23-24). To inherit eternal life is to be rewarded in the coming age (Luke 18:29-30) with the enjoyment of the divine life in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens. In the manifestation of the

kingdom the overcoming believers will participate in the enjoyment of eternal life with the Lord Jesus.

In the church life today we are enjoying the divine life, the eternal life, but this enjoyment is not in full. In the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens, the overcomers will enjoy the eternal life in a fuller way.

(1) Rewarded with the Crown of Life

To inherit eternal life is to be rewarded with the crown of life. In Revelation 2:10b the Lord Jesus says, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." A crown in New Testament usage always denotes a prize in addition to salvation. The crown of life as a prize to the overcomers denotes the overcoming strength, which is the power of the resurrection life (Phil. 3:10); it also signifies that the overcomers have attained to "the out-resurrection from among the dead," that is, the outstanding resurrection (Phil. 3:11). To be rewarded with the crown of life in the coming kingdom will surely be a fuller enjoyment of eternal life.

(2) Rewarded to Eat of the Tree of Life in the Paradise of God— the New Jerusalem in the Millennium

To participate in the coming kingdom is also to be rewarded to eat of the tree of life in the paradise of God—the New Jerusalem in the millennium. Revelation 2:7b says, "To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." Here the paradise of God is the New Jerusalem, of which the church is a foretaste today. Strictly speaking, to eat of the tree of life in the paradise of God refers to the particular enjoyment of Christ as our life supply in the New Jerusalem in the coming millennial kingdom, because this is a promise of reward made by the Lord to His overcomers. The enjoyment of Christ as the tree of life in the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth will be the common portion of all God's redeemed people, whereas the particular enjoyment of Him as the tree of life in the New Jerusalem in the coming millennial kingdom will be a reward only to the overcoming believers. If we overcome all the distractions in the church's degradation to enjoy Christ as the tree of life in the church today, we shall be rewarded with the eating of the tree of life in the paradise of God in the coming age. This will also be a fuller enjoyment of the eternal life.

(3) Rewarded to Have Their Names Remain in the Book of Life

For the believers to participate in the coming kingdom also includes their being rewarded to have their names remain in the book of life. Revelation 3:5 says, "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." The name being erased out of the book of life indicates that that name was already written in the book of life. The book of life is a divine record of the names of those who partake of the blessings God has prepared for them. The names of all the saints chosen by God and predestinated to partake of these blessings are written in this book (Luke 10:20). These blessings are in three stages: the church, the millennial kingdom, and eternity. The blessings in the stage of the church, such as forgiveness, redemption, regeneration, eternal life, and the divine nature, are all the initial portions. All God's chosen ones whose names are written in the book of life have a share in these initial portions to begin their spiritual life. If they cooperate with God's supplying grace, they will mature in life in the church age, and this earlier maturity in life will constitute a prize with which the Lord will reward them at His coming back. However, those who do not mature in life in the church age will not be ready at the Lord's coming back to enter into the millennial kingdom and share in the divine blessings of that age as a prize. Therefore, during the millennial kingdom their names will be erased from the book of life. After being disciplined by the Lord and growing in life unto maturity during the millennial kingdom, they will share in the divine blessings in the stage of eternity. Then their names should be written in the book of life again. This means that all God's chosen ones whose names are written in the book of life and who have been brought into the participation of the divine blessings in the stage of the church shall "by no means perish unto eternity" (John 10:28, lit.), that is, they shall by no means lose the divine blessing of eternity. But some, who will not cooperate with the Lord in the church age, will be dispensationally disciplined by the Lord during the millennial kingdom and will miss the divine blessings in that stage. However, the names of those who have lived an overcoming life in the church age will remain in the book of life during the coming age of the kingdom.

The Lord's word concerning the crown of life, the tree of life, and the book of life in Revelation indicates that in the manifestation of the kingdom the overcoming believers will enjoy the eternal life in a fuller way. The main

enjoyment in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens will be the enjoyment of different aspects of eternal life. This enjoyment of eternal life will be fuller than the enjoyment we have in the church life today.

d. To Gain Their Soul, to Save Their Soul, and to Enjoy the Salvation of Their Soul

To participate in the coming kingdom is also to gain our soul, to save our soul, and to enjoy the salvation of our soul. If today we love only the Lord and not our soul, that is, our self, and if we live by Him and according to His standard, then when He comes back He will reward us with the kingdom. In the kingdom we shall have no problems, sorrows, or sufferings in our soul, for at that time we shall gain our soul, we shall save our soul, and we shall enjoy the salvation of our soul. However, if we are defeated believers, we shall be punished during the kingdom age, and that punishment will involve our soul, with the gnashing of teeth as a sign of suffering in our soul.

Today many believers are loose or indifferent in following the Lord mainly because they love their soul. They want such things as greatness and prosperity for the enjoyment of the soul. To allow the soul to have its enjoyment in this age is to save the soul. But to suffer in our soul because of following the Lord is to lose our soul. If we lose our soul today, willing to suffer and be dishonored for the Lord's name, we shall gain our soul and save our soul when the Lord comes back. When we are rewarded by Him, our soul will be saved and gained, and we shall enjoy the salvation of the soul.

In Matthew 10:39 the Lord Jesus says, "He who finds his soul life shall lose it, and he who loses his soul life for My sake shall find it." To find the soul life is to allow the soul to have its enjoyment and not to suffer. To lose the soul life is to cause the soul to suffer the loss of its enjoyment. If the believers in Christ allow their soul to have its enjoyment in this age, they will cause their soul to suffer the loss of its enjoyment in the coming kingdom age. But if they allow their soul to suffer the loss of its enjoyment in this age for the Lord's sake, they will cause their soul to have its enjoyment in the coming kingdom age, that is, to share the Lord's joy in ruling over the earth (Matt. 25:21, 23).

Luke 9:24b says, "Whoever loses his soul life for My sake, this one shall save it." To save the soul in this verse is the same as finding the soul in Matthew 10:39. It is to allow the soul to suffer the loss of its enjoyment in this

age for the Lord's sake and to be rewarded with the enjoyment of the soul in the coming manifestation of the kingdom.

First Peter 1:5 speaks of a "salvation, ready to be revealed at the last time." This is not salvation from eternal perdition but salvation of our souls from the dispensational punishment of the Lord's governmental dealing. Therefore, in verse 9 Peter goes on to say, "Obtaining the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls." Our spirit has been saved through regeneration (John 3:5-6). Our body will be saved, redeemed, through the coming transfiguration (Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:21). Our soul will be saved from suffering into the full enjoyment of the Lord at His unveiling, His coming back. For this we have to deny our soul, our soulish life, with all its pleasures in this age, that we may gain it in the enjoyment of the Lord in the coming age (Matt. 10:37-39; 16:24-27; Luke 17:30-33; John 12:25). At the Lord's unveiling, some believers through His judgment seat will enter into the joy of the Lord (Matt. 25:21, 23; 24:45-46), and some will suffer in weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 25:30; 24:51). To enter into the Lord's joy is the salvation of our souls (Heb. 10:39).

We must wait for the Lord's coming to be saved from the realm of suffering into a realm of comfort. That will be the full salvation of our soul, which is ready to be revealed to us at the last time.

e. To Participate in the Joy of Their Lord

In Matthew 25 the Lord Jesus twice said, "Enter into the joy of your lord" (vv. 21b, 23b). "The joy of your lord" signifies the enjoyment of the Lord in the coming kingdom. When the Lord Jesus comes back, that will be the time for Him to enjoy the earth. Satan will be bound, Christ will recover the earth, and the entire earth will be under His reign. By repossessing the earth, the Lord will have His enjoyment. Then He will invite His followers, His partners, to participate in this enjoyment, to enter into His joy.

f. To Reign with Christ

In the coming kingdom the overcoming believers will reign with Christ. Revelation 20:4b says, "They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years," and verse 6b says, "They shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him a thousand years." Furthermore, in 2 Timothy 2:12a Paul says, "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him." These verses indicate that in the

coming manifestation of the kingdom the overcoming believers will reign with Christ as His co-kings.

g. To Rule Over the Nations

In the coming manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens, the overcoming believers will rule over the nations. In Revelation 2:26 and 27 the Lord Jesus says, “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.” This is a prize to the overcomers of reigning with Christ over the nations in the millennial kingdom. This promise of the Lord strongly implies that those who do not answer His call to overcome degraded Christianity will not participate in the reign of the millennial kingdom. In Psalm 2:9 God gave Christ authority to rule over the nations. In the coming kingdom Christ will give the same authority to the overcoming believers.

Revelation 12:5 tells us that the man-child “was about to shepherd all the nations with an iron rod.” In the millennial kingdom the ruler will be a shepherd. The iron rod in this verse is the authority of Christ which He gives the overcomers. The overcomers will exercise the authority of Christ over the nations and rule them with Christ in the millennial kingdom.

In the Lord’s teaching about faithfulness in Luke 19:11-27, He indicates that the overcoming believers will rule over the nations. Verse 17 says, “Well done, good slave; because you became faithful in the least, have authority over ten cities.” In verse 19 He says, “And you, be over five cities.” Having authority over ten cities or five cities signifies the overcomers’ reigning over the nations. Furthermore, these verses indicate that the overcoming believers’ reigning in the coming kingdom as a reward will differ in extent.

h. To Rule Over All the Possessions of the Lord

Finally, in the coming kingdom the overcomers will rule over all the possessions of the Lord. In Matthew 24:47 the Lord says concerning the faithful and prudent slave, “He will set him over all his possessions.” The faithful ones will be set over all the Lord’s possessions as a reward in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED EIGHTY-SEVEN

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR FUTURE (8)

We have covered the believers' future in the completing stage of God's full salvation, the stage of glorification. In this message and the message following we shall consider the believers' future in the ultimate consummation of the dispensing of the divine Trinity.

B. IN THE ULTIMATE CONSUMMATION OF THE DISPENSING OF THE DIVINE TRINITY

The central thought, the governing thought, of all these messages on the conclusion of the New Testament is the divine dispensing of the divine Trinity into His chosen people for His corporate expression. In eternity the believers will participate in the ultimate consummation of the dispensing of the divine Trinity. This consummation is altogether related to the New Jerusalem.

The New Jerusalem is not a physical city, as commonly believed by Christians. Rather, the book of Revelation indicates that the New Jerusalem is a divine and spiritual sign. The revelation of the entire book of Revelation is mainly made known to us by signs (Rev. 1:1) symbolizing important persons and things, such as the golden lampstands in 1:12, signifying the churches bearing the shining testimony of Jesus Christ; the stars in 1:16, signifying the bright and shining messengers of the churches; the mysterious Babylon the Great in 17:5, signifying religious Rome; and the bride in 19:7, signifying the overcoming saints as the spouse of Christ. Hence, the New Jerusalem also should be a sign, signifying the ultimate consummation of the divine Trinity dispensing Himself into His chosen people.

If we do not have a clear vision of God's eternal intention in His eternal economy, our interpretation of the New Jerusalem will not be accurate. The interpretation of the New Jerusalem as a literal, physical city does not fit in with the entire revelation of the Bible. The entire revelation of the Bible is that God wants to dispense Himself into man and to be mingled with man to produce a marvelous entity with Himself as the content and man as the expression. This marvelous entity is the New Jerusalem, the ultimate

consummation of the dispensing of the processed Triune God into His chosen, redeemed, regenerated, and transformed people.

1. To Enjoy the Eternal Life to the Fullest

In the ultimate consummation of the dispensing of the divine Trinity in the New Jerusalem the believers are destined to enjoy the eternal life to the fullest. Today in the church life we have the enjoyment of the eternal life. In the coming age, the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens in the millennium, the overcoming believers will enjoy the eternal life in a fuller way. Eventually, in the New Jerusalem in eternity we shall enjoy the eternal life to the fullest. From this we see that the enjoyment of the eternal life is of three stages: the full enjoyment in the church age, the fuller enjoyment in the kingdom age, and the fullest enjoyment in eternity. In the New Jerusalem, which will be the ultimate consummation of the dispensing of the divine Trinity, we shall enjoy the divine life, the eternal life, to the fullest extent.

a. In Eternity

In John 4:14 the Lord Jesus says, "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall by no means thirst forever; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a spring of water welling up into eternal life." This indicates that it is in eternity that the believers will enjoy the eternal life to the fullest extent.

b. In the New Heaven and New Earth

The believers' enjoyment of the eternal life to the fullest will be in the new heaven and new earth. After the millennium, the old heaven and the old earth will pass away through fire and be renewed into the new heaven and new earth (2 Pet. 3:10-13), into which the New Jerusalem will come for God's eternal expression. Revelation tells us that John saw a new heaven and a new earth and that he saw the holy city, New Jerusalem (21:1-2). The new heaven and new earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22) with the New Jerusalem as the center will be the new universe which God will renew out of the old heaven and old earth. Although the heaven and earth which were created by God have become old because of Satan's corruption, God's purpose in creating the heaven and earth cannot be stopped. On the one hand, God will exercise His almighty power to judge the Satan-corrupted old heaven and old earth; on the other hand, He will renew the judged old heaven and old earth into the new heaven and new

earth. Thus, the old heaven and old earth will be rid of their oldness and be renewed into a new universe suitable for God's use to accomplish His eternal purpose and in which He may express Himself eternally and fully.

The new heaven and new earth with the New Jerusalem is the issue, the result, of Christ's death. Christ died to clear up the old creation, so eventually the old creation with the old heaven and the old earth will pass away. Everything of the old creation will be over. Christ's death terminated the old creation, and His death as the grain of wheat (John 12:24) released the divine life to germinate the new creation. The new creation is eventually realized in its ultimate consummation in Revelation 21 and 22, where the old heaven and the old earth have passed away and the new heaven and the new earth have come in. This is a new beginning with a new universe, and in this new universe is the New Jerusalem. After the coming out of the new heaven and new earth, the holy city, New Jerusalem, will descend to the new earth, indicating that the dwelling place of God and His redeemed will not be in heaven but on the new earth. Therefore, in an environment that is new and eternal the believers will enjoy the eternal life to the fullest extent.

c. Only Those Who Are Written in the Lamb's Book of Life Shall Enter into the New Jerusalem

Revelation 21:27 tells us that only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life shall enter into the New Jerusalem. This assures us that all the believers in Christ will be there, for we are those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

d. Those Who Enter into the New Jerusalem Will Be Given to Drink of the Spring of the Water of Life

Those who enter into the New Jerusalem will be given to drink of the spring of the water of life. Revelation 21:6b says, "I will give to him who thirsts from the spring of the water of life freely," and 22:1 says, "He showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the middle of its street." The water of life is the life-giving Spirit as our eternal drink. The life-giving Spirit is actually the Triune God Himself flowing Himself out to be our drink. This eternal drink is bright as crystal. In

the life-giving Spirit there is nothing opaque. As we drink this eternal Spirit, everything becomes crystal clear.

The river of water of life in 22:1 is a symbol of the processed Triune God in Christ as the life-giving Spirit (John 7:38-39; 1 Cor. 15:45) flowing out Himself to saturate His redeemed people, the constituents of the New Jerusalem. In eternity all the redeemed people will drink the water of life as their eternal portion. This indicates that even in eternity future we shall still need the supply of the divine dispensing of the divine Trinity. That dispensing will be the spring of the water of life. The spring is God Himself, and the water of life is the flow of this God. In the New Jerusalem the Triune God Himself will be flowing out as the water of life for our supply eternally.

e. They Shall Have the Right to Eat of the Tree of Life

Revelation 22:14 says, "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city." This verse may be considered a promise of the enjoyment of the tree of life, which is Christ with all the riches of life. The tree of life is nothing less than Christ, the Son of God, the redeeming Lamb, as our life supply. This tree is rich, fresh, and refreshing. We have been redeemed so that we may have the right to come to the tree of life.

After his creation, man was put before the tree of life (Gen. 2:8-9), indicating that he was privileged to partake of that tree. But due to the fall of man, the tree of life was closed to man by God's glory, holiness, and righteousness (Gen. 3:24). Through Christ's redemption, which has fulfilled all the requirements of God's glory, holiness, and righteousness, the way to the tree of life is opened again to the believers (Heb. 10:19-20). Hence, the believers who wash their robes in the redeeming blood of Christ, that is, keep their conduct clean through the washing of the blood of the Lamb, have the right to enjoy the tree of life as their eternal portion.

Revelation 22:2 says that the tree of life grows on the two sides of the river. This indicates that the tree of life is a vine, spreading and proceeding along the flow of the water of life. In the millennial kingdom the overcoming believers will enjoy Christ as the tree of life as their reward (Rev. 2:7). In the New Jerusalem all the believers will enjoy Christ as the tree of life as their eternal portion.

The water of life and the tree of life both signify that the Triune God will be dispensed into us continuously as our life supply for eternity. The water of life signifies the Spirit who is the ultimate consummation of the Triune God, and the tree of life signifies Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God. The fact that the tree of life grows on the two sides of the river of the water of life indicates that the embodiment of the Triune God, who is Christ, is always along with the all-inclusive Spirit, who is the consummation of the Triune God, to be our life supply dispensed into us. In this way the believers will enjoy the eternal life to the fullest extent. The flowing of the water of life with the tree of life is the dispensing of the Triune God into His chosen people as their life and life supply in fullness for eternity.

2. To Be, Together with the Old Testament Saints, the Components of the Holy City, New Jerusalem

In the ultimate consummation of the dispensing of the divine Trinity, the believers, together with the Old Testament saints, will be the components of the holy city, New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2a). The names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel are inscribed on the gates of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:12b). This indicates that the Old Testament saints are components of the New Jerusalem. The names of the twelve apostles are on the foundations of the wall of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14). This indicates that the New Testament believers also are components of the New Jerusalem. Therefore, the New Jerusalem is a living composition of all the redeemed and perfected saints in both the Old and New Testaments throughout the generations.

The fact that the New Jerusalem is a living composition of the believers and the Old Testament saints proves that the holy city is not a physical entity. On the contrary, the New Jerusalem is a corporate person, the aggregate and totality of all of God's redeemed people. This corporate person, this aggregate of the Old Testament saints and the New Testament believers, is the ultimate enlargement and consummation of the Father's house in John 14.

a. Coming Down out of Heaven from God

In Revelation 21:2a John says, "I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." The New Jerusalem will come down to the new earth. After all God's redeemed saints have been raptured to the heavens, they will be the New Jerusalem, which will come down out of heaven from

God. This indicates that our dwelling place for eternity will not be heaven, but will be the New Jerusalem on the new earth.

Many believers want to go to heaven, but God wants to come down from heaven. We may love heaven, but God loves the earth. Eventually, the New Jerusalem, which is something heavenly, will come down out of heaven from God.

b. As the Bride, the Wife of the Lamb—
Christ's Eternal Counterpart

Revelation 21:2 and 9 clearly tell us that the New Jerusalem is the bride, the wife of the Lamb. According to the entire Bible, there is a divine romance between God the Creator, the Redeemer, who is the male, and His redeemed people, who are the female. For this reason, God repeatedly likens His chosen people to a spouse (Isa. 54:6; Jer. 3:1; Ezek. 16:8; Hosea 2:19; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:31-32) for His satisfaction in love. As the wife of Christ, the New Jerusalem comes out of Christ to be His spouse, just as Eve came out of Adam and became his counterpart (Gen. 2:21-24). The bride is mainly for the wedding day, whereas the wife is for the entire married life. The New Jerusalem will first be the bride of Christ in the millennium for one thousand years as one day (2 Pet. 3:8) and then His wife in the new heaven and new earth for eternity. The bride in the millennium will include only the overcoming saints (Rev. 3:12; 19:7-9), but the wife in the new heaven and new earth will include all the redeemed and regenerated sons of God (Rev. 21:7).

The fact that the New Jerusalem is the bride, the wife of the Lamb, Christ's eternal counterpart, is a further proof that the New Jerusalem cannot be a physical city. It would be ridiculous to say that Christ will marry a physical city as His wife. A wife is a person, and the New Jerusalem, as the wife, the bride of the Lamb, Christ, will be a corporate person, the aggregate of God's redeemed, regenerated, and transformed people.

c. As the Tabernacle of God—
God's Eternal Habitation among Men (the Nations)

As the components of the holy city, New Jerusalem, the believers will be the tabernacle of God—God's eternal habitation among men. Revelation 21:3 says, "I heard a loud voice out of the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall tabernacle with them, and they shall be His peoples,

and God Himself shall be with them." The New Jerusalem as the tabernacle of God indicates that in eternity the believers, together with the Old Testament saints, will be God's eternal dwelling place. In both the Old and New Testaments God likens His chosen people to a dwelling place (Exo. 29:45-46; Num. 5:3; Ezek. 43:7, 9; Psa. 68:18; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Tim. 3:15). The spouse is for God's satisfaction in love, and the dwelling place is for God's rest in expression. The New Jerusalem will be God's dwelling place among men for Him to be expressed for eternity.

As God's habitation, the New Jerusalem will be "the tabernacle of God with men" for eternity. The tabernacle made by Moses was a type of this tabernacle (Exo. 25:8-9; Lev. 26:11). That type was first fulfilled in Christ as God's tabernacle among men (John 1:14), and will eventually be fulfilled in the fullest way in the New Jerusalem, which will be the enlargement of Christ as God's dwelling place. This tabernacle will also be the eternal dwelling place of God's redeemed people. God will overshadow us with Christ (Rev. 7:15). Hence, the New Jerusalem will be a mutual habitation for both God and us.

Revelation 21:3 tells us that the New Jerusalem is the tabernacle of God "with men." Here "men" refers not to the believers but to the nations (Rev. 21:24a, 26), the people living on the new earth outside the New Jerusalem. However, many Bible readers think that "with men" in 21:3 refers to the believers. This is wrong. Even today our God is not merely among us—He is within us. In eternity, in the New Jerusalem, God will not be among the believers but will be in the believers. Actually the believers will be the New Jerusalem, and the New Jerusalem will be the tabernacle of God among men, that is, among the nations.

d. Designed and Constructed by God

The New Jerusalem is designed and constructed by God. Speaking of Abraham, Hebrews 11:10 says, "He waited for the city which has the foundations, whose Architect and Maker is God." The Greek word for architect in this verse can also be translated either builder or artificer. This indicates that God is a skillful designer and a top craftsman. As such an Architect and Builder, God certainly has not designed and built a physical city.

Ephesians 2:10 reveals that the church is God's masterpiece. The Greek word for "masterpiece," poiema, means something which has been written or

composed as a poem. Poetry expresses the writer's wisdom. Through the church as a poem written by Him God makes known His multifarious wisdom (Eph. 3:10). The New Jerusalem, as the ultimate consummation of the church, will be full of wisdom. God designed the New Jerusalem with His wisdom, and this city will display His wisdom for eternity.

To say that the New Jerusalem is a physical city depreciates God's wisdom and belittles Him as the eternal, wise Architect. If we realize that the New Jerusalem is a sign which signifies spiritual and divine things, we shall begin to see the wisdom of God in this city. God is a wise Designer and Artificer who designs such a city to be a full manifestation of His multifarious wisdom. Furthermore, in His wisdom God constructs the New Jerusalem by dispensing Himself as the Architect and Maker into our being.

3. To Be the Sons of God (Not the People of God, the Nations around the Holy City) as the Overcomers Enjoying the Divine Sonship to the Fullest

In the ultimate consummation of the dispensing of the divine Trinity the believers will be the sons of God as the overcomers enjoying the divine sonship to the fullest. Revelation 21:7 says, "He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be God to him, and he shall be a son to Me." The meaning of "overcome" here differs from its meaning in chapters two and three. Here it means to overcome by believing, as in 1 John 5:4 and 5. The overcoming in chapters two and three qualifies the overcoming believers for participation in the enjoyment of the millennial kingdom as a particular reward in God's dispensational administration, whereas the overcoming here qualifies all believers for participation as sons of God in the New Jerusalem with all its enjoyment as the common portion of God's eternal salvation.

As the sons of God in the New Jerusalem the believers will enjoy the divine sonship to the fullest. God has predestinated us to receive sonship. When we are born again, our spirit is in the sonship, but our soul and our body are not in the sonship. This sonship will spread outward from our spirit until it saturates our whole being. When the Lord Jesus comes back, our physical body also will be saturated with the sonship and be transfigured. At that time we shall be brought wholly into sonship. Every part of our being—spirit, soul, and body—will be in the completion of sonship.

At present we are undergoing the process of sonship. We have the Spirit of the Son and the life of the Son in us, sanctifying us, transforming us, and conforming us to the image of God's Son. Furthermore, we have the position of the Son (John 20:17) that we may have the legal right to inherit all that God the Father is and all that He has. Eventually, we shall inherit all that God is for eternity.

In the church life today we are enjoying the divine sonship to some extent. In the coming age the overcoming believers will enjoy the sonship to a fuller extent. Eventually, in eternity all the believers will enjoy the sonship to the fullest extent.

In eternity the believers will be the sons of God, not the people of God. The "peoples" in Revelation 21:3 will be "the nations" in 21:24. They will live on the new earth outside the New Jerusalem and enjoy the common blessings in the new heaven and new earth. However, the believers as sons of God will dwell in the New Jerusalem, participate in all its enjoyment, serve God and the Lamb, and reign for eternity (Rev. 22:3-5).

In the new heaven and the new earth we shall not be the peoples, the nations, but the sons. The sons of God in Revelation 21:6 and 7 are those who have been born of God through regeneration (John 1:12-13; 1 Pet. 1:3, 4, 23; James 1:18). They are built together through transformation (1 Cor. 3:9-12a; Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-6; 2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23-24). They will be glorified in full conformation to be a corporate expression of the Triune God (Rom. 8:29-30; Heb. 2:10; Rev. 21:11). The nations outside the New Jerusalem, on the contrary, are not born again, transformed, or glorified. Therefore, as sons of God in eternity we shall be different from the nations.

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED EIGHTY-EIGHT

THE BELIEVERS—THEIR FUTURE (9)

In this message we shall consider further aspects of the believers' future in the ultimate consummation of the dispensing of the divine Trinity.

4. To Enjoy the Lamb-God, the Redeeming God, in His Triune Dispensing

In the ultimate consummation of the dispensing of the divine Trinity, that is, in the New Jerusalem, the believers will enjoy the Lamb-God, the redeeming God, in His Triune dispensing. Revelation 22:1 speaks of the throne of God and of the Lamb. The one throne for both God and the Lamb signifies that God and the Lamb are one—the Lamb-God, the redeeming God, God the Redeemer. In eternity the God who sits on the throne will be our redeeming God, from whose throne proceeds the river of water of life for our supply and satisfaction. This depicts how the Triune God—God, the Lamb, and the Spirit (symbolized by the water of life)—dispenses Himself into His redeemed people under His headship (implied in the authority of the throne) for eternity.

According to Revelation 22, both God and the Lamb are sitting on the throne. They are not sitting side by side. Rather, God is in the Lamb. This is indicated by the fact that God is the light and the Lamb is the lamp (Rev. 21:23). The glory of the light and the lamp are not side by side. On the contrary, the light is in the lamp, and the Lamb as the lamp shines with God as the light. This indicates that God is in the Lamb sitting on the throne. They two are actually one, just as the light and the lamp are one unit, one entity. God in the Lamb is the redeeming God. For eternity in the New Jerusalem we shall enjoy the redeeming God, God in the Lamb, in His triune dispensing.

a. On the Throne as the Center of the Holy City for the Administration of the Eternal Kingdom of God

The Lamb-God, the redeeming God, is on the throne as the center of the holy city for the administration of the eternal kingdom of God (Rev. 22:3b, 1b). Every nation has a center. The center of a nation is its capital, the place where the central government is located. The New Jerusalem also has a center, which is the throne of our redeeming God.

The throne in the New Jerusalem, of course, is for God's administration. God is the One who had a purpose, who made a plan in eternity past, and who created all things for the fulfillment of His plan. The Lamb is the One who redeemed us, the One who has accomplished full redemption to fulfill God's plan. Therefore, the throne of God and of the Lamb indicates that this throne is for the carrying out of God's plan through Christ's redemption. Both God's plan and Christ's redemption are being carried out through this throne. The throne is the source from which the river of water of life flows. The throne for the accomplishment of God's purpose is to flow out the Triune God Himself so that by this flow of life His purpose may be accomplished. Hence, in Revelation 22 we see the redeeming God administrating within the New Jerusalem. This administrating will be for the carrying out in full of God's dispensing. From the throne the redeeming God, the Lamb-God, carries out His administration, based on His redemption in the eternal kingdom in the new heaven and the new earth.

The administration of the Lamb-God in the New Jerusalem is for His expression through His administration. All that the redeeming God administrates is for the purpose that He might be expressed. In the New Jerusalem the throne of the redeeming God will be the center of the city, and His expression will extend to its circumference. Therefore, the redeeming God administrating on the throne is the God both of administration and of expression. His administration serves the purpose of His expression in His eternal manifestation.

b. As the Temple of the Holy City for Their Eternal Dwelling with God as His Serving Ones

The redeeming God will also be the temple of the holy city for the believers' eternal dwelling with God as His serving ones (Rev. 21:22; 22:3c). Actually the holy city is the tabernacle, and the tabernacle is the temple. Here we have three things: the holy city, the tabernacle, and the temple. The term "holy city"

signifies the believers together being constituted as God's dwelling place. The word "tabernacle" denotes God's habitation, and the word "temple" indicates that the redeeming God will be the place in which we dwell and serve Him. Therefore, the holy city denotes the constitution, the tabernacle denotes God's habitation, and the temple denotes our dwelling place in which we serve God. The holy city is the tabernacle, and in the tabernacle the redeeming God will be the temple. This means that the city is the constitution, the building up of the entity, which is the New Jerusalem. This entity is the tabernacle for God's dwelling place, and within this tabernacle is God Himself as the temple to be our dwelling place. The holy city, therefore, is a mutual dwelling place. As the tabernacle it is God's habitation, and as the temple it is our dwelling place. This means that God dwells in us as the tabernacle and we dwell in God as the temple. This is not only a mutual dwelling, a mutual abiding, but also a mingling of God and His chosen, redeemed, regenerated, and transformed people.

Revelation 21:22 says that the Apostle John saw no temple in the New Jerusalem, for the temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. Since God and the Lamb are the temple, They cannot dwell in it, and it is not Their dwelling place. It is the dwelling place of all the believers, who serve the Triune God by dwelling in Him. On the one hand, the New Jerusalem, which is composed of all the redeemed saints as the habitation of God, is the tabernacle; on the other hand, the New Jerusalem, which is constituted of the processed Triune God as the dwelling place of all the redeemed saints, is the temple. Thus, the New Jerusalem is the mutual dwelling of both the redeeming God and His redeemed. It is both the tabernacle and the temple; the tabernacle is the redeemed, and the temple is the redeeming God. This indicates strongly that the redeeming God is mingled with His redeemed, through the processes He has gone through and the procedures in which they have shared, for His expression in His eternal manifestation.

c. As the Light of Life in the Lamp Shining through the Holy City

The Lamb-God will also be the light of life in the lamp shining through the holy city. Revelation 22:5a says, "Night shall be no more; and they have no need of the light of a lamp and the light of the sun, for the Lord God shall illumine them." Revelation 21:23 says, "The city has no need of the sun nor of the moon that they should shine in it, for the glory of God illumined it, and its

lamp is the Lamb." Revelation 21:11 tells us that the New Jerusalem has the glory of God and her light is like a most precious stone, as a jasper stone, clear as crystal. In the millennium the light of the sun and the moon will be intensified (Isa. 30:26). But in the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and the new earth there will be no need of the sun nor of the moon, for there God, the divine light, will shine much more brightly. The Lamb as the lamp will shine with God as the light to illumine the city with the glory of God, the expression of the divine light. Because such a divine light will illumine the holy city, it will have no need of any other light, whether created by God or made by man.

In Revelation 21:23 we see that God is the light and Christ is the lamp. This indicates that God and the Lamb are one light. God is the content, and the Lamb, Christ, is the light-bearer, the expression. The glory of God, with God as its substance, essence, and element, will be the light of the New Jerusalem shining in the Lamb as its lamp. This means that God who is the light will shine in Christ as the lamp throughout the city. This also is a matter of the divine dispensing, for shining is a kind of dispensing. The shining of the divine light is actually the dispensing of the processed Triune God into the believers.

d. As the Spring of the Water of Life

In the ultimate consummation of the dispensing of the divine Trinity, the redeeming God in His triune dispensing will also be the spring of the water of life (Rev. 21:6b). In the New Jerusalem we shall have both the light of life and the spring of the water of life. The spring of the water of life also involves the divine dispensing. The water flows out of this spring to saturate the believers, and this saturation involves God's dispensing.

e. As the River of the Water of Life, the Flow of the Dispensing Triune God, Proceeding Out of the Throne of God and of the Lamb in the Middle of the Street of the Holy City

Revelation 22:1 says, "He showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the middle of its street." Here we see that in the New Jerusalem we shall enjoy not only the spring of the water of life but also the river of the water of life. The spring is

the source, and the river is the flow. Furthermore, both the source and the flow are of the water of life. The water of life is a symbol of God in Christ as the Spirit flowing Himself into His redeemed people to be their life and life supply. It is typified by the water that came out of the riven rock (Exo. 17:6; Num. 20:11) and is symbolized by the water that flowed out of the pierced side of the Lord Jesus (John 19:34). In Revelation 22:1 this water of life becomes a river proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb to supply and saturate the entire New Jerusalem. Thus, the New Jerusalem is filled with the divine life to express God in His glory of life.

The river of water of life that proceeds out of the throne of the Lamb-God is nothing less than the flowing Spirit of God as the life-giving Spirit. In 22:1 we see the Triune God—God, the Lamb, and the river. God the Father is the source; the Lamb, the Son, is the Redeemer; and the river is the Spirit. Hence, we have the Father as the source, the Son as the course, and the Spirit as the flow. This means that in 22:1 we have the flow of the Triune God. This is a picture of the Triune God dispensing Himself into us. He is flowing Himself out of Himself into His redeemed ones. This dispensing of the Triune God into us comes out of God's administrating throne, indicating that God's dispensing depends on His administration.

For the water of life to flow out of the throne of the Lamb-God means that it flows out of God Himself. In the New Jerusalem we have God in the Lamb, and out of the redeeming God flows the river of life, the life-giving Spirit. This is the dispensing of the Triune God. Before God could dispense Himself into us, He had to redeem us. Thus, the picture in Revelation 22 reveals that the redeeming God is the life-dispensing God. The Lamb signifies redemption, and the river of life signifies the dispensing of life. For eternity, our God will be the redeeming and life-dispensing God. In the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and the new earth, our God will be the redeeming Lamb flowing out as the river of life (the life-giving Spirit) to dispense His life into every part of the city.

This river of water of life flows in the middle of the street of the New Jerusalem. The street of the holy city is gold (21:21), which symbolizes the divine nature. The river of water of life proceeding in the middle of the street signifies that the divine life flows in the divine nature as the unique way for the daily life of God's redeemed people. Where the divine life flows, there is the divine nature as the holy way by which His people walk; and where the holy way of the divine nature is, there the divine life is flowing. The divine life

and the divine nature as the holy way always go together. Thus, the river of water of life is available along this divine way, and we enjoy it by walking in the divine way.

f. As the Tree of Life Growing on the Two Sides of the River

Revelation 22:2 says, "On this side and on that side of the river was the tree of life, producing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit each month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." The one tree of life growing on the two sides of the river signifies that the tree of life is a vine, spreading and proceeding along the flow of the water of life for God's people to receive and enjoy.

The tree of life is Christ as our life supply. First, Christ was the Lamb of God for our redemption (John 1:29) and then the tree of life for our life supply (John 6:35). Christ's redemption is for imparting Himself into us as the life supply. He is not only the Lamb of God but also the tree of life.

The tree of life grows in the river of life, and the river of life reaches every part of the city. This indicates that the flow of the Triune God waters the whole city. Every part of the city receives the life supply because the tree of life grows in the river and the river reaches every part of the city. The tree of life, as a vine, grows on both sides of the river, following the flow of the river. Wherever the river flows, the tree of life grows. Hence, the supply of life is in the flow of life. This is a picture of God's dispensing. Christ as the tree of life is the life supply available along the flow of the Spirit as the water of life. Where the Spirit flows, there the life supply of Christ is found. The entire city of the New Jerusalem, which will be constituted of all the redeemed people of God, will be watered by the river of the water of life and nourished by the tree of life. This is the dispensing of the Triune God in full for eternity.

In the ultimate consummation of the dispensing of the divine Trinity, we shall enjoy the light of life, the spring of the water of life, the river of the water of life, and the tree of life. These four things are for the divine dispensing. The light of life shines. The spring of the water of life and the river of the water of life are for the flow of the divine life. The tree of life is for nourishing God's redeemed. The shining, the flowing, and the nourishing are three aspects of the divine dispensing. This is the triune dispensing of the divine Trinity to be

our supply. In eternity we shall enjoy this supply and thereby have the fullest enjoyment of the divine life.

5. To Reign as Kings over the Nations Forever and Ever

In the New Jerusalem for eternity the believers will reign as kings over the nations forever and ever (Rev. 22:5b). In the enjoyment of the divine life we shall reign as kings over the nations.

The fact that the believers will reign as kings over the nations indicates that even in eternity future there will be people who are not regenerated believers. These people, the nations, will simply be the natural man created by God, fallen, and restored to the natural condition of God's creation. They are a different category from the believers. The believers, the first category of people belonging to God, are God's sons born of Him, regenerated of God with His nature and life. The nations, however, will simply be a restored people in God's creation. It is important that we differentiate the believers from the nations.

Because in eternity there will be both the believers and the nations, the tree of life has two functions. The first function is of the fruit of the tree of life, and the other function is of its leaves. The fruit of the tree of life will be a supply to the sons of God, to those born of God. But "the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations" (Rev. 22:2b). Hence, the leaves of the tree of life will not supply the nations but will heal them, keeping them alive for eternity. The leaves of the tree of life symbolize the deeds of Christ. The regenerated believers will eat the fruit of the tree of life, receiving Christ as their life and life supply inwardly, that they may enjoy the divine life for eternity.

The restored nations will be healed by the leaves of the tree of life, taking the deeds of Christ as their guide and regulation outwardly, that they may live the human life forever. When the nations look at the way the Lord Jesus does things and behaves, His deeds will become a source of healing to them, and this healing will maintain their human life forever.

Whereas the believers will be in the New Jerusalem, the nations will be the people around the New Jerusalem. Furthermore, the believers will be members of God's royal family, reigning as kings over the nations. Therefore, in the consummation of the dispensing of the divine Trinity, the believers will be the ruling ones and the nations will be the ruled ones. The nations will be

the common people, but the believers will be the royal family. We thank the Lord that, in His mercy, He has first made us vessels of mercy unto honor and then unto glory. In eternity we shall be in glory, full of honor, reigning as kings over the nations.

6. To Express God, as a Jasper Stone, with His Glory

In eternity the believers will express God, as a jasper stone, with His glory. Speaking of the New Jerusalem, Revelation 21:11 says, "Having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, as a jasper stone, clear as crystal." The glory of God is the expression of God, God expressed. Jasper is the appearance of God (Rev. 4:3) and signifies God's communicable glory in His rich life (John 17:22, 2). The light of the New Jerusalem is like a jasper stone, bearing the appearance of God to express God by her shining.

The wall of the New Jerusalem is made of jasper, and the light of the city is like jasper (Rev. 21:18, 11). In 4:3 we are clearly told that God sitting on the throne looks like jasper. Jasper, then, signifies God's appearance. In eternity the New Jerusalem will bear God's appearance. God looks like jasper, and the entire city will bear the appearance of jasper. This indicates that it will be a corporate and eternal expression of God.

In the consummation of the dispensing of the divine Trinity all believers will express God. We all shall have the appearance of jasper, the appearance of God. This means that in eternity we shall all bear one identity and all bear the image of God. We shall be the same as God in appearance, expressing His appearance in His glory. This expression of the Triune God will be His eternal manifestation according to His eternal economy for the divine dispensing.

7. To Enlighten the Nations

To express God as the jasper stone with His glory is to enlighten the nations. For this reason, Revelation 21:24 tells us that the nations will walk by the light of the New Jerusalem. God as the light in the lamp will not shine over the nations directly. The divine light will first shine in the city and then through the city it will shine over the nations. Hence, the nations will walk in the light of the city. They will walk in the light of the believers' shining. This is in keeping with the New Testament principle that the believers are the light of the world (Matt. 5:14) and that the worldly people should walk in our light. In

eternity all the redeemed people of God will be a great light shining over the nations, and the nations will walk in this light.

At the end of this age a great part of the inhabitants of the earth will be killed. The rest will be judged by Christ at the throne of His glory when He comes back to earth. The condemned ones, the "goats," will be cursed to perish in the lake of fire, whereas the justified ones, the "sheep," will be blessed to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:31-46). They will not be saved and regenerated as the New Testament believers. Rather, they will only be restored to the original state of man as created by God. They will be the nations as citizens of the millennial kingdom, in which the overcoming believers will be kings (Rev. 20:4, 6) and the saved remnant of Israel will be priests (Zech. 8:20-23). After the millennial kingdom, a part of these nations, deceived by the Devil, will rebel against the Lord and will be consumed by fire from heaven (Rev. 20:7-9). The rest will be transferred to the new earth as the nations, living around the New Jerusalem and walking by its light. They will be the peoples mentioned in 21:3 and 4. They, as the created but unregenerated man, will be maintained to live forever in their created state by the healing of the leaves of the tree of life. Even to them there will be no more death (21:4). Under the shining of the New Jerusalem with the divine glory, neither will they be in darkness.

8. In Resurrection

In eternity the believers will be altogether in resurrection. Nothing about them will be natural. The nations outside the city, on the contrary, will still be natural and will remain in the natural life. But the believers, the constituents of the holy city, will be absolutely in resurrection.

Revelation 21:17 indicates that the New Jerusalem will be in resurrection. This verse says, "He measured its wall, a hundred and forty-four cubits, a measure of a man, that is, of an angel." It is in resurrection that man will be like the angels (Matt. 22:30). Man's being like an angel indicates the principle of resurrection. Hence, "a measure of a man, that is, of an angel" signifies that the city is not natural but in resurrection. In eternity nothing will be left of our natural life, for we shall be fully in resurrection. The entire city, therefore, will be in resurrection. Christ the Head and we His members will all be in resurrection.

9. As the Mingling of Divinity with Humanity

Finally, the New Jerusalem as the ultimate consummation of the dispensing of the divine Trinity will be the mingling of divinity with humanity. The New Jerusalem is a marvelous mingling of the processed Triune God with His chosen, redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, transformed, conformed, built, and glorified tripartite people for His glorious and utmost expression in His consummated manifestation for eternity in the new creation of resurrection. This mingling is the eternal dwelling of God, signified by the number twelve (Rev. 21:12-13, 21a, 14, 17b). Twelve is composed of three multiplied by four. We know this by the fact that the New Jerusalem is a square with four sides. On each side are three gates (21:13). For eternity the New Jerusalem will be an absolute mingling, not simply an addition. It is a multiplication—the Triune God (three) multiplied by man (four).

In the New Jerusalem the number twelve is used fourteen times. Twelve foundations of twelve precious stones bear the names of the twelve apostles (21:14, 19-20). Twelve gates of twelve pearls with twelve angels bear the names of the twelve tribes (21:12, 21a). The city's measurement is twelve thousand stadia in three dimensions (21:16). The height of the wall is one hundred forty-four cubits (21:17a), which is twelve multiplied by twelve cubits. The tree of life produces twelve fruits, yielding its fruit each of the twelve months yearly (22:2). The number twelve appearing so many times, indicates that the holy city is a mingling of the Triune God with the redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified tripartite man.