Books by Watchman Nee

1. And Peter
2. Assembly Life, The
3. Authority and Submission
4. Body of Christ, The (W.N. Booklet)
5. Breaking of the Outer Man and the Release of the Spirit, The
6. Burden and Prayer
7. Character of the Lord's Worker, The
8. Christ Becoming Our Wisdom
9. Christ is All Spiritual Matters and Things
10. Christ our Righteousness
11. Church Affairs

Contents

AND PETER

THE ASSEMBLY LIFE

- Preface To The Chinese Edition
- The Authority In The Church
- The Practice Of Fellowship
- How To Meet
- The Boundary Of The Local Assembly

AUTHORITY AND SUBMISSION

- The Importance Of Authority
- Examples Of Rebellion In The Old Testament (1)
- Examples Of Rebellion In The Old Testament (2)
- David’s Knowledge Of Authority
- The Son’s Submission
- How God Establishes His Kingdom
- God Intends That Man Submit To Representative Authority
- Authority In The Body
- The Manifestation Of Man’s Rebellion (1)
- The Manifestation Of Man’s Rebellion (2)
- The Proper Limit Of Submission To Authority
- The Kind Of Person God Uses To Be His Deputy Authority
- The Basis Of God’s Deputy Authority— Revelation
- The Character Of God’s Deputy Authority— Gracious To Others
- The Basis Of God’s Deputy Authority— Resurrection
- The Misuse Of Deputy Authority And God’s Governmental Judgment
- The Need For A Deputy Authority To Submit To Authority
- The Life And Heart Of A Deputy Authority
- The Need Of A Deputy Authority To Sanctify Himself

- The Requirements Of A Deputy Authority

THE BODY OF CHRIST

THE BREAKING OF THE OUTER MAN AND THE RELEASE OF THE SPIRIT

- The Importance Of Breaking
- Before And After The Breaking
- Things In The Hands
- How To Know Men
- The Church And The Work Of God
- Breaking And Discipline
- Separation And Revelation
- Impression And The Condition Of The Spirit
- Pliableness After The Breaking

BURDEN AND PRAYER

THE CHARACTER OF THE LORD'S WORKER

- Preface
- A Good Listener
- A Lover Of Men
- Having A Mind To Suffer
- Buffeting The Body And Making It A Slave
- Diligent
- Restrained In Speaking
- Stable
- Not Subjective
- Towards Money
- A Few Other Matters

CHRIST BECOMING OUR WISDOM

CHRIST IS ALL SPIRITUAL MATTERS AND THINGS

- Introduction

Christ Is The Way, The Truth, And The Life
Christ Is The Resurrection And The Life
Christ Is The Bread Of Life And The Light Of Life
Christ Is God's Matters And Things
Christ Only—Not Matters Or Things
CHRIST OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS
Introduction
The Righteousness Of Christ
Christ Becoming Our Righteousness
Putting On Christ
Our Righteousness And Our Conduct
CHURCH AFFAIRS

AND PETER

Scripture Reading: Mark 16:7; Matt. 28:7

Can you find the difference between these two passages after reading them? The Gospel of Matthew says that after the Lord's resurrection, an angel told the women to tell His disciples of His resurrection. The Gospel of Mark records that the angel asked the women to tell the Lord's disciples and Peter. Oh, the words "and Peter" cause tears to fall. All of the four Gospels record the story of the Lord's resurrection. But only the Gospel of Mark has the words "and Peter." Since John was the one whom the Lord loved, why does the Bible not say "and John"? Since Thomas was doubtful about the Lord's resurrection, why does it not say "and Thomas"? The angel did not mention the best disciples or the most needy disciples. He specifically mentioned Peter. Why? What made Peter different from the others?

What kind of person was Peter? Three days before the resurrection, Peter committed a great sin, a sin that would cause the Lord not to

confess him before the Father's angels. Peter not only denied the Lord before men, he even denied the Lord before a maid who was despised by others at that time. But the Lord wanted the women to tell the disciples and Peter about His resurrection. The words "and Peter" have a very deep meaning! If any brother or sister had Peter's experience, they might think:

"Oh! I have fallen. The sin which I have committed is not a common sin. I am afraid that I cannot draw close to the Lord anymore. The Lord might have already forsaken me. I am afraid that from now on, whenever the Lord has any important thing to do, He will not take me along. I will not be able to have special experiences like I had when I was with Him on the mount of transfiguration. I will not be able to accompany Him like I did in the garden of Gethsemane. I told the Lord that I would die for Him, and the Lord said that before the cock crowed twice, I would deny Him three times. I thought that the Lord misunderstood me. When He was taken, I even cut off a man's ear with a sword, thinking that I could love Him courageously. Yet I fell. I did not fall before the high priest or before the powerful Pilate, but before the questioning of a maid. I denied the Lord once, twice, and finally I even swore in my denial of the Lord. At one time I confessed that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. At another time I said to Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life' But eventually, I fell just as the Lord was about to be crucified. I committed the great sin of denying Him. Although I cried with regret, I do not know how the Lord is going to treat me. It would have been better if He had not known that I denied Him. But when I denied Him, He turned His back and looked at me. He knew what I had done. What should I do? I dare not come close to Him anymore. Although He loves me, I dare not approach Him because there is a sin which separates me from Him. Perhaps from now on, I cannot be close to Him. Yet, after the Lord resurrected, several women brought back word that they were to specifically tell me about it. Oh, the Lord has not forsaken me, even though I denied Him three times. He does not hate me, nor is He angry with me. His heart was thinking of me. He did not mention anyone but me specifically. It is as though He was only thinking about me. 'And Peter!' 'And Peter!' These words are truly the most beautiful music in the world, the most wonderful tidings! If the Lord had only told the women to tell the disciples, I would have thought that I was no longer worthy of being His

disciple and that I was no longer one of His disciples. I would not dare to go see Him. But since the Lord said, ‘and Peter,’ I know that He still wants me. Although I do not have the strength to go see Him, ‘and Peter’ encourages me to go. The message brought back by the women is true. The Lord told the angel to mention my name specifically. The Lord did not forsake me. I can still draw near to Him. Let me rise up and go see Him!”

Here was a fallen, sinful Peter, a Peter who had denied the Lord. Yet the Lord specifically mentioned him. This is the gospel! Brothers and sisters, do you know that once the Lord saves you, He saves you eternally? Although you may be discouraged, the Lord will never be discouraged. A sinful person like you may feel shame in turning back to Him, but the One you have sinned against considers that there is nothing wrong in returning to Him. Why should you keep thinking of your failure when He is not concerned with it? If the Lord can remove the veil from your face today, you will not fear Him or be afraid to come near to Him. Peter might have remembered that he said to the Lord, “If all will be stumbled because of You, I will never be stumbled” (Matt. 26:33). He might have also remembered what he said at the lake of Gennesaret, when he saw the glory of the Lord: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord” (Luke 5:8). After Peter realized his true condition, how could he dare see the Lord again? He might have remembered the Lord’s pleading: “So were you not able to watch with Me for one hour?” He might have heard the Lord’s command in his ear: “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Matt. 26:40-41). His condition was far below the Lord’s requirements. How could he dare to go see Him? But he went to meet the Lord anyway. He dared to go because of the words “and Peter.” Brothers and sisters, if you know the Lord’s intention behind the words “and Peter,” will you still turn away from Him, instead of turning toward Him? If you realize the profound significance of the words “and Peter,” you have to come near to the Lord.

Among the four Gospels, only the Gospel of Mark records this matter. Mark was a young man who followed and learned from Peter. The Gospel of Mark was dictated by Peter and written down by Mark. The words “tell His disciples and Peter” were specifically dictated by Peter. These words might not have been important to other people, but they were very important in Peter’s heart. When the Holy Spirit was writing the

Bible, He specifically wanted to show us that, even though these few words were considered unimportant by Matthew, Luke, and John, they were very unforgettable and important to Peter who dictated the Gospel of Mark. “And Peter” had special meaning for him. Each remembrance of these words was sweet. Words of grace are especially memorable to the person who receives the grace.

Brothers and sisters, when you are at the Lord’s table meeting remembering the Lord, are you still afraid of God in your heart? Is there any sin separating you from God? You may have deeply wept, repented, and admitted that you disappointed the Lord. But do you dare say to the Lord, “Lord, I come to You”? Please consider this: If He was willing to go to the cross because He loved you, would He stop loving you just because you failed, fell, and backslid? Would the love He had on the cross decrease? It may be very easy for you not to love Him, draw near to Him, or return to Him; but it is impossible for Him to forget you, forsake you, or not love you. During the three days after the Lord was crucified, Peter was silent because he had fallen. But the Lord did not forget him. Therefore, if you do not have the strength to come to the Lord, as long as you are willing to believe in His words, He will give you the strength to draw near to Him. If you fall, He can make you rise up again. Although it seems that you will not be able to draw near to Him anymore, remember in faith the words “and Peter,” and you will be able to draw near to Him. When you want to come close to the Lord, but feel that you are very far from Him and have no strength to come near to Him, you need to remember the words “and Peter.” The more Peter fell, the more the Lord wanted to remember him. Although Peter dared not come too close to the Lord, the Lord’s heart attracted him and kept him from running away from Him. May you not misunderstand the Lord’s heart. If you ever hear the words “and Peter,” you should know that the Lord has not forsaken you. The Lord did not desert Peter, and neither has He forsaken you. “And Peter” means “and you”—“you” who have failed like Peter. May you see the Lord’s heart for you. If you see the Lord’s heart, you will run toward Him.

THE ASSEMBLY LIFE

Preface To The Chinese Edition

In recent years, God has raised up many brothers and sisters in various places. As a result of seeing the truth concerning the church, they have gathered together to meet in the Lord's name. They have left human organizations and things that are apart from the Bible, and they have come together to serve the Lord with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. For this, we have to thank the Lord.

Although these scattered brothers who are meeting in the Lord's name have seen much concerning human organizations, they do not have, as yet, a deep enough understanding of the Body of Christ. Although they have given up things that should not be in the church, they have not fully lived out the proper living of the Body of Christ. They have dealt with negative things in a thorough way, but they are not thorough with the positive things yet.

Presently, the urgent need of all those who meet in the Lord's name is the truth concerning the practical living of the Body of Christ on earth. The purpose of the publication of this book, *The Assembly Life,* is to meet this need.

This book is a record of a Bible study conducted by Brother Watchman Nee with the local brothers who were meeting in Shanghai after the Third Overcomer Conference in January of this year (together with some out-of-town brothers who stayed behind after the conference). What is covered mainly deals with the practical aspect of our living. The questions and answers are especially appropriate and useful.

The book is divided into four chapters. The first chapter is on the authority in the church. It can be considered as a chapter on the administration of the church. It shows us that God's church is not without organization on earth; it has organization, yet its organization is unlike that of human organizations today. In the church of God, there is no individual freedom and no possibility of independent movement. If ever an organization is firm and strict, it must be the church. God does not want His children to move freely on earth; He rules over His church through the authority He establishes in the church. We should leave human organizations, but at the same time, we should submit to the God-appointed authority. It is right for us to depart from human organizations,

but it is wrong for us to overturn the authority that God has established. Yet it is very difficult for us to keep our position and submit to authority. Many people can submit to God, but they cannot submit to the God-appointed authority. However, only those who can submit to the authority appointed by God can submit to God. Whoever does not remain in his position is unlawful, and whoever does not submit to authority is lawless.

The second chapter is on the practice of fellowship. This chapter shows us that there is only one fellowship in the Body of Christ. This matter is very much neglected by the churches today. Many people think that as long as they leave the improper fellowship, the denominations, they have been perfected. Yet if a man only departs from improper things but does not acquire proper things, he has not been perfected. Moreover, unless we return to the proper and unique fellowship of the Body of Christ, all of our fellowship is improper, and our leaving of the denominations merely adds more improper fellowship. All of our fellowship must be the fellowship of the Body of Christ rather than only some local fellowship. We must be able to link up with all the assemblies in the whole world who are meeting in the name of the Lord, instead of practicing a fellowship that is merely bound by a locality. It is true that church affairs should be local, but the fellowship of the church should not be simply local. The fellowship of the church is not local but universal. There should not only be fellowship between individuals, but there should also be fellowship among assemblies.

The third chapter is on the way to meet. This chapter can be considered as a kind of spiritual home education. It shows us the common knowledge a brother or a sister should have concerning various kinds of meetings in a local assembly. Although spiritual things cannot be taught, there must be proper teachings before there can be a proper living. A proper living comes out of proper teachings.

The fourth chapter is on the boundary of a local assembly. This chapter deals with the delineation of the boundary of a local assembly. The Bible shows us that God has appointed the city as the unit of a church. The boundary of a local church is determined by the boundary of the city to which it belongs. This God-ordained way maintains the balance in the fellowship of the assemblies in the various places, and it avoids much trouble and confusion. We should not randomly choose from among the

few assemblies around us and freely meet there. Rather, we should decide on the place to meet based on the locality in which we belong. If we are in one city, we should not meet with an assembly in another city. Even if the place of meeting in the other city is closer than the place of meeting in our own city, we should still meet in our own city, rather than the other city. If this is not our practice, the fellowship among all the assemblies will not be balanced, and confusion will result. God does not want us to have freedom of movement. Even in the matter of choosing where to meet, God does not allow us to have a fleshly preference and choice.

May God bless this book so that it becomes the light of life to God's children everywhere, not ordinances in letters. "To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever. Amen."

Witness Lee
Shanghai
September 10, 1934

CHAPTER ONE

The Authority In The Church

Authority In The Church

In order to understand authority in the church, we must first understand what authority is. Otherwise, we will not understand authority in the church.

What is authority? In the whole universe, nothing is harder to understand than authority. Two things are very difficult to explain in the Bible: glory and authority. Many people can understand holiness, righteousness, and patience; they may comprehend these matters a little. But what is God's glory, and what is God's authority? Man cannot understand them and explain them. God's glory is related to God Himself, while God's authority is related to His government. God Himself is glorious, while His government is executed through His authority. God's authority was the principle by which He organized the universe. He rules the universe through authority. (Today, we will only mention the matter of authority in

brief. We will wait for another day to discuss the subject in detail.) How did God create the heavens and the earth? He created by His authority. How did God restore this world? He restored by His authority also. On the first day when God created light, He did not gather all of the electricity together and make light; He only gave a command and said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. The second day God said, “Let there be the firmament,” and there was the firmament. God commanded with His word, and He acted according to His authority. He did not act according to His power or His ways. His word signifies His command, which represents His authority. Can you see that God only exercised His authority? God created the universe with His authority, and He rules the universe with His authority. Both the beginning of the universe and the maintenance of the universe are the result of God’s authority.

In the beginning, after the universe was created, God appointed a cherubim as the archangel to rule over everything. God was over everything, and He ruled over the spirit-endowed animals and over all things through the archangel, the cherubim. Sin is lawlessness, and lawlessness is just the overthrowing of God’s authority. Lawlessness was the reason the archangel fell and became Satan and also the reason sin entered the universe. The archangel attempted to overturn God’s authority because he desired to uplift himself to become equal with God. Sin entered the world because Eve would not submit to Adam. She acted without Adam’s command and ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Although the world is filled with sin today, authority is still the principle of God’s government. In many things, we can see God’s appointed authority. For example, wives should submit to their husbands, servants to their masters, students to their teachers, citizens to the officers, and subordinates to their superiors. All of this is ordained by God. God desires that man submit to authority because the authorities are not only appointed by God, but they also represent God. This is why Romans clearly says that there is no authority except God. Therefore, no Christian student should boycott classes, no Christian worker should strike, no Christian children should dishonor their parents, and no Christian citizen should engage in a revolution. If anyone does these things, he is not just overturning those he directly opposes, he is overturning God’s authority.

God created the universe with His authority, and He maintains the universe with His authority. What is sin? It is lawlessness—refusing to submit to authority. “Sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). Both Satan and Adam overturned God’s authority; by this both sinned. Whoever does not recognize authority and submit to authority is a lawless one, and he has sinned.

Many believers have never realized such a wonderful thing as authority. Yet if a man wants to be a good believer, he has to know what authority is. Authority represents God. If one traces authority to its ultimate source, he will see that authority is just God. Therefore, a Christian must not only submit to the head of a nation or to all its ministers, but he must submit even to a policeman on the street because the latter has authority. He represents not only the government, but God as well. You cannot despise him just because he earns a few dollars a month. Authority is something that issues from God. The Bible is very strict about this matter. Paul, Peter, and Jude all said that we should not revile those in high position. Therefore, in our conversation, we cannot accuse or criticize the head of our government. It is difficult for a Christian to be an editor of a newspaper because one can hardly avoid criticizing the superiors in political commentary.

The book of Jude records the incident of Michael arguing with the devil over the body of Moses. Michael dared not revile Satan. He would only say, “The Lord rebuke you,” because he was once the subordinate of Satan. There was a time when Michael was under his authority. Therefore, Michael only said, “The Lord rebuke you.” He would not speak on his own; he only invoked an authority higher than Satan’s—God’s authority. He knew what authority was. Therefore, he dared not revile Satan himself.

When our Lord was on earth, He was also fully under authority. During His youth, He was under the authority of His parents, and He kept all the ordinances. He was the Creator. Yet He was limited by every one of man’s limitations. He told His mother, “Did you not know that I must be in the things of My Father?” (Luke 2:49). If we were there, we would not have gone home with our parents. But the Lord was different; He went back with them. When He began to work, He was under the authority of the government. During His trial, He was still under the authority of the

government. He did not revile the government; rather, He allowed it to do whatever it wanted to do to Him. We can see that no one has ever been as submissive to authority as our Lord.

Once when Paul was judged and stood before the court, he willingly submitted to the authority there. When the high priest's accusations became too much, Paul said, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall" (Acts 23:3). When the others rebuked him for reviling God's high priest, Paul became quiet and allowed them to accuse him. According to the Bible, nothing is greater and more important than the matter of authority.

The other side of authority is submission. Therefore, the Bible mentions authority, on the one hand, and submission, on the other hand. The Bible also pays considerable attention to the matter of submission. Submission and authority are related one to the other. If a man submits, he comes under God's authority. Otherwise, he overturns God's authority.

In the church God has also appointed His authority, and we should submit to this authority. In the world, in the community, and in our homes, we should submit to authority. God has ordained us to do one thing, which is to submit to authority. We have to lay hold of this one point: whoever wants to overturn any authority overturns God. Do not think that we can submit to God and, at the same time, disobey our parents, husbands, superiors, headmasters, principals, or other men with authority. There is no such thing. If we cannot submit to God's appointed authority on earth, we can never submit to God. In the same way, those who cannot submit to authority in the church cannot submit to God.

I am afraid that many brothers and sisters have come to meet with us for different reasons. Some have come for the purpose of practicing mutual love and mutual care. This, of course, is very good. But we have to realize that we are not without authority among us. There is authority among us, and we ought to submit to authority. Christians often think that once they leave the denominations, they can act as they please. They think that we are all the same and that no one can rebuke anyone else. They think that they can be lawless Christians. Actually, we have to realize that if we leave the denominations just because we want to be free from any kind of control or domination, this kind of presumptuous

leaving of the denominations is a big mistake. Those who come to meet with us have to know that we are more bound by authority.

There are three reasons that a man leaves a denomination: (1) He is disappointed in the denominations. For example, he may expect to become a pastor. However, when his wish is not fulfilled, he disagrees and leaves. (2) He does not have freedom in the denominations. He feels that he is limited and controlled by men, and he thinks that by leaving the denominations, he can be a free evangelist. He will not have to take a salary and be controlled by men, and he can act according to his own wish. Actually, before God there is no such thing as a free evangelist. Today, we only have the Body life. We are restricted by the church and do not have any freedom of our own. (3) He sees the divisiveness in the denominations and that divisions are of the flesh. *At the same time,* he may see the Body of Christ and realize that everything he does has to be limited by the brothers and that he should learn to be a member in the Body. (Yet many people do not see the Body. They have merely left a big denomination and become a small denomination in themselves. They have not seen that they should be restricted among the brothers and sisters.)

Of the three kinds of people mentioned above, only the third kind is right in God's eyes. God's goal is to have the Body life and to take away all independent movement. God has His authority in the church, and He desires to manifest His authority in the church. Therefore, every member should learn to submit to God's authority and be restricted by the other members. Therefore, on the negative side, every brother should see how wrong denominationalism is, but on the positive side, he should see that there are no independent activities in the Body life.

How should authority in the church be assigned? God has appointed the elders and apostles to be the authority in the church. In each respective church, God establishes elders; among all the churches, God establishes apostles. The authority of apostles is for overseeing all the churches, while the authority of elders is for overseeing each respective local church. In order to manifest His authority in the church, God appoints elders in each of the local churches to represent His authority. Another

name for elders is *overseers,* which bears the connotation of authority. The Bible tells us to submit to these ones because they represent authority. All authorities are there to represent God. Therefore, the authority of the elders is for representing and expressing God's authority. It does not matter if an elder is a good representation or a bad one. One should submit to the elders as long as the authority is from God. Whoever does not submit to the authority of the church has lost his standing as a brother.

In the early meetings of a local church, there are no elders. Later, some who bear some resemblance of an elder are gradually manifested. Eldership and overseership are two designated names for the same office. An elder refers to the person, while an overseer refers to the function of such a person. Moreover, in the Bible, elders are always plural in number. There is never just one elder, because it is necessary for the spirits of two to three persons to receive the same leading in order to be assured that what they are doing is right. Individualism is not a scriptural principle, and it easily leads to errors.

How God Appoints Elders

How does God appoint elders? In an assembly, there are always a few brothers whose growth is more obvious than the others'. They bear a more excellent testimony than others and are desirous of picking up the work of an elder. They also bear some resemblance of an elder. As a result, the apostles appoint them to be elders to oversee the brothers. The church in Ephesus gives us an example of this. In the beginning, there were only saved believers in Ephesus; no elders were appointed. But after the apostles went there the second time, we see elders there. The first time Paul went out from Antioch, his intention was merely to save some people. But later, he appointed elders in every city (Acts 14:23). Before a meeting is properly established as an assembly, it is still feeble in its walk, and there is the need for others to support it. But after some are able to take up the responsibility of overseership, the apostles appoint them to be elders.

At times, the apostles could not appoint elders personally; they then sent others to do the appointing. Timothy and Titus were this kind of people. According to the direction of the apostle, they went to different cities and

appointed elders, who then bore the responsibility of the local churches.

Since the appointment of the elders is for the purpose of representing God's authority, the elders should understand that Christ is the Head and that the church is here to express His heart's desire. The elders should inquire concerning the Lord's desire. Only then will they be able to express Christ's authority in the meetings. Through these ones, God makes the decision to move or stop. Therefore, all the brothers should learn to submit to these ones. Of course, no one likes to see anyone lording it over him. Although the elders should not lord it over us, we should submit to the God-appointed authority as our part. God has ordained two things in eternity: authority and submission. But many believers do not like to submit to authority. The world is filled with lawlessness today. I am afraid that the mystery of this lawlessness has become manifest in the church. Parents are criticized at will by children, and husbands submit to the authority of their wives. Headmasters and teachers are attacked, opposed, and elected by students, and workers strike at will. Such things are happening frequently. Now is the time that lawless ones will appear as the Bible predicted. If we are not careful, and if we refuse to submit to authority, we are not following Christ but following Antichrist instead. If we cannot submit to authority, how can we expect others to submit to authority? When those who receive a salary from the so-called churches come to rule over us, we cannot submit to them. But if God has placed a certain person in a certain position and has charged us to submit to him, we should submit accordingly. We should obey the ones who watch over our souls as those who will render an account (Heb. 13:17). Therefore, submission to the elders is something that no one can overturn.

The Title And The Appointment Of Elders Among Us

Let us summarize: (1) The elders are the overseers; (2) the eldership is plural in number; and (3) the elders are appointed by the apostles or the ones sent by the apostles. We know that there are no apostles today and that there is no one sent by the apostles. How then can elders be produced? In the course of our discussion in the brothers' meeting, concerning biblical questions among the co-workers, we have agreed on the following judgment, according to the Bible and the teaching of the Holy Spirit: presently, due to the fact that there are no apostles, there is

no possibility for official elders to be appointed. We cannot confer on anyone the title of an elder. If the title of an elder is conferred, we would have to ask where are the apostles who appointed these elders? However, we are not saying that no one is doing the work of an elder. Although we do not have the official title of an elder, we can find men in all the places who resemble elders and who are doing the work of an elder. They serve as elders in an unofficial way. How can this group of people be raised up to do the work of an elder? Who appointed them to be “unofficial” elders? They have been appointed by “unofficial” apostles.

Today, it is a fact that we do not have apostles among us. However, there are a group of people who are doing the work of the apostles, such as preaching the gospel and establishing churches. They readily admit that they cannot match the apostles in their holiness, power, victory, and work. They are merely doing a small part of the work of the apostles, perhaps only a thousandth part. Today, God is working through this group of people in the same way that He was working through the apostles in the early days. Formerly, the apostles established churches everywhere. Today, this group of people are establishing churches everywhere. We admit that they are far inferior to the apostles and are not qualified to be called apostles. Yet we cannot deny that they are doing part of the work of the apostles. This group of people are the apostles God uses today in this time of the church’s degradation.

God saves sinners and gathers believers through this group of people. They are the most suitable group to lead those who are under their care to respect certain ones in their meetings and consider them as the “elders” among them.

We are merely helping the brothers to submit to these ones. We have to be careful. If we are not careful, we can easily fall into the Catholic system of apostolic succession or the teaching of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which asserts that bishops have apostolic authority. Our judgment is not only according to the scriptural teaching, but this judgment fully matches our experience. For example, Brother Chu is working in Pu-tung and has saved some people there. If he asks Brother Hwang to go there to appoint elders, Brother Hwang would not know whom to appoint because only Brother Chu knows the local situation. He has been continually leading the believers and feeding them. Only he

understands the spiritual condition of the local brothers and is concerned about their souls. Only he can lead them to submit to the ones who act as elders among them. At the same time, the rest of the brothers should learn to accept God's appointed authority.

We cannot refuse submission to authority. We have to ask God to humble us. If we cannot be an "elder," we should submit to others who are the "elders." We should learn to be submissive persons. If our flesh has been deeply judged, we will consider submission to be a good thing and an easy matter; we will consider submission to be something sweet. As long as the flesh is not judged, the church will never be proper. If the brothers deal with the flesh properly and are willing to submit, no difficulty will arise. Therefore, those who are doing the work of the apostles should lead the brothers to acknowledge the ones who should be appointed as "elders" and help the brothers submit to these "elders."

The Qualifications Of An Elder

In the Bible, there are clear guidelines concerning the qualifications of the elders. They must be able to rule themselves and manage their own family, and they must know how to deal with outsiders. They must have much assurance concerning God's truth and must be able to teach it. We will list the qualifications as follows:

(1) Ruling themselves. Why does a person have to rule himself? When a person cannot rule his own temper, he cannot manage the church of God. Subduing one's own heart and spirit is the most difficult thing to do. If a man cannot submit to the authority of Christ, he cannot make others submit to Christ's authority. In 1 Timothy and Titus, the words concerning an elder not being one who drinks excessively, or who strikes others, etc., refer to the aspect of the self-control of an elder. In short, an elder must be one who can rule himself.

In addition, an elder must be the husband of one woman. All those who have had concubines cannot be an elder because this means that such a person cannot control himself.

(2) Managing one's own house. If a man cannot manage his own house, he cannot manage the church. If he cannot manage his own children, how can he manage the brothers? The eldership is a position; it is not a

gift. Teachers, shepherds, and evangelists are gifts. But eldership refers to a person's position in the church. Therefore, such a person must be experienced and capable. His house is his testing ground. If he cannot make his wife and children submit to him at home, and if he cannot be a good husband or a good father, he cannot be a good elder in the church. In dealing with his own wife and children, God puts him to the test to see if he can deal with the brothers and sisters.

At the same time, God also uses our job and the things related to our office, school, and hospital as a test. If a man is efficient at his business, in managing a school, in conducting himself in his office, and in directing his children and servants, he can manage the church well. If a man cannot manage these things, he cannot possibly manage God's church in a proper way.

(3) Having a good public testimony. An elder is a person who represents the church. Sometimes an elder has to represent the assembly to deal with outsiders. If he does not have a good testimony, the whole church will be slandered. When a person has a bad reputation in public testimony it does not necessarily mean that he is bad. However, if a person has a good reputation in public, it surely means that he is somewhat good. Therefore, a good reputation is important, while a bad name does not necessarily mean much. In this world, men primarily say bad things about others; few say good things about others. The Chinese say that those who are in the public eye are "under ten eyes and under ten fingers." Few people say good things about others. Most people tend to destroy the reputations of others. If men can find something good to say about a person and give good marks to him, then he surely must be somewhat good. If a greedy, self-centered, and defiled son of Adam can call a Christian a good man, then the Christian surely must be good.

(4) Having much assurance in the truth of God. Since the work of an elder is related to the church and not to a worldly organization, he needs to have much assurance in God's truth. To do other things, it is not absolutely necessary to have a good reputation or to have much assurance in the truth; one does not need to be apt at teaching the Bible to do other things. Yet an elder must be apt to teach the brothers and sisters. An elder is a doorkeeper of the church. What happens when all the brothers want to preach? The elders must consider who should

preach and who should not preach. They should find out who are flippant ones, undesirable ones, and incapable ones. They should be able to render the brothers much encouragement as well as discouragement. If they do not have much assurance in the truth, they will think that all the brothers are equally good and that everyone can preach. In this way, they will be men of no discernment.

At the same time, an elder must be one who can differentiate and judge. He should be able to judge the kind of teachings that should be introduced to the church and the kind of teachings that should be rejected. If the elders do this, the brothers will not become confused in the messages they hear. (For a detailed discussion of the above qualifications of an elder, see 1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1.)

The Responsibilities Of The Elders

(1) The elders are the overseers. The Bible calls the elders the overseers. The work of an overseer is to oversee, which is to observe from above. In particular it means to detect the dangers that are coming to an assembly and to be aware ahead of time of the dangers that may come to individual brothers or to the whole assembly. Among us, we have many brothers and sisters. It is hard to avoid problems or weaknesses or to be free from sin, discord, dishonesty, failure to repay loans, disgraces, or scandals in dealing with outsiders. When these things happen, the responsible brothers or those who are doing the work of an elder should step forward to deal with such matters. They should not allow the leaven to enter the assembly. These unofficial elders should deal with all these shady matters among the brothers. This is their responsibility. They should come to your house to ask about these matters and deal with them. When they come into your house, you should submit to their decision because their decision is the Lord’s decision; their authority is the Lord’s authority.

The authority asserted by the Catholic Church is too much. Its failure lies in its outward practice. However, the inward reality of their proposal is correct. The problem is that they only have the outward form without the inward reality. If they had the inward reality, they would be right. They would have the proper authority if they were joined to the source in exercising their authority.

(2) The elders express opinions and make judgments on various matters. Only the elders can express their opinion concerning certain matters. No brother can stand up in the meeting at will to express his opinion concerning what to believe and what not to believe. If any brother does such a thing, he is overturning the authority of the elders. Therefore, only the elders have the authority to judge, utter declarations or announcements that are directed toward the public, and make judgments concerning disputes in truths; this is not the work of ordinary brothers. An ordinary believer can only speak on his own behalf. An elder can speak on behalf of the whole church. This is because he is under the Head and is speaking on behalf of the church. This relates to the order in the church.

(3) The elders manage the matters and meetings related to the sisters. In the Bible, we see only brothers as elders; we do not see sisters as elders. The place God has assigned for the sisters is to be under someone's ruling; they do not have a place in ruling over others. God does not allow women to manage the church. In the Bible, there are deacons and deaconesses, but there are no female elders. This shows that in managing the affairs of the church, God wants the man to be the head of the woman. Therefore, the sisters should learn to submit by the grace of God. If there are some among the sisters who can serve others, they can do the work of this service. But if anything needs to be decided, the decisions should be made by those who are responsible as the elders. For example, if some among the sisters want to be baptized or be received for the bread breaking meeting, the sisters can testify for them, but the final decision rests with the elders. Some sisters may have the gifts and may be respected by other brothers and sisters, but the question of position and authority is more important in the Bible than the question of gift, and the question of God's truth is more important than the question of ability. Suppose the sisters would like to have a sisters' meeting at 4:30 p.m. on Saturday. The sisters can express their opinion and check with the responsible brothers. If the brothers think that this is proper, they will not stop it and will allow the sisters to meet accordingly. If the sisters do this, they are not acting independently but properly and in oneness. This shows that their meetings are not private meetings but meetings of the church.

Why do the sisters have to follow this procedure? The reason is that the sisters tend to be emotional and are easily deceived. The elders are there to protect the sisters. If everything concerning the church is decided by the brothers, the sisters will be protected and preserved in their covered position, and they will avoid many problems.

Every problem that arises is corporate in nature and is not the problem of an individual. The elders have a responsibility to properly oversee the matters related to the sisters. While the sisters are standing on the ground of submission through submission to Christ's authority, the elders should not shun their responsibility through fear of offending the sisters or of arousing suspicion. Of course, there are limits to the authority of the elders. But we must not forget that Barak was before Deborah and became the head covering to Deborah (see Judg. 4:4-7).

(4) The elders should manage the matters related to the church meetings and preaching. The elders should control and forbid errors that may arise in the church. For example, in the meeting, some brothers may stand up to say some improper words. Those who do not have the gift of teaching desire to speak many times; it seems as if they are addicted to preaching. Those who have the gifts, on the other hand, do not like to speak and would rather hide themselves. Therefore, when the elders notice that men who are not suitable to conduct Bible study or to preach are trying to do these things, they should stop them. If some brothers pray, preach, or give announcements in an improper way, the elders should notify them after the meeting, explain their mistakes to them, and forbid them from doing similar things again. If the elders do not do this, these brothers will go on with their behavior. You may think that you should be patient with these ones. But the weaker ones will not be able to stand them. For this reason, you have to take up the responsibility to notify them.

Please understand that there is not a strict organization among us. Even when believers who have not left the denominations request to be received, we receive them. Our door is wide open. Everyone in the denominations who is saved can come and break bread with us. Suppose that some of them purposely try to entice some of our brothers and sisters to join them in their Bible study in their homes, after breaking bread with us, or suppose that they gather some of the brothers and

sisters who are meeting with us to listen to their opinionated doctrines. When this happens, the church will be divided through their speaking. Whenever things of this nature occur, any brother or sister should report it to the “elders.” We must wait until the responsible brothers announce in the meeting that certain people will have meetings in their homes before we can all go. Otherwise, these kinds of meetings in the homes should not be held. It does not mean that we have no personal liberty. But we should submit to God’s authority and control and enjoy the liberty of the limitations of the meetings. Our familiarity with certain persons often brings in leaven through conversations with them, and a sect is formed which endangers the whole lump. Therefore, the brothers have to pay attention to this matter, learn to submit to authority, and not do things that the elders have not endorsed.

(5) The elders make decisions concerning the Lord’s Day meeting and write letters of recommendation. Whether the Lord’s Day meeting should be held in the morning or in the afternoon is a matter to be decided by the elders. The writing of a letter of recommendation is also not something that every brother can do. Sometimes, you may write a letter recommending a person to the brothers in another locality. However, only letters written by the elders can represent the church. This shows once again that the elders represent the whole church. They are responsible for overseeing the church and keeping the church from trouble. Therefore, the elders have to learn to serve properly and exercise their authority properly, while the brothers have to learn to submit.

(6) The elders are the patterns. After the elders are appointed and acknowledged, they should be respected by the brothers. At the same time, the elders themselves should take up their responsibility with fear and trembling. They should consider themselves as having no authority. The Bible tells us these two aspects of the truth in a wonderful way. To the brothers and sisters, the elders represent God’s authority, and everyone should submit to them. But to the elders themselves, they have no authority. After hearing about the authority of the elders, are we not afraid that the elders may misuse their authority? What would happen if they began to lord it over us? But God tells the elders, “Therefore the elders among you...shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not under compulsion but willingly, according to God...nor as lording it

over your allotments but by becoming patterns of the flock" (1 Pet. 5:1-3). The elders do not have any authority in themselves; they only have the authority of God. If you are in Christ, understand God's heart, and are able to tell others about God's heart, you are the true authority. The elders should not lord it over the flock. They should be careful to submit to God's authority and be a pattern to the flock. Only then can they demonstrate their authority to the brothers and sisters. On the one hand, the brothers should submit to Christ's authority, which the elders represent. On the other hand, the elders themselves should realize that they have no authority in themselves and that they are there merely as patterns. (Concerning the authority of the elders, please see the books of 1 Timothy, Titus, and Acts 20.)

(7) Accusations against the elders. The books of Timothy tell us, "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses" (1 Tim. 5:19, KJV). In this matter, we should pay attention to two points. First, there must be a written accusation; words from the mouth do not count because many times words alone are groundless and can easily be denied or changed. Second, there must be two or three witnesses; the testimony of one is not reliable. In the Bible, two or three witnesses constitute the word of testimony. The apostles and those whom they have specifically assigned should be responsible for handling such accusations. I would draw your attention again to the fact that because there are no official apostles today, there are no official elders. There is only a group of people who are doing a part of the work that the apostles did at the beginning. Since they are responsible for appointing elders, they are also responsible for dealing with elders.

The Relationship Between An Elder And Other Elders Of Other Localities

God's gifts transcend local boundaries, but position is strictly related to the locality. God's gifts, such as the evangelists, shepherds, and teachers, can function anywhere because these gifts are given by God to the whole church (Eph. 4), and they are for all the local assemblies. No worker can rule over any one particular congregation, as pastors do today in the denominations. In the Bible one cannot find such a thing. If you can edify the believers in Shanghai, you can also edify the believers in northern Kiangsu. If you are a teacher, you can teach the Bible in

Shanghai and also teach the Bible in northern Kiangsu, Nanking, or Tsinan. You will never lose your ability as a teacher by moving to another place. If you are an evangelist, you can preach the gospel in Shanghai, and you can preach the gospel in northern Kiangsu, Nanking, or Tientsin. If you cannot preach the gospel in Shanghai, you cannot preach the gospel anywhere else. It is impossible to find a person who cannot work in one place but can work in another place. This is not a question of knowledge. It is absolutely a question of whether or not one is a God-appointed gift. If you have the gift, others will be saved and helped through you, no matter how much knowledge you have. The amount of knowledge you have will not make any difference. What is a gift? A gift is an ability that God gives to the Body of Christ through Christ the Head. This ability does not change. I can illustrate this with an example. Suppose that there is a concrete worker in Shanghai. If he is in Nanking, he is still a concrete worker. Suppose that there is a tailor who is very skillful at sewing. Whether he is in Shanghai or Peking, he can still make a good dress. In the same way, circumstances will not change a gift.

But the same is not true with the eldership. The eldership is absolutely a question of locality. A person who is an elder in Shanghai is not an elder in Nanking. Because of differences in spiritual conditions, backgrounds, circumstances, educational standards, and the habits of different local assemblies, a man can be an elder in Shanghai but may no longer be able to serve as one in northern Kiangsu. A man may be an elder in the village, but not an elder in the city. This is absolutely a matter of locality. The gifts in the Bible are for the whole church, while the elders in the Bible are for the local churches. Therefore, those who have the gifts should not remain in one place all the time; they should instead go to other places and distribute their gifts to others. An elder should take responsibility in his own locality all the time. Consider the illustration of the concrete worker again. Suppose that you are a foreman among numerous concrete workers in Shanghai. If you move to Nanking, you will still be a concrete worker by profession, but you may not be able to be a foreman anymore. Doing concrete work is your ability, and your ability remains with you even after you have moved to Nanking. But the foremanship is a position; when you move to Nanking, your position as a foreman is gone. In the same way, there is a difference between office and gift in the Bible. An office and a position is for a local church, while a

gift is not just for a local church. However, the mistake most easily committed is that when an elder in one locality moves to another locality, he asserts his own opinion there as well. This is wrong. Do not think that just because things are done one way in northern Kiangsu, it has to be done the same way in Shanghai. The educational standard and means of communication, etc., in northern Kiangsu may be different from those in Shanghai. You cannot use the same method in different places. However, gifts are different; if you are a gift in northern Kiangsu, you are one in Shanghai also.

Questions

***Question**:* If we announce some unofficial elders among us, those in the denominations will say that we have become a denomination because we have brought in such a matter. How should we answer them?

***Answer**:* First, let me ask what you have left behind when you leave the denominations. If you do not know what you have left behind, you will become another denomination. According to my personal understanding, when we leave the denominations, we leave two things behind: (1) We leave the divisive sects, such as the different denominations under the different names, and (2) the main thing we leave behind is the pastoral system. What is the pastoral system? It brings the intermediary priestly class of Judaism to Christianity. Both Catholicism and Protestantism have done this.

In the so-called Christian countries, Catholics have brought in the Judaistic teachings. In Judaism, there was the priestly class. The priests acted as an intermediary class. If a Jew wanted to see God, he had to pass through the hand of the priests; there was no way for him to go directly to God. The book of Judges records a certain man of Mount Ephraim by the name of Micah who made an ephod and invited a Levite to be the priest in his house (17:1-13). This is a clear example. What is Judaism? It is being kept away from worshipping God in a direct way. Between God and man, there was the need of priests to serve as an intermediary class. The Israelites had to go through the priests before they could see God. The same is true with Catholicism. God is on one side, and man is on the other side. There is no direct fellowship between

them, and the priests serve as a medium in the middle. In the Catholic Church, every time there is a mass, the priests are there. Every time there is any preaching, the priests are responsible for it, and every time there is prayer offered, the priests are the ones to do the work. In this way, men are brought back to the situation of the Old Testament.

Protestantism is divided into state churches and private churches. The Anglican Church in England serves as an example of the state churches. In the Anglican Church, there are the clergy and the laity. The bishops, archbishops, and deacons are all called priests, just as they are in Catholicism. This has likewise brought in Judaism. God is on the top, and the people, who are called the laity, are on the bottom. In the middle are the clergy, who call themselves priests. The laity can come to God only through this class of people, who monopolize all spiritual matters.

Among private churches in Protestantism (such as the Episcopal and Methodist), there is also the intermediary class. God is on the top, and the members are on the bottom. In between the two there are pastors. The pastors are the intermediary class, who replace the believers and monopolize all the spiritual matters that belong to the members. For example, administering the Holy Communion, baptism, and preaching are all done by pastors. They do everything for the members and become intermediaries between God and man. From Judaism until today, including all the denominations in Protestantism, God has always been on the top and man has been down on the bottom, with an intermediary class in between. Although the names may have changed, nothing has changed in substance.

Is this what we see in the New Testament? Peter said that we are a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9). In Revelation, John also said that every Christian is a priest (1:6). Therefore, there is no need for any man to be a medium between us and God. In other words, we are all “pastors” and “priests.” Hebrews 10 says that by the blood of Jesus, we have a new and living way to come boldly to the Holy of Holies (vv. 19-20). There is no need of an intermediary like the ones in Judaism, Catholicism, or Protestantism to help us draw near to God. Today we are not like the high priests in the Old Testament, who could go into the Holy of Holies only once a year. Daily, through the blood of the Lord, we can come to God. Every one of us is a priest, and every one can communicate with God boldly all the

time. What then is Christianity? What is the new covenant? It is to annul the intermediary class. Every believer can now be directly responsible to God. Never consider the workers among us to be a kind of intermediary class like the ones in the private churches. There is no such thing. Every one of us can go to God. The workers do not occupy any position in the church; God is directly related to the church. Therefore, leaving the denominations is leaving two things behind: (1) the divisions, and (2) the pastoral system.

One Westerner once asked me why I am against pastors. I told him that I am not against pastors but rather the “pastoral system.” If a man has the gift of a pastor, we cherish it. But whether or not a person has the gift of a pastor, we should not make him a priest and bring in a disguised priestly system. Even if one among us has the pastoral gift, we should not consider him as our priest or mediator.

I am afraid that in leaving the denominations some brothers consider that they are free from every control of man. They may think that since they have left the denominations, they can be lawless and free, doing anything they want. If this is the way you are, I have to call you by another name: you have not left the denominations; you have left the church. You are not freeing yourself from the denominations but from authority. We have left the denominations in order to leave the divisions and pastoral system. The purpose is not that we would become individual, isolated believers. Rather, we have the God-ordained authority with us. Therefore, submitting to man is submitting to God’s authority, and submitting to the brothers is submitting to God’s authority.

The Gospel of Luke records the Lord Jesus as saying, “Did you not know that I must be in the things of My Father?” (2:49). He had to be in the things of the Father but, at the same time, He went back home with His parents. This is the submission of the Lord Jesus. If it were us, we would not have done this. If we had said that we had to be in the things of our Father, we would not have returned with our parents. However, this would only have been a proof of our disobedience. Being in the things of the Father includes being under the authority of the Father, which also includes submitting to God’s authority in the parents. Therefore, when we submit to men, we are submitting to authority. Do not think that by leaving the denominations, we can become free and lawless and that no one can

rule over us. If we think this way, we are more evil than the most evil persons in the world, and we become worse than those who have not left the denominations, because those who have not left the denominations are still under man's authority even though they do not have the God-ordained authority. But we do not even submit to God's authority. The Bible does not have denominations, but it has elders. We are giving up the denominations, which are not found in the Bible; we are not giving up the elders, which are found in the Bible. Just because the denominations have elders, we should not say that we can give up the scripturally-based eldership because we have left the denominations. There are brothers in the denominations; we cannot say that we are giving up the brothers just because we have given up the denominations.

***Question**:* Are the elders appointed by God?

***Answer**:* Acts 20 clearly says that the Holy Spirit has placed men to be overseers over the flock. Therefore, elders are appointed by God. What the apostles did merely expressed the intention of the Holy Spirit.

***Question**:* How should the elders be supported? Is the support for the elders the same as the support for the workers?

***Answer**:* There is no difference between the two. In the Bible, there is no such thing as a worker giving up his salary and becoming a special supported class. Although Peter gave up his fishing, Paul remained a tentmaker. There is no difference between a worker with an occupation and a worker without an occupation; there is no distinction of class. If an elder is gifted and is so busy with the affairs of the church that he has no more time to take up an occupation, he should receive double honor from the brothers. If an elder is not that busy, he can hold a job to support himself and also take care of the church affairs. This is true not only with the elders but with the workers as well. Those who are gifted can hold a job, and they can also do their work, as long as their job does not interfere with their work. I also hope that I can do my work while holding a job. I am not saying this because I am poor and have nothing to eat. Living by faith is not something that makes one holier than others. Yet some consider this to be something extraordinary and super-spiritual. The reason Christians pay too much attention to those who live by faith is that the faith of Christians has become degraded. Actually, there is

nothing strange about this matter. The very early churches did not consider this to be something strange. Actually, every believer should have faith, and every person who is holding a job should live by faith. I have often thought that those brothers who are engaged in business have a greater faith than I have. If they do not have faith, how can they open a shop, put in capital, and order the merchandise? How do they know if people will buy the merchandise?

In the Bible the elders are brothers, the gifted ones are brothers, and those who do not have any gift are brothers also. Among the brothers, there are only distinctions between gifts and positions; there is no distinction between having and not having a job. Such a distinction in support is a concept brought in from the denominations. Those who hold such a concept have forgotten that Paul was a tentmaker. For this reason, we should completely eradicate this concept from among us. If a pastor in a denomination, on the one hand, serves as a pastor and, on the other hand, holds a job, others will misunderstand him. But among us, we should not have such a concept. This kind of concept is a poison left behind by the pastoral system of the denominations.

The Catholic Church says that after a man is ordained, he becomes holy. He will have an indelible mark on him, and it will distinguish him from other, common people. But Catholicism has forgotten that the apostle Paul continued to hold a job of making tents. We workers can give up our job when we are busy and go back to our jobs when we have time. There is nothing wrong in doing this.

***Question**:* Can an evangelist start a school by himself?

***Answer**:* Yes, he can. A person can start a business or a school by himself. Paul might have started a business of tentmaking. But he did not involve all the believers in Ephesus in this tentmaking business.

It is wrong for a church to run a school, hospital, or biscuit factory. It is all right for some brothers to join together to start a school, hospital, or biscuit factory. But it is a big mistake if we run a school under the name of the meeting in Hardoon Road. It is not wrong for a few brothers to start a school together.

***Question**:* Is it true that in the whole Bible, pastors are mentioned only in

Ephesians 4?

***Answer**:* Yes, this is true. The word *pastor* or *shepherd* (as related to the church) is mentioned only in Ephesians 4. [Editor's note: This is according to the Chinese Union Version Bible.] Pastoring or shepherding is a gift and is for the building up of the whole church; it is a gift that God has given to the whole church. The elders, on the other hand, are appointed by the apostles for the purpose of managing a local church (known as the so-called congregation in the denominations). Yet the apostles cannot appoint gifts; they have never appointed any prophets, evangelists, or shepherds and teachers, because these are gifts given by God. Suppose I am the owner of a factory. I can appoint foremen and assistant foremen because these are positions. But I cannot appoint anyone to be a concrete worker, because a person may not know how to do concrete work. Therefore, an apostle can only appoint men to offices, that is, to the eldership; he cannot appoint gifts, such as prophets, evangelists, or shepherds and teachers, because the matter of gifts is entirely in God's hand. God appoints them, and God gives these gifts. No one can usurp or fight for them. If you see someone who is good at preaching, and you want to be the same, it cannot be done. This is because 1 Corinthians 12 says that gifts are not appointed by men and are not obtained according to human will; they are distributed to all respectively even as He purposes (v. 11). Pastoring is a gift of the Holy Spirit and is given to the church by God through the Spirit. If we see anyone with the gift of pastoring, we cherish it. But we cannot ordain a man to be a pastor, just as we cannot ordain a man to be a concrete worker. We must not force the pastors to become priests, the intermediary class. If anyone does this, we will surely oppose it. But this does not mean that we are opposed to the pastors or shepherds that are recorded in the Bible. We are opposed to the "pastoral system" that is in the denominations. This is why we have to be careful not to bring the things invented by the denominations into our midst.

***Question**:* Can elders be elected by the believers?

***Answer**:* No. Elders cannot be elected, because they are appointed by the apostles. Presently, they are appointed by those who are doing the work of the apostles. The Bible never uses the method of election. Only once in Acts is the word *appoint*used; it is used in the appointment of the

first seven deacons (6:3). Actually, these deacons were first tested by the apostles and then appointed.

***Question**:* There are so many pastors in the denominations. Can it be possible that not one of them is a genuine pastor?

***Answer**:* As far as their ordination is concerned, no human- ordained pastor is a pastor. As far as their gifts are concerned, it is possible that among those who are ordained by men, some have the gift of pastoring. No one can become a pastor through human examination, graduation from seminaries, ordination, or invitation. There has never been such a pastor in history. If he is truly a pastor, he must have received the gift of pastoring from God.

***Question**:* How does the pastoral gift build the church?

***Answer**:* The word *pastor* has been used only once in Ephesians 4 [according to the Chinese Union Version Bible]. In other passages, the word is translated “shepherd.” The words *pastor* and *shepherd* are the same word in the original language. The meaning of this word is to feed and guard. Those who are given the gift of pastoring should be able to lead and feed the believers. They should be able to lead others to grow step by step, discuss and study the Bible with others, and pray with others.

An evangelist is one who leads others to salvation and brings in men. A teacher is one who can release the truth and make others understand and see the truth in a clear way. A pastor or shepherd is one who leads others to advance; he does not necessarily have to be able to preach, though some are indeed able to preach. The function of the pastors is to feed the believers.

***Question**:* Can a woman have the pastoral gift?

***Answer**:* Gifts are given without distinction of sex. A woman can also have the pastoral gift. The daughters of Philip had the gift of prophecy.

***Question**:* Can sisters testify and preach the gospel to unbelieving men?

***Answer**:* The Bible has not clearly said no to this, but neither has the Bible encouraged it. There is no clear pattern in the Bible for us to follow. Personally, I think that if the sisters do anything beyond their covered

position, they have gone beyond their limit. The covering that I am speaking of does not refer only to a piece of cloth on the head (which is also an important sign) but to the hidden and submissive position which God has allotted them. Even brothers should have their heads covered before God. The brothers cover their head under Christ. Christ is the head of everyone, while the man is the head of the woman (1 Cor. 11:3). Therefore, a woman has two heads. On the one hand, a woman covers her head in Christ and, on the other hand, she covers her head through the man. The covering on a woman's head symbolizes her submission under the authority of the brothers and her not acting in an independent way. The sisters can do many good and precious things. But they have to take a few brothers as their covering so that both glory and shame will fall on these brothers. Therefore, it is improper for sisters to go to a place to do some pioneering work alone.

A certain Western magazine once reported the words of a sister: "I used to think that I had to do everything by myself and that I had to charge forward alone. When I became sick and returned to my home country, I discovered that everything I had done was wrong, and I confessed my mistakes to God." Many people think that since Deborah was raised up from the Israelites, there could be one today. But we have to remember that not every Israelite woman was a Deborah! Moreover, even Deborah took Barak as her head. All genuine women want to do this. All genuine women honor what God has done, and they honor the place and order that God has placed them in. Because I am not a sister, it is somewhat difficult for me to say these words. If I were a sister, I would be more free to say this. Sisters should always stand in a covered position. This does not mean that sisters should not work. It merely means that God has appointed the brothers to be the protector of the sisters. The ones who assume the headship should be the brothers; all the glory and shame should go to the brothers. This does not mean that the brothers covet the sisters' glory. Rather it means that the brothers protect the sisters and maintain the order God has established.

It is a woman's nature to stand in a non-prominent position. This is why Paul reminded the women that their nature tells them this. If a wife sits in the place of a husband and becomes the husband's head in a family, how can that family stand? It will surely not stand. If a church acts this way,

will it still be a church? The virtuous woman recorded in Proverbs labors, works, and hopes that her husband receives the glory in the gate of the city.

The most precious thing is to be submissive to authority. The relationship between a servant and his master, a child and his parents, a wife and her husband, a citizen and his country, and a woman and a man should be one of submission to authority. God pays much attention to the question of authority, while Satan pays much attention to power. If a man only asks if a thing can be done and does not ask if a thing should be done, he has fallen already. Therefore, every sister should stand in the position of submission to God's authority. The question of authority is the greatest and most crucial one. Unfortunately, it has produced little effect on the brothers and sisters.

Therefore, according to the light of the Bible, sisters should not open their mouth in the church meetings. If they want to testify or preach the gospel to individual men or to groups of men, they should do it in a covered position.

***Question**:* Can one person possess two gifts?

***Answer**:* Yes, he can. Sometimes a person can even possess three gifts.

***Question**:* Was Peter the first pastor?

***Answer**:* We can say that.

***Question**:* Why did we not mention the matter concerning the elders earlier or even later than now? Why do we have to mention it now and stir up misunderstandings that we have become a denomination by having elders?

***Answer**:* The question of elders was mentioned two to three years ago. At that time, no one was raised up who resembled an elder. That was merely a transitional period. The Bible says that a novice should not be an elder. There must be a transitional period. Now the time has come, and we can bring up the matter of the elders. If we go on without any elders raised up among us, we will become a lawless body.

***Question**:* Among us, we may have men who resemble the elders, but they do not have the official title of an elder. This is like having no official

title of apostles at the present time. Is this right?

***Answer**:* This is right. If someone asks you what we are and whether or not we are the church in Shanghai, how should you answer? You should say that we are not the church in Shanghai. If someone asks if we are the church on Hardoon Road, you should say no. We should not admit that we are the church in Shanghai, because besides us there are the Shou-jin Chapel, the Mu-re Chapel, the Chin-lin Chapel, etc. There are many saved ones who are not meeting with us. We do not admit that we are the church on Hardoon Road either, because there may be many people who live on Hardoon Road who are not meeting with us. If we call ourselves the church in Shanghai, we have to include all believers in Shanghai. Otherwise, we cannot be considered the church in Shanghai.

They may then ask you what you are if you are not the church. We admit that we are not the church; we are merely those who meet on the ground of the church. I can illustrate the point by an example. The temple in the Old Testament was built in a splendid way. Later, it was burned, and not one stone was left on top of another. Suppose a man in Jerusalem at that time decided to erect a tent on the foundation of the burnt temple. If others were to ask him what this was, he would say that it was not the temple: rather, it was only a tent on the ground of the temple. The same is true with our meeting today. If others ask us what we are, we have to answer that we are not the church; we are not the church in Shanghai. We are a group of brothers and sisters in Shanghai meeting on the ground of the church. We are those who meet according to the principle of the church as revealed in the Bible. We are those who intend to stand on the ground of the church to maintain the ground of the church. The temple is now in ruins and burned, and we are only a tent. All those who have eyes can see the degradation of the church today; outwardly, everything is in ruins. We cannot and dare not call ourselves the church in Shanghai. We only desire to meet on the ground of the church based on the light we have received concerning the church. We are not the church in Shanghai, but we are meeting in a way that maintains and upholds the church in Shanghai. We are standing on the same ground that the church stands on, yet we are not the very church itself. Therefore, even though we are not the temple, we are a miniature of the temple, and we are here to express the life of the temple. This is why the

elders and deacons among us are non-official. The reason we have elders and deacons is that, even though we admit that we are a small tent, we are, nevertheless, erected on the ground of the temple. Therefore, we have to do everything according to the pattern of the temple.

At the time of the Babylonians, the temple was destroyed. After Nehemiah and Ezra returned from their exile and rebuilt the temple, the old men who had seen the glory of the first temple knew that the rebuilt temple could not match the first one. But men like Nehemiah and Ezra still offered sacrifices according to the former principle of offerings even though the temple was no longer the same as the first temple.

The temple mentioned in John 2 was not the first temple; it was merely a rebuilt temple. Yet the Lord Jesus drove out the cattle and sheep from that temple and said that it was “My Father’s house” (v. 16). The Lord said that because He was standing on the ground of the temple. Although the temple was no longer the same as the first one, the ground of the temple was the same, and the principles of the temple remained. Although the outward structure may collapse, the ground remains, and upon this ground, there is still the possibility of maintaining the principle of service to God on a small scale.

There were twelve tribes in the nation of Israel. Yet God established Jerusalem as the place He chose to put His name. All the tribes had to come to Jerusalem three times a year to offer sacrifices and worship God. Later when Rehoboam was king, the nation was divided into Judah and Israel. The nation of Judah had two tribes and continued to worship God in Jerusalem. The nation of Israel had ten tribes, and Jeroboam was their king. Nevertheless, they obeyed God’s command to go to Jerusalem three times a year to worship Him. However, Jeroboam was afraid that journeying to Jerusalem three times a year would turn the people’s heart to the king of Judah, causing them to rebel against him and leave him. Therefore, he set up an altar in Bethel—the place which men considered the best—made a golden calf, and charged the people to worship there instead of going to Jerusalem to worship. At that time, a young prophet rebuked him, prophesied, and gave a sign by putting forth his hand to the altar. When Jeroboam heard the word of the prophet, he put forth his hand and tried to lay hold of the prophet, but his hand dried up, and he

could not pull it in again to him (1 Kings 13:3-4). In the end, he had to allow the people to return to Jerusalem. From this we see that *although the people were divided outwardly, the principle of service to God should not be lost.* The human Bethel can never replace God's Jerusalem. The outward law cannot replace God's ordination. No political division can change God's principle. Therefore, no outward destruction, failure, or desolation can ever change God's ordained principles.

When the Israelites divided the land, nine and a half tribes remained on the west side of the Jordan in the land promised by God, while two and a half tribes preferred to dwell on the east side of the Jordan. Under the hand of Joshua, the two and a half tribes finished the division of the land. Then they erected a great altar by the river Jordan. When the whole congregation of Israel heard this, they went up to attack the two and a half tribes because they thought the two and a half tribes were trying "to build an altar...besides the altar of the Lord our God" (Josh. 22:29). Not only is it a sin to turn away from following Jehovah, it is a sin even to offer the burnt offering, meal offering, and peace offering on an altar other than the altar of the Lord. The two and a half tribes answered that they had no intention of erecting another center of worship, and that they were not erecting a new altar but were merely making a testimony. Only the altar before the tabernacle of God is the proper place of worship (Josh. 22). The two and a half tribes represent those who have failed spiritually. But the ones who have failed cannot change the principle of worship that God has ordained. Although, after the separation, Israel was no longer one nation outwardly and no longer the original kingdom of David, all of the Israelites still had to worship in Jerusalem. Therefore, although there is division and failure in Shanghai, although there is division and failure in the churches everywhere, and although there is desolation outwardly, we still have to worship God by standing on the ground of the church. This is a matter of principle. This is also the reason for us to appoint the elders. This is why we have elders among us today, but these elders are not official ones. We do not have elders like those in the denominations.

***Question**:* Will God take back the gifts at times?

***Answer**:* The gifts are given by God, and God never takes back the gifts. We can have three different attitudes toward God's gifts: (1) we can misuse them, like the Corinthians; (2) we can bury them, like the one in

Matthew 25; and (3) God can stop the gifts. Through man's unbelief, some gifts such as the gift of prophecy become no longer available.

***Question**:* Can we ask for the gifts?

***Answer**:* Yes. First Corinthians 14 clearly says that we should pursue the gifts.

***Question**:* What does it mean to misuse the gifts?

***Answer**:* God does not take back the gifts. At the time of judgment, God will ask us how we have used our gifts. If a man misuses his gifts, he is using them according to his human way or for his own glory, as the Corinthians did. Yet God does not take back the gifts, because the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29). Suppose a sister preaches the gospel in a meeting, and a man is saved. One may ask that since a sister should not preach to a man, why is she able to lead a man to salvation? I can tell you that this is indeed an exercise of the gift, but it is a misuse of the gift. It is God's gift that is saving men. Sometimes, a gospel preacher goes to a wrong place to preach the gospel and saves a few men. Yet this also is a misuse of the gift. Those who bury their gifts are usually those who have only one talent. The more they consider that their gifts are insignificant, the less they exercise them. The gifts stop because the believers do not have the faith to use them.

***Question**:* Can a man know whether or not he has a gift?

***Answer**:* Sometimes he can and sometimes he cannot, but others know. In most cases, others know through the fruit of his work. The Corinthians knew in themselves that they had the gifts. Some feel sorry for Moses because he did not know the glory that was shining on his own face. Yet it was fortunate that Moses did not know, for had he known that his face was shining, the shining would have gone away. Therefore, we should allow others to find out if we have the gifts.

***Question**:* If misusing or burying the gifts will bring God's judgment, is it better that we do not ask for the gifts lest we fall into judgment?

***Answer**:* The more gift a believer has, the more chance there is for him to receive the reward. The more reward a believer has, the more glory he will receive. If a believer has never been dealt with, it is better that he

does not ask for gifts lest he fail in the future judgment. But those who know God should ask for more gifts, so that they can use them for the church and not for themselves. I do hope that God will raise up more gifted ones.

***Question**:* How do we know that we are misusing the gifts?

***Answer**:* In the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, there are three kinds of gifts—five talents, two talents, and one talent. They were given to three slaves, who were told to do business. The gifts are the capital. When the slaves took the gifts to do business, they could make a profit or incur a loss. If they made a profit, their master would not suffer. If they incurred a loss, their master would suffer. Brothers who have the gift of evangelism can surely save people. But if their works are not done according to God's will and if they are doing these for self-glorification, to meet some personal needs, or for the sake of going along with human affections, they will lose their spiritual power and will be left only with the power of their gifts. Today, many of God's servants are leading conferences, reviving men, helping men, and saving men. Among them, some are indeed gifts given by God. You may find out that although they have the gifts, they do not want to stand on the ground that God wants them to stand on. You may be amazed that they can still save, help, and revive men when they themselves are not standing on the ground God wants them to stand on. Actually, this is a misuse of the gifts. They can save and revive men because they have God's gifts. It is God's gifts that are saving men, reviving men, and helping men. This kind of misuse of gifts is very dangerous. Today God does not interfere and does not say anything. But when we go before the judgment seat, He will reckon with us. As in the parable mentioned in Matthew 25, He will reckon with us according to the amount of gifts that He gave us as capital and according to the way we did business in the world with these gifts.

We must never think that, as long as we have a fine and thriving work and others love to listen to us, we are right. We have to beware of misusing our gifts. Many times, it is possible for a believer to preach out of a desire for fame and praise from man. But the conscience knows that this is wrong. Once a brother went to a place to preach the gospel. When he returned, I asked about his work. He told me that he went and came back, and a few persons were saved. Yet he still did not know if it was

God's will for him to go. This is to misuse the gift. God has entrusted the gifts in your hand, and He will not reckon with you until the time of the judgment seat. Yet we should consider God to be reckoning with us every day. If we think that He will not reckon with us until many years afterward, we may use our gifts in a careless way.

A gift is a kind of spiritual ability, capacity, power, and knowledge which enables one to work. For example, I may be very good at calligraphy. Whether or not I have a proper fellowship with God, my calligraphy remains good. If I am in God's will, I write good calligraphy; if I am not in God's will, I still write good calligraphy. The same is true with the gifts. When we are in God's will, we can help others when we exercise our gift. When we are not in God's will, we can still help others when we exercise our gift. (Of course, there is a question of whether or not such help indeed has any spiritual value to it.) But we will reckon with the sin of misusing our gifts when we face the judgment seat. This is why we have to be careful that we do not work for glory, praise, men's approval, fame, profit, or to gratify ourselves. If we do, we are misusing the gift.

***Question**:* Does every believer have a gift?

***Answer**:* Yes. Every believer has at least one talent. There is no slave who does not have any gift. First Corinthians 12 says that to one is given one kind of gift and to another is given another kind of gift. Therefore, everyone has some gift. Every regenerated person has a gift. But not everyone has the same kind of gift. According to Ephesians 4, there are only five kinds of gifts that build up the whole church. But as to the gifts that are for the growth of a local church, we have those mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. Not every believer has the gifts of Ephesians 4, but they may have one of the gifts mentioned in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12.

***Question**:* How can we know that we are not misusing the gifts?

***Answer**:* In order not to misuse the gifts, we have to accept the cross of Christ. The cross of Christ, the flesh-severing cross, is the basis of everything. The reason there are problems in all the local assemblies and in the church is that the brothers and sisters are not willing to accept the cross of Christ. Everything that issues from the resurrection of Christ is for the Body of Christ; every problem in the church arises when men try

to drag out things that belong in the grave. If we are willing to accept Christ's cross and are willing to allow it to do a deeper work in us, removing our ambitions and grand aspirations, we will not misuse our gifts. For example, yesterday I mentioned the matter of the elders. Who are the ones who are not qualified to be elders? They are those who, upon hearing about the matter related to an elder, expect to be an elder themselves. Who are the ones who are qualified to be elders? They are those who, upon hearing about the matter related to an elder, consider themselves unworthy to be one. Those who aspire to be the authority are not qualified to be the authority; authority can never be placed in their hand. Only those who do not aspire to be the authority are qualified to be the authority.

***Question**:* Why does 1 Timothy 3 say that one has to aspire to be an elder?

***Answer**:* It is because many people may withdraw. Today there are many people who are like Peter, who refuse to be washed. Both fleshly boasting and fleshly withdrawal are of the flesh and are two sides of one truth. First Timothy 3 says that a novice should not be an overseer lest he become proud and fall into the snare of the devil. The Lord is telling these ones not to aspire to be an elder lest they fall into the devil's snare through their pride. But to those who consider themselves useless, who realize the weakness of their flesh, who consider themselves unworthy, and who are withdrawn, the Lord encourages them by telling them that overseership is a good work and is to be desired. God tells those who volunteer to be elders that they are not worthy and encourages those who are worthy but withdrawn to be elders. May all the brothers see that there are two sides to the flesh; either it boasts of itself or it withdraws. We must never consider the boasting of the flesh as a kind of courage and the withdrawing of the flesh as a kind of humility. When we consider our own virtues, we become proud; when we consider our own weaknesses and failures, we dare not do anything and withdraw. We should not confuse boasting with courage and withdrawal with humility. Actually, real humility is not considering one's own goodness or weakness. This is why someone has said that real humility is not considering oneself. Boldness is being strengthened in the Lord and looking at the Lord only. This is why Ephesians 6 says that we have to be

empowered in the Lord. All those who carefully weigh themselves and become confident in themselves are boastful; they are not bold. On the one hand, we must look to the Lord and, on the other hand, not look to ourselves. In this way, we will be bold as well as humble. This is victory. Many fail because they look at either the powerful side of the flesh or the weak side of the flesh. As a result, they become either a person who boasts in the flesh or a person who withdraws in the flesh. The above discussion touches a principle. This principle can be applied not only to the appointment of the elders and the deacons but to other daily affairs as well.

***Question**:* Do the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers in Ephesians 4 refer to people or do they refer to things or titles?

***Answer**:* Ephesians 4 refers to people, while 1 Corinthians 12 refers to things. Ephesians 4 says that God gives some apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers; these are five kinds of people. First Corinthians 12 says that God gives some the ability to prophesy or speak in tongues. Paul was a gift given by God to the church; he was an apostle. But Paul also had other gifts, such as prophesying, speaking in tongues, and healing.

To my observation, Brother Chi Yung-tung looks very much like a pastor. Let me take him as an example. God has given a gift to the church in Soo-chia-tsui, which is Chi Yung-tung. The whole church in Soo-chia-tsui should then receive Brother Chi as a gift given to them by God. At the same time, Brother Chi has the pastoral gift. His gift is the gift of a pastor. If anyone asks what gift Paul had, we would answer that he had the gift of an apostle. But if anyone asks what gift God has given to the church, we would answer, “The apostle Paul.” All five kinds of people in Ephesians 4 are gifts given by God to the church, and they are for the whole church. First Corinthians 12 mentions the various gifts that God gives to individual believers; the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 are for the local churches. Paul was a gift given by God to the whole church. Ephesians 4 mentions men as gifts given by God to the church for the purpose of building up the whole church. Therefore, the gift which was released through Paul has benefited men of all times and places; his work did not pass away; it remains even until today.

***Question**:* How do we deal with lawless brothers in the meetings?

***Answer**:* If a man continually disturbs the meeting but does not have obvious sins that deserve excommunication, we should deal with him in a severe way according to the teaching of Romans 16:17. We should mark him and not communicate with him. “Now I exhort you, brothers, to mark those who make divisions and causes of stumbling contrary to the teaching which you have learned, and turn away from them.” We should not place the affairs of the church in the hands of these ones. Whatever the church is doing, these ones should be excluded from it.

***Question**:* How should one deal with an elder who is involved with some problems?

***Answer**:* The eldership in the Bible is plural in number. If one elder is involved with some problems, the other elders should deal with him.

***Question**:*If the elders are unofficial, does this mean that we can accuse them only in an unofficial way?

***Answer**:* That is right. If one elder is wrong, the other elders can deal with him. This is why the Bible never uses the word *elder* in a singular sense; it is always *elders,* plural. Therefore, this does not present too much of a problem.

Deacons

Deacons are the serving ones in the Bible. In the church there should not only be responsible ones like the elders, but the church should also have serving ones like the deacons. The church needs men who give proposals and who manage and oversee the brothers, like the elders. The church also needs dedicated serving ones to take care of all the miscellaneous affairs, like the deacons. The ones who make decisions, manage the church, make proposals, oversee, and observe from top to bottom are the elders. The ones who execute the affairs, run errands, take orders, and help others in being directed are the deacons. God needs the elders to be the doorkeepers, and He needs the deacons to work and run errands for the believers. For example, the money of an assembly is kept by the deacons, while the authority to use the money is with the elders. All matters related to the brothers are directed and decided by the elders and announced by the deacons. The elders are the

foremen, and the deacons are the workmen. The deacons do not have any proposals of their own; they only work according to the direction of the elders. The deacons are those who help the elders accomplish things. (Concerning the deacons, much is recorded in the books of Timothy and Titus.) I hope that some brothers among us would be raised up to be the deacons, and I hope that some sisters among us would also be raised up to be the deaconesses. The Bible records deaconesses. The deacons and deaconesses are dedicated to the handling and management of affairs.

Questions

Question: Is the selection of the deacons by way of voting?

Answer: No. During the early years, there were not many scrolls with which to write everything down. The selection of deacons in the time of the apostles was not by a vote of the majority. The deacons were first approved by the apostles and manifested to be deacons in a most natural way. The scriptural way of selecting the deacons is to allow the deacons to become manifest in a natural way. Those who were qualified to be deacons were selected by the church and acknowledged by the apostles. We should practice the same today.

Question: Why was the selection of Matthias by the way of casting lots?

Answer: The Holy Spirit had not yet descended, and the disciples did not know which one should fill the place. They selected two and decided which one of the two should fill up the apostleship.

Question: Does not Acts 6 say that the disciples appointed seven deacons?

Answer: Acts 6 does not say explicitly that these seven were the deacons. It only shows us that they were doing the work of deacons. Therefore, we can only say that they were the deacons by the things they did. When Acts mentions Philip, it says that he was one of the seven; it does not say that he was one of the seven deacons. Therefore, although there are deacons in the Bible, it does not say clearly that the deacons are elected. I think that the matter of selection of the deacons should be treated in the same way as the appointment of the elders, that is, they should be appointed by the apostles and sent by the apostles. We should

be careful not to investigate what the Bible has purposely left blank and unexplained.

Question: When should elders and deacons be appointed?

Answer: The sooner they are appointed, the better.

Question: If a local meeting has only three brothers, who should be the elders and deacons?

Answer: The only thing that can be done is for these few brothers to function as elders and deacons at the same time. In the whole Bible, only the book of Philippians gives a complete description of the church, which includes the saints, the elders, and the deacons. It tells us that the church is composed of the saints, elders, and deacons: “Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and deacons” (Phil. 1:1).

Question: Why does 1 Timothy say that a man must be approved before he can be appointed a deacon?

Answer: The deacons are those who are dedicated to handling affairs. The deacons are always the younger ones. They may act in the flesh. Therefore, they must first be tested a few times. They must first be sent to handle affairs a few times, before one can decide if they are qualified to be a deacon.

Question: If a few brothers begin to meet in a place, what should they have first, deacons or elders?

Answer: They should first have responsible ones and then the bread-breaking meeting. They should first have elders and then deacons. This is the teaching in Acts. Antioch is one example. There should at least be one brother who can take responsibility before the bread-breaking meeting is initiated. Otherwise, the bread-breaking meeting will not be proper. Moreover, from the beginning there should be the teaching of submission to the elders and the teaching of submission one to another when the meeting starts. Otherwise, in a meeting of five people, the five will become five big denominations. When this happens, these five may still remember the Lord at the bread-breaking meeting, but they will not be able to discern the Body; they will not consider themselves the Body

of Christ. They will care only for themselves and take only themselves as the head. Therefore, we should learn to submit to the elders and also learn to submit to one another.

CHAPTER TWO

The Practice Of Fellowship

There Being Only One Church

The Bible says that there is only one church. The church which Paul was in is the same church that we are in. The church that we are in is the same church that the apostle John, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and all regenerated persons are in. The church in the Bible is not separated by time, locality, or race. There is only one church, which exists at all times and in all places. There are not two churches. The Bible only recognizes one Body of Christ and never recognizes two, because there is only one Head. Although there are many members in the Bible, the Body is singular. Therefore, all saved persons past and present, here and elsewhere constitute one church and one Body. If this is the case, why are there “churches” in different places? Since Ephesians mentions one Body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God, why does the Bible mention churches also? Is this not a contradiction? Why is it that, on the one hand, there is only one Body, but on the other hand, there are many churches? This shows us that there are different views in the Bible concerning the Body of Christ and the local churches. Strictly speaking, there is only one church, in the same way that there is only one Body of Christ. However, in each locality, there may be as many as three to five thousand believers, or there may be as few as two or three, as described in Matthew 18. As long as there is a group of believers meeting together in a city or a town, that group of believers constitutes the church in that city or town. Therefore, in the original language, the Bible clearly shows us that the church is “the church in such-and-such place.” The word *in* indicates that there is only one church, which is scattered and sojourning in different places. The Bible calls the meeting of those who sojourn and meet together in one place a local church; it serves as a miniature representation of the unique church.

We treasure very much the words in Romans 12 which say, “We who are many are one Body.” “We” includes all the believers. There is only one bread. Therefore, do not think that we have one bread in Wen-teh Lane and another bread in Gordon Lane, and yet another in Peking or Changchun. Materially speaking, in the whole world there can be hundreds and thousands of loaves, but before God there is only one

bread, spiritually speaking. However, we cannot participate in only one bread, because we are limited in our flesh by time and space. If it were possible, all the believers in the world would break only one bread. Although brothers can break bread in Changchun, Peking, Hangchow, or Nan-shu-chow, there is only one bread before God. The one bread that we touch on the Lord's Day evening in Shanghai is the same bread that Brother Luan touched in Hangchow and that Brother Hwang touched in Nan-shu-chow. The bread that is broken in every place and the Body of Christ that it represents is the same bread and same Body of Christ in every place. God has only one church in the world. This one church is scattered *in* all the cities and villages. These scattered churches in the cities and villages are called the churches in those cities or the churches in those villages. For convenience' sake, we call the churches in all the cities and villages the churches of God. Actually, the churches of God are just the church of God. The Lord charges us to break the bread every Lord's Day in order to remind us that the churches in the various localities are not independent churches but are joined as one church. This is why we have the symbol of the one bread. The one bread reminds us that although there are many believers in all places and at all times, and although there are many local churches, we are still one bread.

I do not like to use political figures for illustration, because the subject of politics is too fashionable. But I have to use one today. The Nationalist Party of China respects Mr. Sun Yat-sen to the utmost. All government offices have the picture of Mr. Sun. There may be thousands and tens of thousands of pictures of Mr. Sun, but the person they represent is the same. In the same way, we may be breaking thousands of loaves of bread, but the Body of Christ, which these loaves represent, is just one, and the Lord, whom these loaves represent, is just one. Therefore, the miniature churches in all the places are representations of the whole Body of Christ. When we see a local assembly with fifty people meeting, we should realize immediately that they represent all the believers at all times and in all places. Today in Gordon Lane there are over fifty people meeting. If in Bao-shan there are only seven or eight people meeting, the bread which they break before the Lord at the Lord's table includes Peter, Paul, Martin Luther, Wesley, and others; it also includes you and me. Therefore, whether it be the meeting in Bao-shan, Hangchow, Soo-chia-tsui, or anywhere else, all these meetings represent the Body of Christ.

This is why no church can act independently. All the moves must take care of the whole church. While you are sitting in a meeting, you should not see only the brothers and sisters next to you but the whole Body of Christ. What you are doing affects not only the one or two hundred people who are meeting with you; it affects the whole Body of Christ because we only have one Body. Although you are only a member, what you do is what the Body of Christ does. One member can drag down the whole Body.

Most of the Chinese who live in Southeast Asia are from the provinces of Fukien and Kwangtung. Everywhere in Southeast Asia, whether in a village or in a city, one can find Chinese Associations. The number of members in these associations may vary, but if an association receives respect in one place, it means that the whole Chinese race receives respect in that place, and if an association is persecuted in a place, it means that the whole Chinese race is persecuted in that place. Just as these associations represent China in Southeast Asia, we represent the church in our respective localities. Since this is the case, we can see how intimately related the conduct of an individual church is to the conduct of the Body of Christ. We can also see the relationship between the various assemblies. Although you are a miniature church and a small community within a certain boundary, God intends that this miniature church, this small community, express the large-scale church, the large community. Therefore, what we are doing in the small local churches represents and includes all that the Body of Christ does. For this reason, we have to be related to other local churches and the brothers and sisters in the other localities.

Receiving A Person Into The Bread-Breaking Meeting

If a brother has been received into the bread-breaking meeting, he is not received into the assembly in Hangchow, Tientsin, or Soo-chow but into the churches of God, the (outward) house of God. When we receive a brother in Hangchow, we are receiving him on behalf of the churches in Tientsin, Shanghai, Soo-chow, and other places. If we intend to receive a person in Shanghai and think that the brothers in Hangchow and Peking may not receive him, we should not receive him either. We cannot act independently. If you know that the thing you are about to do in your locality will be considered inappropriate in other localities, you must not

take care of the views of the few in your locality and do it anyway. If you do it, you are not discerning the Body of Christ. If what we do individually cannot represent the brothers in Shanghai, we should not do it. By the same token, if a matter cannot pass the unanimous approval of the whole church, it is not a move of the Body but an individual move. In the Bible there is only the move of the Body; there is no move of individuals.

If a brother wants to be received into the bread-breaking meeting, we must examine him carefully because we are receiving him not only on behalf of the brothers in Shanghai, but also on behalf of the brothers meeting in Tientsin, Hangchow, Wenchow, and other places. However, when a brother goes to another locality to break bread, the brothers in the locality should not examine him further. All he needs to do is to bring a letter of recommendation with him. The brothers in the other localities should believe what the brothers in Shanghai have done and receive him into the bread-breaking meeting based on the letter of recommendation. We have to be very careful in what we do in order to care for the brothers in the other localities.

Recognition Of The Gifts

Furthermore, if the brothers meeting in Soo-chia-tsui in northern Kiangsu recognize a certain person as having a certain gift, whether a pastor, teacher, or evangelist, he should be able to be a pastor, teacher, or evangelist in Shanghai as well. The brothers in Shanghai should recognize the gift of such a person also. A gifted person does not lose his gift by moving from one locality to another locality. Therefore, a local assembly has to recognize the gifts that are recognized by another local assembly. If God has given a person the pastoral gift, he will be recognized as a pastor in northern Kiangsu, and we should also recognize his pastoral gift when he comes into our midst. If Shanghai recognizes a certain person as having the ability to preach the gospel, Peking should recognize the same thing. Although offices may change through change of location, gifts do not change through moving to a different location. Gifts are not local, but offices are local. Therefore, every time an assembly wants to recognize a gift, it has to be careful because not only does that particular assembly have to recognize his gift, but the brothers in other places have to recognize his gift as well. Therefore, we must care not only for ourselves but for the whole church.

Co-Workers

Concerning the matter of the co-workers, let me first relate one incident to you. A brother who was working in a certain place wanted to invite another brother to his locality to work. He came and asked me if he should make the invitation. I told him that he did not have to ask me but that he should consider whether or not the brother would be received if he were introduced to the assemblies in Peking, Shanghai, or Nanking. He was afraid that the brother would not be received. Then I told him that if that was the case, he could not receive this brother and invite him to work in his place either. If he recognized such a one as a co-worker, he would be bringing him into the work of his other co-workers as well. He should not receive a person on behalf of himself or the few who are meeting in his local assembly; he should receive him on behalf of the whole Body of Christ. If men like the apostle Paul were still living on earth, he would be receiving such a person as a co-worker on behalf of Paul, Peter, and others, and he would be adding a worker to them as well. If he did not receive in this way, he would be acting independently. All independent actions have no place in the Body of Christ and must be rejected. Every assembly has to be careful not to have an independent action but learn to follow God, so that the action of any one assembly becomes a joint responsibility of all the assemblies in other places.

No Change Through Moving To Another Locality

Suppose you have fellowship with a certain brother in Peking. If he comes to Shanghai, he should fellowship with us. It would be wrong if he came to Shanghai and did not fellowship with us. We have a brother by the name of Yu Shin-liang. When he was in Kuling, a few Western brothers often came to meet with him, and they had fellowship one with another. When Brother Yu came to Shanghai, two of these Western brothers also came to Shanghai. They were in Shanghai for a few months, but they never came to break bread with us. When I asked Brother Yu about these brothers, he told me that they had been in Shanghai for a few months. I asked why they would not come to Hardoon Road to break bread with us, and he answered that they did not come because they were too busy. However, they did not come because of other reasons, not because they were busy. This is to act independently; this is not the action of the Body. Since they had fellowship with Brother

Yu in Kuling, why would they not fellowship with those who have fellowship with Brother Yu in Shanghai? If they had fellowship with Brother Yu in Kuling, they should be able to fellowship with all those who have fellowship with Brother Yu in Shanghai. They should not just fellowship with Brother Yu and refuse to fellowship with those who have fellowship with Brother Yu. When they fellowship with Brother Yu, they have chosen to fellowship not only with Brother Yu but also with all those who have fellowship with Brother Yu. They should not choose to fellowship only with some brothers in some meetings; they should choose to fellowship with those in all the other meetings who have fellowship with their meeting.

Suppose there is a meeting in Shanghai today. You may come to break bread because you think that this place is better than other places and that you can hear good messages here. As a result, you begin to communicate and fellowship with the brothers who are meeting here. A little while later, you may move to Peking. There you will find brothers who are in fellowship with us also. But their number may be only a handful, and the meetings may be weak. However, in Peking there may be another place with a famous speaker, who is eloquent but who does not fellowship with us. When you arrive in Peking, you may wonder in your heart whether you should meet with the very weak brothers or listen to the famous speaker. If you go to the place with the famous speaker, it is an independent action. When you fellowship with us, you have fellowshipped with all the brothers who have fellowshipped with us, and you cannot choose the place of meeting any longer. This is the principle of fellowship in the Body. You cannot act independently.

Many times, we think that if we could have our choice, we would change our place of meeting all the time. But there is no such thing as this. In the meetings, we have the greatest blessings, but we also bear the greatest responsibilities and have the greatest restrictions. If you go to Peking, you have to break bread at Brother Shu Tsong-jie’s place. If you go to Tientsin, you have to break bread at Brother Lee Shun’s place. If you go to Chefoo, you have to go to Brother Witness Lee’s place. They are assemblies standing on the ground of the church. Do not think that the denominations bind people. Our fellowship binds people even more than the denominations bind people. What others have is an organization

according to law. What we have is an organism in the Body. I am afraid that no denominations bind men as much as the principle of the organism of the Body, which we recognize. None of the members in our body can move freely for a day. Even a finger cannot have a day of freedom. The bondage we have is the bondage of the Body. As such, we have no personal freedom. Therefore, brothers, may we truly see the Body of Christ. If we see it, we will not act independently. After we have believed in the Lord, not only are we saved, but we also should act as brothers by standing in the position of a brother. We should not only be Christians, but among the brothers, we should behave as good brothers. Only then are we actually loving the brothers.

The Responsibility Of Every Brother

In practice, we have to ask: What responsibility should the brothers bear? Every brother should bear the responsibility not only of the local assembly but of the brothers and sisters who are in fellowship with them in the whole of China. Actually, he should care for those in the whole world who have fellowship with them. At present, we can only consider all those who have fellowship with us in China. But to be more scriptural, we should eliminate the thought of China and consider all the believers everywhere in the whole world who have fellowship with us. We share with them the same fellowship with God and His Son. One of our shortages is that we who meet in Shanghai only see the ones meeting in Shanghai, while those meeting in Peking only see the ones meeting in Peking. The greatest lack today is that believers do not have a world view and worldwide love. Many people only see their own sins; they only know that when they believe in the Lord, their sins are forgiven, and they are saved. They do not know what the fellowship among the brothers is. Many only see the brothers in their own localities and do not care for the brothers in all the places. This is not according to God’s will.

God saves men in order to gain living stones for the building up of the spiritual house. If there were only individual, isolated stones, there would not be a spiritual house. Our breaking of the bread is a manifestation of the whole Body of Christ. Everyone who breaks bread should be responsible to the whole Body of Christ; he should see that he is responsible to all those who have fellowship with him. Therefore, every time we are about to receive a brother into our bread-breaking meeting,

the responsible brothers should show him that the breaking of bread is for the discerning of the Body. It is not only a discerning of the Lord's body but a discerning of the *Body of Christ.* If we do not discern the Body, we are committing sin.

Therefore, all the brothers who are breaking bread should realize the scriptural requirement for breaking bread: (1) A person must be saved, and (2) he must not be one who commits the sins in 1 Corinthians 5. Moreover, he should know the responsibility he bears as a brother who partakes of the bread. He is responsible to the local brothers, and he is responsible to the assemblies in all places. If any brother is not clear about the responsibility he should bear, we should not reject him but allow him to consider, and we should show him the consequences of not bearing this responsibility. He should realize that the breaking of bread is not only for the remembrance of the Lord but also a matter of responsibility to the fellowship of the church. If a brother is clear about all these matters and is willing to take the responsibility, he can be received. Otherwise, we should allow him to consider carefully and think clearly. He should then make the decision by himself whether or not he wants to fellowship with us.

This is not a new invention. It was present two thousand years ago. If a brother wants to go to a certain place, he should first try to find the brothers who are in fellowship with us. Do not move to a place for four or five months without looking for the place to meet and without letting others know where you are. Before you leave your own locality, do not neglect to ask the elders to write a letter of recommendation for you. You have to realize that wherever you meet, you are responsible to that assembly. Your conduct there should be worthy of a brother. You should not act like one who is not a brother. If all of us take care of the mutual fellowship and act according to the Scriptures, our fellowship will become very precious. Our responsibility is to care for the whole Body of Christ, not only for the things related to the local assembly. We should not be like those in the denominations, who are pew members only, who do not care for others, and who do not know anyone else except the pastor. The Presbyterians only know the things related to Presbyterians, while the Methodists only know the things related to Methodists. But we should be different. We should know all things related to all the brothers and sisters

who are in fellowship with us; we should know the things related to all the brothers and sisters in the whole world. May God bring us to the position of the church at the beginning. May He show us this matter.

If a brother or a sister has the opportunity to go to another city, he or she should first investigate if there are brothers in that place who are in fellowship with us. If in that place there are two or three places that one can have fellowship with (such as the Brethren assemblies or other independent meetings), and if the choice is up to him, he should choose to fellowship with the brothers who have fellowship with us. This will bring benefit to their meetings and bring benefit to him as well. We admit that the way we take is a lonely way and that the number of those taking this way may not be large. But God will open doors for us so that everywhere we will find some people of the same mind who will meet with us. May God show us what the Bible requires of us.

Responsibility Among The Assemblies

The Bible tells us that a rule that God sets for one assembly is the same rule for another assembly. If the rule in two assemblies is different, there must be something wrong. Either the rule in one place is wrong or the rule in the other place is wrong. Of all the books of the Bible, 1 Corinthians is the clearest in dealing with the affairs concerning the church. First Corinthians 1:2 tells us that it is written not only to the believers in Corinth, but to *all those in every place* who call on the name of the Lord. In other words, all the churches should take the same way; it should not be different from one church to another. In 1 Corinthians the apostle taught about the sister's head covering. After he finished his teaching, he said, "But if anyone seems to be contentious, we do not have such a custom of being so, neither the *churches of God*" (11:16). The apostle did not allow the action of one local assembly to be different from another assembly. From this, we see that our meeting cannot act independently. Every assembly should care for the other assemblies. Before we do anything, we should consider how our actions will relate to the other assemblies. A sister cannot be free of her head covering in the meeting in Peking while covering her head in the meeting in Shanghai. In the churches of God everything has to be in one accord. In 1 Corinthians 14 it is said that women should not open their mouths in the meetings, "as in *all the churches* of the saints" (v. 33). This shows us that all the

churches of the saints should keep the matter of sisters not preaching in the meetings.

However, the meetings in the various churches begin at different times: some begin earlier; others begin later. In addition, the condition of the various churches is also different. Some are clear about the truth of the church, while others are not so clear about the truth of the church. What then should we do? We should learn in a humble way to follow the other assemblies. The apostle said, “And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit” (1 Thes. 1:6). Again he said, “For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus” (1 Thes. 2:14). This verse tells us that the church in Thessalonica were imitators of the churches in Judea. Why did the church in Thessalonica have to imitate the churches in Judea? It was because the gospel was first preached to the Jews. The Judean churches were the more “senior” churches. (I am taking the liberty to use this expression for now. Please note that the Bible never describes the churches in Judea in this way.) No assembly can act independently. Not only should individuals not act independently, but the whole assembly should not act independently.

Independent Assemblies

If anyone wants to set up an assembly in a place and does not want to fellowship or communicate with other assemblies, he is not standing on the ground of the church. None of the churches in the Bible ignored the other churches. In other countries, among all the so-called churches, we have not yet found an assembly that is standing on the same ground of the church as we are. If there are such assemblies and we care only for the churches in China and refuse to communicate with these churches in foreign countries, we are wrong. With God, there is no difference between the churches in China and the churches in other countries. If we only care for the churches in China and cut off the churches in other countries, we are not walking according to God’s will. The church of God can be found anywhere in the world. It is a different matter for a person to be unable to find an assembly that is meeting on the ground of the church. But if we try to limit our fellowship only to China, we have lost the ground of the Body.

What Is A Sect?

I am afraid that some lawless believers will rise up among us, hoping to gain a name for themselves or to assume the authority of an elder. If they do not achieve their goal, they will go to another place like a village or an island and lead some people to salvation. They may eventually preach the gospel successfully in another place and lead many to salvation. They may proceed to help the saved ones to have meetings, break bread, and have elders and deacons. They may do all of these things according to the Bible, yet not fellowship with us. Instead, they will only care for their own meeting and hold tight to their “turf.” They may think that they can ignore us and let each go his own way. Little do they realize, however, that they will become a sect by doing this; they are not an assembly that stands on the ground of the church. As mentioned in the Bible, they are actually a sect because their fellowship is limited to only the one or two hundred people among them. Even if the meetings, the breaking of bread, and the appointment of elders and deacons are all done according to the Scripture, it is still a sect if their fellowship is restricted to only one place. Therefore, in the future, if there is an assembly that has fellowship that is limited to only one locality, not based on the Body of Christ, and not inclusive of all the believers, it is a sect.

Why is Presbyterianism a sect? It is a sect because Presbyterians can fellowship only with the Presbyterians in Nanking, Soochow, England, or America. If a fellowship includes only the Presbyterians in Nanking, Soochow, England, or America and does not include the whole Body of Christ, that fellowship is a sect. Therefore, any fellowship that includes only a few local believers but does not include the whole Body of Christ at all times and in all places is a sect. If some lawless ones among us depart, set up another assembly, and restrict the believers’ fellowship to their meetings alone, they will become a sect.

If the brothers in Chefoo adopt a closed attitude, work diligently, and ask the brothers to do everything according to the Bible, but do not fellowship with others, then sectarianism has to be dealt with all over again in Chefoo because they have become a sect. Every sect has its distinctive marks. If a man takes localism as a mark of distinction, he has become a sect. In considering whether an assembly is a sect or not, it is not enough to see whether its practice is scriptural. The main question does not

involve whether or not the practice of an assembly is scriptural but whether the assembly itself is a sect. If it is a sect, we should depart from it. If an assembly is not of the Body of Christ nor for the Body of Christ, it should be forsaken because it is a sect. Therefore, if we want to serve God properly, we must learn how to not disobey God's commands and how to be restricted by the brothers and sisters. We cannot care for one place alone. All the churches should have the same practice toward certain matters. Yet the standard of our conduct is not according to the approval of the majority but according to the decision of the brothers in oneness. Oneness and one accord are the works of the Holy Spirit, while the consent of the majority emerges from man.

The principle of the Open Brethren is to care only for their own local assemblies, while ignoring the assemblies in other places. If a man is excommunicated from the assembly in Nanking, he can still break bread in the assembly in Shanghai. They even boast that they never argue with another assembly. If we follow their practice, Shanghai will care only for Shanghai, and Nanking will care only for Nanking. Of course, there will not be any arguments, and everyone will coexist in peace, doing their own work. Actually, the Open Brethren are not free from arguments. If a few have divergent views concerning some doctrines within an assembly, they will split. Perhaps by the following Sunday, they will have already separated into two meetings. One group may rent another place to meet. In some localities, the brothers are divided into several assemblies, and no assembly communicates with another assembly. Yet they still tell others that they do not argue! Those who prefer one kind of practice go to the assembly with that kind of practice, and those who prefer another kind of practice go to another assembly that has their preferred kind of practice. This is no different than the way of the denominations. The only difference is that the denominations are larger sects, while they are smaller sects. However, this is not the way or the teaching of the Bible.

Oneness In Administration

If the assembly in Shanghai excommunicates a brother, and the assembly in Nanking receives such a brother, we cannot cut off the assembly in Nanking altogether; we can only negotiate with the assembly in Nanking. A person excommunicated from one local assembly is excommunicated from all the assemblies, and a person received by one

assembly is received by all the assemblies. Not only do the assemblies which stand on the ground of the church practice this way; even the denominations practice this way. All those who are excommunicated by the Presbyterians in Shanghai are excommunicated by the Presbyterians in Nanking. If the denominations do this, should not we, who are standing on the ground of the church and expecting the life of the Body of Christ to be expressed, have mutual relationships which are more intimate and more in oneness than those in the denominations?

However, we also have to pay attention to another side of the truth. The administration of the assemblies is completely local. Shanghai cannot overturn or interfere with the decisions of Tsinan, and Tsinan cannot overturn or interfere with the decisions of Shanghai. However, in making decisions, both Shanghai and Tsinan have to consider how their decisions will affect the other assemblies. Therefore, we have to be careful and need to be bound for the sake of the other assemblies. The administration of one assembly cannot be affected by other assemblies. But if this assembly is seeking after God's will in a definite way, it will not act presumptuously, using the excuse that the administration of churches is local; instead, it will consult the other assemblies, hoping to walk scripturally and according to the Lord's desire. All questions relate to whether or not our flesh has been dealt with and whether or not we are spiritual. In this way, we will be able to care for the other assemblies.

Suppose the assembly in Tsinan receives an unsaved person by mistake, and he is recommended to the assembly in Shanghai. On the day we receive the letter of recommendation, he becomes a person in Shanghai and has nothing to do with the administration in Tsinan anymore. From that point on, it is up to the assembly in Shanghai to deal with him or excommunicate him. The assembly in Shanghai does not have to ask the assembly in Tsinan concerning this matter. If the assembly in Shanghai excommunicates a brother by mistake, and the brother goes to Tsinan, the brothers in Tsinan may realize the mistake, but they cannot receive the brother excommunicated by Shanghai immediately. First, they have to write to Shanghai and check with the assembly in Shanghai. If the assembly in Shanghai does not agree with this matter, the assembly in Tsinan cannot receive that brother. But if the assembly in Shanghai consents, the assembly in Tsinan can receive that brother.

Therefore, it is a question of our flesh being put to the cross. Even between assemblies, this principle applies. If we are wrong, we have to submit to the brothers. But if we care only for our own proposals, the situation will become impossible, and we will become a sect. If a brother thinks that he can never be wrong, he has become a sect already. Therefore, we have to judge the flesh properly and put it to death so that we can live in the Holy Spirit and handle the affairs of the church in a proper way. If the flesh is not judged, and one wants to do one thing while another wants to do another, there will be no way to carry out the affairs of the church. All of us should deal with our self. This is true between persons, and it is also true between assemblies. This is the teaching of the Bible.

QUESTIONS

Question: Suppose a brother has a letter of recommendation from the church in Tsinan, and he comes to meet with the assembly in Shanghai. Later, if he is excommunicated by the assembly in Shanghai, should the brothers in Tsinan be consulted before he is excommunicated?

Answer: When the letter of recommendation is received, we should receive this person according to the letter of recommendation. Later, if we find out that this person is not yet saved, we can excommunicate him. Since the brothers in Tsinan are willing to recommend him, their decision must be right; we should believe in the words of the brothers in Tsinan absolutely and receive him initially. But if later we deal with this person and excommunicate him, we do not have to inform the brothers in Tsinan. This is like excommunicating a brother who has always been meeting in the assembly in Shanghai; there is no need to inform the brothers in Tsinan of such a decision. When that person comes to the assembly in Shanghai with a letter of recommendation, he is received by the brothers in Shanghai and is treated like all other brothers in Shanghai. When we accept a letter of recommendation from the brothers in Tsinan, we have accepted the brother, referred to in the letter, as a brother in Shanghai. Thereafter, the assembly in Shanghai has the authority to deal with him.

Question: Can we break bread in Kun-shan Garden? If we break bread there, are we acting contrary to the truth of the Bible?

Answer: At present, there are three tables in Shanghai. If we are not sure

that the table in Hardoon Road is right, we should not come here tomorrow for the bread-breaking meeting. When we break bread at a table, we should acknowledge that it represents the whole Body of Christ. The table at Kun-shan Garden is of a certain group of the Exclusive Brethren. They have a closed attitude and communicate only with those who fellowship with them; they do not fellowship with everyone who has fellowship with God. Their fellowship includes only so many. Even if you are a very good brother, they will not receive you. You have to cut off your relationship with all other Christians before they will receive you. They are one of the seven or eight groups of Exclusive Brethren, and these seven or eight groups do not even receive one another.

If there are two bread-breaking meetings in one place, we have to distinguish which is the right one. If a meeting is raised up in one place, and another meeting is raised up in the same place, we cannot go to both places. We have to ask if the second meeting is also standing on the ground of the church. If both of them are standing on the ground of the church, they will surely fellowship with one another. This is like the relationship the meeting in Wen-teh Lane has with the meeting in Gordon Lane. Those who have been received by the meeting in Wen-teh Lane are also received by the meeting in Gordon Lane. The reverse is also true because we have only one fellowship. If we do not have the same fellowship, we cannot go to both places even when the form of the meetings in the two places is the same. We must investigate and determine which meeting represents the church and meets on the ground of the one Body. If a meeting is not meeting in this way, it is a sect.

When I was in America, it was right for me to break bread with Dr. and Mrs. Stearn. It would have been wrong if I had broken bread with those whom they would not recognize. The reason for this is that I had broken bread with them in Tsinan already. In a place where there is no assembly yet, we can act freely and set up the bread-breaking meeting. (Of course, we must also establish the oneness with the brothers whom we have fellowship with.) It would be wrong if I went to Hangchow and gathered a few people to set up a table, because there is a table in Hangchow already. Brother Luan would surely tell me that I should not set up another table. If that happened, I would need to confess my mistake. The Brethren say that they cannot receive anyone to their bread-breaking

meeting who has not left the denominations. But this makes them another sect. As for us, we can fellowship with all those who are saved in the denominations. Suppose that there were no bread-breaking meeting in Ningpo. If two or three brothers went to Ningpo from Tsinan, they could start the bread- breaking meeting.

Question: In Peking, there is a bread-breaking meeting, but the brothers there are quite weak. Can I break bread there and also go to another place to listen to a famous speaker?

Answer: It is not absolutely wrong to go to another place to listen to some famous speakers. We do not forbid our people to go to other places to hear other speakers. But we have to make one thing clear: when you go to hear them, there is a limitation to your communication with them. If the goal of their works is not up to the standard of God's goal, their works are not God's work according to the biblical standard. I have said that God's work is not an evangelistic crusade, a society for the promotion of some cause, a Sunday school, or a revival campaign. From the beginning, God's work has been only one thing—the church. His work in every place is the building up of the local church in that place. Everything that comes short of this, that is, everything that endeavors for less than this goal, is not God's work. I am not saying that evangelistic crusades and Bible studies are bad. But if one only does these works and does not come up to the standard of the local church, he has not come up to the standard of God's goal. In reality, he is lowering the standard of God's goal. God's work in the book of Acts was nothing less than the local church; it never came short of this and never fell short of this goal.

Today, there are those in the church who preach the truth, lead others to salvation, or conduct Bible studies, preachings, or evangelistic meetings. Believers can do all of these things. But we have to lay hold of God's goal; we must come up to the standard of the church. I am afraid that although many works are good, they do not come up to the standard of God's work, which is the church. I believe there are many gifted ones who are not with us. I also believe that if we are more faithful, God will raise up gifted ones among us. If we live in God's light, there will not be the need for us to go to outsiders for messages.

Question: Some believers are critical of the truth we hold. They cling

tenaciously to their own “Bible study,” yet they want to break bread with us and even preach in our bread-breaking meeting. How should we deal with this kind of people?

Answer: If there is an exclusive Bible study meeting, it is not being conducted according to the principle of the church. Such a meeting does not come up to the standard of God’s work. In other words, it is not God’s work but man’s imitation of God’s work. God’s work is always centered around the (local) church. It is good that man establishes Bible studies and evangelistic crusades; these are all blessed by God. But these things are not God’s work. God’s work has only one goal, which is the church. For example, the China Inland Mission is a mission; it is not a church. It is good for it to send men to the Chinese inland to preach the gospel; God blesses such a work. We probably do not have as much fruit as it has. But its work cannot be considered God’s work. We can only say that God is working within its work. We should not ignore the working of God within its work. If we say that there is no working of God in their work, we will offend Him. However, the goal and the purpose of their meetings is not the local churches.

If people such as those you have just described want to come and break bread with us, we should be willing and happy to receive them. Yet we are not receiving their denominations. Although they are in the denominations, we should not reject them for this reason. However, our receiving does not mean that they do not need to leave the denominations. We should not refuse to receive a believer in the denominations; we should merely receive the believer himself. Afterward, we still need to advise him to leave the denominations.

If a man from the denominations is saved, we can receive him into the bread-breaking meeting. *But we cannot receive him to preach.* If anyone is not clear concerning the truth of the church, we can have fellowship with him only in life, but not in the work. Since he still has fellowship with the denominations, we do not know what he would speak if we allowed him to preach. Therefore, with many people, we can only have fellowship in life; we cannot be co-workers with them. This was the principle of the apostle Paul.

Romans 16:17 says, “Now I exhort you, brothers, to mark those who

make divisions and causes of stumbling contrary to the teaching which you have learned, and turn away from them." We should not listen to those who are here purposely to criticize us; we should turn away from them. In the future, when some brothers are raised up from the assembly to serve as elders, they can inform the other brothers as to whom they should turn away from and whom they should not turn away from. The other brothers should then obey the elders.

Question: Suppose I go to Sinkiang and suddenly discover a bread-breaking meeting that does not belong to any denomination. Should I start breaking bread with them, or should I first send a cable to Shanghai to get the approval before breaking bread with them?

Answer: There is good reason for doing the latter; it means that one respects the opinion of the brothers. At the same time, it shows how seriously you treat the matter. Sometimes, before you go to another place, you can first seek for the consensus of the brothers. The brothers may give you the liberty to join any bread-breaking meeting which is permissible to join. You can then break bread with them. As to the sending of a cable, it can be done if it is for the sake of informing the brothers or for understanding the brothers' mind. But it is unnecessary if it is done as a means of seeking approval. To understand the mind of the brothers is an act of the Body.

Question: Suppose I go to Sinkiang and realize that there is a bread-breaking meeting there which is related to the denominations, and I break bread with them. Later, when the assembly in Shanghai finds this out, how should it deal with me? Should I be punished or warned?

Answer: This is not just a hypothetical question you may face in Sinkiang; it is a problem we face right here in Shanghai. Let me ask you: For what purpose do you come to break bread here? If this table does not represent the Lord's table, and if you break bread just because others are breaking bread and remember the Lord just because others are remembering the Lord, what good will this bread do you? This does not mean that you can break bread with us only after you have stopped breaking bread with others. The question is how you view our table. If you do not think that this table is the Lord's Table, why come to break bread with us? If you have found that this is the Lord's Table, why look for

another table? If anyone wants to do this, I must tell him that there is no such command in the Bible.

If anyone wants to break bread with us, yet at the same time, partake of the Holy Communion in the denominations, we cannot excommunicate him. But we should deal with this kind of person by exhorting him. If he would not listen to our exhortation, we have to act according to Titus 3:10, “A factious man, after a first and second admonition, refuse.” Second Thessalonians 3:6 says, “Now we charge you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother walking disorderly and not according to the things which were handed down to you and which you received from us.” We should leave these factious people outside our fellowship and not communicate with them, so that they will feel that they are isolated Christians. Of course, some are not this way intentionally; they behave this way because they lack knowledge. In such a case, it is altogether a different story.

Question: Sometimes I live in Shanghai and sometimes in Suchow. When the brothers in Suchow want me to do something for them, they consider me a brother in Suchow. Otherwise, they consider me a brother from Shanghai. Should I be considered as a brother from Shanghai or from Suchow?

Answer: Since you return to Suchow every year during the holidays and you feel that you should bear more responsibility for the meeting in Suchow, perhaps it is right for you to be considered as a brother in Suchow. Since you are in Suchow often, the brothers in Shanghai cannot consult with you about things concerning the assembly in Shanghai. I think you should consider yourself as a brother in Suchow. At present, the assembly in Suchow needs some responsible ones very much.

As to whether a brother should belong to this place or that place, we can say only that it depends on how long this brother stays in each place. Whatever place he stays in longer is the place he should belong to. Additionally, there are questions related to the boundary of the assembly. Concerning this last question, we will cover it in the next Monday night meeting.

Question: We know that when we receive a person, we have to ask him four questions: (1) Is he saved? (2) Does he have the obvious sins in 1

Corinthians 5? (3) Is he willing to be responsible to the meeting? (4) Is he willing to fellowship with the brothers? If a person is saved and does not have any obvious sins that forbid him from partaking of the bread, yet he does not want to be responsible to the meeting or fellowship with the brothers, and instead wants to control us, what should we do?

Answer: Please notice that the first and second points are our conditions for receiving a person to the Lord's table. The third and fourth points are for discerning the Body. If such a person does not discern the Body, he is eating judgment to himself. All who serve as elders in an assembly should be clear about this. Furthermore, there are two aspects to discerning the Body. First, we have to discern that this Body is the Body of the Lord Jesus and that when we break bread, we are eating and drinking for the remembrance of the Lord. Second, we have to discern this Body as the whole Body of Christ. When we gather together on the Lord's Day evening to break bread, we should realize not only that the ones who are breaking bread together are the Body of Christ, but that all those who are redeemed by the precious blood of the Lord are the Body of Christ. If a Japanese comes to our midst and breaks bread with us, we should acknowledge him as our dear brother just like all other brothers. If the British in Tibet start a war with China, and an English brother comes into our midst to break bread with us, we should regard him as our dear brother. We should not care for the distinction that exists between men but only for our relationship in the Body of Christ. If one who does not discern the Body comes to break bread with us, we can ask whether he is willing to discern the Body. Is he willing to be responsible to the church for all his actions? If he is not, we will not reject him from partaking of the bread, because he is saved. However, we have to let him know that if he does not discern the Body, he is eating judgment to himself and that it will be to his loss.

Question: Will one die if he eats judgment to himself?

Answer: Yes, he may. If a meeting is holy, and if it knows how to exercise God's authority, such things can happen. Why is the breaking of bread so important? When one recognizes the Body of Christ and acknowledges that he is a part of this Body yet does not discern it, he is making a false testimony and putting God to shame. Moreover, the testimony of the bread is made before angels, demons, and all the principalities and

powers. Therefore, if one makes a false testimony, it is a great shame to God. God will bear with ignorant ones. But to those who sin willingly, who acknowledge yet make false testimonies, He will send forth His punishment.

Question: In a certain place, one brother has incurred a serious illness. He once committed the sin of reviling. Is his illness a punishment from God?

Answer: Yes, it is.

Question: If a brother is sick, must he ask the elders to anoint him with oil before he can be healed?

Answer: There are a few reasons why believers become sick. Some illnesses are caused by carelessness in the natural realm. Some are caused by attacks from Satan. Some are the result of being detached from the Body of Christ. If a believer is sick because of being detached from the Body of Christ and because he is not holding the Head and standing in the proper position in the Body of Christ, he should first understand how he has become detached before he asks the elders to anoint him with oil. The meaning of anointing with oil is to return to the proper position in the Body of Christ *through the Holy Spirit.* We all know that we are members in the Body of Christ. Just as a member in our body receives the circulation of blood and the life of our body, so the members of the Body of Christ receive the circulation of Christ's life and His blood. This is typified by the ointment which flows from Aaron's head to his whole body. As long as the members are standing in their proper positions, the ointment will flow to them; they will receive the protection of the ointment, and their sickness will be gone. All those who take the proper standing in the Body of Christ are under the anointing of the Head. The ointment is on Christ the Head, but it flows from the Head to us. When we have the ointment, we have health. Where there is ointment, there is life. Believers are sick because they fail and because they have become detached and separated from the Body of Christ. When this happens, the life and ointment of Christ will not be able to flow to them.

The book of James says that if anyone among us is sick, he can ask the elders of the church to anoint him with oil (5:14). It says to ask the elders to do the anointing. The gifted ones are useless because the elders

represent the church, the Body of Christ. The anointing of the oil signifies the restoring of the sick believer back to the anointing of the Head. If you can bring a person back to the anointing of the Head, his sickness will be healed.

Question: If that is the case, can a person who represents the church go to the sick brother and anoint him? Will this heal the sick brother?

Answer: Yes, this can be done. But before the anointing is applied, there must first be the confession of sins and prayers. James says that we have to confess our sins to one another. The reason there is the need for confession is that the mutual relationship in the Body has been severed. There is the need of confession in order to remove the sin of detachment and return to the original position. If the detachment remains, it is useless even if there is the anointing. Therefore, one must first remove the detachment and thoroughly confess his criticisms of and offenses with the brothers. Before they can anoint others with oil, even the elders have to confess their sins to one another in order to remove any detachments and blockages and return to the proper relationship in the Body of Christ. Only then will the oil of Christ the Head flow onto the members.

Question: What kind of oil should we use for the anointing, and where should we apply the oil?

Answer: The best kind of oil is olive oil. But if one does not have olive oil, he can use any kind of oil. The oil should be applied to the head.

Question: How should one deal with a believer who has disturbed the meeting and been stopped by the elders but does not listen, but who has not committed the sins of 1 Corinthians 5?

Answer: We should inform the brothers to stay away from him. The elders are those who are particularly charged to bear spiritual responsibility. If there are such people in a locality, the elders should be responsible to deal with them in their prayers. We have to know that it is a serious thing to deal with a brother in prayer. If a few responsible brothers would deal with such matters in one accord and in a sober way, many tragic, serious, and dangerous things can happen because God will use His appointed authority to judge. This is not a question of being good at prayer or not. When trouble arose in Corinth, Paul rebuked them for

not being able to deal with the situation. This is why the elders have to be careful and deal with matters properly. If moral corruption in the flesh is not dealt with, such flesh will be destroyed. This will result in terrible consequences. Therefore, we have to learn to be obedient persons so that our flesh will be morally restrained and so that we will not cause any trouble.

Question: What does it mean to meet by standing on the ground of the church? How can we know that our meeting is standing on the ground of the church?

Answer: If you go to a new place and find an assembly in which baptism, the breaking of bread, the way of meeting, the place given to woman, and the appointment of elders and deacons are all done according to the Bible and which is the same as we are, you must not rashly join their table and their fellowship. I have to clarify one thing here: Concerning the matter of the breaking of bread and the fellowship, we are, at the same time, very open and very closed. We are open because all of God's children, as long as they are not disqualified from fellowship according to the Scripture, are received by us if they *come,* irrespective of what denominations they come from. We are closed because we cannot *go to others* for fellowship or the breaking of bread, as long as they are not standing on the ground of the church, no matter how scriptural in form their meeting may be.

If you find an assembly which is very scriptural in form and looks the same as we do, you must not presume that everything is the same and that we can join them. There is one *very* crucial question, which is whether or not the meeting is standing on the ground of the church. Before this question is properly answered, you cannot *go to them* and join them in the breaking of bread. The reason we do not go to the denominations to join them in the bread breaking is that they are not standing on the ground of the church. Their bread cannot represent the whole Body of Christ but merely their own denominations.

What does it mean to be "standing on the ground of the church"? Two things are very crucial.

(1) One must not be a sect. What is the difference between a sect and the church? The church includes all the believers, while a sect only

includes a part of all the believers. A sect erects walls within the church and divides itself from the rest of those who belong to the church. A sect is not standing on the ground of the church, because it bears a name which is not shared by the whole church. It emphasizes special truths which the whole church does not necessarily emphasize, and it has a fellowship (with its members) which is not shared by the whole church. In order to stand on the ground of the church, an assembly must not have a name that is different from the general name of the church; it must not have any special truths or special membership.

(2) In order to stand on the ground of the church, one must live out the Body. If you come across a certain group which does not have a name, creed, or membership and which meets and practices other matters according to the Scripture and is the same as we are, you must still ask (even though it is not a sect) whether it is living out the Body life. Not every group that is not a sect is standing on the ground of the church. If a group is not a sect on the negative side, it does not necessarily follow that it knows the Body of Christ and the church of God on the positive side.

You must see whether an assembly can bear the responsibility of being the local church in that locality. If there are small meetings of similar nature in its locality, does this assembly strive to join itself to them to become the local church in that locality? Does it deal with them, teach them, and help them to realize the nature of a local church? Or does it ignore the issue and allow the situation to remain loose, disqualifying any of the meetings from becoming a representation of the local church? If there are independent free preachers in that locality who do not belong to any denominations, does this assembly take the initiative to guide and deal with such ones, so that there will not be isolated workers in that locality? Or does this assembly care only for itself and adopt an attitude of unconcern toward other workers? Is it trying its best to accommodate all of God’s children, or is it digging deep ditches and building walls around its own small community? If it does these things, it is not standing on the ground of the church and not trying to bear the responsibility of being the local church in that locality.

In addition, even if an assembly has taken the responsibility of being the local church in that locality, one must still investigate whether it has

adopted an attitude of “localism,” in which it cares only for its own locality. Does such an assembly recognize that the church of God is universal and that it has to fellowship with other local assemblies who are standing on the ground of the church? If it does not want to fellowship with other local assemblies and bear the responsibility of walking in the same footsteps as the others, it is still not standing on the ground of the church. An assembly that stands on the ground of the church should be responsible for representing the members of the Body of Christ in that locality. It should try to fellowship with other members of the Body of Christ in other localities. (For further explanation, see the main text in this chapter.) If an assembly does all these things, it is standing on the ground of the church.

I believe you know that in the Bible there were originally only local churches. Today the (outward) church has degraded and fallen into serious divisions. Since there are so many denominations in one locality, no one meeting can claim to be the local church in that locality anymore. Therefore, we can only say that we are merely an assembly that stands on the ground of the local church; we are not “the local church.” The reason we stand on the ground of the church is that so many of the existing denominational meetings are not standing on the ground of the church in that locality.

Question: If a table meeting is willing to receive all of God’s children, can we then say that such a meeting is standing on the ground of the church?

Answer: The first thing to settle is the meaning of standing on the ground of the church. We know that to stand on the ground of the church, one must not be a sect. Yet this is the negative aspect only. On the positive side, one must express the life of the Body of Christ. This means that one must not act independently, and *there must be the willingness to move together with all the brothers who are not in the sects.* Of course, we cannot take the same way as the brothers in the sects. Yet, even though the church is in ruins today, there are still those who desire to walk outside the sects and human organizations. We should take the same way together with those who are not in the sects. Only then can we say that we are standing on the ground of the church.

Strictly speaking, the expression “standing on the ground of the church”

applies only to today, a time when the church has become degraded. When the church really becomes one, without sects or human organizations, everyone will be standing on the ground of the church and expressing the life of the Body of Christ. But at present, the (outward) church is in ruins, and men have divided themselves into sects and walk according to human ways. Therefore, there is the need for a group of people who will not only be non-sectarian *but* who will also stand on the ground of the church to express the proper life of the Body on behalf of the whole church.

In many places today, there are believers who see the error of the sects but *who do not see* the Body of Christ. They think that as long as there are no sects, nothing could be better. They do not realize that being rid of the sects is only the negative aspect. Although the church has lost its outward oneness, those who have left this disunity must still walk according to the principle of the oneness of the church in everything. Therefore, even when a table is willing to receive all of God's children, we must still ask if its work, testimony, and fellowship are joined to all those who have left the sects. It must not have the concept that because others have become sects, those who are left behind and do not want to be in a sect can no longer be one like those in the early days when there were no sects. All those who are not in the sects should express the proper Body life of the church. If anyone thinks that he is not in a sect but does not want to cooperate in work and fellowship with others who are not in a sect but would rather act independently, he is not standing on the ground of the church even though he receives all of God's children. He still does not know what the Body of Christ is. As such, that table is still not the Lord's table, because that bread cannot represent all the believers. Since its work does not include all of God's children, and in particular, those children who are not in the sects, we cannot participate in that bread. God has not excused us from expressing the Body life just because other members have divisions among themselves.

If a denomination is willing to openly receive all of God's children, can we go and fellowship with it? Surely we cannot. If there are brothers who are not in a sect in one place who do not fellowship with those who are not in a sect in another place, they are the same as the denominations and not standing on the ground of the church. In reality, they are another sect,

and we cannot go and break bread with them. But this does not mean that we will not receive them when they come to us. It merely means that we cannot go to them.

CHAPTER THREE

How To Meet

There are several kinds of meetings, but we have to pay attention to two things with every meeting:

(1) *Come early.* Those who live upstairs in the meeting hall should not wait until the first hymn is sung downstairs before they come down for the meeting. Being late for a meeting is a very unkind thing because it means that others have to wait for you. First Corinthians 11:33 says, “So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.” Not many people practice this verse. Unfortunately, many do not come and wait for others; instead, they want the other brothers to wait for them. Sometimes we wait from 9:30 to 10:00, and some brothers still have not come. I will say a word especially to the brothers living in Wen-teh Lane. Those who live nearest to the meeting place are often the latest to arrive. Every one of us should try our best to be here early, so that others will not have to wait.

There are negative effects in coming late to the meetings. First, it causes a meeting to start late and end late. The sisters who bear the responsibility for their household are late in returning home, and this delays their cooking or care for their children. Second, during the bread-breaking meeting, another brother may have called a hymn already. Because you are late, you may come in and call the same hymn again, bringing in repetition. Third, sometimes the meeting begins before you arrive. When you come in late, you start the meeting all over again. This can happen four or five times in a meeting, with four or five different beginnings. Although we can learn to remember the Lord by following the leading of the Spirit and start the meeting for the remembrance of the Lord in different ways, sometimes with His suffering, sometimes with the forgiveness of sins, and sometimes with the Lord’s glory, a person who is late to the meeting will not know how the meeting has begun, and his prayer and hymn selection will not be in line with the meeting. Therefore,

it is better to come earlier and wait for a while in the meeting place. This is always better than coming late.

(2) *Stand up to speak.* For the bread-breaking meeting and other general meetings, it is better for the brothers to stand up to speak. According to Chinese custom, it is impolite for one to speak while sitting down. Moreover, one who speaks while sitting down cannot be loud, and it is difficult for others to hear him. In addition, his voice can easily conflict with the voices of other brothers. If you are sitting down with your head bowed and call a hymn, you cannot see if another brother has stood up to pray or call a hymn at the same time. At any rate, our ears are not as sharp as our eyes. If you stand up first, you can avoid the confusion of two people opening their mouths simultaneously. If two people open their mouths simultaneously, it is because both of them have not stood up before they opened their mouths. Therefore, we would like the brothers to remember that whenever they want to say something, whether it is praying or calling a hymn, they should first look with their eyes to see if anyone else has stood up before them. If no one has stood up, then it is all right for them to speak. Although these are small points, they are nevertheless things that the brothers should pay attention to.

The Bread-Breaking Meeting

The first point we should emphasize is that we are at the bread-breaking meeting to remember the Lord. Therefore, the Lord should be the center. It is unsuitable to offer prayers and supplications at the bread-breaking meeting. Of course, we can thank and praise the Lord through our prayers, but we should not remember our own needs during the bread-breaking meeting. The meeting on the Lord’s Day evening is purely for thanksgiving and praise.

According to the light of the Bible, there should be two sections to the bread-breaking meeting. Before the breaking of bread, we have the Lord Jesus before us; after the breaking of bread, we have the Father before us. Before the breaking of bread, the Lord leads us to remember Himself. Therefore, all thanksgiving and praise should have the Lord as the center; everything should be centered upon the Lord. Before the breaking of bread, we see the Lord Jesus as the only begotten Son; He is the only Son. After the breaking of bread, we see the Lord Jesus as the firstborn

Son; we have a share in the Son of God and have become God's many sons. Before the breaking of bread, the Lord Jesus is one grain of wheat; after the breaking of bread, He is the grain that has fallen to the ground and died and brought forth many grains. By discerning the Body of Christ, we see the Lord as the firstborn Son, as depicted in Hebrews 2. He is leading many sons into glory, and in the assembly He is leading them to sing praises to the Father. This is what is described in Hymn No. 183 in our *Little Flock Hymnal.* But this should not be legal; it does not mean that every time we meet we should act this way. If we are willing to learn and follow the Lord's leading, we will be very clear that this kind of spiritual guidance always leads us step by step, onward to the Father. The Lord Jesus first led the disciples to eat the Feast of the Passover. Then they sang a hymn and went to the Mount of Olives. The Songs of Ascents recorded in the Psalms (see the headings of some psalms) were songs the Israelites sang at the Feast of the Passover after they ate the Passover dinner. They sang these songs while they were ascending the stairs. Therefore, after we partake of the Lord's body, we should ascend to the mountain to praise God. We should allow the Lord to lead us and draw us to the Father. All of our hymns are hymns of ascent. Our hymns should climb higher and higher after the breaking of bread. This is not just the teaching of the book of Hebrews. The Lord's word, the teaching of the Psalms, and our experience all testify to this. After our salvation, we always thank the Lord first, then praise Him, and then worship God.

The second point of emphasis is on learning to follow whatever has begun in the bread-breaking meeting. We are remembering the Lord, but there are many different beginnings for this kind of meeting. Some beginnings emphasize the Lord's sufferings, others emphasize the Lord's glory, and still others emphasize what the Lord has passed through. We have to pay attention to the way a meeting begins and follow the same line. No hymn or prayer should come up with another line of emphasis, but they should strengthen and advance the existing line until the end. There should not be three or four beginnings. Furthermore, we should never seek for an opportunity to squeeze into the bread-breaking meeting the interesting passages that we have come across during our morning Bible study time or the hymns that we like to sing at other times. These are things that are related to us personally and should not be things that we do as brothers. We are not in the meeting to take care of our personal

relationship with the Lord but of the going on of the meeting in oneness. This is a precious thing. Therefore, the bread-breaking meeting tells us who the good brothers are. Do you care only for your own things, or do you care for the move of the meeting? Sometimes a meeting is about to end, and the thanksgivings and praises are adequate, but a brother suddenly stands up to pray or call another hymn. This becomes redundant.

In a meeting, you should cease from your personal activity and follow the move of the Body. If you are in a room by yourself, you can sing or pray at will. But in a meeting, you are not the only one who is present. Therefore, please do not bring feelings that are peculiarly your own into the meeting. Of course, all our thanksgivings and praises are personal; if they are not personal, they are not real and are a speaking before others only. However, even though the meetings are very personal, we should care for the feeling of the whole Body as well. This is why we have to follow a line of emphasis.

The same is true with our preaching at the bread-breaking meeting; we should have the Lord as the center. It is all right for a brother to read a passage of Scripture which leads others to the Lord or to remember the Lord. But there is no need to read other unrelated passages of Scripture. There is no meeting that is as important as the bread-breaking meeting. When we hear a message, we are merely listening to others speak about the Lord, and the goal is for our own benefit. But the bread-breaking meeting is the time when we meet the Lord and remember Him; it is a time reserved for the Lord Himself.

The Bible Study Meeting

The brothers and sisters in Shanghai used to have a Bible study meeting. We studied the books of Romans, Ephesians, and 1 John. Unfortunately, this meeting has stopped for a few months. This kind of Bible study meeting is not for only one person to speak; it is for the brothers to study the Word together before God. Some brothers may open up a passage, while the other brothers may speak some, discuss some, ask questions, or supply explanations for that particular passage. In this way, verse by verse, a passage is covered, and the whole chapter is read and studied. Unfortunately, because no brother was particularly willing to take up the

responsibility of the Bible study meeting, it stopped after a period of time. I feel that in the places where there is an assembly, it is a failure if we do not have a Bible study meeting. If there is to be a Bible study meeting, the brothers should be trained in this matter. The sisters should also do the same thing in the sisters' meeting according to the same principle.

There are no definite leaders in a Bible study meeting. Some brothers can read a passage, others can ask questions, while still others can answer or give interpretations. The principle of this meeting is that nothing is done for one's own benefit. No brother should involve his personal feelings in the meetings; they should all be left outside the door before entering the meeting. We have to take care of the expression of the Body life. This is true not only for the Bible study meeting but for all meetings. All the meetings are for the brothers. In the meetings, we are not expressing ourselves, and we should not wait passively for others to help us. In the meetings, we are here to *serve our brothers.* The Lord once said that the ones who are served are not great; rather, the ones who serve others are great. Every time we come to the meeting, we have to remember that we are here to be a servant to the brothers and sisters; we are here to serve the brothers and sisters and not just to listen to a message. Every time we come, we should consider ourselves as ones who serve and help the brothers. We should not have the proud thought that by doing this, we are greater and better than others. We do this because we ought to do this. Therefore, in this kind of meeting we should not wait for others to open their mouth. Perhaps we should open our mouth first to ask questions and show the other brothers something and then leave time for others to answer. In this way, everyone will be able to go on along the same line. If we realize that a question is adequately covered, we can go to another question. We have to remember that the purpose of these kinds of questions is not for taking care of ourselves or understanding something for ourselves. We should strive to make sure that the other brothers receive the benefit. Therefore, when we ask questions, we should not ask only questions that we want to ask and skip other questions that we already know the answers to. Although we may know many answers already, the new brothers may not know them. If we know the answers, we should ask on their behalf and express what they want to know in their hearts.

The message meeting is for helping strong Christians, while the Bible study meeting is *for helping weak believers.* In the message meetings, only those who can receive the message receive help; those who cannot receive the message do not receive help. The message meeting can be considered as being mostly for the knowledgeable or intelligent ones. (Of course, knowledge or wisdom depends on God, not on man.) Those who are foolish, illiterate, slow, or dull can receive only forty to fifty percent of what is released in the message meetings. The Bible study meeting is designed to help the weak believers. In the Bible study meeting you will realize how much your brother understands. You may think that some brothers ask unrelated or meaningless questions. You may think that they are dull. Actually, this is exactly what they need to know. Through their questions, you will learn what is affecting them or touching them. It may be a small thing to you, but to them it may be something great. It may be an insignificant thing to you, but to them it may be as great as a mountain. Therefore, do not think that the Bible study meeting is too shallow and of no help to you. You are there to help the meeting; you are there as a servant. Even the sisters, who do not open their mouths in the meeting, are there to help the meeting; they are there to serve the brothers and be the servants also. Perhaps your absence will become a loss for others. If everyone skips these meetings, the meetings will become small in number, and it will be a loss to the meeting. For you to come is to agree with this meeting and support the meeting.

I do not know if you realize that it is wrong for us not to help or serve the brothers and sisters. We care only for our own spiritual growth and do not want to help or serve the brothers; we do not care for the brothers' benefit or for the advancement of the meetings. The sisters should not think that they do not need to come anymore because they do not open their mouths and since they already understand the things being covered. Actually, their sitting in the meeting is a help to the meeting. Moreover, if some brothers feel that they know and understand a certain subject, they can ask questions on behalf of others and answer on behalf of others. They should not think that they understand the subject, considering it to be repetitious because they have heard it several times. I hope that the brothers and sisters learn to behave as brothers and sisters in the meetings and learn to behave as human beings among human beings. I hope that the brothers and sisters can have a common progress together.

Therefore, I expect to resume the Bible study meeting among us within a short time.

In the meeting, do not raise controversial questions. During the past year, in all of our meetings, we have made progress and seen God's blessing in many aspects. But one day I saw a dreadful situation: two brothers were arguing about something to the extent that both were flushed with anger. They did not know how to behave as brothers among the brothers. The apostle said that we should not be involved with doubtful disputations. This is a very important principle. If you insist on arguing, you are doing wrong to your brother; you are not helping your brother but merely insisting on your own ideas. If you prevail in your own ideas yet have not rendered help to your brother, what good does that do? Therefore, in any kind of meeting, all of our flesh must be restrained and all of our self must be put to death. It is easy to say this at other times, but our flesh encounters the greatest test in the meetings. At other times we may see the gentleness, love, and patience of a brother, but in the meetings we learn whether a brother is raw, sour, or sweet. Therefore, in the meetings we should try our best to drop doubtful things and not argue about them. Unfortunately, almost every brother thinks that his ideas should be accepted by others.

The only principle in the Bible study meeting is to drop the self. Being prideful or withdrawing in a meeting is an undesirable situation. Pride is looking at one's virtues; withdrawing is looking at one's own weakness and uselessness. If a person appreciates his own virtues, he will open his mouth often. If a person is conscious of his own weakness and uselessness, he will not open his mouth. Actually, it is equally bad to open one's mouth or close one's mouth. Where there is self, there is pride; where there is self, there is withdrawal. Both of these are the flesh and should be dropped. All questions should be for the Lord to receive the glory. As long as He has the glory, there should not be any problem.

The Gospel-Preaching Meeting

There is a big misconception among the brothers and sisters about the gospel-preaching meeting. I ask you to pardon me for bringing this up. Brothers often call and ask whether there is a gospel meeting in the morning or afternoon. What they mean is that if there is a gospel

meeting, they will not come, because they are saved. This is wrong. Whether or not it is a gospel meeting is not the question. The question is whether or not you should go to the meeting to strengthen the hand of the brothers so that the brothers will not have to fight alone. Helping the brothers and coming to the meeting are not for our personal gain. Please remember that even though there is not an exciting and new gospel for one to listen to in the meeting, the gospel that is preached every time is a glorious gospel. A saved person should never feel tired of hearing the gospel. As long as you are sitting in the meeting, you are helping and strengthening the hand of the preaching one. If you have never had the experience of preaching, you will not realize the importance of this matter. If you have ever preached before, you will realize the comfort of seeing a brother sitting there. Therefore, in the gospel meetings, we do not expect to hear exciting, new truths. You may be familiar and well acquainted with many truths, but your presence helps and strengthens your brother. You are rendering help to the meeting and working together with God.

Once I met a brother who asked me whether or not there would be a gospel meeting in the afternoon. I said, “Yes.” Immediately he said, “Ah!” That “ah” tells us a great deal. In the gospel meeting, the main thing is not to satisfy ourselves; it is not for us to receive the benefit. The main thing is for the brothers and sisters to receive the benefit and for the meeting to advance.

What is the expression on the faces of many brothers and sisters when they come to the gospel meeting? If there is some new truth concerning the gospel, their countenance is lifted up as they listen. But if there is nothing new, they may not say anything with their mouth, but they seem to be saying in their heart that they regret coming to the meeting, and their countenance is down. I am amazed that such a problem could exist in our gospel meeting. If it is God’s gospel, we should feel that it is new even after hearing it the hundredth time. It is precious every time we mention God and His salvation! We should forever praise the gospel story.

Some brothers and sisters never show any expression on their faces. They are quiet; they neither laugh nor smile, and they are always cool and quiet. This kind of attitude does not render any help to the preaching

brothers. On the contrary, it makes them feel very ill at ease. They do not know whether they have said something wrong to make the other brothers feel this way. If you have ever preached before, you will feel all these things. Many times, when brothers come to the meetings, they just sit and spread death. Even the expression on their faces makes the meeting cold. When you come to the meeting, it will not hurt if you say “amen” once in a while to show your sympathy. You may also nod your head or smile a little to indicate that you have received help from the word. If you do this, you are rendering the speaker some spiritual help. You will make him feel that the brothers are holding up his hands, keeping them from becoming tired, and that he is not standing alone. These are very important matters. The kind of attitude you have while sitting in the meeting directly affects the one who is speaking. Presently, the situation among us has much improved.

When some word from the preaching one touches you, it is most appropriate to say an “amen.” I will not object to an even louder response. It is not just human beings who are saying “amen” within the house; the angels are saying “amen” also. This is similar to what is described in Acts 2 when Peter stood up to preach. I like that portion of the Scripture because it not only shows Peter standing to preach to the crowd; it also shows the eleven apostles standing with him. Even though only Peter opened his mouth, the eleven stood with him and were one with him. Therefore, in the gospel meeting, it is not a question of whether one lives a good personal life but whether his meeting life is proper. Please remember that we should not consider whether we have received anything or whether we are good or bad. If our meeting life is proper, our personal life will also be proper.

The Prayer Meeting

The number attending our prayer meeting is not very many. Of course, we have to do our best to forgive the brothers and sisters. Some live far away, and some are busy with other things. We can forgive them for not coming. But if we want to accomplish anything, and if we want to have the maximum power, the prayer meeting is where we can receive considerable help. The prayer meeting is the best test of our spiritual power. I hope that many brothers and sisters would attend this meeting and have the burden to pray.

The first thing we should take care of in the prayer meeting is to be punctual. The meeting life is a help to the spiritual life of a Christian; it is also an expression of the Body life of a Christian. If we do not pay attention to the meetings and do not care for the corporate life, we will surely fail.

In the prayer meeting, the things that are in need of prayer should be explained in simple and short words. One should not say too many words. This has been a failure of ours in the past. Every time we want to bring up a matter for prayer, we should ask ourselves whether or not we have prayed over the same matter at home. If we have not prayed over the matter at home, there is no need to bring it up in the meeting and deceive the brothers. If you have never prayed for something in your home, the need is not there, and there is no value in praying over it. This is a principle and even a law. Anything that has not been prayed over by you does not need to be prayed over at all. If you have prayed over a matter, yet feel inadequate when praying over it alone, it is worth mentioning in the prayer meeting; it is then a meaningful subject for prayer.

The prayers that God answers the most are the prayers that are offered at the prayer meetings. The prayers that God ignores the most are also the prayers that are offered at the prayer meetings. God often hears the prayers of individuals. As to the prayers in the prayer meeting, God hears them to a small degree as well as to a great degree. Men often use words in the prayer meeting which they do not use in their own room. They express sentiments which they do not express in their own room. One often does not have much to say or many things to cover. But when he comes to the prayer meeting, these words and things come. This is quite inappropriate. Anything that he does not have a burden to pray about in his room should not be brought up in the prayer meeting. All burdenless prayers are unnecessary prayers. All burdenless prayers are prayers that God never answers. If a prayer touches you, it touches God. If a prayer is accompanied by a burden within you, there is certainly a burden with God. If there is oneness and burden in our prayer during the prayer meeting, the power is surely greater than that of our individual prayers. Otherwise, there is no need for public prayer. All prayers that are unhindered, in oneness, and without barriers are effective prayers. God

will surely listen to these prayers. This is why we call prayer a kind of work.

Prayers do not have to be long or numerous. We have to build a net in our prayers, but one person alone does not have to build the net. If you feel that something has not been covered in the prayers, you should privately ask God to raise up others to pray and cast the net. When I was in England, one brother told me one story about a prayer meeting. One brother was burdened to pray for many things. He felt that his prayer was too long and that he ought to stop. Yet he felt that there were still many things that he had not prayed for. If he stopped, he was afraid that no one would follow after him to pray. If he went on praying, he was afraid that he would take up too much time. Being considerate of others, he felt that he should allow some other brothers to pray. As a result, he prayed, “I have prayed too long by myself. Please raise up another one to continue with my prayer.” After he prayed, another person continued on with his prayer and uttered all the things that needed to be prayed about. Therefore, even if your mind is very strong, active, and sound, you should still ask God to raise up others to pray. God answers this prayer because He is a living God. In the prayer meeting, we should allow others to have a chance to pray. If we do this, there will be living prayers and prayers offered in one accord.

Sometimes God will use one of us to speak for the brothers and sisters. All those who are experienced in prayer know how difficult it is to find suitable utterance to express the needs. Although five or eight brothers pray for the same thing, the burden may not be released. Therefore, we have to ask the Lord to grant us the words to pray and express the thoughts in our burden. We should pray that God would raise up some to express His thoughts. Sometimes there can be as many as ten brothers praying for something, and all ten prayers can be good and up to standard, yet there is still the feeling that none of the prayers has hit the point, and the burden is not released. All of a sudden a brother may start praying and, as soon as he opens his mouth, the burden is released. Everyone feels right and says amen to it. This is a prayer in the Holy Spirit. In a prayer meeting, if no one expresses the inner need on behalf of everyone, that meeting is a failure. If we pray from 7:00 to 7:30 and successfully hit the point, we can go home; there is no need to go on

praying, because we have reached the goal. The utterance of the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit's expression of God's desire through man's prayer. Only this kind of prayer can be considered a thorough prayer.

In the prayer meeting, there should be some brothers who act as the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes five or six people may be praying for a certain matter, and they still cannot get through. But when someone opens his mouth, he touches the point. Then everyone feels that he has touched something real, and the blockage is gone. This is what we should pay attention to in the prayer meetings.

In 1926, I was seriously ill in Foochow. My whole body turned purple. Three brothers and a sister came to my room to pray for me. The first one prayed in tears, but I did not feel that he had hit the point. The second one also prayed earnestly for me, but I did not feel anything. The third one was supposedly famous for his prayers, but his prayer was still ineffective. The fourth one was the sister. When she opened her mouth, she said, "O God, no one can praise You in Hades. You have no pleasure in men praising You in Hades." Immediately I felt that something had broken through. I did not have to wait for the prayer to be finished before I felt that the sickness was gone. When the burden was lifted, I knew the sickness was gone. In the afternoon, I rose from my bed, and the next day I went to Ma-wei. From there I traveled to Amoy for my work. We have to ask God to use us to be a mouthpiece in the prayer meeting so that the burden and need of the brothers and sisters can be uttered through us with the language of the Holy Spirit.

Let me mention something concerning our last conference. Our conference was scheduled to begin on the Lord's Day, January 20. On Thursday evening, the seventeenth, we prayed during the prayer meeting for the needs of the conference. Many brothers did their best to pray for many things, and I did my best to say amen. Still there was a feeling that some kind of need or burden was not yet covered. Later one brother opened his mouth and said, "God, give us good weather which is not too cold, and do not let it snow or rain so that we can meet peaceably." Everyone there felt that his prayer received more amens than all the other prayers. The weather was not too good during those few days. The day when we had the prayer meeting, it was snowing. But by Friday, both the rain and snow stopped. It did not start raining again until the

Thursday after the conference. During the whole period of the conference, there was no rain. Furthermore, in Wen-teh Lane, where we were meeting, another household was having a funeral. The Saturday before the conference began, the funeral ceremony was creating considerable noise and commotion. Yet the next day, it stopped. When the conference ended, the noise of chanting and music began again. If that had happened during the conference, we would not have been able to meet peaceably.

In the prayer meeting, there is the need for someone to be the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit. If someone can be the mouthpiece, all problems will be gone. Our problem is that we do not know the needs. But God knows. Therefore, every brother and sister should strive to be the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit. Whenever the prayers are thorough, the burden is released, and we know that there is no further need to pray.

The Brothers' Meeting And The Sisters' Meeting

Since Shanghai is so large, the brothers and sisters are all scattered, and there is little fellowship between them. Therefore, there is a special need for the brothers' meeting and the sisters' meeting. Every Saturday afternoon at 4:30, we have the sisters' meeting. In the evening at 7:30, we have the brothers' meeting. During this kind of meeting, the emphasis is on mutual fellowship and on discussing ordinary affairs. We may talk about how the brothers ought to behave as brothers, and we may also cover something related to the meetings. In these meetings, we bring up problems of brothers and sisters who are out-of-town, problems of those who are unemployed, and other needs of the brothers and sisters, spiritual or material. This is very important. Through these meetings, we can avoid many mistakes and make many corrections. We cannot be individual believers before God; we have to learn to bear the responsibility of other brothers and sisters. A pew member in the denominations can remain a member for twenty years without knowing anyone. Some can be a pew member for five years without acknowledging anyone even once. Many people are only concerned about their personal salvation; they are concerned only about their Christian life and do not care for the other brothers and sisters. They do not care for the corporate life. But God has not made a heaven for each one of us and put us into our own heaven. Rather, He has put us in a

corporate body so that we can help one another and fellowship with one another.

Many poor brothers dare not go into the houses of rich brothers. Many rich brothers do not like to go to the houses of poor brothers. In the world, there are distinctions between the rich and the poor, and in a family, there are distinctions between the master and the servants. But in the meeting, these distinctions should be removed. All differences in our position in the flesh should go through the cross. This is what the cross has done. We should not bring to the meeting what the cross has removed and put in the grave. The cross has not only removed the middle wall of partition between Jews and Greeks, barbarians and cultured ones, but it has also removed the separating wall between slaves and free men. In other words, all classes, ideologies, and systems that exist in society should be removed. In the family, there is a distinction between the master and the servants. But in the church there is no such distinction. If a brother is the servant of another brother, he is, of course, a servant at home and should be obedient to his master in everything. The brother who is the master should, of course, be a master at home. But in the brothers' meeting or the bread-breaking meeting, there is no distinction between master and servant. Both sides should avoid going to extremes. A servant should not think that just because he is a brother, he can tell others what to do at home. On the other hand, a master should not think that just because he is a brother, he should not rule over his servant in a proper way. In the family, there are differences of position. A Christian should still be a proper human being. For example, a father and a son may be Christians together. In the family, they are father and son. In the meeting, the son can call the father a brother. But in the family, the son cannot call his father a brother. Therefore, in the brothers' meeting, when brothers meet together, we should help the brothers understand that in the Lord there should be no question of being rich or poor, educated or uneducated, with status or without status. These distinctions should be removed. Therefore, the brothers and sisters should make an effort to come to the brothers' meeting and the sisters' meeting. These meetings are for fellowship, for helping the brothers and sisters solve their problems, and for living the corporate life. This is not a time for listening to sermons. Although there may be messages in these meetings, one does not meet for the sake of listening to messages. Otherwise, the meeting would be

disbanded if the speaker went to sleep. The danger with many revival campaigns is that as soon as the revivalist is gone, the people are gone. God's way is to save individuals and put them into the church so that they can be blended together and help each other.

Since this is a matter of practice, I have to say a few words that may not be so nice to some. First, there should be more communication between the brothers not only for mutual care but for mutual oversight. Some matters should, of course, be handled individually. But with other matters, there is a need for us to know our brothers' problems. Suppose a brother has lost his job. We should find out how he lost his job and the reason for it. If it was a proper and honest layoff, we should bring this matter up in the brothers' meeting and help the brother according to the teaching of James 2. The main thing is to do something and not just to believe. It is useless to believe as the one in James 2. If a brother has lost his job through dishonesty, we should help this brother, exhort him, and deal with him. If he is truly unemployed, we should try to support him. Things like this cannot be brought up in the prayer meeting, the bread-breaking meeting, or the gospel meeting. We can bring them up only in the brothers' meeting. If there is anything that is related to personal reputation, which does not need to be announced in the brothers' meeting, then it should not be announced in the meeting.

It is wrong for us to be ignorant of the weaknesses and problems of the brothers, to not know whether a family has encountered difficulties, to be ignorant of the spiritual problems, needs, and sicknesses of others, and to fail to care for these ones. The denominations have hired pastors to do this work. But we do not have this class of people; every one of us has to take up this work. Poor brothers should not purposely try to avoid rich brothers, and rich brothers should not ignore the need of poor brothers. None of us can give up being a brother just because we do not want to communicate with certain ones. The brothers should express the assembly life through the communal life, and they should express the proper life of brothers. All those who do not see this are bound to fail, because this is what God wants us to do today.

QUESTIONS

Question: What does the meeting in 1 Corinthians 14 refer to?

Answer: The meeting in 1 Corinthians 14 is a meeting for the exercise of spiritual gifts. Our Saturday meeting is somewhat similar in nature to this kind of meeting. Today we do not have the kind of spiritual gifts that were present in the early days. We are merely meeting according to that principle.

Question: Hebrews 10 mentions not forsaking our assembling together. What kind of meeting does this refer to?

Answer: It refers to all kinds of meetings, including the brothers' and sisters' meetings.

Question: When should we break the bread during the bread-breaking meeting?

Answer: The breaking of bread is for the remembrance of the Lord. Therefore, we should break the bread as soon as possible. We do not have to always wait for Eutychus to fall down before breaking the bread. During the bread-breaking meeting, we should look for the high point of the meeting. Since everyone has different circumstances, family backgrounds, and environments and because everyone has different problems, failures, and weaknesses, bringing these things to the meetings is unavoidable. Therefore, concerning the bread-breaking meeting, some should begin the meeting by calling a hymn or by praying; this helps bring everyone out of their distractions and helps them forget about all the things that have happened during the past six days. The high point of the meeting is when someone prays and brings everyone up to a certain point, and everyone is released and says amen. That is the time to break the bread. We cannot break the bread immediately after we come together, because we are weak. It is common for us to bring our circumstances, family, and other things to the meeting, which frustrates our oneness. Therefore, we cannot break the bread immediately. There is a need for someone to bring us to a certain point, a climax, before we can break the bread. If we delay breaking the bread then, we will recede from that high point. Therefore, we have to take care to break the bread as soon as the high point is reached.

Question: Should offerings be made during the Lord's Day bread-breaking meeting?

Answer: It does not matter very much one way or the other. Of course, it is the Lord's commandment that we offer our money on the first day of the week. On the first day of the week, all the brothers and sisters, including all the workers, should offer. If they do not, they have disobeyed the Lord's command. Both the breaking of bread and the offering of money should be done on this day, but they do not have to be done in the same meeting.

Question: Should the bread-breaking meeting be in the morning, afternoon, or evening?

Answer: The teaching of the New Testament is that it should be in the evening. The Lord's supper should be eaten in the evening. Generally speaking, we eat breakfast quickly because we are in a hurry to go to work. Lunch is a meal eaten in the middle of our labor. This is why many people eat lunch at their place of work and do not go home for lunch. Only dinner is the family meal, in which the whole family gathers together to eat in peace and joy. For the sake of the brothers who are responsible for preaching, it is also better for the bread-breaking meeting to be in the evening. If the bread-breaking meeting is in the morning, those brothers will try to eat in a hurry because they have many burdens they have to release through their message. If we break bread in the evening, they can sit comfortably at the Lord's table.

Personally, I feel that it is better to break the bread in the evening, particularly in China. Of course, this will present some inconvenience to the sisters. In all the denominations in China, the services are conducted in the morning or afternoon. The members have developed the habit of attending services in the morning or afternoon. If our bread-breaking meeting is in the morning or afternoon, it is difficult to deal with these ones; if we allow them to partake of the bread, we are not sure whether they are saved. But if we do not allow them to partake of the bread, we may offend them. If we break the bread in the evening, there will not be such an inconvenience. If they come, they will find that there is no message. Moreover, the distance it takes to come to the meeting is great, and it will be late by the time they return home. As a result, they will not come. This is why we say that the bread-breaking meeting in Shanghai is best conducted in the evening.

Question: When we break the bread, do we have to lift the cup to bless it as it says in 1 Corinthians 11?

Answer: The matter of lifting the cup is a Catholic tradition. Catholic priests claim to bless the cup on behalf of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, when they lift up the cup, they speak in place of the Lord: “This is My body, which is broken for you. This is My blood, which is shed for you.” Some Protestant denominations such as the Anglican Church, Presbyterian Church, and Methodist Church also do the same thing. Our present practice tells us that we cannot bless on behalf of the Lord. We believe that the Lord is among us and that He is still blessing the cup. When we bless, we are merely speaking on behalf of the brothers and sisters to the Lord: “Thank You, Lord.” We believe that this is scriptural (1 Cor. 10:16). If any brother stands on behalf of the Lord Jesus, this usurps the Lord’s position too much. The brothers among us merely serve as the spokesmen of the other brothers, thanking and praising the Lord this way. Since this is the case, there is no need to lift up the bread and the cup. Any brother who is in fellowship with us and who is not hindered by any evil, can stand up and give thanks for the bread on behalf of the other brothers.

Question: Should we stand up, sit down, or kneel down when we pray? If we do not kneel down when we pray, does this mean that we are being disrespectful?

Answer: There are many different ways to pray. The reason we do not kneel down is that the place is too small and would present a problem if we all knelt down. Moreover, the Bible never tells us whether we should pray by sitting down, kneeling down, or standing up. The Bible does not consider it disrespectful to pray without kneeling down, and it does not consider kneeling as the sole condition for praying. The worshippers of Buddha in China are the only ones who have to kneel down when they worship. The Bible records the Ephesian believers sending Paul off by kneeling to pray at the seashore. However, in Matthew, the Lord teaches men to pray by shutting their doors (6:6); He did not say to kneel down. The Bible often mentions praying by covering up one’s face, and a few times it mentions praying by sitting before the Lord. The Bible also mentions praying by lifting up one’s hands. For example, Moses lifted up his hands on the mountain. In fact, the Bible often mentions praying with

uplifted hands. Lifting up one's hands is a sign of beseeching God. Therefore, when one lifts up his hands, it means he is invoking God's attention. This is why Paul told Timothy to "pray in every place, lifting up holy hands" (1 Tim. 2:8). One can pray in every place. But it is not easy to pray in every place by kneeling down. It is not difficult to lift up one's hands in prayer. But it is impossible to kneel down everywhere because, in some places, one cannot kneel down. Personally, I think this matter should be left to each person's own conscience. If a brother feels in his conscience that he should pray by kneeling down, he should do so. But there is no need to consider kneeling as a law.

Question: Can we forbid "outside" brothers from preaching at will in our meetings?

Answer: We should pray and ask God to stop the disenchanted ones in the denominations from coming into our midst. We are not for numbers. We should deal seriously with this matter so that the disenchanted ones in the denominations will not come and express anything in our meetings.

Question: Who should prepare the bread for the bread-breaking meeting?

Answer: According to the Bible, the preparation of the bread should be done by the deacons. There is no difference between a deacon and a deaconess; either a deacon or a deaconess can prepare the bread.

Question: Should the bread and the cup used in the bread-breaking meeting be covered with a piece of cloth, and should the table also be covered with a tablecloth?

*Answer:*The practice of covering the cup and the bread with a piece of cloth is a Catholic tradition. The Catholics think that if they do not cover them, they will not be holy. But according to 1 Corinthians 11, it is wrong to cover them. The breaking of bread is a display of the Lord's death; it is for *exhibiting* the Lord's death, and it is a testimony. Why then should it be covered? As to the tablecloth, there is complete liberty as to what one wants to do. If the table is not too clean, it is all right to cover it with a tablecloth.

Question: If it is a biblical teaching for the sisters to cover their head, why do we not practice kissing each other with a holy kiss since the latter is

also a biblical command?

Answer: The Bible says that we should kiss each other with a holy kiss (1 Cor. 16:20); it does not charge believers to merely kiss each other. The command of the Bible is that if anyone greets another with a kiss, the kiss should be holy. God's command is that when we kiss, we have to be holy. He has not charged us merely to kiss. Neither have the apostles charged everyone to kiss. Kissing can very easily become unholy; therefore, there is the charge to kiss with a holy kiss. If anyone were to ask me whether we should kiss, I would say we should. But the Bible also tells us that if we kiss, we have to be holy. The emphasis of this command is to be holy and not just to kiss. If one kisses, he should be holy. Provided we are holy, I believe it is right for us to practice this biblical command—to kiss each other.

As to the sisters covering their heads, there are many benefits to the practice. In the meetings, the sisters should have the sign of submission to authority for the sake of the angels (11:10). In the original language, the word *authority* in 1 Corinthians 11:10 refers to a positional authority. It is a positional authority because Satan was also an angel. The first sin of Satan was his "self"; that was the cause of his fall. When his self was expressed, he overturned God's authority and rebelled against God. The most amazing thing in the universe is authority. We must see that God works through authority. He upholds the universe with His word. The name of Christ is authority. God has placed Satan under His own authority, yet Satan overturned this authority. The great dragon mentioned in Revelation is the old serpent; he dragged along with him one third of the stars of heaven (12:4). This means that Satan led one third of the angels in heaven to rebel against God and overturn God's sovereign rule. This is known throughout the universe. This is the story of the first introduction of sin into the universe.

How did sin come into the world the second time? It came in through Eve. God created Eve and ordained that Adam should be the head of Eve. Paul said in 1 Timothy that it was not Adam who was deceived, but Eve (2:14). Therefore, the sin in the garden of Eden was the same sin that Satan committed. This sin came in when the woman rebelled against Adam, the head, and did something before she was approved by Adam. Therefore, sin comes from insubordination to authority; sin is

lawlessness.

Because both Satan and Eve fell this way, God ordained that there should be a sign on the head of the woman as a symbol of submission for the sake of the angels. This is a testimony before the angels, showing the angels that we will not do what Eve did at the beginning. Of course, many sisters cannot take this. This is the greatest test to the sisters. If the flesh is willing to be judged, everything is all right. Today, we will mention the head covering only in relationship to authority. There are other aspects of head covering which we will not cover today. In the garden of Eden, the woman refused to remain in her position. Today in the church, our sisters should be faithful to remain in their own position.

Question: Should we tell the sisters who have cut their hair to cover their head?

Answer: These minor questions are a great test to our conscience. First, we should exhort the sisters who want to cut their hair to keep their hair. If they intend to cut it, we do not have to advise them to cover their head anymore because they have clearly given up the glory which God gives to them. There are two coverings for the sisters: One is a natural covering, and the other is a symbolic covering. If a woman gives up her natural covering, the symbolic covering will be completely useless to her. The symbol on the head must be put on willingly.

Question: When a brother prays or preaches on the street, should he take off his hat?

Answer: According to my personal experience, every time I pray, I take off my hat. I feel that if I do not take off my hat, I am shaming my head. But this does not mean that God will not hear us if our brothers pray with their heads covered and our sisters pray with their heads uncovered. Our prayer and prophesying are particularly related to the angels and the spiritual realm. Therefore, personally, I feel that the brothers should not cover their head. Even when we are preaching to someone on the street, it is related to the spiritual realm; as such, it is not that proper to keep our hat on.

Question: What is the difference between preaching and prophesying?

Answer: All those who can preach edifying messages may not be

prophets. A prophet is able not only to edify others, but also to foretell. A prophet is able not only to declare God's will, but also to foretell.

Question: What should we do with the bread and grape juice after the bread-breaking meeting?

Answer: They can be consumed by one or two brothers, or they can be burned in the fire.

Question: In breaking the bread, should we break some off from the whole piece, or can we eat from the crumbs on the plate?

Answer: Both are all right; there is no difference between the two. They are all from the same piece of bread.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Boundary Of The Local Assembly

Tonight we will discuss the mutual relationship between the meeting in Gordon Lane and that in Wen-teh Lane. In other words, we will speak on the boundary of the local church or the extent of the border of the local church. Before we speak on this matter, there are a few things which we need to explain to the brothers from out of town. Our Bible study, at this moment, is designed especially for the local brothers. Therefore, many of the things that are covered are local in nature. However, we welcome the out-of-town brothers to come and listen.

I have mentioned three to five times already that the authority of the elders is for the local assembly. In other words, the elders are for the local assembly. Position is a matter related to the local church, and office is also a matter related to the local church. One can be an elder in Shanghai, but he cannot automatically be an elder when he goes to Nanking or Peking. A person who serves as an elder in the assembly in Shanghai cannot go to the assembly in Peking and assume the same eldership. God's gifts are for the whole church, while His offices are for the local churches. Hence, there is no such thing as a super elder who can control an out-of-town church. An elder can oversee only the church in his own locality.

The Boundary Of The Assembly

The Bible study tonight is on the boundary of the assembly, and it is limited to the local assembly only. We hope that God will show us this truth. Because we are afraid of careless misunderstandings or forgetfulness, we will repeat once again what we have mentioned: gifts are for the whole church, while offices are for the local churches.

What is the extent of a local church? How big of an area constitutes the sphere of a local church? We would draw the brothers' and sisters' attention to the fact that in the Bible, the church is never divided into regions. The Bible never groups a few churches together under a regional organization. Although there were seven churches in Asia, we do not see the Bible appointing Ephesus or Philadelphia to rule over the other six churches. We only see *seven* churches, with *seven*lampstands. These seven lampstands represent the seven churches (Rev. 1:12, 20). In the Old Testament, one lampstand was divided into seven branches. In the New Testament, there are seven lampstands, not one lampstand with seven branches. This means that the seven different churches are shining *by themselves* and each one is responsible to Christ *by itself.* Every church is governed by Christ alone and is not under the control of any other church. In administration, every lampstand is independent and not under the control of any other lampstand. Every one of them is responsible to the Son of Man alone, who walks in the midst of the seven lampstands. They are responsible only to their High Priest. No church is responsible to another church. Although they are seven churches, they have not joined themselves to become one united church, and they are not responsible to some higher synod or convention. Each one of them is a so-called congregation, an assembly whose boundary is the locality. The Bible takes the city or the smallest administrative unit as the boundary of a local church. A local church is the basic unit of the church in the Bible. No local church is joined to another church or regards another bigger church as the central church. In other words, in God's eyes, Rome has never been appointed to be the central church. God has never acknowledged one place as the center of all churches, with that place ruling over and controlling all the other assemblies. According to God's organization, there is no center on earth. Jerusalem was not the central church at that time.

This does not mean that there are no regions in the Bible. Some places have similar conditions and needs, and they are treated according to the same principle. In Acts 19 Paul “passed through the upper districts” (v. 1). In Romans 15 Paul said that he traveled “from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum” (v. 19). These places belong to one region. Galatia was not an individual city but a province. This is why the Bible mentions “the churches of Galatia” (Gal. 1:2). Revelation mentions “the seven churches which are in Asia” (1:4). Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea were all in the region of Asia. Asia was a region, and Galatia was a province. We have to be clear that even though the needs and testimony of these local assemblies are peculiarly similar, no church possessed a higher organization or authority over the other local churches. The Bible never shows us that any local assembly possesses a higher authority than another assembly. Some have thought that Jerusalem was a mother church. Actually, there is no such thing. Every local assembly is local in its administration and responsible to Christ alone; it is not responsible to any other institution or assembly. Putting it another way, a local church is the only organization in that locality. To put it still another way, a local church is the highest organization and institution on earth; nothing is lower than it on earth, and nothing is higher. There is no court above the local church to which one can appeal. The highest organization is the local assembly. The smallest unit is also the local assembly. The Bible does not tell us of a center like Rome, which controlled everything of the churches, because Christ wants to retain His headship in heaven. Every local church should maintain the testimony of the Body and express the Body of Christ in a miniature way. However, every local church should be directly responsible to Christ and not to other churches. This means every local church should only be regulated by Christ and not be controlled by any other institutions or churches.

God dislikes the fact that man can be misled to think that there must be centers on earth. Therefore, He put Jerusalem aside and made Antioch the place from which the apostles set off for their work (Acts 13). It was not Jerusalem. This avoided the misunderstanding that the church in Jerusalem was the mother church, the headquarters church, and that all the other churches were subordinate churches and branch churches. Two hundred years ago the Brethren almost took London as their

headquarters. This is a mistake. Therefore, brothers, please do not consider the assembly in Shanghai as the mother church or the headquarters. Our assemblies in the different localities are directly bound by Christ and are not controlled by any other assemblies.

The truth that I am speaking of tonight balances the truth that was mentioned last Saturday evening. Last Saturday night we mentioned the Body life and the relationship between an assembly and other assemblies. God will never tell one assembly to do something and another assembly not to do the same thing. The way God leads one assembly is the way He leads other assemblies. We saw that the Gentile churches should imitate the churches in Judea. We also saw that, according to God's ordination, no church of God should act independently; rather it should pay attention to the move of the Body and seek for mutual harmony. Any person that one assembly excommunicates should be excommunicated by other assemblies. Today we are speaking on the responsibility of a local church; its responsibility is to God alone and not to any other local assembly. What we covered on Saturday shows us the strictness of the bondage and restrictions between one assembly and other assemblies; no assembly can act independently or make its own proposals. If an assembly acts independently or makes free proposals, these acts and moves are not of God. At the same time, we must see that every church is directly responsible to the Head for what it does. We can easily become biased. This is why we must maintain the balance in the truth.

Sometimes, we may act like the Roman Catholic Church. When Rome makes a decision to do one thing, all the Roman Catholics in every place have to obey. This is not being balanced in the truth. On the one hand, we should be bound by other assemblies so that we have the same footsteps and are the same as far as the truth goes. On the other hand, every assembly should be directly responsible to the Head for what it does. Every local church is responsible to God. Every church mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3, like the church in Ephesus, the church in Smyrna, and the church in Pergamos, etc., had its own golden lampstand. Each stood on its own stand, not on another stand. Every one of them kept their own position and was responsible to God. The Lord both rebuked and praised Ephesus. He did not lay the blame of Ephesus on Pergamos,

nor did He credit the virtue of Ephesus to Smyrna. No church can take the responsibility of another church, and no church can stand on the merit of another church. All the churches are responsible to the Lord directly and are bound by the Lord. At the same time, the Bible says, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says *to the churches”* (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). This is the balance in the truth. On the one hand, the Bible says that the words are spoken to the messenger of the church in Ephesus. But at the end of the speaking, it says that the words are for all the churches. At the beginning it says that the words are for the messengers of the church in Ephesus, the church in Smyrna, the church in Pergamos, etc., but at the end it says that every church should hear what God says to the other churches. The *Holy Spirit* is speaking to all the churches. This is why he who has an ear should hear. This proves that what is kept by one church should be kept by all the churches. The responsibility each church bears in a locality is before God alone, yet all the churches should have the same common move. Consequently, the epistle was written to Ephesus, but the words were for all the churches. This is the balance in the truth.

In the Bible God has ordained that the smallest unit of the church on the earth is the local assembly. The highest institution is also the local assembly. The local church is the ultimate and minimal organization. Every local church is a miniature to express the universal church. Nothing is bigger than the local church, and nothing is smaller than the local church. We should firmly grasp this truth. We should pursue and take care that what we do in the assembly in Shanghai, our move and footsteps, is the same as the move and footsteps of all the assemblies in China. Not only should we pursue having the same move and footsteps as all the assemblies in China, but we should also pursue having the same move and footsteps as all the assemblies in the world. At the same time, what we do in the assembly in Shanghai and whether we are right or wrong is something for which we are directly responsible to God. We are not directed by any higher institution above Shanghai. In the assembly in Shanghai, no authority is higher than the authority of the elders. This is the boundary that God has set. Within each city, there can be a few elders. But these elders can oversee only the assembly in that city; they cannot oversee the assembly in another city. God’s boundary is based on the fact that elders are appointed in every city. This is why the

authority of an elder cannot extend beyond the boundary of the city. The local churches as depicted in the Bible are local in their administration. I hope that the brothers and sisters maintain these two aspects in a balanced way. On the one hand, we maintain a sameness with the other assemblies. On the other hand, each local assembly bears a direct responsibility to God.

The Boundary Of A Local Church

I would like you to pay attention to the fact that in the New Testament, the boundary of the local church is the city in which that church is located. Hence, the maximum reach of a local church is the city; *no* boundary can be larger than the city. In the Bible we cannot find a church that rules over one province or county. The Bible shows us that the city is the boundary of the church. In the beginning the city was the community where men aggregated. We should remember that in the complicated situation of our modern life, there are many towns and villages. At the beginning, when families bound themselves together and set up protection, there were cities (Gen. 4:17). Due to various reasons, men began to dwell in cities. In the first half of the book of Genesis, we see no unit smaller than the city. By the time of Joshua, men still lived in cities. Of course, by then, there were neighboring villages. When the Lord Jesus sent the disciples to preach the gospel, He charged them to go into the cities and villages (Matt. 10:11). This is because a city or a village is the smallest unit of human habitation in the Bible.

The scriptural boundary of a local church is the boundary of a city. Ephesus, Corinth, and Thessalonica were all cities. The boundary of a local church cannot be larger than a city. Asia was a big area, and it had *seven* churches. Galatia was a region, and it had *churches.* Corinth was one city, and therefore, the Bible mentions the whole church coming together *in one place* (1 Cor. 14:23). The church in Corinth was one church. All the other local churches mentioned in the Bible had the city as their boundary. This is God’s wise way to preserve the believers from much confusion. If God were to make the nation the boundary of the church, such a boundary would be changing all the time because nations often fall. If a nation fell, the boundary of the church would be changed. If God made a province the boundary of the church, the provincial boundaries would change often also. If the boundary of a province

changed, the boundary of a church would have to change as well. Would this not cause some problems? This is why God has not made a province the unit of the church, nor has He made a nation or other political units the boundary of the church. Dynasties, nations, and provinces all change easily. God has made the city or village the boundary of the church because the names and boundaries of these places do not change easily. National boundaries constantly change, and the names of provinces constantly change. But the boundaries and names of cities and villages are least likely to change with political shifts. They are least affected by political changes; we can almost say that they are never affected by political changes. In many instances, a village was called by a certain name a few hundred years ago, and it is still called by the same name today. Many cities change hands from one nation to another, yet the cities themselves remain the same. The city (and to a greater extent the village) is the most stable unit politically. This is why God ordained the city to be the boundary of a local church.

There are advantages to God making the city the unit of a local church, separating the churches by the cities, and not establishing higher, supervisory institutions above the cities. If one local church becomes sinful or has failed, the sin and failure will not affect other churches. If God placed seven or eight churches under the rule of a few people, as soon as one or two of these few people fell, the seven or eight churches would fall as well. If God had established a headquarters in Asia to rule over the seven churches, as soon as the headquarters failed, the seven churches would have failed also. The seven churches in Asia were directly responsible to the Lord. Although five of them failed and fell, Smyrna and Philadelphia, who served as God’s remnant, did not fail. God did this in order to avoid such danger. It protects weak and good churches from infiltration by sin and improper things.

The Determination Of Boundary By The City

The concept of the city was not originally in the Bible. In the beginning God created the garden of Eden, but it was not a city. In the end God will gain the New Jerusalem—a city. Hence, the concept of a city came in after man’s fall. Before man fell, everything, including the tree of life and all the fruits, was in the garden of Eden. The living water flowed out of the garden of Eden. After man fell, God’s work was changed from a garden

to a city. A garden does not seem to have a boundary; there is no protection. God made the city for the purpose of protection, so that there were city walls for its boundary and it could be separated from other things. This separation keeps sin out. Not only does God care for the city today, in the millennium His concern will be only for the city. In the future, some will rule over five cities, while others will rule over ten cities. Not only will God care for the city in the millennium, but He will care for the city even in the new heaven and new earth. Then there will be the New Jerusalem. God exalts the city because a city has a boundary which separates it from other places. This distinction has less likelihood of confusion, and it is easy to manage.

Although we have said that the church sometimes takes a village as its boundary, a village is a miniature city in reality. God's concept is still the city. When there are a few believers meeting in a city, that meeting becomes the local church in that locality. Another church from another city cannot come and interfere with this meeting. The boundary of the church in a city is the boundary of the city. The boundary of a local church is determined by the political boundary of the city. God has not left the decision of the boundary of a local church to the brothers or the elders. The responsibility of the church is to follow the division of the government and to take the political boundary as the boundary of the church. The sphere of a local church is as big as the political boundary of the city. There are big cities and small cities. A city as big as Nineveh took three days to circle once (Jonah 3:3). But a city like Jerusalem is only six miles in radius. Bethany is a place which does not belong to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is next to Bethany (John 11:18). Jerusalem is a city; it has its boundary. Bethany is a village; it also has its boundary. This is the way the Bible distinguishes the churches—according to the political boundary. Although some places are big and some places are small, the church cannot mark its boundary according to its own idea; it must mark it according to the political division. God has not given the church the liberty to have its own way. God uses the boundary established by the government. This is the basis that the church should accept today. There is no need to have another way.

The Way To Subdivide Meetings Within A City

We have seen that the Bible takes a city or a village as the unit for an

assembly. In Shanghai, we now have a meeting in Wen-teh Lane and another in Gordon Lane. What is the relationship between these two meetings? This is the question we have to study tonight. But we have to set this question aside for the moment and consider how the Bible divides the believers when the number meeting in a city becomes too large. At Pentecost, three thousand and then five thousand people were saved in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41; 4:4). The number was large. Jerusalem was different from Corinth. There were not many saved ones in Corinth. First Corinthians 14 mentions the whole church coming together. This means that its number was small and could come together. The church in Jerusalem could not have the whole church come together. If the whole church were to come together, they would have three thousand plus five thousand plus many other saved ones. The number was too large, and they would not have an adequate facility. Hence, we see that in Jerusalem, although the believers were together, they broke bread in the homes. There is a slight difference between the assembly in Corinth and the assembly in Jerusalem. The number meeting in the city of Corinth was small, and the believers could come together in one place. The number meeting in the city of Jerusalem was large, and the believers could not meet in one place; they could only meet from house to house. Hence, when the number in a local assembly becomes large, the one assembly can have meetings in many “homes.” This is what is shown in Acts 2:46.

A church can have meetings in various “homes,” but there is still just one church. Suppose there were a few dozen meetings in the city of Jerusalem. Was there one church in Jerusalem, or were there a few dozen churches? The biblical answer is “one church” because God has made the city the sphere of the church. The unit of the church is the city. In the city of Jerusalem, there was only one church. Although there were a few dozen places where the church met, the administration of the church in Jerusalem was the same among all the dozens of places. They had the same elders and deacons. An elder in the church in Jerusalem could serve as an elder in one home or in another home. He was an elder in all the meetings in Jerusalem. But he could not go to Samaria to be an elder, because the church takes the city as its boundary. This is the situation of our meetings here in Shanghai.

Politically speaking, as long as the ceded territories in the city of Shanghai exist, including the French Concession, the British Concession, and the Chinese territory, these could be considered as three cities because the three areas were under three different sets of laws. But now that all these concessions have been reclaimed, the whole of Shanghai is one city again. Although there are still different police authorities in the former French Concession and the Common Concession, legally speaking there is no further distinction. The whole city of Shanghai is now considered as one city. As such, there is only one church. Hence, the meetings in Wen-teh Lane and Gordon Lane belong to one church; there is only one table, not two tables.

When the number meeting in a place becomes large, the meetings can be held in several places. Some brothers and sisters may ask how large the number has to be before they should subdivide. What are the limitations? I have mentioned the story of the Lord distributing the loaves to the brothers. Before the Lord distributed the loaves to the four thousand and the five thousand, He ordered the disciples to divide the crowd into fifty a row or one hundred a row. After that He had the disciples distribute the loaves (Mark 6:40). According to my personal view, we all are the Lord's flock. In order to feed the Lord's flock, it is easier if we divide the sheep into fifty or one hundred per group. There are a few additional advantages to this kind of subdivision.

First, the apostles at that time did not have the money to build big meeting halls. They could only practice according to the principle of meeting in the homes, though they might not have divided into fifty a group or one hundred a group. To subdivide themselves in this way would not pose any problem as far as the place of meeting was concerned. We would rather not have a great central place of meeting and would rather meet separately in groups of fifty and one hundred.

Second, if a few thousand or a few hundred people gathered together in one place, we would not have much time to break the bread at the bread-breaking meeting on the Lord's Day evening, and there would not be a large enough cup or bread. This shows us clearly that, at the beginning of the church age, saved ones were not breaking bread in one place. Sometimes when we have two or three hundred people breaking the bread together, we have to wait for one or two hours before we can have

the bread. Some can wait, but others may not be able to wait that long. This is not a question of whether or not we should wait. It is a question of some not having the energy to wait for that long.

Third, if two or three hundred people gathered together in one place, some brothers would find it difficult to come to the meeting because of the limitation of time. If all the brothers tried to know one another, they could communicate with only one or two brothers each time. If they wanted to have more opportunity to know each other and communicate with each other, they could do it only once every few months. If that was the case, the meeting would not be able to advance. If there are only fifty or a hundred meeting in a place, it is easy for the people to communicate with each other and for the meeting to go on. It is also easy to care for the members, and the care will be adequate. If the number is too large, it is difficult to care for one another, and there is the danger of negligence. This is why we should maintain this principle.

It is for this reason that we started another meeting in Gordon Lane. The reason for starting that meeting is based on this ground. Please remember that the meeting in Gordon Lane and the meeting in Wen-teh Lane are not two churches but one church with one fellowship. We are merely subdivided into two “home” meetings. The responsible ones in Wen-teh Lane and the responsible ones in Gordon Lane are the same group of people. The serving brothers here and the serving brothers there are the same brothers. If a brother meeting in Shanghai wants to go to the meeting in Nanking, he has to have a letter of recommendation. But if he goes from the meeting in Wen-teh Lane to the meeting in Gordon Lane or vice versa, there is no need for a letter of recommendation. We hope that in the near future, there will be another meeting in Bao-shan. Bao-shan is in a different county than the county that Shanghai is in. If some brother goes to the meeting in Bao-shan, he must have a letter of recommendation because Bao-shan is another city, and the church administration in that city belongs to another unit. This situation is different than the meetings in Wen-teh Lane and Gordon Lane, which are only one unit. The offering from these two places is distributed by the same group of people, and all affairs are considered to be under one unit. The ones received by either place are approved by the same brothers and announced in both places.

The Boundary Of The Meetings In Gordon Lane And Wen-Teh Lane

How should we designate the boundary line between the meetings in Gordon Lane and Wen-teh Lane? Which brothers and sisters should go to the meeting in Wen-teh Lane? And which brothers and sisters should belong to the meeting in Gordon Lane? The responsible brothers among us who serve as the elders have discussed this and have made the decision to make the Soochow River the boundary line. All the brothers and sisters who reside to the north of the Soochow River should meet in Gordon Lane, and all the brothers and sisters who reside to the south of the Soochow River should meet in Wen-teh Lane. This designation does not mean that the brothers and sisters residing to the north of the Soochow River cannot meet in Wen-teh Lane or that the brothers and sisters residing to the south of the Soochow River cannot meet in Gordon Lane. It means that those residing to the north of the Soochow River should consider the meeting in Gordon Lane their meeting, and they should bear special responsibility and have special care for that meeting. Those who reside to the south of the Soochow River should consider the meeting in Wen-teh Lane their meeting, and they should bear special responsibility and have special care for that meeting. Therefore, we hope that the brothers and sisters residing to the north of the Soochow River will meet separately from the brothers and sisters residing to the south of the Soochow River. We hope that in the future, there will be meetings in the French Concession, Yang-shu-pu, and Kiang-wan also. Then we hope that the ones who are serving as elders will survey the land and decide who should break bread in each place. Presently, we have only two meeting places, and the Soochow River is the boundary. We should conduct our practice in an orderly way according to this principle.

The Boundary Beyond The City

As to the boundary line between the city and the suburb of the city, we have not yet delved into this subject. But let us consider Joshua 21:3: “And the children of Israel gave unto the Levites out of their inheritance, at the commandment of the Lord, these cities and their suburbs.” This verse mentions the city and the suburbs of the city. Deuteronomy 28:3 says, “Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field.” This verse mentions the city and the field. According to the Old Testament, every city has its suburbs, and every city has its fields. These

suburbs and fields surround the city and sustain the city. The vegetables and staples of the city come from the suburbs and fields around it. The city cannot survive by itself. That is why there are four gates at the four sides of the city. The Bible also shows us that each city should bear the responsibility of its suburbs and fields. Therefore, the church in a city should be responsible not only for the city but for its suburbs and fields. Whether it is gospel preaching or any other kind of work, the church in the city should care for the need of the suburbs and fields around the city. The suburbs and the fields are there to support the city and increase the number of those meeting in the city. In other words, those in the church in the city should care for those living in the suburbs of the city. If anyone is saved in the suburbs, he cannot meet in the suburbs but should be brought to the meeting in the city and should support the meeting in the city so that the meeting in the city can become bigger, stronger, more prosperous, and more developed. Among us, there are brothers from Kiang-wan. Kiang-wan is like a suburb. When they come to our meeting, they are supporting the assembly in Shanghai. I am merely giving you an example. At the beginning, the assembly in the city is the center. By the time the number from the suburbs becomes large, these ones have learned to meet. When they are strong enough to set up another meeting, they may become a “home” meeting and may start meeting in the suburbs. Before that, they should come to the city for their meeting and support the meeting in the center.

The Boundary Between One Assembly And Another

At times, there are problems between two assemblies concerning their boundaries. Some people may live close to the border of two assemblies. Who should meet in Bao-shan, and who should meet in Kiang-wan? Who should meet in Wen-teh Lane, and who should meet in Gordon Lane? Who should make the decision regarding these things? We should decide according to the principle in Deuteronomy 21:2-3 and 6 concerning the slain. “Then your elders and judges shall go out and measure the distance to the cities that surround the slain man. And the city that is nearest to the slain man, that is, the elders of that city, shall take a heifer of the herd which has not been worked and has not drawn the yoke....and all the elders of that city that is nearest the slain man shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the river

valley.” The elders of the city have to come forth to measure and find out which city is closest. The responsibility will then fall on the closest city. Hence, the boundary of the assemblies is very simple. If there are clear political marks, we can mark the boundaries clearly. If there are no clear political boundaries, the elders should measure and decide to which assembly a certain area should belong. In this way, everything will become clear. Those brothers who live close to one assembly should meet with that assembly, and everyone should submit to authority in a proper way.

The Restriction Of Subdividing One Assembly Into Two Local Meetings

When can one assembly be subdivided into two “home” meetings? It must wait until the number becomes large before subdividing into two meetings. Moreover, after the subdivision, both meetings must remain strong. It is better to have a hundred, or at least fifty or seventy-five, in each meeting after the subdivision.

We want to mention the brothers’ request for a meeting in Bao-shan. At present, the brothers in Bao-shan are an outgrowth of the meeting in Gordon Lane. These brothers wrote to the brothers in Gordon Lane and wanted to start another meeting in Bao-shan and break the bread there. What should they do in order to be scriptural? They should not merely realize that it is scriptural for brothers to meet together, but they should make sure that they have the leading of the Holy Spirit and consider the condition of their meeting. They should take care of the meeting in Gordon Lane. First, they have to consider the number meeting in Gordon Lane and see whether that number is becoming too large for everyone to meet together and whether the time is ripe for them to subdivide. If the meeting in Gordon Lane is a weak meeting, a subdivision will further weaken the situation and make it even more difficult to go on. Second, we should not think that we can set up the Lord’s table recklessly just because we want to break bread and remember the Lord in a place. Actually, the minute we set up the Lord’s table in a place, the question of the church immediately comes up, and we have to bear the responsibility of the church. Can these brothers deal with the problem of receiving and excommunicating people? Can they be responsible to take up other burdens? Therefore, we have to pray much concerning this matter before

we can have the proper answer.

Suppose it is time for the brothers in Bao-shan to start their meeting. What are the procedures? They should inform the assembly in Shanghai (both the meeting in Wen-teh Lane and the meeting in Gordon Lane) and tell it of their intention to start a meeting. Those brothers who intend to meet in Bao-shan should pray much, and the brothers in Shanghai should also pray much. If in their prayer, both sides feel with one accord that this can be done, the brothers in Bao-shan can then have their own meeting, and they will have the blessing and the laying on of hands of the brothers. This shows that the brothers in Bao-shan have received the approval of all the brothers and are not acting according to their own will. This is like bees multiplying their hives into smaller colonies. This kind of move is done in a happy way because it is done through much prayer and much fellowship with the brothers. This way is the way of the laying on of hands; it is not the way of an independent move. I have to add a few words. Even though we may meet separately in this way, it does not mean that Shanghai does not need a meeting place that is bigger than what it now has. In Shanghai we still need a meeting place that can hold five hundred or more because every year people come to our conferences from everywhere.

QUESTIONS

Question: In Taichow someone asked about the matter of the laying on of hands. Should we practice the laying on of hands today?

Answer: There is such a thing as the laying on of hands in the Bible. But it is not the so-called laying on of hands (or ordination) that men know of today. Today it is always those who are greater who lay hands on those who are smaller. But in the Bible, we find both the greater ones laying hands on the smaller ones, and the smaller ones laying hands on the greater ones. Acts 8 mentions Peter and John going to Samaria. They laid hands as the greater upon the smaller. But Acts 13 tells us that the teachers and prophets laid hands on the apostles. This is clearly a case of the smaller ones laying hands on the greater ones. In the church in Antioch we see some prophets and teachers. While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit told them that they should send Barnabas and Saul out for the work which He had called them to do.

They laid hands on the two and sent them out. We know that Paul and Barnabas were apostles, but the prophets and the teachers were the ones who laid hands on them. Ephesians 4 clearly puts the apostles first and the prophets and teachers second (v. 11). Acts 13 shows us that the ones who were second laid hands on the ones who were first. This shows that the laying on of hands is not an act of the greater upon the smaller, as some have imagined. In the Bible, the laying on of hands merely signifies fellowship, sympathy, and mutual union. The laying on of hands in Acts 8 indicates that the Samaritans were joined to the Body of Christ in the same way that baptism signifies one's union with the death of Christ. The laying on of hands in Acts 13 signifies that the church was joined to, sympathetic with, and in fellowship with Paul and his companion. Their going was the whole church's going. This laying on of hands shows that it was not just Paul and Barnabas who went on their missionary journey, but the whole church in Antioch went with them. It shows that their work and move were not just related to the two of them; they were related to the whole church in Antioch. The laying on of hands did not only signify their fellowship with those who laid hands on them; it also signified fellowship between the ones on whom the hands were laid and the whole church in Antioch. If any person goes out from us for some kind of work, it is best if he goes out after we lay hands on him.

We should brush aside or wipe away the dust of human tradition from biblical teachings as dust is wiped away from a mirror. Many people do not wipe away the dust. Instead, they think that the mirror is too dusty and break the mirror altogether. Many people think that talking about elders, deacons, and the laying on of hands will make us the same as the denominations. Actually, the original thing was not wrong; what was added later is wrong. Our goal is not to destroy the work of the denominations but to recover what God has ordained in the beginning. We cannot throw away the examples in the Bible just because all the other things are wrong. Our aim is to ask whether God has commanded something. When I go out to work, many times I wish that the brothers would lay hands on me. This shows that I am not going out alone but being sent by the whole assembly, and the whole assembly is sympathetic to what I am doing. I hope those who serve as elders among us would practice the laying on of hands in the future.

Question: Paul imparted gifts to Timothy through the laying on of hands (2 Tim. 1:6). Does this not mean that gifts come from the laying on of hands?

Answer: What is a gift? It is the capacity of a member in the Body. In other words, if you are an eye in the Body, your gift is your capacity to see. If you are an ear in the Body, your gift is your capacity to hear. When a man is joined to the Body of Christ, he immediately receives a gift. The laying on of hands by the apostles is their acknowledgment of a person as being a member of the Body of Christ on behalf of the Body of Christ. It pleases God to manifest man's gift after such an act. Acts 13 also signifies a union with the Body of Christ. In Acts 13 the laying on of hands was not to manifest a gift but to express that they were all co-workers together. There was never a case in which prophets and teachers imparted gifts to the apostles. As to the miraculous gifts in the Bible, they should be present with us and should not be something of the past. I do not understand why there are no miraculous gifts today. The practice of the laying on of hands should not stop with us. Paul told Timothy that he should not lay hands on others quickly lest he partake of their sins (1 Tim. 5:22). Hebrews 6 tells us that we do not have to lay a foundation again. Such a foundation includes baptism and the laying on of hands (vv. 1-2). Hence, if we neglect the matter of the laying on of hands, we must have erred in the foundational matters. Of course, we cannot impart gifts by our laying on of hands as it was practiced in the days of the apostles; today we are merely practicing the principle. We admit that we are like the church in Philadelphia; we do not have much strength. All we have is a little strength (Rev. 3:8).

Question: At present, we have two meetings. How should the responsibility and work be distributed between the two meetings?

Answer: In the meetings in Gordon Lane and Wen-teh Lane, we should have two or three elders take charge of everything. There should also be a few deacons or deaconesses in the meeting in Gordon Lane, just as there are some in Wen-teh Lane. We mentioned the work in the brothers' meeting last Saturday. We will have prayer meetings in Gordon Lane the same way that we have prayer meetings here. For the sake of the work in the future, we hope that the brothers meeting in Gordon Lane can rent a larger place. If we want to start any work there, the present rented place

is too small. In the future, we may separate the Lord's Day morning and afternoon meeting. We may meet in Gordon Lane in the morning and in Wen-teh Lane in the afternoon. We may even have the two places take turns holding the brothers' meeting and the sisters' meeting. Perhaps we will have them in one place one week and in another place another week. Otherwise, some will think that the meeting in Gordon Lane is the branch church of the meeting in Wen-teh Lane. Some have asked me if the meeting in Gordon Lane is a branch of the meeting in Wen-teh Lane. I told them it is not. The meeting in Wen-teh Lane is the same as the meeting in Gordon Lane.

Question: Should we not say "the meeting *in* Gordon Lane" and "the meeting *in* Wen-teh Lane" instead of saying "the Gordon Lane meeting" and "the Wen-teh Lane meeting"?

Answer: Yes, we should.

Question: If in the future we decide to start a meeting in Bao-shan, should we inform all the other brothers?

Answer: We should inform both meetings. First we should inform the meeting in Gordon Lane. Then we should inform the meeting in Wen-teh Lane. We should ask the brothers and sisters in both meetings to pray for this matter until they have the full assurance after their prayer. Then the brothers in Bao-shan can be given a definite answer. This is the best and most proper way.

Question: Concerning the matter of receiving others for the bread-breaking meeting, if the brothers in Gordon Lane are not clear about receiving a brother, can they ask the brothers meeting in Wen-teh Lane about this?

Answer: The elders in both places are the same group of elders. Therefore, Wen-teh Lane does not have anything more than what Gordon Lane has. When we receive a person, the "elders" in Shanghai, together with all the brothers, receive such a one; there is no difference whether the person is received in Wen-teh Lane or Gordon Lane. Concerning the matter of receiving a person, we have to practice it in a proper way in the future. Romans 14:1 says, "Now him who is weak in faith receive," and 15:7 says, "Therefore receive one another, as Christ

also received you to the glory of God.” Receiving is only part of the procedure. The question is whether or not a man has the faith. We ask whether a person has faith; we do not ask whether his faith is strong or weak. Moreover, the question is whether or not God has received him. Therefore, we have to be clear whether God has received such a one. If God has not received him, we cannot receive him either.

CONCERNING RECEIVING

Concerning the matter of receiving, I have to mention a few things.

Those Recommended by Letters from Another Locality

Those from another locality who come with a letter of recommendation should be received by us. But we have to know from where the letter of recommendation came. If it is a letter of recommendation from the denominations, we will not know whether he is clear about the truth and whether he is saved. Hence, those who are recommended by places that we do not know cannot be received by us based on a letter. But if it is a letter written by an assembly such as the one in Hangchow, we can trust in such a recommendation and receive the recommended person. We should trust that what Hangchow does is the same as what we do.

Those Recommended by the Testimony of Two or Three

If two or three brothers testify for and recommend a certain brother to the bread-breaking meeting, we can receive this one. There is a problem among us today of how to receive transient visitors. They pass by us on their way to other places and intend to break bread only once with us. This is difficult to handle. There are also members of some denominations who break bread with us but return to the denominations to break bread there. This is also difficult to handle. In my opinion, it is best to have two or three brothers talk with these ones immediately to check whether they are saved and then decide whether we will receive them for the bread. We cannot ask these people to wait until the next week before we answer them. They are not like those who intend to have long-term fellowship with us, whom we can ask to wait a little.

Three Kinds of Letters of Recommendation

The letters of recommendation which we send out should be of three

kinds: (1) those that recommend a brother as one who has not left the denominations yet; (2) those that recommend a brother as one who is standing on the ground of the church; and (3) those that recommend a brother as one who has some gifts.

A Few Things One Should Know in Recommending Someone to Break Bread

(1) We should ask whether such a one is saved or not. (2) We should know whether he commits the sins worthy of excommunication as recorded in 1 Corinthians 5. (3) We should show him that the breaking of bread is not only for the remembrance of the Lord, but for the discerning of the Body of Christ and for taking a stand in the Body of Christ. The first two matters are the conditions; a man must be saved and must be clean. The third is the teaching; a person must be able to discern the Body of Christ and must take the stand of the Body of Christ. If he does not discern such things, in God's eyes he eats judgment for his sins to himself (1 Cor. 11:29). If he does this, the breaking of bread will not be of much benefit to him.

If a man is saved and has not committed the sins of 1 Corinthians 5 but does not see the truth about discerning the Body, we must still receive him because we have to receive those who are weak in the faith. I think we have not been faithful to those who visit us from the denominations. We have not told them the importance before God of discerning the Body. We should show them this point. However, if we make the discerning of the Body a condition for receiving a person, we become a sect. This is why we have to be careful. However, we should not forget the teaching of Titus 3:10.

Questions

Question: After a person is saved, does he have to wait until he is baptized before he can break the bread?

Answer: It is best for a saved person to be baptized before taking the bread. In the Bible, there is no such thing as believing first and then waiting for a long time before being baptized; believing and baptism are always linked together. There is no such thing as putting a man aside for a few months after he is saved and then baptizing such a one. Such a

practice is not found in the New Testament. But we should not make baptism a condition for partaking of the bread. Some have only been sprinkled and do not know that baptism is a testimony. We should still receive them for the bread-breaking meeting. Those from the Salvation Army do not believe in baptism at all, and none of them are baptized. The Quakers, particularly those who are in China, do not have baptism and bread-breaking at all. There are other smaller denominations which believe the same way as the Quakers. If these people come to us, we should receive them. Since God has received them, we should receive them also. We should receive those who are weak in faith. We can receive them because they belong to God. We cannot make baptism a condition for receiving a person; we can only consider baptism a teaching. Neither should we excommunicate those who are not baptized. When a person sees the cross, he will spontaneously be baptized and obey this truth.

*Question:*The meetings in Gordon Lane and Wen-teh Lane are actually one assembly and are one. In receiving a visitor, should one meeting inform the other of such?

Answer: If it can be done practically, one should inform the other concerning the receiving of a visitor. But if it cannot be done practically, there is no need to inform the other meeting. If anyone wants to remain with us for a long time, those who serve as elders in either meeting should stand on the ground of the church and discuss the matter properly before making a decision. This is why the announcements made in the prayer meeting in Gordon Lane should also be made in the prayer meeting in Wen-teh Lane and vice versa so that there can be prayers in one accord. I hope that the meeting in Gordon Lane can install a telephone. When this happens, it will be easier to discuss matters between the two places.

AUTHORITY AND SUBMISSION

PART ONE

AUTHORITY AND SUBMISSION

CHAPTER ONE

The Importance Of Authority

Scripture Reading: Rom. 13:1-7; Heb. 1:3; Isa. 14:12-14; Matt. 6:13; 26:62-64

The Throne Of God Established Upon Authority

God's works issue from God's throne; God's throne is established upon authority. All things have been created by the authority of God, and all laws on earth are held together through authority. Hence, the Bible says that God upholds all things by the word, which is of His authority (Heb. 1:3b). It does not say that God upholds all things by His power. God's authority represents God Himself; God's power only represents God's works. It is easy to be forgiven of sin against God's power, but it is not that easy to be forgiven of sin against God's authority, because sinning against God's authority is sinning against God Himself. In the whole universe only God is authority. All other authorities are appointed by God. Nothing is greater than authority in the universe; nothing can surpass it. For this reason, if we want to serve God, we must know God's authority.

Satan's Beginning

Satan became Satan because he overstepped God's authority. He wanted to compete with God and to stand in opposition to God. Rebellion is the cause of the fall of Satan.

Both Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:13-17 speak of the transgression and the fall of Satan. Isaiah 14 tells us that Satan violated God's authority, while Ezekiel 28 tells us that he violated God's holiness. Violating God's authority is a matter of rebellion; it is more serious than violating God's holiness. Sin is a matter of conduct; it is easy to be forgiven of sin. But rebellion is a matter of principle; it is not easy to be forgiven of rebellion. Satan, in trying to set up his throne above that of God's, violated God's authority. The principle of Satan is the principle of self-exaltation. Sin's coming into being was not the cause of Satan's fall. Rather, Satan's rebellion against God's authority, for which he was condemned by God, subsequently gave rise to sin.

Hence, if we want to serve God, we can never violate the matter of authority. To do so is to follow the principle of Satan. We can never preach the word of Christ under the principle of Satan. There is a

possibility in God's work that we can stand in principle on Satan's side, while we stand in doctrine on Christ's side. All the while, we may think that we are still doing the Lord's work. This is a very evil thing. Satan is not afraid of us preaching the words of Christ. He is only afraid of us submitting to the authority of Christ. Our service to God can never be according to the principle of Satan. Once the principle of Christ comes, the principle of Satan has to go. Even now Satan is still a usurper in the air; he will not be cast out until the end of Revelation. Only when we wash ourselves spotlessly clean from the principle of Satan can we hope to serve God.

In the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 there is the phrase, "And do not bring us into temptation." Temptation speaks of Satan's work. There is also the phrase, "But deliver us from the evil one." This refers to Satan himself. Following this, the Lord said, "For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." This is the most important declaration. The kingdom is God's and so is the authority and the glory. Everything is God's. What sets us completely free from Satan is seeing this most precious thing—the kingdom is God's. The administration of the whole universe is under God. For this reason we have to learn to submit to God's authority. No one can steal God's glory.

Satan showed the Lord all the kingdoms of the earth, but the Lord said that all the kingdom of the heavens is God's. We need to see to whom authority ultimately belongs. When we preach the gospel we are bringing people under the authority of God. If we are to establish God's authority on earth, is it then possible for us not to meet authority ourselves? If we do not, how can we deal with Satan?

All Disputes In The Universe Being A Matter Of Authority

The center of dispute in the whole universe relates to who has the authority. We have to contend with Satan by asserting that authority is with God. We have to set ourselves to submit to God's authority and to uphold God's authority. We must meet God's authority face-to-face and have a basic realization of it.

Before Paul realized authority, he wanted to eradicate the church from the earth. But after he met the Lord on the way to Damascus, he realized that it was difficult to kick against the goads (God's authority) with his feet

(man’s energy). He immediately fell down, acknowledged Jesus as Lord, and submitted to the instruction of Ananias in Damascus. Paul met God’s authority. At his conversion, Paul was brought not only into a realization of God’s salvation, but also into a realization of God’s authority.

Paul was an intelligent and capable man, while Ananias was a very insignificant, small brother. The Bible refers to him only once. If Paul had not met God’s authority, how could he possibly have listened to the words of Ananias? Unless a man meets authority on the way to “Damascus,” he cannot submit to an insignificant, small brother in “Damascus.” This shows us that anyone who has met authority will deal with the authority alone; he will not deal with the person involved. We should only think of the authority, not of the person, because our submission is not to a person but to God’s authority in that person. If this is not our attitude, we do not know what authority is. If we deal with the person before submitting to authority, we are completely wrong. If we touch the matter of authority first and then submit to the person, irrespective of who he is, we are on the right path.

God has only one goal in the church, which is to manifest His authority in the universe. We can see God’s authority from the coordination in the church.

God exercises the utmost of His strength to uphold His authority. His authority is stronger than anything else. We who are so self-confident, but who are in reality so blind, have to come face-to-face at least once with God’s authority. Only when we are broken can we come into submission. Then we will begin to learn what God’s authority is. Only when a man meets God’s authority will he submit to the deputy authority whom God appoints.

The Greatest Demand In The Bible Being Submission To God’s Will

The greatest demand God has on man is not bearing the cross, offerings, consecration, or self-sacrifice. God’s greatest demand on man is submission. God commanded Saul to smite the Amalekites and utterly destroy all that they had (1 Sam. 15:1-3). But after Saul overcame the Amalekites, he spared Agag the king of Amalek. He also appreciated the best sheep, the best oxen, and all that was good and refused to destroy them, hoping instead to offer them as sacrifices to God (vv. 7-9, 14-15).

But Samuel said to him, “To obey is better than sacrifice,/And to heed, than the fat of rams” (v. 22). The sacrifice spoken of here is the burnt offering; it has nothing to do with sin. It is for God’s acceptance and satisfaction. However, Samuel said that to heed and to obey are better than sacrifice. This is because even in this kind of sacrifice there was the possibility of a mixture with the self-will. Only in heeding and obeying is there an absolute honoring of God and an exaltation of His will.

Obedience is the other end of authority. In order to have obedience, one must first keep the self out of the picture. One must not try to obey with the self. There the possibility of obedience only by living in the spirit. Obedience is the highest expression of response to God’s will.

The Lord’s Prayer In The Garden Of Gethsemane

Some have considered the Lord’s prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, where His sweat fell as blood, as a sign of His weakness in the flesh and His fear of the cup (Luke 22:44). But this is not true. The prayer in Gethsemane is the same in principle as what is recorded in 1 Samuel 15:22. The Lord’s prayer in Gethsemane is the highest expression of submission to God’s authority. Our Lord’s submission to God’s authority far exceeds His sacrifice on the cross. He earnestly sought to know God’s will. He did not say, “I will take the cross” or “I must drink the cup.” He only heeded and obeyed. He said, “If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me” (Matt. 26:39b). Here His own preference is not seen, because following this, He said, “Yet not as I will, but as You will” (v. 39c). God’s will is absolute, but the cup (i.e., the cross) is not. If it had not been God’s will for Him to be crucified, the Lord Jesus very well could have disregarded the cross. Before the Lord was clear concerning God’s will, the “cup” and “God’s will” were two different things. But after He was clear, the “cup” became the “cup” that the Father had given to Him, and it and God’s will became one thing. A will is the representative of an authority. Hence, when submission comes from knowing God’s will, that submission is a submission to authority. If there is no prayer and no willingness to know God’s will, how can there be submission to authority?

Again the Lord said, “The cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11). Here the Lord was upholding the authority of God. The Lord was not upholding His own cross. At the same time, when He

understood that drinking the cup (i.e., being crucified for our redemption) was the will of God, He immediately said, “Arise, let us be going” (Matt. 26:46). He promptly obeyed. Since the cross means the accomplishment of God’s will, the Lord’s death is the highest expression of submission to authority. Although the cross is the center of the whole universe, it is not higher than the will of God. The Lord upholds the authority of God (the will) more than He upholds His own cross (the sacrifice).

Our service to God is not a matter of voluntary sacrifice or of denial of our self. It is a matter of accomplishing God’s will. It is not a matter of picking up the cross. Rather, it is the submission to God’s will. This is the basic principle. If the principle of rebellion is present, even a sacrifice is an enjoyment and a glory to Satan. Saul could offer up sheep and oxen, but God would not recognize that as a sacrifice because the principle of Satan was present. To overturn God’s authority is to overturn God. Hence, the Bible says that rebellion is like the sin of divination, and insubordination is like idolatry and teraphim (1 Sam. 15:23).

We who are involved in the Lord’s work are the servants of God. As such, the first thing we touch is the matter of authority. Touching authority is as real as the matter of touching salvation. For us this is a deeper lesson. We must be touched and smitten at least once by authority. Only then can we work the work of God. In our relationship with God, nothing is more important than touching authority. Once we touch it, we will see it wherever we turn. Only then can we be restricted by God, and only then can we begin to be used by God.

The Judgment Of The Lord And Of Paul

In Matthew 26 and 27 the Lord was summoned for two kinds of judgment: from religion before the high priest (26:57-66) and from the civil government before Pilate (27:11-14). When interrogated by Pilate, the Lord could choose not to answer, because He was not bound by earthly rule. But when the high priest adjured Him by the name of the living God, the Lord had to answer. This is a question of submission to authority. Again in Acts 23 when Paul was judged, after he realized that Ananias was the high priest of God, he readily submitted. We who are workers of the Lord must come face-to-face with this matter of authority. Otherwise, our work will not be in the principle of God’s will, which is the principle of

submission to authority. Instead, we will be in the principle of Satan's rebellion, which is the principle of working without God's will. This matter indeed requires a great revelation.

In Matthew 7:21-23 the Lord rebuked those who prophesied, cast out demons, and performed many wonderful works in His name. What was wrong with this work in the Lord's name? It was wrong because man was the source in all these works. Out of themselves men were working in the name of the Lord. This was the activity of the flesh. For this reason the Lord considered it to be lawlessness. Their work could not be considered as work. Following this word, the Lord said that only those who do the Father's will can enter the kingdom of the heavens. This shows that all works should originate from submission to God's will. God has to be the source. All works are assigned by God. No work should be sought out by man. Only when a man understands God's will in His assignment can there be the experience of the reality of the authority of the kingdom of the heavens.

The Realization Of Authority Being A Great Revelation

In the universe there are two great things: believing unto salvation and submitting to authority. In other words, to trust and obey. The Bible shows us that the definition of sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4). In Romans 2:12 the phrase "without the law" is the same as "lawless." To be lawless is to disregard the authority of God, and to disregard the authority of God is sin. To transgress is a matter of conduct, but to be lawless is a matter of attitude and heart. The present age is one of lawlessness; the world is full of sins of lawlessness. Even the lawless one is about to be manifested. At the same time, authority will have less and less place in the world. In the end all authority will be overthrown. What remains will be a reign of lawlessness.

Hence, there are two principles in the universe—God's authority and Satan's rebellion. We cannot serve God on the one hand, while taking the way of rebellion with a spirit of rebellion on the other hand. Although a rebellious person can preach, Satan will laugh, because the principle of Satan is there in the preaching. Service is ever attendant to authority. Do we want to submit to God's authority or not? We who serve God must gain this basic understanding at some time. It is like touching electricity.

Once one touches it, he will never be careless with it. In the same way, once a man meets God's authority and is smitten by it, his eyes will be enlightened. He will be able to discern not only himself, but others as well. He will know who is and who is not lawless.

May God be merciful to us that we would be delivered from the way of rebellion. We can lead God's children in the proper path only when we know God's authority and have learned the lesson of submission.

CHAPTER TWO

Examples Of Rebellion In The Old Testament (1)

Scripture Reading: Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-6; Rom. 5:19

The Fall Of Adam And Eve

The Fall of Man Due to Not Submitting

Let us consider the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 and 3. After Adam was created, God gave him some instructions. He commanded Adam not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We must realize that this was not merely a matter of eating or not eating the forbidden fruit. Rather, God put Adam under a kind of authority with a view that Adam would submit to it. God entrusted all creation to Adam's authority so that Adam would manage and be the authority over all the creation. At the same time, God put Adam under His own authority so that Adam would learn to submit to authority. Only those who submit to authority can themselves be authorities.

In the order of God's creation, He first created Adam and then Eve. God destined that Adam would be the authority and that Eve would be under Adam's authority. God set one to be the authority and the other to submit. In the old creation and in the new creation, the order of precedence is the basis of authority. Whoever is created first is the authority. Whoever is saved first is the authority. For this reason, wherever we go, our first thought should be to find those to whom the Lord wants us to submit. Wherever we are, we have to see authority, and we also have to submit to authority.

Man's fall came from not submitting to authority. Eve did not check with

Adam; she made the decision. She saw that the fruit was good for food and pleasant to the eyes, so she took liberty and made the decision herself. Before she stretched forth her hand to pick the fruit, she first used her head to think and receive the temptation. Then she assumed the headship by stretching forth her hands. Hence, the taking of the fruit by Eve did not come from submission. Rather, it came from the decision of the self. Not only did she transgress God's commandment, she also disregarded Adam's authority. Rebellion against God's deputy authority is rebellion against God Himself. Adam listened to Eve's word and took of the fruit. This was worse; it was in disobedience to God's direct command. As a result, Adam also disregarded God's authority and was rebellious.

All Work Needing to Be Done out of Submission

While we live on this earth, our first question should not be whether or not we should do a certain thing. Rather, in doing a certain thing, we should ask to whom are we submitting. It is not a matter of doing or not doing. It is a matter of to whom we submit. Without submission there is no work and there is no service. When Adam took the fruit, the first question that should have been asked was whether or not this was in submission to God. All of the work of a Christian should come out of submission. Nothing is of our own initiative; everything is responsive. No act is active; everything is passive. In other words, everything should be initiated by God; nothing should be initiated by us.

Not only was Eve under the authority of God; she was also under the authority that God had set—Adam. Eve had to submit to a double command and a double authority. This is the same for us today. Eve only thought of the fruit being good for food. She did not know to whom she should submit in eating. From the very beginning, God wanted man to submit rather than to propose his own ideas. Eve's act, however, originated from her own idea, not from submission. She neither submitted to God's arrangement nor to God's authority. Instead, she proposed her own idea, transgressed against God, and became fallen. To fall is to act without submission. An act that has no submission behind it is rebellion.

The more submission a man has, the less acts there are with him. At the beginning of a man's pursuit after the Lord, there are many acts and little

submission. As he progresses, the acts become fewer, until in the end only submission is left. When many encounter work, they like to take action. They do not like to be still. They do not care whether or not there is submission. For this reason, many works are done by the self, not through heeding and obedience.

Right and Wrong Are in God

Man should not do anything out of a knowledge of right and wrong. Rather, he should do all things out of obedience. The principle of discerning good and evil is the principle of living by right and wrong. Before Adam and Eve took the fruit, their right and wrong were in God. If they did not live before God, they knew nothing; both their right and wrong were just God Himself. But after man received of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he found a source of discerning between right and wrong apart from God. As a consequence, after man's fall, there was no need for him to seek after God. He could get along by himself. He could isolate himself from God and judge between right and wrong. This is the fall. The work of redemption enables us to turn back to God for our right and wrong.

Christians Needing to Submit to Authority

All authority is from God because everything is ordered by God. If we trace any authority upward, we eventually will come to God. God is above all authorities, and every authority is under Him. Once we touch God's authority, we touch God Himself. Basically, God's work is not carried out by power, but by authority. He upholds everything by the word, which is of His authority. Creation came about through the word of His authority. His word is His authority. We do not know how God's authority works. But we know that God accomplishes everything through His authority.

The centurion whose servant was sick knew that there was an authority above him to which he should submit, inasmuch as there were those under him who submitted to him. Therefore, he only needed the Lord to say one word, and he believed that the matter would then be taken care of. He knew that all authority was in the Lord's hand; he believed in the Lord's authority. This is why the Lord said that He had found no faith greater than this. Meeting God's authority is the same as meeting God. Today God appoints authorities everywhere in the universe. All the orbits

in the universe are established by Him; all the ways in the world are set up by Him. Hence, they are all under His authority. Offending God's authority is the same as offending God Himself. A Christian should submit to authority.

The First Lesson for a Worker Being to Submit to Authority

Our position is to be under others' authority on the one hand, while having others under our authority on the other hand. Other than God Himself, everyone, including the Lord Jesus, has to submit to authority on earth. We should see authority everywhere. Both at home and in school there are authorities. When you see a policeman on the street, even though you may know that he is incapable and that his learning is not as high as yours, you have to consider him as God's appointed authority. When a few brothers are together, they should know how to line themselves up immediately. Everyone should know where he stands. A worker should know who is his authority. Some never realize who their authority is. They have never submitted to anyone. With us there should never be right or wrong, good or evil. Wherever we go, we should first know who is the authority. If you know who you have to submit to, you will spontaneously know what position you should occupy in the Body, and you will stand in your proper position. But there are many Christians today in whom there is not even a thought about submission. For them everything is confused; with them there is no such thing as keeping one's position. Submission is the first lesson for those who work. It is actually the major part of their work.

The Need to Recover Submission

When Adam fell, the order in the universe was destroyed. We should never try to differentiate between good and evil. Rather, we should submit to authority. Man is prone to judge good and evil by himself. He feels that this is good and that is not good. It seems as if man's judgment is clearer than God's. This, however, is a condition of foolishness and the fall. This must be removed from us, for this is nothing but rebellion.

The scant submission that we see now is not enough. Some think that it is enough to be baptized and forsake the denominations. But this is not enough. There are many young students who think that God is chastising them by requiring them to submit to their teachers. There are many wives

who think that God is chastising them by requiring them to submit to a husband who is impossible to live under. There are many Christians who are still living in rebellion. They have not learned even the basic step in submission.

Submission in the Bible is submission to God's appointed authority. How shallow is the submission which has been preached hitherto! Submission is the basic principle. If the matter of authority is not solved, nothing can be done well. Faith is the principle by which we receive life, while submission is the principle by which we conduct our living. All of the divisions and denominations of the church today come from rebellion. In order to restore authority, submission must be restored first. Many are accustomed to acting as the head; they have never known submission. But we must learn submission. It must become our reaction.

God has not hidden one thing from us concerning authority. In the church, whether directly or indirectly, God has shown us how to submit to authority. Many only know about submission to God; they do not know about submission to authorities. Because all authorities are from God, everyone has to submit to authority. All of man's problems are due to living outside the realm of God's authority.

No Oneness of the Body without the Authority of the Head

Today God is taking the way of the recovery of the oneness of the Body of Christ. In order to have the oneness of the Body, there must first be the life of the Head and then the authority of the Head. Without the life of the Head, there is no Body. Likewise, without the authority of the Head, there is no oneness of the Body. We must allow the life of the Head to rule so that the Body can become one. God requires that we submit not only to Him, but also to all His deputy authorities. All the members have to learn to submit to one another. The Body is one. The Head and the Body are also one. God's will can be accomplished only when the authority of the Head prevails. God wants the church be the kingdom of God.

A Few Points on the Lesson of Submission to Authority

A servant of God will eventually encounter authority in the universe, in his community, in his home, or in the church. If a man has never met God's authority, how can he submit to God? This is not a matter of doctrine or

teaching. If it is, it will still be abstract to us. Some think that submission to authority is a very difficult thing. But it is not difficult when one meets God. Unless God's mercy is upon us, no one can submit to God's authority. For this reason, there should be a few points for us to learn:

(1)There must be a spirit of submission.

(2)There must be the training in submission. Some people are like savages; they cannot come under any submission. We have appointed a housekeeper for every household with the hope that we would all learn submission. [Translator's Note: This refers to the dormitories of the training in which these messages were delivered.] Everyone should receive training by standing in the proper position. One who has learned the lesson or who has been trained will not feel restricted no matter where he is placed. He will spontaneously live out submission without any difficulty.

(3)One must learn to be a deputy authority. A worker of God must not only learn submission to authority; he must also learn to be God's deputy authority in the church and in the home. If God entrusts him with many things, and if he has learned to submit under God's authority, he will not feel boastful about anything. However, some who have learned to submit to others find that they do not know how to be the authority when they are brought by God to a place to work. Therefore, not only do we have to learn to submit to authority, but we also have to learn to be the authority and to stand in the proper position. On the one hand, the church suffers because many do not submit. On the other hand, the church suffers because many do not know how to be the authority by standing in the proper position.

CHAPTER THREE

Examples Of Rebellion In The Old Testament (2)

Scripture Reading: Gen. 9:20-27; Lev. 10:1-2; Num. 12:1-15; 16

The Rebellion Of Ham

The Failure of the Deputy Authority Being a Test to Those

Submitting to Authority

In the first garden, Adam fell. In the second garden, Noah also fell. God saved Noah's household because of his righteousness. In God's plan, Noah was the head of his household. God placed Noah's family under his authority. God also set Noah to be the head of the earth at that time.

But one day Noah drank of the wine of the vineyard and became drunk. He became naked in the tent. When his son Ham saw his father's nakedness, he went out and told his two brothers. As far as his conduct was concerned, Noah was wrong; he should not have been drunk. But Ham did not see the seriousness of authority. The father is the authority set up by God in the family. However, the flesh loves to see authority exposed to shame so that there can be freedom from restriction. When Ham saw the impropriety of his father, there was no sense of shame or sorrow. He also did not think of covering the matter. This proves that he had a spirit of rebellion. He went out to tell his brothers and expose the shame of his father. This proves that he also had a reviling conduct. But notice how Shem and Japheth dealt with the matter. They went into the tent backward. They did not turn their faces toward their father's shame; instead, they covered their father with the garment on their shoulders. The failure of Noah became a test to Shem, Ham, Japheth, and Canaan the son of Ham. It showed who was submissive and who was rebellious. Noah's failure exposed Ham's rebellion.

When Noah woke up from his drunkenness, he prophesied that the descendant of Ham would be cursed and that he would be a servant of servants to his brothers. The first slave in the Bible is Ham. The phrase "Canaan shall be his servant" is used twice. This means that those who do not submit to authority will have to be slaves, being subject to authority. Shem was blessed. The Lord Jesus was born of the descendants of Shem. Those of Japheth are the preachers of Christ. All the nations that preach the gospel are descendants of Japheth. After the flood, the first person who was cursed was Ham. His descendants were made to be slaves under others' authority for generation after generation. Everyone who learns to serve the Lord must come face-to-face with authority. He cannot serve God in a spirit of lawlessness.

Nadab And Abihu Offering Strange Fire

The Reason for Devouring

How solemn is the story of Nadab and Abihu! They became priests because they belonged to the house of Aaron. This was due to the proper condition of their house before God; it was not due to the proper condition of the individuals in that house. God appointed Aaron to be the priest. The anointing was upon the head of Aaron (Lev. 8:12). In all things related to offerings and service, the chief person was Aaron. His sons were just helpers taking orders from him to attend to the affairs beside the altar. God had no intention for Aaron's sons to be priests independently. He only wanted them to be under Aaron's authority. Leviticus 8 refers to Aaron and his sons twelve times. Then chapter nine indicates that Aaron offered the sacrifices while his sons helped alongside of him. If Aaron did not move, his sons should not have moved. Everything should have been under Aaron's name. Nothing should have been under his sons' names. When his sons assumed the headship presumptuously to offer sacrifices, it became strange fire. But the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, thought that they also could offer sacrifices. Without Aaron's command, they offered up strange fire. The meaning of strange fire is to serve God while refusing to take orders and disregarding authority. They observed that it was a simple matter for their father to offer sacrifices. Nothing extraordinary seemed to be involved; therefore, they thought that they could do the same. Hence, they took the matter into their own hands. Their only consideration was whether or not the matter could be done. They did not consider the matter of God's authority.

Service Originating from God

Here we see a very solemn matter. Serving God and offering strange fire are two similar matters, yet they are very different. Service to God originates from God. It is man serving God through submission to His authority. The result is acceptance. Strange fire, however, originates from man. There is no need of obedience to God's will or submission to His authority. All that is needed is man's zeal, and the result is death. We often incur more death the more we serve and work. Under such circumstances we have to ask God to enlighten us. Are we under the principle of service, or are we under the principle of strange fire?

God's Work Being a Coordination in Authority

When Nadab and Abihu worked apart from Aaron, they were working apart from God, because God's work is a coordination in authority. God ordained that they serve under Aaron's authority. In the New Testament there are Barnabas and Paul, Paul and Timothy, and Peter and Mark. In all these we see a responsible one who leads on the one hand and a helper who follows on the other hand. In God's work some are set to be authorities while others are set to submit to authorities. God desires that we be priests according to the order of Melchisedec. In the same way, we have to serve God in the order of the coordination in authority.

When a person who should not take the lead begins to take the lead, there is rebellion and death. Therefore, anyone who serves God without touching authority is offering strange fire. If someone says, "Since So-and-so can do it, I can do the same," this is rebellion. God pays attention not only to whether or not there is fire, but also to the nature of the fire. Rebellion can change the nature of fire. All that is not instructed by Aaron, that is, not instructed by God, is strange fire. God's concern is with the upholding of authority, not just the sacrifice. For this reason, man should be a follower. He should always be a complementing one. A deputy authority follows God. Those who submit to authority follow the deputy authorities. In spiritual matters or spiritual works it is not an individual serving, but a corporate Body coordinating in serving. The unit of service is coordination, not individuals. When Nadab and Abihu got into trouble with Aaron, they got into trouble with God. They could not work apart from Aaron. Anyone who violates authority will be devoured by the fire of God. Even Aaron himself did not know that the matter was so serious, but Moses knew the solemnness of rebelling against God's authority. There are many who think that they are serving God. Yet they work independently without coming under any authority. Many have sinned without realizing that they are rebelling against God's authority. For this reason, the free-lance evangelists who were prevalent in China in the past were a great loss to the church.

THE REVILING OF AARON AND MIRIAM

Incurring God's Anger by Reviling the Deputy Authority

Aaron and Miriam were the older brother and sister of Moses. In the

family Moses was under the authority of Aaron and Miriam. But in God's calling and work, Aaron and Miriam were under Moses' authority. They were not happy about Moses marrying an Ethiopian woman, and they spoke against and reviled Moses, saying, "Has Jehovah indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" (Num. 12:2). Ethiopians are Africans. They are the descendants of Ham. It was not right for Moses to marry an Ethiopian. Miriam was older than Moses. It was all right for her to rebuke her brother on the ground of family relationship. But in opening her mouth, she touched the work of God and overstepped Moses' position. In His work, God had placed deputy authority in the hand of Moses. It was a big mistake for Miriam and Aaron to speak against Moses because of family problems.

God appointed Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. But Miriam despised Moses. For this reason, God was not happy with her. It is all right for you to deal with your brother. But it is not all right for you to speak against God's authority. Neither Aaron nor Miriam knew God's authority. They fostered a rebellious heart by standing on natural ground. Moses did not answer. He knew that if he was God's appointed authority, there was no need for anyone to protect him. Whoever spoke against him would touch death. He did not need to open his mouth. As long as God had given him authority, he did not have to speak. A lion does not need protection because it is the authority. Moses first submitted to God's authority. Then he was able to represent God as authority. He was very meek, more than all men who were on the face of the earth (v. 3). The authority which Moses represented was the authority of God. All authorities are delegated by God, and no one can take them away.

Their words of rebellion ascended upward and were heard by God (v. 2b). When Aaron and Miriam offended Moses, they offended God in Moses. Therefore, God became angry. Once a man touches deputy authority, he touches God in that person. Once he offends the delegated authority, he offends God.

Authority Being God's Selection Rather than Man's Attainment

God called all three to come out to the entrance of the tent of meeting (v. 4). Aaron and Miriam came out boldly, presuming that they would be vindicated. They thought that God had finally called them. They thought,

“You, Moses, have married an Ethiopian woman and have caused unhappiness in the family. We have many things to say to God.” But God said, “Moses is My servant. He is faithful in all My house. Why are you so bold as to speak against My servant?” Spiritual authority does not come through man’s attainment. Rather, it comes through God’s selection. Spiritual matters are entirely different from worldly principles.

Authority is God Himself. It cannot be offended. Whoever speaks against Moses speaks against God’s selection. We cannot despise God’s selection.

The Manifestation of Rebellion Being Leprosy

When the anger of God was kindled, the cloud removed from over the tent, and the presence of God was gone. Immediately, Miriam became leprous (v. 10). This was not from infection. It was inflicted by God. Being leprous is not any better than marrying an Ethiopian woman. As soon as inward rebellion is manifested, it becomes leprosy. Lepers have to be shut out. Man cannot approach them. They lose all fellowship.

When Aaron saw that Miriam became leprous, he besought Moses to be a mediator so that God would heal her. God instructed Miriam to be shut out from the camp seven days before she could be received again. She bore shame for seven days as if her father had spit in her face. Only after seven days did the tent of meeting journey on. Whenever there is rebellion and reviling among us, God’s presence is gone, and the tent will not move. The pillar of cloud will not come until reviling words have been judged. If the matter of authority is not settled, all other matters will remain unsettled.

Submitting to God’s Direct Authority and Also Submitting to His Deputy Authority

Many think that they have submitted themselves to God already. They do not know that they still need to submit to God’s deputy authority. Those who are truly submissive see God’s authority in all environments—in their homes and in all institutions. God said, “Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?” (v. 8). Every time reviling words come, we have to pay much attention to them. We cannot be careless, thinking that we can say things rashly. When there is reviling, it

proves that there is the spirit of rebellion within. The reviling is the sprouting of this rebellion. We have to fear God and must not speak in a rash way. Many today speak against those ahead of them. They speak against the responsible brothers in the church, but they do not realize the seriousness of this matter. If one day the church receives grace from God, she will separate herself from those who revile the servant of God. She will not talk to them because they are leprous. May God be merciful to us that we would see that this is not a matter with our brother, but a matter of God's appointed authority. If we have met authority, we will realize that there are too many incidents where we sin against God. Thereafter, our concept concerning sin will be changed. We will see sin from God's point of view. The sin that God condemns is man's rebellion.

THE REBELLION OF KORAH'S COMPANY, AND OF DATHAN AND ABIRAM

A Corporate Rebellion

Numbers 16 speaks of the company of Korah, who were Levites, and Dathan and Abiram, who were of the tribe of Reuben. The Levites represented the tribe of spirituality; Dathan and Abiram represented the leaders. In addition, there were two hundred fifty well-known men. All of these princes gathered together to rebel. They attacked Moses and Aaron, saying, "You have gone too far! For all the assembly is holy.… Why then do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of Jehovah?" (v. 3). They did not respect Moses and Aaron. Perhaps they spoke these words in all honesty. They did not see the authority of Jehovah. They thought that this was a personal matter. They considered that among God's people there was no authority. When they rebuked Moses, they mentioned nothing about Moses' relationship with God or God's command in this matter. When Moses heard these serious charges, he was neither angry nor upset. Instead, he fell before Jehovah. He did not act in any way by himself. He did not try to exercise authority, because authority is of God. He told the company of Korah to wait until the morning. In the morning Jehovah would prove who was His and who was holy. He was answering an improper spirit with a proper spirit.

The words of Korah's company were based completely on reasonings. Their words were entirely suppositions. But Moses said that the Lord

would make everything clear. It was all a matter of Jehovah's selection and command. It was not Moses' problem but Jehovah's problem. They thought that they were only against Moses and Aaron, that they were not against God. They had no intention of rebelling against God. They intended to continue to serve God. They were only despising Moses and Aaron. But God cannot be separated from His deputy authority. One cannot take one attitude towards God and a different attitude towards Moses and Aaron. No one can reject God's deputy authority on the one hand while receiving God on the other hand. If they had submitted to the authority of Moses and Aaron, they would have been submitting to God. But Moses did not lift himself up because of God's authority on him. He humbled himself under the authority of God. In a gentle way he said to them, "Take censers,…and put fire in them and place incense upon them before Jehovah tomorrow, and the man whom Jehovah chooses, he shall be holy" (vv. 6-7). Moses was an aged man. He knew the consequence of such an act, and he sighed, saying, "You have gone too far, sons of Levi!…Is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the assembly of Israel to bring you near to Himself?…Therefore you and all your company have gathered together against Jehovah" (vv. 7, 9, 11).

At that time Dathan and Abiram were not present. Later Moses sent men to ask them to come. But they refused, saying, "You have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up" (v. 14). Their attitude was that of rebellion. Basically, they did not believe in the promise of God. Their attention was on the earthly blessing. They forgot their own mistake—they were the ones who had refused to enter Canaan. But they turned around to rebel against Moses with bitter words.

God Must Remove Rebellion from among His People

Then Moses became angry. He did not answer them, but prayed to God instead. Many times man's rebellion forces God to step forth in judgment. The Israelites tempted God ten times and doubted Him five times. But God tolerated and forgave all of them. Yet when rebellion broke out this time, God stepped forth to judge. He said, "Separate yourselves from among this assembly that I may consume them in a moment" (v. 21). God

must remove rebellion from among His people. Moses and Aaron fell down before God and prayed, “Shall one man sin, and will You be angry with all the assembly?” (v. 22). God answered Moses and Aaron’s prayer and judged only the company of Korah. Not only did the Israelites have to hearken to God’s appointed authority, but God Himself also testified before the Israelites that He accepted their word.

Rebellion is a principle from Hades. When they rebelled, the gates of Hades were opened. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed Korah, Dathan, Abiram, their households, and all their goods. They fell into Hades alive. The gates of Hades cannot prevail against the church. But a spirit of rebellion can open the gates. The church is not victorious because there are rebellious ones within her. When there is no rebellion, the earth cannot open its mouth. All kinds of sins release death. Only submission to authority will shut the gates of Hades and release life.

Submissive Ones Acting Not by Doctrine but by Faith

When the rebellious ones spoke against Moses for not leading them into the land flowing with milk and honey, and for not giving them the inheritance of fields and vineyards, their words were somewhat true. They were then in the wilderness and were, indeed, not yet in the land flowing with milk and honey. Please note that whenever men act and judge according to doctrine or according to what they see with their physical eyes, they are taking the way of reason. But those who submit to authority will enter Canaan by faith. The way of the spirit can never be taken by those who argue and reason. Those who by faith take the leading of the pillars of cloud and of fire and take the leading of Moses, the deputy authority, will enjoy the fullness of the Spirit. The earth opens its mouth for the rebellious ones. This is the way of death leading them quickly to Hades. Those who do not submit to authority have clear eyes, but they only see the desolation in the wilderness. Only those who are apparently blind, who probe forward by faith, ignoring the present desolation, can enter into Canaan. Those on the spiritual pathway see the future promise of blessing by the eyes of faith. Therefore, one must meet authority, be restricted by God, and be led by His deputy authority. If a man sees only his father, brothers, or sisters, he does not know what authority is, and has not yet met God. In any case, the matter of authority is an inward revelation rather than an outward teaching.

The Contagion of Rebellion

In Numbers 16 there are two rebellions. In verses 1 through 40 we have the rebellion of the leaders, whereas in verses 41 through 50 we have the rebellion of the whole assembly. A spirit of rebellion is contagious. The judgment on the two hundred fifty was not enough to warn the whole assembly. They saw with their own eyes fire coming forth from God to consume the two hundred fifty incense burners. Yet they still rebelled. They even accused Moses of killing them. Moses and Aaron could not open the earth; it was God who opened it. Moses could not consume people with fire; it was the fire that proceeded from Jehovah God that judged the people. Some men only see through their own eyes. They do not see that all authority is of God. Such people are very bold; they are not afraid even when they see judgment, because they do not have the knowledge of authority. This is a very dangerous matter. When the whole assembly attacked Moses and Aaron, the glory of God appeared, proving that authority is from God. God came forth to judge. A plague broke out, and 14,700 died. Moses was quick in his spiritual sensation; he immediately ordered Aaron to take the censer, put fire in it, and place incense on it to make propitiation for the assembly. Aaron stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was stopped.

God can bear His people's ten murmurings in the wilderness. But He cannot bear His authority being offended. God can bear many sins and can even pardon them. Once rebellion appears, however, God cannot tolerate it, for rebellion is according to the principle of death. It is according to the principle of Satan. For this reason, the sin of rebellion is more serious than any other kind of sin. Whenever someone opposes authority, God immediately comes in to judge. How solemn a matter this is!

CHAPTER FOUR

David's Knowledge Of Authority

Scripture Reading: 1 Sam. 24:4-6; 26:9, 11; 2 Sam. 1:14

David Gaining The Throne Without Paying The Price Of Rebellion

During the setting up of the kingdom of Israel, God officially established

His authority on earth. When the Israelites entered Canaan they asked God for a king, and God sent Samuel to anoint Saul as their first king (1 Sam. 10:1). Saul was chosen by God. God set him up as the authority, that is, as His deputy authority. But when he became king, Saul did not submit to the authority of God. He violated God's authority. In refusing to kill the king of Amalek and the best of the sheep and oxen, he rebelled against God and disobeyed His words. Therefore, God set Saul aside and anointed David (1 Sam. 15—16). However, David was under Saul's authority. He was one of Saul's subjects and was even a soldier in Saul's camp. Later, he even became Saul's son-in-law. Both of these men had the anointing upon them. But Saul often sought to kill David. There were two kings in Israel. One was set aside but still sitting on the throne. The other was chosen but not inaugurated. At this juncture David was in a very difficult situation.

In 1 Samuel 24 we see Saul chasing David in the wilderness of Engedi. When Saul went into a cave to cover his feet, David and his followers were in the innermost part of the cave. His followers suggested that David kill Saul, but David rejected the temptation. He dared not rebel against authority with his own hands (vv. 1-7). David was anointed by God. Concerning the throne, he stood in the proper position of God's plan and will. Who would have had anything to say about him being king? What would be wrong if David helped himself become king? Would it not be a good way to help God to accomplish His will? But David deeply felt that this could not be done. If he had killed Saul, it would have been in the principle of rebellion against God's authority, because God's anointing was still upon Saul. Although Saul was rejected, he was still God's anointed and still set up by God. If he had killed Saul, David could have become king immediately, and God's will would not have been delayed. But David was a man that denied his self. He would rather see his kingship postponed and God's plan delayed than to become a rebellious one. As a result he was eventually made God's authority.

At one time God set Saul to be king and David was under Saul's authority. If David had killed Saul, he would have gained the kingship at the price of rebellion. He would have fallen on the ground of rebellion. David dared not do this. This is the same in principle as Michael not daring to bring a reviling judgment against Satan (Jude 9). Authority is a

tremendous matter.

Submission Being Higher Than Our Work

If a man is to serve God, he must submit to authority. Submission is higher than our work. Even if David set the whole kingdom in order, this would avail nothing without being under God's authority; he would still be like Saul. In the Old Testament Saul loved the best of the sheep and the oxen and would not destroy them, but rather saved them for offering. This is in the same principle of rebellion as Judas in the New Testament, who betrayed the Lord Jesus out of his love for thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 26:14-16). Offerings cannot cover up rebellion. If David wanted to accomplish God's will and plan, he could have killed Saul. Then he could have served God right away. But David dared not do this. He waited for God to work. He was willing to be submissive. David only cut off the skirt of Saul's cloak, and even then his heart smote him. His feeling was as sensitive as a New Testament believer. What we condemn is not just murder; even the cutting off of another's garment with a little knife is wrong and is rebellion. Backbiting, an evil eye, or a grudge in the heart may not be murder, but they are similar to the cutting off of another's garment, and they proceed from a spirit of rebellion.

David was one who knew God's authority from his heart. He was chased by Saul many times, yet he still submitted to God's authority. He considered Saul as lord, the anointed of Jehovah. This speaks of an important matter. Submission to authority is not submission to a person. It is submission to the anointing upon the person, the anointing which was upon him when God set him up as authority. David knew of the anointing on Saul. He acknowledged that Saul was God's anointed. Hence, he could only seek for his own escape; he could not put forth his hand to hurt Saul. Saul was disobedient to God's command. He was rejected by God. But this was something between Saul and God. As for David, he submitted to God's anointed. This was David's responsibility before God.

David Upholding God's Authority In An Absolute Way

God wants His authority to be upheld in an absolute way. He has to recover this matter. Look again into 1 Samuel 26. A similar thing happened in the wilderness of Ziph. A second temptation came. Saul fell asleep, and David came into the place where he slept. Abishai wanted to

kill Saul, but David forbade him. He swore and said, “Who can stretch forth his hand against Jehovah’s anointed and be guiltless?” This is the second time that David spared Saul. He only took Saul’s spear and water jug (vv. 7-12). This was an improvement from the previous time. He did not take anything from Saul’s body. Instead, he only took something from beside his body. He gave up the chance of saving his own life to submit to and uphold God’s authority.

According to 1 Samuel 31 and 2 Samuel 1, Saul killed himself. A young Amalekite came to David to claim the credit, saying that he had killed Saul. David’s attitude was still that of denying the self and submitting to God’s authority. He said to the man, “How is it that you were not afraid to stretch forth your hand to destroy Jehovah’s anointed?” (2 Sam. 1:14). Then he ordered that the young messenger be killed.

Because David maintained God’s authority, he was called a man after God’s heart. His kingdom has been preserved until now, for the Lord is a descendant of David. Only those who submit to authority can themselves be the authority. This is a serious matter. We must uproot rebellion from among us. In order to be an authority, there must first be submission to authority. This one matter is crucial. Apart from this, we have no way to go on. The church is an organ of submission. There is no need to fear the weak ones in the church; there is only the need to fear the rebellious ones. We must submit to God’s authority from our heart. Only then will the church be blessed. The way ahead depends on us. We are here to spend our days in a sober way.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Son’s Submission

Scripture Reading: Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 5:7-9

The Lord Creating Submission

The Word of God tells us that the Lord Jesus and the Father are one. In the beginning was the Word, just as in the beginning there was God. The Word was God, and this Word created the heavens and earth. With God in the beginning there was glory. It was an inapproachable glory, the glory of the Son. The Father and the Son are equal, equipotent, coexisting,

and existing simultaneously. But there is a difference in person between the Father and the Son. It is not a distinction in intrinsic nature but in arrangement in the Godhead. The Bible says that the Lord did not consider being equal with God a treasure to be grasped (Phil 2:6). To be grasped means to take by force. The Lord's equality with God is not something that He assumed by force. It is not an assertion or a usurpation because the Lord had the image of God in the first place.

Philippians 2:5-7 form one section, while verses 8-11 form another section. The first section is on Christ emptying Himself. The second section is on Christ humbling Himself. The Lord lowered Himself twice, first in emptying Himself in His deity, and then in humbling Himself in His humanity. When the Lord came down to earth, He emptied Himself of the glory, power, position, and image in His deity. As a result of His emptying, those without revelation did not recognize Him and would not acknowledge Him as God, considering Him merely as an ordinary man. In the Godhead the Lord voluntarily chose to be the Son, submitting Himself to the authority of the Father. Hence, He said that the Father was greater than He (John 14:28). The Son's position was a voluntary choice of our Lord. In the Godhead there is full harmony. In the Godhead there is equality, yet it is happily arranged that the Father should be the Head and that the Son should submit. The Father became the representation of authority, and the Son became the representation of submission.

We are human. Submission for us is simple. We can submit as long as we humble ourselves. But the Lord's submission is not a simple matter. The Lord's submission is more difficult than His creation of the heavens and the earth. In order to submit He had to empty Himself of all the glory, power, position, and image in His deity. He also had to take on the form of a slave. Only then could He receive the qualification of submission. Hence, submission is something created by the Son of God.

Formerly, the Father and the Son shared the same glory. When the Lord came down to earth, He dropped authority on the one hand and picked up submission on the other hand. He set His heart to become a slave, to be restricted in time and space as a man. But this is not all. The Lord humbled Himself, becoming obedient. The obedience in the Godhead is the most wonderful thing in the whole universe. He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, a painful and shameful death. In

the end, God exalted Him to the highest. He that humbles himself will be exalted. This is God's principle.

Those Filled With Christ Will Be Filled With Submission

Originally, there was no need for submission in the Godhead. Because the Lord created submission, the Father became the Head to Christ in the Godhead. Both authority and submission were established by God. They were present from the beginning. Therefore, those who know the Lord will be submissive spontaneously. Those who do not know God nor Christ will not know authority or submission. With Christ there is the principle of submission. Those who accept submission are accepting the principle of Christ. Hence, those who are filled with Christ will be filled with submission.

Today many ask, "Why do I have to submit?" They also ask, "Why do I have to submit to you? I am a brother, and you are a brother." Actually, men do not have a right to say such things. Only the Lord is qualified to speak this way, but He never said such things. There was not even such a thought in Him. Christ represents submission, a perfect submission, just as God's authority is perfect authority. Today some think they know authority, but they do not know submission. We can only ask for God's mercy with such people.

The Way The Lord Came Out Of His Divine Form And The Way He Returned

Concerning His deity, the Lord was equal with God. But His being the Lord was something given to Him by God. Being made the Lord is something that happened after He emptied Himself in His deity. The deity of the Lord Jesus is something that is based on what He is. Being God is His original position. But His attainment of the position of Lord is based on what He has done. When He laid aside His divine form to fully maintain the principle of submission and subsequently ascended to the heavens, God accorded to Him the position of Lord. Based on Himself, He is God. Based on His attainment, He is Lord. This lordship was not originally present in the Godhead.

This portion in Philippians 2 is very difficult to explain and very controversial. But it is also a most divine passage. Today we have to

come to this passage with our shoes off, standing on holy ground. It seems as if there was a conference in the Godhead in the beginning in which a plan was made to create the universe. In this plan the divine persons of the Godhead agreed with each other and came to the understanding that the Father would be the representation of authority. But if there was only authority without submission, authority could not be established, because authority is not something isolated. Hence, there must be submission in the universe. Two kinds of creatures were created in the universe. The first kind was the angels—spirits. The second kind was man—souls. God's foreknowledge foresaw the rebellion of the angels and the failure of man. God's authority cannot be built upon the angels or upon the descendants of Adam. In the Godhead there was a harmonious decision that authority would be established first within the Godhead. From that time on, there was a distinction in operation of the Father and the Son. One day the Son willingly emptied Himself to become a created man as the representation of submission to authority. It was the creature that had rebelled. Therefore, only the submission of a creature could establish God's authority. It was man who sinned and rebelled. Therefore, only through the submission of a man could God's authority be established. This is why the Lord had to come to the earth to become a man and to be the same as a creature in every way.

The birth of the Lord is the coming forth of God. He did not retain His authority by being God. Rather, He took up human restrictions by becoming a man, even the restriction of a slave. This was a very risky matter for the Lord. Once the Lord stepped out from the form of God, there was a possibility that He could not return as a man. If He had not been submissive, He could have reclaimed the divine form of His deity only in His position as the Son. However, the principle of submission would have been broken forever. When the Lord stepped out, there were only two ways for Him to return. One was to be a proper man, absolutely and unreservedly submitting with no trace of rebellion, being obedient step by step, and letting God bring Him back and set Him up as Lord. If being a slave had been too difficult for Him, if weakness and the limitations of the flesh had been too much for Him, and if submission had been beyond Him, the only other way to return would have been for Him to force His way back by using the authority and glory of His deity. But our Lord rejected this way, a way which He was not meant to take. He set

His heart to subject Himself to the way of submission even unto death. Since He emptied Himself, He could no longer refill Himself. He did not vacillate in His mind. Since He emptied Himself of all divine glory and authority and stepped forth as a slave, He did not want to go back by any other way than the way of submission. Before He returned, He completed His course of being obedient unto death in the position of a man. He was able to return because He accomplished a perfect and pure submission. Suffering upon suffering was piled on Him, but He remained absolutely submissive. There was not the slightest reaction or rebellion. Therefore, God exalted Him and ushered Him back as Lord in the Godhead. This was not just a refilling of what had been emptied, but the ushering of a MAN into the Godhead by the Father. The Son became Jesus (the Man), and was received back into the Godhead. Now we know the preciousness of the name of Jesus. In the whole universe there is no one like Him. When the Lord declared, “It is done” on the cross, He did not mean that just salvation had been secured, but that everything that He said had been done. For this He obtained a name that is above every name. At the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue should openly confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. From that time forward, He was not only God, but Lord as well. His lordship speaks of His relationship with God. It speaks of what He attained before God. His being the Christ speaks of His relationship with the church.

In short, when the Lord came forth from God, He did not intend to return by His deity. Rather, He intended to return through His exaltation as a man. This is how God maintains His principle of submission. It is wrong for us to have even a trace of rebellion. We should submit to authority completely. This is a great matter. The Lord Jesus’ return to heaven was through His being a man and being submissive in the form of a man. As a result He was exalted by God. We must come face-to-face with this matter. In the whole Bible there is hardly any passage as mysterious as this one. The Lord bade farewell to His divine form. He did not return in just His divine form, because He had put on the flesh. In Him there was no trace of disobedience; consequently, He was exalted by God in His humanity. He stepped forth to give up His glory. He returned to reclaim His glory. All of this was accomplished by God. We need to have the mind in us which was in Christ Jesus. All of us should take the way of our Lord, taking His principle of submission as our principle unto submission

and learning submission from one another. Whoever knows this principle will realize that no sin is uglier than rebellion and that nothing is more important than submission. Only when we see the principle of submission can we serve God. God's principle can be maintained only by submitting in the way that the Lord submitted. Once there is rebellion, we are in the principle of Satan.

Learning Obedience Through Suffering

Hebrews 5:8 tells us that the Lord's obedience was learned through suffering. Suffering brought obedience to Him. True submission is found when there is still obedience in spite of suffering. A man's usefulness is not in whether he has suffered, but in whether he has learned obedience in suffering. Only those who are obedient to God are useful. If the heart is not softened, the suffering will not go away. Our way is the way of manifold sufferings. A man who yearns after ease and enjoyment is of no use. We must all learn to be obedient in sufferings. When the Lord came to the earth, He did not bring obedience with Him; rather, He learned it through sufferings.

Salvation not only brings joy; it also brings submission. If a man is only for joy, his experiences will not be abundant. Only submissive ones will experience the fullness of salvation. Otherwise, we change the nature of salvation. We need to be submissive, even as the Lord was submissive. The Lord became the source of our salvation through obedience. God saved us with the hope that we would submit to His will. When one meets God's authority, submission is a simple matter and knowing God's will is also a simple matter, because the Lord, who was submissive throughout His life, has already given us His life of submission.

CHAPTER SIX

How God Establishes His Kingdom

Scripture Reading: Heb. 5:8-9; Acts 5:32; Rom. 10:16; 2 Thes. 1:8; 1 Pet. 1:22

The Lord Learning Obedience Through Suffering

God set up the principle of submission in the Lord. As a result, God established His authority through Him. In this chapter we want to see how God establishes His kingdom through submission. When the Lord came to the earth, He came empty-handed; He did not bring obedience with Him. He learned obedience through the sufferings He went through, and He became the cause of eternal salvation to all those who obey. His obedience on earth, even His death on the cross, was learned through times of suffering. Through all these sufferings He perfected His learning. The Lord came forth from the freedom of the Godhead to become a man, and He was made a weak and suffering man. Every suffering that the Lord went through bore fruits of obedience. All the sufferings of the Lord did not bring out any murmuring or complaint. However, many Christians pass through many years without learning obedience. Although their suffering increases, their obedience does not increase. When they experience sufferings, words of frustration often come from their mouths. This is a mark of not having learned obedience. The Lord went through all kind of sufferings. His submission was manifested in everything. As a consequence, His submission became the cause of our salvation. Through the obedience of One many received grace. The Lord's obedience is for the kingdom of God. The goal of redemption is the increase of the kingdom of God.

God Desires To Establish His Kingdom

Have you ever realized how much the universe was affected by the fall of the angels and man and how big a problem this made for God? God desired that His creatures would accept His authority; however, both kinds of creatures rejected His authority. God was unable to establish His authority over the creatures. Nevertheless, God did not call back His authority. God can call back His presence, but He will never call back His system of authority. Wherever God's authority is, God is given a position of prominence. On the one hand, God maintains His system of authority, and on the other hand, He establishes His kingdom. Although Satan rebelled against God's authority, and although man daily violates His authority by rebelling against Him, God will not let this rebellion continue. He will establish His own kingdom. The Bible calls the kingdom of God the kingdom of the heavens because rebellion is not limited to just the world (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15). The angels in the heavens rebelled as well.

How did the Lord establish God's kingdom? He did it through submission. Whatever the Lord did on earth was entirely based on submission. He did nothing that opposed God's authority. Everything was in submission, in perfect cooperation with the authority of God. In this realm the Lord set up the kingdom of God and executed His authority. The church today must also allow God's authority to have a free way and manifest His kingdom through submission.

God Desires That The Church Be The Kingdom Of God

After Adam fell, God chose Noah and his family in his generation. After the flood this family also fell, and God chose Abraham to be the father of many nations. The kingdom of God was built upon him. Then He chose Isaac and Jacob. Later, the descendants of Jacob suffered in Egypt. In their sufferings, their number multiplied. God then sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt in order to establish a kingdom. Because of the rebellious ones among them, God led them through the wilderness to teach them obedience before He would establish the kingdom (Deut. 8:3). But they were still rebellious against God in the wilderness. As a result, all were strewn along in the wilderness. Even though the second generation entered, they were not yet fully obedient; they did not completely drive out the Canaanites. Saul, their first king, was not able to establish the kingdom because of rebellion. We do not find the first king after God's heart until David was chosen and became submissive to God's authority. But there was still rebellion within the kingdom. It was God's command that Jerusalem be the place where His name should be set, but the people chose Gibeon and set up altars there. Because of the lack of submission, there was no content to the kingdom even though there was a king. Before David there was a kingdom without the people. During David's time there was a people with the kingdom, but without the content of a kingdom. For that reason, the kingdom of God was still not established.

The Lord came to the earth to establish God's kingdom. There are two sides to the gospel. On the one hand, there is the individual aspect. On the other hand, there is the corporate aspect. Individually, the gospel gives eternal life to those who believe. Corporately, the gospel calls people to repentance unto the kingdom of God. God's eyes are upon the kingdom. In the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, the kingdom is spoken

of at the beginning and the end. Verse 10 says, “Your kingdom come; Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth.” The kingdom of God is the sphere where His will is accomplished in an unhindered way. Verse 13 says, “For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” The kingdom, the power, and glory are related. Revelation 12:10 says, “Now has come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ.” The kingdom is the sphere of authority. In Luke 17:21 the Lord said, “For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.” (He did not say that it is in you.) This word indicates that the Lord Jesus is the kingdom of God. For the Lord Jesus to be in the midst of you is for the kingdom of God to be in the midst of you, because the authority of God is fully executed in Him. The kingdom of God is upon the Lord. It is also upon the church. Because the Lord’s life has been released to the church, His kingdom must also be propagated and established through the church. From the time of Noah, God established a kingdom. But that was just a kingdom of man; it was not the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God began with the Lord Jesus, but how small was its sphere! Today the one grain of wheat has produced many grains. Today the sphere of the kingdom of God is not limited to the Lord alone. It is also in the many believers.

God’s purpose is not only for us to become the church, but also for the church to become the kingdom of God. She is to be the sphere of God’s kingdom, the place where God executes His authority. Hence, God’s desire is not only to gain ground in a few, but to have the whole church free from rebellion. There must be an absolute submission and an absolute position for God so that His authority can be perfectly carried out. In this way authority is established among God’s creatures. Not only does God want man to submit to His direct authority, He wants man to submit to all of His appointed, deputy authorities as well. God does not ask for a little submission; He demands a perfect submission.

The Gospel Being Not Only For Man To Believe But Also For Man To Submit

The Bible speaks not only of faith. It also speaks of obedience. We are not only sinners; we are sons of disobedience. In Romans 10:16 we have the obedience to the gospel. In principle believing in the gospel is obeying the gospel. Second Thessalonians 1:8 says, “Rendering

vengeance to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Those who do not obey are those who rebel. Romans 2:8 speaks of those who are disobedient to the truth. This is also rebellion, and God will render wrath and anger to those who rebel against the truth. First Peter 1:22 says, "Since you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth…" By this we see that salvation comes through obedience. To believe is to obey. A disciple in faith should really be a disciple in obedience. Not only must there be the faith; there must also be the submission to the Lord's authority. When Paul was enlightened, he said, "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10). He not only believed in the Lord; he became obedient to the Lord. Paul's conversion not only made him realize grace, but also made him submit to authority. When he was moved by the Holy Spirit to see the authority of the gospel, he acknowledged Jesus as Lord.

God has called us not only to receive life through faith, but also to maintain His authority through obedience. God's plan for us in the church is for us to submit to His authority and to all the authorities He has established. This covers our home, our government, our school, the church, and so forth. He does not want to specifically mark out whom we should submit to. As long as we have met God's authority in the Lord, we should learn to submit to authority.

Many can submit and be obedient if they are under certain ones, but to others they cannot submit. This is due to a failure in seeing authority. It is useless to submit to man. What is needed is to see authority. All kinds of systems are for us to learn submission. After a man has touched authority, a slight disobedience will cause him to have an inward sense of rebellion. Those who do not know authority do not realize how rebellious they are. Before Paul was enlightened, he did not know that he was kicking against the goads (26:14). After a man is enlightened, he will first see authority. Then he will see many authorities. When Paul met a little brother, Ananias, he did not see just a man. He did not ask who Ananias was or whether or not he was educated. He recognized Ananias as a sent authority, a deputy authority. Therefore, Paul submitted to him (9:17-18). How easy it is to submit when one has met authority!

God Desires To Make The Nations The Kingdom Of God Through The Church

If the church does not take God's authority, He has no way to establish His kingdom. First, God gained the kingdom in the Lord Jesus. Then He established His kingdom in the church. In the end His kingdom will be established on the whole earth. One day there will be a declaration, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ" (Rev. 11:15). Between the time in which the kingdom was in the Lord Jesus individually and the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, there is the church. Only when the kingdom was established in the Lord Jesus could it be established in the church. Only when the kingdom is established in the church can the kingdom of the world become the kingdom of God. Without the Lord Jesus, there is no church. Without the church, there is no expansion of the kingdom of God.

When the Lord was on earth, He was obedient even in the smallest thing. For example, He was not negligent in the matter of paying the temple tax. Even when there was no money, a coin was found in the mouth of a fish to pay it (Matt. 17:24-27). He also said, "Render then the things that are Caesar's to Caesar and the things that are God's to God" (22:21). Although Caesar was rebellious, he was set up by God, and as such, one must obey him. When our obedience is perfect, the Lord will rebuke the disobedient ones. When we become submissive, the kingdom can be expanded to the whole earth. Many have strong feelings concerning sin, but they have no feeling concerning rebellion. Man must not only have the consciousness of sin; he must also have the consciousness of authority. Without the consciousness of sin, one cannot be a disciple of Christ. Without the consciousness of authority, one cannot be a disciple of submission.

The Church Must Submit To God's Authority

We have to know how to submit in the church. There is not a single authority in the church that we can ignore. God wants to see the kingdom issuing forth from the church. He wants all authority to be executed through the church. When the church is so submissive, the earth will submit to the authority of God. If the church will not give the kingdom of God a free way, the kingdom of God will have no way among the nations. For this reason, the church is the highway to the kingdom. If this is not the case, the church will become a hindrance to the kingdom.

Today if the church cannot submit to God because of a little difficulty, how can the kingdom of God be manifested? When men reason with one another and argue with one another, how can God's kingdom come? We have delayed God. We must rid ourselves of all disobedience so that God will have a free way. When the church submits, the nations will submit. For this reason, the church bears a great and heavy responsibility. When God's life, God's will, and God's commands are executed in the church, the kingdom will come.

CHAPTER SEVEN

God Intends That Man Submit To Representative Authority

Scripture Reading: Rom. 13:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-14; Eph. 5:22-24; 6:1-3; Col. 3:18, 20, 22; 1 Thes. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Pet. 5:5; 1 Cor. 16:15-16

The God-Established Systems Of Authority

In the World

In the universe God is the source of all authorities. All authorities on earth are set up by Him. As such, they represent God's authority and even possess God's authority. God Himself has set up systems of authorities for His expression so that when man meets these authorities he will meet God Himself. When the presence of God is available, man can know God through His presence. When the presence of God is absent, man can meet God by meeting His authority. In the garden of Eden when God's presence was there, man could know God. When God was not present, man could remind himself of God's commandment, which was the prohibition concerning the eating of the fruit. This was another way for man to know God. It is not often that man meets God in the world. (This, of course, does not include the fact that in the church, when man lives in the spirit, he can contact God all the time.) God's manifestation is seen most frequently in His commandments. Only the foolish vinedressers need the personal appearance of the owner of the vineyard. In reality, the servants and the owner's son were enough to represent him (Mark 12:1-9).

Some are set up by God to give commands and to be authorities for God. All those in authority are ordained by God. Hence, all authorities that God has set up should be honored. Today God has entrusted authority to man. After entrusting man with authority, many on earth have been set up by God to manifest His authority. If we want to learn submission to God, we should know to whom the authority of God is entrusted. If we understand God's authority as being only in Himself, it is very likely that we will offend God's authority more than half of the time. How many people are there in whom we see God's authority? There is no such thing as making a choice between God's direct authority and His deputy authority. Not only do we have to submit to God's direct authority, we must also submit to His deputy authority because there is no authority that is not from God.

Concerning earthly authority, Paul gave not only a positive word about submission, but also a negative warning that resisting authority is the same as resisting God's personal commandment (Rom. 13:1). For man to reject God's deputy authority is for him to reject God's own authority. In the Bible authority bears only one nature. There is no authority that is not of God. To resist authority is to resist God. God will not overlook this. Those who oppose will receive to themselves judgment. It is impossible for us to rebel without being punished. Hence, for man to resist authority is to incur death. In the matter of authority there is no choice.

At the time of Adam, God committed governmental authority to man and charged him to rule the earth (Gen. 1:28). At that time man ruled only the animals. It was not until the time of the flood that God entrusted to Noah the governmental authority to rule over man. He said, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" (9:6). From that time on, God committed to man the authority to rule over man. From the time of Noah, God began to set up governments, and He put man under governments.

In Exodus 20, after God's people left Egypt and had come to the wilderness, the Ten Commandments were given. Following that, there were the ordinances concerning the people's conduct. Among these ordinances, one says, "Thou shalt not…curse the ruler of thy people" (22:28). This proves that God had placed them under governmental authorities. Therefore, even in the time of Moses, we can already see

that the Israelites' resistance to authority was their resistance to God.

All of the nations on the earth have rulers. Although they do not believe in God, and although their entire kingdoms are under Satan, the principle of authority is still there, having been established by God. The kingdom of Israel was God's kingdom. King David, of course, was set up by God. But the king of Persia was also set up by God (Isa. 45:1). When the Lord was on the earth, He likewise submitted to the government and to the authority of the high priest. This is why the Lord paid the tax and why He said that what belongs to Caesar should be rendered to Caesar. When He was judged by the high priest, who adjured Him by God, He had to obey. The Lord recognized them as earthly authorities. He never tried to stir up a revolution.

In Romans 13:4 Paul showed us that all rulers are the servants of God. At that time the government was in the hand of the Romans. Humanly speaking, there is no need to submit to foreign aggressors. But Paul did not tell us to rebel against a foreign government. Not only do we have to submit to our own nation and to our own race, we have to submit to the government wherever we are as well. I cannot disobey a local government just because I am of another nationality. The law is not a terror to the good, but to the evil. No matter how different the laws of the various nations are, they are all from the law of God. Their basic principle is still the rewarding of good and the punishing of evil. Every government has its laws, and the function of the government is to maintain and execute the laws so that the good would be rewarded and the evil would be punished. They do not bear the sword in vain. Although there are governments that uphold evil and suppress good, they must of necessity change the truth, calling the evil good and the good evil. At any rate, they cannot say that they are upholding such and such because they are evil or that they are punishing such and such because they are good. To this day all governments uphold the principle of the reward of good and the punishment of evil. This principle is irrevocable. For this reason we say that the governments still adhere to God's principle. One day when the lawless one (the Antichrist) appears, he will overturn all authorities. That will be the end of the world. By then the good will, indeed, be taken as evil and the evil as good. The good will be killed and the evil will rule.

There are four signs of submission to authority on earth: rendering (1) tax

to whom tax is due, (2) custom to whom custom is due, (3) fear to whom fear is due, and (4) honor to whom honor is due.

For a Christian, abiding by the law is not something done out of fear of punishment but out of the exercise of his conscience before God. If he does not submit, his conscience will be condemned. This is why we have to learn to submit to our local government. God's children cannot criticize or revile the government lightly. Even the policeman on the street is a God-established authority. He is God's officer attending constantly to this very thing. What should our attitude be when it comes to paying taxes and revenue? Do we consider our local government as God's authority? Are we submissive to it? If man has not met authority, he cannot submit. The more you ask such a one to submit, the harder it is for him to do so. Second Peter 2:10 refers to "those who go after the flesh in the lust for defilement and despise lordship. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble while reviling dignities." There are many whose power has been lost and whose life has drained away through reviling. Man must not fall into anarchy. The way that God deals with an unrighteous government is not our concern. Of course, when we pray for God to execute His righteousness, it is a different matter. But for us, any disobedience to authority is disobedience to God's authority. If we are not submissive, we are actually strengthening the principle of the Antichrist. When the mystery of lawlessness operates, are we its restraints or are we its helpers?

In the Family

God has established His authority in the family. Many children of God do not pay enough attention to the matter of the family. But in the Epistles, especially in Ephesians and Colossians, the two books with the highest spirituality, the matter of the family is not overlooked. In particular, they speak of submission in the family. Neglect of this matter will cause trouble in God's service. First Timothy and Titus are books on work, but they also speak of the family, lest the family affect the work. First Peter is a book particularly on the kingdom, and in this book we see that to rebel against authority in the family is to rebel against the kingdom. When man meets authority, family problems decrease.

God establishes the husband as the deputy authority of Christ, and the

wife as the representation of the church. Unless the wife sees the authority that the husband represents, the authority that God has set up, it is difficult for her to submit. She has to see that it is not a matter of her husband but a matter of God's authority. Titus 2:5 says young women should be "subject to their own husbands, that the word of God would not be blasphemed." First Peter 3:1 says, "In like manner, wives, be subject to your own husbands, that even if any disobey the word, they will be gained without the word through the manner of life of their wives." Verses 5 and 6 say, "For in this manner formerly the holy women also, who hoped in God, adorned themselves, being subject to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord."

Ephesians 6:1-3 says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother,' which is the first commandment with a promise, 'That it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth.'" Of the Ten Commandments, this one has special reward. When a man honors his parents, he will be blessed and live long on the earth. Many probably die early because they do not honor their parents. Some brothers are at odds with their parents. Hence, they are often sick. Not until they become obedient will they become well. Colossians 3:20 says, "Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing in the Lord." We have to submit ourselves to our parents' authority. This also requires that we first see God's authority.

Servants should obey their masters, even as they obey the Lord. In their attitude they should be in fear and trembling, not being deceitful or crafty, rendering only eye-service. Whether one sees his master or not, he has to serve just the same. He should not serve only within the sphere of his master's sight, but should rather serve according to the honesty in the heart, not as unto man, but as unto the Lord, for we serve the Lord Christ. First Timothy 6:1 says, "As many as are slaves under the yoke should regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, lest the name of God and our teaching be blasphemed." Titus 2:9-10 says, "Exhort slaves to be subject to their own masters in all things, to be well pleasing, not contradicting, not pilfering, but showing all good faithfulness that they may adorn the teaching of our Savior God in all things." You must first uphold the Lord's authority yourself, and then others will uphold the Lord's authority which is with you. When Paul and Peter said these

words, they were still under the Roman Empire where slave trading was very prevalent. Whether or not the system of slavery is right is one thing, but God ordains that slaves should obey their masters.

In the Church

God has His appointed authorities in the church. They are the elders who take the lead well and those who labor in word and teaching. God commands that all should submit to them. In addition, all the younger ones should submit to the older ones. First Peter 5:5 says, “In like manner, younger men, be subject to elders.” Chapter five speaks of those who are elderly in age, while 1 Corinthians 16:15 speaks of the household of Stephanas as “the firstfruits of Achaia (indicating seniority in the order of salvation), and they have set themselves to minister to the saints.” Stephanas was exceedingly humble and had set himself to minister to the saints. In verse 16 the apostle further said, “You also be subject to such ones, and to everyone co-working and laboring.”

In the church the woman also has to submit to the man. First Corinthians 11:3 says, “But I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ.” God appointed man to be the authority as a type of Christ and the woman to submit as a type of the church. For this reason the woman should have authority on her head for the sake of the angels. Furthermore, the woman must submit to her husband. First Corinthians 14:34 says, “The women should be silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they should be subject, even as the law also says.” If there is anything that they want to learn, they can ask their husbands at home. Some sisters may ask, “What if my husband does not know?” If God tells you to ask, just go and ask. If you keep asking, your husband will know after a period of time. Because he is being asked, he will have to seek to understand in order to answer. In this way you help yourself and you help your husband as well. First Timothy 2:11 also speaks of women learning in “quietness in all subjection.” Women are not permitted to exercise authority over a man, for Adam was formed first, then Eve (vv. 12-13).

Among God’s children, everyone should gird himself with humility and should submit one to another. Some like to pretentiously show off their position or authority. This is low and shameful.

Not only has God set up His deputy authority in the universe, He has also set up His authority in the spiritual world. Second Peter 2:10-11 says, “Especially those who go after the flesh in the lust for defilement and despise lordship. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble while reviling dignities; whereas angels, though they are greater in strength and power, do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord.” Here we have a very important matter. In the spiritual universe there are lordships and dignities, and God has put even angels under them. Although some lords and dignities failed, the angels still dare not revile them today, for these lords and dignities were once their authorities. Today, even though some lords and dignities have fallen, the other angels can only mention the facts. They cannot pass on their judgments. If they add their judgments to the facts, they are reviling. Jude 9 says, “Michael the archangel, when he contended with the devil and disputed concerning the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a reviling judgment against him but said, The Lord rebuke you.” At one time God set up Satan to be the head of the archangels. As one of the archangels, Michael was under Satan’s authority at one time. One day Moses will resurrect. Perhaps it will be on the mount of transfiguration. Michael followed God’s command to look for the body of Moses, but Satan deterred him. Michael could have countered the rebellious spirit with a rebellious spirit. He could have rebuked Satan in a flagrant way, but Michael dared not do this. He only said, “The Lord rebuke you.” (It is different with human beings. God never put human beings under Satan. We have fallen under his power; we were never put under his authority.) The same principle applies to David. Once he was under Saul, the deputy authority of God; therefore, he dared not overturn Saul’s former authority. How dignified is a deputy authority in spiritual matters! It cannot be reviled. The ones who revile will lose their spiritual power.

Once you touch authority, you will see God’s authority wherever you go. The first question you should ask is to whom you should submit and to whose word you should listen. A Christian should have two kinds of feelings: one is the feeling of sin, and the other is the feeling of authority. When two brothers are together discussing or considering ideas, both can speak. But when the time of decision comes, one makes the judgment. Acts 15 records a big conference. Everyone, whether old or young, was free to rise up to speak. Every brother could speak. Later

Peter and Paul spoke. Then James made the decision. Peter and Paul gave the facts; James made the decision. There was a lining up even among the elders and apostles. Paul said that he was the least among the apostles (1 Cor. 15:9). There is even a distinction between great and small among the apostles. This is not a matter of someone lining us up. Rather, it involves knowing our proper position. This is the most beautiful testimony and the most wonderful picture. This makes Satan tremble, and this will bring down his kingdom. When we all take the way of submission, God will judge the world.

We Should Have Confidence In Submitting To The Delegated Authority

What a dangerous risk it is for God to set up authorities for Himself! How much He suffers if the delegated authorities He has set up wrongly represent Him! But God is confident in the authority that He establishes. It is much easier for us to be confident in submitting to representative authorities than for God to be confident in setting them up. Since God is confident in handing over authority to man, should we not be confident in submitting to man? We should be confident in submitting to the authority which God is confident in establishing. If there is a mistake, it is not our mistake. It is the mistake of the authority. The Lord says that every person should be subject to the authorities over him (Rom. 13:1). There is more difficulty on God's part than on our part. When God trusts man, we can as well. When God is confident about His trust, we should be even more so.

Luke 9:48 says, "Whoever receives this little child because of My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me." There is no problem for the Lord to represent the Father, because the Father has entrusted everything to Him. For us to believe in Him is to believe in the Father. But in the Lord's eyes even a child can represent the Lord. The Lord can entrust Himself to a child. This is why He said that receiving a little child is to receive the Lord. In Luke 10:16 the Lord sent out the disciples and said, "He who hears you hears Me, and he who rejects you rejects Me." All of the disciples' words, charges, decisions, and opinions represented the Lord. The Lord was so confident that He entrusted all authority to the disciples. Whatever they said in the Lord's name, He acknowledged. Therefore, rejecting the disciples was the same

as rejecting the Lord. The Lord could entrust Himself to them with full peace. He did not say that they should be careful in their words or that they should not blunder in speaking when they went out. The Lord was not concerned at all with what would happen if they blundered. The Lord had the faith and the courage to hand over authority to the disciples with confidence.

But the Jews were not like this. They doubted and said, “How can this be? How do I know that all you said is right? We need more considerations!” They dared not believe. They were very afraid. Suppose you are working as an executive in a corporation, and you send one out saying, “Do your best. Whatever you do I will acknowledge. When people listen to you, they are listening to me.” If this is the case, you would probably require him to send back a daily report of his work, lest there be any mistake. But the Lord can entrust us to be His representatives. What a big trust this is! Since the Lord trusts His deputy authority so much, we should trust such authority even more.

Some may say, “What happens if the authority makes mistakes?” If God dares to trust those who are entrusted as authorities, then we should dare to submit. Whether or not the authority makes mistakes has nothing to do with us. In other words, whether the deputy authority is right or wrong is a matter for which he has to be responsible directly before the Lord. Those who submit to authority need only to submit absolutely. Even if they make a mistake through submission, the Lord will not reckon that as sin. The Lord will hold the deputy authority responsible for that sin. To disobey is to rebel. For this the submitting one has to be responsible before God. For this reason there is no human element involved in submission. If we are only submitting to a person, the meaning of authority is lost. Moreover, since God has already set up His deputy authority, He must maintain this authority. Whether or not others are right is their business. Whether or not I am right is my business. Everyone has to be responsible to the Lord for himself.

Rejecting Deputy Authority Being To Reject God Himself

The whole parable in Luke 20:9-16 is on deputy authority. God leased the vineyard to the vinedresser, but He did not come to personally collect the rent. The first, second, and third time He sent His servants; the fourth

time He sent His Son. All of these were His representatives. God could have come Himself, but instead He sent His representative. In God's eyes all those who rejected His servants rejected Him. We cannot hearken to God's word, yet refuse the word of His deputy authority. We have to submit to God's authority as well as to His deputy authority. Other than in Acts 9:4-15, which speaks of the Lord's direct authority, the Lord entrusts His authority to deputy authorities in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. One may say that almost all authorities are entrusted to man. Many think that this means submitting to man. But if you have met authority, you will know that this is God's deputy authority. There is no need for humility for one to submit to God's direct authority. But there must be humility and brokenness for one to submit to the deputy authority. Only by laying the flesh completely aside can one accept and obey the deputy authority. We constantly have to see that God does not come personally to collect His rent. God sends representatives to collect rent. What should we do with God? Should we wait for God to come personally? When He comes personally, it will not be for rent, but for judgment.

The Lord showed Paul at one point that for him to withstand the Lord was to kick against the goads (Acts 26:14). When Paul saw the light, he saw authority as well. He said, "What shall I do, Lord?" (22:10). This was Paul putting himself directly under the Lord's own authority. But then the Lord placed Paul under His appointed deputy authority. The Lord said, "Rise up and enter into the city, and it will be told to you what you must do" (9:6). From that time on Paul knew authority. He did not say, "It is so rare that I meet the Lord Himself; let Him tell me what to do." At that time, the Lord placed Paul under a deputy authority. It did not please the Lord to tell Paul directly. From the time we have believed in the Lord until now, how many deputy authorities have we submitted to? How many times have we submitted to them? Prior to this, we did not have the light, but today we have to see in a serious way God's deputy authority. We have been talking about submission for five or ten years, but how much have we submitted to indirect authorities? What God looks at is not His own direct authority. He looks at His established, indirect authorities. All those who do not submit to God's indirect authorities cannot submit to God's direct authority.

For the sake of clarity in explanation, we have differentiated between direct authority and indirect authority. Actually, in God's eyes it is just one authority. We cannot despise authority in the family or in the church. We cannot despise any deputy authority. Although Paul was blind, it was as if he were waiting for Ananias with open eyes. When he saw Ananias, it was as if he saw the Lord. When he listened to Ananias, it was as if he was listening to the Lord. The deputy authority involves such serious matters that if you offend him you get into trouble with God. It is impossible for you to reject light from the deputy authority and hope to receive light from the Lord. Paul did not say, "Since Cornelius asked for Peter, I also can ask God to send Peter or James. I do not want this little brother Ananias to be my authority." It is impossible for us to reject the deputy authority and to submit to God directly. This is because the rejection of deputy authority is a rejection of the Lord Himself. Only foolish ones will want the deputy authority to fail. He who dislikes God's representative dislikes God Himself. Man's rebellious nature likes to submit to God's direct authority, but reject God's appointed deputy authority.

God Honoring His Deputy Authority

Numbers 30 speaks of a woman's vow. When a woman was young in her father's house, her father had to silently acknowledge the vow before it would become effective. If the father disallowed it, the vow would not stand. If she was married, then the vow had to be silently acknowledged by the husband. If the husband disallowed it, then the vow was annulled (vv. 3-8). When the deputy authority consents, the direct authority fulfills it. If the deputy authority disallows it, the direct authority disowns it. God is pleased with having deputy authority. He also honors the deputy authority. When a woman is under the authority of her husband, God will not uphold her vow as long as the husband disallows it. God only wants her to submit to authority. But if the deputy authority is wrong, God will deal with him; he will have to bear the iniquity of his wife, and the submitting wife is guiltless (v. 15). This chapter tells us that man cannot overstep the deputy authority to submit to the direct authority. Since God has handed out His authority, even He Himself will not overstep His deputy authority. Even He Himself is bound by the deputy authority. God establishes through the establishment of the deputy authority, and He

annuls through the annulling of the deputy authority. God wants to maintain His deputy authority. Therefore, we have only one way with the deputy authority, which is the way of submission.

The whole New Testament upholds deputy authority. Only in Acts 5:29, when the Sanhedrin persecuted Peter by forbidding him to preach in the Lord's name, did Peter say, "It is necessary to obey God rather than men." Only when the deputy authority obviously defies God's commandment and offends the Lord's person can we refuse the deputy authority. Hence, this kind of word can only be spoken under such a circumstance. Other than this, we have to submit to the deputy authority in any other circumstance. We cannot be careless. We must not fulfill submission by exercising rebellion.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Authority In The Body

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 12:12-21; Matt. 18:15-18

The Body Being The Place For The Highest Expression Of Authority

The highest expression of God's authority is in the Body of Christ, the church. Although God has established systems of authority in the world, none of the relationships with the government or between father and son, husband and wife, and master and servant can perfectly manifest authority. Although God has set up many authorities on earth, they are but systems of authority set up by God. Man can obey them outwardly without submitting to them inwardly. For example, if the government passes an edict, the people can obey it from their heart, or they can obey it, but not from the heart. There is no way to tell which kind of obedience is present. Likewise, there is no way to tell whether a child's submission to his parents is from the heart or if it is merely superficial or behavioral. Hence, submission to authority cannot be typified by a child's submission to his parents or a servant's submission to his master, much less a people's submission to its government. Without submission there is, of course, no establishment of God's authority. An outward submission that has no inward correspondence still does not establish God's authority. Moreover, many kinds of submission are based upon man's relationship

with man—for example, a father with a son or a master with a servant. But master and servant can be separated, and so can father and son. Hence, we do not see absolute and perfect submission in these relationships.

Only Christ and the church have the highest expression of authority and submission. God has not established the church to make it an organization, but to make it the Body of Christ. We think that the church is the gathering together of believers of the same faith, or that it is a gathering together in love. But God sees it differently. The church is not only a convergence in faith or love; it is a body. The church is the Body of Christ, and Christ is the Head of the church. Father and son, master and servant, or even husband and wife can be separated, but the body and the head can never be separated. They are forever joined as one. In the same way Christ and the church can never be separated one from the other. With Christ and the church there is an absolute submission and an absolute authority which are far above all other authorities and submissions. Although the parents love their children, they may make mistakes. They may misuse their authority. Likewise, a government can also give wrong orders, and a master's authority can also be wrong. Not only is submission imperfect in the world, but authority is also imperfect. For this reason God has to establish a perfect authority and a perfect submission, which is Christ and the church, the Head and the Body. There are some parents who would harm their children; there are husbands who would harm their wives; there are masters who would harm their servants; and there are rulers who would harm their subjects. But there is no head that would harm its own body. Hence, the authority of the head cannot be wrong; it is perfect. Look at the submission of the body to the head; it is also perfect. As long as the head has any desire, the finger will move. There is no need for words; there is no need of force. Everything is so harmonious. God's will is that we submit perfectly. We must be brought by God to a condition that is like the body submitting to the head. Only then will God be satisfied. This cannot be represented by the husband and the wife and so forth. Authority is of Him, and submission is likewise of Him. Authority and submission are one thing. It is not like the world, where authority and submission are two different things. For a body to move, there is no need for the head to exert strength to give command. As soon as a thought arises, the body will

move. There is perfect harmony in this. If we can only submit to the degree that the children are submissive to parents or wives are submissive to husbands, God will not be satisfied. God desires that our submission be like that of the body submitting to the head. It is not a submission by coercion, such as that which is seen in the nations. Rather, it is a submission of the body to the head. As soon as the head has a little intention, there is a harmonious submission.

If you have submitted yourself to God often, you realize that God's command and God's will are entirely different. His command is a word out of His mouth, and His will is an idea out of His heart. A command must be uttered, but a will need not be uttered. The Lord Jesus was submissive not only to God's word but also to His will. Whenever there was a will, the Lord moved and acted. God must wrought into Christ and the church a relationship like that between Christ and the Father. God must work in us until we can submit to Christ in the same way that Christ submits to God. In the first part of His work, God made Himself the Head of Christ. In the second part of His work, He made Christ the Head of the church. He has to work until there is submission even without the need of the dealing of the Holy Spirit. As soon as He has a desire, we will immediately obey. In the third part of God's work, God will make the kingdoms of the earth the kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ. The first part has already been accomplished, and the third part is yet to come. Today we are in the middle part. If the work in the second part is not complete, the third part cannot commence. Are we here to submit and give God a free way, or are we here to disobey and hinder God? God has never secured authority in the universe. The place where His authority will see a complete success and the place where the tide is turned is the church. The church is the middle part; it is the turning point. For this reason God reserves the greatest glory for us. Without seeing authority there is no way to go on. If this matter is not resolved in us, it will not be resolved in others. We all bear the responsibility of expressing authority.

It Being Most Spontaneous And Harmonious For The Body To Submit To The Head

Today God has made everything ready. The Body and the Head already

have the same life and nature. Therefore, submission is very spontaneous, while not being submissive is rather strange. For example, if the hand is raised up according to the desire of the head, there is nothing strange about it. But if the hand cannot move, then it is a strange thing. Perhaps the hand is sick. The Spirit of life that God gave to us is the same as that which is in the Lord. The life and the nature that He gave us is likewise the same as that in the Lord. Here again there is no possibility of disharmony and disobedience. Some of our bodily movements are conscious, while others are unconscious. The oneness of the body with the head does not depend only on a conscious submission, but on an unconscious submission. It is like breathing. There can be conscious deep breathing or there can be unconscious and spontaneous ordinary breathing. This is like the heart which beats without consciousness. There is no need to give it an order; it keeps on beating by itself. This is submission in life. For the body to submit to the head, there is no noise, no imposition, and no friction. Everything is in harmony. It is not enough for some to just submit to commands. In the commands is the will, and in the will is the law of life. Only when one submits to the law of life is his submission perfect. If the submission is not like that of the body submitting to the head, it is not called submission. The submission of some is with such reluctance that it cannot be considered as submission.

The Lord has put us into the Body. Here the union is perfect and the submission is perfect. It is a wonder that even the mind of the Holy Spirit can be guided by the members. There is no possibility of separating two members from the other to make them distinct wholes. A harmony spontaneously exists between the members. There is no need to even think about this submission. Its harmony is beyond the description of human words, and its submission to authority is the most perfect that can be found. For this reason we cannot be a sick member, one that makes noise and causes friction. We are living in the operation of God’s authority; there should be a very spontaneous submission. The church is not only the place of fellowship for the brothers and sisters; it is also the place for the manifestation of authority.

Rejecting The Authority In The Members Being To Reject The Head

The authority in the Body is sometimes not manifested directly, but

indirectly. Not only does the body submit to the head; its members submit to and help one another also. The left and the right hands do not have direct fellowship with each other. The head moves the right hand, and the head moves the left hand. The left hand does not control the right hand, nor the right hand the left. The hand does not order the eyes to see. It only informs the head. The head then directs the eyes to see. No matter how far the members are from the head, their relationship with the head is the same, and all their works relate back to the head. If my eyes see, my hands work, or my feet move, then I say that I see, I work, or I move. Hence, many times the decision of the members is the decision of the head. The authority of the members is the authority of the head. The hand cannot see by itself; it needs the decision of the eyes. It is wrong for the hand either to ask the head to see or to ask itself to see. Both are impossible. But this is often the problem with God's children. Hence, we must take other members as the deputy authority of the Head. The function of the hand is just that of a hand, the function of the foot is only that of a foot, and the function of the eyes is only that of the eyes. We must accept others' function as our function. We cannot reject the function of the members. If the foot rejects the hand, it is rejecting the head. Consequently, when we accept the authority of the members, we are accepting the authority of the Head. Every member is my authority in fellowship. Although the function of the hand is great, it has to accept the function of the foot in the matter of walking. The hand cannot feel color; it needs the authority of the eyes. The function of the members is the authority of the members.

Authority Being The Riches Of Christ

Today it is impossible for every member to be the whole Body. For this reason everyone should stand in his position as a member, receiving the function of the other members. When others see and hear, then I see and hear. Receiving the function of the members is receiving the riches of the Head. There is no one member who is independent. I am only a member. A member cannot do the work of the Body. What the other members have done is what the Body has done. It is also what each member has done. In today's situation, the eyes have seen, but the hand says that it has not seen and that it is waiting to see. Man wants to have everything and to be able to do everything; he does not want to receive the supply of

the members. This makes him poor, and the church is dragged into poverty. Authority is the riches of Christ. To receive others' function, which means to receive their authority, is to receive the riches of the whole Body. If we submit to the authority of every member, we obtain the riches of every member. If we reject the authority, we have poverty. When the eyes are illuminated, the whole body is illuminated. When the ears hear, the whole body hears.

We always think that the purpose of authority is to suppress us, smite us, and embarrass us. But God does not have this thought. We are wrong. God uses authority to fill up that which is lacking in us. God set up His authority in order to dispense His riches to us and to fill up the lack of all the weak ones. God cannot wait until we reach a certain stage or until a certain number of years have passed before He shows us something. If that were the case, we would have to pass through a countless number of dark and painful days, and a countless number of people will be led into darkness. It would truly be the blind leading the blind. How much loss God would suffer! This is why God first works thoroughly on the people who are used by Him so that when He gives them to us as our authority to help us learn submission, we can receive what we never could have otherwise received. Their riches will become our riches. If we neglect this, we might have to pass through fifty years without attaining what they have learned.

God's grace to us is twofold. On the one hand, it comes to us directly. This happens rather infrequently. On the other hand, there are indirect riches. In the church God has set brothers and sisters before us to be our authority. Through their discernments becoming our discernments we can receive their riches without going through their sufferings. In the church there is much grace which God will only give to others, not to you. Every star has its own glory. Therefore, authority is the riches of the church. Individual riches are riches for the many. To rebel is to take the way of poverty. To reject authority is to reject the way of receiving grace and riches.

Delegated Function Being Deputy Authority

No one dares to say that he would not submit to the Lord's authority. But there is also the authority of the members in coordination that we have to

submit to. We have to realize that all the members are joined together. If we do not receive help from other members, we are in rebellion. Sometimes the Lord uses one member directly. At other times, the Lord uses a member to supply another member. When the head directs the eyes to see, the whole body takes the seeing of the eyes as its own seeing because when the eyes see, the whole body sees. This delegated function, which is deputy authority, is also the authority of the Head. If any other members think that they can see for themselves, they are in rebellion. We cannot be so foolish as to think that we are almighty.

Never forget that we are just members. We need to receive the function of the other members. When we submit to the authority of the seeing function, we will have no barrier with the Head, because the supply is in the authority. Whoever has the gift has that ministry; and whoever has the ministry has the authority. No one else can see except the eyes. If we want to see, we have to submit to the authority of the eyes and receive their supply. God's appointed ministry is His authority. No one should reject it. Everyone wants to receive God's direct authority. But God wants us to submit to indirect authorities (i.e., deputy authorities) so that we may receive spiritual supply.

Submission Being Easy With Life

For unbelievers and Israelites, submission is a difficult matter because they are not related to other unbelievers and Israelites in life. We, however, are related in life. Therefore, it is not a difficult matter to submit, for within we are all one, sharing the same life and the same Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit directs all things. Mutual submission brings in a happy state and a lifetime of rest for us. If we take all burdens upon ourselves, it will be a tiring job. If they are distributed among the members, it will be a relaxing matter. If we are willing to be restricted by the Lord, we will have true rest. Hence, to submit to the authority of the members is a great release. Otherwise, we stand in the position of others, while causing ourselves to be under great strain. For us, submission is spontaneous, and disobedience is awkward. Why do we have to devour one another? Why do we have to criticize one another? For us these should be awkward things.

The Lord has taught us not only to learn submission in the family and in

the world, but also in the Body, in the church. If we learn submission well in the Body, we will learn it well everywhere else. This is the only place to start. Hence, the church is the place of testing. It is also the place of perfection. If we do not learn well here, anything done elsewhere will not be successful. If the lesson is learned well in the church, the problem of the kingdom is solved, the problems in the world will be solved, and the problems in the universe will be solved.

In the past authority has been too objective to many, and submission also has been objective. We have tried to apply outward submission to a subjective body. Today authority has become a matter of life. In other words, it has become an inward matter. In the Body of Christ, authority and submission meet in one Body, and both have become subjective, living, and united. This is the highest expression of God's authority. Authority and submission are in one Body, and they are being brought to the highest peak. Let us be perfected here. Otherwise, there will be no way for us to go on. The place to meet authority is in the Body. The Head as the source of authority is in the church. The members who operate according to the measure of each one part, with a mutual supply between those who represent authority and those who submit to it, are also in the church. If we do not meet authority here, there is no hope for us elsewhere.

CHAPTER NINE

The Manifestation Of Man's Rebellion (1)

Scripture Reading: 2 Pet. 2:10-12; Eph. 5:6; Jude 8-10; Matt. 12:34; Rom. 9:11-24

Where is man's rebellion practically manifested? First, it is manifested in words. Second, it is manifested in reasons. Third, it is manifested in the thoughts. In order to be delivered from rebellion, we must first deal with these three things. Otherwise, rebellion cannot be truly dealt with.

Words

Words Being the Outlet of the Heart

If a man is rebellious, his words surely will reveal rebellion. Sooner or later rebellious words will come out of his mouth, because out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. In order to know authority, a man must first meet authority. If a man has not met authority, he will never be able to submit. It is useless to merely listen to messages on submission. A man must at one time meet God, and then the basis of God's authority will be established in him. When he speaks, he will know if a word of disobedience comes out. Even before the word comes out, the thought of it will give him an uneasy feeling. He will realize that he has stepped beyond his boundary and that there is a restraining within him. If a man speaks words of rebellion carelessly without any restraining within, he must be one who has never met authority. It is much easier for a man to speak in rebellion than to act in rebellion.

The tongue is the thing that is the hardest to tame. Therefore, when a man rebels against authority, the tongue will show it immediately. Perhaps one agrees with you in your presence, but when the back is turned reviling words will come out. No words may be spoken up front, but the mouth is filled with words when the back is turned. This is because the mouth is so available. Everyone in the world today is rebellious. Mostly people pay lip service and submit outwardly. But in the church there should not be just outward submission; all submission should come from the heart. If you want to know whether or not a man is submissive in heart, see if he is submissive in words. God requires a submission of the heart from us. We have to meet God's authority or the problem will explode sooner or later.

Eve Adding Carelessly to God's Word

When Eve was tempted in Genesis 3, she added a few words: "Neither shall ye touch it" (v. 3). We have to realize the seriousness of this matter. If man knows God's authority, he will not dare add to God's word. The word of God is clear enough. "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it" (2:16-17). God did not say, "Neither shall ye touch it." Those words were added by Eve. Whoever changes God's word by adding to or deleting from it proves that he has never met authority. Such a one is surely rebellious and unlearned. If a government sends a person as a representative to speak a word at a certain place, that person must remember precisely the words that he is to speak. He must not add anything else to the words. Although Eve saw God every day, she did not know authority. She spoke carelessly, thinking that it was all right to say a few words more or less. If a mortal man serving a mortal master would not dare to add to or delete from his master's words, how much more should we who serve God be careful in doing the same? If a man speaks carelessly, it proves that he is a rebellious one.

Ham Exposing His Father's Failure

Look at the behavior of Ham, the son of Noah. When he saw the nakedness of his father, he went out to tell Shem and Japheth (9:20-22). A person who is not submissive in heart always likes to see authority in failure. Ham found the opportunity to expose his father's mistakes. This proves that he was one who did not submit to his father's authority. Previously, he submitted through pressure. When he saw his father's mistake, he exposed it to his two brothers. Many brothers criticize others and delight in tearing them down because of a lack of love (1 Cor. 13:4-5). With Ham there was not just a lack of love, but a lack of submission. It was a manifestation of rebellion.

Miriam and Aaron's Reviling of Moses

In Numbers 12 Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses. They mixed up family affairs with the work. In God's calling Moses was singled out; Miriam and Aaron were only the helpers. This was God's decision. The disobedience of these two was also manifested in words. If we know authority, many mouths will be shut and many problems will be

prevented. Once we meet authority, many natural problems are gone. Miriam's words did not seem to be an overstepping. She only said, "Has Jehovah indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" (v. 2). But God understood that as reviling (v. 8). Perhaps there were many words which they had not spoken. Perhaps what was revealed was only the tip of the iceberg, a tenth of all that was there. Perhaps ninety percent was still hidden. As long as there is a spirit of rebellion in man, God will detect it no matter how many nice words he speaks. Rebellion is manifested in words. A rebellious word speaks of rebellion no matter whether it is strong or weak.

The Company of Korah Attacking Moses

In Numbers 16 when the company of Korah and the 250 leaders rebelled, the manifestation was all the more in words. Whatever they had in their heart they spoke. They even broke out in open rebuke. Although Miriam reviled, she did so in a reserved way, and as such there was still the possibility of recovery. But the company of Korah had no restraint. Everything spilled over like a flood. Even rebellion has degrees. Some have more of a sense of shame, and they can be recovered. But those who have shaken off all restraints, who are completely unchecked, open the gates of Hades for themselves, and Hades swallows them up. Not only did the company of Korah speak in an evil way; they attacked in an open way. It was so serious that Moses had to fall on his face. How serious were such words: You take too much upon you. Why are you lifting yourselves up above the congregation of the Lord? We only recognize Jehovah in our midst. The whole congregation is holy. We do not recognize your authority. You are taking too much upon yourselves. Here we see that whoever listens only to God's direct authority, but refuses His deputy authority, is in the principle of rebellion.

If a man submits to authority, surely he will restrict his mouth. He will not be careless. In Acts 23 Paul was being tried. As an apostle and prophet he spoke in the position of a prophet to Ananias the high priest: "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall" (v. 3). But at the same time Paul was a Jew. When he heard that Ananias was the high priest, he immediately softened and said, "'You shall not speak evilly of the ruler of your people'" (v. 5). How careful he was in his words, and how much he restricted his mouth.

Rebellion Being Related to the Walking after the Lust in the Flesh

Man's rebellion is especially related to the indulgence of the flesh. In 2 Peter 2:10 the flesh and the lust were first mentioned, then those who despise lordship. The expression of this despising of lordship is shown in reviling words, words of rebellion.

Particular kinds of people live among those who are of their own kind; they have communication with their kind of people. Rebellious ones always accompany those who walk after the flesh. They are also the ones who accompany those who indulge in the lust of uncleanness and who despise lordship. In God's eyes, walking after the flesh, indulging in lust, and despising lordship are all the same thing. Such ones are presumptuous, self-willed, and not afraid of speaking evil of dignities. But those who know God are fearful on their behalf. The mouth has a lust, which is to speak evil words. If we know God, we will be repentant and remorseful, because we will realize how much God hates this. The angels were under those with lordship at one time. For this reason, they dare not revile them with evil words. They dare not deal with a lawless spirit by lawless means. Therefore, if we live before God, we cannot revile others with reviling words. Please notice that it is possible to speak reviling words even in our prayers. David could say that Saul was God's anointed. This proves that he was one who kept the proper position. The power of Satan is established upon lawlessness, while the angels are those that would not overstep their position. Peter used this as an example to show us that since the angels in the heavens are like this, we should be like that even more (v. 11).

There are only two things that cause a Christian to lose his power. One is sin, and the other is speaking evil of those above him. The more evil speaking, the more power is lost. If a man's lack of submission is in his heart only, without corresponding utterances from his mouth, his power will not be lost as fast. The effect of speaking is much more serious than we can imagine.

To God, man's thoughts and conduct are the same. As long as there is a thought, a sin is committed. However, Matthew 12:34-37 also says that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. In the day of judgment, we will be judged righteous or sinful according to the words we

have spoken. This shows us that there is a difference between words and thoughts. If there are no words, there is still the possibility of covering up. But if the words come out, everything is thrown into the open. For this reason, disobedience in heart is a little better than openly speaking with the mouth. Today Christians lose their power through their mouth in no less measure than they lose it through their conduct. Actually, more is lost through the mouth. All rebellious ones have trouble with their speaking. Hence, if a man cannot restrict himself in words, he cannot restrict himself in anything.

God Rebuking the Rebellious Ones with the Strongest Words

Look again at 2 Peter 2:12, which says, “But these, like animals without reason, born natural for capture and destruction…” This is the strongest word in the Bible. There is no word of rebuke more serious than this. Why does the Bible rebuke these ones as animals? It is because these ones have no feelings. Authority is the most central thing in the Bible. Hence, to God reviling is the most serious of all sins. The mouth cannot speak lightly. As soon as a man meets God, his mouth will be restricted, and there will be a fear of reviling dignities. Once we meet authority, there will be a sense of authority in us, in the same way that there will be a sense of sin once we meet the Lord.

Problems in the Church Arising Frequently from Reviling Words

The oneness and the power of the church are broken through man’s careless words. Today the majority of the problems in the church come from evil speakings. Only a minority come from real difficulties. The majority of the sins in the world also come from lies. If evil words are stopped in the church, the majority of our problems will be reduced. We need to repent before the Lord and ask for His forgiveness. Evil speaking needs a thorough termination in the church. Out of one spring there cannot issue two kinds of water. Out of one mouth there cannot issue words of love and words of reviling. May God set a watchman upon our mouth, and not only upon our mouth, but also upon our heart so that all words and thoughts of reviling would be stopped. May evil speaking depart from among us from this day forward.

REASONS

Reviling Words Being from Reasons

Man's rebellion is manifested in words, reasons, and thoughts. If a man does not know authority, there will be reviling words. But these words come from reasons. Man speaks because he thinks he has a reason. Ham thought that he had a reason to revile Noah because he was naked. Miriam's word concerning Moses marrying an Ethiopian woman was a fact; she had a reason. However, those who submit to authority and live under authority do not live in their reasons. Korah's company and the 250 leaders said that Moses and Aaron should not put themselves above the others because the whole congregation was holy and Jehovah was in their midst. Again, their rebellion had a reason behind it. Reviling words often come from reasons. Dathan and Abiram had even more reasons. They charged that Moses had not brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, that he had not given them the inheritance of fields and vineyards, but rather that they were still in the wilderness. They charged that Moses was just covering up their eyes, saying, "Will you put out the eyes of these men?" (Num. 16:14). This meant that their eyes were very clear. The more they thought, the more reason they had. Reason cannot stand thinking. The more thinking there is, the more reasons are stirred up. In the world everyone lives in reasons. What difference is there between us and the worldly people if we also live in reasons?

Being Delivered from Reasons to Follow the Lord

Indeed we need to put out our eyes and follow the Lord without reason. Are our lives based upon reasons or upon authority? Many become blind when they are struck by the Lord's light. Although they have eyes, it is as if they have none. Once the light comes, all reasons are gone. Once Paul was enlightened on the way to Damascus, he became truly blind. From then on he did not care for reasons (Acts 9:3, 8). Moses' eyes were not put out, but he was like a man without eyes. It was not that he had no reasons; he knew many reasons. But all the reasons were under him because he submitted to God. Those who submit to authority do not act by sight. A servant of the Lord must be blind. He must be delivered from a life of reasons. Reasoning in the heart is the first cause of rebellion. Hence, if we do not deal thoroughly with reasons, it is impossible to stop the words. If we are not delivered from reasons, they will issue forth in reviling words sooner or later.

How difficult it is to be delivered from a life of reason. We are rational beings. How can it be possible for us to not reason with God? This is a very difficult point. We reason continually from our youth. From the time before we believed in the Lord even until now, the basic principle of our living has been in reasoning. What can cause us to stop now? Requiring us to do so will take our flesh-life to the gallows! There are two kinds of Christians: one living on the level of reason and the other living on the level of authority. We should submit as soon as there is a command. On which level are we living? When God has a command, do we consider a little and submit when there are sufficient reasons and not submit when there are insufficient reasons? This is the expression of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil causes us not only to discern things in ourselves, but to discern things established by God as well. All these have to pass through our reasons and judgments. We can reason for God and even make judgments for God, but this is the principle of Satan. Satan wants to be equal with God. Those who know God only have submission; there is no reason with them. The two never mingle together. If a man wants to learn submission, he has to throw away reasons. Either he lives by God's authority or he lives by reasons. He cannot have both. The Lord Jesus lived a life on earth that was completely beyond reason. What reason was there for the insults, tortures, and crucifixion that He suffered? He, nevertheless, submitted under God's authority. He did not care for any reason. He was only responsible for submission. He did not ask for anything else. How simple is the man who lives under authority! But how complicated is the man who lives in reasons! The birds in the air and the lilies in the field live a simple life. The more a person lives under authority, the simpler his life will become.

God Never Reasoning

In Romans 9 Paul tried to prove to the Jews that God has called the Gentiles also. He said that not all of the seed of Abraham were chosen; only Isaac was chosen. And not all of the seed of Isaac were chosen; God chose only Jacob. Since everything is of God's choice, can God not choose the Gentiles as well? God will have mercy on whomever He will have mercy, and will have compassion on whomever He will have compassion. Humanly speaking, God loved the wicked Jacob, while He

hated the honest Esau. He also hardened Pharaoh. Is He then unfair? We have to realize that God sits on His throne of glory, and man is under His authority. Who are we but humble mortals, nothing but dust. How can we reason with God?

He is God. He has the authority to do things. We cannot follow God on the one hand, while forcing Him to listen to our reason on the other hand. If we want to serve Him, we must give up all reasons. Every person who has met the Lord has to throw away all his reasons. We can only stand on the position of submission. We cannot stand on the position of interference, attempting to act as God's counselor. God says that He will have mercy on whomever He will have mercy (9:15). How precious is the word "will have." We have to worship Him for this. God does not reason at all. God chooses to do this. He delights in doing this. He is the God of glory. Paul went on to say, "So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy" (v. 16). God said of Pharaoh, "For this very thing I have raised you up, that I might show in you My power" (v. 17). Moreover, He said that "He hardens whom He wills" (v. 18). To harden does not mean to cause to sin. It means to "give one up" as recorded in 1:26. Up to this point Paul anticipated that there would be more reasonings, such as, "Why does He still find fault? For who withstands His will?" (9:19). These reasons are very valid. Many will agree with them. Paul also knew that they were quite reasonable and sensible, but he retorted, "But rather, O man, who are you who answer back to God? Shall the thing molded say to him who molded it, Why did you make me thus?" (v. 20). Paul did not counter the reasons. Rather he asked, "Who are you?" Paul did not ask what kind of words these are. He asked rather what kind of person would dare reply against God. When God exercises His authority, He does not have to discuss it with us. He does not need our consent. All He asks is our submission to Him. As long as we say, "This is God's doing," everything will be fine.

Man is constantly trying to reason. But please consider whether or not our salvation had any reason behind it. There was absolutely no reason for our salvation. We did not will, nor did we run. But we were saved. This is the most unreasonable thing. But God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy. Out of the clay, the potter can make one vessel to honor and another to dishonor. There is only the question of authority. There is no

question of reason. The basic problem with man today is that he is still under the principle of the knowledge of good and evil, the principle of reasoning. If the Bible reasoned out everything, then we could be justified in reasoning out everything. But in Romans 9 God opened up a special window from heaven to shine on us. He did not reason with us. He only asked, “Who are you?”

Seeing God’s Glory Delivering Us from Reasons

It is not easy for man to be delivered from evil speaking. But it is more difficult for man to be delivered from reason. When I was young, I was always bothered by God’s unreasonable acts. Later, when I read Romans 9, I touched God’s authority for the first time. I began to see who I am. I am His creature. My most reasonable words are but stubbornness before Him. The God who is far above all is unapproachable in His glory. If we would see only a millionth part of His glory, we would bow down and cast off all our reasons. Only those who live far off can be proud, and only those who live in darkness can abide in reasons. No one in the whole world can see himself in his own torchlight. Only when the Lord grants us a little light and reveals a little of His glory to us will we fall down as dead, just like the apostle John (Rev. 1:16-17).

May God be merciful to us that we would see how unworthy and lowly a person we are. How dare we argue with God? When the queen of the south came to visit Solomon and he revealed a little of his glory to her, there was no more spirit left in her. But there is One who is greater than Solomon. Is there any reason in me that cannot be given up? Adam sinned because he ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. From then on, reason became rooted in man’s very being. But if God would reveal just a little of His glory to us, we would see that we are but a dead dog and a lump of clay. All our reasons would vanish in His glory. The more a person lives in glory, the less he will reason. However, the more you see a person reason, the more you know that he has never seen glory.

During these years I have found out one thing—God’s work is never according to reasons. Even if I do not understand what He is doing, I still have to worship Him because I am His servant. If everything that He does is understood and realized by me, I might as well be the one to sit

on the throne. Once I see that He is far above me, that only He is the Most High One, and that I should bow down in the dust, all reasons will disappear from me. From this day forward, authority only is the fact, not reasons, rights, and wrongs. Those who know God surely know themselves, and once a person knows himself, all reasons are removed.

The way to know God is by submission. Everyone who lives in reason does not know God. Only those who willingly submit to authority can truly know God. All of the knowledge of good and evil that we inherited from Adam must be removed. Then our submission will be very easy.

“I Am Jehovah” Being the Reason

Every time the Lord commanded the Israelites to do something in Leviticus 18—22, He inserted the words, “I am Jehovah,” in between the commands. There is not even the word because. I speak this way, for I am Jehovah. There need be no other reason. “I am Jehovah” is the reason. If we see this, we will not live by reason from this day on. We have to say to God, “In the past I lived by my thoughts and reasons. Today I bow down and worship You. As long as it is of You, it is enough for me. I will worship You.” When Paul was struck down on the way to Damascus, all reasons vanished from him. Once light shines in, a person falls down. The first word that came out of Paul’s mouth was, “What shall I do, Lord?” (Acts 22:10). Immediately, he became obedient. Those who know God do not reason. When the light judges, the reason disappears.

For man to reason with God is for him to say that God’s work requires our consent. This is the thought of the most foolish. God does not have to tell us the reason for anything He does. God’s way is higher than our way. If we pulled God down to the level of reason, we would have God no longer, because He would be no different from us. If we reason, there will be no more worship. When submission goes, a lack of worship follows. When this happens, the self becomes the judge of God and even becomes God. What difference then is there between the clay and the potter? Will the potter have to ask permission from the clay to do anything? May God’s glory be revealed so that all our reasons cease.

CHAPTER TEN

The Manifestation Of Man’s Rebellion (2)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 10:4-6

Thoughts

The Relationship between Reasons and Thoughts

Not only is man’s rebellion manifested in his words and reasons; it is manifested in his thoughts as well. Man speaks rebellious words because he has rebellious reasons. But reasons are manifested in one’s thoughts. Therefore, thought is the center of man’s rebellion.

Second Corinthians 10:4-6 is one of the most important passages in the Bible, because it especially points out which part of a man should submit to Christ. Verse 5 speaks of taking “captive every thought unto the obedience of Christ.” Man’s rebellion is a rebellion of thought. Paul said that we have to overthrow the strongholds, the reasonings, and every high thing rising up against the knowledge of God. Man uses reasonings to build a fortress around his thoughts. This reasoning must be overthrown, and the thoughts must be taken captive. Discard the reasons, but take back the thoughts. Today reason is man’s fortress, and thoughts are imprisoned in it. Spiritual warfare involves storming this fortress and recapturing the thoughts. It is impossible for man’s thoughts to submit to God without overthrowing reasons. All reasonings frustrate man from knowing God. The “high things” are like tall buildings. In God’s eyes man’s reasons are a tall building, a big obstruction along the way of knowing God. Once a man reasons, his thoughts are surrounded; they can no longer submit to God. Submission is a matter of the thoughts. If reasons are manifested, they become words. If reasons are hidden, they encircle the thoughts, and submission becomes impossible. Paul was not dealing with reasonings by reasoning. Man’s reasonings are so serious that they cannot be dealt with except by battle. The mind with its reasonings can only be dealt with by spiritual armor, by God’s power. This is a battle between God and us. We have become God’s opponent. Man’s reasoning mind is inherited from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is hard to imagine how much trouble this mind gives to God. Satan binds us through different kinds of reasons so that we become the

prisoner to reasons, unable to be gained by God, and so we also become God's enemy.

Genesis 3 is a picture of 2 Corinthians 10. Satan reasoned with Eve. When Eve saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food, she also reasoned. She disobeyed God for a reason. Once reason comes, man's thoughts are stuck in it. Reasons and thoughts go together. Reason preys on thoughts. Once the thoughts are captured, man will no longer be able to submit to Christ. If we want to submit to God, we must touch God's authority and break through all the strongholds of reasons.

Taking the Thoughts Captive

In the Greek New Testament, the word for thought is noema. This Greek word is used six times in the New Testament, in Philippians 4:7; 2 Corinthians 2:11; 3:14; 4:4; 10:5; and 11:3. The word is rightly translated as "thought," which means propositions of the heart. The heart is the organ, and the propositions are its activities. They are the product of man's mind. Man asserts himself through the liberty of opinions and propositions. In order to protect his liberty, all of his propositions must be justified as being good and correct. They must not be contended with. Therefore, he has to surround them with many reasons. A man refuses to believe in the Lord usually because of one or two reasons with which he surrounds himself as strongholds. For example, some say that they will believe when they get old, that they do not see good examples in Christians who have believed, or that they will have to wait until their parents die before they can believe. There are also many reasons for Christians not to love the Lord. Students say that they are too busy with their schoolwork. Businessmen say that they are too occupied with their businesses or that they do not feel well physically. If God does not break through these strongholds, man will never be liberated. Satan uses reasons as strongholds to keep man in. Man is outwardly surrounded by these fortresses of reasons. By himself man cannot break through to freedom. Submission to Christ is possible only through the authority of God that captures the thoughts and makes them God's slaves.

For man to know authority, he must first break down reasons. When man sees God as He is presented in Romans 9, all reasons are shattered. When Satan's stronghold is torn down, there is no more reason, and the

thoughts are taken captive unto the obedience of Christ. It is not enough for man to meet authority in his speaking. It is not enough to remove all reasons. His thoughts must be captured unto the obedience of Christ. Only when his thoughts are captured can man truly submit to Christ.

To discern whether or not a man has met authority, we need to see if such a one has been dealt with in speaking, in reasons, and in opinions. Once a man has confronted authority, his tongue will not be that careless, his reasonings will not be that bold, and deeper still, his opinions will not be exercised. An ordinary man has many opinions, and he uses many outward reasons to fortify his opinions. A day must come when God's authority comes in to remove the strongholds that Satan has set up through reasons and to capture the thoughts of man, making him a willing slave of God who subjects himself to Christ without any opinion. Only then will there be a thorough salvation.

A person who has never met authority always wants to be God's counselor. His thoughts are not captured by God. When he goes to a place, the first thought that occurs to him is to "improve." When thoughts are not disciplined, there are many reasons and no brokenness is seen. Therefore, our thoughts have to be cut so deeply that they are captured back to God. Only then can we see the authority of God. Only then will we not dare to hide under our reasons and express our opinions carelessly.

There often seem to be two persons in the whole world who know everything—one is God and the other is myself. I am the counselor. I know everything. When this is the case, it clearly shows that the thoughts are not captured and that there is no knowledge of authority. A person whose stronghold of reasons has been broken by God's authority will have his thoughts captured by God; he can submit to Christ and be free from expressing opinions. In fact, he will not be interested in expressing his opinions. His thoughts will become the slaves of God, and he will no longer be a free man. The natural freedom is a prey for Satan. Such freedom has to be given up. We would only be obedient ones. There are only two ways in which man's thoughts can be used. One is being under the control of reasons, and the other is being under the control of Christ's authority. Actually, there is no such thing as freedom of choice in the whole world. We are captured either by reasons or by the Lord. We are

either Satan’s slaves or God’s slaves.

To discern whether or not a brother has met authority, we first need to find out whether he has rebellious words; second, we need to find out whether or not he reasons before God; and third, whether or not he expresses opinions. Before the Lord we must take care of the shattering of our reasons, but this is only the negative aspect. The reasons have to be shattered in order that the thoughts may be taken captive unto the obedience of Christ and no longer dare express their own opinions. Formerly, I gave many reasons based on my own opinions. Today all my reasons are gone. I owe submission to whoever has captured me. A captive has no freedom. Even if he expresses an opinion, it is useless. A captive cannot present his own opinions. He can only receive opinions. It is the same way when we are taken captive by the Lord. We no longer express opinions or suggestions. Instead, we only take God’s opinion.

A Warning to the Opinionated Ones

Paul

Paul was an intelligent, able, wise, and sensible person. He was capable and confident in his work, and served God with his own zeal. When he was on his way to Damascus with a company of men to lay hold of Christians, he suddenly met a great light, which struck him to the ground. In that moment all of his opinions and methods were gone. All his capabilities were shattered. He did not go back to Tarsus, nor did he go back to Jerusalem. Not only was his trip to Damascus thrown away; all of his reasons were thrown away as well. When many encounter difficulties, they turn another direction. If one way is blocked, they try another way. All the while they still journey according to their own methods and opinions. Many are so foolish that they do not fall even when they are struck by God. They are only struck by God in the event. They are not struck by God in their reason; their thoughts are still present. Many have been cut off from their way to Damascus, but they still find a way to Tarsus or to Jerusalem. But once Paul was struck, everything was over. Nothing more needed to be said. Nothing more needed to be considered. He did not know anything anymore. He asked the Lord, “What shall I do, Lord?” Here was a man who was submissive from the heart. His thoughts were captured by the Lord. Saul had been an outstanding and

distinguished person everywhere he went, but when he met the authority of God, all of his opinions were gone. The biggest mark of a person who has met God is the absence of prejudice and cleverness. We have to ask for God's mercy that we would be simple in the light. He who meets God's authority will fall before God's face and spontaneously have no more opinions. Paul said that he had been captured by God to be His prisoner. Now is not the time for us to express opinions. Our place is just to listen and submit.

King Saul

Saul was rejected by God, not for theft but for offering a sacrifice to God of sheep and oxen that he assumed were the best. This was his opinion. He was trying to please God by his own thoughts. His thoughts were not captured, and he was thus rejected by God. One cannot say that Saul was not zealous in his service to God. He did not lie. They were the best of the sheep and the oxen. The problem, however, was that he made a decision based on his own opinion (1 Sam. 15). A servant of God cannot express his own opinion; he can only carry out God's will. We should have only one desire: "What shall I do, Lord?" If this is not our attitude, we are completely wrong. To obey is better than sacrifice. There is no place for man to express his opinion before God. When King Saul saw so many fat sheep and oxen, he wanted to keep some for offerings. His heart was for God, but his obedience was short. Having a heart for God cannot replace the words, "I dare not say anything." And the offerings of the fat cannot replace an attitude of "having no voice" before the Lord. God commanded that all the Amalekites with their sheep and oxen be completely destroyed, but Saul was unwilling to do it. Later, the Amalekites killed him, and his reign was stopped. Whoever comes up with a proposal to save the Amalekites will be killed by the Amalekites in the end.

Nadab and Abihu

Nadab and Abihu were also rebellious in the matter of sacrifice. They did not submit to the authority of their father, but instead made a proposal out of their own initiative. They committed the sin of offending God. It was a sin of offering strange fire, a matter of overstepping God's minister. Although they did not say anything or murmur any reasonings, they

burned incense by their own will and according to their own feeling. They thought that this kind of service was a good thing. If they were wrong, they thought that it was but a mistake in service. To them it was not a great sin. But it turned out that they were immediately rejected by God and immediately died.

The Testimony of the Kingdom Made Possible Only through Submission

God does not check on our zeal for the gospel or our willingness to suffer; He checks to see whether or not we are obedient. Refraining from opinion, stopping all reasonings, ceasing all evil speaking, and submitting to God completely are the beginning of the kingdom. This will be a day of glory, the day that God has been waiting for since the foundation of the earth. God has a Firstborn who has already submitted, who is the firstfruit. Yet God is waiting for all the sons to be conformed identically to the Son. If there is a church on earth that truly submits to God's authority, there will be the testimony of the kingdom, and Satan will be defeated. Satan is not afraid of our work. As long as we stand on the principle of rebellion and act independently by our own will, Satan will laugh in secret.

According to the law of Moses, the ark should have been borne by the Levites. But when the Philistines sent the ark back to the Israelites, they did so with an oxcart. When David desired to receive the ark into the city of David, he did not seek the will of God. Rather, he made his own proposal and pulled the ark by the oxen. When the oxen stumbled, the ark fell, and Uzzah stretched forth his hand to uphold it. Immediately, he was smitten by God and died. Even if the ark did not fall, it was at most on an oxcart; it was not on the shoulders of the Levites. When the Levites lifted the ark across the Jordan, the waves were high. Yet the ark was in peace. This tells us one thing: God does not like man's proposals. Man must forever be submissive to God. Only when God empties us completely can His will be done unhindered. If we come with our human opinions, service to God will never have a way. Everything is done through God's ruling, not man's scheming. Man's opinion must be thoroughly dismantled. His thoughts must be shut up; they must be forbidden from making suggestions. In the past there was freedom in living by the self. But when the thoughts are captured, there is no more

freedom. As a result we can be obedient to Christ and have the true freedom, a freedom that is in the Lord.

Second Corinthians 10:6 says, “We are ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.” Only when the thoughts are captured can obedience be fulfilled. Everyone who can still maneuver and express opinions before God does not have his obedience fulfilled. The Lord is ready. When our obedience is fulfilled, He will rise up to avenge the disobedient ones. If we would thoroughly turn around and be fearful of our own opinions and proposals, our obedience will be fulfilled, and God will manifest His authority on earth today. If the church cannot be submissive, much less can the world be submissive. If the church is not submissive, it is vain to hope for others to submit to the gospel. Only with a submissive church can there be a submissive response to the gospel. All of us have to learn to be restricted. Our mouths have to be disciplined to stop speaking. Our minds have to be disciplined to stop reasoning. Our hearts have to be disciplined to stop proposing. If we do this, a way of glory will be before us, and God will manifest His authority on earth.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Proper Limit Of Submission To Authority

Scripture Reading: Heb. 11:23; Exo. 1:17; Dan. 3:17-18; 6:10; Matt. 2:13; Acts 5:29

Submission Being Absolute, But Obedience Being Relative

Submission is a matter of attitude, but obedience is a matter of conduct. Acts 4:19 says, “But Peter and John answered and said to them, Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you judge.” The apostles, however, were not rebellious in their spirit; they were still submitting to all those who were in authority. Obedience is not absolute. Some authorities we have to obey, but others we cannot obey. The latter include those who touch on basic matters of the Christian faith, such as our belief in the Lord and the liberty of preaching the gospel. A son can say anything to his father. But there cannot be any attitude of rebellion. Our submission should always be absolute. In some matters we can be obedient at the same time that we are submissive. In other

matters we cannot be obedient, but we still have to remain submissive. All these are a matter of attitude.

Acts 15 is an example of a church conference. In a conference we can suggest or debate. But when the decision is reached, everyone should be submissive.

The Limit Of Obeying The Deputy Authority

If there are parents who force their children to stop attending church meetings, the children should be submissive in their attitude, but they must not obey. This is like the apostles preaching the gospel. When the Jewish synagogue stopped them, they were submissive in their attitude, but in practice they went on according to the commission of the Lord. They chose to preach the gospel rather than be restricted by the synagogue. It was not a defiance with quarrels and shouting, but a defiance with calmness. At any rate, there must never be any attitude of stubbornness or words of contradiction against those in authority. Once a man meets authority, he becomes soft and pliant. The submission of a person in heart, attitude, and words must be absolute. There must not be any stubbornness or rebellion.

When the deputy authority (the one representing God's authority) clashes with the direct authority (God), one must be submissive to the deputy authority but must not be obedient to it. We will summarize the matter in three points:

(1)Obedience is a matter of conduct; it is relative. Submission is a matter of attitude; it is absolute.

(2)Only God is the object of unlimited submission. Man, who is less than God, should only receive limited submission.

(3)If the deputy authority gives an order that is obviously contrary to God's order, we can only submit; we cannot obey. We must submit only to the authority of God. We do not obey the orders that are contrary to God.

If parents ask their children to go to places that the children do not like to go to, and if there is no sin involved in the matter, we have a borderline case. Submission is absolute. But obedience is another matter. If your

parents force you to go, then you have no choice but to go. But if they do not force you to do it, you do not have to go. If all children have this attitude, God will release them in their environments.

Examples In The Bible

(1)The midwives and the mother of Moses disobeyed the order of Pharaoh so that the life of Moses could be preserved. The Bible calls them women of faith.

(2)The three friends of Daniel did not worship the golden image of King Nebuchadnezzar. They disobeyed the order of the king, yet they submitted to the king's burning.

(3)Daniel defied the decree in order to pray to God, yet he submitted to the king's judgment to be thrown into the lion's den.

(4)Joseph escaped with the Lord Jesus to Egypt to avoid the killing by King Herod.

(5)Peter went contrary to the charge of those in the synagogue and preached the gospel. He also said that it was right to obey God rather than men. Yet he submitted to the rulers' chains and imprisonment.

Definite Marks Of Submission To Authority

How do we know if a person is one who submits to authority? Here are a few marks:

(1)As soon as a person meets authority, he will look for authority everywhere. The church is the organ for the training of Christian submission to authority. In the whole world there is no such thing as submission. But a Christian must learn submission. He must, moreover, submit from the heart, not just in an outward way. Once a person learns submission, he will look for authority wherever he goes.

(2)Once a man meets God's authority, he will soften, wither, and weaken. This is because he has become fearful of making mistakes; he is a truly soft person.

(3)Those who have met authority will not like to be the authority. They will have no desire or interest to be an authority. They have no joy in giving opinions or in controlling others. Those who submit to authority are

always afraid of making mistakes. But many love to be God's counselors. Only those who do not know authority love to be the authority.

(4)Those who have met authority will have their mouths shut. They will be restricted. They will not dare to speak carelessly, because they have the consciousness of authority with them.

(5)If a man has met authority, any transgression in others will be detected by him immediately. He will see through many lawlessnesses and realize many rebellions. He will then come to know that the principle of lawlessness abounds everywhere, in the world as well as in the church. Only those who have met authority can lead others to learn submission. Only when the brothers and sisters are submissive to authority will the church have a testimony and a way on earth.

Upholding The Order Of Authority Depending On The Knowledge Of Authority

If a man has not met authority and does not know the principle of submission to authority, he cannot bring others into the way of submission and authority. If you put two dogs together, you cannot make one the authority and make the other submit to authority. This is useless. If a man meets authority, everything is solved. Once he violates authority, he will realize that he has violated God. If a man has not seen authority, it is useless to point out his mistakes. When such a situation occurs, we have to withdraw and take care lest we fall into the same realm of rebellion.

Martin Luther And Leaving The Denominations

It was right for Martin Luther to rise up to speak for the basic principle of justification by faith. It is also right for us to leave the denominations to stand as the testimony of oneness in the local church. Since we have seen the glory of Christ and the Body of Christ, we cannot have any other name apart from the name of the Lord. The Lord's name is of foremost importance. Why is salvation not only through the blood of Christ but also through the name of the Lord? This is because the Lord's name means resurrection and ascension. God has only one way of salvation, and He has placed this under the name of the Lord. In baptism we are baptized into the name of the Lord, and our meeting together is in the name of the

Lord. Therefore, the cross and the blood alone cannot solve the problem of denominations. If a man sees the glory of ascension, he cannot insist on any name other than that of the Lord's. We can only exalt the Lord's name. There cannot be any other name. Today's denominational organizations are overthrowing the Lord's glory. This is a blasphemy to the Lord.

Life And Authority

The church is maintained by two things: life and authority. The life is for us to submit to authority. The difficulties in the church seldom arise from disobedience. They mainly arise from an unwillingness to submit. The principle of our life is that of submission, in the same way that the principle of the bird life is to fly in the air, and the principle of the fish life is to swim in the water.

The way of oneness in Ephesians 4 seems far off now. But if men meet authority, the way is not far away. All of the saints may have differences of opinion, but there is no rebellion. The submission is from the heart. Then we will all arrive at the oneness of the faith. Today the life is here, and the principle of life is also opened to us. If the Lord is merciful to us, we will be able to take up this way quickly. Today life is not only for us to deal with sin. That is only the negative aspect. Life is also for submission. This is more crucial, and is the positive aspect of it. Once the spirit of rebellion departs from us, the spirit of submission will be recovered, and the situation in Ephesians 4 will be manifested before our eyes. If all the churches take the way of submission, these glorious facts will unfold before our eyes.

PART TWO
HOW TO BE GOD'S DEPUTY AUTHORITY

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Kind Of Person God Uses To Be His Deputy Authority

Submission To Deputy Authority And Being A Deputy Authority

God’s children must learn to know authority and find out to whom they should submit. Wherever we go, the first thing we should ask is whose authority should we be under. As soon as we move to a place, we should not expect to be the master, asking others to submit to us. Instead, we should be like the centurion, who told the Lord Jesus, “For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me” (Matt. 8:9). Here was a man who truly knew authority. He could submit to authority; therefore, he was able to be a deputy authority himself. We have said that God upholds and maintains the whole universe with His authority. He also begets His children with His authority (John 1:12) and binds them together with His authority. Therefore, if a man is independent, individualistic, and free from any God-appointed deputy authority, he is an outsider as far as God’s administration over the whole universe is concerned. He cannot get along with other children of God, and as such, he cannot accomplish God’s work on earth today. God has established deputy authorities in the church; the church is built up and maintained by the authority of God. For this reason every child of God should look for the authority to whom he should submit so that he can coordinate with others in a proper way. Unfortunately, many people have failed in this point.

If we do not know the object of our faith, we cannot believe in anything. If we do not know the object of our love, we cannot love anyone. If we want a person to believe in something, we first must show him the object of his faith. If we want a person to love someone, we first must show him the object of his love. In the same way, if we do not know the object of our submission, we will not know how to submit. In order to teach a person submission, we first must let him know the person to whom he should submit. There are many deputy authorities in the church to whom we should render submission. When we submit to them, we are submitting to God. Many people can preach submission, but they themselves cannot submit to any authority. We must be a person who submits to authority before we can be a deputy authority ourselves. Moreover, we cannot submit only to those whom we love; we have to learn to submit to all authorities over us. Even the policeman on the street is an object of our submission.

The Need To Encounter Authority In A Thorough Way

There are many authorities in the church. They are over you, and you have to learn to submit to all of them. You have to learn to face all kinds of authority, and you must recognize authority in others. Once you encounter authority in a person, you have to learn to submit to that person immediately. You should not weigh him carefully and then decide if you should submit to him. If you consider whether or not a person is worthy of submission before you submit to him, you have only encountered the person himself; you have not encountered authority itself. If a man has not met authority, he can never be a deputy authority himself. If a man does not know how to submit to authority, he cannot be God's deputy authority. Unless a man first deals with rebellion in himself, he does not know how to be an authority. Unless we first judge the sin of rebellion in us, we cannot know what submission is. God's children should not be unorganized and tangled yarn or a mob of undisciplined people. If there is no testimony of submission among God's children, there will be no church, and there will be no ministry and no work. We must realize that this is a grave problem. We must have a very serious dealing before the Lord, and must encounter the matter of authority in a thorough way. We have to learn to submit to one another, and we must learn to submit to deputy authorities. Only after that can we begin to learn to be a deputy authority.

Three Requirements for Deputy Authorities

Today we will consider the kind of persons God uses to be His deputy authorities. In order to be God's deputy authority, a person must fulfill three fundamental requirements (in addition to knowing God's authority and submitting to His authority).

Recognizing That All Authorities Come from God

A deputy authority must remember that all authorities come from God. God is the One who has established all authorities. If there is any authority in a man at all, that authority comes from God. There is no inherent authority in a person, and no one can appoint himself to be an authority. Our personal opinions cannot become others' law, and our own ideas, views, and proposals do not deserve others' esteem; they are no better than those who are under us. We have to remember that all authority comes from God. In fact, the only authority that is authority at all

is the authority that comes from God, and only such authority can claim submission from others. We can only ask the brothers and sisters to submit to the authority in us which comes from God. A deputy authority can only be a deputy to God's authority. He cannot presume that he has any authority in himself just because he has become a deputy authority. This is a basic problem with us today. All deputy authorities must remember that they are merely God's representative authorities; they have no authority in themselves.

No matter whether we are in the world, in the church, or in God's work, we must always remember that we have absolutely no authority in ourselves. None of us have any authority in ourselves. We must remember that no one in the whole universe has authority except God. The authorities that we see today are but men executing God's authority; there are no self-made authorities. Policemen merely carry out the law. Likewise, judges merely execute the law. They can only execute the law; they cannot legislate the laws. All the officers and authorities in this world are established by God and are there only to execute the law. They execute the law on behalf of God's authority. They cannot institute any law by themselves. All authorities in the church today are likewise deputies of God's authority. The reason we have authority is simply because we are representing God's authority. There is no intrinsic element in ourselves that sets us apart from others or that gives us the right to be an authority.

A person becomes an authority because of his knowledge of God's will, God's mind, and God's thoughts. One does not become an authority based on his own ideas or opinions, but through an apprehension of God's will and desire. One cannot expect others to submit to his own will or opinion. The extent one represents authority depends on the extent of one's knowledge of God's will and thoughts. God appoints a person to be a deputy authority because such a person knows His will and His thoughts more than others, not because he has more suggestions, better ideas, or higher thoughts. Actually, this is the kind of people we are most afraid of in the church. They think that they have better ideas and opinions, and they assume to be the authority and impose themselves upon others.

Many young co-workers and saints have not learned the lessons; they do

not know God's will or thoughts. This is why God has placed them under you. As the authority to them, you have the responsibility to tell them God's will and thoughts. Please remember that you have nothing in yourself that can claim submission from others. It is only when you become acquainted with God's will that you can ask others to submit to the authority in you. Every time that you have to deal with someone, you must have the assurance from God that you understand His will and that you know what God wants to do in that instance. Once you become clear about the Lord's way of dealing with the situation, you can act as the authority. Only then can you serve others with your authority. Without this you do not possess any authority to which others should submit.

No one who does not learn to submit to God's authority or who is ignorant of His will can become God's deputy authority. Suppose a man represents a company to negotiate business with others. He cannot make an offer according to his own ideas. He cannot make a promise based on his own likes, and he cannot make his own decision to sign a contract. He must first find out his manager's plan and know what his manager wants him to say and under what circumstances and conditions he can sign the contract. In the same way, if a man wants to be God's deputy authority, he must first understand God's will and His way. Only then can he execute God's authority. To be a representative authority, one must first be acquainted with the person whom he represents. He cannot have his own ideas, thoughts, or words. God's deputy authority must first know God's will. He cannot pass on an order to the brothers and sisters that God has not issued. Suppose you tell someone to do something, and suppose he has the chance to go to the Lord together with you to inquire of the matter. If God does not acknowledge what you have said to the brothers, you will be left representing only yourself, not God. This is why you have to understand God's will and execute it on God's behalf. If you do this, God will acknowledge what you do. You can have authority only when God acknowledges your decision. Anything that issues from yourself bears no authority whatsoever.

In spiritual matters, we have to learn to always climb higher and strike deeper. We must always seek for a deeper and richer knowledge of God's ways and will. We need much revelation and learning. We need to learn many things and acquire all kinds of experiences. We have to see

what others have not seen and touch what others have not touched. What we do must be based on what we have learned before the Lord, and what we say must be based on what we have perceived and experienced before the Lord. If we have sufficient experience before the Lord, and if we have sufficiently learned His ways, we will have the boldness to declare that this is what we know from God, that this is what we have learned of Him, and that this is what we have experienced in Him. When we do this, we will have authority. Without God, there is no authority. Those who have not seen anything before God have no authority before men. All authorities are based on our knowledge and learning before God. Some older ones may think that they can impose their ideas upon the younger ones. Some brothers may think that they can impose themselves upon the sisters, and some quick ones may think that they can impose themselves upon the slow ones. But such self-acts will never work. If you want to be an authority to others and want others to submit to your authority, the first thing you have to do is know authority yourself. You have to realize that you have no authority in yourself. What you should have is knowledge of God and an apprehension of His will. Only then can you be a deputy to God's authority.

Learning to Deny Ourselves

The second basic requirement of a deputy authority is to deny himself. Before one is clear about God's will, he should not open his mouth and should not exercise any authority. God's deputy authority must not only know His authority on the positive side, but must learn to deny himself on the negative side. Please remember that neither God nor the brothers and sisters treasure your opinion. I am afraid that the only one who treasures your opinion in the whole world is yourself. If you think your opinion is the best, that God treasures your opinion, and that the brothers and sisters honor your idea, you are living in a dream. Do not be so foolish as to unilaterally impose your opinion upon others. We are afraid of those with much opinion, and we are also afraid of those with many ideas, those who like to be others' counselors. We are afraid of men who are too subjective. Many people are very subjective, and they like to be counselors to others. They make proposals and plans for others in everything. The minute they are given the opportunity, they put forward their proposals. These ones can never be a president, a chairman, or a

policeman. However, even though they may not be in certain positions, they think they know what those in such positions should do. They like to propose for others. As soon as they are given the chance, they open their mouth to express their ideas and air their opinions before others. Even if they are not given the chance, they still try to barge in for a word or two. If they cannot find an opportunity to speak in front of others, they will try to do it behind others. Please remember that God would never appoint anyone with a great deal of opinions, proposals, and views to be His deputy authority. We would not ask a person who loves to spend money to manage our bank account, because we do not want to suffer loss. In the same way, God does not ask a person who loves to express his opinion to be His deputy authority, because He does not want to suffer loss either.

The Lord must first thoroughly break our self before we can become His deputy authority. According to my personal observation, I have never seen God choose an opinionated person to be His deputy authority. Such a one must first go through God's breaking and give up his interest in meddling in others' affairs and acting as others' counselors. God wants us to represent His authority, not replace His authority. It is true that we are like God in many ways. But He remains the sovereign One in His Godhead and position. His will belongs to Him alone; it is supreme and sovereign above everything else. He never seeks counsel from us, and He never wants us to be His counselor. This is why God's deputy authority must not be subjective. Of course, in order to conduct business, there is the need for decisions and judgments. It does not mean that God will only use those who have no ideas, opinions, or judgments in anything. It means that we must be genuinely broken, our wisdom must be destroyed, and our opinions and proposals must be crushed before God can use us. The basic problem with many people is that by nature they are active in their mind; they speak a great deal and make many proposals. They are naturally clever and like to be others' counselors. Such ones have to pray for mercy from God. They need a basic dealing and a basic breaking. This is not an empty slogan, a teaching, or a kind of imitation. A man must receive a fundamental dealing and breaking, and there must be an open wound; his own wisdom, opinion, and ideas must be crushed and broken. Such a person spontaneously will be free of his own thoughts and ideas. A man who has passed through God's

chastisement is one who lives in fear before the Lord. He will no longer dare speak carelessly. He will always be afraid of making mistakes. As long as God's wound remains in a man, he will feel the pain the minute he moves, and no one will need to remind him of his wound.

If a man only knows the teaching of brokenness and is only putting on a performance by imitating others in keeping his mouth shut, his true nature will be exposed sooner or later. Some people are by nature talkative and opinionated. It is difficult to see them shut their mouth and not express their opinion. Such ones may pick up some teachings on brokenness and realize that they should not talk so much or make so many proposals. If they begin to imitate others and follow their example, their fig leaves soon will dry up (Gen. 3:7), and their underlying condition will be exposed. We cannot control ourselves with our will. If we try to control ourselves with our will, our true self will be exposed as soon as we are engaged in a heated discussion, and we will find ourselves confessing our sins to God again. We need nothing less than the killing of our self by God's light. God has to allow us to bump against the wall until our skull is cracked and our bones come apart. We must go through an experience like that of Balaam in Numbers 22:25. God needs to inflict a wound on us so that as soon as we move again, we will feel the hurt and not dare make any more proposals. When a man is wounded, there is no need for others to exhort him to walk slowly; he spontaneously will slow his pace. This is the only way that will deliver us from our self. This is why I have often said that we need wounds. Others must find open wounds in us. There is no other way to go on except through a thorough confession and dealing before God.

Those who are the deputy authorities must learn not to propose any opinion of their own or express their own ideas. They must not have an addiction for meddling in others' affairs. Some people think that they are the supreme justices; they think they know how to manage everything, whether it is things in the world, things in the church, or anything at all. They think that they know everything, and that they have an idea and a solution for everything. When others come to them, they gladly give away their advice. If others do not come to them, they still give away their advice freely like spreading the gospel. Such opinionated ones have never been disciplined; they have never gone through any severe

dealings. They may have experienced some minor and superficial dealings, but their opinions, ideas, and methods still abound. They seem to be omnipotent and omniscient. Their opinions are like open merchandise in a department store. Such ones can never be an authority. Every deputy authority of God must have one basic qualification—they must not have an inclination for careless opinions or criticism. They should not even have murmuring opinions or unexpressed proposals in their heart. Only those whose self has been dealt with in such a way are qualified to be God's deputy authority.

The Need for Constant Fellowship with the Lord

Those who are God's deputy authorities should possess a third qualification—they must have a constant and intimate fellowship with the Lord. There must not only be a communion, but a communication. Some are loaded with opinions throughout the day. These ones must learn to give up their opinions. Every time one has an opinion, he has to bring it to the Lord and find out if such an opinion is of the flesh or of God. In this way God will gradually reveal His heart's desire to him. This is the basic need. The fundamental problem with many people is that they open their mouth without ever approaching God. They express their opinions loosely and speak for the Lord carelessly because they are far from God. The easier it is for a person to mention God's name, the more it proves that he is far from God. Only those who are near to God have a fear of Him, and only these ones can feel the repugnancy of wild opinions. For example, many villagers here in Kuling are lumbermen. They can freely criticize the government and the leaders of our country. But in Nanking or Chungking (capitals in China) one does not hear criticism from the people. Even though people here speak of the president freely, if he came to Kuling, everyone would address him as "Sir" or "Mr. President" in a respectful way. No one would dare address him disrespectfully. In the same way, only those who are near to God have a fear of and respect for Him. They would not dare walk loosely or speak in the Lord's name.

We must realize that fellowship is a basic qualification for being an authority. The more we come to the Lord and draw near to Him, the more we become conscious of our mistakes. We will see that many of the actions that we previously considered as right were actually wrong. The more we know God, the more things will appear different to us. There

were things which we were so sure of ten or twenty years ago. What is our view of them now? Many times you may say to yourself, “Why was I so blind? Why was I so confident and so sure that I was right?” The same thing that seemed right before may be shown to be totally wrong today. Once you have met God face to face, you will no longer be so sure in your speaking, you will no longer be so self-confident, and you will begin to be afraid of making mistakes. If the things we were so sure of in the past can be found to be wrong today, what will happen to the things that we are so sure of today? Hence, if we are persons who are in constant fellowship with the Lord, we will never open our mouths rashly. The less a person knows himself, the more he will boast about what he knows. Loose speaking is a proof that one is far from God.

The fear of the Lord is not an outward performance. Only those who constantly come near to God can fear God. However, a wild person who has no control over himself is far from God. As soon as the queen of Sheba saw Solomon, there was no more spirit in her (1 Kings 10:4-5). But today something more than Solomon is here (Matt. 12:42). When we go before the Lord, there should be “no more spirit” in us; we should not dare speak His name lightly or open our mouth rashly. We should be like a servant waiting at the door, telling God that we know nothing. May the Lord deliver us from the sickness of speaking what we do not understand and making judgments on what we do not know. Sometimes we have to take action immediately, yet we are not a person in constant fellowship with God, and we make decisions in the spur of the moment. This is a big problem in many people. No problem is more serious than that of a servant of God speaking rashly when he is unsure of God’s will. It is indeed a big problem for a man to make judgments about a matter before he is even clear of anything before the Lord; such a one is never clear, yet he is ever speaking. We can be clear about God’s will only when we live before Him and draw near to Him all the time.

The Lord Jesus said, “The Son can do nothing from Himself except what He sees the Father doing, for whatever that One does, these things the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19). He also said, “I can do nothing from Myself; as I hear, I judge, and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will but the will of Him who sent Me” (v. 30). We have to learn to hear, to understand, and to see. All these abilities are

derived from an intimate fellowship with the Lord. Only those who are living in the presence of God can listen, understand, and see. Only those who have learned the lessons can know God's will, and only as they live in God's presence can they speak to the brothers and sisters. When problems arise among the saints or in the church, these ones will know what to do. Unless a person practices this, he will be taking the name of the Lord in vain.

Please give me the liberty to say a frank word. The problem with many of God's servants today is that they are too bold, or to put it in a stronger way, they are too reckless. They have never learned to listen to God's word, and they have never seen any revelation or understood God's will, yet they have the audacity to speak for God! Let me ask you: What kind of authority do you have in speaking? Who has given you authority? What makes you different from the other brothers and sisters? If you do not have the assurance that what you speak is God's word, what authority do you hold? If I brought you and someone who has a dispute with you to the Lord, would you have the confidence to say that everything you have said was of the Lord? If God acknowledges your words, it would be all right. But if God does not acknowledge your words, what authority would you really have? You must remember that authority is deputized to you; it is not intrinsically yours. If you are not representing God's authority, what right do you have to speak or work?

All of God's deputy authorities must live before God and learn to fellowship with Him. You must be dealt with by Him, and there must be scars upon your body. When you speak to the saints or in the church, you must not insert your self into your speaking but must have the assurance that there is authority behind your words. Never be deceived to think that you have any authority in yourself. Never think that any authority has its source in you. You must forever remember that God is the only One who has the authority, and no one else. The Bible says clearly that all authority is of God.

If there is any authority in me today, such authority comes from God. I am only the channel through which authority flows. Other than this distinction, I am the same as everyone else; I am no different from the most foolish man. What sets me apart from others and gives me the authority is God, not anything in myself. Therefore, we have to learn to

fear God and to fellowship with Him. This is not a light matter. We should tell the Lord, “I am no different from all the other brothers and sisters.” If God has arranged for us to bear some authority and learn to be a deputy authority, we have to learn to live before Him and have constant fellowship with Him. We have to ask Him to show us His heart’s desire. Only when we see something before God can we minister it to the brothers and sisters, and only then are we qualified to be a deputy authority.

Why do we use the word communication in discussing fellowship with God? It is because fellowship is not something that we can take care of once for all before the Lord; it requires that we live in the Lord’s presence continually. Communication is a lifelong exercise. We can learn some basic lessons once for all. But living in the presence of the Lord is a continual matter. Once we move away from God, authority becomes perverted, and the flavor changes. Hence, we have to live before the Lord continually and fear Him all the time. We should always bear in mind that we should be those who have passed through God’s judgment. Since God wants to use us, we must live in His presence all the time.

The above three items are the basic qualifications of a deputy authority. Authority is of God, and we are merely His deputies. All authority belongs to God. Therefore, man cannot be subjective and must deny himself. This is why we need to live moment by moment in fellowship with Him. Since authority belongs to God, we have no authority of our own. We are merely representatives. Authority does not belong to me; therefore, I cannot be subjective. I must live in fellowship. Once fellowship is cut off, authority is gone. Those who are in authority are placed in an awkward position—they cannot quit and they cannot relax. How very different this is from human concepts. No one who truly knows God would like to be an authority. To be a deputy authority is a great matter; it is a serious thing.

Not Establishing One’s Own Authority

Since God is the One who establishes authority, there is no need for deputy authorities to try to build up their own authority. I know of a few brothers and sisters who were so foolish in the past that they thought they could direct others with their authority. They were trying to build up their own authority. This is foolish in the eyes of God. Hebrews 5:4 says,

“No one takes the honor upon himself, but only as he is called by God.” The same is true with authority; no one can take authority upon himself. When God grants one to be an authority, he has authority. Hence, there is no need to demand obedience from others. If others insist on being wrong, let them be wrong. If others will not obey, leave them alone. If others want to take their own way, let them take their own way. We must never argue with others. If I am not appointed by God to be the authority, why do I have to demand obedience from others? On the other hand, if I am an authority appointed by God, why do I have to worry that others will not submit to me? If there is authority with me, others are disobeying God when they disobey me. So why do I need to be concerned with others’ disobedience? If authority is with me, others will be arguing with God when they argue with me. There is nothing more serious than this in the whole world. We do not need to force others to listen to us; we can give everyone the liberty to do what they want. If God backs up the authority, what more do we have to fear? Have you ever seen a king on earth backing up his ministers? No! However, if you are a deputy authority, God will sustain you, support you, and even back you up.

The more we know authority and the more open doors, revelation, and ministry we have, the more we will give others the liberty to take their own way. We must never speak one word to vindicate our own authority; rather, we should give others the full liberty. Others should come to us in as spontaneous a way as possible. If they do not want us to be their authority, or if they shy away from us, we do not have to force them to accept us. If there is authority in us, whoever desires the Lord will gladly come to us. It is a most ugly thing for anyone to speak for his authority in order to establish authority for himself. No one can establish his own authority. What one can minister to others in a locality can never be replaced by anyone else. If you have a ministry and others do not submit to you, they are the ones who will suffer the loss. God’s government is a mysterious thing. Many people think that they are growing spiritually, but unless they continue in obedience, God’s light will stop. They may not realize it after just one or two days, but after a while, they invariably will fall.

We have a good example in David. He was a person who never tried to establish his own authority. After Saul was rejected and David was

anointed by God to be king, David still spent many years under Saul. He did not move his own hands to build up his own authority. If God has appointed you to be the authority, you must be able to pay the price to allow others to oppose you, disobey you, and rebel against you. But if you are not God's appointed authority, it would be useless to even try to build up your own authority. I do not like to hear some husbands speak to their wives, saying, "I am God's appointed authority and you must obey me," or some elders speak to saints in the church, saying, "I am God's appointed authority." If you are a deputy authority, others will spontaneously submit to you. If they do not submit, they will fall back, and if they oppose you, they will not be able to go on spiritually. Paul said that all who were in Asia had turned away from him (2 Tim. 1:15). Those who had forsaken Paul could never advance spiritually. Brothers and sisters, never try to build up your own authority. If God has appointed you to be the authority, simply accept it. If God has not appointed you to be the authority, why do you have to strive for it? All self-established authority must be eradicated from among us. We must allow God to establish every authority, and we must not try to build up any authority of our own. If God has indeed commissioned us to be the authority, others will have only two ways to take: Either they can disobey and fall or they can obey and be blessed.

When A Deputy Authority Is Tested

When a deputy authority is tested, he has to trust in God's government. There is no need to worry, defend, speak for oneself, or do anything at all. I dislike and abhor those who say, "I am God's appointed authority." When we set out for our work, we will find much opposition, lawlessness, and rebellion. But if we are truly a deputy authority, we do not have to build up our own authority or try to maintain it. If a man rebels, he is not rebelling against us, but against God. If he rebels, he is not offending our authority, but God's authority. We are merely here to act as the deputy authority. The One who is shamed, criticized, and opposed is God, not us. If God can endure these things, can we not endure them? Who are we? We are just the lowly ones who follow Jesus Christ of Nazareth. It is only right that we be despised. If we have not seen this, may the Lord be merciful to us. We have to realize that when others offend authority, they are not offending us, but the authority that is in us. I can speak from my

own experience. If our authority is of God and others oppose and damage us, they are the ones who suffer loss; they will have no future spiritually; their revelation will stop. God's government is a most sobering matter! We must learn to not trust in ourselves. We must fear God and know what authority is. May the Lord be gracious to us!

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Basis Of God's Deputy Authority—Revelation

Scripture Reading: Exo. 3:1-12; Num. 12:1-15

In the Old Testament the greatest authority God appointed was Moses. We can learn many lessons from him. We will put aside for now the general and lifelong dealings that Moses went through. Instead, we will pay attention to the description of his reaction when his authority was offended, mocked, opposed, and rejected. Moses was rejected and opposed several times, and each time he reacted in the proper way.

Before Moses was appointed by God to be the authority, he killed an Egyptian who had slain one of his kinsmen. Afterwards, he exhorted two Hebrews to not argue with each other. But the two Hebrews turned around and asked him, "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?" (Exo. 2:14). At that time Moses had not yet learned his lesson; he did not know the cross or the meaning of resurrection; he acted purely by the strength of his flesh. As a result, he could not stand the test. He had killed someone and rebuked others and appeared to be quite bold, yet within he was weak. As soon as he was tested he became afraid. He ran away to the wilderness of the Midianites in fear, and stayed there for forty years to learn his lesson (vv. 11-22). After he passed through many trials, God showed him the vision of the burning bush. The bush appeared to be burning, but it was not consumed. The fire did not consume the bush. After God showed Moses this revelation, He called him and made him the authority. It was after such a training and such a calling that he was qualified to be a leader. After he became the leader, he experienced rejection by others many times. In one instance, his brother Aaron and

his sister Miriam reviled him, criticized him, and rejected him as the deputy authority. Let us see how he responded.

The Reaction Of The Deputy Authority When Being Rejected

Not Listening to Reviling Words

According to Numbers 12:1-2, Moses married a Cushite woman, and Aaron and Miriam spoke against him for this. In this section we see the degree of spiritual loss they suffered as a result of their reviling of deputy authority, and we also see Moses' reaction as God's deputy authority. Aaron and Miriam were in effect challenging Moses: "Can it be possible that only you, Moses, who married a Cushite woman, can speak for God? Can we not do the same? You are a descendant of Shem, and you married a descendant of Ham. Can a person like you be a spokesman for God? Is it possible that we who have never married a descendant of Ham are barred from being God's mouthpiece also?" They might have argued a great deal with their sister-in-law, but the real problem was that they were touching Moses as the deputy authority. At this point verse 2 says, "And Jehovah heard it." It does not say that Moses heard it. Here we see a man who was not touched by man's word. He was a person beyond man's reviling. We see a transcendent man, a man of authority. All opposition, reviling, and rebellion were under his feet. He let God listen to the many words while he himself did not lend an ear to them.

Those who desire to be a minister of God's word, who want to speak for God, and who aspire to take the lead among the brothers and sisters should learn to have no ear for reviling words. We should let God listen to those many words; we should reserve the words for God. We should never pay attention to how others criticize or revile us. Those who find out what others say about them and then get angry, indignant, or vindictive are not qualified to be a deputy authority. Those who can be affected by revilings or who can be crushed by such words cannot be a deputy authority. Moses was a person untouched by reviling words.

Not Vindicating

When Moses was reviled, he did not vindicate himself. All vindication, justification, and reaction should come from God, not from man. Those who seek to vindicate themselves do not know God. No one who has

walked on this earth has had more authority than Christ. But when the Lord was on earth, He never vindicated Himself. He is the only person who never vindicated Himself. Authority and vindication are incompatible. Whenever we try to vindicate ourselves before someone, it means that the person is our judge. Whenever we vindicate ourselves before those who criticize us, we are telling them that they are higher than us. A vindicating person is a person who is under the judgment of others. Those who vindicate themselves have no authority whatsoever. Whenever a person vindicates himself, he loses his authority. God may have committed His authority to us, but if we vindicate ourselves before men, we have lost our authority because we are begging them to be our judge.

Paul was a deputy authority to the Corinthians, yet he said, “It is a very small thing that I should be examined by you or by man’s day; rather I do not even examine myself” (1 Cor. 4:3). Vindication can only come from God. We should pass on all reviling and critical words to the Lord. When man’s revilings become too much, God will take action. But if we vindicate ourselves to anyone, we are in effect making him our judge. If we seek understanding from anyone, we are falling under that person’s feet. Hence, we must never vindicate ourselves and must never seek understanding from anyone.

Full of Meekness

In Numbers 12:2 God heard the reviling words, and He took action in verse 4. But there is a parenthetical word in verse 3: “Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all the men who were on the face of the earth.” This is what we find in a God-appointed deputy authority. Why did Moses not hear their reviling words? Perhaps Moses thought that he was indeed wrong and did not want to argue with them. God cannot make a stubborn person His authority. He cannot appoint a belligerent man to be His deputy authority. The authorities God establishes in the church are meek and inconspicuous. God does not appoint persons of great charisma to be His authority; He appoints those who are not only meek in a general way, but meek to the extent that their meekness exceeds that of all the men who are on the face of the earth. In other words, they are as meek as God is.

A deputy authority can never build up his own authority. The more a person tries to build up his own authority, the less he is qualified to be the authority. Authority is from God; hence, vindication must also be from God. We pray that we do not meet too many hardened persons. Do not get the wrong idea that a hard and capable person would make a good deputy authority. We should be very clear that only a person like Paul, whose bodily presence was weak, can be the authority. The Lord said that His kingdom was not of this world, and therefore His attendants did not need to struggle (John 18:36). God's kingdom is not established through struggling. All authority earned through struggling is not authority from God.

Please remember that Moses was meek above all the men who were on the face of the earth. This is why he could be a deputy authority. If I ask you to list the traits of a deputy authority, I believe that nine out of ten of you would list such things as good and proper appearance, strong charisma, great power, or an imposing image. The human thought is that an authority should be capable, imposing, powerful, assertive, and eloquent. But such traits do not represent authority; rather, they represent the flesh. No other God-appointed authority in the Old Testament was as great as Moses, yet He was a most meek person. When he was in Egypt, he was quite fierce. He killed an Egyptian and rebuked two Hebrews. He dealt with others with his fleshly hands, but God did not use him as His authority then. Only after he had passed through God's testing and dealing, becoming so meek that his meekness was above all the men who were on the face of the earth, did he become an authority. The less a person truly resembles an authority, the more he feels that he is an authority. The more a person thinks that he is an authority, the less it is likely that he is an authority.

Revelation Being The Basis Of Authority

Numbers 12:4 says, "And suddenly Jehovah said to Moses and to Aaron and Miriam, Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting." Here the Lord spoke suddenly. Suddenly means something unexpected. Aaron and Miriam might have criticized Moses many times, but the Lord suddenly called them to the tent of meeting. Many people criticize easily and act against authority lightly. They speak against others loosely because they are living in their own tent; they are far away from the tent of meeting.

When a man is in his own tent, it is easy for him to criticize. But once he enters the tent of meeting, everything becomes clear to him. All three came before the tent of meeting, and Jehovah said to Aaron and Miriam, “Hear My words” (v. 6a). They first questioned if it was fair that God only spoke to Moses, and now God summoned them to hear His words too. This shows that they had never learned to hear God’s word and had never known what it was like for God to speak. On that day Jehovah spoke to them for the first time. Indeed, God was speaking, but He spoke words of rebuke, not words of revelation. It was not for the manifestation of God’s glory, but for the judgment of their actions. He said, “Hear My words.” It was as if He were saying, “I did not say anything in the past, but let Me say something now.” This word may also mean, “You have been speaking for so long and so often. Now give Me a chance to speak. You who are so good at speaking, listen to Me today.” A talkative person cannot hear God’s word; only a meek person can hear His word. Moses was meek, not talkative. He could turn any way the Lord wanted him to turn; he could go forward or backward. But Aaron and Miriam were stubborn.

After this God said, “If there is a prophet among you…” (v. 6b), as if He did not know that there was a prophet among them. It sounded as if God had forgotten something. But God said that even if there were a prophet, God would at most speak to him in a vision or in a dream (v. 6c). But with Moses, God spoke mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in obscure words (v. 8). This was God’s vindication. God’s speaking to Moses came in the way of revelations and light; they were very clear. Moses did not vindicate himself. It was God who vindicated him. It is true that everyone who is sent in the name of the Lord to speak to God’s children has some degree of authority. But I do hope that you will not try to establish your own authority. I hope that you will not vindicate yourselves. Revelation was granted to Moses alone, not to Aaron or Miriam. Whoever speaks with God face to face is God’s appointed authority. The establishment of authority is based upon God’s choice; it is God’s business, and man cannot interfere in any way. Neither is the annulling of authority achieved through man’s reviling. God could appoint Moses, and He could also annul Moses. But whether it was appointment or annulling, it was God’s business; man had no right to question it. Man could not annul Moses’ authority with reviling words. A man’s worth before the Lord is not based

on others' evaluation of him nor his own evaluation of himself. A man's worth before the Lord is based on revelation. Revelation is the standard of God's measure and valuation. The establishment of authority is based on God's revelation, and God evaluates a person based on revelation. As soon as a person is set aside by the Lord, he loses his revelation, and God no longer speaks to him. God said that Moses was His servant and that He spoke with him mouth to mouth. If God grants us revelation, everything will be fine. If He does not grant us revelation, nothing will work. Aaron and Miriam complained, and God seemed to ask, "How much revelation do you have? All My revelation is with Moses."

In order to learn to be the authority, we have to consider what we are before the Lord. When we set out for our work, the test is not in Aaron's or Miriam's measuring, but in God's measuring. If God grants us revelation, and we have a clear word from Him and face-to-face fellowship with Him, no one can annul us. But if the way upward is not clear and heaven is not open to us, nothing will avail even if all the doors on earth are open to us. If heaven is open to us, we will have God's vindication. We will have the proof of being a son of God, that is, the proof of sonship. When the Lord was baptized, heaven opened (Matt. 3:16). Baptism is a symbol of death. When the Lord was crucified on the cross, He entered death and was placed in the tomb. When darkness is at its worst, when pain reaches its height, and when all doors are shut, heaven opens. Revelation is the basis of authority. We must learn to not fight for ourselves or speak for ourselves. We should not be like Aaron or Miriam, clamoring for authority. If after you leave here you fight for authority, it will prove that you are in the flesh and in darkness. It will also prove that you have not seen anything here on the mountain.

God's Servant

In Numbers 12:7, God said, "My servant Moses…is faithful in all My house." This word is later quoted in the New Testament book of Hebrews. Hebrews shows us that Moses, as a type of Christ the Son of God, was faithful in all God's house (3:2). God seemed to be hinting at Aaron and Miriam, saying, "Moses might not have been altogether faithful in your house when he married a Cushite woman. But he serves My people and is faithful in all My house. You spoke against him because his wife may not have been a good sister-in-law in your house, but he is My servant.

Why are you not afraid when you speak against My servant Moses?”

God called Moses His servant. For me to be God’s servant means that I belong to God. I am God’s inheritance, and I have been sold to God. If I ever become lost, it will be God’s loss, not my loss. Those who own servants lose their property when they lose their servants. Moses was God’s servant, which means that he was God’s property, and when anyone spoke against His servant, God surely had to step forward to speak for him. We do not have to defend ourselves, and there is no need for us to build up our own authority. This is God’s business. I am His servant, and when I am spoken against, God will step forward. If God does not step forward, what use would there be for me to step forward myself? Why is there the need to build up my own authority at all? If God is the One who appoints me to be the authority, I should not do anything to establish myself; I should only allow revelation to vindicate me. If I find revelation and supply in others also, it proves that God has not vindicated me. But if God has established me, He will seal up others as a vindication for me. If you are a deputy authority and others dispute this, they are disputing God. If they have any life in them at all, they will experience a closed heaven, and they will bow to you and acknowledge your authority.

I hope that no one would stand up to claim that he is the authority. You should allow time and revelation to vindicate you. Revelation is the best vindication. Suppose you say that God has chosen you and that you have revelation and authority. If others oppose and rebel against you, and if they go to God and also receive revelation, it means that God has not vindicated you or backed you up. In that case it would be useless to speak for yourself. If you are faithful in all of God’s house and put everything you have into His house, and if you find Him sealing up others, it means that He has appointed you to be His authority. Authority is something in God’s hand; it does not depend on you. The greatest problem today is man’s self. If you understand what is God’s authority and God’s way, you will realize what I have been saying repeatedly, that is, when others argue with you, they are arguing with God, because you are God’s possession. As soon as others touch you, God seals up their heaven, and they have no choice but to turn and repent, acknowledging you as God’s authority. Hence, there is no need to build up your own authority. Everything depends on God’s vindication. If God seals up

others, it means that He has appointed you to be the authority.

No Personal Feelings

At the end of verse 8 God said, “Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?” God knows that there are some things to be fearful of. God is God; He knows what love is, what light is, what glory is, and what holiness is. God even knows what fear is because He feared for Aaron and Miriam. He asked, “Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?” God is afraid of nothing, but He told Aaron and Miriam that speaking against Moses was a fearful thing. To God this was a matter to be feared. Unless they were altogether in darkness, ignorance, and senselessness, they should have been afraid. At this point God stopped. He did not execute His judgment yet, but He departed, His anger burning against them (v. 9).

God expends much energy to maintain His authority. Let me solemnly repeat this: God maintains His own authority; He does not maintain Moses’ authority. We can say respectfully that when God’s servant commits a mistake, it is God’s business alone. God did not say, “You have spoken against Moses;” rather, He said that they had spoken against “My servant, against Moses.” It so happened that in this case, God’s servant was Moses. But if it had been someone else, it would have been the same; it would have been “My servant,” plus the name of the servant. God was here maintaining His own authority; He was not maintaining Moses’ authority. God would not allow anyone to infringe on His authority. As soon as man rebels against His authority, He turns away in wrath.

As soon as God left, the cloud was removed from over the tent (v. 10). The cloud represents God’s presence. For the cloud to leave means that God’s presence was removed. Typically, when the cloud moved on, God moved on, and the tabernacle moved on as well. But when the cloud moved this time, Miriam became leprous. Typically, the moving of the cloud marked the start of the Israelites’ journey. But on that day, they could not journey on, because rebellion had broken out. When Aaron saw this he was afraid, because he had partaken of this rebellion. Since Miriam had taken the lead in this rebellion, she was the one who became leprous.

Moses did not open his mouth. As long as the tabernacle did not communicate any revelation, Moses did not open his mouth. He had learned his lesson. Although he was eloquent, he kept his mouth shut and did not open it until Aaron pleaded for forgiveness. Those whose hearts and mouths are not bridled are not qualified to be the authority. Those who have God's authority surely have it in their heart as well as their mouth. When Aaron pleaded with Moses, he cried to Jehovah. Before that time, Moses was a bystander. There was no murmuring in him. There was no rebuke or criticism in him. When Aaron pleaded with him, he prayed. This is the cross. Here we find that Moses was a person who did not have any personal feeling. When he saw Miriam becoming leprous and Aaron pleading out of fear, he immediately cried to God. He did not say coldly, "All right, as a favor to you I will perhaps try to plead with God for you." No! Moses cried to God immediately. He did not have any feeling of his own. He had no thought of justification or punishment. When God's purpose was fulfilled, he forgave immediately. Authority is for executing God's command; it is not for uplifting oneself. A deputy authority should bring the presence of God to God's children, not the presence of himself. We are here to bring others under God's authority, not our authority. It is a small thing for us to be rejected. In verse 13 Moses prayed, "Heal her, O God, I beg You." Here was a man who was truly qualified to be an authority because he had no feeling of his own. May the Lord deliver us from our personal feelings. Once a man is entangled with his personal feelings, God's business suffers and He becomes restricted.

Moses did not take pleasure in Aaron and Miriam's suffering. On the contrary, he asked God for mercy and prayed for Miriam's healing. Had Moses not received mercy and had he been ignorant of God's grace, he would have said to Aaron, "Since you have said that God should speak to you also, why don't you pray to God yourself?" Or he could have said to God, "If You do not vindicate me, I will quit." It seems that God was giving Moses a chance to vindicate himself. Moses did not ask for such a chance; it came by itself. Moses could have said: "Had God been silent, I could not have done anything. But now that God has done something, I can take this opportunity to vindicate myself." But he did not take the opportunity to vindicate or revenge. He could have said to God, "My brother and sister are criticizing me. If You do not do anything for me, I

will quit.” It is easy for a man to seize the moment of God’s vindication to vindicate himself and take revenge. But Moses did not justify himself, nor did he take advantage of God’s vindication. He did not have any feeling of his own; he was a person who was not living in his self. Such criticism seemed very insignificant to him. Moses’ flesh had been completely dealt with. He did not revenge. On the contrary, he prayed for God to heal Miriam. This is like Christ praying on the cross for His persecutors (Luke 23:34). Some people think that it is an easy thing to be God’s deputy authority. But it is not an easy thing. One has to empty himself completely before he can be a deputy authority.

Moses was indeed a true representative of the Son of God. He was able to act as God’s deputy authority because he truly represented God. He was not touched by the flesh, and he did not protect himself or vindicate himself. He did not take revenge on his attackers. This is why God’s authority could flow through him unhindered. We can say that he truly was a man who had met God’s authority. He was not touched by the flesh, the carnal man, or the self at all. As such, he was qualified to be God’s deputy authority.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Character Of God’s Deputy Authority—Gracious To Others

Scripture Reading: Num. 16

How Moses Dealt With Rebellion

No rebellion among the children of Israel was as great as the one recorded in Numbers 16. Korah of the tribe of Levi took the lead, joining himself with Dathan and Abiram of the tribe of Reuben. In addition, 250 of the leaders of the assembly joined them. They gathered themselves together and spoke strong words against Moses and Aaron. This was a great rebellion. The reviling in Numbers 12 was confined to Aaron and Miriam, and was merely a murmuring behind the back. But the rebellion in chapter sixteen was corporate, and it was directly against Moses and Aaron. The rebels said, “You have gone too far!…Why then do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of Jehovah?” (v. 3). Their charges

were serious and severe. We should pay attention to (1) the condition of Moses, that is, his attitude, and (2) the way he dealt with the situation, that is, his answer to them.

First Reaction—Falling on His Face

Verse 4 says that Moses' first reaction was to fall on his face. This is the proper attitude of God's servant. All of the rebellious ones were standing when they spoke; only Moses fell down on his face. Here we see a man who had touched authority. He was indeed meek; he did not have any feeling of his own. He did not vindicate himself or argue. The first thing he did was fall on his face. In verses 5 through 7 he seemed to be saying, "Jehovah will make known who is His, who is holy, and whom He will choose, and He will cause him to come near to Him. There is no need for us to argue. In the morning we will all know. I dare not say anything for myself. He will show us clearly who is His. If it turns out to be you, that is fine. If it turns out to be me, that is also fine. Let God decide. We do not have to decide anything. Tomorrow we will all come before the Lord and be tested by the censers. Let the Lord decide who is the one; we do not have to fight for it. God will choose who is His. Let us come to God and be open to His speaking." Moses spoke these words meekly while he was falling on his face. However, the last few sentences were quite strong and serious: "You have gone too far, sons of Levi!" (v. 7). This was a sighing of grief from an elderly man who knew God. The Israelites had been wandering in the wilderness for a long time, and they were still not in Canaan yet. Moses was still hoping that they could go into Canaan; he was still hoping that he could recover them.

Exhortation and Recovery

Verses 8 through 11 were Moses' words of exhortation to Korah; he was trying to recover Korah. He had to deal with their accusation, which had to wait for the result of the next day. In the meantime, he was aware of the seriousness of this matter, and he was worried about them. It was not enough for him to sigh and worry; he felt that he had to exhort them as well. He seemed to say to Korah, "It is not a small thing for the sons of Levi to be chosen by God to do the service of the tabernacle of Jehovah. You should be content with this. Why do you still want to be the priests? When you do this, you do not oppose me; you oppose the Lord." Moses

was a magnanimous man, and he was confident of the things he was doing. He knew the seriousness of this matter and he was worried about the sons of Korah. This is why he exhorted them. His exhortation was not a sign of arrogance, but of humility. Others were attacking him and giving him a hard time. But no matter how wrong they were, he could still exhort them. This is a sign of a truly meek person. If we allow others to continue in their mistakes, it means that our hearts are hardened and that we have no intention to recover them. Refusal to exhort is a sign of a lack of humility; it shows that one is proud. When Moses was rebuked, he turned around to exhort his opposers and openly deal with them. He even gave them a night to think about it, hoping that they would repent.

In dealing with the rebellious ones, Moses took care of them separately. First he dealt with Korah the Levite and then with Dathan and Abiram. In verse 12 he sent for Dathan and Abiram to come, but they would not come, indicating that they wanted to break away. Here we see that even when a deputy authority is rejected, he will not want the opposing ones to break away. Instead, he will try to recover the lost ones. Dathan and Abiram said, “You have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey” (v. 13). This statement turned things around; it was exactly the opposite of the truth. They forgot that they were making bricks in Egypt. There was no milk or honey; there was not even straw to make the bricks. This is like bringing a young man to the Lord who then turns around and accuses you of bringing him to hell. It is also like the ten spies who clearly saw the riches of Canaan and yet would not enter, but murmured against Moses instead. Nothing more could be done except judgment when Dathan and Abiram’s rebellion reached its peak. Moses tried his best to recover them, but they declared twice that they would not go up. After all this, Moses gave up his hope, became angry, and went to Jehovah to settle the matter (v. 15). Then he told Korah, “You and all your company shall be present before Jehovah, you and they and Aaron, tomorrow. And let every one of you take his censer, and put incense upon it, and every one of you bring before Jehovah his censer, two hundred and fifty censers; you also, and Aaron, each his censer” (vv. 16-17). Korah’s company then came before the tent of meeting, reviling Moses and Aaron again. At this point the glory of Jehovah appeared to the whole assembly.

God stepped forward to judge. Korah was the chief instigator, and the assembly followed. God was prepared to destroy not only the chief instigator but all of the assembly as well (v. 21). But Moses fell down before the Lord again. The first time Moses fell on his face before his brothers. The second time he fell before the Lord. He prayed for the whole assembly and interceded for their safety. God answered his prayer and ordered the assembly to depart from the tents of the wicked ones (vv. 22-24). Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram. (They were of the tribe of Reuben and lived in a separate place.) Since they would not come to Moses, he went to them. He ordered the assembly to depart from them, and God executed His judgment upon Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (vv. 25-33).

Not Having a Spirit of Judgment

While God was about to execute His judgment, Moses said, “In this shall you know that Jehovah has sent me to do all these works, and that it has not been of my own mind” (v. 28). Moses was a meek person. He explained why he had to do this. It was God who ordered him to do it. According to his own feeling, he would not judge anyone who rebelled against him. He did it because God wanted to do it. Moses continued to show himself to be a servant of God. He did not say that they had offended him. He only said that they had offended the Lord. We have to learn to touch the spirit of such a person. There was no feeling of judgment in Moses at all. He was a servant of God, and he only wanted to be obedient to God. He had no feeling of his own. The only feeling he had was that the assembly had offended God, the One who had sent him. Following this, he told them that God had sent him and that there would be evidence as proof of this. We must realize that Moses could not fail here. Had Moses failed, the Israelites’ exodus out of Egypt would have been a failure. Moses was sent by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, just as Christ was sent by God to impart eternal life to men. God had to establish Moses. The result of His judgment was the destruction of three families and the consuming of the 250 leaders by fire. God executed a large-scale judgment to establish His deputy authority. The way of the rebellious ones is the way to Hades; rebellion and death go hand in hand. Authority is established by God, and when a man offends God’s authority, he is despising God. Here we see how Moses acted as a

deputy authority. He did not pass his own sentence or make his own proposals, and he did not have a spirit of judgment within him.

Intercession and Propitiation

When all the Israelites saw that the earth opened its mouth, they were afraid and fled away (v. 34). But they were afraid of the judgment; they were not afraid of God. They still did not know Moses, and their hearts were not yet turned. Therefore, their fear did not do them any good. They thought it over for a night, and the next day they rebelled again. All the assembly of the sons of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron, saying, “You have killed the people of Jehovah” (v. 41). Indeed, if a man has not touched God’s grace, one cannot expect any change in him. God wanted to step forward and destroy the whole assembly immediately. Here we see how a deputy authority should react to opposition. Actually, Moses could have been very angry with the attack of the whole assembly of Israel. It was God’s doing. Why did the Israelites have to blame him? They did not confront God but turned and sharply dealt with the deputy authority. Verses 42 through 45 tell us that God’s reaction was faster than that of Moses or Aaron. The glory of the Lord appeared suddenly, and a cloud covered the tent of meeting. God was about to judge the whole assembly. He told Moses and Aaron to rise from the midst of the assembly. This order seemed to be saying to Moses and Aaron, “Your prayer yesterday was wrong, yet I answered it. Today I am going to destroy the whole assembly. What would you say?” God is never wrong, yet He is full of mercy. He answered the prayer the day before. Yet on this day, He would not tolerate their rebellion any longer.

For this, Moses and Aaron fell on their faces for the third time. Moses’ spiritual sense was keen. He knew that prayer alone would not solve the problem this time. The sin the day before was still somewhat hidden, but the sin this day was clearly an open one. He told Aaron to come to him immediately, and he took Aaron’s censer to the assembly and made propitiation for them (vv. 45-47). Moses was truly qualified to be a deputy authority. He knew the tragic end that the Israelites were going to face, and he realized that their loss would be God’s loss. He pleaded for God’s forgiving grace; his heart was full of compassion and mercy. This is the heart of one who knows God. Moses was not a priest; he could not offer up any sacrifice. But he knew that the situation was critical and there was

no time to plead with God. He ordered Aaron to offer a sacrifice and to make propitiation for the people immediately. This is intercession plus propitiation. By then a plague had broken out. Aaron ran into the midst of the assembly and stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was stopped. Fourteen thousand seven hundred died by the plague (vv. 48-49). Had Moses and Aaron reacted more slowly, more would have died.

Here we see the kind of person Moses was and how he acted as God's deputy authority. His intention was for propitiation. His heart for propitiation was as gracious as that of the Lord. Moses' heart was for propitiation and forgiveness. He had no pleasure in judgment. The kind of person who can serve as God's deputy authority is one who represents God on the one hand and cares for and bears God's children upon his shoulders on the other hand. God's deputy authority must care for God's people. He must bear not only the obedient ones on his shoulders but also the rebellious ones. If he cares only for himself, minding how others treat him, and if he constantly complains that he cannot stand this one or that one, he is not qualified to be a deputy authority. When God looks for deputy authority, He considers not only a person's individual submission to Him but his reaction to others' opposition in his service as a deputy authority. A person's reaction to others' rebellion and opposition exposes the kind of person he is. Many people care only for their own faces. They care very much about criticisms, words, misunderstandings, and oppositions. Their own mind is occupied with themselves. They consider themselves to be the most important persons. These ones can never be God's deputy authority.

The Character Of The Deputy Authority— Gracious To Others

When you set out for your work this time, you have to learn from Moses. He was faithful in all of God's house. He was not faithful to himself. If he had allowed God's house to suffer loss, his flesh might have enjoyed some ease and comfort. But if he had done this, he would not have been faithful. We can be rejected and despised. We must still bear the affairs of God's children on our shoulders, and we must not allow God's house to suffer loss. Here we see a beautiful picture of how Moses was faithful in all of God's house. While Aaron was offering sacrifices for the children of Israel, Moses was prostrating and praying to God. He did not know

what God was going to do. He let Aaron offer sacrifices and make propitiation for the people of Israel. Although the people rebelled against Moses, he turned around to bear their sins upon his shoulders. He took up their case. While they were opposing and rejecting him, he was interceding for them. Moses was the offended party, yet he was the one who pleaded for forgiveness. He was reviled, yet he was the one to intercede before God. Here we see the kind of person who can be God's deputy authority. A deputy authority must not act according to his own feeling, and he must not care for himself or be a self-centered person.

If we want to be God's deputy authority, we must learn to bear all of God's children upon our shoulders. May the Lord make us gracious persons, those who can tolerate all of God's children and who can bear His children upon our shoulders. If we only care for our own feeling, we will not have the capacity to bear the burdens of God's children. We must confess our sins. We are too narrow and too hard. We are not like Moses. God has grace in Himself, but He does not want to dispense grace directly. He wants His servants to seek after His grace inwardly while they are carrying out His righteousness outwardly. God's work is righteous outwardly, but His heart is full of grace. He wants all His servants, that is, those who are His deputy authorities, to have His heart and be full of grace as well. God wants us to be gracious to others. We should ask for more grace inwardly. This is pleasing to God. Why are there so many narrow-minded and self-caring ones? Many people cannot take any offense at all. But if God can take offenses, we should also be able to take offenses.

If we will truly bear the burden of the church and the children of God, and if we will learn to prostrate ourselves before the Lord, God will find His deputy authority on earth today. The more we dispense grace, the more we are qualified to be God's deputy authority. Being gracious to others is one characteristic of a deputy authority. Those who deal righteously with others are not qualified to be a deputy authority. We have to spend all our time in prayer for this before we can learn this lesson well. We have to learn to bless when we are reviled, to intercede for others when we are rejected, and to plead for forgiveness when we are offended. God's deputy authorities are gracious ones. All those who are for righteousness alone have need of God's mercy. We should allow only God to execute

His righteousness in all things, while we ourselves should be gracious to all men. This is the character of an authority of God.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Basis Of God's Deputy Authority—Resurrection

Scripture Reading: Num. 17

The purpose of Numbers 17 is to show us the way God dealt with Israel's rebellion. In chapter sixteen there was an unprecedented rebellion, but chapter seventeen speaks of the termination of the rebellion; it shows the way to turn away from rebellion and death. What did God do? He vindicated to everyone that deputy authority is according to His appointment. He showed the Israelites His basis and reason for appointing authority. Such a basis is indispensable to every God-appointed authority. If a man is short in regard to this basis, he cannot be a deputy authority.

Resurrection Being The Basis For God's Authority

God commanded the twelve leaders to take twelve rods according to the twelve tribes of Israel, and put them in the tent of meeting before the ark. Then He said, "And the rod of the man whom I choose shall bud" (v. 5). A rod is a piece of wood. It is a branch that has been stripped of its leaves and roots. It once was living but now has become dead. It once derived its sap from the tree, being able to blossom and bear fruit, but now has become dead. All twelve rods were leafless, rootless, dry, and dead. Whichever one budded was the one that was chosen by God. Here we see that resurrection is the basis of God's selection. It is also the basis of authority.

Chapter sixteen speaks of man's rebellion against God's deputy authority and how man opposed God's appointed authority. Chapter seventeen speaks of God's vindication of His appointed authority. The basis of God's vindication of His appointed authority is resurrection. By resurrection He stopped man's murmuring. Man, of course, has no right to question God in the first place, but God condescended Himself to tell

man the reason and basis for His appointment of authority. The basis for His appointment of authority is resurrection. This shut the mouth of the Israelites.

Both Aaron and the Israelites were descendants of Adam and both were fleshly. By nature and according to their natural disposition, they were both sons of wrath; there was no difference between them. All twelve rods were the same. They were all leafless and rootless rods, dead and lifeless. This shows us that the basis of service is something apart from our natural life. It is the resurrection life we receive from God that gives us authority. Authority has nothing to do with man but with the resurrection that is manifested through man. Aaron was no different than all the other persons. His distinction was in God's choosing and the resurrection life which God granted him. From this we see that the basis of authority is resurrection.

The Budding Of The Rod Being A Humbling Experience

The twelve rods spent a night before the ark. God caused Aaron's rod to bud, blossom, and bear ripe almonds. Here was a dead rod, yet God put the power of life into it. Moses took all the rods that were set before the ark and showed them to the Israelites. What did it mean for Aaron's rod to bud? First, a budding rod humbles the owner of the rod. Second, it shuts up the mouth of the owners of the other rods. What would our reaction be if we took a dry rod like that of Aaron's, which was dead and had no hope of budding, and found to our surprise that it had budded, blossomed, and borne fruit the next day? We would confess to God in tears that this was His doing. It would have nothing to do with us. It would be His glory, not our glory. Spontaneously, we would be humbled before God. This is what Paul meant when he said, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not out of us" (2 Cor. 4:7). Only foolish ones would try to be proud. A person who has received grace from God will surely fall down before Him, saying, "This is God's doing. I have nothing to boast of. Everything depends on God's mercy, not on man's willing or running. There is nothing that I have which has not been received. Everything that I have comes from God's selection."

Here we see that the basis of authority does not depend on man; it has

nothing to do with man. When Aaron served the Lord again with his authority, he would say to the Lord, “My rod was as dead as others’ rods. I can serve while they cannot serve. I have spiritual authority and they do not. But this has nothing to do with my rod. My rod was just as dry as theirs. None of our rods count; they are not the issue. They are not the reason. The only reason is God’s mercy. It is God who has chosen me.” From that time on, he could no longer serve by his rod, but by the budding of his rod.

The Mark Of Ministry—Resurrection

A rod signifies human position, while budding signifies the resurrection life. As far as position is concerned, the twelve leaders of the twelve tribes occupied a position of leadership. Aaron represented the tribe of Levi and was no different than the others in his representation of his own tribe. Aaron could not serve God based on his position, because his position was the same as all the others. In fact, this was why the other tribes objected to his leadership. But what did God do? He ordered that twelve rods be placed in the tent of meeting before the ark for a night. The rod of the one whom God had chosen would bud. This is resurrection. Resurrection is the mark that God recognizes. He only recognizes those who have passed through death and resurrection as His servants. Hence, the mark of ministry is resurrection. A man cannot base his service to God on his position. He must base it on God’s selection. After God caused Aaron’s rod to bud, blossom, and bear fruit, the tribes saw it, and they had nothing more to say.

Authority is not something that one can fight for. It is something established by God. It has nothing to do with our position of leadership. Whether or not we are an authority depends on whether we have passed through death and resurrection. There is nothing in ourselves that sets us apart as a spiritual authority. Everything depends on grace, selection, and resurrection. A man has to degrade to a great depth of darkness and blindness before he can be proud. According to ourselves, no rod will bud even if it is left to itself for a lifetime. The problem today is that it is hard to find a person who will bow down and confess that he is the same as everyone else.

Only The Foolish Ones Being Proud

When the Lord Jesus went into Jerusalem on a colt, the people cried, “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Mark 11:9). When the colt heard the people shouting “Hosanna” and saw them spreading branches before the Lord, it could have turned around and asked the Lord, “Are they shouting to You or to me?” It could even have turned to its own mother and said, “I am better than you are after all.” If the colt had done this, it would not have known the One who was riding on it. Many servants of God are often this foolish. The colt was no different than other colts. The difference was the Lord who was on the colt. It was not the colt who was being praised, but the Lord who was on the colt. When others cry “Hosanna,” they are not crying to you. The branches and garments on the ground are not laid for you. Only a foolish person would say that he is better than others.

When Aaron saw his rod budding, would he not be the first one to be taken by surprise, and would he not bow down in tears and worship the Lord, saying, “Why has my rod budded? Is not my rod the same as the rods of all the others? Why is such great glory and power bestowed upon me? By itself, my rod would never bud.” That which is of the flesh will always be the flesh. Aaron was the same as all the other people of God. After this experience, others could still be deceived, but not Aaron. He should have realized that all spiritual authority is from God. Today we need to realize also that there is no ground whatsoever for us to be proud. We have mercy because God is willing to grant us mercy. We are not sufficient in ourselves to undertake this ministry; our sufficiency is from God (2 Cor. 3:5). It is a strange thing that a man can claim to live before the Lord and yet not be humbled. What extreme self-confidence and foolishness would the colt have had if it assumed on that day that the praises were directed towards it! The day will come when we will realize how shameful this is. Even if we crave for glory, our glory lies in the future, not in the present.

All young brothers and sisters have to learn humility. You have to realize that it is not you who is able to go on. Do not think that just because you have learned some spiritual lessons, you are different from others. Everything depends on God’s grace, and everything is from God. We can do nothing in ourselves. Aaron knew that God caused the rod to bud; it was the work of supernatural power. Through the budding God spoke to

the Israelites, and He also spoke to Aaron. From that day on, Aaron knew that service was based on budding, not on oneself. If we want to serve the Lord today, we must also realize that our service is based on resurrection, and resurrection is based on God, not on us.

What Is Resurrection?

Now my question is: What is resurrection? Resurrection is everything that is not out of our natural life, not out of ourselves, and not based on our ability. Resurrection speaks of the things that are beyond us, which we cannot do in ourselves. Any rod can be engraved with flowers or painted with colors, but no one can make it bud. We have never heard of a rod which can still bud and blossom after being used for decades. This is God's work. No woman in the world has ever given birth after her womb has been closed, but Sarah bore Isaac (Rom. 4:19). This was God's doing. Hence, Sarah typifies resurrection. What is resurrection? Resurrection means that one cannot do anything by himself, that he can only do it through God. It means that it is not by oneself, but by God. Resurrection means that one ignores what he is and trusts only in what God is. It matters little whether or not you are smarter than others or more eloquent than others. If you have any spirituality, this spirituality is not based on yourself, but on God's work in you. Suppose Aaron had been foolish enough to say to others, "My rod is different from your rod. My rod is smoother, brighter, and straighter. This is why it budded." How foolish and silly that would have been! If we think for a moment that we are different from others, that is the most foolish thought. Even if there is something different in us, it is the result of God's work. Resurrection means that everything is out of God.

The name Isaac means "laughter.'' Why did Abraham call his son "laughter"? He called him Isaac for two reasons. First, God promised Abraham that Sarah would give birth to a son. When Sarah heard, she laughed. It was natural for her to laugh. When she looked at herself, she could not help but laugh. Her time of childbearing was past, and her womb was closed. How could she ever bear a child? She thought that this was impossible. Therefore, when God told Abraham that she would have a child, she laughed. Second, when Sarah brought forth a son a year later, she was indeed laughing for joy. Hence, God called the child's name Isaac (Gen. 18:10-15; 21:1-3, 6-7), which means "laughter." The

first time she laughed because of the impossibility of the promise. The second time she laughed because she discovered to her surprise that it was possible. If a man has never experienced the first laughing, he can never experience the second laughing. If a man has never realized his own inability, he can never experience God's ability. Sarah knew herself; she had full knowledge of herself. She knew that she could not make it. But as soon as she looked to God's work, she was able to laugh. What is resurrection? Resurrection means that God has given us something that we did not have in ourselves. The Bible testifies again and again that man cannot make it by himself. But many people think that they can make it. In the matter of service, if some would truly laugh at themselves, saying, "I cannot make it," they would find themselves laughing again, saying, "I did not make it. I have seen through myself. The Lord has made it for me." If there is any manifestation of authority in us, we should say to the Lord, "You are the One who has done it. It is none of my business." Resurrection means that you cannot make it and that God is the One who has done everything.

Resurrection Being The Eternal Principle Of Service

The principle to every service lies in the budding rod. God returned all the eleven rods to the leaders, but kept Aaron's rod inside the ark as an eternal memorial. This means that resurrection is an eternal principle in our service to God. A servant of the Lord is one who has died and resurrected. God testifies again and again to His people that authority to serve God lies in resurrection, not in a person himself. All services to the Lord must pass through death and resurrection before they will be acceptable to God. Resurrection means that everything is of God and not of us. It means that God alone is able and that we are not able. Resurrection means that everything is done by God, not by ourselves. All those who think highly of themselves and who hold a misguided judgment of themselves have never realized what resurrection is. No one should be mistaken to think that he can do anything by himself. If a man continues to think that he is able, that he can do something, and that he is useful, he does not know resurrection. He may know the doctrine of resurrection, the reason for resurrection, or the result of resurrection, but he does not know resurrection. All those who know resurrection have given up hope in themselves; they know that they cannot make it. As long

as the natural strength remains, the power of resurrection has no ground for manifestation. As long as Sarah could beget a child, Isaac would not come. What we can do belongs to the natural realm, and what is impossible for us to do belongs to the realm of resurrection.

God's ability is not manifested in His creation but in resurrection. God's greatest power is manifested not through creation but through resurrection. When God's power is manifested in creation, it does not need to be preceded by death. But when His power is manifested in resurrection, there is the need for it to be preceded by death. Every created thing needs no precedence for its creation, but everything in resurrection has its precedence. If a man can survive by what he possessed in the first place, he has not experienced any resurrection. If a man's ability is according to what he had in the first place, he does not have resurrection. If he is what he was in the first place, he does not have resurrection. If what he has is what he possessed in the first place, he does not have resurrection. We must acknowledge that we can do nothing, are nothing, and have nothing. We are like a dead dog. If we acknowledge this, and we find that something is still alive in us, that is resurrection. Creation does not require the knowledge of death, but resurrection requires that we fall down, prostrate before God, and confess to Him, "I can do nothing. I am nothing, and I have nothing. This is what I am. If I can give anything to others, it is because You have given it to me. If I can do anything, it is because You have done it through me." Once we prostrate before the Lord in this way, everything we have will become God's work in us. Henceforth, we will never be mistaken. We will realize that everything that is dead belongs to us and everything that is living belongs to God. We have to separate ourselves from the Lord clearly; everything that has to do with death belongs to us, and everything that has to do with life belongs to the Lord. The Lord is never confused, but we are often confused. A man must come to the end of himself before he will be convinced of his utter uselessness. After Sarah gave birth to Isaac, she would never be foolish enough to think that her own strength was responsible for it. The colt would not be mistaken to think that the hosannas were directed at it. God has to bring us to the point where we will no longer be confused about what is of God and what is of us.

Everyone who is an authority should know this; he should not be mistaken in any way. There must be no misunderstanding with authority. Authority is of God and not of us; we are only those who keep custody of authority. Only those who have seen this are qualified to be a deputy authority. Brothers and sisters, when you set out for your work, I hope that none of you would be foolish enough to think that you have any authority in yourself. As soon as you offend the principle of resurrection, you lose authority, and as soon as you try to exhibit your authority, you instantly lose authority. A dry rod can exhibit nothing but death. But when you have resurrection, you have authority, because authority rests with resurrection, not with the natural life. Everything that we have is natural. Hence authority does not rest in us but in the Lord.

The Treasure And The Earthen Vessel

Paul's word in 2 Corinthians 4:7 matches the teaching here. I have often thought that Paul painted a wonderful picture in that chapter. He compared himself to an earthen vessel, one made of clay. He compared the power of resurrection within him to a treasure. This is like the precious ointment in the alabaster box. He knew very well that he himself was just an earthen vessel. But the treasure within him constituted the excellency of power. There is a vast difference between these two things. Paul said that this resurrection power is a treasure and that it is a surpassingly great power. This is truly the word of an honest man; he said it like it was—"the excellency of the power." Following this he said that he was pressed on every side, but that he was not constricted because of the efficacy of the treasure. In himself he could not find a way out, but with the treasure he was not utterly without a way out. In himself he was persecuted, but with the treasure he was not abandoned. In himself he was cast down, but with the treasure he was not destroyed. As far as he was concerned, he was pressed on every side. But as far as the treasure was concerned, he was not constricted. On the one hand, there is death, but on the other hand, there is life. On the one hand, we have a constant deliverance to death, but on the other hand, we have the producing of life. Death operates on the one hand, and life is manifested on the other hand. Second Corinthians 4 and 5 unfold the center of Paul's ministry. Here we find the principle of death and resurrection and nothing else. Everything in us is death, and everything in the Lord is

resurrection.

Authority Being Where Resurrection Is

If there is any authority in us, this authority comes from God, not from us. We should never be mistaken. We should see clearly that all authority comes from the Lord. We are here on earth merely to maintain His authority; we are not here to maintain our own authority. Authority does not belong to us. Whenever we trust in the Lord, we see authority. Whenever we express the natural life, we become the same as everyone else, and there is no authority in us whatsoever. Only that which issues from resurrection results in authority. Authority is based on resurrection, not on ourselves. No ordinary rod can be placed before God. Only a rod of resurrection can be placed before Him. Furthermore, resurrection is found in the budding rod. It is not a general resurrection but a full resurrection. It is not just a faint expression of the resurrection life but a life that has budded, blossomed, and brought forth fruit. This is resurrection life in maturity. Only one matured in resurrection life can act as God's deputy authority. The more resurrection life is expressed through us, the more authority we will have.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Misuse Of Deputy Authority And God's Governmental Judgment

Scripture Reading: Num. 20:2-3, 7-13, 22-28; Deut. 32:48-52

A Deputy Authority Should Sanctify The Lord

After the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for over thirty years, we find in Numbers 20 that they forgot the lesson that they had learned through their rebellion. When they came into the wilderness of Zin, they were without water, and they murmured and spoke against Moses and Aaron (vv. 2-3). Moses and Aaron had learned many lessons before the Lord already. But this time Moses erred in acting as God's deputy authority. We need to consider how God judges a deputy authority when he fails. God was not angry this time at the people's murmuring; He told Moses to take the rod, which was a symbol of God's authority, and to

speak to the rock so that it might yield its water. This shows that Moses and Aaron were God's deputy authority. God did not say that He wanted to punish the Israelites. Moses and Aaron were not young men, yet they still failed in their position as God's deputy authority. Verse 10 shows that Moses was very angry when he said, "Hear now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" The phrase you rebels is strong in English as well as in Hebrew. It is a short expression in Hebrew. Moses used very strong words. He was angry. He might have thought, "This rebellious people has been causing trouble for decades, and they are causing trouble still." He forgot God's command and struck the rock with the rod twice. Although Moses was wrong, water flowed out just the same (v. 11).

This act prompted God to rebuke His servant. He said, "You did not believe in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the sons of Israel" (v. 12a). This means that Moses and Aaron had not sanctified God; they had not separated God from themselves. Moses' speaking was wrong and his striking was also wrong. His spirit was completely wrong, and he represented God in a wrong way. In reading the Bible we have to touch the spirit of the Word. It seems that God was saying, "I saw that My people were thirsty, and I gave them to drink. Why are you rebuking them?" God said that Moses and Aaron had not sanctified Him. This means that they had not set Him apart as the holy One. It seems that God was saying, "You have involved Me in your errors." A person's words have to do with his attitude. Moses' word did not sanctify God. His attitude was different from God's attitude, and his feeling different from God's feeling. God did not rebuke the people, but Moses did. This caused the Israelites to misunderstand God. They thought that God was fierce, that He was quick to condemn, and that He was a merciless God.

It is imperative that an authority represent God properly. Whether in wrath or in compassion, he should be like God all the time. If we are wrong, we should confess that we are wrong; we should never drag God into our mistake. If we do, we will bring judgment upon ourselves. We must be careful. It is a serious thing to drag God into our mistakes. Moses had been a deputy authority for decades, but he implicated God in his error. He represented God wrongly. This is why God had to judge him. When a deputy authority makes a mistake and does not confess it, God will step

forward to vindicate Himself. It would be wrong for God to not judge Moses and Aaron. God's dealing with Moses and Aaron meant that this act was committed by Moses and Aaron only, and that God had no part in it. Israel's murmuring could have been a rebellion in attitude only; their spirit might have been different. This is why God did not judge them. Moses should not have judged them rashly when God had not judged them. He should not have uttered any unrestrained words according to himself. Moses rebuked the Israelites. This was his own attitude and his own wrath. But this easily could have lead the Israelites to believe that this was God's attitude and God's wrath. Man's wrath does not accomplish the righteousness of God. This is why God needed to vindicate Himself. He had to separate Himself from Moses and Aaron. He had to show the whole world that what Moses did that day was done by Moses alone; it was not done by Him. The words Moses spoke on that day were his own words; they were not God's words. We can never implicate God in our mistakes or our personal failures, or give others the impression that our attitude is the attitude that God is expressing through His deputy authority. If we do, God will have to vindicate Himself. A deputy authority acts on behalf of God. If we become angry, we can only say that we are angry, that it is we who are behind it, not God. We have to separate the two. My worst fear is that man would become so bold as to associate his own acts with God's work, and think it unnecessary to identify his actions as his own.

We are too prone to errors. Once we make a mistake, we should acknowledge it. On the one hand, this will save us from wrongly representing God and falling into the evil one's ensnarement. On the other hand, this will save us from falling into darkness. If we take the lead to acknowledge our mistakes, God will not have to vindicate Himself. Otherwise, we will fall into God's governmental hand.

The Seriousness Of Being A Deputy Authority

The result of this incident was the manifestation of God's judgment. God said that Moses and Aaron could no longer enter the land of Canaan on account of their mistake (v. 12b). When man speaks and acts loosely and does not sanctify God, He will vindicate Himself. When this happens, man can no longer ask God for forgiveness. Here is another thing that we should note: Every time we execute God's authority and take care of His

business, we have to do it with fear and trembling. We cannot let down our guard or become presumptuous just because we have become old. When Moses was angry and threw down God's handwritten tablets of stone, God did not judge him because he was filled with God's jealousy, and it was right for him to do that. He was zealous for God, and God did not rebuke him. But after following God for so many years, he misrepresented God by disobeying Him, striking the rock twice, and speaking rash words. He had incriminated God in his mistakes, and he had dragged God into his error. He made others think that his words were God's words and his judgments God's judgments. This was a grave error. In order to serve God, we must sanctify Him, and we must not associate Him with ourselves loosely. Otherwise, when God vindicates Himself, we will suffer severe judgment. Moses lost his right to enter Canaan through this one mistake.

God's Governmental Judgment

The Israelites could not enter Canaan because they had rebelled many times. Moses and Aaron were wrong only once. Yet they could not enter Canaan either. It is a sobering thing to be a deputy authority. God's judgment on a deputy authority is serious. In Numbers 18 God told Aaron that he and his sons would bear the iniquity of the sanctuary (v. 1). The more a person represents God's authority, the more God scrutinizes him and will not let him go. In Luke 12 the Lord also said, "To every one to whom much has been given, much will be required from him; and to whom much has been committed, they will ask of him all the more" (v. 48).

Numbers 20 tells us that Aaron would die on Mount Hor through this judgment. We see Moses, Aaron, and his son Eleazar going up Mount Hor together (vv. 25-27). What a beautiful picture this is! All three were submissive and willingly accepted God's judgment. They really knew God. This is why they did not even pray. Aaron knew that his day had come, and Moses also knew what was to become of himself. They were like Abraham when he took Isaac up the mountain. Abraham knew Isaac's future. God told Moses to take Aaron and Eleazar with him up to the mountain, because in the incident by the waters of Meribah, Moses was the one who took the lead. On the mountain Moses found the way that Aaron was to take, and he also found the way he would take.

As soon as Aaron's garments were stripped off, he died (v. 28). Ordinarily, when a man takes off his garments, he does not die. But when Aaron's garments were removed, he died. This means that his life was derived from his service. It means that when a servant of the Lord ceases his service, his life stops. There are many people who are not genuine servants. When they cease their so-called service, their life continues to go on. Here we see that Aaron was a genuine servant of the Lord.

Deuteronomy 32 shows us that God's judgment does not go away with time. God dealt with Moses in the same way that He dealt with Aaron. He told Moses to go up to Mount Nebo and die there (vv. 48-52). During those years Moses was faithful. Deuteronomy 32 and 33 tell us that before he died, he sang to and blessed the children of Israel. He did not pray for God to spare him from such a judgment. He humbly and meekly submitted to the hand of God. Even though he was a deputy authority of God who was obedient to God all his life, he was barred from entering Canaan because of his one failure in representing God. What a great loss this was! Moses was brought up to Mount Nebo to the peak of Pisgah. Nebo was the plateau, while Pisgah was the peak. There God told Moses, "This is the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, To your seed I will give it. I have let you see it with your own eyes, but you will not go over there" (34:4). God's promise lasted for five hundred years from the time of Abraham, but Moses could only see it; he could not inherit it, because he misrepresented God's authority by the waters of Meribah. What a loss he suffered!

I have a very heavy burden which I want to share with you. Nothing is more serious and sobering than to misrepresent authority. I am fearful that our young brothers would wrongly represent God's authority. We may be wrong only once, but that one mistake can bring in God's judgment. Every time we execute God's authority, we have to pray that we are joined to God. The minute we make a mistake, we have to learn to separate ourselves from God. Otherwise we will bring God's judgment upon ourselves. In making a decision we have to ask if the decision is according to God's will. We can say that we are acting in His name only if we know for sure that it is God's will. Moses rebuked the Israelites and struck the rock by the waters of Meribah. He could not say that he was acting in the name of the Lord. He should have said, "I am doing this by

myself.” Otherwise, he would bring judgment on himself. I hope that you will not be foolish but will learn to live before the Lord in fear and trembling. Do not act or walk rashly when you say that you are doing things in the name of the Lord. Do not pass on careless judgments or make proposals easily. Control your spirit and your tongue. In particular, shut your mouth when you are angry. When you act as God’s deputy authority, you will either do a good job or you will drag God into your error. This is a serious matter. The more a man knows God, the more careful he will be. If you fall into God’s governmental hand, you may be forgiven at times, but you may not be forgiven at other times. No one can touch or offend God’s government. We have to be clear about this way. Only after we have seen the proper way of representing authority can we be a deputy authority.

A Deputy Authority Cannot Afford To Make A Mistake

Self-motivated service cannot find acceptance in the eyes of God. In fact, no one can render any service at all by himself. A man must serve by standing on the ground of resurrection before his service can be approved. The Lord does not want us to be misguided to assume that authority comes from someone other than God. We are not the authority; we are only here to represent authority. The flesh has no place. We must also tell others that everything wrong comes from us and everything right comes from God. Every time we talk to men or deal with matters, we have to remember that we cannot trust in ourselves and that we have to understand God’s will. We cannot go out on our own and make suggestions or decisions lightly. Authority does not rest with us; we are merely the deputy authorities. If we act according to our own will, we will create big problems. The church cannot be without authority, and the church cannot tolerate the misuse of authority. God has only one mind, which is to build up His own authority.

In the church submission to authority is absolute, and fear and trembling on the part of the deputy authority should also be absolute. Without submission there is no church. At the same time, a deputy authority must not make suggestions or decisions loosely, and he must not speak carelessly or dictate others’ pathways. It is wrong to judge the brothers or to interpret the Bible lightly. Our submission must be absolute, and our representation of authority must also be absolute. There are two

problems in the church today. One is the lack of absolute submission, and the other is the misrepresentation of authority. We must learn not to speak loosely or make proposals casually. Our spirit has to be open to the Lord all the time, and we have to look to His light. If we do not, we will implicate God in our mistakes. We may even say that we are acting in the Lord's name or on His behalf. Actually, none of our actions are of the Lord. We must learn to submit on the one hand, and learn to represent God on the other hand. Hence, we must know the cross, and we must know resurrection. Whether or not the church will have a way to go on depends on how we have learned this lesson.

Authority Being Based On Ministry, And Ministry Being Based On Resurrection

A man's authority is based on his ministry, and his ministry is based on resurrection. Without resurrection there is no ministry, and without ministry there is no authority. Without resurrection, Aaron could not serve. His service was based on resurrection, and his authority before men was also based on resurrection. Resurrection enables us to serve before God and establishes us as an authority before men. God will never appoint a man who has no ministry to be His authority.

Authority today is not a matter of position. Without a spiritual service, there cannot be any positional authority. Only after a man has a spiritual service before the Lord can he have authority before men. This means that God will appoint you as an authority among His children only after you have acquired a spiritual ministry. Hence, authority is based on one's ministry before God, and ministry is based on resurrection. For this reason, there is no dispute in the matter of authority, for there is no dispute in the matter of ministry. Ministry is something given by God. Hence, authority is also something decided by God. If a ministry has not been given to you, no authority has been assigned to you. All authority is based on service. Without service there is no authority. Aaron had authority because he had a service before the Lord. His censer could make propitiation and stop the plague, while the censers of the other 250 leaders were cursed by God. The rebellion in Numbers 16 was not only a rebellion against authority, but a rebellion against ministry. Aaron had a spiritual ministry because he was in resurrection. He was able to be the authority because he had such a ministry.

We should not have any authority that extends beyond our ministry. No one can acquire an authority that goes beyond his ministry. We should not boast of any authority that is apart from our ministry. We have to learn to be faithful in our ministry before the Lord and faithful in our authority before men. We should have the attitude that we will not go about in things too great or too wondrous for us (Psa. 131:1). We have to learn to be faithful to our portion before the Lord. Many people make the mistake of thinking that anyone can assume authority. Little do they realize that any authority which issues from a ministry never goes beyond its own service to rule over God's children. Your measure of authority before men must match your ministry before God. The amount of service you have before God determines the amount of authority you have before men. As soon as authority goes beyond ministry, it becomes a positional authority, and it is no longer spiritual.

Authority issues from ministry, and when it flows to others, it brings the presence of God with it. Ministry grows out of resurrection and is rooted in God. If a minister misrepresents authority, his ministry will stop, just as Moses' and Aaron's ministries were stopped. We have to learn to maintain the Lord's authority and not to say things loosely. Otherwise, we will suffer God's judgment.

God's Vindication

When a deputy authority makes a mistake, God will step forward to judge it. His judgment is His vindication. God's vindication is one great principle in His administration. God is willing to commit His name to us; He has allowed us to use His name, just as a man commits his personal seal to another and allows the latter to use it in his name. This being the case, when we misrepresent God, He will have to vindicate Himself. God needs to show man that the mistake is caused by us and not by Him.

Moses and Aaron suffered serious judgment as a result of one mistake. In the end Aaron died and Moses also died. The greater loss though was their disqualification from entering Canaan. Neither one of them debated with God; they knew that God's vindication was more important than their entry into Canaan. They were willing to allow God to vindicate Himself rather than enter Canaan. In Deuteronomy 32 Moses especially made the point that they, rather than God, had made the mistake. We must

maintain the absoluteness of the truth; we should not try to take any shortcuts. No faithful servant of God should take the cheap way out. God's vindication is more important than our face, our likes, and our years of prayers and hopes. Moses and Aaron were meek; they submitted to the hand of God. They could have reasoned with God, but they chose, rather, to not argue. They did not pray for themselves even to the end. They prayed many times for the children of Israel, but they did not pray for themselves. Such silence is precious. They knew how to let God vindicate Himself, and they willingly took the blame upon themselves. When Moses wrote of this in his book, he pointed out that he was the one who made the mistake. We thank the Lord because here was a servant who knew how to judge himself and who allowed God to vindicate Himself. He did not argue in the face of judgment. He did not make proposals lightly and he did not want to control others. He was humble and gracious, and he feared God. He is indeed a model for us who are serving the Lord.

May the Lord give us the grace to be a teachable person. May He be gracious to the church in this end time. We need to pray, "Lord, may Your authority be manifested in the church, and may every brother and sister know what authority is. May authority be manifested in the local church, and may deputy authority be manifested through man." I hope that the responsible ones in the church will not make any mistake concerning the matter of authority, and I hope that there will also be no mistake on the part of those who receive orders from the authority. I hope that everyone will know where he stands so that the Lord will have a free way to go on.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Need For A Deputy Authority To Submit To Authority

Scripture Reading: 1 Sam. 24:1-6; 26:7-12; 2 Sam. 1:5-15; 2:1; 4:5—5:3; 6:16-23; 7:18; 15:19-20, 24-26; 16:5-14; 19:9-15

In the Old Testament David was the second king appointed by God. Before David there was Saul, who was also appointed by God. David was the up-to-date authority appointed by God; he was God's present

anointed one. Saul was God's displaced authority; he was God's previous anointed one. God's Spirit left Saul, but he was still on the throne. David was already appointed the king, yet Saul would not step down. What should David do? Here we see how David submitted to authority and how he did not build up his own authority. David was a man according to God's heart. He could be a deputy authority because he was a person who genuinely submitted to authority.

Waiting For God To Establish Authority

First Samuel 24 tells us of a story in the wilderness in Engedi. Saul was pursuing David. When David hid in a cave, Saul went into the same cave to cover his feet. David was hiding in the innermost part of the cave. He cut off a corner of Saul's cloak, but later rebuked himself (vv. 4b-5). His conscience was very tender and keen. First Samuel 26 tells us of another opportunity that David had to kill Saul. This time, however, he only took his spear and water jug (v. 12a). David cut off a corner of Saul's cloak and took something in his possession. This could have served very well as a basis for him to boast to Saul (vv. 17-20). But this would have been the way of a lawyer, not the way of a Christian. A lawyer is only concerned with reason and evidence. But a Christian is concerned with feeling; he is not concerned with reason. He is concerned with fact, not with evidence. David had the sense and feeling of a Christian. This is why he rebuked himself after he cut off a corner of Saul's cloak. We should be those who are only concerned with facts before the Lord; we are not for politics. We should not pay attention merely to the procedures. Both in Shanghai and Foochow I have seen brothers who were concerned only with procedures and evidence. But here was a man who began to rebuke himself after he had only cut Saul's cloak. A Christian is one who is concerned with inward feeling, not with proof of evidence. Those in the world are concerned with proof of evidence. A person may be able to cut the cloak of others, he may be able to take their spear and water jug, and he may be able to boast of it, but his heart will condemn him. David was a person who could submit to authority. He did not tear down Saul's authority. Instead he waited for God to establish his authority. He was able to wait; he did not try to "help" God by hastening Saul's death. A deputy authority of God must learn not to establish his own authority, but to build up the authority of those who are over him.

Not Being God's Choice Alone, But Also The Church's Choice

Second Samuel tells us of a person who came to David and reported that he had killed Saul. He thought that he would be rewarded, but David killed him instead. The man was wrong because he had annulled God's authority (1:10-15). Although he had not annulled David, David felt that it was wrong that the man had annulled Saul's authority. He judged any annulment of authority.

After Saul died, David asked God to which city he should go. At that time the palace was in Gibeah. Who among the Israelites did not know David? As soon as David knew of Saul's death, he should have gone to the capital with his warriors. Humanly speaking, he should have hurried to Gibeah with his army. This was a golden moment. How could he let it slip away? As far as common sense goes, he should have gone up to Gibeah. It was good enough that he had been submissive. Who did not know that David was a warrior? But he acted strangely. He inquired of God, and God told him to go to Hebron (2:1). Hebron was a small city and an unimportant one. At that time some came from Judah and anointed him the king of Judah. This shows us that David did not try to seize authority by himself. He left it up to God's people to anoint him (v. 4). When Samuel anointed him, it was a mark that God had chosen him. When the people anointed him, it was a mark that God's people (a type of the church) had chosen him. David could not deny or reject the men of Judah's anointing. He could not say, "Since I have God's anointing already, why do I need your anointing?" It is one thing for God to anoint someone, and it is another thing for His people to anoint someone. A deputy authority must be not only God's choice but the church's choice as well. No one can impose his authority upon others. He must wait for God's children to make their choice.

David did not go up to Gibeah. Rather, he waited for God's people to come to him in Hebron. He waited for seven years and six months. Seven and a half years is not a short time. But David was not in any hurry. I have not seen one person who was full of self and desirous of self-glory who also was chosen by God to be an authority. God anointed David not only as the king of Judah but also as the king over the whole nation of Israel. Yet as long as God's people did not acknowledge him, he would not come forward. When only the house of Judah anointed him, he

was satisfied to just be the king of Judah. He was not in any haste. He could wait.

After seven and a half years, all the tribes of Israel came to Hebron and spoke to David, saying, “Here we are; we are your bone and your flesh. Even previously, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And Jehovah said to you, You shall shepherd My people Israel, and you shall be ruler over Israel” (5:1-2). The tribe of Judah first acknowledged him as king in Hebron. After seven years and six months, the elders of the tribes of Israel anointed him as king, and then he reigned in Jerusalem for thirty-three years. In David we see that authority is not self-appointed. It is not imposed upon others. Authority is appointed by God and anointed by men. An authority does not proclaim himself the king, and he is not just appointed by God to be king. First, he is chosen by God, and then he is acknowledged by man. David was a real king. In the New Testament, when David is spoken of, he is addressed as “David the king” (Matt. 1:6), but Solomon is not addressed as a king. The New Testament gives special recognition to David’s kingship because he did not trust in himself. He had God’s anointing, and he waited for the anointing of His people, that is, the church.

We should have not only the Lord’s anointing but also the church’s anointing before we assume authority among His children. David waited from the age of thirty to thirty-seven. He did not doubt. He did not say, “What will happen if the children of Israel do not anoint me?” He was humbled under the hand of God. Everyone who knows God can wait. Those who know God do not need to move a finger to help themselves. If you are in the right condition, not only will the Lord acknowledge you as His representative; the church also will acknowledge you as God’s representative. I hope that you will have not only God’s anointing but the church’s anointing as well. You must never contend with your flesh or try to move your finger. The flesh has no place here. No one can stand up to proclaim, “I am God’s appointed authority. You must all obey me.” We must first learn to have a spiritual ministry before the Lord. We must wait for God’s time before we can serve Him among His children.

The More A Person Is An Authority, The More He Upholds Authority

David waited in Hebron for seven and a half years because Ishbosheth,

Saul's son, continued to be king in Mahanaim after Saul's death (2 Sam. 2:8-9). Later Ishbosheth was assassinated by Baanah and Rechab. They took his head to David in Hebron, thinking that they were bringing good tidings to David. But David killed them (4:5-12). He judged the rebellious ones. This shows that the more a person is an authority, the more he upholds authority. We cannot build up our own authority at the expense of others' authority. The less a man seeks for authority, the more God gives him authority. The minute a person rebels against authority he should be judged, whether or not he is rebelling against your authority. When David did this, he gained the favor of God's people. Consequently, 2 Samuel 5 says that the eleven tribes sent men to seek after David. A man who knows God's authority is submissive to authority. Such a one is qualified to be an authority. You should not deal with anyone just because he has offended your authority. You have to wait for God's children to anoint you as the authority. Before the children of God anoint you, it is wrong to harbor any complaints or murmurings.

Having No Authority Before God

Second Samuel 6 says that when David brought God's ark back to the city of David, he danced before the ark with all his might. David was already king of the whole nation of Israel. When Michal the daughter of Saul saw this, she despised David (vv. 14-16). Michal thought that since David was the king, he should have sanctified himself in the eyes of the Israelites. Of course, it is right that a king should not be wild. But David was not wrong in what he saw. He saw that he had no authority before God, that he was lowly and worthless. Michal's mistake was her father's mistake. Saul kept the best of the cattle and the sheep; he disobeyed God's commandment and was rejected by God. Yet he tried to save his face by asking Samuel to recommend him before the people of Israel (see 1 Sam. 15:1-30). The way Michal took was different from the way David took. God was pleased with David, and He judged Michal. Michal had no descendant until the day of her death (2 Sam. 6:23). This means that God cut off any continuation of such a person. He would not allow such a person to go on.

When David went before the Lord, he felt that he was as lowly as anyone else; he did not consider himself higher than others. A deputy authority should take a place before God that is as equally low and humble as all

the people of God. He should not exalt himself or try to uphold his authority among men. On his throne David was the king, but before the ark he was the same as all the children of Israel. They were all God's people and were all the same. Michal wanted to hold on to her way; she wanted David to be a king even before God. She could not stand David's action, and said to him, "How the king of Israel has made himself honorable today!" (v. 20). But God accepted David's way and judged Michal's way. When Moses went before the Lord, he was the same as the people of Israel. When David went before the Lord, he was also the same as the people of Israel. We may be an authority in the church, but when we go before the Lord, we are the same as everyone else. This is the basis and secret of an authority—being the same as all the brothers when he goes before the Lord.

Having No Consciousness Of Being An Authority

I am particularly fond of one sentence in 2 Samuel 7:18: "Then King David went and sat before Jehovah." By then the temple was not yet built. The ark was in the tabernacle and David sat on the floor. God made a covenant with David, and David offered a wonderful prayer. Here we touch a pliable spirit, a sensitive spirit. Before David was king, he was a warrior, and no one was able to stand before him. Now that he had become king and his nation had become strong, he was meek enough to sit on the floor beside the ark. Here was a person who maintained his humility. He could pray in a very simple way. This is a picture of a deputy authority.

Michal, who was born in the palace, was concerned with pomp and majesty, like her father. She did not realize the difference between being sent by the Lord and entering into the presence of the Lord. When a man is sent by the Lord, he may have a certain degree of authority in speaking and acting on God's behalf. But once he enters the presence of the Lord, he has to fall down before His feet; he has to know who he is. David was indeed a king appointed by the Lord; he was endowed with the God-given authority. If we count Saul out, David was the first king appointed by God. Christ is not only the descendant of Abraham but also the descendant of David. The last name recorded in the whole Bible is the name of David (Rev. 22:16). However, the amazing thing is that though David was king, he did not have the consciousness that he was king. He

knew that he was nothing in the eyes of the Lord. If a man is always conscious of his authority, he is not qualified to be an authority. An authority must learn to know himself. The more a person is an authority, the less consciousness he should have about his authority. God's deputy authority should have such a blessed ignorance—being an authority without having the consciousness of it.

No Need To Uphold One's Authority

Second Samuel 15 is a record of Absalom's rebellion. This was a double rebellion. On the one hand, it was the rebellion of a son against his father. On the other hand, it was the rebellion of a people against their king. This was the greatest rebellion David experienced. His son was taking the lead in this rebellion. At that time, more and more people were following Absalom, and David had to flee from the capital. He was in need of followers. Ittai the Gittite wanted to follow him, but David was able to say to Ittai, "Return and abide with the king" (v. 19). David was truly meek. His spirit was truly keen. He did not say, "I am the king, and all of you should follow me." Instead he told Ittai, "You can take your way. I have no intention to drag many people into my woes. Even if you choose to go to the new king, that is fine with me." He was in the midst of his tribulation, yet he still would not take people along with him. It is not easy to know a person when he lives in the palace. But when he is in the midst of trials, his true personality is manifested. Here David was not rash or careless. He was still humble and submissive.

After he crossed the brook Kidron, he was about to turn to the wilderness. Zadok the high priest with all the priests and the Levites wanted to come with him, and they took the ark along with them. If the ark had left the city, many Israelites would have gone with it. Zadok and the Levites' attitude was right: When rebellion broke out, they had to remove the ark. But at this juncture David did not say, "This is good. Do not leave the ark with the rebellious ones." David thought that if the ark left Jerusalem, many of the people of Israel would be in turmoil. He was a person who had ascended to a great height. He would not allow the ark to go with him. He was willing to resign himself to God's dealing. His attitude was the same as that of Moses, who was altogether humbled under the mighty hand of God. Both of them ascended to a height that was unmatched by their opposers. David said that if he should find favor

in the sight of the Lord, He would bring him back again to see the ark and His habitation. If he did not find favor in God's sight, it would have been useless even if the ark followed him. Therefore, he exhorted Zadok the high priest and the Levites who bore the ark to return (vv. 24-26). This was easy to say but difficult to do. There were not many people who escaped from Jerusalem, and the city was filled with rebellious ones. Now he had to send his good friends away. How pure was David's spirit! He was still humbling himself meekly before the Lord, just as Moses did.

In verse 27 David said to Zadok that since he was a priest and a seer, he should take the lead to bring the priests and the ark back. At that word the group returned. In reading this passage, we have to touch David's spirit. His spirit was saying, "Why do I have to fight with others? Whether or not I remain a king is God's business. I do not need many people to follow me, and I do not need the ark to accompany me." He realized that being an authority is God's business and that no one needs to maintain his own authority. David went up to the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went up and with his head covered (v. 30). Here indeed was a meek and pliable man! This was what David did when he was offended. He did not hold on to his authority. This is the proper attitude of a God-appointed authority.

An Authority Should Have The Capacity To Take Offense

A rebellious spirit is contagious. Second Samuel 16 tells us that Shimei came forth along the way. He threw stones at David and cursed him, saying that he had shed the blood of the house of Saul. Even David's followers suffered because of him. Nothing could be farther from the truth than Shimei's accusation. If there was a person who had not shed the blood of Saul's house, that person was David. Shimei could say that David had reigned in Saul's stead and that David was running for his life. There was nothing wrong in saying that. But it was a gross lie to say that David had shed the blood of Saul's house. Yet David did not argue. He did not vindicate himself or deny anything. David still had his mighty men with him, and it would have been easy for him to get rid of this man, but he would not do this. Shimei cursed as he went. Even David's followers could not stand it. Yet David exhorted them not to kill. He said, "Leave him alone and let him curse, for Jehovah has told him to do so" (v. 11). He was truly a broken and pliable man. He was learning to submit to a

higher authority. David said that it was God who had told Shimei to curse him. In reading this portion of the Bible, we have to touch David's spirit. He was alone and an outcast. At least he could have taken out his frustration on Shimei and vindicated himself a little. However, he was an absolutely submissive person. He submitted absolutely to God and accepted everything that God had done to him.

Brothers and sisters, you must realize that God's appointed authority is one who can take offenses. He is one who can be offended. If the authority that you have received cannot suffer any offense, you are not qualified to be an authority. Do not think that you can act as you please as long as you have been given authority. Only those who have learned the lesson of obedience are qualified to be an authority. Verse 13 says that Shimei continued to curse David, yet David was truly a submissive man. Only such a person is qualified to be an authority. Here was a man who was truly pliable before the Lord. David and his followers rested wearily at a place. Even while Absalom was rebelling, David still maintained a proper attitude. He was a man in the Old Testament, yet he was full of the grace of the New Testament. He was so broken that he was able to have such a spirit. This is indeed a person who was qualified to be an authority.

Learning To Be Humbled Under The Mighty Hand Of God

In 2 Samuel 19, after Absalom was defeated and killed, the Israelites heard that David was sitting in the city gate, and they all had fled to their own house (v. 8). David did not return with fanfare to his palace. Absalom had been anointed to be a king also. This was why David had to wait. The eleven tribes came and asked him to go back, but the tribe of Judah did not come along. David sent men to recover the tribe of Judah (vv. 9-12). David was of the tribe of Judah, and he was driven away by it. This was why he had to wait for the people to ask him back. He was God's appointed authority, but during his trial, he learned to humble himself under the mighty hand of God. He did not try to build up his own authority. He accepted the arrangements in the environment and was humbled under the mighty hand of God. He was not in any haste. He was a warrior himself, but he did not fight for himself. All the battles were fought for the Lord's people. In the past God's people had anointed him to be the king. In order to return to his kingship, he had to wait for God's

people to anoint him once again.

All those whom God uses to be an authority should have the spirit of David. We should not say anything to defend ourselves. There is no need for us to say anything for ourselves. We should not act on our own. There is no need to move even a little finger to prove that we are chosen by God. We should trust, wait, and humble ourselves. We have to wait for God’s timing. God will surely accomplish what He has set out to accomplish. The more submissive we are, the more we will learn to be an authority. The more we prostrate ourselves before the Lord, the more God will vindicate us. But if we try to speak for ourselves, fight for ourselves, and complain, we will destroy God’s work. We have to learn to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. The more we try to be an authority in ourselves, the more we will walk down the wrong path. The way is clear before us. In the Old Testament the greatest authority was Moses, while among all the kings the greatest authority was David. Both behaved the same way in their capacity as deputy authorities. We have to touch these men’s spirits before we can maintain God’s authority.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Life And Heart Of A Deputy Authority

Scripture Reading: Mark 10:35-45

Drinking The Lord's Cup And Partaking Of His Baptism

When the Lord was on the earth, He rarely taught others how to be an authority. This is because His goal on earth was not to establish authority among men. Mark 10:35-45 contains the clearest teaching concerning how to be an authority. Anyone who wants to be an authority must read this passage; it is the Lord's own teaching. Here He shows us the way to be an authority. We know that the conversation was initiated by James and John; they wanted to sit on the right and left of the Lord in His glory. They knew that such a request was somewhat blunt, and they were too shy to mention it to the Lord directly. Instead they said, "We want You to do for us whatever we ask You" (v. 35). They said this to first secure a promise from the Lord. But the Lord did not answer them immediately. He asked, "What do you want Me to do for you?" (v. 36). Since He did not know what they wanted, He could not promise them anything. At this point they said, "Grant to us to sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory" (v. 37). This request implies two things. First, they wanted to be near the Lord, and second, they wanted authority in glory. It was proper for them to desire to be near the Lord; such a request was properly directed. But that was not all they wanted; they wanted authority in glory as well. They wanted to be over the other ten disciples. What did the Lord say to them? First, He said that He did not know what they wanted Him to do. Then He said that even they themselves did not know what they were asking (v. 38a).

They thought that sitting on the right and the left was something that the Lord could grant or dispense to them. But the Lord told them that it was not that simple. They wanted to be near the Lord and to have authority. The Lord did not say that their request was wrong, nor did He say that it was wrong to desire to be at His right and left side. He told them that in order to be on His right and left, they had to drink of His cup and be baptized with His baptism. James and John thought that they would acquire the place merely by asking. But the Lord told them that it was not a matter of asking but a matter of drinking the cup and partaking of the baptism. This is not a matter of prayer. It is not a matter of trying to sit on

the right or left side of the Lord. If one does not drink of the Lord's cup and is not baptized with His baptism, his asking is in vain. If a man does not drink of the Lord's cup and is not baptized with His baptism, he cannot be near Him nor can he have any authority. The Lord is not free to grant position and authority to anyone. Only those who drink His cup and are baptized with His baptism are given position and authority. Drinking and baptism are the foundation. If the foundation is wrong, there cannot be the right superstructure. Suppose a child goes up to the mountain to pick flowers and then plants the flowers back in the soil. Even though he thinks that he has planted a garden, the flowers have no roots. James and John were wrong in the root matters. In order to be near the Lord and have authority in glory, they needed to drink His cup and be baptized with His baptism. If the disciples did not drink His cup and were not baptized with His baptism, they could neither be near Him nor receive authority and position. This is something that they would understand shortly. This is something that has to do with today, not just with the future.

What Is The Lord's Cup?

What is the Lord's cup? His cup carries only one meaning. When the Lord was in the garden of Gethsemane, a cup was before Him. It was God's cup of righteousness which He was to drink. Yet He prayed to the Father, saying, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matt. 26:39). Here we clearly find that the cup and God's will were two different things. At that moment the cup was the cup, and God's will was God's will; the two had not yet become one. The cup could be changed, but God's will could never be changed. The Lord was asking if the cup could pass. But He was not asking to avoid God's will. The cup could pass, but He was absolute to carry out God's will. The cup was not a necessity. It was not permanent but incidental. If the cup was not God's will, He was willing to let it pass. But if the cup was God's will, He would drink it. The Lord's attitude was clear: If it is God's will that I drink the cup, I will drink it. But if it is not His will that I drink the cup, I will not drink it. His word indeed draws out our worship. He could never reverse the order of His word. It would have been wrong for Him to pray the other way around. In other words, the one thing He insisted on in the garden was knowing whether or not the cup was God's will. Before the cup and God's

will became one, it was all right for the Lord to pray as He did. In fact, He prayed this way three times (v. 44). But when He knew that the cup and God's will were one, He said to Peter outside the garden, "The cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11). In the garden He could ask for the cup to be removed, because the cup and God's will had not yet become one. Outside the garden the cup and God's will were one. At this point the cup was different; it was something from the Father. This is why the Lord said, "The cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?"

Here we find the deepest spiritual lesson. The Lord was not hasty even when He was about to go to the cross. He only wanted to carry out God's will. He was not set on crucifixion. Although His crucifixion was crucial, it could not replace God's will. Although the Lord's crucifixion was the most important thing, He was still under God's will. Although the Lord came in order that He would become a propitiation for the sins of many, and although He came expressly to be crucified for men, the cross could never surpass God's will. He did not go to the cross simply because the cross was good and necessary for men's salvation. He did not come for the crucifixion but for doing God's will. He went to the cross only after He realized that God's will was the cross. He went to the cross for the simple reason that it was God's will. He was not crucified for the sake of crucifixion. God's will is higher than the cross. Hence, the Lord's crucifixion was not just a matter of the cross but a matter of doing God's will. He went to the cross because the Father wanted the crucifixion.

We can see that the cup is dispensable but God's will is indispensable. The Lord did not ask for God's will to be taken from Him. He had no direct relationship with the cross; it was only an indirect relationship. His direct relationship was with the will of God. This is why He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane for the cup to depart from Him. He wanted to walk in God's will. He chose God's will; He was not choosing the cross. Hence, the Lord's cup signifies His subjection to God's paramount authority. He prostrated Himself to choose God's will, and His only desire was to carry out His will. This is why He asked James and John, "Are you able to drink the cup which I drink?" (Mark 10:38). In other words, He was asking if they could prostrate themselves to choose God's will in the same way that He prostrated Himself before God to choose His will.

This is like Abraham's offering up of Isaac, which I spoke of earlier. In the end Abraham took Isaac back. Perhaps many people have offered up their Isaac. It becomes a problem to them when they are asked to take Isaac back. This seems to be a loss of face to them. Many people attach themselves directly to their consecration. Others attach themselves directly to suffering. Still others attach themselves directly to their work. But we should be directly attached to one thing only—God's will. To drink the Lord's cup means that we should not be attached directly to anything. If a cup is not God's will, we do not have to take it. Even though everyone knew that the Lord was going to go to the cross, He still prayed at the final hour to know whether the cross was God's will. Everything depends on God's will, not on us. Many people work for the sake of work itself. Once they take up a work, they cannot take up anything else. They are stuck to their work and sunk in their work. They have no more time to consider God's will. They insist on having their work to the end. This is not working for God's will but working for the sake of working. The Lord was so much for God's will that He was able even to give up the cross. When He understood God's will to be the cross, He took it without consideration of its pain. Drinking the cup means that we deny our own will and yield to God's will. The Lord was asking the disciples if they could yield to God's will in the same way that He yielded to God's will. This is the Lord's cup. If a man wants to be near the Lord or receive glory, he has to obey God's will.

Obedience to God's will is an important matter. It is a great matter. If a man can say glibly that he obeys God's will, he probably has not seen the great significance of God's will. Obeying God's will means being related to His will directly. Everything else can change. Even the cross, God's cup of wrath, can change. But God's will can never change. Man must forever be subject to God's authority before he can obey God's will. In reading the prayer in Gethsemane, we have to touch this spirit. The garden of Gethsemane speaks of the peak of the Lord's submission on earth. He did not impose God's will on the cup. Here is a profound principle. God's will was the object of His submission; God's cup was not the object. From the first day to the last, Christ's unswerving allegiance was to the will of God. He obeyed God's will all the way to the end. This was more important for Him than anything else. I believe there is a most profound revelation in the Lord's earthly experience of Gethsemane. We

have to know Christ Himself through such a deep experience. Up until a few hours before the cross, He was still not committed to the work of the cross; He was only committed to obedience to God's will. Hence, the highest calling is not the work, the suffering, or the cross, but the will of God. This is why the Lord asked James and John, "Are you able to drink the cup which I drink?" It seems that the Lord was saying, "If a man wants to draw near to Me and receive a place in glory above that of the other children of God, he must be like Me, yielding to God's will and taking it as the unique goal. Only such ones can come near to Me and sit at My right and left hand." Whether or not we can be near the Lord and sit at His right and left depends on whether we can drink His cup, which is to render absolute obedience to His will.

What Is The Lord's Baptism?

What is the Lord's baptism? Clearly the baptism that the Lord referred to was not the baptism at the river Jordan, because that was over. The baptism that the Lord was about to go through was forthcoming, referring to His death on the cross. In Luke 12:50 the Lord said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how I am pressed until it is accomplished!" In his book The Release of the Lord, Mr. Austin-Sparks said that this refers to the Lord's desire to release Himself. The Lord was yearning to release Himself. The word pressed means confined or constricted. Christ had a sanctified body in which all of God's riches were embodied. Such glorious riches were bound by the flesh, and how constricted and confined He was! How wonderful it would be if these riches would be released! It seems as if He was saying that God's life was too confined and constricted within Him, and that it would be wonderful if it could be released. On the one hand, the cross was for redemption of sins. On the other hand, it was for the release of life. God released His life through the cross. The Lord desired that this life be released. Before crucifixion, however, such a life was constricted within Him. Hence, the basic and primary meaning of this baptism is the release of life.

Following this, the Lord said that once God's life was released, it would be kindled like fire on the earth. What would be the result of this baptism? It would result in something like a fire, something that would bring in division rather than peace on earth (v. 51). Once a fire touches something, it burns. From that time on, houses would be against houses,

believers would be against unbelievers, those who have life would be against those who do not have life, and those with the fire would be against those without the fire. This is what it means to be baptized with the Lord's baptism. Once life is released, let go, and unleashed, there will be division. Wherever this life goes, it will not bring peace, but strife. Some know the Lord and some do not know the Lord, and there will be strife. Once life enters a house, there will be striving in the house. Those who have passed through this baptism are immediately separated from those who have not passed through it. The Lord was saying, "I am going to the cross to release My life. This will bring in strife. Can you handle this? Do you like this?" First there is death, and then there is the release of life. This is baptism. The result of this baptism is division. Dead men cannot strive with one another; only those who have life can strive. The Lord's word points to the fact that death operates in us and life operates in others (2 Cor. 4:12). The Lord's baptism was the removal of the outward shell and the liberation of His life through death. This is what we are doing today. We must break the outward shell before the life within us can flow out.

When we were at Custom Lane [Translator's note: In Foochow at the base of Kuling Mountain], I mentioned that life cannot be released unless the outward man is first broken. Our outward man has constricted His life and restricted it from flowing out. We must realize that if the outward man is not broken, life cannot flow out. Once a man's outward shell is broken, he becomes very approachable and life flows out easily. Otherwise, life is bound; man's spirit is not released, and life does not flow freely. It is one thing to expound 2 Corinthians 4:12. It is altogether another thing to give others a touch of life. Many people think that this verse is merely a teaching. Let me repeat: Unless your outward man is broken, no life will flow out. Once a man's outward shell is broken, he becomes very approachable. This is like a grain of wheat that falls into the ground; the life within breaks forth from its shell and spontaneously grows out of the opening. This is what the Lord said in John 12:24: "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." When a grain of wheat falls to the ground, the shell breaks, and the life is released. Following this the Lord said, "He who loves his soul-life loses it; and he who hates his soul-life in this world shall keep it unto eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am,

there also My servant will be. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him" (vv. 25-26). If a man wants to save his "shell," he will not be able to release the life. Once a man loses his "shell," he will bear much fruit.

There are two aspects to the cross—the aspect of redemption and the aspect of life-releasing. In Mark 10:35-45 the Lord did not speak of His death; He only spoke of His baptism, because He did not want others to think that James and John could participate in His redemptive work. The work of redemption can be accomplished only by Christ our High Priest; no one else can participate in it or do anything about it. We have no share in the Lord's death on the cross as far as redemption goes. But we do have a share in the release of His life. This is why the Lord only brought out the aspect of death that is related to His baptism when He spoke of the cross. This death has to do with the release of His life; it has nothing to do with redemption. The Lord said that He was going to go through a baptism. This meant that His outward shell would be broken and life would be released, like a grain of wheat breaking its shell and bearing much fruit. For a person to be baptized with the Lord's baptism means for him to be broken and torn down before the Lord and for life to come forth. If the outward man is not broken, it is very difficult for the Lord's life to be released. You may have life within you, but it cannot come out. You may be sitting very close to another person, but the life within you cannot come out or touch him.

The result of baptism is fire and division. Once this life flows out, there is no peace on earth. Instead, there is division. Many people are divided by this life. There is a big chasm between those who follow the Lord and those who do not. There is also a big difference between those who belong to the Lord and those who do not. Once a man touches the life of Christ, he takes a different way. There is much contention between those who have the Lord and those who do not, those who know God and those who do not, those who pay the price and those who do not, those who are faithful and those who are not, and those who accept the trials and those who do not. The Lord seemed to be saying, "Are you willing to bear the consequence of taking My baptism? You want to be on My right and left; you want to be different. But are you willing to bear the consequence of taking My baptism and becoming different from other children of God today?" In order to sit at the Lord's right and left and to

have a place of glory, we have to drink His cup and be baptized with His baptism, which means that we have to acknowledge God's will above everything, to break the outward shell, and to release life. Only such ones know what it is to sit at the right and left of the Lord. This is the Christian pathway.

The Lord's word to James and John, in effect, was, "You must first drink My cup and pass through My baptism before you can sit on My right and left in glory. Can you drink this cup and be baptized with this baptism?" They answered, "We are able" (10:39). The two inquired of the Lord, but they did not know how serious their request was. They were not the only ones; all descendants of Adam are the same. The Lord spelled out the conditions, and they said that they were able. The Lord told them the fact, that to sit on His right and left required that they drink His cup and be baptized with His baptism. But even in saying this, He did not promise them His right and left side. What He meant was that if a man does not drink His cup and is not baptized with His baptism, he will surely not be able to sit on His right or left. But even if they drank His cup and passed through His baptism, they still might not sit on His right or left, because the latter depends on God's preparation (v. 40). If a man does not drink the Lord's cup and is not baptized with His baptism, he will surely not be able to sit on His right or left side. But even if he drinks His cup and is baptized with His baptism, he may still not be able to sit on His right or left side. Those who do not drink the Lord's cup and are not baptized with His baptism will surely not sit on His right or left. But those who drink His cup and are baptized with His baptism may not necessarily sit on His right or left. Perhaps James and John would ask, "What then can we say?" If one does not drink the cup and take the baptism, he is disqualified for sure. And if one drinks the cup and takes the baptism, he may be qualified, but it still depends on God's preparation. James and John could be off the mark in their request, but the Lord could not be inaccurate in His answer. If the Lord gave the right and left places to James and John, these two seats would have been gone for the past two thousand years of church history. Other seats might still be available, but these two seats would have been taken over by these two; they would have become reserved seats for the two disciples, and others would have been discouraged to go on in the Lord's way. The Lord did not grant their request, and the two seats are still available. Some among us may still

have a chance to take those two seats. Therefore, this lesson is still applicable to us. But the main point of this passage is not in the preceding discussion but in what follows.

An Authority Does Not Dominate Or Control, But Humbles Himself To Serve

Following this, the Lord talked about authority. Verse 41 says that when the other ten disciples heard about James and John's request, they became indignant. It appears that James and John asked the Lord in secret, but later the ten disciples found this out. Subsequently, the Lord taught them. Here is the subject of the whole passage. He gathered the disciples around and taught them things concerning the future glory. He said, "You know that those who are esteemed as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wants to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you shall be the slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many" (vv. 42-45). The two disciples' question led to a discussion on authority. The Lord told them that the issue is not with the future but with today. The spirit of this subject is applicable not only to future glory but also to today. The Lord introduced the spirit that will be applicable from that day until the present. Here were two persons who wanted to sit on the throne to rule over others. The Lord showed them that among the Gentiles, there are those who are esteemed as rulers and great ones who lord it over them. Among the Gentiles there is the hunger for authority. Men like to be kings; they like to rule over others or to be great ones to control others. But it is not so among us. It is good if some among us seek for future glory, but such ones should not have the thought of lording it over God's children today. They should not have the thought of controlling or ruling others.

There is nothing wrong for man to want to sit on the Lord's right or left side. But there should not be any striving for supremacy among God's children. There should not be any thought of struggle for power or any intention of controlling others. If we do, we will fall into the same condition as that of the Gentiles. Nothing is more unsightly than a person who struggles to be an authority. It is the most ugly thing for a person to try to

control others in an outward way. Ambition for authority or to be a great one is something that belongs to the Gentiles. We should drive this kind of spirit from the church. The Lord can only use those who know His cup and who are willing to be baptized with His baptism. If we drink His cup and take His baptism, authority will be ours spontaneously. This is the God-ordained way, the root of everything. If we do not take this way yet try to reach our destination, or if we do not have the root yet try to produce fruit, we are trying in vain. We must abound in our knowledge of God's will and must accept all the breakings so that the life within can be released. As far as our position before God is concerned, it is up to God's preparation. If anyone wants to climb above other children of God, or if he wants to take control and rule, I will say that such a one is a Gentile in reality. We must first drive out this Gentile spirit from among us. Among us, we should not tolerate the spirit of the Gentiles. We are after those whom God can use, not those who can rule over others. Such a Gentile spirit must be thoroughly purged from us before we can go down from this mountain to help others or handle business affairs.

The more a person wants to be an authority or a great one, the less we can entrust him with authority. God never grants authority to those who want to be His authority. The more Gentile spirit a person has, the less God can use him. I hope none of us are politicians, manipulating, controlling, and hushing others, while allowing only ourselves to be the ones to issue the orders. We cannot do this. The more a person realizes his foibles, the more authority God will give to him. Since this is how the Lord selects men, this is the way we should take. We must never be a politician and must never play politics. We should never say, "If we do not give this man some position, he will rebel against us." We cannot deal with others this way. In God's house we can only take the spiritual way according to the spiritual principle; we cannot take the way of politicians. I hope that you will be faithful. You should be meek and pliable in your attitude, but you have to be faithful before the Lord. A man can only be used by God after he has prostrated himself before Him. When a man is standing tall, God can never use him.

In verses 42 and 43 the Lord said that the Gentiles have rulers and great men to rule over them, but "it is not so among you." I like the words among you. This means that there is a great difference between the

Gentiles and the church in the matter of authority. If we are not careful in this matter, we will have no way to go on in the church. The Gentiles rule according to position, but the church serves according to its spiritual life. Once the church is contaminated with this Gentile practice, it is ruined. The church has to maintain a strict separating wall between it and the Gentiles. Among the Gentiles, one only sees power struggles. Among us, the more a person thinks that he is authority, the less he is qualified to be the authority. The more a person thinks he is qualified, the less he is qualified. We should maintain this attitude among us at all times.

Whoever Wanting To Become Great Shall Be The Servant, And Whoever Wanting To Be First Shall Be The Slave

The Lord uses the phrase among you three times. Today the Lord is establishing authority in the church. Those who are great in the church, that is, those who are established by the Lord as great ones, are actually the servants and slaves of all. Whoever wants to become great shall be the servant of all, and whoever wants to be the first shall be the slave of all. This is the authority in the church. Here we see the two great requirements for a man to be appointed as God's authority. First, there is the need to drink the cup—obedience to God's will absolutely—and to accept the baptism—acknowledgment of death for the release of life. Second, there should not be any ambition for power. One should only be a servant, a slave of all. On the one hand, one should have a spiritual basis; he should honor God's will as the central and highest thing among all things and should release the Lord's life. On the other hand, one has to be humble, which means having no interest in being the authority among the brothers and sisters and being satisfied with being a servant and a slave. God can only use such people as His authority. All those who are willing to be servants will be appointed by the Lord as the great ones, and they will be entrusted with authority. All those who are willing to be the slaves, that is, who have a heart to serve the brothers and sisters, will be appointed to be the first by the Lord. In other words, a man must have a spiritual foundation on the one hand, and have a proper attitude and view towards authority on the other hand. He must not have any craving for authority. Only men such as this can be God's authority.

I have laid out these two points in an honest way before you. If you do not possess the first point—a spiritual foundation, it will do you no good

to possess the second—humility. You still will be useless even if you become very humble. When the Lord answered James and John, He first dealt with the first criterion. However, this does not mean that a person will be given the right or left side of the Lord after he has a spiritual foundation. The Lord said that it would be given to whoever God wills. After the first qualification, there is the need for the second condition, which is being a servant and a slave among the brothers and sisters. Those who fulfill these two conditions, who see themselves as unsuitable and incapable men, are the ones who are qualified to be the authority. The Lord is after those who consider themselves unqualified men, servants, and slaves. The Lord said that such ones can be made the great ones and the first. In order to be an authority, one has to drink the cup and take the baptism. Otherwise, all is in vain. But in addition to this, he has to be truly humble, considering himself worthy to be only a servant (not in word only, but in inward feeling). The Lord said that such a one can be great. We are afraid of the kind of humility that stays on one's lips only. Humility must be something that issues from the heart.

In order to be a deputy authority, we must fulfill the condition of spirituality as well as the condition of humility. The qualification of an authority is based on one's consciousness of his inability and unsuitability. One thing is sure: None of the persons that God used in the Old and New Testaments were proud. I can tell you frankly that as soon as a person becomes proud, God will put him aside. As a worker for over twenty years, I have never seen a proud man who was used by the Lord. Even if a man is just a little proud in private, his words will sooner or later expose him, because a person's words always disclose the hidden state of his heart. Even a humble person will be greatly surprised at the judgment seat. The surprise that awaits the proud, however, will surely be many times more than that of the humble! We must be conscious of our unprofitableness all the time, because God can only use the unprofitable slaves. We are not saying this to be polite. We honestly should feel that we are unprofitable slaves. We may have tended sheep or plowed the field, but when we come in from the field, we should still acknowledge that we are unprofitable slaves. We should always stand in the position of a slave (Luke 17:10). God never entrusts His authority to the self-confident and self-assured. We have to reject pride and learn humility and meekness. We should not speak for ourselves but should learn to

know ourselves and to see things from God's viewpoint.

Finally the Lord said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The Lord did not come to be an authority but to serve. The less ambition a man has and the more he humbles himself before the Lord, the more useful he is in the eyes of the Lord. The more a man thinks highly of himself and the more he thinks he is different from others, the less he is useful in the hand of the Lord. The Lord took the form of a slave and became a slave to all. He never seized any authority; all of His authority came from God. The Lord was raised from a lowly place to the height. This is His principle. We should not try to seize any fleshly authority with fleshly hands. We should be the servants of all. Then when God commits certain responsibilities to us, we will learn to represent Him. The basis of authority is ministry, and there is ministry only where there is resurrection. When one has a ministry, he has a service, and when he has a service, he has authority. May the Lord deliver us from haughty thoughts.

A man who tries to usurp God's authority with his fleshly hands will suffer severe judgment! We have to fear authority as much as we fear hell fire. It is not an easy matter to represent God. It is too great a matter, something unfathomable to man, and something that we dare not touch with our own hands. We should take a straight course in obedience. Our way is the way of obedience, not the way of authority. It is a matter of being a servant, not a matter of being great. It is a matter of being a slave, not a matter of being the first. Moses and David were great authorities, yet neither of them built up their own authority. This should be the way of those who serve as authorities today. We should tremble with fear in our exercise of authority. May the Lord be merciful to us.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Need Of A Deputy Authority To Sanctify Himself

Scripture Reading: John 17:19

We have seen that spiritual authority depends on spiritual attainment. No

authority is appointed by men. It is not even appointed by God alone. Please remember that authority is based on attainment on the one hand and on humility and obedience before God on the other hand. Today we will say something more about the need for a deputy authority to set himself apart from others. Although our Lord was sent from God and had uninterrupted fellowship with God, He said, “For their sake I sanctify Myself” (John 17:19). A deputy authority must therefore sanctify himself for others’ sake.

The Lord’s Sanctification Of Himself

What does it mean that the Lord sanctified Himself? It means that the Lord refrained from doing many things, which were legitimate for Him to do, for the sake of the disciples. He could have done and said many things. He could have adopted many attitudes. He could have worn many different kinds of clothing and eaten many different kinds of food. For the sake of the disciples, however, He refrained from them. The Lord Jesus is the Son of God; He does not know sin. While He was on the earth, He had much more liberty than we have, and He could have done many more things than we. There are many things which we cannot do because we are the wrong person. There are many words we cannot speak because we are unclean persons. But such a problem did not exist with the Lord. He is holy. We are impatient; therefore, we need to learn to wait. But the Lord was never impatient; therefore, He did not need to wait. There are many restrictions which did not have to apply to Him, because He had no sin. Without the unclean ones being around Him, the Lord Jesus as a man could have had so much more liberty. Even when He was angry, His anger was holy and without sin. Yet He said that He sanctified Himself for the disciples’ sake. He was willing to take many restrictions.

The Lord was not only holy before God; He was holy in Himself. As far as His own character is concerned, He is without sin. But while He moved among His disciples, He needed to sanctify Himself. For us to become holy we need to refrain from many things, but the Lord is holy in His very nature. This is why He can do so many more things than we can. It would be very wrong for anyone to say that he is good. But it is perfectly all right for the Lord to say that He is good. He can say many things that we cannot say, because there is no taint of sin in Him whatsoever. He has

more freedom than we have. Yet He willingly subjected Himself to restrictions. The Lord is not only holy in Himself, He condescended to our holiness. Our holiness necessitates our setting ourselves apart from others and refraining from doing many things.

In addition to His own holiness, the Lord took our holiness upon Himself. This is why He sanctified Himself. The Lord willingly accepted restriction for our sake. Man speaks and judges by his own sinful standard. If the Lord had acted and spoken according to His own standard of holiness, man would have criticized Him according to his own sinful thoughts. This is why He willingly placed Himself under restrictions. We refrain from doing many things because of our sins, but the Lord refrained from doing many things and placed Himself under restrictions because of holiness. We do not do things because we should not do them. The Lord could have done them, yet He did not. He refrained from many things which He otherwise could have done for the sake of maintaining God's authority. He wanted to set Himself apart from the world. This is what it meant for the Lord to sanctify Himself.

The Loneliness Of An Authority

In order for us to learn to be an authority, we must also learn to set ourselves apart from the brothers and sisters. We need to refrain from many things which we otherwise could do or say. We should be separated in our speech and in our emotion. We may hold a certain attitude when we are by ourselves. But when we are with others, we have to set ourselves apart. We can only fellowship with the brothers and sisters to a certain extent. We cannot be flippant or frivolous. We need to give up our freedom and suffer loneliness. Loneliness is a mark of being an authority. All those who are frivolous among the brothers and sisters cannot be an authority. This is not pride. It merely means that for the sake of representing God's authority, we have to have certain limitations in our fellowship with the brothers and sisters. We cannot be too loose or easy-going. Sparrows fly in company, but the eagles fly alone. If we can only fly low and not suffer the loneliness of flying high, we are not qualified to be an authority. In order to be an authority, we have to be restricted and must separate ourselves. We cannot do what others can freely do. We cannot say what others can hastily say. We have to submit to the Spirit of the Lord. The Holy Spirit within us will teach us. This will

make us lonely; it will strip us of excitement. We will no longer dare to joke around the brothers and sisters. This is the price that an authority has to pay. We must sanctify ourselves as the Lord Jesus did before we can be an authority.

As far as being a member in the Body is concerned, an authority has to be absolutely inconspicuous, being the same as the other brothers and sisters, in order to maintain the fellowship of the Body. However, in representing God, an authority has to be restricted by God and sanctified. He should be a pattern to the saints. But in acting as a member, he should coordinate and serve together with others, not setting himself apart as a special class.

An Authority Has To Be Restricted In His Emotion

Leviticus 10:1-7 records God's judgment on Nadab and Abihu. They were judged because they did not come under the authority of their father Aaron. Aaron had four sons, who served as priests in the sanctuary; they were anointed the same day that he was anointed. They were not supposed to serve independently; rather, they were to help their father in his service to God. They could not do anything by themselves. But one day Nadab and Abihu offered up strange fire on their own, without the command of their father. This brought in God's judgment, and they were burned to death. Moses said, "This is what Jehovah spoke, saying, I will be sanctified by those who come near to Me" (v. 3). God wanted to point out that those who draw near to Him cannot be loose. This punishment was more severe and strict than His discipline on the rest of His people.

Nadab and Abihu died on the same day. What should Aaron have done? Before God he was the high priest; in his house he was the head of his household. He played a double role. Can a man be so dedicated to God's service that he can ignore his sons? According to Jewish tradition, when a man dies, his family has to dishevel their hair and tear their garments. But Moses only ordered the corpses to be carried out. Aaron and his sons were not allowed to dishevel their hair or tear their garments.

Sorrow and grief over death are human affections; they are normal. But here a servant of the Lord could not express his sorrow or else he would die. This is a very sober matter. The judgment that a servant of God can suffer is different from the judgment that an ordinary Israelite can suffer. A

servant of God cannot do what an ordinary Israelite can do. It is understandable and legitimate for a father to mourn over his son or for a person to mourn over his own brother. But those who have God's anointing oil upon them must sanctify themselves. This is not a matter of sin but a matter of sanctification. We cannot say that we can do many things just because they are legitimate and not sinful. It is not a matter of whether or not they are sinful, but whether we are sanctified. It may be right for others to do them, but a servant of God cannot because he must sanctify himself.

The opposite of sanctification is being common. To be sanctified means that we cannot do what everybody else can do. The Lord could not do what the disciples could do. An authority cannot do what his brothers can do. A high priest cannot even express his own emotion which he would otherwise be entitled to express. If he becomes loose in this matter, he will die. The Israelites died because of sin, while the priests died because of the failure of separation. Among the children of Israel, those who kill die, but Aaron would die if he were to weep for his sons. What a difference this is! An authority must pay the price.

Aaron could not even leave the tabernacle. He could only let others bury the dead. The Israelites did not have to live in the tabernacle at all, yet Aaron and his sons could not even leave the door of the tabernacle. They had to carefully guard that which God had entrusted to them. The holy ointment has sanctified us and separated us from all our activities. We have to honor the ointment that God has given us. All of us have to go to God to deal with Him and to ask Him to separate us from others. The world and other brothers and sisters may maintain their family affections, but a deputy authority is set apart to maintain God's glory. He cannot seek for ease. He cannot hold on to his own feelings. He cannot rebel or be loose. He must instead exalt God for His glory.

A servant of God is one who has God's holy ointment upon him. He must sacrifice his own emotion and abandon his legitimate sentiments. This is the only way to become a deputy authority. Anyone who maintains God's authority must also reject his own feeling. One must be willing to pay any price, even to the extent of giving up his deepest affections, his filial sentiments, his friendships, and even his love. If he is entangled by these things, he cannot serve the Lord. God's requirements are strict. If a man

does not give up his own affections, he cannot serve the Lord. God's servants are those with a distinction, while ordinary people are those without a distinction. God's servants must sanctify themselves for the sake of His people.

An Authority Must Sanctify Himself In His Living And His Enjoyment

Why did Nadab and Abihu offer up strange fire? According to Leviticus 10:9, God told Aaron, "Do not drink wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting." Many who are familiar with the Bible think that these two offered up strange fire after becoming drunk with wine. According to the record of verse 5, it is possible that they became naked in the sanctuary. This is why others came in and carried them in their tunics after they died. It is very easy for a drunken person to expose his body. The Israelites can take wine or strong drink, but a priest could not do the same. This is a matter of enjoyment. We cannot enjoy what others enjoy, and we cannot rejoice in what others rejoice in. (Wine signifies joy.) A servant of God has to be restricted. He has to separate the holy from the common, the clean from the unclean. It is right for us to maintain our fellowship in the Body with the brothers and sisters, but we cannot be loose, because we bear a special service. We cannot engage in anything that will induce us to cast off all restraints.

Leviticus 21 records God's specific requirement of sanctification on His serving priest:

(1)They cannot defile themselves by death, except for their relatives who are near to them. They have to sanctify themselves (vv. 1-4). This is the general requirement.

(2)One has to be sanctified in his attire and in the body (vv. 5-6). He cannot make any baldness on his head, and he cannot shave off the corners of his beard. (Egyptians did this when they worshipped the sun god.) Neither can they make any cuttings in their flesh. (Africans do this.)

(3)One has to be sanctified in marriage (vv. 7-9).

(4)The high priest is bound by a higher requirement: He cannot touch a dead body, not even when it is his father or mother (vv. 10-15). Therefore, the higher a servant of God stands, the higher God's requirements are. God pays attention to whether or not His servants are separated. The

more a person is near to God, the higher God's requirements are upon him. The degree of our nearness to God becomes the degree of God's requirement on us. The more God entrusts Himself to a person, the more He requires of a person. God pays much attention to the sanctification of those who serve Him.

The Basis Of Authority Being Separation

Authority is based on separation. Without separation there is no authority. If you crave the company of others, you cannot be an authority. If your communication with others is unrestricted, you cannot be a deputy authority. The higher an authority stands, the greater is the separation. God is the highest authority. Therefore, He exercises the greatest separation. We all have to learn to separate ourselves from others in unholy things. The Lord Jesus could have acted as He willed, but He sanctified Himself for the disciples' sake. He separated Himself and stood on the side of holiness. We should willingly and gladly pursue after deeper separations—separation from unholiness. This does not mean that we should separate ourselves from God's children through self-proclaimed holiness. The more we are sanctified and the more we are restricted by God and bound under His authority, the more we can be an authority. Obedience cannot be maintained in the church if those who are in authority do not behave properly. If the issue of authority is not settled, there will always be confusion in the church.

Those who are in authority do not usurp authority. An authority is a servant of God. He must pay any price to shun excitement. He must climb high, he must not be afraid of loneliness, and he must be a sanctified person. May we be willing to pay the price to recover God's authority. This is the way the Lord is taking in the church today.

CHAPTER TWENTY

The Requirements Of A Deputy Authority

Scripture Reading: Eph. 5:22, 25, 28, 33; 6:1, 4, 9; Psa. 82:1-2; 1 Tim. 4:12; 3:4-6; Titus 2:15; 1:6-8; 1 Pet. 1:21

God has appointed authorities in many places. In the family there are husbands, parents, and masters. Above us there are rulers and officers.

In the church there are elders and workers. Each deputy authority has his own requirements. Today we will consider the requirements for these different deputy authorities.

The Requirements Of Various Deputy Authorities

Concerning Husbands

The Bible teaches the wife to submit to the husband and the husband to exercise authority. However, there are requirements which the husband has to fulfill. Ephesians 5 mentions three times that the husband has to love the wife. He has to love his wife as himself. Although there is such a thing as authority in the family, those who are in authority should fulfill God's requirements. The requirement of a husband as a deputy authority is to love his wife. There is a pattern for the husband's love for the wife—Christ's love for the church. Just as Christ loved the church, husbands should love their wives. The love that a husband has towards his wife should match that of Christ's love towards the church. In order for a husband to maintain his authority in representing God, he must love his wife.

Concerning Parents

Children should obey their parents. But as deputy authorities, parents also have their responsibilities and requirements. The Bible says that parents should not provoke their children to anger. Although parents have authority over their children, they have to learn to control themselves before God. They cannot say that since their children have been begotten and are being raised up by them, they can treat them at will. God created us, but He does not treat us at will. He gives everyone a free will. Hence, parents should not provoke their children to anger. Some people dare not do certain things before their friends, students, subordinates, or relatives, but they readily do them before their children without any hesitation at all. This is wrong. The greatest thing parents need to do is to exercise self-control. They have to control themselves through the Holy Spirit. Parents can deal with their children only to a certain extent. Their authority over their children is for the purpose of educating them only. They have to warn and nurture their children with the teaching of the Lord. There is no sense of domination or punishment here. A parent's heart should be for education, not for punishment.

Concerning Masters

Servants should be obedient to their masters. But there are requirements for those who are masters. A master should not intimidate his servants. He should not threaten them or be angry with them. God will not allow an authority to behave in an unrestrained way. He must fear God. Both the servant and the master have the same Master in the heavens. A master has to remember that he himself is under authority. Although others may be under him, he also is under authority, even God's authority. This is why he cannot be careless. The more a person knows authority, the less intimidating and threatening he will be. We have to learn to be meek and loving, always having a heart for perfecting others. This is a necessary attitude for one to be an authority. If a deputy authority only knows to threaten and judge others, he will come under God's judgment sooner or later. Therefore, a master must learn to walk with fear and trembling before God.

Concerning Rulers

We should submit to the authority of rulers and officers over us. We cannot find a teaching in the New Testament concerning how to be a ruler. God has given charge of the world to the unbelievers. He has not given it to the Christians. In the New Testament God gives no indication that Christians should be rulers in the world. But in the Old Testament there are cases of men serving as civil servants (Psa. 82). Of those in position and power, God requires righteousness, integrity, fairness, and compassion on the poor. This is the proper principle for those who are executing authority in public office. A man who is over others should not try to uphold his own standing; instead, he should do his utmost to uphold righteousness.

Concerning Elders

The elders are the authorities in the local church. All the brothers have to submit to the elders. Titus 1 speaks of basic qualifications of an elder—self-control and submission. A lawless person can never execute the law, and a rebellious person can never make others submissive. An elder must exercise strict self-control. A common trait among many people is the lack of discipline. Hence, in appointing elders, we have to select those who are particularly exercised in self-control. God appoints the

elders to manage the church. As such, they must be submissive and must exercise self-control. They must set their hearts to be a pattern to all in everything. God never appoints a person who loves to be the first among others (like Diotrephes) to be an elder. The elders are the highest deputy authority in a local church. For this reason they must be men with self-control.

First Timothy 3:4-5 speaks of another basic qualification of an elder—he must be able to manage his own house. Managing one's house does not refer to managing one's parents or wife, but it refers mainly to managing one's children. An elder has to teach his children to walk soberly and to be obedient in all things. A man must first be a good father before he can be an elder. He must first be an authority at home before he can be an elder in the church.

An elder must not be an arrogant person. If a person becomes proud as soon as he assumes authority, he is not qualified to be an elder. An elder in a local church should feel as if he has no authority at all. If an elder is always conscious of his authority, he is not qualified to be an elder or to handle the affairs of the church. Only the foolish and the narrow-minded are proud. Such ones cannot stand the temptation of God's glory, and they cannot bear God's commission and assignment. Once such ones are entrusted with something, they fall into a snare. This is why a new convert cannot be an overseer (1 Tim. 3:6—in Greek this word means a novice in a trade. For example, among carpenters there are masters who have been in the trade for decades, and there are novices who have barely learned to handle a hammer.), lest he be blinded with pride and fall into the judgment suffered by the devil.

Concerning the Lord's Workers

Titus 2:15 describes the requirements of a deputy authority in the Lord's work. Titus was not an elder in the church, but a worker of the Lord, serving in the capacity of an apostle. Paul charged Titus to exhort men. He should not only speak in public but also exhort men one by one. He should convict men with all authority. At the same time, he should not let others despise him in words and deeds. In order for others not to despise us, we have to sanctify ourselves. If we are the same as others in many things, and if we are loose, careless, and unchecked in our daily life,

others will despise us. We must not be indulgent in anything. Only then will others respect us and honor us as an authority and a representative of God. This is what Paul told Timothy (1 Tim. 4:12). Although a worker should not seek after human glory or honor, he should neither be despised to the point of losing his sanctified stature.

In the entire New Testament, Paul wrote only two books which were directed toward young co-workers. They are 1 Timothy and Titus. In these two books Paul often said that a worker should not dishonor himself but should be a pattern in everything. Anything that leads to contempt should be avoided; one should refuse such things. There is a price to pay in being an authority. One has to separate himself from others. He has to be able to live alone. A pattern must be different from others; he must sanctify himself. If he is the same as the others, he is no longer a pattern. We should not uplift ourselves, but at the same time we should not make others despise us. We should always sanctify ourselves and should not jest lightly. We have to learn to separate ourselves in the Lord. A worker should not be arrogant, but neither should he give reason for others to despise him. Once a worker becomes too common, he is disqualified from his work. Once he becomes too common, his usefulness is gone, and his authority is lost.

A worker must also keep his standing and maintain God's authority. Authority manifests itself in separation and distinction. The main thing about a representative authority is that he represents God, and being an authority has everything to do with being a pattern. This is a very serious matter. A deputy authority is one who "represents" authority, not one who "exercises" authority.

How God Deals With The Mistakes Of The Deputy Authority

Numbers 30:13 tells us how God upholds His appointed deputy authority. It says that a husband can establish the vow his wife vows, or make it void. On the one hand, God tells the wife to submit to the husband. On the other hand, He upholds the authority of the husband. Even if the husband voids both the vow and the oath of the wife, she has to submit, and it is not reckoned to her as a sin if she breaks them. If the husband voids the vow of the wife, he will have to bear his wife's iniquity. We who are deputy authorities may propose something. Those who are under us

should submit to authority. They may be wrong, but the sin is not reckoned upon them. However, we who make the proposal will have to bear their iniquity. Therefore, we should never propose or suggest anything rashly, because we will have to bear the consequence of it. The most dangerous thing is to be a counselor of the church and to propose something lightly. We can find no clearer picture of man's requirement to submit to deputy authority in the Bible than in Numbers 30. There we see God asking man to submit to deputy authority unconditionally. In the same way, there is no clearer picture of the serious responsibility that an authority bears before God than in Numbers 30. The more proposals a deputy authority makes, the more trouble he is asking for himself, and the more he will invite God's judgment.

We have to learn to not control others' lives presumptuously. We should not subject others to our own ideas. Before we have the full assurance, we should not take the burden of others upon ourselves. Only a broken and pliable man will be free from iniquity before God. A hard and opinionated man will bear much iniquity before God. The Body life is the basis of guidance in the church. We have to live in the Body life, to fellowship with the Lord, and to fellowship with the brothers and sisters. We should not be individualistic in our decisions, and we should not be so self-assured. The more we present our decision to the church and the more we fellowship with the members, the more assurance we will have. We should never bear the name of the Body while occupying ourselves with activities of the flesh. If we do, we should expect nothing except the bearing of our own iniquity. We should wait before the Lord, understand His will, and be open to others. We should not speak before we are taught or relate things to others before we see them ourselves. If we do, we will lay up iniquity for ourselves. A deputy authority must be meek and humble. This will save him from getting into trouble. Otherwise, God will have strong words for him because he will bear the iniquity of others. This is a sober matter.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Eph. 3:4-6; Col. 3:4-11; Rom. 12:3-5

The Church Being
The Body Of Christ

In this message we will speak on the Body of Christ. In the New Testament, Paul was the only apostle who used the expression the Body of Christ to denote the church. In other places in the New Testament, the church is called the temple of God, the household of God, etc. But Paul specifically said that the church is the Body of Christ. The subject here is not us becoming the sons of God or becoming Christians. We are talking about how the church becomes the Body of Christ. We can say that the church is Christ in a different form. Christ was the only begotten Son of God. Now He has become the Firstborn. Christ plus all the sons—the church—is the one Body. There are no individual persons in the church; there is only Christ in the church. Anything that issues from Christ is the church. The church comes fully out of Christ and is one with Christ. There is no need for a Christian to do anything or change anything in order to be in Christ. As long as a man is regenerated, he is in Christ and becomes a part of the Body of Christ.

The Body Of Christ
Being A Matter Of Life

The church as the Body of Christ is absolutely a matter of life. The church as the Body of Christ is not a doctrine; it is of life. A man cannot become a part of the Body of Christ just by understanding it. He becomes a part of the Body of Christ through regeneration. This is absolutely a matter of life; it has nothing to do with knowledge or doctrine. As Christians we need very much to see the Body of Christ. But the only way we can see the Body of Christ is by God's revelation. We cannot understand the Body of Christ with our mind. Even if we have all the knowledge there is about the Body of Christ, we still may not have seen the Body of Christ or touched the reality of the Body. Only those who have received revelation from God will see the Body of Christ, and only they will enter the reality of the Body.

Romans 12 tells us that the church is the Body of Christ, but it does not explain how the church becomes the Body of Christ. In order to understand how the church becomes the Body of Christ, we have to understand Romans 5 through 8. Chapter five tells us that all men are

joined to Adam and that man derives his life from Adam. Through Adam's fall, all men have become sinners and have been joined to the old man. Chapter six tells us that the old man has to be dealt with; it has to be crucified with Christ. Through Christ's redemption, we have died and resurrected. Chapter seven says that a man should no longer live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Chapter eight goes on to explain how we live according to the Spirit.

The Body Of Christ
Being The Consummation Of The Work Of The Cross

The consummation of the work of the cross is the church. The work of the cross goes as far as the Body of Christ and consummates with the Body of Christ. Hence, the knowledge of the cross brings us to the knowledge of the Body of Christ. The cross brings a man to a state of weakness and inability, one in which he totally loses hope in the old creation. When he is brought to this point, he is delivered in a real way from the old creation and brought into the new creation. Everything in the old creation has been condemned and terminated by the cross. The Body of Christ is the new creation; it has nothing to do with the old creation. If we resort to human methods, tactics, and skills (which we have used in the past) to deal with the affairs of the church, the result will only be disastrous. God does not approve of anything that is from the old creation, and He will not allow anything from the old creation to remain in the new creation. Everything of the old creation must pass through the cross and remain on the cross. The church has no use for anything that comes from the old man. The church only takes that which issues from Christ.

When man fell, he fell because of his own concepts, choices, and judgments. Therefore, God will not allow anything that issues from the old creation to gain the upper hand. The "backbone" of the natural man must be broken; the hollow of his thigh must be touched. Before he will submit to God, he must be crippled and fall flat on his face. This is what God is doing in the new creation. He is smashing everything of the old creation, and He is constituting us with everything that issues from Christ so that we can become the Body of Christ in practicality. I saw the evil of man's flesh twelve years ago in Philippians 3, Romans 5, and John 5. For seven months I was hesitant to make any move at all, because I knew that everything that issued from the flesh would be rejected by God. God

wants to remove everything in man that is from the flesh. God's children must first deal with the natural life. If they deal with their natural life, they will be in the Body spontaneously, because the Body of Christ is composed of everything that issues from Christ. Nothing of the old man can remain in the Body. As soon as a man passes through the experience in Romans 5 through 8, he can enter into the experience of Romans 12.

Today the church is divided because Christians are living in the wrong realm and the wrong sphere. Christians are not living in the new creation or in the reality of the Body of Christ. They are living only in the superficiality of doctrines, which belongs to man's natural life and is part of man's oldness. If every Christian was willing to be dealt with and to leave the natural things and the old creation behind, and if every one of them was willing to live in the reality of the Body of Christ, there would be no more divisions. May the Lord be merciful to us to see what the Body of Christ is. May the work of the cross usher us into the Body of Christ.

THE BREAKING OF THE OUTER MAN AND THE RELEASE OF THE SPIRIT

CHAPTER ONE

The Importance Of Breaking

Scripture Reading: John 12:24; Heb. 4:12-13; 1 Cor. 2:11-14; 2 Cor. 3:6; Rom. 1:9; 7:6; 8:4-8; Gal. 5:16, 22-23, 25

Sooner or later a servant of God discovers that he himself is the greatest frustration to his work. Sooner or later he finds that his outer man does not match his inner man. The inner man heads in one direction, while the outer man heads in another direction. He discovers that his outer man cannot be subject to the rule of the spirit and cannot walk according to God's highest demands. He discovers that the greatest hindrance to his work is his outer man and that this outer man frustrates him from exercising his spirit. Every servant of God should be able to exercise his spirit, to secure God's presence in his spirit, to know God's word through

his spirit, to touch men's condition by his spirit, to convey God's word through his spirit, and to sense and receive divine revelation with his spirit. Yet the frustration of the outer man makes it impossible for him to use his spirit. Many servants of the Lord are fundamentally unfit for the Lord's work because they have never been dealt with by the Lord in a fundamental way. Without this dealing, they are basically unqualified for any work. All excitement, zeal, and earnest pleading is vain. This kind of fundamental dealing is the only way for us to become a useful vessel to the Lord.

The Outer Man And The Inner Man

Romans 7:22 says, "For I delight in the law of God according to the inner man." Our inner man delights in the law of God. Ephesians 3:16 also tells us "to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man." In 2 Corinthians 4:16 Paul also said, "Though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." The Bible divides our being into the outer man and the inner man. God resides in the inner man, and the man outside this God-occupied inner man is the outer man. In other words, our spirit is the inner man, while the person that others contact is the outer man. Our inner man puts on our outer man like a garment. God has placed Himself, His Spirit, His life, and His power in us, that is, in our inner man. Outside of our inner man is our mind, emotion, and will. Outside of all these is our body, our flesh.

In order for a man to work for God, his inner man must be released. The fundamental problem with many servants of God is that their inner man cannot break out of their outer man. In order for the inner man to be released, it must break out of the outer man. We have to be clear that the first obstacle to our work is ourselves, not other things. If our inner man is an imprisoned, confined man, our spirit is shrouded and not easily released. If we have never learned to break through our outer man with our spirit, we cannot work for the Lord. Nothing frustrates us like the outer man. Whether or not our work will be effective depends on whether the Lord has broken down our outer man and whether the inner man can be released through our broken, outer man. This is a very fundamental issue. The Lord has to dismantle our outer man in order to make way for our inner man. As soon as the inner man is released, many sinners will be blessed and many Christians will receive grace.

Death And The Bearing Of Fruit

In John 12:24 the Lord Jesus said, "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Life is in the grain. However, there is a shell outside of the grain, a very powerful shell. As long as this shell does not break open, the grain cannot grow. "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies." What is this death? It is the action of the temperature and moisture of the earth upon the grain which results in the breaking of the shell. When the shell breaks, the grain grows. Therefore, it is not a matter of whether or not the grain has life, but whether the outer shell is broken. The very next verse says, "He who loves his soul-life loses it; and he who hates his soul-life in this world shall keep it unto eternal life" (v. 25). According to the Lord the outer shell is our own life, and the inner life is the eternal life that He dispenses. In order for the inner life to be released, the outer life must suffer loss. If that which is outward is not broken, that which is inward cannot be released.

Among all the people in the world, some have the Lord's life within them. Among those who have the Lord's life, we find two different kinds of conditions. With the first, the life is bound, surrounded, and locked up. With the second, the Lord has opened up a way and the life can be released. The problem with us today is not how we can have life, but how we can allow this life to flow out of us. When we say that the Lord has to break us, this is not a figure of speech or a doctrine. Our very being has to be broken by the Lord. The Lord's life is well able to spread over the whole earth. However, it is locked up within us! The Lord is well able to bless the church, yet His life is imprisoned, contained, and blocked in us! If the outer man is not broken, we can never become a blessing to the church, nor can we expect the world to receive God's grace through us!

The Need For The Breaking Of The Alabaster Flask

The Bible speaks of ointment of pure nard (John 12:3). God's Word purposely uses the adjective pure. It is ointment of pure nard, something truly spiritual. Unless the alabaster flask is broken, however, the ointment of pure nard cannot be released. It is strange that many people appreciate the alabaster flask. They think that the flask is more precious

than the ointment. Many people think that their outer man is more precious than their inner man. This is the problem facing the church today. We may treasure our own wisdom and think that we are quite superior. Another person may treasure his emotions and also think that he is quite outstanding. Many people treasure themselves; they think that they are much better than others. They think their eloquence, their ability, their discernment, and their judgment are better. But we are not antique collectors; we are not admirers of alabaster flasks. We are those who are after the aroma of the ointment. If the outer part is not broken, the inner part will not be released. We will have no way to go on, and the church will have no way to go on. We no longer should be so protective of ourselves.

The Holy Spirit has never stopped working. Many people can testify that this work has never stopped in them. They face one trial after another, encounter one incident after another. The Holy Spirit has only one goal in all of His disciplining work: To break and dismantle the outer man so that the inner man can break forth. But the trouble with us is that we murmur as soon as we suffer a little hardship, and we complain as soon as we suffer a little defeat. The Lord has prepared a way for us. He is ready to use us. As soon as His hand is upon us, however, we become unhappy. Either we argue with Him, or we complain about everything to Him. From the day we were saved, the Lord has been working on us in many different ways for the purpose of breaking the self. We may or may not know it, but the Lord's goal is always to break our outer man.

The treasure is in the earthen vessel. Who needs to see your earthen vessel? The church lacks the treasure, not the earthen vessels. The world lacks the treasure, not the earthen vessels. If the earthen vessel is not broken, who will find the treasure within? The Lord works in us in so many different ways for the purpose of breaking the earthen vessel, the alabaster flask, the outer shell. The Lord wants to prepare a way to bring His blessing to the world through those who belong to Him. This is a way of blessing, but it is also a way stained with blood. Blood must be shed, and wounds are unavoidable. How crucial the breaking of this outer man is! Unless the outer man is broken, there cannot be any spiritual work. If we are consecrated to the Lord for His service, we have to be prepared to be broken by Him. We cannot excuse ourselves or preserve ourselves.

We have to allow the Lord to break our outer man completely so that He can have a free way through us.

We all have to find out God's intention for us. It is unfortunate that many people do not know what the Lord is doing in them or what the Lord intends for them. May every one of us know the Lord's intention for us. When the Lord opens our eyes, we will see that everything that has happened to us throughout our lives is meaningful. The Lord never does anything in vain. After we realize that the Lord's goal is to break our outer man, we will realize that everything that has happened to us is significant. The Lord is trying to achieve one goal: To break and dismantle our outer man.

The trouble with many is that before the Lord is able to move even a finger, they show signs of displeasure already. We must realize that all the experiences, difficulties, and trials from the Lord are for our highest good. We cannot ask for anything better; they are the best. If anyone goes to the Lord and says, "Lord, please let me choose the best," I believe the Lord will tell him, "I have given you the best. What you are facing every day is for your highest good." The Lord has arranged everything for us for the purpose of breaking our outer man. We can put our spirit to full use only as our outer man is broken and our spirit is released.

Breaking And Timing

The Lord breaks our outer man in two ways. First, He breaks it in a cumulative way, and second, He breaks it in a sudden way. The Lord gives some people a sudden breaking first, followed by more gradual breakings; the sudden work comes first and the cumulative work follows. Other people face situations and problems every day. Then one day, they suddenly receive one great blow from the Lord; the cumulative work comes first and the sudden work follows. These are different patterns of breaking that we ordinarily experience. Either the sudden breaking comes, followed by the cumulative breaking, or it is the other way around. Generally speaking, even with those who have not deviated and detoured, the Lord has to spend a few years before He can complete this breaking work.

We cannot reduce the time this breaking takes, but we can extend this

time. The Lord completes the work in some in a few years. However, with others, the work is not completed after ten or twenty years. This is a very solemn matter! Nothing is more pitiful than wasting God's time. Too often the church is deprived of blessing because of us! We can preach with our mind and incite people with our emotion, but we cannot exercise our spirit. God cannot use His Spirit to touch others through us. When we delay the work, we incur great loss.

If we have never consecrated ourselves to the Lord in a thorough way in the past, we have to do it now. We have to say, "Lord, for the sake of the church, for the going on of the gospel, for You to have a way, and for the sake of my going on in my own life, I commit myself unreservedly and unconditionally to Your hand. Lord, I gladly put myself in Your hand. I am willing to let You find a way to release Yourself through me."

The Meaning Of The Cross

We have heard about the cross for a long time. We may be very familiar with it already, but what is the cross? The meaning of the cross is the breaking of the outer man. The cross puts the outer man to death and breaks open the shell. The cross destroys everything of the outer man. It destroys our opinions, methods, wisdom, self-love, and everything. Once the outer man is broken, the inner man is released, and the spirit is able to function. The way before us is very clear indeed.

Once our outer man is broken, it becomes easy to release our spirit. One brother has a good mind; those who know him all acknowledge this. His will is strong and his emotions are reserved and deep. Yet when others meet him, they realize that they are touching his spirit, not his strong will, good mind, or reserved and deep emotions. Every time others fellowship with him, they touch a spirit, a pure spirit because this man is broken. Another sister is quick. Everyone who knows her realizes this. She is quick in thoughts, quick in words, quick to confess, quick to write, and quick to throw away what she has written. But when others meet her, they do not touch her quickness but her spirit. Her very person has been broken. The breaking of the outer man is a very fundamental issue. We cannot hold on to our weaknesses all the time. We cannot have the same flavor after the Lord has dealt with us for five or ten years. We must allow the Lord to have a way through us. This is the Lord's basic requirement

of us.

Two Reasons For Not Being Broken

Why do so many people remain unchanged after being dealt with for years? Others have a strong will, strong emotions, or a strong mind, yet the Lord can still break them. There are two main reasons that many people are not broken in spite of the passing of years.

First, these ones are living in darkness. They do not see God's hand. God is working and breaking, yet they do not know that God is doing the work. They are short of light, and they are not living in the light. They only see men, thinking that men are opposing them. Or they only see the environment, complaining that it is too harsh. They put all the blame on the environment. May the Lord grant us the revelation to see God's hand. May we kneel down and say, "This is You. This is You. I accept it." At a minimum we have to know whose hand is dealing with us. At a minimum we have to know that hand and see that it is not the world, our family, or the brothers and sisters in the church who are dealing with us. We have to see God's hand. God is the One who is dealing with us. We have to learn from Madam Guyon, who would kiss such a hand and treasure such a hand. We must have this light. We have to accept and believe everything that the Lord has done. He can never be wrong in what He does.

Second, a person is not broken because he loves himself too much. Self-love is a great obstacle to breaking. We have to ask God to remove all self-love from us. When God plucks this self-love from us, we have to worship Him, saying, "Lord! If this is Your hand, I accept it from my heart." We have to remember that all misunderstandings, complaints, and dissatisfactions arise from only one thing—secret self-love. Because we love ourselves secretly, we try to save ourselves. This is a big problem. Many times problems arise because we try to save ourselves.

Those who know the Lord go to the cross without taking the vinegar mingled with gall! Many go to the cross reluctantly. They try to taste the vinegar mingled with gall in an attempt to relieve their feelings. Those who say, "The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?", will not take a cup that is filled with vinegar mingled with gall. They only take one cup, not both cups. These ones do not have any self-love in

them. Self-love is the root of our problem. May the Lord speak within us today, and may we pray, "My God! I now see that everything comes from You. My experiences of the past five, ten, or twenty years have all come from You. All of these things were done with only one purpose in mind—that Your life would be expressed through me. I have been foolish. I did not see this. Through self-love I have done many things to save myself, and I have wasted much of Your time. Today I see Your hand, and I willingly consecrate myself to You. I commit myself to Your hand once again."

Expecting Wounds

No person expresses more charm than one who has passed through such a breaking process. A stubborn and self-loving person becomes charming after he is broken by God. Consider Jacob in the Old Testament. He wrestled with his brother from the time they were in their mother's womb. He was a naughty, cunning, and conniving person. Yet he went through many sufferings throughout his lifetime. In his youth he ran away from home and was cheated by Laban for twenty years. His beloved wife Rachel died on the way home, and his cherished son Joseph was sold. Many years later Benjamin was detained in Egypt. Jacob was dealt with by God again and again, and he met with numerous misfortunes. He was smitten by God time after time. Jacob's history is a history of God's smiting. After repeated dealings by God, he changed. During his final years, he became a truly transparent person. How dignified he was in Egypt when he stood before Pharaoh and spoke to him! At his deathbed he worshipped God leaning on his staff. How beautiful this picture is! How clear his blessing to his children and grandchildren was! In reading the last part of his history, we cannot help but bow down and worship God. Here was a matured person, one who knew God. After being dealt with for decades, Jacob's outward man was broken. In his old age we see a beautiful picture. All of us have something of Jacob in us. Perhaps more than a little! Hopefully the Lord will find a way through us. May our outer man be broken to such an extent that the inner man can be released and expressed. This is precious, and this is the way of the servants of the Lord. We can only serve when we have reached this point, and we can only lead others to the Lord and to the knowledge of God when we have reached this point.

Nothing else will work. Doctrines and theology will not work. Mere Bible knowledge will not profit us. The only thing that is useful is for God to come out of us.

When our outer man is smitten, dealt with, and humbled by all kinds of misfortune, the scars and wounds that are left behind will be the very places from which the spirit flows out from within. I am afraid that some brothers and sisters are too whole; they have never suffered any dealings and have never changed in any way. May the Lord be merciful to us and set a straight course before us. May we see that this is the only way. May we see that all of the dealings that we have received from the Lord during the past ten or twenty years are for achieving this one goal. Therefore, we should not despise the Lord's work in us. May the Lord truly show us the meaning of the breaking of the outer man. Unless the outer man is broken, everything we have is in the mind and in the realm of knowledge and is useless. May the Lord grant us a thorough dealing.

CHAPTER TWO

Before And After The Breaking

The breaking of the outer man is a basic experience which every servant of the Lord must go through. God has to break our outer man before we can render any effective service to Him.

A servant of the Lord faces two possibilities in working for the Lord. First, his outer man is never broken and his spirit is never aroused. His spirit cannot be released, and no power flows out from it. Only his mind or his emotions are active. If he is a clever person, his mind is active. If he is a sentimental person, his emotions are active. This kind of work does not bring anyone to God. Second, it is possible that his outer man is not separated clearly from his inner man. When his spirit is released, it is wrapped in his mind or his emotions. The result is mixture and impurity. This kind of work produces mixed and impure experiences in others. These two conditions frustrate a man from serving the Lord in a proper way.

"It Is The Spirit Who Gives Life"

If we want to engage ourselves in effective works, we have to have a basic acknowledgment of one thing at least once: "It is the Spirit who gives life" (John 6:63). If we do not settle this issue this year, we will have to settle it next year. If we do not settle it the first day we believe in the Lord, we will have to settle it sooner or later, even if it is ten years later. Many people have to be brought to the end of themselves and realize the vanity of their work before they see the futility of their many thoughts and feelings. No matter how many people can be gained through our thoughts and feelings, the result is vain. Sooner or later we have to confess, "It is the Spirit who gives life." Only the Spirit can give life. Even our best thoughts and feelings cannot give life. A man can have life only through the Spirit. The Lord's word is always true. What gives life is the Spirit. Many workers of the Lord have to go through many pains and failures before they see this fact. Since the Spirit alone gives life, it is only as the spirit is released that sinners are regenerated and believers are built up. Regeneration is a matter of transmission of life resulting in others receiving life, while building up is also a matter of the transmission of life resulting in believers being built up. Without the Spirit there can be no regeneration, and there can be no building up.

The interesting thing is that God has no intention to separate His Spirit from our spirit. In many places in the Bible it is impossible to say whether the spirit being spoken of refers to the human spirit or God's Spirit. Even many Greek experts cannot tell the difference. Throughout the ages Bible translators, from Luther in Germany to the translators of the King James Version, have been unable to ascertain which of the many references to the spirit in the New Testament denote the human spirit and which denote God's Spirit.

Romans 8 is perhaps the chapter with the most references to the word spirit. Who can tell which words refer to the human spirit and which refer to God's Spirit? When Bible translators come to Romans 8, they leave the readers to decide for themselves which spirit refers to the human spirit and which refers to God's Spirit. When the English versions come to the word pneuma, some use an upper-case Spirit, and others use a lower-case spirit. All versions differ in this respect, and no one person's view is authoritative. The truth is that it is impossible to differentiate between the Holy Spirit and man's spirit. When we received a new spirit,

we received God's Spirit at the same time. When our human spirit was revived from its deadened state, we received the Holy Spirit at the same time. The Holy Spirit resides in our spirit, but it is difficult to tell which is the Holy Spirit and which is our spirit. There is a distinction between the Holy Spirit and our spirit, but the two are not separate. Hence, the release of the spirit is not merely a release of man's spirit but a release of the Holy Spirit through man's spirit, because the two spirits are one. We can differentiate the two spirits as terms but not in fact. The release of the spirit is the release of the human spirit. It is also the release of the Holy Spirit. When others touch our spirit, they are touching the Holy Spirit at the same time. If we can provide others the opportunity to touch our spirit, we should thank the Lord because they are being provided with an opportunity to touch God's Spirit at the same time. In fact, our spirit brings God's Spirit to men.

When God's Spirit operates, He has to operate through the human spirit. This is similar to electricity that runs household appliances; it cannot travel like the lightning in the air. It travels through the electrical wires. Today we not only have electrical power but electrical wires. The wire bears the electricity. In physics there is such a thing as an electrical charge. To be charged is to bear a burden. If we are to carry electricity, we have to carry the charge by means of electrical wires. This same principle holds true for God's Spirit. He needs the human spirit as a medium to bear His Spirit. Through the human spirit the Holy Spirit is conveyed and carried to men.

After a man is saved, the Holy Spirit resides in his spirit. Whether or not a man can be used by the Lord depends more on his outer man than on his spirit. The problem with some people is that their outer man has never been broken. There is not a blood-stained pathway; there is no wound, no scar. The result is that God's Spirit is locked up within their spirit and cannot be released. Sometimes the outer man moves, but the inner man does not respond. The outer man is released, but the inner man is still bound.

A Few Practical Considerations

Let us consider a few practical matters. First, in the matter of preaching, we often preach earnestly, persuasively, and logically. Yet within us we

are ice cold. We try to convince others, but we cannot even convince ourselves. The outer man is working, but the inner man does not join in. The outer man and the inner man do not match; they are not in unison. The outer man is excited, but the inner man remains ice cold. We tell others how great the Lord's love is, but we do not have the slightest feeling within us. We can tell others of the pain of the cross, but when we return to our room, we have no problem laughing. It is a hopeless situation when the outer man and the inner man are not in union. The outer man may be working, but the inner man is not moving at all. This is the first condition: The mind and emotions are working, but the spirit is not. The outer man acts, but the inner man does not respond. It is as if the inner man is a spectator of the outer man's performance. The outer man remains the outer man, and the inner man remains the inner man. The two are not in harmony.

At other times, the inner man can be very desperate; it wants to cry out, but it cannot utter anything. Whatever is said just beats around the bush. The more desperate the inner man becomes, the colder the outer man is. The person may want to speak, but nothing comes out. He sees a sinner and wants to cry, but no tears come out. He has an earnestness to shout on the platform, but the outer man is nowhere to be found. This is a great suffering. This frustration is the result of the outer man not being broken. As a result, the inner man is not released. When the outer shell remains, the outer man does not take orders from the inner man. When the inner man weeps, the outer man does not weep. When the inner man grieves, the outer man does not grieve. The inner man may have much to say, but the outer man does not direct its thoughts to convey them. The inner man may have many feelings, but they cannot be expressed. The spirit cannot break the outer shell.

The above descriptions fit the condition of those whose outer man is not broken. Either their spirit does not move and the outer man acts alone, or their spirit moves but the outer man blocks its passage. Therefore, the breaking of the outer man is the first lesson confronting everyone who desires to enter the service of the Lord. The fundamental training for every servant of God is to allow his inner man to come out of his outer man. Every true servant of God does not allow his outer thoughts and emotions to act independently. When his inner man needs to be

released, the outer man affords a channel; the spirit can break out of the outer man to reach others. If we have not learned this lesson, our effectiveness in the work is very limited. May the Lord bring us to the place where our outer man is broken. May God show us the way to become broken before the Lord.

Once we are broken, all performances and acts will cease. We will no longer be excited outwardly and indifferent inwardly. When we have proper feelings and utterances inwardly, we will act accordingly outwardly. Nor will we experience the embarrassment of the inner man trying to weep while the outer man is unable to shed any tears. We will not complain of having things to say inwardly yet going around in circles and not being able to say them outwardly. Poverty of thoughts will not occur, and we will not need to use twenty words to utter what can be said in two words. Our mind will aid the spirit instead of frustrating it. Our emotions can be a very strong shell as well. Many people want to rejoice but cannot rejoice. They want to weep but cannot weep. The outer man will not respond. But if the Lord renders a heavy blow to the outer man through the discipline or enlightening of the Holy Spirit, they will be able to rejoice when they need to rejoice and grieve when they need to grieve. Their spirit will be released liberally and freely.

The breaking of the outer man leads to the free release of the spirit. The free release of the spirit is not only necessary to our work; it is profitable to our personal walk as well. If the spirit is released, we can constantly abide in God's presence. If the spirit is released, we spontaneously touch the spirit of inspiration that lies behind the Bible. We spontaneously receive revelation through the exercise of our spirit. If the spirit is released, we spontaneously will have power in our testimony when we deliver God's word with our spirit. We will also experience this in our preaching of God's word, that is, in ministering God's word to others as a minister of the word. Moreover, if our spirit is released, we will touch others' spirits with our spirit. When a person comes and speaks to us, we will be able to "measure him" with our spirit. We will know the kind of person he is, the kind of attitude he has, the kind of Christian life he lives, and the kind of needs he has. Our spirit will be able to touch his spirit. If our spirit is free and released, it will be easy for others to touch our spirit; our spirit will become very touchable. With some people, we can only

touch their thoughts, emotions, or will; we cannot touch their spirit. They are Christians, and we are Christians, but after we sit down and talk for two or three hours, we still cannot touch them. Their outer shell is very hard, and no one can touch their inward condition. When the outer man is broken, the spirit will be open and free to flow to others, and when the spirit is open and free, others can easily touch it.

Going And Coming Back

If the outer man is broken, the spirit spontaneously will remain in the Lord all the time. A brother read Brother Lawrence's book The Practice of the Presence of God the second year after he was saved. He struggled very much because he was not able to enjoy God's presence continually like Brother Lawrence. He made a pact with a brother to pray once every hour. He wanted to follow the biblical teaching of praying unceasingly. Every time the clock struck the hour, they would try to kneel down to pray. Nevertheless, they felt as if they could not maintain God's presence, and they wrestled to turn back to God all the time. It was as if they wandered away from God whenever they went about their own business or became engaged in their studies so that they had to hurriedly turn back to God. If they did not turn back, they felt that they would be gone forever. They prayed all the time. On Sundays they prayed the whole day, and on Saturdays they prayed half of the day. They did this for two or three years. But even though they felt His presence when they turned back to God, they would lose it as soon as they turned away. The problem of maintaining God's presence with human memory is a great frustration to many Christians, not just to these brothers. To them, the "presence" of God can only be maintained when their memory is fresh; when their memory fails, the "presence" is gone. Such attempts to preserve the divine presence with human memory are foolish. God's presence is in the spirit, not in the memory.

In order to deal with God's presence, we have to first deal with the matter of the breaking of the outer man. The nature of our emotion is different from the nature of God; the two can never be joined as one. The same can be said of our mind. John 4 shows us that God's nature is Spirit. Only our spirit is of the same nature as God, and only our spirit can be in harmony with God forever. If we try to retain God's presence in our mind, this presence is lost as soon as we are not in complete control of our

mind. If we try to retain God's presence in our emotion, the same is true; this presence is gone as soon as we are not in complete control of our emotion. Sometimes when we are happy, we think we have God's presence. But this happiness does not stay. When it goes away, our sense of His presence is gone. We may think that we have God's presence when we weep, but we cannot weep all the time. Sooner or later our tears will stop, and when they stop, God's presence seemingly stops as well. The function of the mind and the function of the emotion are both activities, and no activity can go on forever. If we try to maintain God's presence with activity, this presence will be gone as soon as the activity stops. Two substances will blend together only when they are of the same nature, such as water with water or air with air. Things with the same nature can enjoy each other's presence. The inner man is of the same nature as God; therefore, it can realize God's presence through His Spirit. The outer man is constantly in the realm of activity; therefore, it is a frustration to the inner man. The outer man is not a help but a hindrance. The inner man will be free from distractions only when the outer man is broken.

God has installed a spirit within us to respond to Him. The outer man, however, only responds to outward signals. A man loses God's presence and the enjoyment of it because his outer man is constantly responding to outside activity. We cannot eliminate all outward signals, but the outer man can be broken. We cannot stop all outside activity. Millions and billions of things in this world are occurring outside of us. If the outer man is not broken, we will react whenever something happens outside of us. We cannot enjoy God's presence calmly and continually because the outer man is constantly reacting. God's presence is based on the breaking of the outer man.

If God grants us mercy and breaks our outer man, we will manifest the following traits: Our old curiosity will be dead; we will no longer be curious. Formerly, we were very strong in our emotion; we were easily stirred up in the tender sentiment of love or in the raw sentiment of anger whenever something happened. We reacted as soon as something happened around us, and we were caught up in those things. As a result, we lost God's presence. But if God is merciful to us, He will break our outer man, and our inner man will no longer be touched when many

things happen to us. We will remain calm, and God's presence will abide with us.

We must see that the enjoyment of God's presence is based on the breaking of the outer man. A man can only enjoy God's uninterrupted presence when his outer man is broken. Brother Lawrence worked in a kitchen. Many people would come and demand service from him. There was noise all around him; plates were shuffled back and forth. Yet Brother Lawrence was not affected by all these things. He had God's presence when he prayed, and he also had God's presence when he was busily working. How could he maintain God's presence in the midst of his hectic work? The secret is that no outward noise could affect his inward being. Some people lose God's presence because they are inwardly affected as soon as they hear any noise around them.

Some who do not know God try to hold on to God's presence. What do they do? They look for an environment where there is "no shuffling of plates." They think that the farther away they are from people and activities, the closer they will be to God's presence. They are mistaken. They think that the problem is with the "plates," the human distractions. No, the problem is with them. God is not delivering us from the "plates"; He is delivering us from being influenced by them. Everything around us can be in turmoil, but within we can remain untouched. Everything around us can be clamorous, but within we can be perfectly still. Once the Lord breaks our outer man, our inner being will not respond to such things; we will have a deaf ear to these noises. Thank God that we can have very sensitive ears. However, the action of grace and the operation of His work will break our outer man, and nothing that comes upon our outer man will affect us any longer. When the "plates" clamor, we can hide ourselves in God's presence as much as when we are praying by ourselves alone.

Once the outer man is broken, a man does not have to come back to God because he is with God all the time. There is no need for a coming back. An unbroken man needs to come back to God whenever he goes about with his business because he has moved away. This is the reason he has to come back. A broken man never moves away; therefore, he does not need to come back. Many people move away all the time, even while they are working for the Lord. This is because their outer man has

never been broken. It is best that they not do anything at all. As soon as they do something, they move away. But those who know God in a genuine way never move away. Therefore, they never need to come back. If they spend the whole day praying to God, they enjoy His presence. If they spend the whole day busily scrubbing the floor, they still enjoy His presence. As soon as our outer man is broken, we will live before God. We will not need to come back. There will not be the feeling nor need to come back.

We usually feel God's presence only when we come to Him. Whatever we do, even when we exercise the utmost care, we feel that we have turned away from God a little. I am afraid that this is most of our experience. Although we conscientiously try to rein ourselves in, we turn away as soon as we engage in some activity. Many brothers and sisters feel that they have to drop the things they have in their hands before they can pray. They somehow feel that there is a difference between being in God and doing some form of work. For example, we may be helping a person by preaching the gospel to him or by edifying him. Halfway through our conversation, we may feel that we have to pray and come back to God. We feel that we have somehow drifted from God in talking to others and that by praying we can come back to Him once more. It seems as if we have moved and are returning to God. We have lost His presence, and now we are regaining it. We may be conducting some daily chores such as scrubbing the floor or working at some craft. After we are finished with this work, we feel that we have to come back before we can pray. We feel that there is a great distance between where we are and where we want to be. Any feeling of coming back is a sign that we have moved. The breaking of the outer man will bring us to the point where we will not have to come back any longer. We will feel as much of God's presence in talking to others as when we are kneeling down and praying with them. We will feel as much of God's presence in scrubbing the floor and working on our craft as when we are praying. These things will not take us away from God's presence any longer. As a result, we will no longer need to come back.

Let me give a more extreme example. The most raw sentiment a man can have is temper. The Bible does not say that we cannot be angry; some forms of anger are unrelated to sin. The Bible says that we should

"be angry, yet do not sin" (Eph. 4:26). This shows that a person can become angry without sinning. Yet anger is a very raw sentiment. In fact, it is close to sinning. God's Word never says that we should love yet not sin, because love is far from sin. Nor does God's Word say that we should be patient yet not sin, because patience is also far from sin. But God's Word says, "Be angry, yet do not sin." This shows that anger is very close to sin. Sometimes a brother commits a big mistake, and we have to rebuke him. But this is a very hard thing to do. It is easy to exercise kindness but very hard to exercise anger. Once we are careless, we will fall into a different state. It is not easy to be angry according to God's will. If we know the breaking of the outer man, we can enjoy God's continual presence without interruption from the outer man, whether we are rebuking a brother severely or praying in the presence of God. Putting this a different way, we will not have the feeling that we are turning back to God when we pray after rebuking a brother severely. Any feeling of turning back to God is a proof that we have left God. I admit that rebuking a brother is a difficult thing to do, but if our outer man is broken, we can rebuke a brother without the need of turning back to God because God's presence will be with us all the time.

The Separation Of The Outer Man From The Inner Man

When the outer man is broken, all outward activities are confined to the outward realm while the inner man continues to enjoy God's presence. The problem with many people is that their outer man and inner man are entangled together. Whatever affects the outer man affects the inner man. Strictly speaking, the outward things can only affect the outer man; but the outer man, in turn, affects the inner man. With those who are not yet broken, their outer man can affect their inner man. With those who are broken, their outer man cannot affect their inner man. If God is merciful to us and if our outer man is broken, it will be separated from our inner man, and outward things will only affect the outer man; they will not affect the inner man. When the outer man is separated from the inner man, all distractions are confined to the outer realm; they cannot enter the inner realm. A man can converse with others with his outer man while his inner man is still fellowshipping with God. The outer man can be conscious of the "shuffling of the plates," while the inner man continues to live before God. He can work and labor with his outer man, interact

with the myriads of things in the outer world, yet confine all the activities to just that realm. His inner man is not affected, and he can continue to live before God. He has never left; therefore, he never needs to return. Suppose a brother is building a road. If his outer man is separated from his inner man, outward things will not affect his inner being. He can work with his outer man while his inner man is turned to God continually. Some parents can laugh and play with their children according to their outer man, but when the occasion calls for them to take up spiritual work, they can exercise their inner man immediately. Their inner man has never left God. The separation of our outer man from our inner man is very much related to our work and our life. This is the only way we can continue in our work without the need to come back to God all the time.

Some people live as one person, one entity. Others live as two persons. With some people, the outer man and the inner man are one person, one entity. With others, the two are separate. What happens to those who are one person in themselves? When they attend to their affairs, their whole being is involved in the work, and they move away from God. When they pray, they have to drop what they are doing and turn their whole being back to God. They need to apply their whole being to their work, and they need to apply their whole being to pray to God. Such ones move away all the time and need to turn back all the time. Their outer man has not yet been broken. Those who are broken by the Lord will find that their outer man no longer influences their inner man. They can take care of outward things with their outer man, while at the same time continue to abide in God and in His presence. Whenever the need arises for them to demonstrate their inner man before men, they can do so with ease; they are not cut off from the presence of God. The issue, therefore, is whether we are one person or two. In other words, is our outer man separated from our inner man? This difference is very great.

If God is merciful to us and we have such an experience of separation, we will conduct business and move around in our outer man, but our inner man will be unmoved. One person moves around, while the other person is still before God. The outer man will only mind the outward things, and the outward things will stop with the outer man; they will not get to the inner man. Those who know God apply the outer man to outward affairs while their inner man remains in God. The two men do not

mix. They are like Brother Lawrence, who was busy with outward affairs, yet who had another person within him who lived before God. God's presence never went away in him. This can save us much time in our work. Many people do not have this separation of the outer man from the inner man. As a result, their whole being moves away at one time, and then they move their whole being back later. Many people face difficulties with their work because their inner man tags along with their outer man. If the inner man is separated from the outer man and remains untouched while the outer man is involved in business, many outward things will be properly handled. This kind of exercise will isolate us from the influence of the flesh through outward things; they will no longer touch our inner being.

Simply put, whether or not man's spirit can be useful to God depends on two kinds of work of the Lord. One work is the breaking of our outer man. The other work is the separating of our spirit from our soul or the dividing of our inner man from our outer man. God must accomplish these two things in us before we can put our spirit to use. The breaking of the outer man is accomplished through the discipline of the Holy Spirit, and the separation of the outer man from the inner man is through the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER THREE

Things In The Hands

Let me first explain the title of this chapter. Suppose a father wants his son to do something for him. The father gives the order, but the son says, "I have something in my hands. When I am finished with what is in my hands, I will do what you want me to do." This is the meaning of having something in one's hands. Before the father asks the son to do something, the son already has something in his hands. Every one of us has something in our hands. In our course of following the Lord, we often are hindered by things in our hands. We have to tend to the things in our hands first. As a result, God's assignment is delayed. It is hard to find a person who does not have anything in his hands. We always have things in our hands prior to God's speaking, and we always have many things in our hands before the outer man is broken. The outer man is involved in

business, things, labor, and activities. When God's Spirit operates in our spirit, it becomes impossible for our outer man to meet the demands. The things in our hands disqualify us from being useful spiritually in any real way.

The Outer Man Being Limited In Strength

Our outer man's strength is limited. Suppose a brother is not very strong and can only lift fifty catties of weight [Translator's note: a Chinese measure of weight]. If he has fifty catties on his shoulder, he cannot add ten catties. He is limited. He is not unlimited in the things he can carry. He can carry fifty catties and cannot add ten more. These fifty catties are the things in his hands. This is an analogy. The strength of our outer man is limited, just as the strength of our body is limited.

Many people realize that the strength of their body is limited. But they do not see that the strength of their outer man is also limited. As a result, they squander and waste the strength of their outer man. Suppose a person expends all his love on his parents. He will have no strength to love the brothers or to love all men. He only has so much strength, and when he has exhausted his strength, he has no more strength to spend on other things.

A man's mental strength is also limited. No one has an unlimited supply of mental energy. If a man spends more time in one thing, that is, if his mind is set fully on one thing, he will have no strength to think about other things. Romans 8 tells us that the law of the Spirit of life has freed us from the law of sin and of death. Why then is the law of the Spirit of life not working in some people? The Bible also shows us that the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in those who walk according to the spirit. In other words, the law of the Spirit of life only has an effect on those who are spiritual. The spiritual ones are those who set their mind on spiritual things. Those who set their mind on spiritual things do not have their mind set on the flesh. Only those who do not set their mind on the flesh can set their mind on spiritual things. The expression setting the mind on can also be translated as "paying attention to" or "taking care of." Suppose a mother leaves the house and entrusts her young child to a friend, saying, "Please take care of her for me." What does it mean to take care of the child? It means to pay attention to her all the time. A man

can only pay attention to one thing; he cannot pay attention to two things at the same time. If a person commits a child to our care, we cannot take care of it on the one hand and take care of the sheep and cows on the mountain on the other hand. If we take care of the child, we cannot take care of anything else. Only those who do not take care of the things of the flesh are able to take care of the things of the spirit, and only those who take care of the things of the spirit receive the benefit of the law of the Spirit. Our mental strength is limited. If we waste our mental strength on the things of the flesh, we will not have enough mental energy to take care of the things of the spirit. If we set our mind on the things of the flesh, we will have no further strength to set our mind on the things of the spirit.

We must be very clear about this one thing: Our outer man is limited in strength, in the same way that our two arms are limited in their strength. Therefore, if there are already things in our hands, we cannot take up God's things. How much we have in our hands is inversely proportional to the power we have in our service to God. The things we have in our hands are a great hindrance, a very great frustration.

Suppose a man has "things in his hands" with respect to his emotion. He has all kinds of distracting desires and expectations. He wants and craves many things. He has so many things in his hands. When God has need of him, he has no emotions to spare because all of his emotions are used up. If he has used up all of his emotions within the last two days, he will be unable to feel or say anything for another two days. Our emotions are limited; we cannot draw from them endlessly.

Some people have a strong will; they are very determined. We may think that they have unlimited strength in their will. But even the strongest person finds himself with a wavering will when it comes to making a decision before the Lord. He will wonder if one choice is as good as another. He may appear to be a strong person, but when a situation calls for the genuine exercise of the will in the course of God's business, he cannot do it. Many people like to express their opinions. They have an opinion for everything. One minute they have one opinion; the next minute they have another opinion. They are never short of opinions. But when it comes to making a judgment on God's will, they are very hesitant. They are lost and cannot decide because their outer man is full

of "things in the hands." There are too many things before their eyes and in their hands. Their entire person is consumed by these things, and all the strength of their outer man is used up and gone.

We must see that the strength of our outer man is limited. As soon as we have things in our hands, our outer man is bound.

The Spirit Using An Outer Man That Is Broken

As soon as our outer man is bound, our spirit becomes bound as well. The spirit cannot bypass the outer man to operate in others. God never bypasses man's spirit when His Spirit works in man. Nor does God allow our spirit to bypass our outer man when it operates in others. This is a very important principle, and we must be clear about it. The Holy Spirit never works on man apart from man, and our spirit can never work on man apart from our outer man. Our spirit must pass through our outer man before it can operate in others. Whenever our outer man is occupied by "things in the hands" and has exhausted its strength, we cannot participate in God's work. If our spirit does not have a way to go on, the Holy Spirit does not have a way to go on either. The outer man can block the way of the inner man. The outer man can frustrate the inner man and prevent it from coming out. This is the reason that we repeatedly emphasize the breaking of the outer man.

Once the outer man has things in its hands, the inner man has no way to break out, and God's work is frustrated. Things in the hands refer to things which are present before God's work comes into view. In other words, things in the hands are things that are unrelated to God. These things are perpetuated without God's command, power, or ordination. They are not under God's hand; rather, they are independent entities.

God has to break the outer man before He can use the inner man. He has to break our love before He can use our love to love the brothers. If the outer man is not broken, we are still doing our own things, taking our own way, and loving our own preferences. God must first break our outer man before He can use our "broken" love to love the brothers and before our love can be expanded. Once the outer man is broken, the inner man is released. The inner man must love, but it must love through the outer man. If the outer man has things in its hands, the inner man will have nothing to work through.

Our will is strong. It is not only strong; it is also stubborn. When our inner man needs the will, it cannot find it, because our will has been moving too independently and has too many things in its hands. God has to give us a heavy blow; He has to smash our will and humble us so much that we are forced to say, with our face in the dust, "Lord, I dare not think. I dare not ask. I dare not decide. I need You in everything." We must be so smitten that our will can no longer act independently. Only then can the inner man take hold of the will and use it.

If the outer man is not available, the inner man will be unemployed. Can we preach God's word if we do not have a physical body? How can we preach without a mouth? It is true that one needs the spirit to preach. But preaching also requires one's mouth. What can a person do if he only has a spirit but not a mouth? At Pentecost there was the work of the Holy Spirit. But at Pentecost there was also the dispensing of the gift of speaking. Without utterance one does not have the word to release and explain God's word. If man does not speak, God has no speaking. Man's word certainly is not God's word, but God's word is conveyed through man's word. If man does not speak, there will be no word of God. There must be man's word before there can be God's word.

Suppose a brother is preparing to speak God's word. He may have the word and a burden in his spirit, and the burden may be very heavy. But if he does not have the suitable thoughts, his burden can never be released. In the end even his burden will disappear. We do not despise the burden, but even if our entire spirit is full of burden, this burden is useless and bound up if our mind is not fruitful. We cannot save men with our burden alone. The burden in our spirit must be released through our mind. After we have a burden within us, we still need a mouth. We still need a voice and the help of the body. The trouble today is that while our inner man is available to receive a burden from God, the mind in our outer man is too busy and confused. From morning to night it is giving its own suggestions and expressing its own opinions. Under such circumstances, the spirit does not have an outlet.

Today God's Spirit must be released through man. Man's love must be available before others can see God's love. Man's thoughts must be available before others can see God's thoughts. Man's decision must be found before others can touch God's will. But the trouble with man is that

his outer man is too busy with his own things. He has his own views, his own thoughts. He is too busy with himself. As a result, the inner man has no way to be released. This is the reason God has to break the outer man. This does not mean that the will has to be annihilated. However, it does mean that the "things in the hands," that is, in the will, have to be stripped so that the will no longer acts independently. It does not mean that our thoughts have to be annihilated. It means that we will no longer think according to ourselves, that we will no longer come up with all kinds of ideas or be led astray by our own wandering mind. It does not mean that our emotion is annihilated. It means that our emotion will be under the control and direction of the inner man. In this way the inner man will find a mind, an emotion, and a will that are available for use.

The spirit needs a mind, an emotion, and a will to express itself. It needs a living outer man, not a dead one, to express itself. It needs a smitten, wounded, and broken outer man, not a sealed and untouched outer man. Today the biggest obstacle is with us. God's Spirit cannot break through us. His Spirit lives in our spirit, yet He cannot come out of our spirit. Our outer man is too full; it is full of things in its hands. We have to ask God for mercy so that the outer man will be broken and the inner man will have a way to come out.

God does not destroy our outer man. But neither will He allow it to remain intact and unbroken. He wants to pass through our outer man. He wants our spirit to love, think, and make decisions through the outer man. God's work can only be accomplished through a broken outer man. If we want to serve God, we have to pass through this basic dealing. If our outer man is not broken, the Lord will not be able to have a way through us. He has to break through our outer man before He can reach others.

Before the outer man is broken, the inner man and the outer man stand in opposition to one another. The inner man is a complete person, and the outer man is also a complete person. The outer man is complete and independent; it is free and full of things in the hands. Meanwhile, the inner man is imprisoned. After the outer man is genuinely broken, it no longer acts independently. It is not destroyed, but it no longer stands in opposition to the inner man; it is subject to the inner man. In this way there will be only one person left in us. The outer man will be broken into pieces and ready for the inner man's use.

Those whose outer man has been broken are "unified" men. Their outer man is under the control of the inner man. An unsaved person is also a "unified" man, but the roles of his two men are reversed: His inner man is controlled by his outer man. An unsaved person has a spirit, but his outer man is so strong that his inner man is completely subdued. At the most the inner man can voice some protest in the conscience. The inner man of an unsaved person is completely defeated and dominated by the outer man. After a man is saved, he should turn everything around. The outer man should be completely crushed and be fully under the control of the inner man. Just as an unsaved person finds his outer man dominating his inner man, we should turn things around and allow the inner man to take control of the outer man. In riding a bicycle a person can be in one of two conditions: Either the wheels work on the road or the road works on the wheels. On flat terrain, the legs peddle the wheels and the wheels work on the road. On a downward slope, the legs do not have to work. The wheels roll by themselves, and in this case, the road, that is, the slope, works on the wheels. When our inner man is strong and the outer man is broken, the wheels work on the road; that is, we decide when and how fast we want to move. But if the outer man is stubborn and unbroken, it is like riding a bicycle downhill; the slope works on the wheels. The wheels will roll by themselves, and we can do nothing about it. This is what happens when the outer man controls the inner man.

Whether or not a man is useful before the Lord depends on whether his spirit can be released through his outer man. When our inner man is bound, the outer man does everything by itself. The outer man acts independently; the wheels turn by themselves. By the Lord's grace, when He levels the slopes and breaks the outer man, the outer man no longer offers suggestions and makes decisions. When this happens, the inner man will be released freely without any hindrance from the outer man. If the Lord grants us the grace and breaks our outer man, we will become a person adept at exercising our spirit, and we will be able to release it whenever we want to.

The Person, Not The Doctrines

We do not become qualified for God's work simply by learning some doctrines. The basic problem is our very person. Our person is the means by which we carry on our work. It is a matter of whether or not our

person has passed through God's dealings. If the right doctrines are committed to a wrong person, what can be ministered to the church? The basic lesson for us is to make ourselves usable vessels. In order to make ourselves usable vessels, our outer man must be broken.

God has been working in us all these years. Although we are not very clear about this work ourselves, nevertheless, God has been carrying on the breaking day by day. We have gone through sufferings and difficulties for years. Time after time God's hand has halted us. We want to go one way, but God does not let us do it. We want to go another way, but God stops us again. If we do not see God's operation through the working together of all these environments, we have to pray, "God! Open my eyes so that I may see Your hand." The eyes of the donkey are often sharper than the eyes of a self-proclaimed prophet. The donkey has seen Jehovah's messenger already, but the self-proclaimed prophet has not seen it yet. The donkey realizes God's halting hand, but the self-proclaimed prophet is still ignorant of it. We have to realize that breaking is God's way with us. For years God has been trying to break our outer man. He has been trying to crush us so that we will not remain intact. Unfortunately, many people think that what they lack is doctrines. They wish they can hear more doctrines, pick up more ideas for preaching, and understand more expositions of the Bible. But this is absolutely the wrong way. God's hand is doing only one thing in us—breaking us. We cannot have our way; we have to take God's way. We cannot have our thoughts; we have to take God's thoughts. We cannot have our decisions; we have to take God's decisions. God has to break us down completely. The trouble with us is that while God stops us time after time, we blame this and that for the blockage. We are like the prophet who did not see God's hand; instead, we blame our "donkey" for halting.

Everything that comes our way is meaningful and under God's sovereign arrangement. Nothing accidental happens to a Christian. Nothing is outside God's ordering. We have to humble ourselves under God's sovereign arrangements. May the Lord open our eyes to see that God is arranging everything around us; He has a purpose in us. Through everything He is crushing us. When God grants us the grace one day, we will gladly accept all the arrangements He places in our environment. Our spirit will be released, and we will be able to use our spirit.

A Law, Not A Matter Of Prayer

In dealing with us and in breaking us for the release and exercise of the spirit, God works according to His law, not according to our prayer. What does this mean? This means that the release of the inner man through a broken outer man is a law. It is not something that we secure by means of prayer.

A law cannot be altered by prayer. If we put our hand into the fire while we pray, our hand will still be burned. (I am not speaking about miracles here. I am speaking about a natural law.) Our prayer cannot change the law. We have to learn to obey God's law. Do not think that prayer alone will work. If we do not want our hand to be burned, we should not put it in the fire. We should not pray and put our hand in the fire at the same time. God deals with us according to law. The inner man can only be released through the outer man. This is a law. If the outer man is not broken and pulverized, the inner man will not be released. This is the Lord's way. He has to break us before He can have an outlet through us. We should never challenge this law while praying for this or that blessing. Such prayers do not work. Our prayer cannot change God's law.

The way to true spiritual work is for God to be released through us. This is the only way God will take. If a man is not broken, the gospel will not go out through him, and God cannot use him. He will have no way to go on. We have to truly prostrate ourselves. Submission to God's law is better than many prayers. A minute of revelation of God's way is better than an incessant, ignorant pleading for God's blessings and His help in our works. It is better to stop such prayer and say to the Lord, "I humble myself before You." Our prayer for blessing often is nothing but a hindrance to God. We often long for blessing but do not even find mercy. We have to ask for light. We have to learn to humble ourselves under His hand and obey this law. With obedience there is blessing.

CHAPTER FOUR

How To Know Men

It is crucial for a worker of the Lord to be able to know men. When a person comes to us, we have to know his spiritual condition. We have to know what kind of person he was and what he has now become. We have to know what he is saying with his mouth and what he is really saying in his heart, and what is the difference between the two. We have to know what he is trying to hide from us. We have to know his outstanding characteristics, whether he is stubborn or humble, and whether his humility is real or artificial. The effectiveness of our work very much depends on our ability to discern the spiritual condition of others. If the Spirit of God shows our spirit the condition of those who come to us, we will be able to give them a suitable word.

Whenever men came to the Lord in the Gospels, He spoke a suitable word to them. This is amazing! The Lord did not speak to the Samaritan woman about the truth of regeneration. Neither did He speak to Nicodemus about the living water. The word on regeneration was for Nicodemus, and the word on the living water was for the Samaritan woman. How fitting! To those who had never followed Him, He issued a calling. To those who wanted to follow Him, He spoke of bearing the cross. To those who volunteered, He spoke of counting the cost. To those who were hesitant to follow, He spoke of letting the dead bury the dead. The Lord has a suitable word for everyone, because He knows everyone. Whether a person comes to the Lord with a seeking heart or a prying attitude, our Lord knows him. This is the reason His word is forever effective and suitable. Our Lord is far ahead of us in dealing with men. We are following Him only from a distance. Although we are following at a distance, we still have to follow; the direction has to be the same. May the Lord be merciful to us so that we may learn to know men as He does.

If we place a soul in the hand of a brother who has no discernment of men, he will not know how to deal with him. He will only speak according to his subjectivity. If he has a certain feeling on a certain day, he will speak of this feeling to whomever he meets. If he has a favorite subject, he will speak to everyone about that subject. How can such a person do an effective work? No doctor can prescribe only one kind of medicine to all of his patients. Unfortunately, some servants of God have only one prescription. They do not understand others' illnesses, yet they try to heal

them. They do not know the problem, they do not know the complexity of men, and they have never learned to know the spiritual condition of others. Nevertheless, they act as if they have a ready treatment for everyone. This is indeed foolish. We cannot expect to heal every spiritual sickness with just one spiritual prescription. This is absolutely impossible.

We should not think that those who are slow in feeling will have a difficult time discerning men, but that those who are sharp in mind will have an easy time discerning men. Neither slowness in feeling nor sharpness of mind have anything to do with discerning men. We cannot discern men with our mind or our feelings. No matter how sharp our mind is, we cannot bring the hidden things in man to light, nor can we touch the depth of man's condition.

When a worker contacts a man, the first and most basic thing for him to do is to learn what this person's real need is before God. Sometimes even the person's own answer is unreliable. When he says that he has a headache, does he really mean that only his head hurts? Perhaps the headache is merely a symptom; his sickness may not be in the head. Or he may say that he feels feverish, but this does not necessarily mean that he has a temperature. He can say many things, but the things he says may not be that reliable. Very few patients really know what is wrong with them. They do not know the kind of sickness they have. They need us to diagnose them and tell them of their need. If we want them to tell us what is wrong with them, they may not be able to tell us the right thing. Only those who have studied medicine, that is, those who are trained in discerning spiritual problems, can tell them what they need.

When we are making a diagnosis, we must know what we are speaking of. We cannot impose a diagnosis upon others. A subjective person will insist that others are sick with what he imagines the illness is; he will impose an illness upon others. When a person is sick or in difficulty, he cannot identify his problem. We have to point it out to him. Yet we should not insist on our diagnosis in a subjective way.

Whether or not we can render help to the brothers and sisters depends on whether we can identify their problems and give them the right prescription. If our diagnosis is correct, we will help them. Sometimes we may find out that their problem is beyond our ability, but at least a course of action is clear. Some spiritual conditions are within our ability to help, while others are beyond our

ability to help. We should not be so foolish as to assume that we can do everything and can help everyone. Some people are within our ability to help, and we should give our whole being to help them. Some people are beyond our ability to help, and we should tell the Lord: "This is beyond my power. I cannot deal with this sickness. I have never been trained in this matter, and I cannot deal with this problem. Lord, be merciful to him!" Perhaps the specific function of some members of the Body will come to our mind, and we may realize that this is something that that brother or sister can do. We then can refer the matter to him or her. We know our own limitations, and we know that this is all we can do. We should not think that we can take every kind of spiritual work upon ourselves; we cannot monopolize everything. We have to see our limitations. At the same time, we have to know the supply in the other members. We should be able to look to them and say, "This is something beyond my ability. This is your business." This is the principle of co-working together, the principle of the Body. We can never move independently.

Every worker of the Lord and servant of God has to learn to know men. Those who do not know others' spiritual conditions are not qualified to work. It is unfortunate that the spiritual well-being of many people is ruined in the hands of inexperienced brothers. These brothers cannot render others any help. They can only impose their subjective views on them; they cannot meet the objective needs. This is our most serious problem. Others are not sick in a certain way just because we think that is their sickness. Whatever their spiritual condition may be, they are what they are. Our responsibility is to learn their spiritual condition. If we are not properly calibrated, we will not be able to render help to other children of God.

The Tool To Know People

When a doctor diagnoses a patient, he needs the help of many instruments. We, however, do not have any instruments. We do not have any thermometers or X-ray machines. We do not have any physical instruments to measure the spiritual condition of others. How can we decide whether or not a brother is sick? How can we diagnose him? This is where God's work comes in. God must turn our whole being into the very standard of measurement. God has to work on us to the extent that we can measure others to determine whether they are sick and to determine the nature of their sickness. This is how the Lord uses us. This work is much more difficult than the work of a doctor. We have to have a

deep realization of the grave responsibility that faces us.

Suppose a doctor does not have a thermometer. The doctor then would have to feel the patient with his hand to determine whether or not he has a fever. His hand would have to function as a thermometer. If this were the case, his hand would need to be very sensitive indeed. It would not only need to be sensitive but accurate as well. This is exactly what is going on in spiritual work. We are the thermometers; we are the medical instruments. Therefore, we have to go through strict trainings and dealings. What is untouched in us will remain untouched in others. We can never expect to help others in the areas that we ourselves have not first learned the lessons. The first matter we have to settle is whether or not we have learned the lesson before the Lord. The more completely and thoroughly we learn our lessons, the more useful we will be to God's work. The less we learn, that is, the less price we pay and the more we hold back ourselves, our pride, our narrowness, our opinions, and our joy, the less useful we will be. If we spare and save these things in ourselves, we will be unable to deal with them in others. A proud person cannot deal with a proud person. A narrow person cannot deal with a narrow person. A spurious person cannot deal with a spurious person. A loose person cannot deal with a loose person. If we are a certain kind of person and are afraid of condemning that kind of illness in others, we will be unable to know whether or not others have a similar illness, much less help them. It is possible that a medical doctor can heal others but cannot heal himself. In spiritual matters, however, the same principle does not apply. First the worker is the patient; he must be healed of the sickness before he can heal others who have the same sickness. He cannot make others see what he has never seen himself. He cannot make others experience what he has never experienced himself. He cannot make others learn the lessons that he has never learned himself.

Before the Lord we have to see that we are the very instruments which God uses to discern men. Therefore, our very person must be very reliable. Our feelings and judgment must be very reliable. In order for our feelings to be reliable, we have to pray, "Lord! Do not let me go." In order for our feelings to be reliable, we have to allow God to perform works that we have never dreamed of. We have to allow God to work on us to such an extent that we become useful to Him. If a thermometer cannot

accurately gauge temperature, a doctor cannot use it. A thermometer has to be reliable and accurate. When we try to identify others' spiritual problems, we are facing an issue far more serious than identifying physical illnesses. Yet we have our own thoughts, feelings, opinions, and ways. One minute we try to do one thing and the next minute we try to do something else. Because we are unreliable and unusable, we have to go through God's dealing before we can become useful.

Do we feel the gravity of our responsibility? God's Spirit does not work directly on man. He only works through some men. Although the discipline of the Holy Spirit does bring a person what he needs, nevertheless, God works through the minister's speaking, that is, through the ministry of the word. Without the ministry of the word, the spiritual problems of the brothers and sisters will remain. This responsibility is upon us. This is a very sober matter. Whether or not we, the person, can be used by God directly affects the supply that comes to the church.

Suppose a certain illness always results in a temperature of 103 degrees Fahrenheit. We cannot feel the patient with our hand and say, "This roughly feels like 103 degrees." We have to be very accurate and certain that it is 103 degrees before we can say that he has an illness that is associated with this temperature. God is using us, the person, to diagnose others' sicknesses. It is too risky for us to diagnose others if our feelings, thoughts, opinions, or spiritual understandings are wrong, or if we have not learned enough from the Lord. But if we are accurate and reliable persons, ones whom God can trust, His Spirit will flow out of us.

The beginning of all spiritual work is based on our repeated calibration before the Lord. A thermometer must be made according to certain specifications. It must be carefully checked according to the standard before it will give reliable and accurate readings. We are like the thermometer. If we are not accurate, we will only bring in confusion. In order for us to be accurate, we have to be calibrated through fine dealings. We are the doctors, and we are the instruments as well. Therefore, we have to learn our lessons properly.

The Way To Know Men—From The Side Of The Patient

In order to know the condition of a patient, we have to consider this matter from two sides: From the side of the patient and from our side.

From the side of the patient, how can we determine his sickness? If we want to know a person's sickness, we have to find the most conspicuous and unusual point about him. The unusual point is the most obvious point. No matter how hard he tries to hide it, he cannot keep it out of sight. A proud person will be found in his pride. Even when he is acting humbly, his humility still exposes his pride. He cannot hide it. A sad person conveys his sadness even when he smiles. The kind of person a man is dictates the kind of expression he displays and the kind of impression he gives to others. This is a fact.

The Bible describes man's spiritual condition in many ways. Some have a spirit of wrath; others have a spirit of stubbornness or a contrite spirit. In fact, we can use all kinds of words to describe man's spiritual condition. We can say that a man has a frivolous spirit or a downtrodden spirit, etc. What is the source of all of these spiritual conditions? For example, when we say that the spirit is stubborn, where does this stubbornness come from? When we say that the spirit is proud, where does this pride come from? When we say that the spirit is wild, where does this wildness come from? A normal spirit has no characteristic of its own. It has no characteristic other than to manifest God's Spirit. We speak of a stubborn spirit, a proud spirit, a haughty spirit, an unforgiving spirit, a jealous spirit, etc., because the outer man has not been separated from the inner man. The condition of the outer man is the condition of the inner man. When we say that a spirit is stubborn, we mean that the inner man of that person has assumed the characteristics of the stubborn outer man. When we say that a spirit is proud, we mean that the inner man of that person has been covered with the proud outer man. When we say that a spirit is jealous, we mean that the inner man of that person has been shrouded with the jealousy of the outer man. This occurs when the outer man and the inner man are not separated. The spirit itself has no characteristic of its own. The characteristics of the outer man have become the characteristics of the spirit. When the outer man is not broken, the spirit takes on the characteristics of the outer man.

The spirit is of God and does not have any characteristic of its own. But when our outer man is aberrant in nature, the spirit is affected. The spirit can be proud or stubborn because the condition of the outer man is mixed up with the spirit when the outer man is not broken. When the spirit

is released, the condition of the outer man tags on to the spirit and is released together with the spirit. A proud person tags his pride on to his spirit and releases it together with his spirit. A stubborn person tags his stubbornness on to his spirit and releases it together with his spirit. A jealous person tags his jealousy on to his spirit and releases it together with his spirit. This is why, according to our experience, we have proud spirits, stubborn spirits, and jealous spirits. These are, strictly speaking, not characteristics of the spirit itself but characteristics of the outer man. Therefore, in order to have a clean spirit, a man does not have to deal with his spirit; he only needs to deal with his outer man. The trouble is not with the spirit but with the outer man. The characteristics a man displays when his spirit is released tell us the areas in which he is unbroken. The kind of spirit we touch in a person identifies the characteristics of his outer man. It also tells us the areas in which he has remained unbroken. He has passed these things on to his spirit, tagging them and pegging them to his spirit. As a result, his spirit is bound and shrouded with the many conditions of his outer man.

If we know how to touch others' spirit, we will know a brother's need because the secret to knowing man is to touch his spirit. We have to touch the very thing that is attached to a person's spirit. I do not mean that the spirit itself has anything that we have to touch. I mean that the spirit always carries something with it. Knowing the condition of a man's spirit means knowing the condition of his outer man. We have to repeat: This is the basic principle in knowing a person. The condition of a man's spirit is the condition of his outer man. Whatever the spirit manifests is a reflection of the state of the outer man. The characteristics of the spirit are the characteristics of the outer man. A brother may be very strong and conspicuous in a certain point, which strikes our attention as soon as we come into contact with him. It is the first thing we touch and sense, and we immediately know that it is from his unbroken outer man. Once we touch his spirit, we know his condition, and we know the things he is trying to show as well as the things he is trying to hide. We know a person by knowing his spirit.

The Way To Know Men—From The Side Of Ourselves

What must we do before we can know the condition of man's spirit? We have to pay special attention to this point. All of the discipline we receive

from the Holy Spirit is a lesson from God. Whenever the Holy Spirit disciplines us, we become more broken. As we receive more discipline, we experience more breaking. In whatever matter we receive the Spirit's discipline, we are broken in that same matter. This discipline and breaking is not once for all. Many areas in our lives require repeated discipline and breaking before we can become useful to the Lord. When we find that we can touch a brother with our spirit, it does not mean that we can touch every brother with our spirit, nor does it mean that we can touch every spiritual aspect of a brother with our spirit. It only means that as we have been disciplined by the Holy Spirit and broken in a certain aspect, we are able to touch a brother in that same aspect. If we have not been broken by the Lord in a certain matter and our spirit is insensitive or unprofitable in that matter, we cannot minister to the brother's need. In other words, the discipline we receive from the Holy Spirit is proportional to our spiritual sense. The more breaking we receive, the more our spirit will be released. In whatever matter we experience the breaking, our spirit will be released in that matter. This is a spiritual fact; it can never be artificially engineered. If we have it, we have it. If we do not have it, we do not have it. This is the reason we must accept the discipline and breaking of the Holy Spirit. Those who have much experience will be able to render much service. Only those who have gone through much breaking will acquire much feeling. Only those who suffer much loss will have much to give others. If we try to save ourselves in a certain matter, we will lose our spiritual usefulness in that matter. If we try to protect or excuse ourselves in a certain matter, we will lose our spiritual sense and supply in that matter. This is a very basic principle.

Only those who have learned their lessons can participate in the service. A man can learn the lessons of ten years in one year, or he can drag out the lessons of one year for twenty or thirty years. If a man delays his learning, he delays his service. If God has given us a heart to serve Him, we must be clear about our way. The way of our service is the way of breaking; it is a way acquired through the discipline of the Holy Spirit. It is impossible for those who have never experienced the discipline of the Holy Spirit and who have never been broken to participate in the service. The amount of discipline by the Spirit and the amount of our breaking determine the amount of service. No one can change this. If a person has this experience, he has it. If he does not have it, he does not have it.

Human affection and wisdom have no place here. The degree of God's work on us determines the capacity of our service. The more we are dealt with, the more we will know people. The more we experience the discipline of the Holy Spirit, the more we will be able to touch others with our spirit.

It hurts me very much to see many brothers and sisters so lacking in discernment in many spiritual things. Some are of the Lord, yet they do not know it. Others are of the natural man, yet they are ignorant of this as well. They do not know when a person is exercising his mental strength or working by his own emotion. They do not have the discernment because they are too poor in their learning. God has given us His Spirit once for all, but learning lessons in our spirit is a lifetime endeavor. The more we learn, the more we see. Once the Lord gives us a severe blow in a certain matter, we immediately will be alerted when the same seed sprouts in other brothers. It does not have to develop into a big plant; a little sprout is all that is needed for us to detect it. The extent of the Lord's work on us is the extent to which we acquire such discernment. Spiritual senses are acquired one by one, time after time. A man can only have feelings as often as he has been dealt with. Suppose a person condemns pride in his mind. He may even be able to preach on the subject of pride. But in his spirit he does not feel the evil of pride. When others are proud, he does not feel sickened. On the contrary, he seems to be full of sympathy for them. When God's Spirit operates on him, he will see what pride is. He will experience God's dealing, and the very matter of pride itself will be burned away from him. When he opens his mouth to condemn pride again, the teaching may be the same, but a basic difference will be evident. As soon as a proud spirit comes out of a brother, he will feel that something is wrong. In fact, he will feel sickened. What he has learned and seen from God will give him a sick feeling. No other word describes this feeling better than the word sick. From that point onward he will be able to serve this brother because he knows his illness; he has passed through the same illness and has received healing from it. Although he cannot say that he is completely healed, he can say that he has been healed a little. This is how we acquire our spiritual knowledge.

God's gift of the Holy Spirit is once for all. But acquiring spiritual senses

is a continual process. The more we learn, the more feelings we acquire. The less we learn, the less feelings we have. What use is there in trying to save ourselves or preserve ourselves? Those who will save their own life will lose it. If we try to save ourselves from pain in a certain matter, we will lose the chance of gaining what the Lord wants us to gain in that same matter. We have to ask the Lord not to release us from His hand. May He work on us time after time. The saddest thing is to see the Lord working on us once, twice, with no result at all. Time after time, we are ignorant of the work of the Lord's hand. We do not pay attention to what He is doing. We even oppose His work. A man is short of spiritual understanding and discernment because he is short in spiritual learning. May we realize before the Lord that the more dealings we receive, the more knowledge we will acquire concerning men and many things, and the more we will have to offer others. In order to expand the sphere of our service, we must expand the sphere of our dealings. It is impossible to have an expanded sphere of service without an expanded sphere of dealing.

Some Practical Points

After we are dealt with by the Lord and have learned our basic lessons, our spirit will be released, and we will be able to use our spirit to touch other brothers, and we will know their condition. Here we should discuss some practical steps in learning to know men.

In order to touch others' spirit, we have to let them speak. Of course, some people can touch others' spirit without waiting for them to open their mouths. But such persons are rare. Generally speaking, we have to wait for others to open their mouth. God's Word says that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. No matter what intention or tactic a man may have, what he says comes out of the abundance of his heart. If he is spurious, a spurious spirit will come out. If he is jealous, a jealous spirit will come out. We can touch a person's spirit by listening to what he says. When a man is speaking, we have to pay attention not only to the things he is saying but to the condition of his spirit. We do not know men merely by their words but by their spirits.

When the Lord Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem and two disciples saw the Samaritans rejecting Him, they said, "Lord, do You want us to

command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" Once they opened their mouths, their spirits came out. The Lord said, "You do not know of what kind of spirit you are" (Luke 9:54-55). Here the Lord showed that one's spirit can be discerned by listening to his words. As soon as words come out, the spirit is exposed. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. Whatever the condition of the heart is, the mouth will reflect it.

In listening to others, we should pay attention not only to their story but also to their spirit. Suppose two brothers are arguing, and both say that the other is wrong. When the matter is presented to us, how should we deal with it? When the argument broke out, only the two brothers were present. We do not know what happened. But as soon as they open their mouths, we can find out something; we can know their spirits. Among Christians, wrong is not judged by mistakes in facts but by deviations in spirits. When a brother opens his mouth, we may not be able to tell if he is wrong according to facts, but we immediately can tell whether he is wrong in spirit. He may accuse others of slandering him, but his own spirit is wrong. The whole issue depends on the spirit. A person with a wrong spirit is wrong not only in the things he has done but also in his very own person. Right and wrong before God are determined by the spirit, not merely by facts. Therefore, in listening to others, we have to touch their spirit. In the church many problems are related to the spirit, not to facts. If we judge everything according to the facts, we will bring the church into another realm. We are in the realm of the spirit, not in the realm of facts. We should never be dragged away by the facts.

If our spirit is open, we will be sensitive to all kinds of spiritual conditions. Sometimes we will sense when the other party has a closed and bound spirit. At such times we have to make discernments with our spirit and learn to know him. May we be able to echo Paul's word: "We, from now on, know no one according to the flesh" (2 Cor. 5:16). We should not know men by the flesh. We should know men by the spirit. Once we learn this basic lesson, we have a way to go on in God's work.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Church And The Work Of God

If we truly know the meaning of God's work, we will have to acknowledge that the outer man is indeed a great hindrance. We can say that God is restricted by man today. God's children must understand the function of the church and its relationship with God's power and His work.

God's Manifestation Or God's Limitation

There was a time when God confined Himself within the body of a man—Jesus of Nazareth. With that flesh there was the possibility of either limiting God or manifesting God's riches. Before incarnation God's riches were not limited. But after incarnation God's work and power were limited to this flesh. God would not do anything apart from that flesh. God was willing to be limited by that flesh. Of course, the Bible shows us that God was not limited in any way by that flesh. It could have limited God, but it did not; rather, it manifested God's riches in a full way. God's riches became the riches of that flesh.

God put Himself into flesh at the time of incarnation. Today God has put Himself into the church. His power and work are found in the church. At the time of the four Gospels, God did not do anything apart from that flesh. All of His works were committed to the Son. In the same way God has entrusted all of His works to the church. He does not do anything apart from the church. God does not work independently; He works exclusively through the church. From Pentecost until today, God's work has always been carried out through the church. Just as He committed Himself wholly, unequivocally, and unreservedly to one person—Christ, He has given Himself wholly, unequivocally, and unreservedly to the church. How great the church's responsibility before God is! The church can limit God's work; it can limit God's release.

Jesus of Nazareth was God. God was manifested in Him. He did not limit God because everything within and without Him was taken up by God. His emotions were God's emotions. His thoughts were God's thoughts. While He was on earth He did not come to do His own will but the will of the One who sent Him (John 6:38). The Son did nothing from Himself; He only did what He saw the Father doing (5:19). He did not say anything from Himself. What He heard from the Father, these things He spoke to the world (8:26). In Him we see a man in whom God entrusted Himself. God could say that this was the Word becoming flesh, God becoming

man in a full way. When God wanted to dispense His life to men, this One could readily respond, "If [the grain of wheat] dies, it bears much fruit" (12:24). He was able to release His life. He did not become a hindrance or a frustration. Today God has chosen the church to be His vessel. He has put Himself, His power, and His work into the church. His desire is to release Himself through the church. The church is the oracle of God, the vessel through which God manifests His power and accomplishes His work. If the church affords God a way today, God's power and work will be expressed. If the church fails, God will be limited.

The fundamental teaching of the Gospels is that God was in a man, while the fundamental teaching of the Epistles is that God is in the church. The Gospels tell us that God was only in one man. He was only in Jesus Christ. The Epistles show us that God is only in the church. He is not in any organization or congregation. He is only found in the church. May our eyes be opened to see this glorious fact.

Once our eyes are opened to this glorious fact, we will spontaneously lift our gaze heavenward and say, "My God, how I have restricted You!" When the Almighty God dwelt in Christ, He was still the Almighty One; He was not limited or diminished in any way. God's hope and goal today is that in the church He would continue to be the Almighty One, the infinite One. God wants to freely express Himself in the church just as He was expressed in Christ. If the church is restricted, God is restricted. If the church is powerless, God is powerless. This is a very serious matter. We can only speak such a word humbly and respectfully. Simply put, any obstacle in us becomes an obstacle to God. Any limitation in us becomes a limitation to God. If God is not released through the church, He does not have a way to go on. God's way today is through the church.

Why is the discipline of the Holy Spirit so important? Why is the dividing of the soul from the spirit so important? Why must the outer man be broken by the disciplining work of the Holy Spirit? It is because God needs to have a way through us. We should never think that this is merely about personal, spiritual edification. It is not merely a matter of personal, spiritual experiences. It is very much related to God's way and work. This is a big issue. Should we limit God? Does God have the liberty in us? Only as we are dealt with and broken will God find full freedom in us.

If the church is to afford God a free way, we must undergo His stripping and allow Him to break our outer man. The greatest hindrance to this is our outer man. If the matter of the outer man is not settled, the issue of the church as God's channel can never be settled. If our outer man is broken by God's grace, there is no limit to how God will employ us as channels to His work.

Breaking And The Way God's Work Operates

After the outer man is broken, how does a man approach God's Word, how does he serve as a minister of His word, and how does he preach the gospel? Let us turn our attention to these questions.

Studying the Word

One undeniable fact in studying God's Word is that the kind of person we are determines the kind of Bible we have in our hands. A man often approaches the Bible with his rebellious, confused, and seemingly clever mind. What he gets out of the Bible is the product of his mind; he does not touch the spirit of the Word. If we want to meet the Lord through the Bible, our rebellious and uncooperative mind must be broken. If our mind is always rebellious and uncooperative, none of our cleverness will do us any good. We may think that our cleverness is outstanding, but it is a great hindrance to God. No matter how clever we are, we can never know God's thought through our cleverness.

There are at least two things that we should do when we come to the Bible. First, our thoughts must be identified with the thoughts of the Bible. Second, our spirit must be identified with the spirit of the Bible. We have to think like the writers of the Bible. Men like Paul and John had certain thoughts behind them when they wrote the various portions of the Word. We have to get into the same thoughts. We have to begin from where they began, and develop our thoughts along the same line they developed. We have to reason the same way they reasoned, and consider the same teachings they considered. In other words, our thoughts are like a cog, and their thoughts are also like a cog. The two cogs have to interlock with one another. Our thoughts have to enter Paul's and John's thoughts. As our thoughts enter the Bible's thoughts and our mentality becomes one with the mentality behind God's inspiration, we will understand what the Bible says.

Some people read the Bible with their mind as the principal organ. They read in the hope of picking up some ideas from the thoughts in the Bible. They have a whole set of doctrines spinning in their minds already, and they only want to collect material from the Bible to strengthen their doctrines. When we stand up to speak, an experienced person, after five to ten minutes of our speaking, knows whether we are quoting Scriptures with our mind or whether our thoughts are merged with the thoughts of the Bible. These are two entirely different things. These two kinds of preaching belong to two entirely different worlds. When some stand up to preach, they may be scriptural and their sermons may be very attractive, but their thoughts are contrary to the thoughts of the Bible; the two are incompatible with each other. However, others are different. When they speak on the Bible, their thoughts are merged with the thoughts of the Bible. The two become one and are in harmony with each other. This is the right way. But not everyone can do this. In order for our thoughts to merge with the Bible's thoughts, our outer man has to be broken. If the outer man is not broken, we cannot even read the Bible. We should not think that our study of the Bible is poor because we cannot find anyone to teach us. It is poor because our very person is wrong; our thoughts have not subjected themselves to God. As soon as we are broken, we will cease our own activity. We will not have any subjective notion of our own. Gradually, faintly, and little by little, we will touch the Lord's thinking. We will touch the thoughts behind the writers of the Bible, and we will think as they did. The outer man must be broken before we can enter into the thoughts behind God's Word. When this happens, the outer man is no longer a hindrance.

It is important in our study of the Word to have our thoughts enter into the thoughts of the writers of the Bible and to have our thoughts enter into the thoughts of the Holy Spirit. However, this is only the initial step. Without this step, we cannot study the Bible at all. But even when we have made this step, we may not be reading the Bible correctly. The Bible is not made up just of thought. The most important thing about the Bible is that God's Spirit is released through this book. Peter, John, Matthew, Mark, and every writer of the Bible had the same experience: As they were writing the Bible under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they wrote according to a certain train of thought, but at the same time, their spirits were released along with the release of the Holy Spirit. The world

can never understand that behind the words of the Scriptures there is the Spirit. When the Spirit is released, the prophets come alive, as it were, and speak to us once again. If we hear a prophet speaking today, we have to realize that his speaking contains not only words and thoughts but something else. This something is mysterious, even though within us we are clear that this "something" is the Spirit. The Bible contains not only thoughts but the release of the Spirit. Therefore, the basic and most crucial requirement of all in reading the Bible is to be able to release one's spirit to touch the spirit of the Bible. We have to strike the spirit of the Bible with our own spirit before we can understand the Bible.

Suppose a naughty boy breaks a window of a neighbor's house and the owner of the house runs out to scold the child. When the mother finds out, she will scold the child as well. But there is a different feeling associated with the scolding of the owner than with the scolding of the mother. Outwardly, both are scoldings. But the "spirits" behind the scoldings are different. The owner of the house scolds out of anger; his is a spirit of wrath. The mother's scolding is filled with love, hope, and education. Her rebuke is a rebuke of love, a rebuke of hope, and a rebuke for education. The two spirits are entirely different.

This is a simple illustration. The Spirit behind the writing of the Bible is much stronger than the kind of "spirit" mentioned above. The Spirit behind the writing of the Bible is an eternal Spirit. It is still with us today; it forever saturates the Bible. If our outer man is broken and our spirit is released, our thoughts will not only become one with the thoughts of the Bible, but our whole being will touch the very Spirit that is behind the writing of the Bible. If our spirit is not released and we are cut off from the spirit of the authors of the Bible, we will never understand God's Word; the Bible will be a dead book to us. Hence, we are back to the same fundamental issue: The outer man has to be broken. Our thoughts will become fruitful and our spirit will be free to flow only when the outer man is broken. Only then will God not be restricted by us. The problem we face today is that we are constantly frustrating God. Even in the study of the Bible we frustrate God and limit His freedom.

Ministering the Word

On the one hand, God wants us to understand His Word—this is the

beginning of His work. On the other hand, He desires to place one or two words in our spirit. These words become a burden to us, and He desires that we minister these one or two words to the church. Acts 6:4 says, "But we will continue steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the word." Ministry is service, and the ministry of the word is a service that serves men with God's word.

What is our problem? Our problem is that we have the word within us but cannot release it. Some people have a word and a very heavy burden within their spirit. They want to convey this word to the brothers and sisters. Yet as they speak on the platform, the burden is bound within them. After speaking one or two sentences, a minute, or even an hour, the burden is still not released. The word cannot be released, and the outer man cannot convey the inward burden. They want to discharge the burden and the message that is within them, but their outer man cannot provide them with any utterance. No matter how much they speak, they feel that the burden remains unchanged. They come with a burden and leave with the same burden. The only explanation for this is that their outer man is not broken. Their outer man cannot render any help to their inner man. On the contrary, it becomes a stumbling block to the inner man.

If our outer man is broken, it is easy to say what we want to say. When we have a burden or a word within, our outer man will come up with a suitable word to fitly express our inner thoughts. As soon as the word within us is released, the burden within us is lifted as well. The more we speak, the lighter we will feel. We will realize that our work is to serve the church with God's word. Therefore, the burden within must be matched by suitable words from our thoughts without. If the outer man is not broken, it will not yield to the will of the inner man. It will not obey the inner feeling or the spirit within. When the outer man tries to probe the feeling of the inner man, it will find nothing. It will not find the necessary and suitable words, and God will not be released. God will be stalled and blocked, and the church will not receive any help.

We must remember that the outer man constitutes the greatest hindrance to the ministry of the word. Many people think that cleverness is somewhat useful. This is wrong. No matter how clever a person is, the outer man can never replace the inner man. The inner man will come up

with the right thoughts and proper words to flow out only as the outer man is broken and smashed. The outer shell must be broken by God. The more this shell is broken, the more the life in the spirit will be released. If the shell remains, the burden in the spirit will remain, and God's life and power will not flow to the church. Such a person will not be able to serve as a minister of the word. God's power and life primarily are released through the ministry of the word. If the outer man is not smitten and does not have any open wounds, the inner man will have no outlet. Those who come for the message will hear sound only; they will not touch life. The speaker may be eager to deliver something, but the audience will not receive anything. He will have the word within him, but he will not be able to speak it out because his outer man is blocking the way.

We find a precious story in the life of the Lord Jesus. A person touched only the hem of His garment, and she received His strength. The hem of His garment is the outermost part of His being. This person could feel His power even in His outermost part. The problem with us is that we have God's life within us, but this life cannot flow out. We have the word within us, but we cannot release this word. We have God's word within us, but we have obstacles around us. As a result, this word cannot be released. When God does not have any freedom in us, He cannot flow freely out of us.

Preaching the Gospel

Many people have the wrong concept that a man believes in the gospel because he has heard the right teachings, or because he is touched in his emotion. But this is far from the truth. Those who base their acceptance of the Lord on emotional impulses will not last, nor will those who are convinced by persuasion in the mind. There is nothing wrong with using the mind and the emotion, but these things are not enough. A man is not saved through emotion and thought. A sinner falls at the Lord's feet because the speaker's spirit has released light through his speaking. As soon as our spirit gushes out, others are struck. This is the reason we need a released spirit to preach the gospel.

A coal miner was greatly used by the Lord in preaching the gospel. He wrote a book entitled Seen and Heard in which he described his

experience with the gospel. We were deeply touched by this book. This brother was not an educated or gifted man; he was only an ordinary brother. But his absolute consecration to the Lord became the basis for the Lord to use him greatly. Do you know what was so special about him? He was a broken man. His spirit could be released easily. He started to preach at the age of twenty-three, when he first experienced salvation. In one meeting the word of a preacher kindled a burning desire within him to save souls. He asked to be allowed to speak. After he stood up, he was unable to say anything, even though his heart was burning with fire for lost souls. His tears came down like a torrent. In the end he could only utter one or two sentences. God's Spirit filled the meeting, and everyone was convicted of his own sin and waywardness. Here was a man who, in spite of his young age, was broken in the outer man. He did not have much to say, yet his spirit was released and men were saved. He led many people to salvation during his lifetime. When we read his biography, we sense that he was a man with a released spirit.

This is the way to preach the gospel. The way to preach the gospel is to release the spirit. When the hardness of the outer man is removed and the outer man is broken, the spirit is released. If the very sight of an unsaved person compels us to do something to save him, it means that our spirit is released. This is the basic issue. The preaching of the gospel has everything to do with the breaking of the outer man. When the outer man is broken, our spirit will be released and will touch others. It is our spirit that reaches others' spirits. It is God's Spirit that touches the darkened spirit of man. When this happens, a man is saved, and no reason can account for this change. However, when the outer man chokes the spirit, God does not have a way through us and the gospel will not be released. We always have to pay attention to the matter of the breaking of the outer man because all of our problems lie in the outer man. If we, the person, are not dealt with, it is useless for us to memorize more teachings. The only thing that will bring salvation to men is for our spirit to touch others' spirits. If our spirit touches others' spirits, they will fall on their face before God. If our spirit is discharged in a strong way, they will have no choice but to prostrate themselves before the Lord.

During these years God has been taking the way of recovery. God does not want to see a saved person wait for many years before he deals with

his sins. He does not want to see him wait for many years before he consecrates himself to the Lord or answers the Lord's call to follow Him. The Lord is taking the way of recovery. The gospel has to be recovered, and the fruit of the gospel has to be recovered as well. As soon as a man is saved, he should be delivered from sin and should consecrate himself absolutely to the Lord. As soon as he is saved, he should break the power of mammon in him. He should be like the ones who were saved by the Lord in the Gospels and in Acts. If the gospel is indeed to be recovered, the preachers of the gospel must allow the Lord to cut a free way through them.

We believe that as the Lord takes the way of recovery, the gospel of grace will become one with the gospel of the kingdom. In the Gospels we see no separation between the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of grace. Later, it seems as though those who heard the gospel of grace did not have a chance to hear the gospel of the kingdom. The gospel of grace seems to have been separated from the gospel of the kingdom. But the time will come when the gospel of grace will become one with the gospel of the kingdom once again. Those who receive the Lord will also give up everything for Him. Those who accept Him will also consecrate everything to Him. Men will no longer be saved in a poor way but in a strong and thorough way.

We have to humble ourselves before the Lord and say, "The gospel needs to be recovered, and the ones who preach the gospel also need to be recovered." In order for the gospel to reach men, we have to allow God to work through us. A greater power is needed for the preaching of the gospel. Even so, a greater price needs to be paid. If we expect both the gospel as well as the ones who preach the gospel to be recovered, we have to give everything to the Lord and say, "Lord, I give my all to You. I pray that You will find a way through me. I pray that the church will also find a way through me. I do not want to hinder You or the church."

The Lord Jesus was never a limitation to God. He never limited God in any way. Throughout the past two thousand years God has been working in the church. The goal is for the church to eventually not be a limitation to Him either. Just as Christ was God's manifestation rather than His limitation, the church should be His manifestation rather than His limitation. God has been teaching, buffeting, stripping, and smiting His

children continually. This is how He deals with the church. He will continue this work in the church until the church no longer is a limitation to Him but a manifestation of Him instead. Today we can only bow down our heads and say, "Lord! We are ashamed that we have delayed Your work. We have frustrated Your life, Your gospel, and Your power." Each one of us has to say to the Lord, "I give my all to You. I pray that You will have a way through me." If we want to see an absolute recovery of the gospel, we have to have an absolute consecration. It is foolish to only lament the fact that our gospel is not as powerful as that of the early church. We have to acknowledge that our consecration is not as absolute as the consecration of the early church. In order to recover the gospel, we have to recover the consecration; both have to be absolute and thorough. May the Lord find a way through us.

CHAPTER SIX

Breaking And Discipline

Consecration And Discipline

In order for our outer man to be broken, we need to consecrate ourselves to the Lord. Consecration, however, does not take care of all the problems. It is only an expression of our intention to willingly give ourselves unconditionally, unreservedly, and unequivocally to God. We can consecrate ourselves to God in just a few minutes. This willingness to offer ourselves unreservedly to Him only constitutes the initial step in our spiritual journey. It does not mean that God has finished all of His work with this one step. Whether or not a man can be used by God does not depend on consecration alone. After consecration there is still the need of discipline from the Holy Spirit. This is very important, and whether or not we will become useful to God depends a great deal on this. The discipline of the Holy Spirit must be added to our consecration before we can become a useful vessel to the Lord. Without consecration, it often will be hard to go on with the discipline of the Holy Spirit. However, consecration alone cannot replace the Spirit's discipline. Therefore, we have to turn our attention to the matter of the Spirit's discipline.

In consecration we offer ourselves to God according to the light we have

received. In disciplining us the Holy Spirit deals with us according to the light that He dispenses to us. We can only consecrate according to what we know. We can only consecrate according to what we can see with our spiritual eyes. In reality even we do not know how much is included in our consecration. The amount of light we have received is not infinite; our light is very limited. Even when we think that we have the greatest light, God's eyes still may find us in darkness. What we consecrate to God according to our perceived light will never satisfy His demand. In other words, God's demand is always higher than what we can offer. Our consecration cannot satisfy God's heart because our knowledge is limited and our light is limited. But the discipline of the Holy Spirit is altogether different; it evaluates our need in God's own light. It is not what we see, but what God sees. He knows that we have certain needs, and He operates through His Spirit in the environment for us to experience these things, the purpose of which is to break our outer man. Therefore, the disciplining work of the Holy Spirit goes far beyond our consecration. It is many times greater than our consecration. There is a big difference here.

The work of the Holy Spirit is based on the light of God. The Spirit works according to what God sees. Therefore, only the discipline of the Holy Spirit is thorough and complete. We often are ignorant in ourselves; we do not know what we need to go through. Even our wisest choices are full of errors. What we think we need often is not what we actually need according to God. What we see from our side may only be a tiny fraction of the whole picture. The Holy Spirit, however, orders things for us according to God's light. The discipline of the Holy Spirit far exceeds what our mind can fathom. We often are not prepared for a certain discipline, and we think that there is no need for it. When the Spirit's discipline does come upon us, we are taken by surprise. What the Spirit has ordered for us in the environment is not what we expected. Much discipline from the Holy Spirit comes without any warning from God. Suddenly we are struck with a heavy blow. We may think that we are living under God's light, but to God this light may be a very feeble flicker. He may not even consider it as light at all. The Holy Spirit, however, deals with us according to God's light. We think that we know our condition, but actually we do not. Only God knows us. From the time we accepted Him, He has been ordering our environment. Everything that He has ordered is for our greatest benefit because He knows us and He

knows our needs.

The work of the Holy Spirit in us has a positive aspect and a negative aspect to it. There is a building-up aspect and a tearing-down aspect. After we are regenerated, the Holy Spirit lives in us, yet our outer man limits His freedom. This is like a man wearing a pair of new shoes; the shoes are too stiff and tight, and he finds it difficult to walk in them. The outer man gives the inner man a difficult time. The inner man cannot control the outer man. This is the reason that God has been dealing with our outer man and breaking it from the day we were saved. God does not deal with our outer man according to our perceived need but according to our need as He sees it. He finds out what is tenacious in us and what is beyond the control of the inner man, and He deals with us according to what He knows.

The Holy Spirit does not deal with our outer man by strengthening our inner man. He does not deal with it by supplying our inner man with more grace. This does not mean that the inner man does not need to be strengthened. It means that God has a different way of dealing with the outer man. The Holy Spirit diminishes our outer man by means of outward things. It is not too easy to tackle the outer man with the inner man, because they are of different natures. It is hard for the inner man to bruise or crush the outer man. The nature of the outer man corresponds to the nature of outward things; the outer man is easily affected by the outward things. The outward things can crush, inflict pain, and bruise the outer man much better than the inner man can. Therefore, God deals with our outer man with outward things.

Matthew 10:29 says, "Are not two sparrows sold for an assarion?" Luke 12:6 says, "Are not five sparrows sold for two assaria?" One assarion buys two sparrows, and two assaria buy five. This is cheap. The fifth one is a bonus; it is free. Yet, "not one of them will fall to the earth apart from your Father" (Matt. 10:29). The Bible also says, "Even the hairs of your head are all numbered" (v. 30). Not only are all the hairs counted; they are numbered. This leads us to realize that everything that happens to a Christian is under God's ordering. No environment comes to us by accident. God wants us to see that everything is under His sovereign arrangement.

God arranges all these things according to our need as He sees it. He knows what is best for our inner man and how best to break and dismantle our outer man. He knows that a certain thing will break our outer man, and He orders it to come upon us once, twice, and again and again. We have to see that all the things we have encountered during the past five or ten years have all been under God's ordering and are for our education. If we murmur against any person, we are indeed ignorant of God's hand. If we think that it was bouts of bad luck, we have no idea what the discipline of the Holy Spirit is. We have to remember that all the things that come upon us are measured by our God's hand. All these are for our good. We may not know to choose them, but God knows that they are for our good. I am not sure what misery we would have fallen into had it not been for such discipline from God. Such arrangements keep us pure; they preserve us in God's pathway. They are the best for us. God can give us nothing better. Many people cannot submit themselves. They murmur with their mouth and resent in their heart. This is indeed foolish. We have to remember that everything is measured to us by the Holy Spirit and is the best that it can be.

As soon as a person is saved, the Holy Spirit begins this work. But a period of time has to lapse before He can gain full liberty through this work. When does the Holy Spirit have the full liberty? It is when we consecrate ourselves. The day that a man is saved is the day that the Holy Spirit begins the disciplining work, and the day that he consecrates himself is the day that the Holy Spirit has the full freedom to perform such a work. After a man is saved and before he is consecrated, he still loves himself dearly and has little love for the Lord. One cannot say that the Holy Spirit is not disciplining him; He does order things to bring him to God and to break his outer man. But with an unconsecrated man, He does not have the full liberty to do this work. After a man is enlightened by God and has consecrated himself to God, the Holy Spirit will have the liberty to do His work. At a certain point, a man will feel that he can no longer live by himself or for himself. Under the feeble light that he apprehends, he will come to God and say, "I consecrate myself to You. Whether the outcome is death or life, I will consecrate myself to You." When this happens, the Holy Spirit's work in him will be intensified. Consecration is important. Through consecration we allow the Holy Spirit to have the full and unconditional freedom to do His work. We should not

be surprised when many things come upon us unexpectedly after we have consecrated ourselves. The only reason for such things to come upon us is that we have committed ourselves unconditionally to the Lord. We have said, "Lord, accomplish in me what is most profitable in Your sight!" Because we consecrated ourselves in this way, the Holy Spirit is free to do His work in us without concern for resistance on our part. Either we do not take the Lord's way at all, or if we do, we have to pay the utmost attention to the disciplining work of the Holy Spirit.

The Greatest Means Of Receiving Grace

From the day a person is saved, God has been edifying him through the impartation of grace. A man can receive grace from God through many ways. We call these ways the means of receiving grace. For example, prayer is a means of receiving grace because we can go to God and receive grace through prayer. Listening to a message can also be a means of receiving grace because we can go to God and receive grace through listening. The expression means of receiving grace, or simply means of grace, is a good expression. The church has been using this expression for hundreds of years. We receive grace through means of grace. From the day we became a Christian, our daily life has been one in which we receive one means of grace after another. Our meetings, our listening to messages, our prayer, and many other things we do are means by which we obtain grace. Here we would like to point out one thing: The greatest means of receiving grace, one which we should never neglect, is the discipline of the Holy Spirit. The chief means of receiving grace in the Christian life is the discipline of the Holy Spirit. No other means of grace, such as prayer, Bible study, meeting together, listening to messages, waiting, meditation, or praise, can match this means of grace—the discipline of the Holy Spirit. Of all the means of grace that we receive from God, none is more important than this. The discipline of the Holy Spirit is the greatest means of receiving grace.

When we look back and examine our experience of the various means of grace, we will get an idea of how much we have gone on with God. If our spiritual progress has been through prayer, listening to messages, and reading the Bible alone, we have missed the chief means of receiving grace. All the things that come upon us every day in the family, in our school, in our work, or even on the street are arranged by the Holy Spirit

for our highest good and profit. If we have not received profit from them and if we remain ignorant and closed to this greatest means of grace, we will suffer the greatest loss. The discipline of the Holy Spirit is too crucial; it is a Christian's main means of receiving grace throughout his life. Our reading of the Bible cannot replace the discipline of the Holy Spirit. Our prayer cannot replace the discipline of the Holy Spirit. Our meetings cannot replace the discipline of the Holy Spirit. No other means of grace can replace the discipline of the Holy Spirit. We need to pray, to study the Bible, to listen to messages, and to have all kinds of means of grace. They are all precious, but none of them can replace the discipline of the Holy Spirit. If we have not learned the proper lessons in the discipline of the Holy Spirit, we cannot be proper Christians and can never serve God. Listening to messages can nourish our inner being. Prayer can revive us inwardly. Reading God's Word can refresh us within. Helping others can release our spirit. However, if our outer man remains strong, others will encounter mixture when they encounter us; they will realize that we are not that pure. On the one hand, they will feel our zeal; on the other hand, they will sense our mixture. On the one hand, they will see that we do love the Lord; on the other hand, they also will know that we love ourselves. On the one hand, they can say that here is a precious brother; on the other hand, they have to say that here is a stubborn brother. The outer man is not yet broken. We are edified not only when we pray, listen to messages, and study the Bible. Our greatest edification comes when we are under the discipline of the Holy Spirit.

We need an absolute consecration on our side. But we can never assume that consecration can replace the discipline of the Holy Spirit. Consecration affords the Holy Spirit a chance to work on us freely. We should say, "Lord, I commit myself to Your hand. I allow You to work freely. Lord, give me what You think I need." If we yield to the arrangement of the Holy Spirit, we will reap the benefit. The very act of yielding will bring us benefit. But if we do not yield, instead arguing with God and walking according to our own will, we will end up taking the crooked path no matter what way we take. The basic issue is whether or not we can give ourselves to God unconditionally, unreservedly, and unequivocally for Him to deal with us freely. If we realize that all of God's arrangements are for our highest good, including those things that bring us embarrassment, and if we are willing to give ourselves to God in this

way, we will find the Holy Spirit dealing with us in many things.

All Kinds Of Dealings

Some people are particularly bound by certain things. The Lord deals with them in those particular things. He deals with them item by item, including such minute details as their food and clothing. God will not let them go. How fine the Holy Spirit is! He does not neglect anything. We may love a certain thing without even realizing it ourselves. Yet God knows, and He will deal with us in a very detailed way. When all these things are taken away, we will be completely free. The Holy Spirit deals with many people by touching certain things. He goes after their cherished items relentlessly. Through such dealings, we begin to appreciate the way the Spirit attends to all the details. Even things that we have missed and forgotten are picked up by the Lord. He never forgets anything. God's work is perfect. He will not stop working until He reaches perfection. He will not be satisfied until He reaches that point. Sometimes God deals with us through men. He puts men around us whom we hate, envy, or despise and deals with us through them. He also puts lovable men around us to deal with us. Before we pass through the dealings, we have no realization of how filthy and impure we are. After we pass through His dealings, we will see how impure we are. We think that we are totally given to the Lord. But after we pass through the discipline of the Holy Spirit, we will realize how much outward things affect us.

Sometimes God touches our thoughts. Our thoughts are confused, wild, self-motivated, and undisciplined. We think that we are clever, that we know everything, and that we can think of things that others cannot think of. Because of this, the Lord allows us to make mistakes and stumble again and again so that we would be wary of our own thoughts. If we find great grace in the Lord, we will shy away from our thoughts as much as we shy away from fire. As soon as the hand touches fire, it pulls back. In the same way as soon as we touch our thoughts, we turn back and tell ourselves, "This is not what I should think. I fear my own thoughts." Sometimes God deals with our emotions through ordering various circumstances for us. Some people are too strong in their emotions. When they are happy, they cannot stop rejoicing. When they are depressed, they cannot be comforted. Their whole life revolves around

their emotions. If they are sad, no one can make them sing. If they are happy, no one can make them sober. Their happiness drives away their sobriety, and their sadness leads them into passivity. They are fully manipulated by their own emotions. Because they live in their emotions this way, they even justify their own emotions. For this reason God has to deal with their emotions through all kinds of circumstances. They have to be so dealt with that they dare not be sad or happy any longer; they can only live by God's grace and mercy, not by their own emotion.

The weakness of some people relates to their thoughts, while with others it relates to their emotions. Abnormal thoughts and emotions, however, are not common to everyone (though not a few have them). The biggest weakness and the most common one relates to the will. Because our will is untouched, our emotion becomes a problem to us. The root lies in the will. It is easy for us to say, "Not according to my will, but according to Your will." But when we go through our experiences, how many times do we truly own Him as Lord? The less a man knows himself, the easier it is for him to talk like this. The less a man is enlightened by God, the more he thinks that he will have no trouble obeying God. The quicker a man makes loud claims, the more it proves that he has never paid any price. Those whose words pretend intimacy with God are probably farthest away from Him. When one does not have the light, it is easy for him to claim intimacy with God. Actually such ones are far from God. A man must go through God's dealings before he will find out how stubborn and opinionated he is. He always believes in himself and considers his own opinions, feelings, methods, and views to be right. Paul found grace with God in many ways, the chief one of which, I believe, lies in his words in Philippians 3:3: "Have no confidence in the flesh." This means that he no longer trusted in his flesh. We also have to be led by God to realize that we dare not trust in our own judgment. God allows us to make mistakes again and again until we are forced to confess that we have been wrong in the past and that we will be wrong again in the future. We will acknowledge that we need the Lord's grace. The Lord often allows our judgment to bring us serious consequences. We make certain judgments, and they turn out to be wrong. We make other judgments, and they turn out to be wrong again, so terribly wrong that we cannot even salvage the loss. Time after time the Lord smites us, until a point is reached when as soon as we need to make a judgment, we will say, "I fear my own

judgment as much as I fear hell fire. I am afraid that my judgment is flawed. I am afraid that my view and my methods are flawed. Lord, I am prone to mistakes. I am simply a man of mistakes! Lord, unless You grant me mercy and hold me by my hand and protect me with Your hand, I will fall into mistakes!" When we pray this way, our outer man will begin to crumble. We no longer will dare to trust in ourselves. We often make rash judgments; our views are too simplistic. But after a man is dealt with and broken by God time after time, and after he has passed through all kinds of failures, he will humble himself and say, "God, I dare not think, and I dare not decide." God deals with us in many ways through all kinds of things and people. This is the discipline of the Holy Spirit.

The discipline of the Holy Spirit is a lesson that will never slacken in us. Sometimes we lack the ministry of the word or other means of grace. But this means of receiving grace—the discipline of the Holy Spirit—is never lacking. The supply of the word can vary according to limitations in circumstances. But the discipline of the Holy Spirit is not limited by any circumstance. In fact, it becomes more manifest through limitations in the circumstance. Sometimes, we can say that we do not have the opportunity to listen to a message, but we can never say that we do not have the opportunity to obey the discipline of the Holy Spirit. We can say that we do not have the opportunity to receive the ministry of the word, but we cannot say that we do not have the opportunity to receive the teaching of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is arranging things every day and providing us with plenty of opportunities to learn our lessons.

If we can yield to God, the discipline of the Holy Spirit will be found to be a very fitting means for us, more so than the ministry of the word. We have to be clear about this way. We should never be mistaken to think that the supply of the word is the only means of receiving grace. Do not forget that the greatest means of receiving grace is the discipline of the Holy Spirit. It is the chiefest among all means of receiving grace. It is not available just to those who are educated, clever, and gifted but to those who are uneducated, dull, and short of gifts as well. The discipline of the Holy Spirit does not grant special favor to anyone. As long as a person is a child of God, he can commit himself unconditionally to God no matter who he is, and he can witness the discipline of the Holy Spirit. Through the discipline of the Holy Spirit, one learns many practical lessons. Some

may think that it is good enough for them to have the ministry of the word, the grace of prayer, the fellowship with other believers, and many other means of grace. But they have to realize that no means of grace can replace the discipline of the Holy Spirit. Prayer cannot replace the discipline of the Holy Spirit, nor can the ministry of the word, the study of the Scriptures, or meditation. This is because we not only need the building up but also the tearing down. There are too many things in us that cannot go into eternity, and these must all be torn down.

The Cross In Practice

The cross is not merely a doctrine. It has to be carried out in practice. The cross has to be realized in us; all the things that belong to us have to be destroyed. As we are smitten once, twice, many times, there will come a time when spontaneously we will become sober; we will no longer be arrogant. The way is not through denying our arrogance when our memory reminds us of it. That kind of denial will disappear in five minutes. Only after a man passes through God's chastisement will his pride be forever stripped. A man may be proud at first, but after he is smitten by God once, twice, many times, he will begin to humble himself, and his arrogance will begin to erode away. No teaching, doctrine, or memorization will destroy the outer man. Only God's chastisement and the Spirit's discipline will destroy it. When a person is dealt with by God, spontaneously he will not dare to be proud. He does not have to force himself to remember this lesson. He does not act this way because he has heard a message a few days ago about it. He is not acting according to teaching. His pride has been knocked out, removed. He abhors his own methods and views them like fire; he is afraid of being burned. We live by God's grace, not by our memory. God has to smite us to the extent that we will be the same whether or not we remember to act that way. Such a work is reliable and lasting. When the Lord finishes such a work in us, we will not only receive grace and be strong in our inner being, but the outer man which was once a hindrance and frustration to the Lord's word, purpose, and presence will now be broken. Formerly, the outer man and the inner man could not be joined together. Now the outer man prostrates in fear and trembling; it has yielded itself to God and is no longer at odds with the inner man.

Every one of us needs to go through dealings from the Lord. In looking

back, we find the Lord dealing with us item by item. He is continually breaking our outer shell and knocking down our outward independence, pride, and selfishness. When we look back at all that has happened in the past, we have to acknowledge that everything the Lord has done is meaningful.

I hope that God's children would see the significance of the discipline of the Holy Spirit. God wants us to see that we are poor, that we have been going against Him, that we have failed, that we have lived in darkness, walked by ourselves, and been proud and arrogant for a long time. Now we know that the Lord's hand is on us to break us. Let us put ourselves in His hand unreservedly and unconditionally, praying that this breaking work will be accomplished in us. Brothers and sisters, the outer man must be broken! Do not try to save the outer man from being wrecked while hoping to build up the inner man. As we pay attention to the work of breaking, we will spontaneously witness the work of building.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Separation And Revelation

God not only wants to break our outer man, but also to separate it from the inner man. He wants to dismantle our outer man so that our outer man does not become an encumbrance to the inner man. He wants our spirit and our soul, that is, our inner man and our outer man, to be separated from each other.

A Mixed Spirit

A problem among God's children is the mixture of the soul with the spirit. Whenever their spirit is released, their soul is released as well. It is hard to find a person whose spirit is pure. With many people this purity is lacking. It is this mixture that disqualifies them from being used by God. The first qualification in the work is a purity of the spirit, not a measure of power. Many people hope to have great power, yet they pay no attention to purity in the spirit. Although they have the power to build, they are short in purity. As a result their work is bound for destruction. On the one hand, they build with power. On the other hand, they destroy with their impurity. They demonstrate God's power, yet at the same time their spirit

is a mixed spirit.

Some people think that as long as they receive power from God, everything that they have will be sublimated and be taken up by God for His service. But this will never happen. Whatever belongs to the outer man will forever belong to the outer man. The more we know God, the more we will treasure purity over power. We cherish this purity. This purity is different from spiritual power, and it is free from any contamination of the outer man. If a man has never experienced any dealing in his outer man, it is impossible to expect the power that issues from him to be pure. He cannot assume that just because he has spiritual power and has produced some results in his work that he is free to mix his self with his spirit. If he does this, he will become a problem. This, in fact, is a sin.

Many young brothers and sisters know that the gospel is the power of God. But when they preach the gospel, they add in their own cleverness, frivolity, jokes, and personal feelings. Others can sense God's power with them, but at the same time they also sense the self. The preachers themselves may not feel anything, but the pure ones immediately will sense the presence of mixture. We often are zealous for God's work outwardly, yet in reality we mix in our own preferences. We often are doing God's will outwardly, but actually it is only a coincidence that God's will matches our will. Many so-called wills of God are mixed up with man's preferences! Much zeal is mixed up with man's sentiment! Many stout testimonies for God are mixed up with man's stubborn disposition!

Our greatest problem is our mixture. Hence, God has to work on us to break our outer man as well as to remove our mixture. God is breaking us step by step so that our outer man will no longer be whole. After our outer man is battered once, ten, twenty times, we will be broken and our hard outer shell before God will be gone. But what should we do with the mixture of the outer man in our spirit? This requires another work—the work of purging. This work is carried out not only through the discipline of the Spirit, but also through the revelation of the Spirit. The way to purge mixture is different from the way to break the outer man. The way to purge mixture is often through revelation. Therefore, we find God dealing with us in two ways. One is the breaking of the outer man, and the other is the separation of the outer man from the spirit. One comes through the discipline of the Holy Spirit, and the other is the result of the revelation of

the Holy Spirit.

The Need Of Breaking And Separation

Breaking and separation are our two different needs. Yet there is a strong relationship between the two, and it is impossible to disassociate the two altogether. The outer man needs to be broken before the spirit can be released. But when the spirit is released, it must not be mixed with the sentiments and characteristics of the outer man. It must not carry any element that comes from man. This is not merely a matter of the release of the spirit, but a matter of the purity and quality of the spirit. Many times when a brother stands up to speak, on the one hand, we feel the spirit and the presence of God. However, on the other hand, we touch his self in his words; we touch his conspicuous spot. His spirit is not pure. He can give us a cause for praise, yet at the same time be a source of pain. The issue is not whether the spirit is released, but whether the spirit is pure.

If a man has never been enlightened by God or judged by Him in a deep way, thereby gaining a knowledge of his outer man, the release of his spirit naturally will be accompanied by his outer man. When many people speak, we can sense the release of their very person. They release God, but the release of their spirit is accompanied by their own uncondemned self because many things in them have never passed through judgment. When we contact others, they are primarily touched by our most conspicuous and outstanding elements. If our outer man is not condemned, what will be exposed as soon as we come in contact with others will be the most conspicuous element of the outer man. No one can hide this. Many people who are not even spiritual in their own room expect to be spiritual when they stand on the platform. This is impossible. Many people lose their spirituality as soon as their memory fails to remind them. Their spirituality is sustained by their memory. But this is an impossible proposition. We should not think, "I will remember to muzzle myself today because I have to give a message; I have to work." Our memory is not our salvation. We cannot be saved by our memory. Whatever kind of person we are will be exposed as soon as we open our mouth. No matter how hard a person tries to pretend, act, or cover up himself, his spirit comes out as soon as he opens his mouth. Whatever kind of spirit we have and whatever mixture there is in our spirit will be obvious to everyone as soon as we open our mouth. In spiritual matters,

there is no way to pretend.

If we want to experience deliverance from God, this deliverance must be fundamental, not fragmentary. God has to work in us to deal with our strong point, and He has to break it. Only then will our spirit be released without mixture being imparted to others. If we have never been touched by God in a fundamental way, we may act somewhat spiritual when we remember to do it, but we will manifest the self once our memory slips. Actually, in both cases, whether we remember or we forget, the spirit that we release is the same, and the things that are carried by the spirit are the same.

The problem of mixture is the biggest problem among workers. We often touch life in the brothers, but also touch death. We touch God in the brothers, but also touch their self. We touch a spirit of meekness, but also touch a stubborn self. We find the Holy Spirit in them, but also find the flesh in them. When they stand up to speak, others sense a mixed spirit, an impure spirit. If God intends for us to serve Him in the ministry of the word and if we have to speak for God, we have to ask for grace. We have to say, "God, work in me. Break my outer man, tear it down, and separate it from the inner man." If we have not experienced this deliverance, we will express our outer man subconsciously every time we open our mouth. There is no way for us to hide it. As soon as the word goes out, the spirit goes out as well. We are the kind of person we are; we cannot pretend. If we want to be used by God, our spirit must be released, and this spirit must be pure. In order for us to be pure, our outer man must be destroyed. If our outer man is not destroyed, we will carry our own cargo with us when we serve as ministers of the word. The Lord's name will suffer loss, not on account of our lack of life, but on account of our mixture. The Lord's name will suffer, and the church will suffer as well.

We have spoken of the discipline of the Holy Spirit. Now we would like to speak on the revelation of the Holy Spirit. It is possible for the discipline of the Spirit to come before the revelation of the Spirit, and it is possible for the order to be reversed. We can make a distinction in sequence, but when the Holy Spirit works, He does not necessarily do one thing first and then the other. In our experience there is no set order of events. Some people experience discipline first. Other people experience revelation first. Everyone's experience is different. Some receive the

discipline of the Spirit first, then the revelation of the Spirit, and then more discipline. Others receive the revelation of the Spirit first, then discipline, and then more revelation. However, among God's children there is always more discipline of the Holy Spirit than revelation of the Holy Spirit. Here we are speaking about experience, not doctrine. With many people, discipline occurs more often than revelation. In short, the soul and the spirit have to be separated. The inner man must be separated from the outer man. The outer man must be broken, pulverized, and completely separated from the inner man. Only then will our spirit be free and pure.

How To Be Separated

Hebrews 4:12-13 says, "For the word of God is living and operative and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow, and able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature that is not manifest before Him, but all things are naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him to whom we are to give our account." Word in verse 12 is logos in Greek. Account in verse 13 is also logos in Greek. This carries the meaning of judgment. The last part of verse 13 can be translated as "all things are naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him who judges us" or "all things are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the Lord; the Lord is our Judge."

The first thing we have to realize is that the Bible tells us that God's word is living. If we really touch God's word, it will be living to us. If we do not sense the livingness of God's word, it proves that we have not touched God's word. Some people have read through all the words of the Bible. But they have not touched God's word. Only to the extent that we have touched something living can we claim that we have touched God's word.

John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that every one who believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life." One person hears this word and kneels down, praying, "Lord, I thank and praise You because You love me and save me." This is a person who has touched God's word, because His word has become living to him. Another man sitting right next to him may hear the same word. The sound may be the same, but he only is hearing the sound; he does not hear God's word. There is no living response within him when he hears the word. God's word is living. If a man hears the

word and does not become living, he has not heard the word. God uses His own word, and this word is living.

God's word is not only living, but operative. Living refers to its nature, and operative refers to the works which it accomplishes in man according to God's will. God's word does not pass away lightly. It always results in something. It produces results. God's word does not come to us void. It operates to produce results in man.

God's word is living and operative. What does this word do to man? It pierces and divides. God's word is sharp, even "sharper than any two-edged sword." It pierces "even to the dividing of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow." Here is a contrast. On the one side, we have a two-edged sword versus the joints and marrow. On the other side, we have God's word versus the soul and the spirit. The joints and marrow are the deepest parts of man. To divide the joints is to divide the bone outwardly. To divide the marrow is to divide the bone inwardly. A two-edged sword can divide a bone outwardly and inwardly. Physically, a two-edged sword can do this to our body. But there are two things which are harder to divide than the joints and the marrow: the soul and the spirit. A sharp, two-edged sword can divide joints and marrow, but it cannot divide soul and spirit. It cannot tell us what the soul is and what the spirit is. It cannot show us what is of the soul and what is of the spirit. But the Bible says that one thing, which is sharper than any two-edged sword, can divide the soul and the spirit. It is the word of God. God's word is living, and God's word is operative. It can pierce and divide. What it pierces is not the joints and what it divides is not the marrow. It pierces to the dividing of the soul and the spirit. It can separate the soul from the spirit.

Some may say, "I do not feel that God's word can do anything. I have been listening to God's word for a long time, and I have accepted His revelation. But I have not received anything special. I do not know what it means to pierce and to divide. I know that God's word pierces even to the dividing of soul and spirit. But in my experience I do not know what it means to pierce and to divide."

The Bible answers this concern. In the first part of the verse it says, "Piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow." What does it mean to pierce to the dividing of soul and spirit? The next

part of the verse says, "And able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Thoughts are what we think in our heart, and intentions are our motives and purpose. God's word can discern what we think in our heart as well as our motives.

We often concede that something is of our outer man, that it is of the soul, of the flesh, and is fleshly. We concede that it is something that originates from ourselves. Yet even as we are saying this, we do not see this matter in actuality. When God grants us mercy and enlightens us, He will speak to us in a serious and sober way, as if to say, "This is it! This is the self that you have been talking about for a long time. This is your self! You have been talking so glibly and lightheartedly about the flesh. This is it! This is what I hate. This is what I abhor." When we do not see the flesh, we speak about it jokingly. When we are under the light, we will fall on our face and confess: "This is it! The flesh that I was speaking of is this very thing!" The dividing of the soul and the spirit is not a division in knowledge. It occurs when God's word comes to us and reveals the thoughts and intentions of our heart. The dividing of the soul and the spirit happens when, under God's shining, we see that our thoughts, our mind, and our actions are all of the flesh and that our motives are all for the self.

Suppose two sinners are before us. Both are sinners, but they are not the same. One is a sinner with knowledge. He comes to the meeting and hears many teachings. He knows that man is a sinner, and that he is a sinner by virtue of this and that fact. The preacher is lucid in his preaching, and our friend has picked up much knowledge. He confesses that he is a sinner. Yet in talking about himself being a sinner, he is very jovial and unconcerned. The other man hears the same thing, but God's light is upon him, and he falls on his face and says, "My goodness, this is me! I am a sinner!" He hears God's word telling him that he is a sinner, and he sees that he is a sinner. He condemns himself and falls on his face. This enlightened one prostrates himself on the floor and confesses his sins; he receives God's salvation. The other one who jokes about being a sinner does not see anything, and he is not saved.

Today we have heard that the outer man is a serious problem and that the fleshly man must be broken. If we speak about this subject lightly as if it is a subject for conversation, it will do us no good. If we receive God's

mercy to see the light, we will say, "Lord! Today I know myself. I now know what is my outer man." When God's light shines on us, we will see what the outer man is, and we will fall down and not be able to rise again. We immediately will see that we are that very person. We say that we love the Lord, but when God's light shines on us, we will see that we did not love the Lord at all but instead only loved ourselves. When the light comes, it divides. The mind does not divide us. Doctrines do not divide us. God's light divides us. We boast of our zeal, but God's light will reveal this zeal as nothing but activities of the flesh. We preach the gospel and think that we love sinners, but when light comes, we will see that our preaching of the gospel was the result of our restlessness and talkativeness; it was only our natural inclination. When light comes, the motive and thoughts in our heart are exposed. We think that our thoughts and intentions are of the Lord, but when light comes, everything is exposed, and we will find that these were all of ourselves, not of the Lord at all. Once the light comes we will see, and when we see, we will fall at God's feet. Many things which we think are of the Lord will be found to be of ourselves. We foolishly claim that such and such is for the Lord, but when the light comes, we will realize how little of what we have done was for the Lord. Most of the things were done for ourselves. We think that many works have been done by the Lord. Actually they all have been done by us. We boast that many messages that we preach are from the Lord. But when God's light shines on us, we will find that very little of what we have said were words given by the Lord. Perhaps there were no such words at all. We think that many works are commissioned by the Lord, but when the light breaks from heaven, we will see that all the works we have done were merely activities of the flesh. This revelation of our true state of affairs and the confrontation of reality become light to us. Then we will realize how much of what we have is of ourselves, of the soul, and how much is of the Lord and of the spirit. As soon as the light shines, the soul is divided from the spirit, and there is the discerning of the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

We cannot make this matter clear with doctrines. If we try to discern doctrinally what is of the self, what is of the Lord, what is of the flesh, what is of the Holy Spirit, what is of the Lord's grace, what is of the outer man, and what is of the inner man, we can spell out a long list and can even memorize the list, but we will still be in darkness. We will still do the

same things. We will still be unable to get rid of the outer man. The things will still be with us, and we will still not be able to free ourselves from them. We can say that the flesh is wrong. We can jokingly point out that this is the flesh and that is the flesh, but this will not save us. Deliverance does not come this way; it comes from God's light. As soon as God's light shines on us, we will realize that even our rejection of the flesh is an act of the flesh. Even our criticism of the flesh is a word of the flesh. The Lord will discern the thoughts and the intentions of our heart. We will see the real condition of the thoughts and intentions of our hearts, and we will bow down and say, "Lord! Now I know that these things belong to the outer man." Brothers and sisters, only this light will separate our outer man from our inner man. The separation of the outer man does not come from denial. We cannot grit our teeth and say that we reject it. Our rejection is unreliable. Our confession is unclean. Even the tears of our confession have to be washed by the blood. We foolishly think that we possess what we know in our mind. But God does not see things this way.

God says that His word is living and operative. His word is sharper than anything else. When this word comes to us, the soul and the spirit are divided, even as a two-edged sword divides the joints and the marrow. It divides us by exposing the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Not many of us know our heart! Brothers and sisters, only those who are under the light know their own heart. Those who are not under the light never know their own heart. There is no exception to this! We do not know our heart at all. Only when God's word comes to us will we see that we have been only for ourselves. We live for our own satisfaction, our own glory, our own pursuit, our own position, and our own edification. Brothers and sisters, when the self is exposed and made manifest by the light, we will fall on our faces before God.

What Is A Revelation?

Hebrews 4:13 continues, saying, "And there is no creature that is not manifest before Him, but all things are naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him to whom we are to give our account." Here the Lord shows us the standard by which He enlightens us and discerns our thoughts and intentions. What constitutes a revelation of the Holy Spirit? To what extent do our eyes have to be opened before we can say that we have a

revelation? This is what verse 13 tells us. Putting it in one sentence, the standard of light is the standard of God. Revelation means that we see things according to God's standard. All things are naked and laid bare before Him, and nothing is hidden from Him. Hiding something only hides it from our eyes; nothing can be hidden from the Lord's eyes. Revelation is God opening our eyes to see our intentions and the deepest thoughts in our being as God sees them. Just as we are naked and laid bare before Him, we are naked and laid bare before ourselves after we receive revelation. Just as we are manifest before God, we are manifest before ourselves after we receive revelation. This is revelation. Revelation is seeing what the Lord sees.

If God is merciful to us and grants us a little revelation, if we see a little of ourselves as God sees us, and if He reveals to us a little of what we are like, we will immediately fall on our face before the Lord. We will not have to force ourselves to be humble; we will fall by ourselves. Those who are in the light cannot be proud even if they want to. Only those who are in darkness are proud. A man is arrogant because he does not have God's light. All those who are in the light and in revelation surely will fall on their faces.

How do we know what is spiritual and what is soulish, what is from the inner man and what is from the outer man? It is hard to clarify this matter by means of doctrine. But if we have revelation, we will find this question simple to answer. As soon as God exposes our thoughts and shows us the intentions of our heart, our soul will be separated from our spirit. Whenever we are able to discern the thoughts and intentions of our heart, we are able to divide our soul from our spirit.

If we want to be useful, sooner or later we have to allow this light to shine upon us. Only when this light comes to us will we be under the Lord's judgment. When we are judged, we will be able to lift up our head and say, "God, I am totally unreliable. Even when I am rebuking myself, I am not trustworthy. Even while I am confessing my sins, I am still ignorant of what I am confessing. I can only know through the light." Before we receive light, we may say that we are sinners, but we do not have the sense of being a sinner. We say that we hate ourselves, but we do not have the feeling that we are actually hating ourselves. We say that we are denying ourselves, but we do not have the feeling that we are

denying ourselves. This will only come through the Lord's shining. As soon as the light shines, our true self will be exposed. We will find that all our lives we have been loving ourselves, not the Lord. We have been deceiving ourselves and deceiving the Lord. We did not love the Lord at all. Light will show us the kind of persons we are and the kind of things we did before. From that day onward, we will know what is of the spirit and what is of the soul. We will know that many things were of ourselves. A man can only say that he knows after he has been judged by the light. If he is not judged by the light, he will not be what he claims to be even if he tries to imitate. Only as God shines a great light upon us can we say, "This is my soul." The judgment that comes with the light will distinguish the inner man from the outer man. When the inner man and the outer man are distinguished from one another, then our soul and spirit will be divided. The Lord does a kind of one-time shining in us with His unprecedented, great light. It may happen while we are listening to a message. It may happen while we are praying, fellowshipping with other brothers, or walking along the road. The unprecedented light shines, and we discover ourselves. Once we are placed under this great light, we will discover how little of what we have done in our lifetime has been of the Lord. It always has been ourselves. We have been the ones who have been acting, busily and zealously working, speaking, helping the brothers and sisters, and preaching the gospel. When the light shines on us, we will realize how pervasive our presence is, how we have extended ourselves into everything, and what our self encompasses.

The self that was previously hidden now will be exposed. The self that was removed from our consciousness now will be clearly felt. Everything will be clear, and we will realize that the self actually involves so much, including activities so numerous. We thought that many things were done in the name of the Lord. Now we will see that in essence they are all of ourselves. Once we see this, we will spontaneously condemn the outer man. The things that we see under the light will be condemned by us when they surface again. What we have seen under the light will be rejected by us again when things, words, or intentions of a similar nature arise a second time; we immediately will see that what we are faced with is the same thing that we were trying to deal with the first time. Anything that has passed through the judgment of light once will be judged again as soon as a little seed sprouts forth. After we have received this shining

we will be able to divide the soul from the spirit. Before this shining, all we had were doctrines, and we spoke like a sinner glibly talking about his own sin. If we do not have the light, even our effort to deal with ourselves is useless. The only kind of dealing that is useful is the dealing under the light. When we live before the Lord in this way, our spirit will be released. We will become pure, and the Lord will not have any trouble using us.

The dividing of the soul and the spirit comes from the shining. What is the shining? May the Lord be merciful to us to show us what the shining is. Shining is seeing what God sees. What does God see? He sees what we do not see. What do we not see? We do not see the things that are of ourselves, the things that we think are of God but which are not. Light shows us how much of what we thought was of God is actually of ourselves. It shows us how much of what we thought was good is actually not good, how much of what we thought was right is actually wrong, how much of what we thought was spiritual is actually soulish, and how much of what we thought was of God is actually of ourselves. Then we will say, "Lord! Now I know myself. I am a blind man. I have been blind for twenty or thirty years, yet I have not realized it. I did not see what You have seen."

This seeing will take away what we have. Our seeing is the dealing. Do not think that seeing is one thing and dealing another thing. God's word is operative. Once His word shines on us, our outer man is gone. We do not hear God's word and then gradually experience the dealing afterwards. We do not see something through God's light and then deal with what we have seen afterwards. We do not have seeing as one step and dealing as another. The shining is the removing; both happen at the same time. As soon as the light shines, the flesh dies. No flesh survives when it is exposed to the light. When a man sees light, he does not have to humble himself; he will fall on his face immediately. Under the light his flesh will wilt away. Brothers and sisters, this is what it means to be operative. God's word is living and operative. This does not mean that God speaks, and then we make it operative. The word itself is operative in us.

May the Lord open our eyes to see these two things. On the one hand, we have the discipline of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, we have revelation. These two things combined together will deal with our outer man. May the Lord be gracious to us so that we will put ourselves under

His light, and may this light shine on us so that we will prostrate ourselves and say to the Lord, "I am indeed foolish and blind. I have been so foolish and blind that for years I have taken what is of myself to be of You. Lord, be merciful to me!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

Impression And The Condition Of The Spirit

Breaking And Impression

Whether or not we can be a worker of the Lord depends not on what we say or do but on what comes out of us. If we say and do one thing, yet what comes out of us is another thing, others will not receive help. What comes out of us is a very crucial matter.

Sometimes we say that we have a good impression of a certain person, or that we have a bad impression of another person. Where does this impression come from? The impression does not come from a person's words. If it does, then we would say that a person is good if his words are good and that he is bad if his words are bad; there would not be the need to talk about impression at all. Yet in reality there is something inexplicable which gives us certain impressions. The impressions that we receive of a person are something apart from his words and deeds. As he is speaking or acting, something else comes out of his being which impresses us with an impression.

What generates an impression in others is the strongest spots we have in ourselves. If our thoughts have never been broken and are lawless and wild, when we meet the brothers and sisters, they spontaneously will touch our thoughts. This will be all that impresses them. We may possess an abnormal emotion; it may be exceptionally warm or cold. If our emotion has never been broken by the Lord, it will spontaneously come out of us when we contact others. The impression others will receive will be of our emotion. Our strong spot will be what comes out of us, and it will be the impression that others receive. We can control our words and our actions, but we cannot control what flows out of us. Whatever we have will flow out of us spontaneously.

Second Kings 4 gives us the account of the Shunammite woman's reception of Elisha. The Bible says that "one day Elisha was passing through Shunem; and there was a wealthy woman there, who compelled him to have a meal. So whenever he passed through, he would turn aside and have a meal there. And she said to her husband, Now I know that this man who continually passes through unto us is a holy man of God" (vv. 8-9). Elisha passed through Shunem. He did not give one message or perform one miracle. Every time he passed through, he turned aside and had a meal there. The woman identified him as a man of God by the way he took his meal. This was the impression that Elisha gave to others.

Today we have to ask ourselves, "What is the impression that we give to others? What is the thing that comes out of us?" We have spoken repeatedly that the outer man must be broken. If the outer man is not broken, the impression that others receive from us will be nothing but the outer man. Every time we contact others, we may give them an unpleasant feeling that we are self-loving, stubborn, and proud. Or we may give them an impression that we are clever and extremely eloquent. Perhaps we give others a so-called good impression. But does this impression satisfy God? Does it meet the church's need? God is not satisfied, and the church has no need of our so-called good impressions.

Brothers, God requires that our spirit be released, and the church also requires that our spirit be released. We have a very great and crucial need: Our outer man must be broken. If the outer man is not broken, our spirit will not be released, and the impression we give to others will not be an impression of the spirit.

A brother once was speaking on the subject of the Holy Spirit, but all his words, attitude, and stories exposed him as a man full of the self. While others were listening, they were uncomfortable. The Holy Spirit was in his mouth, but the self was in his being. His words were on the Holy Spirit, but the impression he gave to others was of his self. What purpose does this serve? We must not pay attention to doctrines alone. The important thing is what comes out of us. If what comes out of us is the self, others will only touch the self. Even though our subject may be wonderful and our message excellent, what good will it serve? God has no intention for us to make progress in doctrine alone. He has to deal with the person. If

our person is not dealt with, we will be of little use to God's work. We will only be able to give others spiritual teachings; we will not be able to give others spiritual impressions. It is a great pity if our teachings are spiritual but the impressions we give to others are of the self! This is the reason we repeatedly have spoken of the need for God to break our outer man.

Time after time, God has been arranging our circumstances to break our strong spot. It may be so strong that one blow is not enough to take it away. Therefore, a second blow comes. If our strong spot is still unyielding, a third blow will come. God will not let us go. He has to break our strong spot. He will never stop His work.

What the Holy Spirit accomplishes in us through His disciplining work is different from what we receive through ordinary preaching. In receiving a message, we generally understand the doctrine in our mind and then wait for months and even years before God leads us into the truth subjectively. We receive the message, and then we enter into the truth. But the discipline of the Holy Spirit works differently. It is characterized by the fact that the instant we see the truth, we receive the content of that truth itself. These two things occur at the same time. We do not see the doctrine and then receive the content later. We are foolish men; we understand doctrines quickly, but we learn from the discipline slowly. We can remember many teachings after hearing them once. Yet the discipline of the Holy Spirit may come to us ten times, and we still may be bewildered and astonished as to what we are being disciplined for. If the Lord cannot break us with one blow, He will do it again and again. As we experience the discipline of the Holy Spirit once, twice, ten times, or even a hundred times, the Lord will wrought something into us, and in that same moment we will see the truth. The moment we see the truth is the moment we acquire the thing itself. Hence, the discipline of the Holy Spirit equals both the breaking down and the building up of the Holy Spirit. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. After a man passes through the Spirit's discipline, he will be edified as well as see the truth; he will be built up as well as torn down. When he has experienced so much discipline from the Holy Spirit, he will see and touch something real before the Lord, and he will say, "Thank the Lord. Now I know that the Lord has used the past five or ten years to deal with me just for the purpose of getting rid of this one thing." Thank the Lord that He removes

our obstacles through repeated dealings.

Shining And Killing

Shining is another work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit deals with our outer man by these two means: discipline and shining. Sometimes He works by both means simultaneously and at other times consecutively. Sometimes, the Holy Spirit disciplines us through the environment to knock out our strong spots. At other times, He grants us special grace by enlightening us in a special way. We must be clear that the flesh can only take shelter in darkness. When darkness is gone, the flesh has no place to hide. Many acts of the flesh remain because we do not know them as the flesh. As soon as light comes and we see them as the flesh, we become fearful to act the way we have before.

When the church is rich, when God's word is released, when the ministry of the word is strong, and when prophesying is common, light is frequent and prevailing. Once light shines, we realize what pride is. We begin to know the very thing that we have been talking about in the past. When we spoke of pride previously, it was something we boasted of. But when we see pride under the light, we can only exclaim, "My goodness! This is pride. Now I know that pride is so evil and filthy!" The pride that we see under the light of revelation is completely different from the pride that we speak of with our mouth. The pride that we so glibly speak of does not appear loathsome and filthy to us. Even while we are speaking about it, we have very little feeling. But when we are under the light, everything becomes different. Light exposes our true condition. The self that we see today is thousands of times more evil and filthy than the self that we spoke of in the past. Under such circumstances, our pride, self, and flesh will wilt away. They will be removed and no longer survive.

The wonderful thing is that whatever we see under the light is killed by the light. The seeing and the killing do not happen consecutively. We do not see our shortcomings and then remove them gradually years later. When we see our shortcomings under the shining, the shortcomings are finished immediately; they are killed immediately. Light kills; this is the most wonderful thing about the Christian experience. As the Holy Spirit enlightens us, we are dealt with. Therefore, revelation comprises seeing as well as killing. Through seeing, the flesh withers away. Revelation is

God's way of operation. In fact, revelation is God's operation itself. As soon as light reveals, it kills. When light shines, we see, and our seeing kills everything. Once we see how filthy and evil something is and see the Lord's condemnation of it, it can no longer survive.

The greatest thing in the Christian experience is the killing that comes from light. Paul did not receive a shining and then hasten to kneel beside the road; the very instant he was enlightened, he fell down. Prior to that, he was able to plan for everything, and he was confident about everything. However, his first reaction when the light came was to fall down. He became foolish and ignorant. Light brought him down. We should take note that these two things happen as one step, not two steps. It does not happen the way we think. God does not shine on us and make us understand, and then we carry out what He has shown us. God does not enlighten us concerning our shortcomings, and then we begin to change these shortcomings. No, God does not work this way. He shows us how evil, filthy, and short we are, and as soon as we see this, we exclaim, "My! What a filthy and evil man I am!" As soon as God shows us our true condition, we fall. We wither away and are not able to stand up any longer. Once a proud man is enlightened, he is no longer able to be proud even if he tries. Once we have seen our true condition under God's light and once we have seen what our pride is, the impression will never leave us. Something will remain in us that will give us pain, that will give us the feeling that we are useless, and we will no longer be able to be proud.

When God shines on us, it is a time for believing and prostrating ourselves, not the time for petitioning. Many brothers and sisters busy themselves in prayer when God is speaking to them. As a result they do not see any light. The principle that brought us our initial salvation holds true for all subsequent works of God. At the time we were enlightened for our salvation, we did only one thing: We knelt down and prayed, "Lord, I accept You as my Savior." Following this, something happened. If a man prays after he hears the gospel, "Lord, I beg that You would be my Savior," he may pray the same prayer for a few days without feeling that the Lord has saved him. As soon as the Lord shines on us, we have to fall under His light and say, "Lord, I accept Your judgment. I accept Your view." If we do this, God will give us more light and will show us how filthy

we are.

The day that God shines His light on us, many things will change before our eyes. We thought that we had done many things in the name of the Lord and for love's sake. Now the picture changes. We discover that hidden beneath our noblest goals are base and ugly motives. We thought that we were absolutely for God. Now we discover that we are full of plans for ourselves. In fact we are so full of these things that we can only fall on our faces. Man's self creeps into every nook and cranny; it even tries to usurp God's glory. "Is there anything that man cannot do?" Under God's shining, we find out the kind of person we are. As soon as God's revelation comes, our condition is exposed and laid bare. He exposes us, and we see ourselves. Previously, only the Lord knew us. We were naked and laid bare before Him, but not before ourselves; we still did not know ourselves. But when God exposes all of the thoughts and intentions of the heart to us, we become naked not only before Him, but before ourselves as well. When we are naked and laid bare before ourselves, we no longer dare to lift up our heads. Before we are exposed, we do not know ourselves, and we can easily get by. But when we see ourselves under God's light, we are so ashamed that no place is good enough for us to hide ourselves. Now we know what kind of person we are! Now we know the kind of boasts we made! We thought we were better than others. Now we know the kind of persons we are! We cannot find more fitting terms before the Lord to describe ourselves; we can only say that we are filthy and evil. We admit that our eyes have been blind for years, that they have seen nothing. The more we see our filth, the more ashamed we become. It seems as if all the shame of the whole world is upon us. We prostrate before the Lord and repent, saying, "I repent of myself. I hate myself. I admit that I am an incurable man."

This shining, repentance, shame, loathing, and prostration will shake off what we have been unable to shake off all these years. Man's salvation comes from this instant enlightening. The seeing and removing are one work; the two are joined together. As the Lord shines, He saves. The shining is the saving, and the seeing is the deliverance. We need this kind of seeing before the Lord. Only this kind of shining will remove our pride, and only this light will stop our fleshly activities and break our outer shell.

A Comparison Between Discipline And Revelation

We have these two main things before us—the Spirit's discipline and God's shining, or we can say the Spirit's revelation. Let us make a comparison of the two things. The discipline of the Holy Spirit is generally a slow process. It comes to us slowly, little by little. Sometimes it takes a few years for Him to deal with us concerning a certain thing. Moreover, this discipline does not come necessarily through the ministry of the word. Many times there is no ministry of the word, yet the Spirit still exercises His discipline. But the revelation of the Holy Spirit is different. Often it comes quickly, maybe in days or even in minutes. God's light may shine on a man for a few minutes or a few days. Under this light he sees that he is finished, that he is absolutely useless, and that all of his former boasts are now his shame. Such revelation of the Holy Spirit often comes through the ministry of the word. This is the reason the revelation of the Holy Spirit occurs more frequently when the church is strong and the ministry of the word abundant. But even when there is no ministry of the word, and consequently little revelation from the Spirit, no one can remain in the Lord's presence while still preserving his outer man. The word and the revelation may be lacking, but there is still the discipline of the Holy Spirit. Even if a person has not come into contact with any other believer for years, the Holy Spirit still performs His disciplining work on him, and a man can still learn and touch something high before the Lord. Some do not have the ministry of the word because the church is weak. Some even think that they have lost the discipline of the Spirit through their own foolishness. This does not mean that there is no longer any discipline of the Holy Spirit. Rather, it means that the Holy Spirit has been disciplining for years without producing anything or arriving at any result. The Lord may strike once, and we may not know what it means. He may strike again, and we still may not know what it means. He may strike for ten years, while we act like a mule without reason, unaware of His intentions. This is a pity. Discipline never falls short in us; what falls short is our vision of the Lord's hand.

The Lord often chastises us, but we turn our attention to men and take the wrong track. Our attitude before the Lord should be as the psalmist said, "I did not open my mouth; for You have done this" (Psa. 39:9). We

have to remember that it is not our brother, sister, friends and relatives, or any other person who is dealing with us. It is God who is dealing with us. We have to see this. We have to realize that the Lord has been disciplining us and dealing with us all these years. Because of our ignorance we have put the blame on others or even on fate. This is total ignorance of God's hand. It is wrong. We have to remember that everything has been measured to us by our God. The amount, the length, and the intensity of what befalls us are all measured by Him. He orders everything around us, the only purpose of which is to break our conspicuous, obtuse, and hard spots. May the Lord be gracious to us and show us the meaning of His work in us. May He grant us much light to expose us and to humble us. If the Lord breaks our outer man, we will no longer present others with our strong self when we touch them. Instead, our spirit will flow out whenever we touch men.

We pray that the church will come to know God in a way as never before. We also pray that God's children will receive unprecedented blessings from God. The Lord has to adjust our being until we become proper. Not only must the gospel be proper; the gospel preacher also must be proper. Not only must the teaching be right; the teacher also must be right. The question is whether or not God will be released through our spirit. When the spirit is released, it will touch many in this world who are in need of the spirit. No work is more important or basic than this, and no other work can replace this. The Lord's attention is not on our doctrine, our teaching, or our message. He is asking what impression we are giving to others. What is coming out of us? Are we drawing others to ourselves or to the Lord? Do they touch doctrines, or do they touch the Lord through us? This is a very serious question. If this question is not resolved, all of our labor and work will not be worth much.

Brothers, the Lord cares more for what comes out of us than for what we say with our mouth. Every time we contact someone, invariably something comes out of us. Either our self comes out or God comes out. Either the outer man comes out or the spirit comes out. Brothers, let me repeat the question: "When we stand before men, what comes out of us?" This is a fundamental question that needs to be resolved. May God bless us and may we see the light.

CHAPTER NINE

Pliableness After The Breaking

Pliableness And The Breaking Of The Will

God uses many ways to break our outer man, and these ways vary from person to person. This is the reason the Holy Spirit directs different kinds of disciplining works to different persons. With some people, God deals specifically with their self-love. Again and again God orders environments that deal with their self-love. With other people, God deals with their pride. Again and again God orders environments that break their pride. With still others, God deals with their wisdom. He tears down their trust in their kind of walk which has its source in their own wisdom. He allows them to blunder and fail in everything they lay hold of around them. God allows them to fail again and again in order that they learn not to trust in their own wisdom, until they say, "I live not by man's wisdom but by the mercy of God." With some people, the Holy Spirit may order yet another kind of discipline; He may use the environment to shatter their subjectivity. Many people are very opinionated. They are full of ideas and methods. The Bible says, "I am Jehovah...is there anything too hard for me?" (Jer. 32:27, Darby). With some brothers, it seems that there is nothing too hard for them. They never find one thing which prompts them to bow down and confess their ignorance and inability. The Lord's Spirit has to deal with them through all kinds of environments; He has to strike again and again. These ones will find that in spite of their boasting about everything, they cannot accomplish anything. Things they consider to be easy turn out to be the causes of failure and embarrassment. The Holy Spirit chooses to humble them through this way. Simply put, the Spirit strikes different men at different points.

The Spirit also deals with everyone at different speeds. With some, the Lord's rod visits them in a relentless, rapid sequence. With others, the Lord deals with them for a while and then gives them a period of respite. But one thing is unchanging: He always scourges those whom He loves. We should find many bruised spots among God's children. These are the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. When chastisement comes, it may hit different spots, but the goal is the same. Whatever outward form the chastisement takes, inwardly these chastisements always wound the

person himself. God may choose to deal with our self-love. He may choose to deal with our pride, our wisdom, or our subjectivity. Whatever point He touches, the result of every dealing is to make us weaker than before. He deals with us repeatedly until our self is wounded and we are weakened. Some are touched in a particular way in their emotion. Others are touched in a particular way in their mind. Whatever area a man is touched in, the end result is the breaking of the will. He may be hit in one area, but the breaking is always applied to the self and the will. We are all stubborn. Our will is stubborn. Our stubborn will is boosted by our mind, our proposals, our self-love, our emotion, and our wisdom. The things that sustain our stubborn will may be different, but in every case there is a hardness of the will. The smiting, dealing, and breaking work of the Holy Spirit may be different, but the final and intrinsic cutting work is the same—it deals with the self and strikes at the will.

Therefore, everyone who is subdued, either by revelation or by discipline, shows one characteristic—pliableness. Pliableness is a mark of a broken man. Those who are broken by God are pliable before Him. Our outward shell is hard and closed because there are many things which prop up these hard things in us. We are like a house that is supported by many pillars. These pillars keep the house from collapsing. When God removes the pillars one by one, the house collapses. Once the outward supporting structure is dismantled, the inward self collapses. We should not think that those who speak softly are free from any stubbornness in the will. We should not think that those who are subdued in their voice are pliable in their will. Many soft-spoken ones are very hard within. Hardness has to do with our nature, not with our voice. Many people seem to be outwardly milder than others; they appear to be not as quick and loud. But before God they are just as stubborn, hard, selfish, and self-confident. The supporting elements which prop up our inner structure may be different, but the inner structure is the same. The self, the will, is just as strong. The Lord has to remove these supporting elements one by one. He has to break them one by one. This is the reason He deals with us once, twice, and repeatedly. By the grace of God, something will be knocked off of us through these repeated dealings. Such a severe chastisement will produce a fear in us when we try to do the same thing again. We will know that if we do the same thing again, the Lord will smite us again. If we say the same thing again, the Lord will chastise us again. We no

longer will be so free to act. It seems as if God has only touched something outward. But actually, our very being has become softened; we no longer can stand in the area in which we are touched. At least in that particular area we will not dare to disobey the Lord or insist on our ideas anymore. Out of fear of the Lord's chastisement, we no longer dare to move. We fear God, and we become mellowed in that particular area. The more we experience God's dealing, the more pliable we will become. The more God carries out the breaking work in us and the wider the scope of this breaking becomes, the quicker we will be mellowed. Pliableness is a result of breaking.

When we contact certain brothers, we can say that they are gifted, but we have the feeling that they are not yet broken. This is the condition of many people: They are gifted, but they are not broken. Others can sense this. As soon as they touch these ones, they can sense the hardness in them. Once they are broken, they become soft. If a man is never broken, he will surely remain hard. In whatever area a man experiences God's chastisement, he will be purged from boasting, pride, carelessness, and lawlessness in that same area. He will fear God with respect to that area, and he will become pliable in that area.

The Bible uses many symbols for the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is symbolized by fire as well as by water. Fire speaks of the power of the Spirit, whereas water speaks of His purity. In symbolizing the Spirit's nature, the dove is used. The Spirit's nature is a dove's nature—pliable, peaceful, and meek. It is not hard. As the Spirit of God works His nature into us step by step, we acquire a dove's nature. The pliableness that comes as a result of a godly fear is a mark of the Spirit's breaking work.

Different Manifestations Of Pliableness

Once a man is broken by the Holy Spirit, he will manifest a pliableness that comes from a fear of God. When others contact him, they no longer will find him as hard, fierce, and severe as before. Having been dealt with by the Lord, his voice becomes subdued, and his attitude becomes softened. He begins to fear God inwardly, and this fear spontaneously flows out through his attitude and words. Spontaneously, he becomes a pliable man.

Easy to Be Dealt With

What is a pliable person? A pliable person is one who is easy to be dealt with. It is easy for him to speak to others and easy for him to ask from others. When a man is broken before God, it becomes easy even for him to make confessions and to weep. It is very hard for some people to weep. This does not mean that weeping has any merit in itself. But it does means that when a man has passed through God's dealing, his outward disposition, thoughts, emotion, and will are shattered, and it becomes easy for him to see his mistakes and to make confessions. It will not be difficult for others to talk to him. The shell in him is broken, and his emotion and mind will have the capacity to accept others' opinions and to allow others to speak to him and teach him. He will be brought into a new realm, and he will be able to receive help anytime and anywhere.

Easy to Have Feelings

A pliable man is one who has sensitive feelings. Because his outer man is broken, it is easy for his spirit to be released, and it is easy for him to touch the brothers' and sisters' spirits. As soon as their spirits move, he will sense it. His feelings become very sensitive. He immediately knows whether something is right or wrong. As soon as others' spirits move, he will respond. He will not do anything foolish or insensitive, and he will not do anything that offends others' feelings. We often carry on with things that others' spirits disapprove of. We behave this way because our outer man is not broken. Others' spirits are sensitive about what we are doing, but we have no feeling. Some brothers and sisters often offer such tiresome prayers in the meetings that others wish they would stop, yet they keep on going. The spirits of the others speak out and plead for them to stop, but they do not have any feeling in themselves. The feelings of others do not produce any response in them. This is because their outer man is not broken. If a man is broken, it is easy for his spirit to touch the spirits of others, and it is easy for him to feel what others feel. He does not act like an insensitive person who is ignorant of things that others are clear about.

Only those whose outer man is broken will know the meaning of the Body of Christ. Only they can touch the spirit of the Body, the feeling of the other members. They will no longer act or feel independently. If a man is void of feelings, he will be like an artificial limb, perhaps a mechanical arm in a body. A mechanical arm can move with the body, but it is short of

one thing—feelings. Some people are members without feelings. The whole Body feels something, yet they do not feel anything. Once the outer man is broken, a man will touch the conscience and feelings of the church. His spirit will be open, and the church will easily touch his spirit and communicate its feelings to his spirit. This is a precious thing. Every time we are wrong, we will know that we are wrong. However, the breaking of the outer man does not guarantee that we no longer will be wrong. It merely provides us with a faculty that tells us when we are wrong. The brothers and sisters may realize that we are wrong without opening their mouth to point this out. Yet as soon as we touch them, we realize that we are wrong. As soon as we touch their spirit, we know whether they are for or against the matter in question. This is a basic requirement in the Body life. Without this, there is no possibility of having the Body life. The Body of Christ does not arrive at a consensus through discussion and debates, just as there is no need for discussion in our own bodies. Every member spontaneously feels the same thing. This common feeling is the will of the Body; it is also the will of the Head. The will of the Head is expressed through the will of the Body. As our outer man is broken, it will be easy for us to be adjusted, and it will be easy for us to have the feeling of the Body.

Easy to Receive Edification

The greatest help that we can receive does not come simply from the correction of our mistakes. The greatest help comes as our outer man is broken and our spirit becomes open and free. When this happens, we will receive supply from others' spirits. Our spirit will not only be released; it also will receive spiritual help wherever we go. If our outer man is not broken, it will be hard for us to receive any help from anyone. Suppose a brother is not broken in the outer man because his mind is too strong. When this brother comes to the meeting, it will be hard for him to receive any edification. Unless a head-strong person is confronted with another strong mind, he will not receive any help from anyone. While other brothers are speaking, he will despise various thoughts, finding them too dull and dry. Others will not be able to render him any help. He may go on in the same way for a month, two months, a year, or two years without receiving any help at all. He has a shell in his mentality, and he can only receive help in the mental realm; he cannot receive any spiritual

edification. But if the Lord steps into his situation and works on him repeatedly for one, two, or a few years, the shell of his mentality will be broken. He will realize the futility of his mentality. He will become like a child, and it will be very easy for him to listen to others. He will no longer dare despise others. When he listens to another brother, he will no longer try to catch flaws in his pronunciation, mistakes in his teaching, or ambiguities in meaning. He will instead touch the speaker's spirit with his own spirit. As soon as the Lord moves a little in the speaker and his spirit is activated, the brother's spirit will be revived, and he will receive the edification. If a person's spirit is broken, whenever others release their spirit, he will receive edification. He does not receive edification in doctrine only—that is altogether a different matter. The more dealings a man's spirit receives from God, the more thorough will be the breaking of the outer man, and the more help he will receive. Whenever the Spirit of God moves in a brother or sister, he will receive the help. He will no longer criticize others according to his doctrines or measure others according to the letter. He will no longer pay attention to the nicety of the sermon, the eloquence of the speech, or the soundness of the interpretation. His entire attitude will change. The degree to which we can be helped by others depends on the condition of our spirit. Men often pass by us, but we cannot touch their spirit and cannot receive any edification from them because our shell is too thick.

What is edification? It is not the increase of thoughts, ideas, or doctrines. Edification is when our spirit touches God's Spirit. The Spirit of God can come out of any man. Whether in the meeting or in private fellowship, we will experience the feeding and the reviving as soon as God's Spirit is activated in others. Our spirit is like a mirror. Every time we are edified, it is as if someone has polished our spirit a little and made it shine more. The meaning of edification is nothing less than our spirit being touched by others' spirits or by the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit touches our spirit through others' spirits, we receive edification. What comes out of the spirit ignites us as soon as we touch it. We are like an electric lamp that shines as soon as electricity passes through it, without regard to whether the lamp shade is red or green or whether the wires are white or black. We do not care what the "lamp shade" is like; our attention is on the release of "electricity" and the fact that we have been revived, that we have been fed before God. Thank God! If we can do this, we will become

persons who can receive help easily. It is very hard for many people to receive help. If we want to help them, we have to exert much energy to pray and work on them before they will allow us to do anything. A hard person does not receive help easily. Only those who are pliable will receive help easily.

There are two entirely different approaches to edification. One way is outward, involving thoughts, doctrines, and expositions of the Scriptures. Some can claim that they have received help in this way. The other way is entirely different, involving the touching of spirit with spirit. When spirits touch, spiritual help is found. We only touch true Christianity as we touch the second way. This is true edification. If all we know is to listen to sermons, we may hear a good message today. If we happen to hear the same brother preaching on the same message the next Sunday, we will be bored and will want to leave. We think we need to listen to a message only once. As far as we are concerned, Christianity involves doctrines. We keep doctrines in our head. However, we must realize that edification has nothing to do with doctrines; it has to do with the spirit. If a brother preaches the first time with the release of his spirit, he will touch and change our entire being; we will be washed and revived. If we listen to him a second time and he releases his spirit again, we will receive help once again. The subject may be old and the doctrines may be the same, but we will receive a cleansing and washing every time his spirit is released. We have to remember that edification is a contact of spirit with spirit; it is not the increase of thoughts. Edification is an exchange between spirits. It has nothing to do with receiving some doctrines and teachings from the outer man. The best that can be said of doctrines and teachings that are not vitally linked with the spirit is that they are dead.

After our outer man is broken, it will become easy for us to receive edification; in fact, we will receive much edification. When others ask us a question, we will receive edification from their asking. When a sinner comes to us seeking the Lord, we will receive edification as we pray with him. A brother may be in gross error, and the Lord may want us to speak a strong word to him. When we touch his spirit, we will be edified once again. We can receive edification and supply from many directions. We will feel that the whole Body is supplying us. Any member, whoever he may be, can render us supply. We will always receive help, and we will

become persons who are good at receiving. The whole church will become our supply. What riches we will find! We truly will be able to say that God's riches have now become the riches of the Body, and the riches of the Body have now become our riches. How different is this from the increase of thoughts and doctrines! The difference is too great.

The more help a person can receive and the broader the scope of supply he draws, the more we can say that he is a broken man. Those who hardly receive any help from anyone are not wiser than others. It only proves that their outer shell is harder than others' and that nothing can arouse them. If the Lord grants them mercy and deals with them in strong and multifarious ways, they will receive supply from the whole church. We have to check with ourselves: Can we receive help from others? If we have a hard shell around us, we will not sense the spirit even when the Holy Spirit is released through other brothers. If we are broken by God, however, we will receive help whenever others' spirits move. Even though the move may be very small, what matters is not whether the move is big or small but whether or not we have touched the spirit. As soon as we touch the spirit, we are revived and edified. Brothers and sisters, may we all realize that the breaking of the outer man has a great deal to do with receiving help and edification from God. It is the fundamental qualification for working for God.

Fellowship in the Spirit

Fellowship is not a communication of the mind with the mind or an exchange of opinions; it is the contact of spirit with spirit. When our spirit touches another brother's spirit, that contact of the spirit is fellowship. It is only as we receive mercy from the Lord to break the outer shell and to tear down the outer man that our spirit is released. Only then will we touch the spirits of the brothers and sisters, and only then will we understand the meaning of fellowship with the saints. From that point forward we will understand what the Bible means when it speaks of the fellowship of the spirit. We will realize that fellowship is a matter conducted in the spirit; it is not a fellowship of opinions. When there is fellowship in the spirit, there is prayer in one accord. Many people pray with their mind. It is hard for them to find like-minded companions, because they cannot find another mind to match their own even if they searched the whole world. Actually, fellowship is carried on in the spirit.

Everyone who is regenerated and who has the Holy Spirit within him can fellowship with us. If God removes our barriers and our outer man is dismantled, our spirit will be open to all men. Our spirit will be open to receive the spirits of all the brothers; it will touch and be touched by the spirits of all the brothers. We will touch the Body of Christ. We will be the Body of Christ; our spirits will be the Body of Christ. Psalm 42:7 says, "Deep calls unto deep." The "deep" is indeed calling the "deep." The "deep" within us is calling and yearning to touch the "deep" within others, and our "deep" is calling and yearning to touch the whole church's "deep." This is the fellowship of deep with deep. It is the calling and responding between deep and deep. If our outer man is broken and our inner man released, we will touch the spirit of the church, and we will be more useful to the Lord.

No Imitation

The breaking of the outer man that we refer to can only be done by the Holy Spirit. Man cannot imitate this. No imitation will work. When we say that a man must be meek, we are not telling everyone to try to be meek the next day. If a person tries to do this, he eventually will find that even his manmade meekness needs to be torn down. Manmade meekness is worthless. The only meekness that will work comes from the work of the Holy Spirit. Our experience tells us that no achievement comes through us but through the Holy Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit knows our need. He orders experiences for us in our environment. He does the breaking work.

Our responsibility is to ask for a little light from God so that we will know and acknowledge His hand. We want to be humbled under the mighty hand of God to confess that whatever He does is right. We should not be a senseless mule. Rather, we should commit ourselves to His breaking. We should accept His work. When we hand ourselves over to His mighty hand, we will see that this work should have started five or ten years ago. But nothing has been accomplished during the past five or ten years. Today we should commit ourselves into His hand and say, "Lord, I have been a blind man. I did not know where You were leading me from and where You were leading me to. But now I know that You want to break me, and I offer myself to You." Perhaps the fruitlessness of the past five or ten years will end today, and we can become fruitful. The Lord will

demolish many things in us which we previously were not aware of. Once these things are demolished, we will no longer be proud, self-loving, or self-exalting. This demolition will free and liberate our spirit and make it useful to the Lord. Then we will be able to use our spirit.

Here we have to raise two matters. First, we must know that the breaking of the outer man is a work of the Holy Spirit. There is no need for imitation by the self. But if we know that an activity is of the flesh, should we try to stop it ourselves, or should we wait for the Holy Spirit to break it? Should we wait for a great light to come and not try to put any restraint on it at all?

Our answer to the above question is: We should cease all activities of the flesh. This is different from pretension. If I have the tendency to become proud, I should deny my pride. However, I should not pretend to be humble. If I am about to lose my temper at someone, I should deny my temper. But I should not pretend to be meek. Ceasing doing something is a negative prevention, while pretending to act a certain way is a positive move. Pride is something negative, and we should deal with it. Humility is something positive, and we cannot imitate it. Suppose we are very stubborn with a harsh voice and an unbending attitude. We have to deny this harshness, but we should not pretend to be meek. We have to stop all activities and works of the flesh that we are aware of. But we should not imitate any of the positive virtues. We should offer ourselves to the Lord and say, "Lord, I will not try to imitate anything. I will look to You for Your work." If we do this, we will find God breaking us and building us up.

All outward imitations are not God's work; they are man's work. Therefore, every seeking person should learn the inward lessons, not the outward imitations. He should allow God to effect something in him. It is through this work that he will derive his outward expressions. Anything that a person does in an outward way is not genuine. All manmade structures have to be demolished. When a man puts up something false, he will not only cheat others but also cheat himself. As we give ourselves to imitations and artificiality, we will gradually be led to believe that we are what we pretend to be. Even if others point out that we do not have anything real and that we have to get rid of it, we will still wonder whether their words are true. We should never imitate anything in an outward way. It is better to be a little bit more natural in the way we conduct ourselves

and allow God to build up something in us instead. We should live in a simple and unpretentious way. We should not engage in any outward imitating or copying; rather, we should look to the Lord to daily add the virtues that we need.

The second matter is that some people have some virtues in the natural realm. For example, some are naturally very meek. What is the difference between natural meekness and a meekness that comes as a result of discipline?

We should point out two things in reference to this question. First, everything natural is independent; it does not need to be joined to the spirit. Anything that comes from the discipline of the Holy Spirit is controlled by the spirit. When the spirit moves, it moves. When the spirit does not move, it does not move. Natural meekness sometimes is a hindrance to the spirit, and anything that hinders the spirit is stubborn in nature. In other words, even our natural meekness can become a kind of stubbornness. If a man is naturally meek, his meekness is independent; he is meek in himself. If the Lord wants him to stand up to say a few severe words, his natural meekness will become a hindrance to him. He will say, "Oh, I cannot do this. I have never said such a thing in my life. I must let others say such a word. I cannot say that." In this instance his natural meekness is not subject to the control of the spirit. Anything from the natural realm is motivated by its own will. It is stubborn, and it follows its own wishes. The spirit cannot use it in any way. However, meekness that comes from brokenness is totally different; it is useful to the spirit. It offers no resistance, opposition, or opinion but is fully under the control of the spirit.

Second, a naturally meek person is meek when his will takes the lead. But when he is asked to do what he does not want to do, or when something challenges his reluctance, he is meek no longer. Therefore, all natural virtues do not lead to self-denial. All human, natural virtues can only be utilized by man to build up himself. Not just meekness, but every kind of natural virtue, is used by man to build up himself. For this reason, whenever his very self is threatened, all of his virtues disappear. As soon as we touch the innermost self of a naturally meek person, his meekness disappears. As soon as he comes across something that he is reluctant to do, his humility is gone and his meekness is gone; everything he has is

gone. Virtues that result from discipline are different. These virtues are produced only to the extent that the self is broken. Whenever God destroys the self, these virtues are made manifest. The more the self is wounded, the more the man becomes meek. There is a fundamental difference between natural virtues and the fruit of the Spirit.

Be Strong

The outer man must be broken. We cannot pretend, and we cannot replace it with anything else. We must humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and accept His dealings. As soon as the outer man is broken, the inner man becomes strong. Nevertheless, a few people are not strong in the inner man in spite of the fact that their outer man has been broken already. But the inner man should be strong. If the inner man is not strong when the outer man is broken, we should not pray for strength. Instead, we should say, "Be strong." The Bible commands us to be strong. The wonderful thing is that when the outer man is broken, we can be strong when we want to be strong. We can be strong when we have to be strong and are determined to be strong. Try this. When we say that we will do it, it will be done. As soon as the problem of the outer man is settled, the issue of being strong is also settled. We can and will be strong whenever we want to. From that day forward, no one can stop us. We only need to say that we will do something or that we are determined to do something. A little willing and determination will bring about wonderful things. The Lord says, "Be strong." When we say that we will be strong in the Lord, we will become strong.

The outer man must be broken before the inner man can find freedom. This is the fundamental path that a servant of the Lord must learn to take.

BURDEN AND PRAYER

Scripture Reading: Jer. 33:2-3; 1 Thes. 5:19

ONE

Every child of God should have some God-given burden. No child of God can say that God has never given him or her a burden. However, burdens

can only be received from God when our spirits are open to Him. An open spirit to God is the condition for receiving burdens from God. Having received a burden, we must learn to discharge it faithfully through prayer. When we have discharged the first burden, we will receive a second, and when the second is discharged, we will receive a third. Therefore, the most important thing is to open our spirits to God. We should say to God, “I open myself before You to pray.” Because of our unfaithfulness we often do not receive any burdens; therefore, if we want to be those who bear God’s burdens, we must be very sensitive and not reject any feeling that comes from Him. If we feel we should pray for something, we should do it immediately. At the outset, these feelings may be faint, but they will gain in strength as we go on. If we quench the Spirit and do not release our burden through prayer, we will lose our burden. Then the only way to recover it is to confess our sin and thereafter faithfully respond to every God-given feeling. As soon as we are moved to pray, we should pray. As we faithfully discharge the burdens we have, God will continually give us further burdens to bear. The sole reason for not receiving further burdens is that we have not released the burden we already have, and the unreleased burden has squelched us. If we unload the burden, a second burden will follow. A burden may be very faint at the beginning, but we must be faithful to it. If we are faithful to do this repeatedly before the Lord, God will continue to dispense burdens to us one after another. O brothers and sisters, if we hope to be of any use to God, we must recover our lost burdens.

Burdens are especially related to the work of God. Therefore, we must seek to do His will in everything and wait on Him in His work until He communicates His burden to us. His burden is the manifestation of His will. The burden we receive is the very will of God, and it is also the means by which God manifests His will.

For example, God may give you a clear and strong burden to preach the gospel. If you go along with it and act according to God’s will, the more you preach, the more the burden will be released. The burden may be heavy at the beginning, but the more you preach, the lighter the burden will become. However, if you fail to discharge your burden, it will weigh down heavily on your spirit, and you will feel its weight becoming heavier and heavier as time goes on. Eventually, your feeling will become numb,

and you will no longer feel the burden. The life within will seem to perish, and there will seem to be a barrier between you and God. (This does not mean that you will eternally perish, as in the case of eternal perdition; it merely means that you will feel as if your life has ceased.) It will seem as if you can no longer touch God and that the burden has crushed you. All spiritual work issues from such burdens. If you try to work without a burden, your work will be ineffective. But if you work in accordance with the burden that is upon you, your whole being will be increasingly liberated as you advance. You may start off by having a heavy burden, but as you go on, the burden will be released, and you will be uplifted. The value of your work depends on the burden you bear in connection with it. Without a burden, there is no spiritual value to your work. But with a burden, there is spiritual value. Every time you work according to a burden, you will be refreshed and edified. As your load is discharged, you will be edified in the process. If you work without a burden, you will sense that you are laboring in vain and may even be conscious of reproof as you labor. In relation to all spiritual work, you should wait on God for His burden and then set out to discharge it in a conscientious way.

TWO

But this does not mean that we need to constantly look within to discover whether or not we have a burden. Among God's children, there is nothing more damaging than introspection. Let us bear this in mind—the most damaging thing is to turn our gaze inward. This may be even more serious than sin. Sin is readily recognized as such, but introspection is not detected so easily. An unsuspected disease is always more serious and damaging than an apparent one. If you were asked whether it is wrong to be proud, you would immediately answer that it is obviously wrong. If you were asked whether it is wrong to be envious, you would know quite well that it is wrong. These flaws are obvious. But you can become introspective twenty times in a single day without any sense of wrongdoing. If you quarrel, you soon become aware that you have done something wrong; you quickly identify your sickness. But you can be introspective and be totally unaware of its evil. Looking within is the most hurtful thing in the Christian life. Many Christians are given to introspection, and they are living a life of false spirituality. Before doing any work, they stop and ask, "Do I have a burden for this? Is the feeling I

have a burden or not? Is this a burden? What is a burden?” If a man continually asks these questions, he does not know what a burden is.

Suppose someone asks you to help him carry a table from one room to another. While you are doing it, do you wonder whether this is a burden? Would you say that it is not a burden if it were lighter and that it is a burden if it were heavier? No. As long as something is burdening you, it is a burden. Remember that a burden is what you know, not what you have to discover. If you have a burden, you know it. It is wrong to look inward to see whether or not you have a burden. A burden is known rather than found. It is of great importance to recognize this fact. There is no profit in introspection. The greatest damage a Christian can suffer comes from introspection; it will cheat you. It is not necessary to look for a burden day and night. If you feel that you should preach the gospel to someone and you stop to ask whether or not you have a burden, the opportunity will disappear while you are asking your questions. O brothers and sisters, it is unprofitable to look within. Whether or not you have a burden will be apparent—either you have a burden or you do not. In both cases you will know; there is no need to discover one. If you have to turn inward to find one, you do not have a burden. There is no need to ask anything. If you have it, you will know. If anything weighs upon you, that is your burden.

If you feel heavy within, you have a burden, and if you act in accordance with it, you will be liberated. Then you will be free to receive further burdens from God, and you will be edified in the process. All the work of God is done this way. The ministry of prayer is carried on this way. Prayer and work are inseparable. Without prayer, there is no work. Therefore, you have to learn to pick up burdens as well as release burdens through prayer. The Lord may put a certain matter within you and give you a burden for it. If you pray, it will be released, and you will be refreshed. But if you do not pray, you will be crushed beneath the burden. If you do not pray today, tomorrow, or the next day, you will feel bothered whenever you think about it, and the burden will become heavier and heavier because you have not done what you are supposed to do. After setting it aside once or twice, eventually, you will not feel it anymore. If you repeatedly act contrary to your feeling, at a certain point you will not feel it anymore. You will lose touch with God and no longer be able to

fellowship with Him. A barrier will develop between you and God because you have betrayed the burden and not acted according to God's direction. Every work has to be conducted with a burden, whether the work is directed toward God or toward men. At the same time, once you have a burden, you should act according to the burden. If you do not act according to the burden, you will become deadened because you have violated God's will. A burden is a necessary requirement in God's work. Once you have a burden you have to work accordingly.

THREE

While it is true that the burdens we have are from God and that our burden is God's will, it is also true that our knowledge mainly governs our burdens initially. There are exceptions. For instance, God may call certain things to our remembrance and may ask us to pray for them, or in the middle of the night God may call us to get up and pray for a brother in a remote place. These experiences do occur, but they are not common, and God does not do this kind of thing very often. Sometimes God cannot find anyone nearby, and He has to go to someone far away; however, these are exceptions. Under ordinary circumstances, God directs men according to their knowledge. This is why we say that knowledge governs a burden in its initial stage. However, after one has knowledge, it does not necessarily mean that he will have a burden. We may know about the condition and everything else related to certain brothers and sisters yet not have any feeling for them or be stirred up within. We have the knowledge, but we do not have the burden. Therefore, burden does not come ultimately from knowledge. Yet knowledge does govern our burden in its initial stage. For example, God may give you knowledge of certain matters and the burden to pray and help out the situation. In this way, the burden comes. A burden can be formed at the beginning through knowledge. Most burdens even have knowledge as their starting point. It is rare for God to start a burden without giving any knowledge of it. There are exceptions. Sometimes God may give you a burden to pray for a brother. He may be sick or he may be in difficulty, but you know nothing about it; you have not received any news from him. Yet God puts a clear burden within you to pray for him. Perhaps after a few weeks or a few months, you may receive a letter from him and find that he was indeed sick and in difficulty. There are cases like this, but they are exceptions.

They may happen once in a thousand times. Generally, burdens start from knowledge. Yet this does not mean that knowledge is burden.

FOUR

Since prayer is a Christian ministry and an important ministry, a question arises: When there is a heavy burden to pray, do we express it through words, or should we be quiet and silent? Can we just bear our burdens silently before God?

We believe that if God gives us a prayer burden, then He wants it to be uttered. If we have only a few disjointed words, we should express ourselves with these words. Burdens are released only through utterance. If we remain silent before God, the burden will not leave; rather, it will become heavier and heavier upon you. Brothers and sisters, in the spiritual realm, it is an amazing principle that utterance counts. God takes account not only of what we believe but also of what we say. He is mindful not only of the intents of our heart but also of the words in our mouth. Our Lord said to the Canaanite woman, “Because of this word, go. The demon has gone out of your daughter” (Mark 7:29). The few words the woman uttered caused the Lord to work. We may make a request in our hearts, but there is more effect in an uttered request. God seems to require that we speak what is in our heart. The Lord’s prayer in the garden of Gethsemane was a crucial prayer, but it was a prayer with “strong crying” (Heb. 5:7). We do not insist on loud prayers. Sometimes there is no need to pray in a loud way. But if there is a heavy burden within, there should be a correspondence between the inner burden and the outward expression. If the burden within is not strong, loud prayers are nothing but noise. But if the burden within is heavy, it must be uttered with audible sounds. If we cannot pray aloud in our homes, let us find a place where we can utter our burden as the Lord did. At times He went to a deserted place (Mark 1:35) and at other times He went to the mountain (Luke 6:12). Even if we cannot go to the wilderness or the mountain, we should pray audibly even if it means praying in a low voice. The important thing is that our prayers have to be audible. If our burden is strong enough, we can find a suitable place to pray. God wants our burdens to be articulated. If we have not articulated our burden, the burden will remain. Some say that they pray silently and that it matters little whether or not the burden is released. This is not true. If a man has not finished

the work he has in his hands, he cannot go on to more work. In the same way, if our burden is not released, God cannot give us another burden. We have to discharge our burden with our words so that God can give us a fresh burden.

But very often our difficulty is that even when we are conscious of a burden to pray, we do not know how to pray when we kneel down. We know that something is weighing within us, but we do not know how to pray. There is a burden in our spirit, but we do not know what to pray. We need to realize that our burden is a matter of the spirit, whereas our comprehension of the burden is a matter of the mind. When our spirit touches our mind, we will understand the nature of the burden in our spirit. When the spirit and the mind touch, both will become clear. Some people feel that they have a burden but do not know what it is. This is because their spirit has not yet touched their mind. Therefore, when their spirit has a burden, their mind does not comprehend the burden. How can contact between the spirit and the mind be established? It is quite simple. If you want to find anything, how should you go about it? If it is to the west and you go east, how would you find it? You would have to circle the globe before you found it. The object may be only a mile away, but you would have walked around the globe before you found it. You should take the point where you are as the center and look around in a circle, moving out steadily from the center to the circumference, expanding the circle as you move. In this way, you can cover all four directions. This is the best way to look for things. When your spirit has lost touch with your mind, you should do the same thing. When you kneel down to pray, do not hold on tenaciously to one thing. That would be like walking in one direction, and you will not find what you are looking for easily. Pray for many things and from many directions. After praying a few sentences for one thing, you may feel that it is not the right thing to pray about. You should drop it and change to another subject. You may have to change your subject two, three, or four times. Or you may become clear after you come to the second subject. You may also have to mention five or six things before you feel that you have touched something that releases your burden; once you pray for this, your mind and your spirit become linked together. You should then pray specifically for that matter in order to release your burden. Once you pray this way, you will feel released, and when you have released your first burden, you

will be ready to receive a second burden from God.

FIVE

Many Christians cannot be used by God in the prayer ministry because they are over-burdened. They have never released any of their burdens. God gives them a burden to pray, and they may know what it is; their mind and their spirit may be connected, yet they do not pray. Instead, they allow the burden to become heavier and heavier until they are so crushed that they cannot bear it any longer; the feeling for the burden will be gone, and they can no longer pray. Oh, brothers and sisters, the work of God will be seriously hampered if we do not have a free spirit to serve as instruments for His use. If we asked someone to help us with a certain job but found that his hands were full, it would be useless to seek his aid. In the same way, if we are weighed down by many burdens, how can God commit anything further to us? This is why we must release our burdens. The release of the burden will set us free, and God will be free to give us additional burdens. Without this, we will not be able to fulfill a ministry of prayer before the Lord. The ministry of prayer requires a liberated spirit. If we have a burden in our spirit and do not pray for it, we cannot go on to a second thing. If we have a burden but are not faithful to pray and take up the ministry of prayer before the Lord, we will feel heavy the first day, heavier the second day, and still heavier the third day. After a few more days, the burden will gradually go away, and the strength to pray will be gone as well. If we have a burden and do not pray, eventually it will cost us our prayer ministry. We must, therefore, devote time to fulfill our ministry of prayer. The best way to pray is to pray with two or more people; this will save us from being individualistic. Many people have not learned to pray together with others. In praying with others, we must not only pray with our mouths but listen with our ears. If we learn to pray in this way, the “spiral” prayer that we mentioned earlier, praying from the center to the circumference, will come into effect. Through prayer, we can release the burden that God has given us. Prayer frees our spirit and liberates our being. This will allow God to commit fresh burdens to us continually. Today God needs the cooperation of His church on the earth, and we can cooperate with Him through prayer. May there be a way for the working out of His will!

THE CHARACTER OF THE LORD’S WORKER

Preface

This book contains ten messages by Watchman Nee on the subject of the character of the Lord's worker. The messages have been previously translated into English and published as The Normal Christian Worker. These messages, however, have been newly translated and entitled The Character of the Lord's Worker, conforming to the original Chinese title. The book covers ten character traits that are crucial to the usefulness of a Christian worker in the Master's hand. The messages were given by Watchman Nee in 1948 during a training for the edification of his co-workers. The intimate and uninhibited nature of the messages derives from the willingness of the trainees to give Watchman Nee the freedom to speak and to rebuke. As such, the subjects touch the very core of a worker's being.

CHAPTER ONE

A Good Listener

The personal life of a worker of the Lord is intimately related to his work. Therefore, we have to consider matters of character, habit, and conduct when considering the qualifications necessary to be in God's employment. This relates to the constitution of character and the formation of habits. A man must have not only a certain amount of spiritual experience, but a certain constitution in his disposition; the Lord must constitute a certain kind of disposition within him. Many things need to be built up, cultivated, and developed into habits within a worker. These things relate more to our outward man than to our inner man. As these things mold the outward man into a proper shape, we will become suitable for the Lord's use. It takes grace and mercy from God for this to occur; character is not built up in a day. But if the Lord gives a person enough light and if He speaks to him often enough, his natural and undesirable elements will be burned away; they will not be allowed to remain or grow. In His mercy, God will reconstruct a new character in him through resurrection. Let us now speak of a few things that all seasoned servants of the Lord have realized and apprehended. The lack of any of these will result in a breakdown in service.

ONE

The first thing we want to speak of is an ability to listen to others. A worker of the Lord must build up the habit in his daily life of listening to others. I do not mean that he should listen to others in the sense of obeying them. I mean that he should listen to others in the sense of being able to hear what they are saying and to understand what he has heard. There is a great need for this trait to be built up in a worker's personal life. No worker of the Lord can do a good job if he can only speak to others but cannot listen to them. A worker is of little use to God if he can only speak to others, if he can only blast incessantly at others like a firecracker. No worker of the Lord can be an incessant talker. If he can only speak to others, but cannot listen to them and realize their problems through conversation, his usefulness is very limited. If a Christian turns to a servant of the Lord for help, the worker should be able to discern three aspects of his brother's words while he is listening: the words that are being uttered, the words that are being held back, and the words that are lying in the depth of the brother's spirit.

First, you must fully understand what the person is actually saying. This means that you need to be a quiet person before the Lord. Your mind must be clear and your spirit must be calm. Your inner being should be like a blank piece of paper before the Lord. You should not have any prejudice, preconception, or inclination. You should not make any determination in your mind or pass any judgment on anything. You should remain perfectly calm before the Lord. When the other person opens his mouth and relates a story, you should learn to listen. As you listen quietly, you will know what he or she is talking about.

Listening is not an easy matter. When a brother is trying to explain his problem, how much do you understand of what he is saying? Sometimes when many people listen to the same person at the same time, there are as many impressions of that person's problem as there are listeners. You may have one impression, and another may have another impression. Many impressions are formed. It would be disastrous if there were the same diversity of impressions in relation to matters of the truth. Listening to others is a very basic training, and one of the basic qualifications for a worker is to be able to understand what others are saying. Others come to you with a burden on their shoulders; they try to unload their problems to you and expect some help from you. What would happen if you misunderstood their words or if you missed their problem altogether and gave them an answer based on what was in your mind the previous two days? Some have their mind on a certain theme for a couple of days. When a sick brother comes to them, they speak on the matter that they have been meditating on because their mind is full of thoughts on that subject. When a healthy brother comes to them, they bring forth the same thoughts. When another brother in distress or in joy comes along, they tell him the same thing. They cannot sit down quietly to listen to what others have to say. If a worker of the Lord cannot listen to what others have to say, how can he expect to render help to others? When others are speaking, we have to listen carefully. We have to understand what they are talking about. Our work is more difficult than that of a doctor diagnosing his patient. At least he has a laboratory where he can make tests to aid him in his diagnosis of various cases, whereas we have to make our diagnosis without any such aid. Suppose a brother comes and talks to us for half an hour, relating all of his problems to us. We may have no idea how he has been living, what his family background is, or

what his condition before the Lord is. Ten minutes, twenty minutes, or half an hour is a long time. If we cannot listen to what he is saying, how can we expect to render him the proper help? Every worker of the Lord has to build up a proper habit; we must have the capacity and the ability to sit down to listen and understand what others are saying. This is very important, and we have to pay much attention to this exercise. We have to learn to understand what others are saying as soon as they open their mouth. We have to be very clear about their condition, and we have to have a clear diagnosis of their case. We must have clear discernment and assurance. Only then will we know whether we are qualified to handle the need. Sometimes we know that the condition of our brother is beyond our ability to help, and we should tell him honestly that we are not the right one to help him. But we should know where he stands and where we stand as soon as he speaks. This is the first thing we have to do; we have to hear and understand what others are saying.

Second, we have to hear and understand what others are not saying. We have to discern before the Lord what others have refrained from saying. We have to know what a person has not said, that is, the things he should tell us but which have been kept back. Naturally, it is more difficult to get a clear perception of unspoken words than of spoken ones. After the first kind of words are spoken, we still have to listen to the second kind, the kind that are not spoken. When people come to talk with a worker about their affairs, it is not unusual for them to tell half of a story and to refrain from divulging the other half. This tests the worker's competence. An incompetent worker will not be able to discern what is not spoken. He may even project thoughts which were never in the heart of the speaker. This problem arises in his own mind, not in the mind of the speaker. Some preexisting concepts may be in his mind, and he may project these concepts into others, even though they have never spoken of such a thing, either from their heart or from their mouth. We have to exercise clear discernment before the Lord to know what a person has said and not said. Often a man utters things that are off the subject while omitting things that are crucial to the subject. How is it possible to know whether crucial words are being left out? We will only know if we have passed through sufficient dealings with the Lord. When a brother comes and says something to us, we must not only be clear about what he is saying, but also about what he is not saying. We must know what is

roughly being referred to when he keeps something back in his words. Then we will have confidence before God, and we will know how to help, exhort, or rebuke the brother. If we are not sure of anything within ourselves and cannot hear what others are saying, always waiting instead for a chance to speak, we will only be burdened to say what we have to say. We will not know what others are talking about and have no way to render proper help to them. It is a fact that poor listeners are often less useful workers. This is a serious problem among many people; they simply cannot listen to others. They cannot discern what others have kept within themselves because they are too insensitive. It is impossible to expect such ones to "give...food at the proper time" (Matt. 24:45).

Third, we must be able to detect what others are saying in their spirit. Beyond hearing the words a person may utter and the words he may deliberately refrain from uttering, we have to hear what we have referred to as the words that his spirit is speaking. When a person opens his mouth and speaks, his spirit also speaks. The fact that he is willing to talk gives us an opportunity to touch his spirit. If his lips are sealed, his spirit is bound, and it is difficult to know what his spirit is speaking. But his spirit will find some measure of release in the opening of his mouth, however much he may try to contain himself. Our ability to discern what his spirit is saying depends on the measure of our exercise in the Lord. If we are exercised, we will be able to discern the words he has uttered, the words he has refrained from uttering, and even the words in his spirit. As he speaks, we will know which words are from his spirit. We will be able to discern the intellectual difficulty as well as the spiritual difficulty he is facing. We also will have the assurance to offer a specific remedy for his case. If we are not that exercised, we may listen to a brother's problems for half an hour without realizing his real ailment and the remedy for it.

This is indeed a desperate need of those who are engaged in the Lord's work. It is unfortunate that very few Christians are good listeners. Some can spend a full hour talking to a believer. However, at the end the believer may still be quite hazy about what has been said. Our hearing ability is too poor. If we cannot hear what people are saying, how can we hear what God is saying? When a man sits in front of us, his words should be clear to us. But if we cannot understand what is being said, I seriously question our ability to understand God's speaking within us. If

we cannot understand the audible words from man, how can we understand the words that God speaks to us in our spirit?

If we are unable to diagnose the ailment, condition, or problem of a brother who is in trouble, what word can we give to him? Brothers and sisters, let us not consider this as a trifling matter. If we do not deal with this matter and learn to listen, we will be unable to help a brother in need even if we become great Bible readers, great Bible teachers, or powerful workers. We must not only be preachers who talk; we also should be those who can solve others' problems. But how can this ever happen if we cannot hear what others are saying? We have to realize the seriousness of this matter. Brothers and sisters, how much time have you spent learning to listen to others? Have you spent enough time to learn this lesson? We have to spend time to learn to listen to others, to hear what they have said, what they have not said, and what is in their spirit. The words out of a man's mouth may not match his spirit. Many people say something with their mouth, but their spirit testifies to something else. Eventually, the mouth cannot cover up the spirit. Sooner or later the spirit will be revealed, and when it is revealed, you will know a person's real condition. Without such discernment, it will be difficult to render proper help to others. A joke is told of an elderly doctor whose entire stock of medicine consisted of two things: castor oil and quinine. No matter what his patients complained of, he invariably prescribed one medicine or the other. He applied these two medicines to every kind of ailment. Many brothers treat their "patients" the same way. They only have one or two pet prescriptions, and however varied the ailment of those who seek them out, they talk according to these one or two special lines. Such workers cannot be of any real help to others. Everyone who bears God's trust and commission possesses one common ability—he knows what others are saying as soon as they open their mouth. Without such an ability, a person cannot deal with others' illnesses.

TWO

How can we acquire the ability to listen and understand?

First, we must not be subjective. Please remember that subjectivity is one of the main reasons that people are poor listeners. Everyone who is subjective finds it difficult to understand what others are saying. If we

have our own subjective concepts and ideas about people, it will be difficult for us to hear what others are saying because our mind is already full. We can be so set in our opinions that others' opinions cannot penetrate our mind. This is the situation with many people who are subjective. They are firmly persuaded of their own ideas, opinions, and views. Nothing can shake their ideas, opinions, and views. They have decided to give their "castor oil" to everyone, no matter how varied the needs may be. Their only panacea is their "castor oil." How can they hear what others are saying? When weak saints come to them, they have no heart to find out their problem. Instead, they are set in their mind as to what they want to say, and they have nothing to say other than their own premeditated admonitions. They are very confident of themselves, yet they are completely ignorant of others' problems. How can these ones work for the Lord? We must ask the Lord to save us from this kind of subjectivity. We should pray to the Lord, "Lord, may I not be prejudiced when I talk with others. May I not force my diagnosis upon others. I should not be the one to determine their illness. Lord, You have to show me their illness." We have to learn to give up our subjectivity, to listen carefully, to hear what others are saying, and to find out their problem.

Second, our mind must not wander. Many believers have never learned the proper lessons in their mind. Their thoughts flow on uninterruptedly both day and night. Their thoughts are never in focus. They just let their thoughts roam hither and thither. They accumulate so many things in their mind that there is no room for anything more when others try to convey their thoughts to them. Many people are too active in their mind. They have a capacity only for their own thoughts and no capacity to take up other people's thoughts. As a result, they can never understand how others think. They cannot take up others' thoughts because they have never learned to be quiet in their own mind. In order for us to hear what others are saying, our mind first must be disciplined. If our mind is always turning like a flywheel, nothing will lodge in it. In learning to listen to others, a worker of the Lord has to steady his own mind. Not only must he reject all subjectivity; he must learn to be calm in his mind. We must learn to think as others are thinking and to understand what others are saying. We must also learn to comprehend the hidden meaning behind their words. If we are unable to do this, we will not be of much use to the Lord.

Third, we must learn to enter into the feelings of others. A fundamental qualification for understanding others' words is to be able to empathize with their feelings. We cannot understand what others are saying merely by understanding their words; we have to be able to feel what they feel. If someone comes to us in deep distress and trouble and we maintain a breezy manner, being untouched by his grief, we will never be able to help him, no matter how long we listen to his words. If our feeling cannot match his, we will not understand what he is facing. Those who have never been dealt with in their emotions can never feel what others feel. A person with hardened feelings cannot enter into the feelings of others, and he cannot understand what others say. If we have not been dealt with by God, we will not be able to sing "hallelujah" when others express their joy, and we will not be able to share their grief when they express their sorrow. We will be unable to identify with their feelings, and their feelings will never touch us. This is why we have to understand their words.

How can we feel what others feel? In order to do this, we must be very objective in regard to our own feelings. We may feel something, but we must be objective in regard to our own feelings before we can have the capacity to feel what he feels. But if we are too busy with our own feelings, we will not be sensitive enough to consider his feelings. We must remember that we are the servants of the saints for Christ's sake. Not only should we give our time and strength to them; we should make our affections available to them as well. This is a crucial matter. Not only should we help them solve their problems; we should accommodate their feelings with our feelings as well. Our feelings should be available to share in others' feelings. This is what the Scripture means when it says that the Lord Jesus, who was tempted in all respects like us, is touched with the feeling of our weaknesses (Heb. 4:15).

Brothers and sisters, our emotions have to be dealt with by the Lord so that they can become available. If our emotions are overactive and we are preoccupied with our own feelings, we will never be able to enter into others' feelings. Hence, we must make not only our time available to others but our emotions as well. This means that our love, joy, and sorrow should not be occupied, but rather available, when others are speaking to us. If our whole being is occupied by a certain feeling, there

will not be any space within us for others' feelings; we will not have the capacity to meet others' needs. If we do not have any joy or sorrow of our own, but are fully available before the Lord, we will be able to enter into others' feelings. If we are constantly busy with our own feelings, we will be too preoccupied to feel for others when they come to us.

God has a very high standard for those who serve Him. A servant of the Lord has no time to feel happy or sorry for himself. If we indulge in our own laughter and tears and in our own likes and dislikes, we will have no room within for the needs of others. We must remember that a servant of the Lord must be empty within. If we cling to our own pleasures and griefs, begrudging the letting go of this and that, we will be too full to take care of others. We will be like a room that is full of furniture; it has no space to accommodate anything further. Many brothers and sisters cannot work for the Lord because they have expended all their love on themselves and have none to spare for others. We need to realize that there is a limit to our soul-strength just as there is a limit to our physical strength. Our emotional energy is not boundless. If we exhaust our soul in one direction, we will have nothing to give in another direction. For this reason, anyone who has an inordinate affection for another person cannot be the Lord's servant. The Lord Himself said, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters,...he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26). This is because when we love these things, our love is exhausted on them. We have to love the Lord our God with our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole mind, and our whole strength (Mark 12:30). This means that we have to give all our love to God. It is a good thing for us to discover that we are limited in many ways. We must realize that our capacity is limited. Our vessel is limited. If we fill it with other things, we will not have any space for more. We are limited by our capacity. In order to enter into others' feelings, we have to make our own feelings available. Our mind and emotions have to be available before we can identify with others' feelings. If our hands are filled with assignments, we cannot take up any requests from others. If our hearts are weighted down by burdens of our own, others cannot share their burdens with us. Hence, whoever makes himself most available is capable of embracing the most. Those who love themselves or their families too much have little love for the brothers. A man's capacity for love is only so big; he has to drop all other loves

before he can love the brothers and understand the meaning of brotherly love. Then he will be able to work for the Lord.

The fundamental requirement of everyone who is engaged in the Lord's work is to know the cross. A man who does not know the cross is useless in the Lord's work. If you do not know the cross, you will always be subjective. Your thoughts will wander unceasingly, and you will live constantly in your own feelings. You have to come back to the knowledge of the cross. There is no cheap and easy way. You must receive fundamental dealings from the Lord. Without these dealings, you will be spiritually worthless. May the Lord be merciful to us and deal with us so that we will not remain complacent in our subjectivity. We do not want to have unchecked thoughts, nor do we want to be insensitive in our feelings. A worker has to open up himself to embrace others' problems. If we do this, we will know what others are saying as soon as they come to us. We will know the words that they have not said, as well as the words that are in their spirit.

THREE

The first thing a worker of the Lord has to learn is to listen to others. When a brother or a sister is speaking or when an unbeliever is speaking, we have to learn to listen. We have to learn to think the way he thinks, and feel the way he feels. We have to know what he has not said and the condition of his spirit. If we practice this, our listening ability will greatly improve. Gradually, we will understand what others are saying. In the end, others will need to only open their mouth, and we will know immediately what they are saying. We must remember that our inner being must be like a spotless piece of blank paper before others can write on it. We must be in perfect stillness, void of our own thoughts, our own subjective opinions, and our own feelings, before we can listen quietly to others and understand what they are saying. The most important thing related to a worker is not his measure of knowledge but the person of the worker himself. Our person is our very instrument. God is using us to measure others. If our person is wrong, God cannot use us. We are not measuring others with something physical. It would be so much easier if we had something physical with which we could measure others. A thermometer can measure a person's temperature. But in the Lord's work, the only "thermometer" is our person. We have to find out

the condition of others ourselves. It matters a great deal, therefore, as to the kind of person we are. If our person is wrong, nothing will work. We are the vessels of God. If a vessel does not function properly, God cannot use it to deal with others. Listening is a very crucial matter. If we can listen to others, know their condition, and get into their thoughts and feelings, we will have a way to help them.

Suppose a man comes to you and pours out his grievances. If you have never been dealt with by the Lord, you will surely want to pass on many teachings to him. Typically, this is our habit. When others come to us, we open our mouth immediately and give them some teaching, before even trying to realize their sickness or understand their ailment. Many people are too impatient to let others finish speaking. They cannot wait for others to finish speaking before they come up with their solutions. Others only have to say two or three words before they will offer their teachings and corrections. As a result, others do not receive any genuine help.

This does not mean that we should let people talk for three to five hours while we sit in silence and listen. Some people expect others to listen to them for three to five hours. They want us to listen to them. We should stop these ones from their incessant talking. However, generally speaking, we should give others enough time to speak, and we should give ourselves enough time to listen. If one has many years of experience in this matter and is clear within, if he can discern the condition of others as soon as they speak, and if he knows what should be done, he can stop this incessant speaking. Otherwise, he should spend an adequate amount of time to listen to them. I am not saying that he has to spend three to five hours to listen to others, but I am saying that he should allow ample time to understand their condition. We have to realize the complexity of our work; we are dealing with living human beings, and we are tackling living problems. We are here to deal with a person's problem before the Lord. If we are not able to identify others' problems, we will not be able to say much. It is impossible to make judgments before fully understanding what is involved in others' problems. We are dealing with living human beings, so we are dealing with living problems. As we are dealing with a person's problem before God, we should be still and quiet to receive something from the Lord. Unless we can do this, we will encounter problems in rendering help to

him. Many people cannot render help to others because they do not know how to listen to them in the first place. We need to ask for grace from the Lord so that we can sit down and listen to others when they speak. We need to listen quietly, intelligently, and attentively until we fully understand. Once we understand what they are saying, the job is done. We must learn to listen, and we must listen until we understand. It is not an easy thing to speak, and it is no less difficult to listen. Many preachers are accustomed to speaking, but they find it difficult to sit down and listen. However, we must learn this lesson well.

We need to be enlightened within. We need to spend considerable time learning to listen and to touch others' feelings. If we do not learn this lesson well, we will encounter problems in our service. We have to try our best to listen. When a person is speaking, can we hear what he is saying? Do we understand his words? In order to understand others' words, it is not enough for us to be undisturbed outwardly. The Lord must deal with us in a fundamental way. Our subjectivity, thoughts, and feelings must be dealt with. We can skip many things, but we can never skip the basic dealings, without which no one can serve the Lord in a proper way. Without experiencing the basic dealings, we cannot even read the Bible properly. There are certain qualifications to reading the Bible. One cannot just exercise his mind. It takes more than a smart mind to read the Bible. Basic dealings are indispensable. Without such dealings, a man can outwardly listen to every word that others are saying, but he will be in total darkness within; he will not understand anything. A brother may talk to him for a whole hour, yet he will not know what is being talked about. How can he be expected to render any help? We are God's vessels. We should know when a man is hot or cold, well or sick. We are the measuring stick. But when we are off, we give the wrong diagnosis.

There is a prevalent misconception among Christian workers that the most essential thing is to be able to speak. Far from it! The Lord's work has to do with our spirit, not just with our words. We have to identify the spiritual problems plaguing the brothers and sisters, and we have to know how to deal with them. If we are not clear within, we will not understand their inward condition. How can we render them any help at all? How do we know if a sinner is saved when we preach the gospel to

him? Do we judge only by the words of his mouth? Are his words the only means of discerning his condition? No, we know his condition through our inner registration. How do we know if a person is of the Lord? Do we judge him merely by a few words, such as, "I believe in Jesus; I am saved"? Do we baptize a person simply because he has memorized a formula? No, we make judgments based on our inner registration. We are the measuring stick. We test an unbeliever according to this measuring stick, and we also test a child of God according to this measuring stick. How do we know whether or not the spiritual condition of a child of God is healthy? If we are walking in the light of the Lord, we will know. Brothers and sisters, we must be dealt with by the Lord to the point that we become His measuring stick. If we are off within, we will easily make a wrong judgment, and once we make a wrong judgment, we will spoil His work. This is the reason that we must walk in the light inwardly; we must have genuine light within us. What a tragedy it is that many brothers and sisters are not only dark within, but they are even incapable of sitting down and listening to others. Brothers and sisters, we have to learn to be calm. We have to learn to hear what others are actually saying. We have to open ourselves and allow the affairs of others to enter into our hearts. We must have a keen inner registration within ourselves before we can discern the real problems of others. Only then can we render them the proper help.

CHAPTER TWO

A Lover Of Men

ONE

Every worker of the Lord must have not only a love for the brothers but also a love for all men. Solomon once said, "Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker" (Prov. 17:5). God is the Creator of all men; therefore, every man is worthy of our love. A servant or worker of the Lord is not fit to serve Him if he is lacking in brotherly love or if he only has brotherly love but is lacking in love for all men. He must have a love for all men, a genuine affection for men, before he can serve God. All those who find men to be wearisome, troublesome, or contemptible are

unqualified to be God's servants. We must see that in God's eyes man was created by Him. Man certainly has fallen, but he has become the object of the Lord's redemption. Although by nature man is stubborn, the Holy Spirit has chosen to touch man. Even the Lord Jesus became a man when He came to earth—a man like other men, gradually growing from infancy to full maturity. God's intention is to set up a "standard" man, a representative man, in whom all the plans of God are realized. After the Lord Jesus' ascension, the church was brought into being, which is the "one new man." The whole plan of redemption involves the uplifting and glorification of man. When we really come to understand the Word of God, we will realize that the term children of God is not so weighty as the term man, and we also will realize that God's plan, selection, and predestination have a glorified man as their objective. When we see the place that man occupies in the purpose of God, when we see man as the focus of all His plans, and when we see how the Lord humbled Himself to become a man, we will learn to appreciate all men. When our Lord was on earth, He said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The Lord's word is clear. The Son of Man came to serve many. Many does not refer to the church or to God's children, but to all men. Furthermore, He did not say that the Son of God came to serve, but the Son of Man. Here we see the Lord's attitude toward man.

A serious problem with many who are engaged in God's work is their total lack of love and respect for man, and their total failure to realize the value of man in God's sight. Today we feel as if we have attained great heights when we begin to love God's children. Formerly we did not love anyone. Now that we can love the brothers a little, we feel as if we have done a tremendous thing. But, brothers and sisters, this is not enough. We need to be enlarged by God; we need to see that all men are precious to God. Whether or not we will build up a good spiritual work depends on how much we love man and how much interest we have in man. What I want to know is not whether we are interested in a few particularly intelligent men, a few who in one way or another are outstanding, but whether we are interested in man in general. This is a matter of great importance. The Son of Man's coming firstly implies that the Lord was intensely interested in man; He was so interested in man that He became a man. The Lord was very interested in man, but what is the extent of our

interest? We may not think much of this or that individual. But how does our Lord look on those people? The Lord said that the Son of Man came. This means that He came into the midst of men as the Son of Man. It also means that He is interested in man, that He has a feeling for man, and that He has a high regard for man. He so values man that He took the place of a man in order to serve men. It is amazing that many of God's children have little concern for men. We cannot help but be somewhat indignant about this apathy. Brothers and sisters, do we know the meaning of the phrase the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve? We should ponder these words before the Lord. They tell us that Christ cared for man. Brothers and sisters, it is absolutely wrong for anyone to say, "I am among men, yet I have no interest in them whatsoever."

An interest in man is a basic requirement in the life of every worker. This does not mean that one picks out certain individuals and develops an interest only in them. It does not mean that one can be exclusively interested in and affectionate towards certain men. It means an interest in all men. We must pay attention to the Lord Jesus, whose outstanding characteristic is a feeling and a love for all men. He was so interested in man that He could say, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve." If we go to a certain place and insist on not being served by the men there but instead serve them, we are not far from the attitude we are talking about. This would put us on the right track with the right stand. Brothers and sisters, God's servants cannot reserve their love just for their brothers. A worker of the Lord is a total failure if he selfishly reserves his love for his brothers. Brotherly love is not the first thing on our list. It is something in addition to our love for all men. We have to have a love for all men. John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world." What does the world refer to? It refers to everyone in this world, including unsaved ones and those who have no knowledge of God. God loves the world; He loves everyone in this world. This is the meaning of God so loved the world. If God loves everyone yet you do not, or if you extend your love only after a person has become a brother, your heart is different than the Lord's, and you are not qualified to serve God. Your heart must be broadened to the extent that you love everyone and are interested in every man. As long as someone is a man, you should be interested in him. This is the only way to serve God.

TWO

The Lord Jesus said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45). In other words, the Lord never asked for anything from men. We should be interested in men, and we should find men lovable. Moreover, we should not take advantage of men or be served by men. We should not embarrass them or hurt them. We should not even accept service from them. Brothers and sisters, years of instruction have accustomed us to address all men as our "fellow men"; however, this is not a matter of words but a matter of feeling. For example, we have a certain feeling for our brothers. We feel that certain ones are our brothers and that we are "fellow brothers" to them. But may I ask if we have the feeling with all men that we are their "fellow men"? Do we have a feeling that they are our fellows? If we do not have such a feeling, we cannot serve God. All servants of the Lord should have a broad heart. Their heart should be so broad that they can include and embrace all men. They should be able to embrace the whole human race into their bosom. The biggest problem among many workers is that they lack this love for men. Their love for the brothers is already short. Their love for all men is almost nonexistent. Perhaps they can pick out one from among a hundred or even from ten thousand that they can love! If this is our condition, we do not have a love for all men. We must remember that God is our Creator and we are all fellow creatures; we are fellow human beings. We must enlarge our heart's capacity to love every person created by God, every fellow human being. We should not allow them to suffer, we should not take advantage of them, and we should not seek for any service from them. The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.

Brothers and sisters, we should not take advantage of others in any way. A Christian should realize that it is shameful for him to take advantage of his fellow men while on earth. It is wrong to take advantage of the brothers, but it is equally wrong to take advantage of anyone at all. As far as receiving from others is concerned, our Lord's basic attitude is that He would never allow Himself to be served by men. He did not have the slightest intention of receiving anything from anyone. We must remember that we should never selfishly receive the services and ministration of others at the expense of their sacrifice and loss.

God's children should not take advantage of others, not only because the Lord has forbidden it, but because we are fellow human beings. We should not seek for profit from our fellow men. We must realize that all men are lovable in the eyes of God. If we have no interest in man, our work will be of very limited value in the sight of God, no matter how great it may be outwardly. God wants to see His servants increased in their capacity and interested in all man. This is the only way to become a gracious person; this is the only way to serve the Lord.

THREE

Mark 10:45 says, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many." Luke 19:10 says, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost." John 10:10 says, "I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly." The Lord Jesus came to the earth for man. According to Mark 10, He came to serve men even to the point of giving His life as a ransom. The purpose for His coming was to serve men. In His service to men, there was the need for Him to give His life as a ransom, and that is what He did. His becoming a ransom was the highest and consummate act of His service to men. The Lord did not say that the Son of Man came only to be a ransom. He said that the Son of Man came "to serve." The goal was service. He was interested in man, and He considered man precious and worthy of love and service. He served men to such an extent that He met their need by becoming their Savior. This is why He gave His life as a ransom. If we preach the gospel of the Lord's sacrifice of His life as a ransom without having the Lord's heart of service, we are not qualified to be called His workers. Man is lovable. Because he is lovable, the Lord did not say that it was "the Son of God" who came to serve, but "the Son of Man" who came. The Lord Jesus first loved and served men, and then He gave His life for them. Love comes first; the sacrifice of life comes afterwards. When we work among men, we cannot preach the Lord's sacrifice without first having the proper love. We should not think that we can first preach His sacrifice and then love the listener after he has received the Lord. If we have no interest in man and do not find him precious, and if we have no awareness that we are all fellow creatures of God, we cannot preach about sacrifice. If we have never been touched by the expression God created man or have very little

feeling for it, we are unfit to preach Christ's sacrifice. Brothers and sisters, we must first love all men before we can lead them to the Lord. We cannot hold back our love until they receive the Lord or until they become our brothers. Unfortunately, this is a problem with many people; they come short in this matter. Many people hold back their love for a person until he or she has become a brother or a sister. Brothers and sisters, this is not the way our Lord works. He first loved, and then He gave His life. We who preach His redemption also should love first and then preach redemption. Our Lord first served and showed mercy to others before giving His life as a ransom. In the same way, we should be interested in men, counting them worthy of our love and grace, before we present the Lord's redemption to them.

If God opens our heart to see that we are fellow men among all men, our attitude towards them will drastically change. We will find man lovable and precious. Brothers and sisters, it needs to dawn on us that man is precious in God's eyes because He created man in His likeness. Even today, man is still in the likeness of his Creator. Unless man becomes the object of our affection we cannot possibly become a servant of men. We must find man lovable and valuable in the sight of God. Many brothers and sisters have an altogether wrong attitude, temperament, and sentiment toward their fellow men. They consider them a burden, trouble, nuisance, or an annoyance. This is totally wrong. We must learn to see man as God's creation with God's image. Although man has become fallen, his future remains bright. If we regarded man as lovable, we would not feel that man is a burden, trouble, nuisance, or an annoyance to us. The Lord went to the cross for man. Can our love be anything less than this? If a man is touched by the Lord in a genuine way, and if he really sees the Lord's goal in coming to the earth, he will spontaneously conclude that man is lovable. It is impossible for anyone who has a genuine knowledge of the Lord to despise man.

Man is worthy of our love. All sins can be forgiven; we can sympathize with all weaknesses and activities of the flesh. We are sinners, and we know what sinners are like. Yet, at the same time, we know that man is precious. Brothers and sisters, the Lord did not die for men because there was a great number of them. He said that the Good Shepherd forsook all to seek one lost sheep. He did not come to seek to save the

lost sheep because there were ninety-nine of them. The Good Shepherd came for one lost sheep. In other words, even if only one person in the whole world were lost, the Lord would still have come to the earth. Of course, historically, all men needed to be saved. But as far as the love in His heart is concerned, He was ready to come for one man, for one lost sheep. The Holy Spirit did not begin searching because ten coins were lost; He searched because one coin was lost. The Father did not wait for His prodigal because all of His sons had become prodigal; He opened His arms to one prodigal who returned. In the parables in Luke 15, we see that in His work of redemption, the Lord was willing to spend Himself freely to meet the need of even one soul. He did not wait for the needs of many to arise before He would work. This shows us the intense love that the Lord has for man.

Brothers and sisters, if we want to serve the Lord in a proper way, we have to cultivate an interest in man. If we cannot cultivate this interest, we will not be able to do much. Even if we do something, our work will be very limited. When we are limited as a person, we will not have the capacity to embrace many people. We will not fathom the full significance of redemption until we become interested in man and our hearts are enlarged to see his worth in God's eyes and in His plan. Without this, it is vain for puny creatures such as we to try to have a share in the great work of God. How can anyone be used to save souls if they do not love souls? How can anyone try to save man without loving man? If this fundamental lack of love for men is removed, many other difficulties in relation to men will vanish. We think that some people are too ignorant and others are too hard, but these problems should not stop us from loving them. If there is love, there will not be any disdain for man, and God will bring us to the point that we take our place as men among our fellow men.

When some Christian workers in urban areas go out into the country to work among farmers, they have an inordinate sense of superiority toward them. This is a despicable attitude. Our Lord did not say that the Son of God would not be served by men. He said that the Son of Man would not be served by men. If we go anywhere to preach the gospel, we have to go as a son of man. Many times, however, workers consider working among some people as a humbling experience! It is right to humble

oneself, but it is wrong to consciously think that we are humbling ourselves by walking among certain kinds of people. If we feel that we are humbling ourselves when we walk among less educated ones, this is proof that we are not humble enough. Such humility is manmade; it is unnatural. When our Lord came to earth, men only recognized Him as the son of Mary or as the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon. They only knew Him as a son of man. Brothers and sisters, we have to be real men. When we are among our fellow men, we should not give them the flavor that we are above them in any way. This is not how a Christian should behave. When we are among men, we should be one of them. We should not give others the impression that we are condescending ourselves. If we do, we are not qualified to serve anyone, and our way is totally wrong. We can only serve men by being a man ourselves. We should never give others the impression that we are always humbling ourselves. We should not give others the impression that we are different. If others have that kind of impression about us, it proves that we are not God's servants. In order to serve the Lord, we must be genuinely emptied of self. When we talk with those who have less education than we have and we stand aloof from them, we are telling them that we are not one of them.

Unless we can humble ourselves to the lowest level, we cannot serve God. We must be brought to the lowest point; we must never feel that we are better than others. No brother or sister can despise a man of little knowledge. Such a person has a place in God's creation; he has a place in God's redemption and plan just as you and I have. The only difference between us and an unsaved man is that we know the Lord. Brothers and sisters, we are wrong in our attitude in many ways. We must turn away completely from such an attitude. We must see that all men are equal in the sight of God. Our Lord came to earth for all men. Therefore, we should humble ourselves for them as well. We should never categorize men based on the amount of education they possess.

You may say, "The ignorance of men presents no problem to me; my difficulty arises when I come in contact with men who are deceitful, sinful, and wild. What should be my attitude toward them?" You only need to take a retrospective look at your own life. Were you better than they are now before the grace of God reached out? How much better would you

be today but for the grace of God? Who has made you holier than they? When you look at yourself outside the realm of grace, you cannot find any difference between you and them. Except for grace alone, what makes you any different than them? You can only bow before God and say, "I am the same as they are, nothing more than a poor sinner." Only grace can teach you to prostrate yourself in the dust and say, "Lord, You are the One who has saved me." Grace will never cause you to uplift yourself; it will always cause you to see that you are the same as the wicked and the sinners. It is God's grace that sets you apart from them, not you yourself. If what you have is yours through receiving, what is there for you to boast of? If grace is the only thing that makes you different, you have no ground to exalt yourself with such grace. You should give more thanks for grace; you should spend more time thanking the Lord for grace instead of giving glory to yourself. You should realize that you are the same as all other men in the eyes of God. You should love them. Their sins should cause you to recoil, but you should still go out in love for them. With such an enlarged heart, you will bring them to the Lord.

FOUR

In remembering that every servant of God has his own special characteristic and function to God, we should not forget that, no matter how different one's function may be, all true servants of God are alike in this respect: They are interested, intensely interested, in men. If a brother has an enlarged heart and is interested in men, his usefulness in the hand of God will be greatly enhanced. Brothers and sisters, we have to be interested in men. If we are indifferent to and disinterested in men, how can we preach the gospel to them? We are here to deal with men, to gain them, and to save them. If we have no interest in men, how can we accomplish our task? No doctor should shrink away from sick patients, and no teacher should shrink away from students. It is strange indeed for us to be preachers of the gospel and to be afraid of meeting people at the same time! In order to work for the Lord, we must be interested in men. This must not be something out of compulsion. We must have an interest in contacting people, in communicating with them. There should not be the need for anyone to tell us to contact or communicate with men. A worker should feel in his heart that man is lovable and precious. Brothers

and sisters, we have to realize that all men were created by God and are loved by Him. God wants them, and He gave His only begotten Son for them with the expectation that they would receive His life through believing into Him. The only difference we have with unbelievers is that we have believed. This is why we have to help them to believe. We must cultivate a great interest in them. If we do this, we will find a boundless field of service opening up to us, and under the mercy of God we will become servants who are of some account to Him.

Brothers and sisters, in order to serve the Lord in a proper way, we have to take the straight pathway. Please remember that in the eyes of God, everyone has a spirit. In this respect everyone is equal. Everyone ranks the same because everyone has a soul and a spirit. As soon as we touch a person with a soul and a spirit, we should love him and strive to serve him. If we do this, our attitude will be different every time we meet a person on the street. When a man is enlightened by God to see that he is begotten by the same Father as his brothers, he develops a special taste for them. A worker similarly has to be enlightened to see that he is created by the same God as his fellow men. This light will cause him to have a different taste every time he meets someone. Among the saints, we do have the feeling that we are brothers and sisters. Now we need a further enlightening to see that among all men, we are fellow men. Everyone is precious and lovable, and everyone is worthy of our service. If we have this attitude, we will touch the things of God while living on earth today, because God's attention is always directed towards man. Men were created by God, and from such God-created men, we can rescue some into His church. God's goal is the church, but God's attention is still on man. He wants to gain man. No worker of the Lord can despise any person with a soul and a spirit. If we despise any man in attitude or in conduct, we are unworthy to be called servants of God. If we want to serve the Lord in a proper way, we must not despise any soul. In fact, we have to learn to be servants to all men. We have to learn to render others service in all things and to serve them with a willing heart.

Many people have the habit of despising those who seemingly are inferior to themselves while flattering those who seemingly are better than themselves. It is shameful for such things to be found among God's workers. We should not despise those who seemingly are under us in

any way. We should consider a man's position according to God's worth. If we do not deal with this matter, we cannot serve God. It is a great and joyful thing for us to realize man's worth. If we see how the Lord has died for men, we will echo that very character that led Him to suffer such a death for men; we will feel what the Lord feels and conclude that man does deserve all of our love and interest. Unless we can do this, we will not be able to identify with the Lord's feeling, and we will not be able to work for the Lord.

CHAPTER THREE

Having A Mind To Suffer

ONE

In addition to the character traits already mentioned, every Christian worker should have a mind to suffer (1 Pet. 4:1). This is crucial. Before we consider this subject from a positive point of view, let us first consider the common Christian concept of suffering.

The teaching of the Scriptures is very clear: God has no intention for His people to suffer. There is a certain philosophy which promotes physical suffering as a means of depriving the body of all enjoyment. Those who hold to this philosophy maintain that every form of enjoyment is wrong. As the Lord's workers and those who represent Him, we must be clear that this philosophy should not be in a Christian's mind at all. God's own Word declares that God has no intention for His children to suffer. The Bible says that God has not withheld any good thing from us. Psalm 23:1 says, "Jehovah is my Shepherd; I will lack nothing." The words lack nothing do not mean that we have no further needs. Rather, they mean that we do not have to ask for anything because the Lord is our Shepherd. Psalm 23 tells us that we will lack nothing when we have the Lord as our Shepherd. In other words, God has no intention that we lack anything. His intention is for us to be filled. He has not withheld any good thing from us. The entire Bible portrays to us the loving care of the Lord. He watched over His own faithfully, relieved their distresses and pains, and drew a clear distinction between His people and the nations. The land of Goshen was always different from the rest of Egypt; God's blessing was always there. We must never introduce any kind of ascetic

philosophy into Christianity. Once we introduce non-Christian elements into Christianity, we confuse the latter. We must pay attention to this point.

Having said this, we also should realize that God does not exempt His children from trial or chastisement; indeed, God gives His children trial and chastisement. But we must make a clear distinction between these and forms of asceticism. Under ordinary circumstances, God always blesses, cares, supports, and supplies His children. But when it becomes necessary for Him to chastise and try His children, He will not hesitate to do so. This does not mean that He tries them every day. He chastises His children only when the need arises; He does not do this every day and every minute. God does not send trials and chastisements to His children continuously. Sometimes He resorts to such methods, but He does not dwell on them all the time. On the contrary, under ordinary circumstances, He always cares for us and makes provisions for us. Of course, when we are stubborn, He will allow trials and chastisements to come upon us. But under His usual provisions, He carries out what He ordinarily would do. He does not want to see us suffer. We must be clear about this. God is reserving all the good things for His children. We can enjoy all of His provisions which He has given to us.

What then does the Scripture mean when it speaks of suffering? In the Bible, suffering refers to a deliberate choice one makes before the Lord. The Lord has arranged for our days to be filled with gracious blessings, but for the sake of serving Him and being a servant to Him, we would rather choose a way of suffering. Hence, the way of suffering is a way of choice. David's three mighty men could have lived in safety beside David, but when they heard him expressing a longing for a drink from the well of Bethlehem, they endangered their lives and broke through the ranks of the Philistine host to fetch the water (2 Sam. 23:14-17). Suffering is a matter of choice, not a matter of imposition. We choose the way of suffering. We suffer willingly for the sake of serving Him. According to God's plan, we can avoid many sufferings. However, for the sake of serving God, we would rather gladly choose a way that is different from that of ordinary people. This is what it means to have a mind to suffer. Having a mind to suffer is a fundamental necessity in the character of a servant of God. Without such a mind, we will produce little results in our

work, and the work we do will be very superficial in quality. If a worker of the Lord does not have a mind to suffer, he cannot work at all in the eyes of God. Let us speak of a few things related to this subject.

TWO

We have to realize that suffering and having a mind to suffer are two different things. Having a mind to suffer implies that we have a desire to willingly suffer for Christ's sake; it means that we have a heart and a willingness to endure affliction on His behalf. This is the meaning of having a mind to suffer. Those who have a mind to suffer may not necessarily be suffering. But in their mind they are prepared to meet all sufferings with fortitude. For instance, the Lord may put you in circumstances where you are provided with food and clothing and a nicely furnished home. It does not mean that you cannot continue to enjoy all the provisions He has given you. If the Lord has made such provisions, you can accept them from the Lord. But within, you still have a mind to suffer for Him. Although you are not suffering physically, you must have a mind to suffer. It is not a question of whether you have encountered something outwardly, but whether you have a mind to suffer inwardly. Do you have a mind to suffer even when circumstances are smooth and easy? The Lord may not arrange for you to suffer every day, but every worker of the Lord must not be short of a mind to suffer, not even for a single day. Suffering may not come to us daily, but a mind to suffer must be with us daily.

The problem is that many brothers and sisters, and many families of Christian workers too, seem to shrink back the minute affliction comes to them. They do not have a mind to suffer. When the Lord provides smooth circumstances, abundance in material supply, and good health to them, they can serve Him happily. But as soon as they experience a little setback or affliction, their whole being collapses. This means that they do not have a mind to suffer. Without a mind to suffer, you cannot withstand any trial.

Having a mind to suffer means that we are prepared before the Lord to suffer. It means that we are ready to suffer and that we choose the way of suffering. If the Lord does not allow suffering to come our way, that is His business. On our side, however, we are always ready for suffering. When

the Lord changes His course circumstantially and trials come upon us, we will accept them fortuitously, not counting them as strange. If we can only accept the good provisions of the Lord, but cannot take any trial, instead backsliding at any change and ceasing from our work, we do not have a mind to suffer. We must remember that our work does not sit and wait on us. We have to work when there is food, and we have to work when there is no food. We have to work when we are adequately clothed, and we have to work when we are not adequately clothed. We have to work when we feel happy, and we have to work when we feel uncomfortable. We have to work whether we are in good health or in ill health. The Scripture shows us that we should arm ourselves with a mind to suffer; that is, our mind should be an armory, a weapon, to us. This is a sharp weapon, something Satan cannot prevail against. Without this kind of mind, our work will cease as soon as we experience setbacks and afflictions.

There are some brothers and sisters who endure suffering, but they have no conception of the preciousness of the suffering. They go through it without any sense of gratitude to the Lord. They may even murmur and complain continually, hoping for the day when they will be delivered from their suffering. They pray, but they never praise. They do not heartily accept the discipline of the Spirit which comes upon them. Instead, they pray that these days will go away quickly. Their attitude betrays their lack of a mind to suffer. Brothers and sisters, if we do not have a mind to suffer during peaceful times, we will only be fit to travel on smooth roads. Once the road becomes muddy, we will stop serving the Lord. This will not take us very far. Let me repeat: A mind to suffer is different from suffering itself. If we have a mind to suffer, the Lord may not necessarily give us sufferings, but when we do encounter sufferings, we will be inwardly prepared, and we will not draw back. Those who suffer do not necessarily have a mind to suffer. Many people are suffering, but they do not have a mind to suffer. Among the suffering ones, some may have a mind to suffer, while others may not have a mind to suffer. When many brothers and sisters encounter sufferings and afflictions, they complain and cry for help day after day. They pray for deliverance from their afflictions every day. Such ones do not have a mind to suffer at all. They are suffering, but they do not have a mind to suffer. Brothers and sisters who are undergoing sufferings in physical health, in financial supply, or in

other matters should realize that the Lord only counts a mind to suffer as being precious. He does not pay attention to whether we are suffering. We should not think that we are suffering for the Lord simply because we are put in trying situations. It may be true that our situations are unpleasant, but how much of a willing mind to suffer for the Lord do we have? How much of this is by choice? Or are we merely murmuring, begrudging, self-pitying, and self-justifying? It is possible for us to suffer a great deal of heartache and hardship without having the will to suffer. A will to suffer is something deeper than suffering itself. Those who have a heart to suffer may not have any outward suffering at all, and those who are outwardly suffering may not have a mind to suffer. Brothers and sisters, do you see the difference? This is like saying that those who are poor in material things are not necessarily poor in their spirits. Many people are poor materially, but they are not poor spiritually. In the same way, many brothers and sisters are indeed suffering, but they do not have a mind to suffer at all. If the Lord were to offer them the option of choosing, they would most definitely choose not to suffer, not just for a month or for a day, but even if it was just for a minute of their time. They have absolutely no mind to suffer. If a man does not have a mind to suffer, he can not go anywhere with his work. When the outward demands exceed his inward ability, he will shrink back. When a situation requires that he make an additional effort, he will find no strength to meet the need. He cannot relinquish his own treasures and can only carry on an easy work under an easy environment. He needs the Lord to remove all hurdles before he can work in peace. It is surprising that many servants of the Lord would have such a demand.

We must be clear what it means to have a mind to suffer. A brother living in peace may have a greater mind to suffer than a brother living in tribulation. The first one may have a mind to suffer; he is prepared to suffer for the Lord. The second one may be suffering, but he has no heart to suffer for the Lord. There is little sign of hardship in the circumstance of one, while the other may be obviously in great distress. Humanly speaking, the one in great distress is the one who is suffering. But in the eyes of the Lord, He values more the one who, even though he has less hardship, has a mind to suffer. We should not think that suffering alone qualifies us for anything. We must remember that God has demands on us, and in order to meet these demands, there is the need for us to have

a mind to suffer. We must arm ourselves with this mind. Without such a mind, there is no possibility for us to fight the spiritual warfare. As soon as we face troubles, we will draw back, and as soon as we are called upon to pay a price, we will give up. When the Lord allows a little affliction to come our way, we withdraw. We are not concerned with how much suffering a person experiences; we are concerned with how much of a mind to suffer one has. According to our natural concept, we would conclude that a brother who suffers much knows God's grace in fuller measure. But many times, we do not receive any help from a suffering brother when we meet him. We may soon discover that he lacks the mind to suffer; he is only suffering reluctantly. If he were given a choice, he would run away from his trials at the first possible moment. He may indeed be suffering, but he has not yielded to the suffering, and he is going through his experience reluctantly. He has not learned any lesson before the Lord, and he is filled with rebellion inwardly. This shows us that a mind to suffer is very different from suffering itself. What the Lord treasures is a mind to suffer—a conscious readiness for suffering, not the experience of suffering itself. We cannot replace a mind to suffer with suffering itself.

THREE

Now we have to consider some common problems we encounter in the Lord's work. Suppose our work appears to encounter financial difficulties. What should we do when God puts us through a trial of material shortage? If the shortage in provision halts our work, the Lord surely would put a question mark on what we are doing. He would probably ask, "What are you serving Me for?" Brothers and sisters, whether or not we will perform well in our work depends a great deal on whether we have a mind to suffer. We cannot quit just because a little trouble comes our way or a little trial bothers us. No servant of Christ can stipulate that he will go to work in fair weather but stay at home if it rains. If we have a mind to suffer, we will defy difficulties; we will defy hardship; we will defy physical infirmity; and we will even defy death. A mind to suffer stands up to the devil and declares, "I will go on no matter what may happen to me!" If we are inwardly afraid of anything, Satan will threaten us with that very same thing, and we will be defeated. If we say, "I am not afraid of hunger!", Satan will not be able to do anything to us when he sends us hunger; he

will have to flee. If we say, "I am not afraid of the cold!", Satan will not be able to do anything to us when he sends us cold weather; he will have to flee once again. But if we say, "I am afraid of sickness," Satan will surely send us sickness, because he knows that sickness will bring us down. If we say, "I am not afraid of sickness!", Satan will not be able to do anything to us. If we do not have a mind to suffer, Satan will use whatever we are afraid of to attack us, and we will be defeated. Every servant of God must be well prepared and not afraid of anything. We must persist when this and that happen to us. We must persist when trials come to our family or sickness comes to our body. We must persist even when hunger or cold comes our way. If we have this attitude within us, Satan will not be able to do anything to us because we will have a mind to suffer. Without such a mind to suffer, we will fall as soon as Satan confronts us with the very thing we fear. We will shrink back from God's work and become useless.

Brothers and sisters, we should declare to the Lord, "Because of Your love and the power of Your grace, I am committed to do what I am doing whatever the consequences may be, whether it be heaven or hell. This will be my stand, whether or not I think I am up to it!" If we do not have such a mind, Satan will seize our weakness, and we will be finished and proven unprofitable for anything. We have to pray for mercy to know what a mind to suffer is. A mind to suffer is a settled decision within oneself to be on the Lord's side, no matter what the future may hold and no matter what circumstances one may encounter. A mind to suffer does not necessarily lead to suffering. It is possible that one will not suffer. But an inward conviction is always present. Without such a conviction and determination, a little difficulty will knock a person off his feet. But if this inward conviction is present, whether or not there is outward trouble will mean little. Do you see what I am saying? The way of service for a Christian is not the way of suffering but the way of having a mind to suffer. You can thank the Lord if He provides you with food and clothing, and you also can thank Him if He does not provide you with these things. These things do not mean much to you—they can be in abundance or scarcity. Please remember that a Christian does not need to go out of his way to look for suffering. However, he should have a mind to suffer. A Christian is one who is prepared to accomplish his task whether or not difficulty lies along the way. He does not draw back at the face of

difficulty. If the matter of his mind-set is not settled, all other issues will not be settled. Consider the example of traveling. If you are physically weak, you naturally need a more comfortable bed than a stronger person. But if you say, "I must have a comfortable bed because I am not very strong," you will be vulnerable to the enemy in that point; he will give you an uncomfortable bed. A mind to suffer ignores the issue of a bed and continues with one's work. If you have been provided with a comfortable bed, however, there is no virtue in going out of your way to sleep on the floor. If the Lord gives you a good bed, take it, and if He gives you a bad bed, take it also. You have to continue with your work no matter how bad your bed is. You must never shrink back for the sake of a bed. This mind-set is what the Bible calls a mind to suffer. Some brothers have less than favorable material provisions in their life. Yet this does not necessarily mean that they have a mind to suffer. Do not imagine that Christians who live in unfavorable circumstances will have, as a matter of course, more of a mind to suffer than those who live in more favorable circumstances. Only those who have consecrated themselves to the Lord will have a mind to suffer. A mind to suffer is not limited by anything; it does not have a bottom line. You may be provided with a hard floor for your bed if you go to one place. You may not even have a hard floor in another place. Your bed may just be straw strewn on muddy ground. What would you do? Some force themselves to accept such beds. They are indeed suffering, but there is a limit to their suffering. They can tolerate a hard floor but nothing more. They seemingly tell others that they have stooped low enough and that they can stoop no lower. This is having the experience of suffering without the mind to suffer. Some brothers may go through their life with relative ease and enjoyment, yet they can always adjust themselves happily to lower standards of living. They can sleep on a hard floor as well as on straw. They have no complaints, and they are happy to take whatever comes along the way. This is having a mind to suffer. God is calling for men to have a mind to suffer. We must remember that it is not a matter of suffering but a matter of a mind for suffering. In order to serve the Lord, we must have a mind to suffer; otherwise, God cannot use us. Those who do not have a mind to suffer will collapse at the mildest trial. They will quit their work as soon as Satan puts something in their path. Brothers and sisters, do you see this? A mind to suffer is an ability to lower one's standard of living

unconditionally.

This is not a matter of how much we suffer, but to what extent we can endure suffering. Suffering is not a necessity, but a mind to suffer is. The Lord's intention is not to keep us in sufferings but to wrought such a mind into us. No brother or sister learning to serve the Lord will be strong if he or she does not have a mind to suffer. If we do not have a mind to suffer, we will be the weakest of all men. As soon as we touch any difficulty, we will give way to self-pity. We will weep for ourselves and sigh, "How did I become this way?" On a certain occasion a sister, who had been serving the Lord for years, came upon another sister shedding tears, and she asked her, "Who are you shedding your tears for?" Many people shed tears for themselves. They consider themselves dear and precious, and they feel sorry for their own fall. Their tears are shed for themselves. Such ones are the weakest of all men; they collapse as soon as they encounter challenges.

The important question when trials and pains come is where our heart is. On the one hand, there is the issue of our pain. On the other hand, there is the issue of the Lord's work. If we do not have a mind to suffer, we will immediately sacrifice the Lord's work. We will be too busy feeling sorry for ourselves and loving ourselves, and there will be no more energy to take care of the Lord's work! Brothers and sisters, we have to learn to have a mind to suffer. It is true that our suffering may go away if we abandon our work, but then the work will suffer a loss. If a mind to suffer is absent or lacking, Satan can force us to abandon and sacrifice our work at any time. We must remember before the Lord that we are here to uphold God's glory. God can order life or death for us, but on our part we have to be faithful to our responsibility. We cannot forsake our work. We must persist to the end. It is not our desire to see our brothers and sisters go through sufferings. If at all possible, it is good for them to take care of their daily needs in moderation. We are not asking them to go out of their way to look for sufferings. We do not impose sufferings on others. Our hope is that God would supply all of our needs. But we must realize that a mind to suffer is very necessary. On the one hand, we must believe that God has not withheld one good thing from us. On the other hand, we must have a mind to suffer. If we do not, we will collapse as soon as we encounter difficulty or setbacks in our lives.

FOUR

A question naturally arises: To what extent should we be prepared to suffer? The Bible's standard is "Be faithful unto death" (Rev. 2:10). In other words, we have to be prepared for any suffering, even the suffering of death. Of course, we do not want to become an extremist. Yet there is no compromise as far as a mind to suffer is concerned. If there is any compromise, we would rather let the Lord do the compromising; we would rather let the church or the more mature brothers balance us. As for ourselves, we have to give our all. If we compromise ourselves, how can we be effective in the work? We will have no way to go on. If we consider our own life to be so precious, and hold ourselves carefully by the hand all the time, we will not accomplish much in God's work. We all have to be faithful even unto death. This is our way. The Lord will not sacrifice our life simply because we have vowed to be faithful. Nevertheless, it is the Lord's business to preserve our life; we do not preserve it ourselves. It is the Lord's business to arrange everything for us. On our side, we have to be prepared to sacrifice ourselves. We have to be prepared to face every kind of suffering. Brothers and sisters, if you love your life, you will not be able to be faithful even unto death. Those who are faithful even unto death do not love their own life. This is the Lord's basic requirement. Our mind to suffer should be so strong that we can say, "Lord, I will die for You! I do not care for the circumstances around me. I am willing to give up my life for You!" Brothers and sisters, without such a determination, we will stop as soon as we encounter difficulty. Every worker of the Lord has to learn to not love himself. Those who love themselves are limited in their works. When they reach a certain point, they will stop. God wants absolute men to serve Him. He wants those who are willing to lay aside their life to serve Him. Do not worry about becoming an extremist. That is a totally different issue. On our part, we should never make any provision for ourselves. We all should be absolute in our mind to suffer. Let me repeat: We do not have to suffer, but we all must have a mind to suffer. We must always be prepared to cast every care aside. We must cast aside not only our outward difficulties but should sacrifice our own health. If we love ourselves and are too afraid to give ourselves up, we will not accomplish much. We have to tell the Lord, "I am willing to consecrate everything. From now on, no suffering will stop me from serving You. This is my

choice, no matter what the outcome, whether it is death, life, suffering, or joy!"

Brothers and sisters, only one thing is effective—a service that is faithful even unto death. The more we take this stand, the less Satan can do anything to us. He will have no place to flee. Those who love themselves are truly bound by themselves. A little pain and they are in constant tears and sighings. They love themselves too much! If we do not love ourselves, our tears and sighings will be gone. Brothers and sisters, we who are taking this way have to give up our very lives. If we want to take this way, we have to say to the Lord, "Your ordained way for me may or may not be a way of suffering, but I am ready to meet any sufferings." Forgive me for repeating this again and again. But we must realize that even though our suffering is limited, our mind to suffer should be unlimited. The actual amount of suffering which the Lord has measured to us may be limited, but our readiness for suffering should be unlimited. If our readiness for suffering is limited, it means that we do not have a mind to suffer. As soon as we put a limit on our readiness for suffering, we will not be able to get very far. This is a high demand, but this is what the Lord is after. Anything short of this will not qualify us for His service. We should not think that a mind to suffer is limited to just a little suffering. No, a mind to suffer has no limit; it is not even limited by death. Anything that comes short of this will not withstand any temptation from Satan. "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they loved not their soul-life even unto death" (Rev. 12:11). If our conscience does not condemn us, if we declare our testimony of victory in the face of Satan, and if we love not our soul-life even unto death, his assaults against us will be futile. He cannot deal with a person who does not seek to preserve his own life. We are familiar with the story of Job. Satan attacked Job because he scoffed at the idea that Job could possibly not have a desire to preserve his own life. He said to Jehovah, "Skin for skin! Indeed all that a man has he will give for the sake of his life. But stretch forth Your hand, and touch his bone and his flesh; and he will surely curse You to Your face" (Job 2:4-5). Satan knew that he could have a way with Job if Job had the slightest love for his own life. The passage in Revelation shows that Satan cannot do anything about those who do not love their soul-life even unto death.

This is where many of God's servants have failed. They love their own life. May I ask: Is the preservation of our lives more important or the preservation of the Lord's work more important? Is our life more important or is our responsibility more important? Is it the saving of souls that matters or is it the saving of our lives? Which is more important, our own life or the church of God? Is God's testimony on earth more important or is our own life? No one who indulges in self-love can serve God. Those who are suffering may not be qualified to serve God. Only those who have a mind to suffer, who have an unlimited capacity to suffer, who will not love their soul-life even unto death, can serve Him. Today we have to consecrate ourselves once again to the Lord. We do not consecrate ourselves to suffering, but we are ready to sacrifice everything. The Lord may not want us to give up our life, but we should have the conviction that we will love not our soul-life even unto death. Brothers and sisters, too many failures in the work have resulted from man's own laziness, self-protection, and self-preservation. We must not think that the eyes of the world are blind or that the eyes of the brothers and sisters are blind. When we set out for our work, others will see whether we are fully consecrated. If we hold something back for ourselves and if we take the compromising way, others will see it. Brothers and sisters, when the Lord calls us, He wants us to give up everything. May the Lord be gracious to us, and may none of us treasure ourselves or love our own soul-life. We have to learn to not love or pity ourselves. This is our way. If we do not take this way, our work will become very limited. The degree of our willingness to suffer determines the amount of spiritual work we will perform. If our mind to suffer is limited, our spiritual work will be limited, our blessing to others will be limited, and the result of our work will be limited as well. No other measurement of God's blessing is as accurate as our willingness to accept sufferings. If our mind has an unlimited capacity to suffer, we will know the boundless greatness of His blessing.

CHAPTER FOUR

Buffeting The Body And Making It A Slave

ONE

First Corinthians 9:23-27 says, "And I do all things for the sake of the gospel that I may become a fellow partaker of it. Do you not know that those who run on a racecourse all run, but one receives the prize? Run in this way, that you may lay hold. And everyone who contends exercises self-control in all things; they then, that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we, an incorruptible. I therefore run in this way, not as though without a clear aim; I box in this way, not as though beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest perhaps having preached to others, I myself may become disapproved."

Verse 23 says, "I do all things for the sake of the gospel." This shows us that this passage is about the way of a gospel preacher, a servant of the Lord. Verse 27 says, "I buffet my body and make it my slave." This is a fundamental requirement that a servant of God imposes upon himself. Verses 24 through 26 show us how Paul buffeted his body and made it his slave.

We wish to immediately make it clear that Paul was not speaking about asceticism when he said that he buffeted his body and made it his slave. He did not agree with those who, under the influence of asceticism, teach that the body is an encumbrance which we must seek to get rid of. Ascetics believe that the body is the source of sin, and that one must treat it severely before the problem of sin can be resolved. But the Bible does not teach that the body is an encumbrance, much less a source of sin. The Bible tells us that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (6:19) and that a day is coming when this body will be redeemed and glorified. We should never bring in the thought of asceticism when we speak of "buffeting the body." If we introduce such thoughts into Christianity, we are making it another religion altogether. This is not what we preach. We repudiate the thought that the body is a hindrance or the source of sin. We readily acknowledge that the body can lead us to sin, but the body is not the source of sin. We can still sin no matter how drastically we deal with the body.

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul confronts Christian workers with the problem of their bodies. Verse 23 says, "And I do all things for the sake of the gospel." This means that he was standing on the ground of a gospel preacher when he spoke this word. What did he do for the sake of the gospel? Verses 24 through 26 show us what he did. In verse 27 Paul

points out that what he did was a buffeting of his body. According to the Greek text, the word buffet means to batter the face until it bruises. To buffet one's body and to make it one's slave means to put one's body into subjection and to "hit" it so much that it obediently becomes one's slave, yielding to the will of the gospel preacher. (This, of course, does not mean a literal buffeting of the physical body, which is like the "severe treatment of the body" spoken of in Colossians 2:23.) Paul said that he did this "lest perhaps having preached to others, I myself may become disapproved." This shows us that for every servant of God, buffeting the body and making it one's slave is a basic way of life. Every servant of God should walk by one basic rule—his body has to be brought into subjection. If his body is not brought into subjection, he cannot serve God. How did Paul resolve the problem of his body? He buffeted his body and made it his slave. Verse 27 is the subject, while verses 24 through 26 are the explanation of the subject. In verses 24 through 26 we see how Paul buffeted his body, and in verse 27 he stated the subject. Let us consider this passage point by point.

TWO

Verse 24 says, "Do you not know that those who run on a racecourse all run?" Paul illustrated his point with the example of a runner in a race. A Christian's service to the Lord and labor for his Master can be compared to a race. Everyone is running in this race; this is compulsory. No one can exempt himself from it. "Do you not know that those who run on a racecourse all run, but one receives the prize? Run in this way, that you may lay hold." Only one of the runners in a race receives the prize. But if we all run, everyone can receive the prize. This is the difference between their running and our running. Paul used the illustration of a racecourse. This illustration leads to verse 25.

Verse 25 says, "And everyone who contends exercises self- control in all things." This is Paul's emphasis: In order for a man to contend, he has to undergo training. He has to exercise self-control in everything. He cannot eat as he wishes or skip eating as he wishes. He cannot sleep as he wishes or skip sleep as he wishes. All athletes who compete in games are strictly disciplined during their training. They are strictly regulated as to what they can eat and what they cannot eat, when they can sleep and when they should wake up. Before a game begins, they have to follow

strict rules such as not drinking or smoking. Once the game starts, there are stricter rules to follow. This is why verse 25 says that everyone who contends exercises self-control in all things. Some may think that it is hard to drop their smoking, drinking, or favorite pastimes. But when a man prepares for a race, he has to strictly control his own body. "Everyone who contends exercises self-control in all things." What are the things he has to exercise self-control in? He has to exercise self-control in the demands of his body. He cannot allow his body to have too many demands or to have too much freedom. In running a race the body is reserved for only one thing—the race. It is not for eating, clothing, smoking, drinking, or sleeping, but for running. Many runners have to abstain from sweet and starchy food. This does not mean that these foods are harmful or useless; rather, they do not help a runner in his race. In order to be a runner, a person has to exercise self-control in all things. Verse 27 speaks of buffeting the body; that is, the body is brought into the discussion. The body has to be under control; it has to obey. All of the faculties of the body are reserved for just one thing—running, the kind of running that will win first prize.

Verse 25 continues, "They then, that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we, an incorruptible." The runners exercised much self-control for the sake of a corruptible crown. Should we who are after an incorruptible crown not exercise much more self-control? The corruptible crown refers to the Greek garlands of flowers, which lasted only for three to five days. A runner had to go through long periods of training before he could have a chance to win such a corruptible crown. Paul said, "They then, that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we, an incorruptible." We should pay attention to Paul's comparison. The Greek runners ran on the racecourse, while we run in the world. Their running was an exercise of the body, while our running is our service to God. In their running, only one received the prize, but in our running, everyone can receive the prize. Their prize was a corruptible crown, but our prize is an incorruptible crown. These are different contrasts. However, one thing holds true in both races—exercising self-control in all things. Self-control is necessary in both cases. They exercised self-control to win the race, while we exercise self-control to preach the gospel. The goals may be different, but the discipline imposed on the body is the same. One has to exercise self-control in running the race, and as Christians we also have to

exercise self-control in our Christian life.

Verse 26 says, "I therefore run in this way, not as though without a clear aim; I box in this way, not as though beating the air." This means that Paul was not running in an aimless way; he knew where he was going. He said that he buffeted his body. This means his boxing was not beating the air; he was beating his own body. We should consider verse 26 together with verse 27. Verse 26 tells us that Paul was not without a clear aim. He did not run in whatever way others directed him to; he had a definite direction in his running. Neither was his boxing a beating of the air. Then in verse 27, he immediately points out that he was buffeting his body. He was hitting his own body. We pointed out earlier that buffeting means a kind of hitting, one which produces bruises all over one's body. It is not ordinary hitting, but a kind of severe beating. Ordinary hitting does not produce bruises. Paul dealt with his body in a harsh way so that his body would come under his control. He did it to make his body his slave. This means he would not allow his body to become loose. He brought it under his own control.

The goal for such an exercise is to make the body the slave, while the means is the buffeting of the body. We buffet our body so that it may become our slave. Brothers and sisters, if we do not overcome in this matter, it would be better for us to wait for three to five years and learn this lesson before we attempt to touch God's work. Every servant of God must learn to bring his body under his control. The Bible shows us that a worker of the Lord is like a runner. He may take great pleasure in the work, but it will have little value if his body is not under his control. Service to the Lord is not a simple thing; it is not merely a matter of preaching sermons from a platform. There is no such thing. Paul shows us here that only those who will buffet their bodies and make them their slaves can serve the Lord. If your body cannot obey, you need more training from the Lord. Do not think that a little aspiration will qualify a person to serve the Lord. God's workers must buffet their body and make it their slave. If their body will not obey them, they are of little use to the work.

THREE

What does it mean for our body to become our slave? In order to

understand this, we must first understand what the demands of the body are. We shall only mention a few practical examples—food, clothing, rest, sleep, comfort, and special care in times of sickness. All of these things are demands of the body. Making the body our slave means that, through long periods of buffeting our body during ordinary times, we are able to put it under our control at the time of a race. If we are easy with our body at ordinary times, our legs, feet, lungs, and every other organ will not come under our control at the time of the race, and we will not be able to meet the demand of the race. In order for our body to obey, there is the need for long periods of training. If there is no such training, it will be impossible to steer the body on the spur of the moment. If we lack such training at ordinary times, and if we have never buffeted our body or dealt with it, it will not submit to us at a time of need. When we set out for our work, we will find that our body does not obey us. We will not be able to meet the demands of the body, and we will have no control over our body.

We should not think that a certain measure of spirituality is all that is necessary to engage in the Lord's work. There is still the matter of the body. Paul showed us how real this problem is. I am not asking whether we have a healthy body. I am asking whether or not we are the master of our body. Will our body obey us? If our body will not obey, we cannot serve God in the gospel. This kind of training cannot be completed in a short time. Some spiritual problems can be solved in an instant, but the buffeting of the body requires three, five, or even ten years. Those who have developed a habit of loose living need all the more to impose a strict discipline upon themselves.

For example, the body demands sleep under ordinary circumstances. Sleep is not wrong; it is not sinful, and the demand is surely legitimate. God has divided the day from the night to provide man with the opportunity to rest. It is right for man to sleep. If a man does not sleep, how can he work? But in order for us to buffet our body and make it our slave, we should not insist on sleeping when there is the need to be awake. This is what it means to make our body our slave. Suppose I have scheduled eight hours of sleep every day. It is right for me to take care of my body in this way. But in order to buffet my body and make it my slave, I will act in such a way as if I am beating myself and forcing my

body to follow my instruction. I will train myself to such an extent that if I decided not to sleep today, I could do so. When the Lord was in the garden of Gethsemane, He took three of His disciples aside and said to them, "Watch with Me." When He found them sleeping on His return, He said to Peter, "So were you not able to watch with Me for one hour?" (Matt. 26:38, 40). The Lord wanted them to watch with Him, but they fell asleep. They could not watch with our Lord for even an hour. Is it wrong to sleep? No, sleep is legitimate and necessary. But if the Lord requires us to watch with Him and we cannot overcome this "legitimate" need, we will hinder His work. If any of us cannot give up our demand for sleep, we cannot serve God. This does not mean that a servant of God has to go without sleep night after night. This would be the life of an angel. We are not angels, and we need a good night's sleep every day. But for the sake of learning to follow the Lord and to buffet our body, we should learn to forsake our sleep for a night or two when necessary. This is what it means to make our body our slave.

What does it mean to run the race? Does a man run every day and every minute of the day? Walking is ordinary, but running is something extraordinary. Walking is a daily demand; normally, we walk step by step. Running, however, is not a daily thing. On a racecourse we have to quicken our pace. The normal capacity of the body can support our walk, but in running the body is called upon to put forth extra effort. The normal capacity of the body has to be stretched in order to take care of the extra need. At such times the body needs to obey. In running, the body is asked to supplement its normal functions with extra energy. Running imposes additional demands on the body. The demand on our body is not as strenuous during normal times of walking; it only becomes strenuous when the body has to run. In the same principle, we may need only eight hours of sleep during ordinary times. But if our work requires that we work four more hours one day, we should be satisfied with only four hours of sleep. This is what it means to run the race. To run the race means to meet the extra demands. When the three disciples failed to watch with the Lord, He pointed out the trouble to them: "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (v. 41). What good is there in having a willing spirit if the flesh is weak? A willing spirit and sleeping flesh amount to the same thing as an unwilling spirit and sleeping flesh; both amount to nothing. It is not enough for the spirit to be willing; the body has to be

willing as well. If the body is not willing and insists on sleeping, it is no longer one's slave. If the body is not a slave, it would be futile to claim that the spirit is willing. This is not to say that the body is the source of sin or that it is an encumbrance. We are saying that, for the sake of serving the Lord, there are extra demands on the body at times, and the body should rise to meet these demands. This is what it means to make our body our slave. We must train our body not just to meet ordinary demands but to have an extra supply when there are extra demands.

When the Lord was on earth, Nicodemus came to Him by night. The Lord could receive him without succumbing to tiredness. A few times He spent whole nights in prayer. All these activities interfered with His sleep. We are not advocating that God's children should make a habit of spending nights in prayer. But if a man wants to serve the Lord, it is a shame if he never spends a night in prayer. It is wrong to constantly spend the night hours in prayer. If you are doing this, you are heading the wrong way. But it is a strange thing to serve God for ten or twenty years without having once prayed all night long. We are not advocating the extreme way. We are not telling people to pray throughout the night all the time. Making a habit of praying all night long is damaging to the body and even to the mind. We do not agree with those who do not pray during the day but who give up their sleep at night for prayer; this is not normal. But if a worker of the Lord never gives up his sleep for prayer, there is something wrong with him also.

Running in a race is not a daily thing, but exercise is a daily thing. We have to exercise to the point that our body will no longer rebel against us but will be subject to us. If we have never exercised in this way and our body is never put under control, sleep will become our first priority when we set out for our work. Our sleep will become our master. If others do not touch our sleep, we can do anything. But as soon as others touch our sleep, we cannot do anything. It is imperative that a servant of God exercise himself to make his body his slave. To make our body our slave means that when the Lord has a need and a demand, and when circumstances call for it, we can put aside the demands of our body temporarily. We can direct our body to provide the extra supply, to ignore its need, and to be under our control and rule. If we cannot do this, we love ourselves too much and are useless in the Lord's work.

The same principle applies to the matter of eating. Many times our Lord went without food for the sake of His work. He did not make His eating a priority. But this does not mean that our Lord never ate. He could eat well at ordinary times. But when the need was before Him, He could forsake eating. This is to put the body under subjection. We are not so dependent on food that our work has to stop if we have to go hungry. Unfortunately, in the Lord's work, many cannot function without food. We undoubtedly need food, and we have to take care of our physical body, but the body must be trained to go without food when special circumstances call for it. Remember the occasion when the Lord sat down at noon beside Jacob's well to rest while the disciples went to get some food in the city. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and the Lord asked her for a drink. At the same time He opened up the matter of the living water to her. In the end the woman did not give Him anything to drink. It was high noon, the time for a meal and a drink, but the Lord patiently explained to this spiritually thirsty and suffering Samaritan woman the word of life and the meaning of the living water (John 4:5-26). This shows us how one can carry on God's work without the interruption of food. If we arrive at a certain place and cannot do anything until we have had a meal, our body is not serving us as it should. We should not be extremists, and we should not skip our meals all the time. But when there are special demands, we should be able to forego our eating. Bread is not the most important thing. We should be the master of our body. When we need to go without a meal, our body should obey us. We should not be overcome by our body's insistent cries for food. This is what it means to make our body our slave.

In Mark 3 the Lord was surrounded by such a multitude that He had no time to eat. His relatives reacted by seeking to drag Him away from the crowd, for they said He was beside Himself (vv. 20-21). Yet the Lord continued with His work. He was not beside Himself, but the multitude had their pressing needs. He was able to forego His food and drink for the sake of the work. If we can never forego our own needs when the work demands our immediate attention, we will have little effective work. At critical times we have to push ourselves a little to the extreme; we have to be somewhat beside ourselves. When the need calls for it, we should be able to bridle our body and ignore the demands for food and drink. We should not consider these demands to be mandatory.

The Bible plainly states that Christians should fast when occasion requires. The meaning of fasting is to temporarily put aside the legitimate demand of the body. Sometimes a special need calls for serious prayer. At these times we should fast before the Lord. We do not advocate fasting three or five times a week. But if a man has been a Christian for eight or ten years and has never fasted once, something is not right. The Lord spoke of fasting in His teaching on the mount. If we have never fasted, we lack something in our experience. The purpose of fasting is to make our body our slave.

Another demand of the body is comfort. We dare not find fault with a worker for enjoying a measure of ease in his living. But when his work calls for his sacrifice, his body should not ignore the call of the work if the comforts he was accustomed to are not provided. If our body will not respond to our call, we cannot work for the Lord. Some brothers and sisters move around often, not because of the Lord's command, but because they are unhappy and uncomfortable with where they live. We can say that comfort has become their way of life; comfort is leading them by the nose. Such ones cannot be of much use in the hand of the Lord. God's servants should learn to thank Him for easy conditions when the discipline of the Spirit so orders them and when the Lord makes provisions for them. But when the Lord's provisions turn the other way, and they are stripped of ease and comfort, they should be the master of their body and continue with their work. We are not for a life of extremes. Under ordinary circumstances, we may enjoy better conditions. But when the Lord's need calls for it, we should be able to bear what others normally cannot bear. Some brothers and sisters can only live a comfortable life. As soon as their standard of living is slightly lowered, they are finished. Such ones are of little use to the Lord. In running the race, we have to make our body our slave. We must be able to live under any circumstance. Making our body our slave means that we will not be affected by our circumstances when the work calls for our attention. It means that we can carry on our work even when we have to live at a substandard level. If we are unable to do this, we will retreat as soon as our conditions fall below our accustomed standard. This does not mean that those whose lot is inferior will better withstand harsher environments. Many poorer brothers collapse physically as soon as they are given a lot that is inferior to what they are used to. They love themselves too much,

and they have never made their body their slave.

Another example is our clothing. While we should eat well and clothe ourselves, we should not give undue attention to the matter of clothing. John the Baptist was a person with little concern for his attire. The Lord Jesus said of him that if anyone wanted to see an elegantly attired person there was no need to look in his direction; the place to look was the royal palace. Unfortunately, some Christians have set too high a standard in the matter of clothing. They cannot go on without maintaining such a standard. We hold that it does not glorify the Lord for us to wear ragged garments; they are not a glory to the Lord. We should, whenever possible, be clean, tidy, and suitably dressed. Nevertheless, when a need arises, we should be like Paul, who, even though he was in hunger and thirst and nakedness, continued to serve the Lord (1 Cor. 4:11). If God's servants will exercise themselves at ordinary times, their body will be under their control, and their work in the Lord will not be affected by an issue such as their clothing.

Another example is sickness. In times of sickness or weakness, the body makes heavier demands than usual. Many workers of the Lord love themselves so much that they excuse themselves from work as soon as they are slightly sick. How could Paul ever have written his Epistles if he had called a halt whenever his eyes were hurting? At least he would not have written the book to the Galatians, for that book was written at the time when his eyes were very weak. This is why he said, "See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand" (6:11). If Paul had to wait for his eyes to get better before he could make his tents, he would never have made any tents, because it surely requires eyesight to make tents. Yet he worked during the day and made tents during the night. He did not stop because of his eyes. If Timothy had to wait until his stomach was well before he would go on with his work, there would have been no one to continue Paul's ministry, because Timothy's stomach never became well. On the one hand, it is necessary for us to take reasonable care of our bodies. But on the other hand, when the work requires us to sacrifice a little, we must never spare ourselves. When our work calls for it, we should set aside the demand of our sickness and take care of the demand of the work. It is true that sickness demands rest, but when the work calls for sacrifice, even a sick body has to heed to its call. We have

to buffet our body and make it our slave. This is a basic requirement in the work. If we cannot direct our body, with what means shall we engage ourselves in the work? If a servant of the Lord is seriously sick and the Lord has not imposed a special burden upon him, it is right for him to take care of his sickness; the church should know what to do with him, and the other co-workers should also know what to do with him. But if a need exists in the work and the Lord's command is clear, he cannot be bound by his sickness. Sometimes, there is no time for sickness; we must put aside temporarily the care of our sickness. This is a lesson we all must learn.

This principle applies not only to sickness but to pain in general. Sometimes we are in so much physical pain that we feel that our body can no longer bear the torment. At ordinary times, we should provide suitable rest and therapy to the body and take care of its needs. But when the Lord's work demands and commands us to do something, we have to do it, even though our body may still be in pain. Our body should always obey us. Sometimes we have to lift up our eyes to the Lord and say, "Lord, my body has to obey me this one more time. I cannot satisfy its need this one more time!"

This principle should equally be applied to sexual desires. It is not mandatory that we gratify our need for sex. We should learn to give His service the priority over everything else.

Let us consider Paul's story. In 1 Corinthians 4:11-13 he said, "Until the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked and buffeted and wander without a home; and we labor, working with our own hands. Reviled we bless; persecuted we endure; defamed we exhort. We have become as the offscouring of the world, the scum of all things, until now." Please pay attention to the words in verse 11: "Until the present hour." This means that these conditions were still present at the time of his speaking. It shows us that Paul's body was under his control all the time. Nothing was ever allowed to hinder his service to the Lord. In chapter six of this same Epistle, from verse 12 through the end, he referred to two matters—the matter of food and the matter of sex—and he made it very clear that we are not servants of the body. Whether in the matter of food or sex, there is no need for us to become slaves to our bodies. In chapter seven he shows clearly that a man does not have to be a slave to his

body in the matter of sex, and in chapter eight he shows that a man does not have to be a slave to his body in the matter of food. What then does it mean for us to buffet the body and make it our slave? It means that we buffet our body and "hit" it to the extent that it comes under our full control. Brothers and sisters, in working for the Lord and in our service to Him, we often have to restrict the demands of the body. When a need arises in the work and the body is called upon to deny its cravings, can we be strong enough to deny them? Of course, all human cravings are created by God and are given to us by Him. There is nothing wrong with the legitimate demands of the body. But are any of these demands preventing us from serving our Lord?

FOUR

Brothers and sisters, do not think for a moment that you can relax your rein on the demands of the body. You have to realize that laxity and discretion are two entirely different things. You must exercise discretion to care for your body, but at the same time, you must take full control of your body. To buffet the body does not mean that you starve all the time. It means that you can go on without food even when your stomach is empty. At the same time, you should still take care of your body. However, if you are involved in God's work, yet are very inflexible with your eating, you will not be able to go on as soon as the food falls below your accustomed standard. We are not for asceticism, and we do not agree that the body is the source of sin. We acknowledge that God is the One who has created in us our physical needs. We readily agree that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. But at no time are we under any obligation to follow the needs of the body. This does not mean that we have to be without clothing, food, and sleep all the time. If at all possible, we should clothe and feed ourselves properly and rest properly. Our eating can be the result of our buffeting the body, or it can be the result of not buffeting the body; the two things are entirely different. The problem today is that many brothers and sisters are very loose with their body. If we cannot put our body under strict control, as soon as we face any trial in our work, we will grumble, complain, or run away. We have to exercise endurance before the Lord. We should say, "Lord, my troubles can never match the troubles You faced when You were sojourning on the earth." The Lord lowered Himself from the loftiest height and descended to the

lowest depth. Today we have not lowered ourselves from the loftiest height nor descended to the lowest depth. We should say, "Lord, we can never come up to what You have done." We must learn to accept all the restrictions imposed upon our body.

Some people have allowed their body to go unchecked for a long time. These ones need to spend more time to learn the proper lessons. We hope that they can be useful in the work within a short period of time. But if they do not deal with their problems and cannot overcome them, they cannot participate in God's work. Those who have never buffeted their body or made it their slave will fall back as soon as they are put in a race. We must remember that the work of the gospel is like a race. If we have never exercised ourselves and our body has never been under our control, we will fail and not be able to run when God puts extra demands on us. Running is an extraordinary demand that one imposes on his body. We can never be loose with our own body. All the great servants of the Lord are under His strict rule; they all exercise strict control over their own body. If we do not rule over our body, we will fail as soon as we are challenged by additional needs. All extraordinary and valuable works are performed under extraordinary demands. If we cannot work under extraordinary demands, how can we be useful in any way? We should not be loose. We should not allow our body to relax. We have to tightly hold the rein and put our body under strict control. We must be able to give up our sleep, give up our food, and give up our comfort when we are called to do so. We have to persist in the work and insist on our body being our slave. Today we take our body along with us to the work, and even when our body is sick or in pain, it still has to obey us.

Paul said, "See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand" (Gal. 6:11). He was doing more than what his capacity allowed him to do. We can sense our brother's feeling here; he was forcing himself to do what he could not do. Throughout the ages, this is how the Spirit is expressed. If a servant of God is in good health at ordinary times and experiences no hardship in the environment, sleeping well and eating well, yet finds his body uncooperative when the need arises, he is not a useful servant of the Lord. Paul said, "I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest perhaps having preached to others, I myself may become disapproved." In other words, he was afraid that others would receive the

gospel while he would miss the reward and the Lord's commendation: "Well done My servant." Remember that a man who loves himself cannot serve God. Those who are loose in their living and who cannot discipline themselves strictly cannot serve God. If we want to learn to serve the Lord, we have to exercise ourselves, control ourselves, and rule over ourselves every day. If our love for the Lord is strong enough, we will not be led away by the demands of the body. If our spirit is strong enough, we will not allow our flesh to remain in weakness. When the resurrection life in us multiplies, it will give life to our mortal body. We have to be brought on until our body will obey us and us alone, until it no longer frustrates us. When this happens, we will be able to serve the Lord in a good way.

CHAPTER FIVE

Diligent

The daily life of a Christian worker often determines whether he is qualified for the Lord's work. Some young people manifest qualities that give you the confident expectation that they will develop into useful servants of Christ. From the very beginning, they give others the impression that they are good seeds and that they will blossom and bring forth fruit. There are others who are quite confident of themselves and who consider themselves quite highly, but before long, they fall by the way. In addition to being useless, they also bring dishonor to the Lord's name. They chose a way that is too broad and too wide. Still others are not very conspicuous at the beginning. However, they prove their worth before the Lord in later years. You may ask how we can account for these wide differences. Let me answer frankly that there are certain fundamental features in the constitution and character of every person which account for his usefulness and without which no one can be of any use in the service of the Lord. A young man may hold great promise in many areas, but if fundamental features are lacking, he cannot work for the Lord, even though his desire to serve the Lord is genuine and even though he has prepared himself for it. He can never carry out a proper work for the Lord. We have never met anyone who cannot control his body, yet who can be a good worker of the Lord. I do not know what these ones make of themselves in other professions, but I have never seen a person who is unable to control and rule over his body prove to be a useful servant of the Lord, nor have I seen a man who does not have a mind to suffer who can serve the Lord. I have never met a person who fails to listen to others who is good at serving. All servants of the Lord have to have certain basic character traits. In other words, they must possess such qualifications; they must receive mercy from the Lord to possess these qualities before they can serve the Lord in a proper way. Serving the Lord is not simple. A breaking-down and building-up process is necessary for the outer man. If you are wrong, loose, and undisciplined in many things, you are not qualified to do the Lord's work. Many are not qualified to do the Lord's work because of flaws in their character and personality, not because of a lack of technique, knowledge, or doctrine. This frustration has delayed the Lord's work in many instances. We have to learn to listen to the brothers, to humble ourselves before the Lord, to seek after Him, and to deal with Him in many aspects. We should never

despise the training of our character. If our character and disposition do not go through some severe constituting work of the Spirit, we cannot expect much result from our work. None of the basic training in our character can be overlooked. If we are constituted in our character, we can work for the Lord. Without such a character, we cannot work for Him. Let us spend time before Him to deal with these character issues one by one.

In this chapter we come to another character issue—diligence.

ONE

Matthew 25:18, 24-28, 30 says, "But he who had received the one went off and dug in the earth and hid his master's money....Then he who had received the one talent also came and said, Master, I knew about you, that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow. And I was afraid and went off and hid your talent in the earth; behold, you have what is yours. And his master answered and said to him, Evil and slothful slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not winnow. Therefore you should have deposited my money with the money changers; and when I came, I would have recovered what is mine with interest. Take away therefore the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents....And cast out the useless slave into the outer darkness." This passage shows us that one of the basic requirements of a worker of the Lord is diligence. It clearly portrays the fundamental trouble in the life of a servant. The trouble was twofold: He was both "evil" and "slothful." His evil was manifested in his calling his master "a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow." We shall not dwell on this aspect of his character, but we shall speak of the other, that is, his sloth. He hid his talent in the earth because his heart was evil and his hands were slothful. In his heart he had certain thoughts about his master. These thoughts were evil. At the same time, he did not do what he should have done, but instead he hid the talent in the earth. This is simply slothfulness. We want to pay attention to this aspect of his character. A slothful character is the biggest weakness among many people.

Slothful people never look for things to do. If work comes their way, they

seek to evade it. Many Christians also adopt this attitude; they view big matters as being small, and small matters as being nothing. They try to reduce a big work to a small work, and they try to make a small work nothing at all. This is their attitude all the time. Based on our experience, we can say that only one kind of person is useful—those who are diligent. A slothful person is detestable. A brother once said that even Satan can do nothing about a slothful person. Proverbs 19:24 says, "A sluggard burieth his hand in the dish, and will not even bring it to his mouth again" (Darby). It is hard for a lazy man to do just about anything. It is hard because he is afraid of becoming tired. He puts his hand in the dish, but cannot even bring it to his mouth again. He has to eat, but he wishes that others would bring the food in the dish to his mouth. If there is ever a useless man on this earth, he has to be one who is slothful. God will not use a slothful person. Brothers and sisters, have you ever known an effective Christian worker who is slothful? Everyone who is ever used by God labors and works diligently in His service. He is always on the alert lest he squander his time or strength. Those who are always looking for an opportunity for rest and recreation are not worthy of being called God's servants. God's servants cannot adopt a lazy living. They seek to buy up every opportunity that is available to them.

Look at the apostles in the New Testament, from Peter to Paul. Can we find one lazy bone in them? They did not have any trace of laziness. They had no thought of wasting their time. All of them labored diligently and sought for every opportunity to serve the Lord. Paul said, "Proclaim the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2). The proclamation of the word must be done in season and out of season. One has to labor diligently, whether in season or out of season. A worker of the Lord has to work in season and out of season. This means that he has to be very diligent. All the apostles were extremely diligent. Think of the colossal amount of work Paul accomplished. We may be eighty years old before we have done one tenth of what he did. We must realize that all servants of the Lord are diligent. In considering Paul's work, we can see that he was truly diligent. There was no laziness in him whatsoever. He was either traveling from place to place, preaching the gospel wherever he went, or reasoning intently with individuals and teaching them. Even when he was in prison he was still writing his Epistles. The Epistles which

touched the peak of spiritual revelations were all written in his prison cell. Although he was bound within the cell walls, God's word was not bound. Paul was truly a diligent man. He was like his Master, who was never slothful.

In the original language of the New Testament, there are three Greek words for slothfulness. The first is argos, the second is nothros, and the third is okneros. All three words mean slothfulness. They are translated differently in the New Testament (1 Tim. 5:13; Rom. 12:11; Heb. 5:11; 6:12; Matt. 12:36; 20:3, 6; 2 Pet. 1:8; Phil. 3:1; Titus 1:12). Whether the words are translated as idle, slothful, sluggish, irksome, or dull, they all mean a refusal or reluctance to work or do things. To be slothful means to ignore the work or to reduce the work until it becomes no work. There is a joke about a doorkeeper whose responsibility was to open the door whenever visitors rang the bell. One day the bell rang, but he did not open the door. When asked why he did not open it, he answered, "I am hoping the bell will stop ringing!" Visitors were waiting to come in, yet he was hoping the bell would stop ringing. Brothers and sisters, what kind of person is this? Unfortunately, this is the way many behave in God's work. They hope that things will go away. Even when things do not go away, they hope that they will not become a burden to them. In their mind they are saying, "How I would thank the Lord if these things went away and I did not have to deal with them!" What is this? This is slothfulness!

What is slothfulness? It is to procrastinate, to drag on for as long as possible, and to take time in doing something. Perhaps a work can be finished in one day, yet the person drags it out for ten days. Or it can be finished in a month, yet the person drags it out for three months. He takes his time to finish the work. This is slothfulness. In some instances the word is translated "idle" (Matt. 20:3, 6). An idle person is one who mills around aimlessly. He is tossed between acting and not acting, and his mind is never set on what should be done. In Philippians 3:1, it is translated "irksome." Paul said, "To write the same things to you, for me it is not irksome, but for you it is safe." As soon as you put something on the shoulders of some brothers and sisters, they are reluctant to take it up. It is irksome to them. They sigh and grumble. It seems as if they are being asked to take up an impossible task and that a very heavy burden has been placed upon them. But this is not the way Paul acted. He was

in prison when he wrote his Epistles. It would indeed be a challenge for anyone to write in a situation as dire as his. Yet in writing to the Philippians, Paul exhorted them to rejoice. "Rejoice in the Lord always" (4:4). As far as his circumstances went, he was in grave hardship. Yet he said, "To write the same things to you, for me it is not irksome." He was not slothful. He did not consider it irksome; rather, he considered it a joyous thing. He did not know the meaning of laziness. In him we find a zeal which is prominent among all servants of God. They are not slothful and do not consider it irksome to take challenges upon themselves.

Many brothers and sisters have become useless in God's service because they are afraid to take on any responsibility. They are irked by everything. They constantly hope for less work. They would rather choose less responsibility than more responsibility, and they would be happy to settle for no responsibility at all. They do not have a diligent character. If we are lazy, we are disqualified not only from God's service, but from man's service as well. Many brothers and sisters cannot be servants of the Lord because they are lazy. Some so-called servants of God sit high on a pedestal. It seems as if no one has control over them; no brother or sister can touch them, and no one can say anything to them. They regard themselves as servants of God alone. If their master was changed for a brief moment, they would be shown to be total failures. No human master would allow them to be as sloppy as they are. Our disposition and walk must be so exercised that we would never shrink back from troubles, but would instead prefer service and sacrifice for God's people, both materially and physically. We should prefer to labor and work with our own hands. If this is not our way, we are not qualified to be called God's servants! Paul said, "You yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my needs and to those who are with me" (Acts 20:34). He had two good hands; they were not slothful at all. They worked during the day and during the night. Such a person is truly a servant of God.

TWO

What is diligence? It is the opposite of slothfulness. It is not shirking from responsibility. A diligent person does not try to reduce his work to nothing. On the contrary, he tries to create work out of nothing. In the Lord's service, it is quite possible for us to take a day or two of rest if we do not

look for work. We should not be those who stand around idly waiting for something to turn up. If we work only when work turns up, we are not diligent persons. A diligent person is never idle; he is always looking for things to do. He is always pondering, praying, contemplating, and considering before God as to what he should do. Unless he exercises himself this way, he can find himself with nothing to do. If we only act "according to the book," we may soon find that there is not much of a book left. We should expect to find much work in our service to God. We should discover many needs. We have to pray much to the Lord and look to Him all the time. We should open our eyes, and as soon as we find something that needs to be done, we should do it. After we finish a job, we should wait on the Lord and look to Him again. And as soon as we find more to do, we should tackle it. Following this, we should seek God's will again, and take on yet another task. This is what it means to serve God. The Lord said, "My Father is working until now, and I also am working" (John 5:17). We must never change this verse to read, "My Father is resting until now, and I also am resting." Laziness is not our way; our way should be, "My Father is working until now, and I also am working."

We should ask the Lord, "What work do You have for me to do?" After the Lord's conversation with the Samaritan woman, He asked His disciples a very strange question: "Do you not say that there are yet four months and then the harvest comes? Behold, I tell you, Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are already white for harvest" (4:35). According to His disciples, the harvest would not be ready for another four months. But according to the Lord, the harvest had already come. In man's view, one had to wait four months, but the Lord said, "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are already white for harvest." The lack today is men who would lift up their eyes. Everyone wants to wait for four months to work. Today many people are hiding at home instead of journeying in God's way. Their eyes are not on what God is doing today. In John 5:17 the Lord said that He was always doing what His Father had sent Him to do. In John 4:35 He told us to lift up our eyes and look. If we do not lift up our eyes, we will not see anything. The matter of work is altogether related to the matter of diligence. It involves our conscientiousness. It is not a matter of taking care of what is in our hands, but a matter of lifting up our eyes to look for things to do. God is moving and acting behind

many things, and we have to lift up our eyes to look for them in order to find them. We have to lift up our eyes to see the harvest and to see if it has ripened. Once we look, we will find work to do. How strange it is that so many people seem so idle; they seem to have nothing to do!

Those who have the intention to work will always find work to do. Those who have no intention to work are always afraid that work will come their way. A diligent person always waits on God. As soon as he is free, he goes to the Lord and looks for things to do. He is always seeking an opportunity to work. A brother once said, "Brother So-and-so is not doing his job. So many brothers from out of town are here, and he will not spend any time to fellowship with them." Another brother asked, "Why do you not tell him?" The first brother answered, "Does something like that have to be said?" This is right. A servant of the Lord should always be waiting on God for things to do. Of course, this does not mean that he should move around and make a fuss ostentatiously. But it does mean that the Lord's servant should always be seeking God and looking to Him. He should build up the habit of lifting up his eyes and looking. If he is truly busy, God will not burden him with further work. But as soon as his time becomes available, he should ask, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" As long as we will lift up our eyes, we will find that many people need our service.

Those who always have nothing to do have only one reason—they are used to being lazy. They live a lazy life. They are lazy by nature. When something is put in their hands, they take more than ten days to finish what others can finish in a day. They have no motivation for work. Brothers and sisters, we have to actively seek for work. If we have not looked to God for work, prayed for work, and found work, we are lazy, and we will not be able to accomplish much work. Even if we are given five or ten more years, we still will not get very far with our work.

A basic requirement of a worker of the Lord is to be quick with his eyes. As soon as a need arises, he should know what to do and how to move. Without this trait, he will not find any work. Our spirit has to be sensitive to the Lord. If we are not sensitive, we will be slow to react to things. We have to pay attention to lifting up our eyes. We should not follow what others say. We should not assume that there are four months to the harvest. We have to hear what the Lord is saying: "Behold, I tell you, Lift

up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are already white for harvest." It is amazing that some walk by the fields every day and yet have no eyes to behold. They think that they still have to wait four more months! They walk by needs every day, yet they do not find anything to do! Their hands have already touched the things that they should do, yet they still say that they do not know what they should do. How strange this is! Brothers and sisters, we have never seen God use a man who was slothful. Those whom God uses are men who expend their energy, who always look for things to do, and who are never loose. They jealously guard the passing moments and never put off until tomorrow what can be done today. Those who are loose with their time have little use in the hand of the Lord. Some people will not move unless they are pushed to do so. They are like grandfather clocks; others have to set them in motion before they do anything. If no one pushes them, they will not move by themselves. Such ones are of little use in God's work. No matter where we go, as long as we find brothers who are laboring and diligently working, we find results. God has done great works in many places because many people labored diligently behind the scene. In some places God's work suffers a setback because some have been slothful. We have never seen a lazy person who was greatly used by God. Often the underlying reason for failure in the work is nothing but slothfulness.

The word in Greek for diligence is spoude or spoudazo. It is also translated as zeal, earnestness, eager, and haste (Rom. 12:8, 11; 2 Cor. 7:11-12; 8:7-8, 16; Heb. 4:11; 6:11; 2 Pet. 1:5, 10; 3:14; Gal. 2:10; 2 Tim. 2:15; 4:9, 21; Titus 3:12; Jude 3; 1 Thes. 2:17; Eph. 4:3; 2 Pet. 1:15; Mark 6:25; Luke 1:39). Romans 12:11 puts the words diligence (zeal) and slothful together. It says, "Do not be slothful in zeal." In other words, to be slothful is to not be diligent. In spiritual work one person should count for ten or even a hundred. If God's servants are lazy, no work can be done. If we are slothful, and ten of us are needed to do the work of one man, how can we meet the need of the work? Brothers and sisters, we have to acquire a diligent character. Whether or not our work is actually overwhelming is a secondary issue. The primary issue is whether or not we have a diligent character. We should be those who are desperate to seek for work before the Lord. Of course, this does not mean that we should pretend to be busy. It is useless to pretend. We should be diligent, and this means that we should not be afraid of responsibility, that we

should serve the Lord with zeal, and that we should be burning in spirit. We have to find out what we can do in God's service. This may not be manifested in outward activities, but it should be manifested in our character and disposition. If we are lazy by nature, it will be useless even if we are busy twelve hours a day for days, because eventually we will revert to our same old habits. We must have a character that is diligent and conscientious before we can become useful to the Lord. Some people can force themselves to work for two hours, but in essence they are still lazy persons; they are still very much afraid of responsibility. They pray day and night for their responsibilities to be reduced or eliminated altogether, and they yearn for the day when they will have no responsibilities at all. This is not the way our Lord works. He came to the world to seek out men, to take on responsibilities. He said that He came "to seek and to save that which is lost." He did not come just to make contacts with men; He came to seek them out. We must have this kind of character before we can go on with the Lord.

Second Peter 1:5-7 says, "Adding all diligence, supply bountifully in your faith virtue; and in virtue, knowledge; and in knowledge, self-control; and in self-control, endurance; and in endurance, godliness; and in godliness, brotherly love; and in brotherly love, love." This is diligence. Peter used the phrase and in six times. This shows that a diligent man always adds to what he has; he is not content with what he has. We should cultivate this character. We should always add to what we have and never stop. There must always be the "adding...and in." We must push ourselves all the time. This is the only way to see results. If we are idle and lazy by nature, we will not get anywhere. Some people do not sense any responsibility in God's work; they do not feel any burden on their shoulders. They have never thought of improving the work or expanding their work. They have never thought of gaining more men for the Lord or spreading the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth. They can tolerate everything. How can God use such men? If they do not see a single soul saved today, they accept it as a matter of course. If they do not see a soul saved tomorrow, they are not alarmed either. How can such ones work for God? How can the Lord's purpose be attained through workmen of this sort? God needs workers who will not give up, who always seek to add to what they have. Only such men can participate in the Lord's work. Read the words of 2 Peter 1:5-8 again:

"Adding all diligence, supply bountifully in your faith virtue; and in virtue, knowledge; and in knowledge, self-control; and in self-control, endurance; and in endurance, godliness; and in godliness, brotherly love; and in brotherly love, love. For these things, existing in you and abounding, constitute you neither idle nor unfruitful unto the full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Peter said that we should be more diligent. How can we be diligent? We have to add to what we have. This is the way to be delivered from idleness. In other words, slothfulness can only be removed by diligence. How do we become diligent? We become diligent by always adding to what we have. We should always feel that we do not have enough, that we will not settle for what we have, and that we will not stop until we abound and are no longer idle or unfruitful unto the full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Brothers and sisters, we have to counter our laziness with "adding...and in." We should pay attention to Peter's word. If we only preach the doctrine of diligence, we only have to exhort others to be diligent, and we only need to say it once. But Peter repeated the pattern in verses 5 through 7. He was showing us that one can only be diligent when he adds to what he has again and again until he has these things in abundance. This is the only way to not be idle or unfruitful. Brothers and sisters, we need to pray for God to change our character. We do not want to be slothful. We want to be those who are happy and willing to work and who constantly seek for an opportunity to serve the Lord.

Peter did not stop here; he went on. Please read verse 15: "Moreover I will also be diligent that you may be able, after my exodus, to bring these things to mind at all times." Here the word diligent is used once again. Peter charged them diligently to remember these things. Perhaps he had seen too many lazy ones. This is why he had to diligently remind them of these things. Brothers and sisters, we have to learn to serve our God diligently and conscientiously. We should seize every opportunity to serve Him. We should have a disposition and a character that are forever diligent. A good worker is one who is at work not only with his hands and feet, but with his mind and heart as well. If we are not diligent, we will not be of much use to the Lord's work. Those who are good at doctrines may be completely useless to the Lord if they are lazy by nature. All who are afraid of work and responsibility and who have no desire to do anything are not qualified to serve God. They are not fit for His work.

The two Epistles to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus are letters concerning the Lord's work. Second Timothy 4:9 says, "Be diligent to come to me quickly." If a man is diligent, he will come quickly. But if a man is slothful, he will come slowly. Paul said, "Be diligent to come to me quickly." Verse 21 says, "Be diligent to come before winter." Titus 3:12 also speaks of diligence. In these Epistles on work, diligence is very much emphasized.

Jude says the same thing in verse 3: "Beloved, while using all diligence to write to you concerning our common salvation..."

Paul spoke of diligence in other places as well. In pointing out the Corinthians' repentance, he said, "For behold this very thing, your being made sorrowful according to God, what earnestness it has worked out in you" (2 Cor. 7:11). The word earnestness in this verse is the same as diligence in Greek.

Brothers and sisters, if a man wants to learn to serve the Lord, he must be awakened to the weightiness of his responsibility, to the urgency of the need around him, and to the fleeting nature of time! Life is short. If such a consciousness is present within him, he will become diligent and unrelenting. If we do not feel the fleeting nature of our time, the urgency of the need around us, or the weightiness of our responsibility, we will not be able to accomplish much in God's work. If the burden is pressed upon us, we will have no option but to work, even if we have to deprive ourselves of food, sleep, and rest to achieve the goal. This is the only way to make progress in our work. If we consider rest as the most important thing in our life, we will not get too far with our work. Brothers and sisters, our time is almost gone; the need is ever so desperate, and our responsibility is ever so great. Let us, as dying men with fleeting breath and fading opportunity, give ourselves fully to preach the gospel to those who are dying around us. If we drag our feet and fail to see the needs around us, the responsibility that we bear, and the little time that we have, we will not get much of the Lord's work done. Today every servant of God has to serve with a dying urgency. Who can be slothful under such pressure? Brothers and sisters, we must arise and discipline our body in order to be diligent. As Paul said, we have to buffet our body and make it our slave. Just saying that we are eager to serve the Lord is not enough. If we are lazy, we will not be able to tackle any problem

before us. Do not think that slothfulness is a small thing. Second Peter 1:8 says that slothfulness is laziness and idleness. We cannot be lazy, and we cannot be idle. We have to buffet our body again and again until we realize that a total, genuine, and daily sacrifice of our life is the only way to work and become useful. We cannot deceive ourselves. Some people say that they will gladly give up their lives for the Lord. Yet they live a lazy life. They try to spare themselves in everything. If they try to bring their character, habits, and disposition into the Lord's work, they will find that they are holding back the Lord's work! If Paul had waited every time for a Macedonian call before he worked, the book of Acts might have recorded only one mission of Paul to Macedonia. The Macedonian call was only one among many in Paul's work. As for the rest of his work, Paul carried it out with a burden which he bore before the Lord. If we have to wait for the brothers to come to us before we will work, we may wait a lifetime for nothing. We work because we have a burden, because we know that the time is short, the need is great, and Satan's attack is fierce. We are forced to be diligent. Slothfulness can make an otherwise useful man useless. It can turn a man of riches into a man who works only to a third, a fifth, or merely a tenth of what he is capable of! Everyone who knows God and who is useful in His hand is diligent.

THREE

Let us return to the passage in Matthew 25:18-30. What does it say in that passage? In the parable we see two possible charges facing us at the judgment seat—the charge of "evil" and the charge of "slothful." The slave was evil because he harbored ill thoughts about the Lord. Perhaps not many people are this evil. But nine out of ten may have to admit that they are slothful slaves when they stand before the Lord. At that time the Lord Himself will pronounce the judgment: "Cast out the useless slave into the outer darkness" (v. 30). The Lord considers a slothful servant a "useless" one. Sometimes we ask why God uses a certain brother. He uses him because he gives himself to what he is doing day and night. The way is with the diligent ones; no lazy ones can take this way. We have to sacrifice our all before we can take this way. Brothers and sisters, if we do not deal with the problem of slothfulness, we cannot have any work at all. Once we become lazy, our worth is cut in half. If we allow ourselves to go on this way, we may end up with only a tenth of our

worth. There are already too few people who know the Lord today. If we drag our feet and are slow in our endeavor, how can our work accomplish anything? Do not regard this matter lightly. Do not think that diligence is a small thing. Many people in the past have become useless and have fallen by the wayside, wasting themselves through their slothfulness. Let us take this solemn warning. From this very day let us look to the Lord to enable us to reverse our habit and character altogether. May the Lord remove slothfulness from us. We cannot be lazy and idle. If we are, our work will not have a future.

We should discipline our body in such a strict way that it will be fully obedient to us. We should be diligent, not slothful. The most common malady in our work is slothfulness. Perhaps nine out of ten persons are slothful. A servant of the Lord should have the stamina to always push himself forward. The Bible uses the ox instead of the horse as a symbol of our service. An ox plods on with the same work today, tomorrow, and the next day; it never gives up. If we work one day when we are up and rest the next day when we are down, or work when the weather is fair and rest when the weather is foul, we will never see any result to our work. But if we move on step by step, day by day, unrelentingly and steadily, we will see results sooner or later. May God deliver us from our flippant and foolish ways so that we can be like the ox, holding, gripping, steadying, and unrelentingly and diligently working all the time. If we do this, we will have a way to go on.

The book of Proverbs speaks of slothfulness more than any other book in the Old Testament. It gives a clear picture of what slothfulness is. The Hebrew word atsel is translated fourteen times, either as slothful or as sluggard (6:6, 9; 10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30; 26:13-16). It is translated once as slothfulness (19:15). The Hebrew word remiyah is also translated as slothful twice (12:24, 27). Solomon made it clear what slothfulness is.

Since slothfulness is a habit that has been built up over the years, we cannot hope to correct it in a day or two. If we do not deal with it in a serious way, it may stay with us for the rest of our life. Do not think that hearing one message will solve the problem. It is not that simple. This habit has taken years to build up, and it has become part of our character. Unless we deal with it sternly before the Lord, we cannot rid

ourselves of it. We expect those who are accustomed to laziness to be all the more conscientious in dealing with their slothfulness. Unless they deal with this matter soberly, they cannot participate in the Lord's work. God's work cannot tolerate lazy ones. No slothful person can produce a proper work, because the disposition of a lazy man always tries to ignore or put off things. When things come his way, he wishes that they would disappear altogether. Those with a lazy habit are hopeless as far as God's work is concerned. Every servant of the Lord must be a busy person. He should always look for something to occupy himself with. He should put himself under every burden and delve into every problem; he should not avoid problems. Every servant of God should take all kinds of responsibilities upon himself; he should not be afraid of troubles. Brothers and sisters, we have to deal with our evil habit of avoiding work, trouble, and assignments. We must deal with this in a stern way. A man who is lazy can never serve God.

CHAPTER SIX

Restrained In Speaking

ONE

Many people could be very useful in the hand of God; they could be a powerful vessel to the Lord. Yet they remain useless to God, or they are used by Him in only a limited way. One of the main reasons for their failure is a lack of restraint in their speaking. We must remember that careless words are often the source of a leakage of power. Our words are like holes: They can be an outlet for God's power, or they can leak away His power. Our mouth can be the outlet through which God's power flows, or it can be a hole through which the divine power leaks away. Unfortunately, many people leak away God's power through their speaking.

James 3:11 says that a spring cannot "gush forth the sweet and the bitter" at the same time. A worker of the Lord should send forth sweet and living water; he should be a conveyer of God's word. A water bucket cannot be used both for carrying drinking water and for dumping sewage. If the bucket for sewage is used to carry drinking water, it will become hazardous to health and life. In the same way, if our lips are consecrated

for the utterance of God's word, then a solemn obligation is upon us to guard our lips for His service alone. If we employ our lips in things other than God's word, we cannot employ them in the utterance of God's word. Many people cannot be used by God, or they can only be used by God in a limited way, simply because their spring produces two kinds of water, sweet and bitter. They speak God's word with their mouth, and they also say many things which have nothing to do with God.

Brothers and sisters, before the Lord we should realize that once we consecrate our mouth to be God's oracle, we have a great responsibility upon our shoulders. It is a grave responsibility for God to entrust His word to us. In Numbers 16 we are told how Korah and his associates banded together to oppose Moses and Aaron. They took their censers filled with fire and presented them to the Lord. They all perished for their sin, but the censers remained holy and were beaten into plates for a covering of the altar (vv. 16-18, 33, 38-39). Whatsoever has been offered to God and used by Him is set apart for Him and cannot be put to common use afterwards. Some brothers and sisters have a wrong concept; they think that they can speak God's word one minute and Satan's word (lies being of Satan) the next. Brothers and sisters, this cannot be our practice. Once a brother opens his mouth for the Lord, his mouth is forever the Lord's. Many people leak away their power through the words they speak. Some brothers could have been very useful in the hand of the Lord, but because they spoke many things that were not for God, their inward power leaked out through their speaking. We must remember that a spring can bring forth only one kind of water. If our mouth has once spoken God's word, we have to realize that we have no right to speak just anything when we open our mouth again. Our mouth has been sanctified; it is separated already. Once something is consecrated to God, it becomes God's possession forever; we can never take back what we have given to Him. If we take it back, we become like Balaam's donkey; we are no longer God's prophet. We have to see the strong relationship between God's word and our word. Our mouth is separated; it belongs to God, and it can only speak God's word.

It is unfortunate that many otherwise useful men have become useless in the eyes of the Lord simply because their mouths have become a gaping hole through which God's power dissipates. Once a mouth speaks the

wrong kind of words, power is gone from such a mouth. The trouble with many people is that they have too many words. In a multitude of words we can detect the voice of a fool (Eccl. 5:3). Many people lose their power through the multitude of words. They like to say such-and-such to So-and-so. They always have something to say about everything. Not only do they have much to say, they like to pass on what they have heard to others. Brothers and sisters, we have to pay attention to guarding our mouth. We have to guard it the same way we guard our heart. This is particularly true for those who serve as God's oracle. God is using them to be His mouthpiece and to convey His word. Their mouths are sanctified for His service; they are holy, and their mouth should be guarded as jealously as one guards his heart. The mouth cannot be loose.

TWO

There are several points connected with the matter of speaking, and we should take note of them.

First, let us note before the Lord the kind of talk we hear all the time. The kind of talk we hear determines the kind of person we are. Many people will not tell you some things because they know that you are not like them, and it would be useless to say that thing to you. If a person readily shares certain things with you, he does it because he knows that you are of the same kind, and that such things will produce a certain effect on you. You can know yourself by noting the things that people relate to you all the time.

Second, let us observe the kind of words we most readily believe. That which we are prone to credit reveals our own disposition. A certain kind of people will tend to believe certain kinds of words. We hear things wrongly and believe things lightly because we are blind; we are not in God's light. As soon as we are short of light or void of light, we fall into error. The direction of our ear and the degree of our gullibility often betrays our sick condition. Many people believe others' words even before they ever hear anything from them. Then when they hear something, they rejoice over what they have heard. The words may be incredible and ludicrous, yet a person can still be convinced that they are true. Hence, the kind of words that we believe show the kind of person that we are.

Third, next to listening and believing, there is also the matter of passing words on to others. This is similar in nature to the first two points. One may hear and believe a certain kind of words, but if he decides to pass them on to others, this indicates that he is not only the kind of person being portrayed by the words, that is, a person in darkness, but he is also willing to make others just like himself. His whole being is involved with the words he speaks. In listening, others are speaking; in believing, others' words are received; and in passing on words, one's whole being is put into the words. Many people love to speak and pass on words. Because of this, they lose all their power and are no longer able to be a proper minister of God's word.

Fourth, there are the inaccurate words. Some people are very inaccurate in the things they say. One minute they say one thing and the next minute they say something else. This type of person is "double-tongued" (1 Tim. 3:8); they cannot serve as deacons. They say one thing to one person and another thing to another person. They say something to a man's face and turn around and say something else behind his back. Such ones are useless in the work of God. Brothers and sisters, if we cannot bridle our tongue, how can we control ourselves and how can we serve the Lord? A man must bridle himself and buffet his body before he can serve the Lord in a proper way. We have a terrible member in our body—our tongue, which always leads us into trouble. Inaccuracy in words, being double-tongued, and vacillation in our statements are marks of weakness in character. Those who have such habits have no standing, and they are powerless before God. They vacillate back and forth because they are too easy going and uncertain. Such behavior points to extreme weakness in one's character! In the Lord's work, inaccurate words are a very sobering matter, and we must deal with them.

Fifth, there are those who are intentionally double-tongued. Some are double-tongued in a way that is more serious than others; they are worse than those who are double-tongued through ignorance; they are intentionally double-tongued. Some are double-tongued because they are ignorant. They say one thing at one time and another thing at another time. To them "yes" and "no" mean more or less the same thing. They do not have a sense of right and wrong, and they are completely in the dark. If you ask them if an object is black, they may say yes. If you ask them if

the same object is white, they may say yes again. They are not clear about anything. To them black and white are just about the same. They live a sloppy and foolish life. They are ignorantly double-tongued. But with others, there is a conscious effort to be double-tongued. They purposely say something on one occasion and another thing on another occasion. This is not only a weakness in character but a moral corruption. Matthew 21:23-27 records that the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the Lord and asked on whose authority He was acting. He replied with this question: "The baptism of John, from where did it come, from heaven or from men?" They reasoned among themselves: "If we say, From heaven, He will say to us, Why then did you not believe him? But if we say, From men, we fear the crowd, for all hold John as a prophet." They answered the Lord saying, "We do not know." Their answer was a deliberate lie. In Matthew 5:37 the Lord said, "But let your word be, Yes, yes; No, no; for anything more than these is of the evil one." If something is yes, we say yes. If it is no, we say no. This is to walk in the light and in honesty. But if we stop to reason about the possible effect of our words on others and consider how we can speak with diplomacy, our motive and attitude are unbecoming of a worker of the Lord. If our words are framed in craftiness, we are making such words instruments of deceit! We would rather follow our Lord's example. When people sought to lay a snare for Him by their questions, He resorted to silence. If we have to say something, we would rather have our words be "Yes, yes; No, no." Anything more than this is of the evil one. A clever person has no place here. Paul exhorted the Corinthians, saying, "If anyone thinks that he is wise among you in this age, let him become foolish that he may become wise" (1 Cor. 3:18). Romans 16:19 says, "I want you to be...guileless as to what is evil." To be wise in these things gets us nowhere in the eyes of God. It is useless for us to maneuver. Our wisdom is in the Lord's hand. We cannot be double-tongued. This is the trouble with many people. Those whose words are untrustworthy have little use to God. If they give themselves to the work, sooner or later they will find themselves in trouble. If a man says one thing at one time and another thing at another time, wavering between right and wrong, yes and no, and vacillating between what can be done and what cannot be done, he is of little use to the work of God. Those with fluctuating and unreliable words are useless in God's work.

Sixth, we must deal with the very way we listen. A man may be somewhat gifted and talented. But as long as he is inaccurate with his words, there is a gaping hole in his character. This one flaw alone will cost him all of his power. How unfortunate that many of God's workers have become information centers! Brothers and sisters, as the Lord's workers we come into constant contact with people and have therefore many opportunities to hear others speak as well as to speak to others ourselves. If we are not disciplined and restricted in our words, it is very possible that while we are speaking God's word, we are spreading rumors and gossip at the same time. If our words are not disciplined, we may be building up God's work with one hand and destroying it with the other. Hence, we have to look to God to apply strict discipline to our ears. Brothers and sisters often want to tell us their personal stories. We should do our best to listen to them. We should be a good listener, and we should realize their problem and render them the proper help. When others speak to us, we should listen to them to take care of their need and solve their problem. But we must discourage them from going into any further detail once we are inwardly clear about their need. We should tell them to stop. We can say, "That is enough. You can stop here." It is wrong to listen with curiosity to what others have to say and to treat their words as stories or tall tales. All we need to do is to realize their problem. As soon as we know and have some assurance about it, we should say, "Brother, that is enough." We should not have a lust for information. Human beings have a lust for knowing other people's business; they have a lust for listening. There is a lust for knowledge, a lust for listening. But we must listen with guarded caution. As soon as we reach the limit, we should stop. Our listening is for the purpose of taking care of our prayer and for solving problems. We should listen only to take care of our brothers' and sisters' problems. At a certain point, we should stop listening.

Seventh, we have to gain and maintain people's trust. If anyone shares his spiritual problems with us, that is a trust he has placed with us. We must not speak about these confidences carelessly. Unless the interests of the work make it necessary, we should not repeat these things loosely. If we have never been disciplined in our words, we cannot participate in God's work. God's servants are entrusted with many things. They need to treat such confidences as a sacred trust and guard them faithfully. These

words are entrusted to us; they are not our possessions but are objects entrusted to us in our ministry and our divine service. We cannot release them at will. We must learn to safeguard and protect every spiritual confidence placed in us by the brothers and sisters. We cannot spread these things irresponsibly. If our responsibility or God's work or human needs calls for their divulgence, that is another story altogether. At any rate, a multitude of words always brings in a loss, a great loss. Those who are wordy and who pass on words easily cannot be entrusted with the Lord's work. We should receive warning from the Lord. May He restrict our words, and may we not open our mouth rashly or speak lightly. Whether or not a person is disciplined is most easily seen from the way he controls his tongue. If a man is disciplined, his tongue will always be restricted. We should pay particular attention to this matter.

Eighth, we have to pay special attention to the matter of lies. The double-tongued person to whom we have referred is a close kinsman of the liar. All utterances that are made with an intent to give a false hope or a wrong impression fall into the category of lying. Sometimes a lie may not contain any false statement, but it is skillfully spoken to give others a false impression. This is in reality a lie. We have to remember that honesty in our speech is a matter of motive; it is not simply a matter of correctness in words. If a brother asks a question we do not wish to answer or are unable to answer, we should politely refuse to reply, but we should not deceive the brother. A false statement is a lie, and anything that gives others a wrong impression is also a lie. We want people to believe the truth; therefore, we dare not use words that are true in order to convey a false impression. For God's children, it should always be "Yes, yes; No, no." Anything more than this is of the evil one. The Lord once spoke very strongly to the Jews: "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father....When he speaks the lie, he speaks it out of his own possessions; for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44). The devil is the author of lies. He was a liar from the beginning. Even today he is filled with lies. He is a liar and the father of it. It would be unthinkable for a child of God and, even more, for a worker of the Lord to lie. Yet some are indeed lying. This is too poor. There is no sickness more fundamental than this one. This is a very serious problem, very serious and very sobering! We must pay attention to the matter of lies. We should not think that everything we say is always accurate. The

more careful we are, the more we will realize the difficulty of being accurate in everything that we say. Sometimes our intention is to speak the truth, but with a little carelessness we find ourselves off the mark. If we can so easily veer off when we are trying to be accurate, how much more we will be off the mark if we are not consciously trying. It is hard enough for us to speak the truth by carefully watching over ourselves. It is harder still for us to speak the truth when we do not control ourselves. Hence, we must guard ourselves, pay attention to our words, and never be loose. Otherwise, we will not be able to serve our God. God cannot use a person who is His mouthpiece one minute and a mouthpiece of Satan the next minute. No, He can never use such a person.

Ninth, we should pay special attention to another point, which is to "not strive nor cry out." The Bible prophesied of the Lord: "He will not strive nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets" (Matt. 12:19; Isa. 42:2). Paul said, "A slave of the Lord ought not to contend" (2 Tim. 2:24). This means that no servant of the Lord can strive or make a loud noise. Making a loud noise is an expression of rudeness. The Lord's servant should be under such control that he will "not strive nor cry out." He should not quarrel with anyone. Loud speaking usually indicates a lack of power, at least the power of self-control. No servant of the Lord should be so loud that his neighbor can hear his voice next door. No one could hear the Lord's voice in the streets. This is the pattern He left for us. This means more than a rejection of lies. Many words are indeed correct and true, but we would rather not strive or cry out. "A slave of the Lord ought not to contend." We can keep our mouth shut about many things. A brother or a sister has to be extremely loose before he or she can shout at others. He or she must have been living an undisciplined life for many years before he or she could shout with little restraint. We should restrict ourselves and exercise discipline over our own voice, like the Lord, whose voice was not heard in the streets. Let us learn to muzzle our mouth from unwarranted noise, shouting, crying, and clamor. This does not mean that we should try to act in a sober and quiet way. We have to be spontaneous, and when we meet others, we have to speak with them in a proper and natural way. But the fact remains that those who have never been disciplined in their speaking will face difficult times in the work. We hope that all the workers of the Lord will learn to be finer and more tender and that no one will be rough and uncouth. Our

Lord is very fine and tender. He did not strive or cry out, and no one heard His voice in the streets. God's servants should give others the impression that they are fine and tender persons before the Lord.

Tenth, we need to pay attention to the matter of motive and fact. What we say is one thing, but our motive is another thing. God's children should not only pay attention to accuracy in words but also to accuracy in the facts. We should rather be accurate in facts than accurate in words alone. Many people only pay attention to accuracy in their words; they do not care about accuracy in the facts. Actually, even when we are very careful and accurate about the things we say, we may still be in error. Before the Lord we have to pay attention to accuracy in facts. If we do not pay attention to accuracy in facts, we will be of little use to the Lord even if our words are correct. Some brothers and sisters pay much attention to their words, yet we cannot trust them, because even though we have never found a mistake in their words, we know that they are only concerned about the correctness of their words; they are not concerned about the correctness of their facts. Suppose you hate a brother in your heart. This is a fact. As far as the fact is concerned, you hate him. But when you see him in the streets, you nod at him and greet him just the same. When he visits you, you serve him food, and when he is sick, you visit him. When he is in need, you give him money and clothing. Another brother may come to you and ask you, "How do you feel about this brother?" Even though you have no love for him in your heart, you still answer, "Did I not nod at him and greet him? Did I not visit him when he was sick? Did I not take care of him when he was poor?" It is true that you have the arguments. The law may be on your side, and your words may all be correct. But you are still lying because what you say does not reflect the facts. Some brothers and sisters pay much attention to procedures. You cannot find any fault with their procedures, yet their heart says something absolutely different. This is wrong. It is wrong to be correct in words but incorrect in facts. When we speak to others, we should not just pay attention to correctness in procedure and assume that we are telling the truth; we should instead pay attention to our motive before the Lord. This has to do with the fundamental issues that lie behind our words. Do not think that it is enough to use the correct words. Do not think that it is enough to be nice and cordial to others. You cannot say that just because you have these things, you do not hate your

brother. We have to consider the facts. The proof is not in the words you speak. We should speak the truth, the things that are actual facts. If the facts are wrong, we are still lying even if we use all the right words. Unfortunately, this is the way many people live. In speaking, we should take care not only of the words themselves but should go deeper to our motive and care for the facts.

Eleventh, we should not speak any idle words. "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks....Every idle word which men shall speak, they will render an account concerning it in the day of judgment" (Matt. 12:34-36). Following this the Lord says, "For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned" (v. 37). When God's children come together, it is advisable for them to eliminate idle words. This does not mean that we should not greet each other or talk about the weather or gardens. Words of greeting have to do with maintaining human relationships, and it is proper to have them in our conversation. But idle words are gossip about this and that family; they have nothing to do with us directly. They are unnecessary. The Lord Jesus says, "Every idle word which men shall speak, they will render an account concerning it in the day of judgment." Idle words will not be spoken once, but twice. They are spoken once today, and when the day of judgment comes, they will be spoken once more. All idle words will be repeated; a person will have to render an account concerning them in the day of judgment. One day we will discover the many idle words that we have spoken, and God will justify us or condemn us based on these words. This is why we cannot speak any word in a light way.

Many jokes, light talks, and jestings have to be ruled out. It is of course a different story when some brothers and sisters make a few clever remarks once a while, or when they say a few amusing words to their children and grandchildren. Paul refers in his Epistle to the Ephesians to "obscenity and foolish talking or sly, filthy jesting" (5:4). These are frivolous words, and we should reject them and turn away from them.

Moreover, there should not be any scoffing among us. At the time the Lord was on the cross, men scoffed Him, saying, "Let Him be. Let us see if Elijah is coming to take Him down" (Mark 15:36). This is scoffing. Those who do not believe in the Lord's second coming scoff and say, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things

continue in this way from the beginning of creation" (2 Pet. 3:4). Others may scoff and jest in all kinds of ways, but God's children should not allow these things to come out of their mouth.

There are many other kinds of unfitting words, such as words spoken behind others' backs or words of criticism. As for reviling words, they are sin and should be refused (Titus 3:10); they definitely should not come out of a Christian's mouth. We have to watch out for all these kinds of words and refrain from all of them.

THREE

A worker of the Lord must speak accurate words; he must not be careless with his tongue. He can only be a conveyer of God's word. If he is disciplined in his tongue, he will be spared of any entanglements. Our heart aches when we think of the lack of restraint among God's workers in the things they say. The brothers and sisters may be entertained by our gossip and interesting tales, but we will fail to command their respect when we speak for the Lord. Do not think that it is all right to joke and make fun with our brothers and sisters. There may be much fun in the joking and jesting, but when we turn around to speak God's word, they will consider our words to be of the same value as our stories, and our words will lose their weight. Some brothers can gain others' ears when they say something, while others may say the same thing yet not command any attention. We should consider the reason some have an audience while others do not. Their words may be the same. Certainly God's word is the same, but the way they speak at ordinary times differs. Let us pay attention to this matter. We may be the same as far as speaking God's word is concerned, but if we are different with our other speakings, we will be different when it comes to the power behind God's word. If we are used to loose words and always indulge ourselves in unrestrained conversations, the impact of our words on those who listen will be the same when we speak for the Lord as it is when we speak in a loose way. There will be very little impact at all. Brothers and sisters, let us remember that a spring cannot send forth from the same opening sweet and bitter water. It cannot supply sweet water at one time and bitter water at another time. The bitter water is always bitter. Its bitterness may be moderated sometimes, but it is still bitter. When clean water and filthy water are mixed together, the filthy water does not become clean;

rather, the clean water becomes filthy. Many brothers have no impact in their speaking, not because they are wrong in the words they preach, but because they are wrong in their other speakings, the ordinary speakings outside the platform. When they preach God's word, nobody listens to them. We must remember that the words we speak on the platform are governed by the words we speak off the platform. If we talk foolishly off the platform, our words on the platform will be completely spoiled. The sweet water will become bitter. There is no need for laborious preparations before we preach, but there is the need for constant precaution in our ordinary, everyday conversation. We cannot expect to have any power in our service to the Lord if we are not restricted in our daily living. If we are loose and inaccurate in our words, confuse truth for falsehood, joke and jest all the time, and even lie, we cannot have any power in our service. We must begin by controlling our tongue so that we can preach God's word.

Accurate words have much to do with one's reading of the Bible. The Bible is the most accurate book in the world. God's word is the only accurate word in the world. If we do not have a habit of speaking accurately, we cannot read the Bible, much less preach the Bible. Some brothers cannot read the Bible in the condition that they are in. It takes a certain character to be a gospel preacher. It also takes a certain character to read the Bible. A sloppy person cannot read the Bible because God's word is accurate. A sloppy person will miss everything in God's word. In fact, he will understand it in the wrong way.

Let us give an example to show the meaning of being accurate. According to Matthew 22, the Sadducees did not believe in resurrection. One day they came to the Lord and posed a question, saying, "Teacher, Moses said, If anyone dies and does not have children, his brother as next of kin shall marry his wife and raise up seed to his brother. Now there were seven brothers with us. And the first married and died, and having no seed, he left his wife to his brother; likewise also the second and the third until the seventh. And last of all the woman died. In the resurrection, then, whose wife will she be of the seven? For they all had her" (vv. 24-28). Resurrection was unthinkable to them. They thought that it would be better if there was no such thing as resurrection, because it would complicate things. They preferred to believe that there was no

resurrection. They came and reasoned with the Lord, coming up with a seemingly unsolvable problem. Jesus answered, "You err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying, `I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (vv. 29-32). The Sadducees certainly read the Scriptures, but the Lord said they did not know the Scriptures. They spoke so carelessly that it was impossible for them to appreciate the absolute accuracy of God's utterances. Our Lord only quoted a short passage from Exodus 3 to prove resurrection—God calls Himself the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. How does this short word prove resurrection? The Lord went on to explain, "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living." To the Sadducees Abraham was dead, Isaac was dead, and Jacob was dead; all three were dead. Would this not make the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob the God of the dead? Yet God is not the God of the dead. How can this be? Since God is not the God of the dead, Abraham must not remain dead forever. The same must be true of Isaac and Jacob. But how can dead men no longer be dead? They must be resurrected. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will all be resurrected because God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. The Lord Jesus answered the Sadducees this way. Our Lord was very accurate in the things He said. It exposed the inaccuracies of the Sadducees and their ignorance of the Bible.

If we are careless in our speaking, we will not appreciate how accurate God's word is. A sloppy character does not care for accuracy and is incapable of accuracy; it is not capable of holding and containing God's accurate word. The Bible is the most accurate book; it is accurate to the last iota and serif. The Lord said, "One iota or one serif shall by no means pass away from the law" (Matt. 5:18). God is purposeful in every iota and serif; He is never loose. Since God is so accurate in His words, His servants should also be accurate in their speaking. Brothers and sisters, God is never ambiguous in His speaking; He is never careless. His words are always firmly established; every one of them is sure and unshakable. The more we read His Word, the more we will realize that not a single word can be added or deleted. We must pay attention to this

point: no one who is loose in his speaking can be a servant of God. A loose talker will have no impact among the brothers and will not even be able to handle God's word himself. Some brothers are a suffering to others when they speak from the platform. One only has to listen to a message from such ones and he will realize how sloppy these ones are. A sloppy person can only speak sloppy words. Even when God's word is before him, he will speak in a sloppy way. If he is sloppy when he walks off the platform, how can he be anything but sloppy when he stands on the platform? No sloppy person can read the Bible, and no sloppy speakers can speak for the Lord. May God be merciful to us. May we receive mercy to have an accurate mouth. We should offer up a prayer to the Lord: "Give me the tongue of a learner so that I will not be loose, careless, or flawed in words. I do not want to lose many things. I do not want to lose my testimony." If we are careless in speaking, we cannot read and understand God's Word. In studying the Bible, we have to dig out the facts. But a sloppy person cannot find any facts. We have to learn to speak carefully and cautiously before we can appreciate the accuracy of God's every word.

FOUR

Every worker of the Lord has his specialty. He has his own special portion before the Lord, and God uses him by bringing out his special portion. Yet he should also have a balanced development in the other areas. A balanced development will eliminate any gaps or flaws in his ministry. If a brother is good at his specialty, yet fails in other areas, his ministry will be damaged by leaks. In the previous chapters, we covered various character traits such as listening to others, having a love for men, having a mind to suffer, buffeting the body, and being diligent. These are basic qualifications which we should have. No servant of God should be lacking in these character traits. The point of this chapter—being restrained in our speaking—is another basic qualification. A loose talker cannot convey God's word in an accurate way. Many brothers would have had a very bright and hopeful future had it not been for the fact that their tongues were too loose; they lost all their strength before God.

We have to guard our spiritual worth, our spiritual weight, and our spiritual usefulness before the Lord by every means. We cannot squander the special portion that God has given us. We should not

deplete it a little here and a little there. In order to preserve our ministry, we have to plug all the leaking holes. The preservation of the ministry of the Lord's worker should be his most crucial concern. If we do not preserve our ministry, all the things and responsibilities God has given us will be lost little by little, and in the end they will all be gone. We cannot be careless with even a single word that we say. We have to receive the dealings, rebukes, and judgments from the Lord. Brothers and sisters, it is not enough just to receive positive things. We also have to pay attention to preserving the positive things so that they will not become lost. If we do not deal with our speaking, we will surely lose the positive things that we already have.

When we stand before the judgment seat, we may discover that the damage done by frivolous, loose talk exceeds that which was done through many other things, because this kind of damage does not stop with us. It works great havoc in the lives of others as well. Words do not stop with us. Once a word is spoken, it continues to spread. Suppose some brothers have said something improper. Once the words escape their lips, they cannot be retracted. We can repent of our folly, and we can ask for forgiveness. We can even bury ourselves in ashes and repent, saying, "Lord, I have said something wrong." The Lord's blood will cleanse us, but it will not remove the words that have gone out. The words will continue to exist on the earth. We can confess our sins to the Lord and to the brothers, and both the Lord and the brothers can forgive us, but the words that we have spoken will remain and continue to spread. Some workers may be lacking in having a mind to suffer. Others may have a problem with listening to others or a weakness in being slothful. But the problem of unrestrained words may be more serious than slothfulness, a failure to listen, or the lack of having a mind to suffer. Careless words release a deadly stream that flows on and on and spreads death wherever it goes.

Brothers and sisters, in the face of such solemn facts, we need to be careful about our speaking. We should repent before the Lord for many words that have gone out of our mouth. These words do not produce good fruit. In fact, they harm in definite ways. Many of the words we uttered in the past were "idle words," but they are no longer "idle"; they are spreading all over the earth. At the time we spoke them, they were

idle words, but after a while they have become very busy and are working great havoc. We need to seek God's mercy to be cleansed of our past, and for the present we need to ask Him to deal radically with us and to burn us with a burning coal (Psa. 120:3-4). If He will deal with us and burn our tongues so that we will no longer open our mouth rashly, we will be spared many regrets in the future. Many mistakes are irreparable once they are done. Lot could repent and return to his former position, but Moab and Ammon are still with us today. Abraham could beget Isaac after he repented, but by then Isaac had an enemy. Abraham could send Hagar away, but the trouble he created goes on. Once our words go out, they will not stop, and the trouble they create will not stop. We have to pray for the Lord to burn our tongues with a burning fire so that they will not utter any idle words or lies and will be unbridled no longer. We should pray that our tongue would become the tongue of the instructed. Only when the Lord puts our mouth under strict control and it ceases to say things carelessly can we expect Him to use us as His mouthpiece. Otherwise, the one spring will never produce two kinds of waters. We cannot serve others with sweet water as well as bitter water. We may say that we are burdened to serve God and to share in His work, but we cannot speak God's word one moment and the devil's word the next. We have to look to the Lord to grant us the grace to terminate our history of having a "runaway" mouth. We should say to the Lord, "Let all my words be acceptable to You, just as my heart is acceptable to You." May the Lord have mercy on us!

The Lord Jesus said, "For their sake I sanctify Myself" (John 17:19). Every servant of God who desires to serve Him has to learn to sanctify himself, wherever he is. In order to serve others, we have to sanctify ourselves in our speaking. Speaking is a great temptation. When three, five, eight, or ten people are talking together, it is a great temptation to join in and be part of them. We have to learn to sanctify ourselves, to set ourselves apart from others, and to not mix with them. We should not speak lightly. We have to have the words of the instructed, the tongue of the instructed. Our tongues have to pass through the fire. We must never expose ourselves to temptation. When other brothers and sisters are engaged in improper conversation, the first thing we have to do is to separate ourselves from them. As soon as we mingle with them and become one of them, we become fallen. We have to separate ourselves

from them and be set apart from their midst. Every time something like this happens, we must not give in to temptation and we must not associate ourselves with the others. We must always separate ourselves. I believe God will grant mercy to us and build us up with grace little by little.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Stable

ONE

Stability is another character trait that must be found in the life of every Christian worker. Stability in character can be understood as stability in one's emotions. Some people are solid and unshakable before the Lord, but others are loose and shaky. They have no conviction in anything, and they turn with every turn in the environment. Many people are unreliable by nature, not because they want to be unreliable, but because their character is unreliable. As soon as something touches them, they change. They are not stable in their character. God requires a stable character of His servants, one that is solid, reliable, and unshakable.

In the Bible we find a man who was easily shaken, who is known to us as Simon Peter. Let us read some verses. Matthew 16:13-16 says, "Now when Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Who do men say that the Son of Man is? And they said, Some, John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. He said to them, But you, who do you say that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." First John 5:1 says, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been begotten of God," and verse 13 says, "I have written these things to you that you may know that you have eternal life, to you who believe into the name of the Son of God." When Peter said "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," he must have at least touched the life of God. He had to have touched God's life in order to have known this. Read again Matthew 16:17: "And Jesus answered and said to him, Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in the heavens." Brothers and sisters, being with the Lord Jesus, following Him, and being beside Him

do not guarantee one a knowledge of Him. One only knows Him through the revelation of the Father who is in the heavens. Our present attention is drawn to verse 18, which says, "And I also say to you that you are Peter [Petros], and upon this rock [petra] I will build My church." We must see that the church is something unshakable. The foundation of the church is unshakable, and the church itself is unshakable. This being the case, all the servants of the Lord should be unshakable as well. The Lord said, "Upon this rock I will build My church." The church is built upon this rock. We should pay attention to this rock.

In verse 18 the Lord seemed to be making a hidden reference to the words in Matthew 7, in which He spoke of those who build their houses upon the sand, and when rain and water and wind come, the houses totter to the ground. Then He said that we should build our house upon the rock so that it will not fall when the rain and water and wind come. The Lord said that the church is built upon the rock, which means that the church will never fall. The rain may come, and the water and wind may do their work, but the building will not fall. Even if the church is subject to the rain, water, and wind, it will never collapse, because it is firmly built upon the rock. It is stable, unshakable, and immovable. This is the underlying nature of the church. Paul told Timothy that the house of God, which is the church, is the pillar and base of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). The church is like a pillar; it can never be moved. A chair can be moved and shaken, but a house can never be moved from place to place. The underlying nature of the church is a building that is upon a rock. Such a rock is stable and unshakable. God's children are little stones (lithos) upon the unique rock. In writing the second chapter of his first Epistle, Peter said that we are God's living stones, and that we are being built into a spiritual house (v. 5). Every brother and sister is a living stone that is built upon the rock. The superstructure of the church is of the same substance as the foundation. The material for the superstructure is the same as the material for the foundation. The church has no bricks; it only has stones. The tower of Babel was made of bricks, which are manmade imitations of stones. But in the church there is no brick, no manmade stability. The church is built upon the rock. Every one of us is a stone, and we are built together piece by piece into a spiritual house. Our eyes have to be opened to the intrinsic nature of the church. The Lord's church is something unshakable. In Matthew 16:18 the Lord continued, saying,

"The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." This is something unshakable; this is what the church is all about. The foundation of the church is a rock, something unshakable, and the church itself is made of stones which are also unshakable. Can we then say that the ministers within the church are shakable? This is what we are talking about here. We are not here to talk about the church. We are here to talk about the very person of the ministers. The ministers must not be shaken, because they are the stones. The Lord said to Peter, "You are Peter." This means, "You are a stone." "And upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." Peter represents all the ministers of the church. A minister and servant of God must be a stone. Although the stone is not as big as the rock, it has the same nature as the rock, and it is equally unshakable.

In verse 19 the Lord said, "I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens, and whatever you bind on the earth shall have been bound in the heavens, and whatever you loose on the earth shall have been loosed in the heavens." The Lord's promise to Peter was also a promise to the church. This promise became the church's possession in Matthew 18. But the Lord first gave it to Peter. This shows us clearly that the Lord considered Peter as one of the ministers. The Lord gave him the keys of the kingdom of the heavens so that he could open the doors. On the day of Pentecost, Peter opened one door, and at the house of Cornelius, he opened another door. He opened the door to the Jews, and he opened the door to the Gentiles. This is what one stone has done. Before Simon became Peter (a stone), he could not exercise the keys. Today not all who are called Peter are Peters, in the same way that not all who are called by the name of Israel are men of strength. A man can be called Israel yet be a weak person. Here was a person whose name was Peter. The Lord put the keys in his hand. But he could exercise the keys only after he truly became a Peter, a stone. When that day came, whatever he bound was bound, and whatever he loosed was loosed.

The effectiveness of a minister has much to do with the stability of his character. This is a basic requirement. If a man is shaky before God, he cannot be a minister, and the church cannot follow him. A fundamental problem with some brothers and sisters is the lack of a stable character. They are constantly changing. They sway back and forth and are never

steady and firm before the Lord. They cannot serve the church, because they cannot stand firm and upright, and the gates of Hades easily prevail over them.

Thank the Lord that Peter was chosen as a pattern. God is looking for a man whose nature is the same as the nature of the foundation under him and the superstructure of the building around him. A minister must be a stable stone. Thank God that Peter was chosen as a pattern, because his case shows us that God can make anyone stable. Here was a man named Peter, yet he was not always a "Peter." His name referred to a stone, but his character was like water. He was not reliable. He was one thing at one time and another thing another time. One minute Peter was bold and the next minute he was very weak. This was the kind of person he was. The Lord put such a person before us to show us how unstable a person's nature can be before he is dealt with by the Lord. Before such a person becomes a stone, he cannot use the keys and cannot be useful to God in any particular way. God can only use him after his wobbly nature has been dealt with by the Lord. We thank the Lord that a man's character can change; it is not unchangeable. Peter was a wavering person, yet he could be changed into a stable person. When the light of the Lord burns our tongue, our talkativeness will disappear. When a lazy man is rebuked, his laziness wilts away. The Lord cursed the fig tree, and the tree dried up. The Lord's rebuke brings in His curse, and where His curse is, there is wilting and death. If we have never touched Him, we can go on in our merry way. But as soon as we touch Him, our frivolity wilts away. As soon as God's light touches us, either through a message or through a brother's direct rebuke, something in us wilts away. The Lord's rebuke results in an immediate wilting away. Here we are talking about a reconstitution or a remake of our character. Many people have a character that cannot listen to others. Or they may have a character that is too cold, lazy, or weak. But as soon as God touches them, or a brother comes along and points out their insensitivity in listening or their weakness, they will receive the light, and something in them will wilt away. It is God's grace that Peter was chosen. Had it not been for Peter, all those who are weak and unstable would have no hope. But the Lord chose one man and called him Peter, and after He made him a "Peter," He gave him the keys to bring men into the church.

TWO

The Bible tells us that after Peter recognized the Lord as the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord said, "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in the heavens" (Matt. 16:17). This was entirely God's work. Peter did not deserve any merit, but the Father's revelation enabled him to see the Lord as the Christ and the Son of God. Peter received a revelation from the Father, a revelation from God. Such a revelation is unknown to flesh and blood, even to Peter's own flesh and blood. Let us go on with the same passage: "From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You! But He turned and said to Peter, Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men" (vv. 21-23). In the previous passage Peter saw the vision, while in this passage Peter became an instrument of Satan. In the previous verses Peter touched God the Father; here he touched Satan. In the first instance he was able to say, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." In the second instance he said, "God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You!" The two statements are as far apart as the north pole is from the south pole. If we are not wrong in our understanding, we can safely say that no revelation in the four Gospels reached the height of Peter's revelation. It was the Father who had given Peter the revelation; he knew the Lord as "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Then the Lord proclaimed that the church was to be built upon this knowledge, this rock. Peter indeed received a great revelation, one unseen by other followers and friends of the Lord. Perhaps the revelation that Peter received and saw should be considered the ultimate revelation. But in the same chapter, he fell to the lowest depth. He was speaking not only according to the flesh, but by Satan. One minute he was speaking according to the Father; the next minute he turned around and was speaking according to Satan. What an extreme turn this was! If the church is built upon such a minister, the gates of Hades surely will prevail against it. No, the church cannot be built upon such a wavering one; it needs to be built up by men of stone. The ministers of the church must be as stable as stones. They

cannot be God's mouthpiece in one instance, and Satan's mouthpiece in another instance. This is a serious matter. Not long after Peter received the highest revelation, he fell to the lowest abyss. He was keeping the Lord from going to the cross. He was not setting his mind on the things of God. He was utilized by Satan. Whenever Satan's word is released, the gates of Hades are opened. If Satan prevails and the gates of Hades prevail, the church is defeated. Had the Lord not turned Peter into a stable stone, the church would be hopeless. Today we need ministers as stable as stones. They have to be firm and unshakable. They cannot be one way one day and another way the next day, saying one thing one moment and another thing another moment. If we are solid and firm before the Lord, we will see what the church really is, and we will see blessing and victory over the gates of Hades. But if we are weak and wavering, Satan will open his mouth immediately, and the gates of Hades will be opened. In Peter we see an extreme contrast; there were great discrepancies in his character. This is a picture of the old, unchanged nature of Peter.

After the last supper the Lord Jesus said to the disciples, "You will all be stumbled because of Me this night, for it is written, I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." Peter said, "If all will be stumbled because of You, I will never be stumbled" (26:31, 33). Peter's word was based on his disposition. He was saying the right thing; he was not lying, no, not at all. But we must remember that we do not know anything about many of the things that we say to the Lord at the time of our consecration and revival. Peter was a person who was rich in emotion. He said, "I will never be stumbled." But this conviction was merely in his emotion; he was not this kind of person at all. Many people who are rich in emotion have to learn to separate their emotion from their person. Sooner or later they discover that their emotion does not represent them. Some people live by their mind too much. They are always in their mind. When they pray, and others say to them, "You are praying only with your mind; your heart is not in your prayer," they answer, "What do you mean my heart is not in my prayer?" A man can be in his mind so much that when his heart is not into what he is doing, he can be deceived to think that his mind actually is his heart. One day when the light shines on him, he will see that his mind is not his heart. Some people feel a burning within their heart; they think that they love the Lord.

They proudly proclaim, "I love the Lord." If another brother says, "You may think that you are loving the Lord, but actually you are not," they will argue, "If I do not love the Lord, who does?" When their emotion is dealt with by the Lord, they will realize that their heart and emotion are two different things. Their person is not the same as their emotion; there is a great difference between the two. In the same way there is a great difference between their mind and their person. Peter was speaking from his emotion. He thought that he was the one who was speaking. He boasted that even if all the others would be stumbled because of the Lord, he would never be stumbled. He did not realize that the "I" he was speaking of was not his person but his emotion. He did not realize how much his outward man was at work. He did not realize how much he was living in his outward man. He did not know what he was saying, and he was not clear about himself at all. Then the Lord said to him, "Truly I say to you that in this night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times" (v. 34). But Peter still did not know himself. He told the Lord, "Even if I must die with You, I will by no means deny You" (v. 35). Here were another two extremes. Peter said that he would never be stumbled, but he denied the Lord three times. He boasted that he would die with the Lord, but long before there was any call to die with the Lord, he failed and became fearful when the crowd pointed out that he had been with Jesus.

These two extremes show us that Peter was a very unstable person. Although his name indicated that he was a stone, his character was like water; it flowed one way one moment and another way the next moment. It constantly changed in shape, being rectangular one minute and circular the next minute. He was completely governed by his environment. He became a certain kind of person when he faced a certain kind of environment. In the garden of Gethsemane, he dozed off with the other disciples. During the heat of his boast, he claimed that he would never be stumbled, even if the others were stumbled. But in the garden of Gethsemane, he fell sleep just like everyone else. Here was a person who was so sure in his speaking and who felt the same way in himself, but who did everything just the opposite. He was living according to his feeling; he was not living according to his true self. A man can live in his feeling so much that he no longer knows what his true self is. He thinks that his feelings are himself. This was Peter. He said he would never be stumbled, and according to his feeling, he sincerely believed that he

would never be stumbled. But even before he met any opposition from men, he fell asleep in the garden of Gethsemane. His spirit was willing, but his flesh was weak (26:41). A while later, he gathered up his energy, drew up his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and took off his ear (v. 51). He was bold to do this. He loved the Lord so much that he cast aside his personal considerations and stood at this height. Yet in a little while he slid back again. This was Peter.

Mark 14 also provides us with a record of Peter's denial of the Lord. At the beginning, "Peter followed Him at a distance until he was within the courtyard of the high priest. And he was there sitting with the attendants and warming himself in the light of the fire" (v. 54). A servant girl of the high priest came and said to Peter, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus" (v. 67). Peter denied this and answered, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are talking about" (v. 68). Here was a man who had followed the Lord for three and a half years. Did he not know who the Lord was? One moment he could draw out his sword and cut someone, yet in the next moment he lost his boldness altogether. The Lord was being tried, and everyone was mocking Him. Under these circumstances, Peter's boldness was nowhere to be found. A little earlier, he was genuinely ready to die for the Lord. Now he was genuinely loving himself and shrinking from death. He turned from one extreme to the other. The second time the slave girl spoke, Mark tells us that she did not address Peter, but instead she spoke to those standing by, saying, "This man is one of them!" After the slave girl first spoke to Peter about being with Jesus the Nazarene, Peter denied it and went outside into the forecourt. But the slave girl saw him again, and she told those who were standing by that he was one of them. Then Peter made his second denial (vv. 69-70). Matthew 26:72 says, "And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man!" After a little while, those standing by again said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean as well" (Mark 14:70). Peter began to curse and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak!" (v. 71). He began to curse and to swear! A little earlier he denied with an oath. Now he denied with cursing and swearing. When the slave girl first talked to him, he denied the Lord and moved to the forecourt because he could no longer remain in the same place. There he heard the slave girl telling those standing around that he was with Jesus of Nazareth. He denied the Lord again with an oath that he did not know

Him. By the time those who were standing around echoed the words that he had been with Jesus, he did not just make an oath; he cursed and swore. In the original Greek, three different words are used to describe his denial. One was used during his second denial, and the other two were used in his third denial. He exhausted every means of swearing and cursing. In his second denial he made an oath by God's name and by heaven and earth. In his third denial, he simply cursed and swore. He not only invoked God's name to assure others that he did not know Jesus; he even cursed that he would be damned if he knew the Lord! His vocabulary was vulgar. Peter had degraded and fallen to the uttermost. Here was a man who was just the opposite of a "Peter," that is, one who should be solid as a rock. Instead, he was one way one minute and another way the next minute. One minute he was high in the heavens. The next minute he was Satan's instrument. One minute he could boast that he would never be stumbled even if others were stumbled. The next minute he fell asleep. One minute he was bold to draw his sword to cut off the ear of Malchus. The next minute he was even afraid of a slave girl. He denied the Lord with an oath. He even cursed and swore in his denial. Such a person surely had a serious flaw in his character.

THREE

Why was Peter so unstable? Generally speaking, a man is unstable for three reasons. First, he is governed by his emotions. Second, he is afraid of loss; that is, in seeking for his own happiness, he is afraid of the cross and of pain. Third, he is afraid of men in general; that is, he is afraid of offending men. He wants to please men and to please the environment. These are the basic reasons for instability in man.

Peter was this kind of person. He was tainted by his own emotions. If a man lives according to his emotions, at times he is carried to the loftiest heights, and at other times he is carried into the snare of Satan. Emotions are very unstable. We have never seen a person who can remain on the same emotional plane for a long time. If a man lives according to his emotions, he is conducting his life by the impulse of his emotions, by what capriciously drives him to be hot or cold within. Such ones can receive God's mercy and revelation. But they can also be driven by the impulse of their heart to exclaim, "God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You." Peter hindered the Lord. It

seemed as if he was clearer than the Lord about what needed to be done. He "took Him aside and began to rebuke Him." All who are emotional like to be the Lord's counselor; they like to make proposals to the Lord. They have a plan for everything. An emotional person can act by the impulse of his emotion and turn around suddenly to rebuke the Lord, saying, "God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You!" He is quick to feel, quick to speak, and quick to act. But in reality his speaking is Satan's speaking!

We must learn to receive some basic dealings. We are by nature emotional persons. We should not think that we are very much different from Peter. This weakness in character is the greatest hindrance to our work. If this obstacle is not removed, our Pentecost will not come. We cannot live our life according to our emotions or by the impulse of our feelings. We should not live by stimulus; rather, we should deny our own feelings. Our feelings will guide us to the left one minute and then to the right the next minute, to the east one minute and then to the west the next minute, and up one minute and then down the next minute. These feelings are not from the Lord but from the corrupted man within us. If such feelings occupy a central place in our life, we will be of little use to God's work. Only the weakest ones live according to their feelings. It is not a sign of strength to live according to one's feelings, but a sign of weakness. A strong man is one who can control himself, whose eyes are opened, and who puts no trust in his own feelings. Only those who do not trust in their own feelings, but rather deny them, will be able to learn what it means to live not by feelings. Otherwise, they will always regard their feelings as being themselves. Peter had a forthright character. He said what he thought was true. He said what he saw and what he felt. To others he was upright, honest, and not given to diplomacy or double dealings. But he was actually living by his emotions, and he was useless in the spiritual pathway. There was no alternative except for him to go through his dealings. Brothers and sisters, we may feel that we love the Lord, but actually there is no love for the Lord within our being. We may feel that we are for the Lord, but actually there is nothing for the Lord within our being. Our being is much deeper than our feelings; it is buried beneath our feelings, far, far beneath them. We may feel that we are willing to die for the Lord, but do we really know the kind of persons that we are? When we say that we are for the Lord, we do not know the very

"we" to whom we are referring. We do not know the "we" that boasts of dying for the Lord or living for Him. Our real person is beyond and much deeper than our feelings. Peter thought that his outer man was his person. But the one who boasted of dying for the Lord was just the emotion of Peter's outer man. It only took a little time for his real condition to be exposed. Before a man is broken by the Lord in his emotions, he invariably lives by his emotions. He is prone to fluctuate back and forth. Although he may feel that he is very genuine, he is in fact being controlled by his emotions. We know that lying is detestable, and that it is pitiful when someone does not know that he is lying. In the same way, our fickle emotions are detestable, and it is pitiful when we do not know that our emotions are fickle. Those who are convinced that their feelings are an accurate reflection of who they are, are most foolish. They will have to experience what Peter experienced, a total and utter failure, before they know that their feelings are different from themselves. They feel one way at "the last supper," and they feel another way at the "garden of Gethsemane." They feel one way when they come out of "Gethsemane," and they feel another way when they enter the "courtyard." Blessed is he who can separate his feelings from himself. Only a foolish one assumes that his feelings are himself. Everyone who is taught by God knows that his feelings are not himself. Our feelings are something totally different from ourselves. Brothers and sisters, have we seen this? When our emotional impulses point one way, we are not necessarily the person our impulse portrays. As far as Peter's impulse was concerned, he was a heavenly man, one who would never fail. He was willing to cut off the ear of Malchus for the Lord's sake. But spiritually speaking, Peter's feelings could not be considered to be Peter's very person. He was bold according to his feelings, but he was fearful according to his own self. He loved the Lord as far as his feelings were concerned, but he loved himself more than the Lord as far as his person was concerned. He was willing to lay aside himself as far as his feelings were concerned, but he wanted to protect himself as far as his person was concerned. If this is the way the church's ministers are, and if the church follows the footsteps of such ones, surely the church will be as shaky as they are, and the gates of Hades will surely prevail against the church. God can never use such persons.

This was not all. Peter was very afraid of suffering. One of the reasons

that a man is not stable is because he is afraid of suffering. Many people are bold before they encounter the cross or before they experience trials or tribulations. But when the day comes for them to give up their lives and everything, they shrink back. At other times they seem to love the Lord and to be willing to bear the cross. But when the critical moment comes, they cannot hold out, because they are afraid of suffering and because they love themselves. This is where Peter's problem lay. What Peter felt compelled to do in the courtyard was the same as what he had done in Caesarea Philippi in front of the Lord. His fear of suffering and self-love did not appear suddenly in the courtyard. When the Lord spoke to him face to face about the cross, he recoiled by saying, "God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You!" He believed his words, and his statement revealed the kind of person he was. This was why he rebuked the Lord the way he did. He was afraid of loss and death. He did not want this to happen to the Lord. He was so hardheaded that he even took the Lord by the hand to rebuke Him. Brothers and sisters, only one kind of person is stable --those who will be faithful even unto death for the Lord. Satan can do nothing to those who do not love their own life. The weakest ones are those who love their own life. Once a man loves his own life, he will be stumbled as soon as something touches his life. This was what happened to Peter. He rebuked the Lord saying, "God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You!" In other words, he was saying, "Lord, You can never go to the cross!" Later he tried various ways to escape the cross himself. He even resorted to cursing and swearing! A mind to suffer is a big thing. Later in his life, he spoke of having a mind to suffer. He knew that he was short in this matter, and he learned some good lessons. He began to arm himself with this mind to suffer. This attitude was unknown to him in the earlier part of his life. No one who is fearful of something is strong. We have to be brought on to the point where we can say, "Lord, I am happy and willing to bear Your cross. I am happy and willing to suffer any loss, to not seek after my own gain or my own pleasure." If a man stands on this ground, Satan will not be able to do anything to him. If you are not afraid of loss and pain, if you can be like Job, who said he would trust in God even if God were to kill him, or Madam Guyon, who said that she would kiss the whip that chastised her, your absoluteness will make you a strong man. If the cross cannot shake a person, nothing will shake him,

for there is no greater requirement than the cross. If you can satisfy the greatest demand, you will have no trouble with lesser demands. If you cannot meet the demand of the cross, and instead shrink back from it, you will fail in the face of any test. You will be unsteady and unstable. You have to believe in the fact of the cross, and you have to enter the experience of the cross. You have to accept and submit to all God-given trials, tribulations, and pains. If you do, no trial or tribulation in this world will appear big. You are troubled because you do not know the cross. If you have never encountered a big test, you will be stumbled at a small one. But if you have passed through a big test, you will not be shaken by a small one. Peter was shaken because he was afraid of suffering and because he loved himself.

Another reason for Peter's unsteadiness was his desire to go along with the environment. He wanted to please those in the environment. He was afraid of men. We may not realize how much we are influenced by men's affections and displeasure. As soon as we try to please men and to avoid their displeasure, our way is no longer straight. We have to say this or that to meet others' expectations. We have too many ears to listen to what others have to say. Peter was afraid of the slave girl, and he was afraid of many other people. He was bound by his weaknesses. Brothers and sisters, are you trying to please men, or are you trying to please God? This question should be settled the first day you consecrate yourself to God's service. If you are here to please men, will you still experience persecution? Will you still experience trouble? If you are here to please men, the stumbling block of the cross will be annulled (Gal. 5:11). Brothers and sisters, if the problem of your fear of men is not resolved, you cannot run a straight course before the Lord. Those who have a fear of men change their course as soon as something affects them one way or another. They can never be stable and strong before the Lord.

FOUR

Brothers and sisters, the church of God has the nature of a stone. The nature of the ministers should also be of stone. The foundation of the church is of stone, the building up of the church is of stone, and the service of the church should be of stone. Everything should be rock-solid, unshakable, and without any shadow of change. God cannot use

anything flippant, shaky, or unstable in His divine work within the church. When something is stable, it is solid and trustworthy. When one stone is laid upon another, any unstable piece will endanger the whole structure. If one rock on a stone wall is unsteady, the whole wall will be in danger of collapsing. In the church of God, we are not the last stones; many more will be built upon us. The church is not composed of thousands of isolated stones; it is composed of stones that are built one upon the other. The many stones are built up together to become a spiritual house. When the stones are not on top of one another, there is no church. When the temple was destroyed, no stone was upon another. In order for the temple to be built, every stone has to be upon other stones. Today God is still building; He is still building up many spiritual things, piece after piece. If one piece shakes, the whole building will be in jeopardy; many lives will be at risk, and God's church will not be able to go on. This is why our character must be as solid as stone; it must be stable. If our character is shakable and unreliable, everything that is built upon us will be shakable, and sooner or later everything will collapse. First Corinthians 15:58 says, "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." We can go on positively only if we are steadfast and immovable. If our character wavers, being up at times and down at other times, being one way one minute and another way the next, God's work will be damaged.

Some brothers and sisters cannot participate in the Lord's work because they are too unreliable. If you build upon something that is unreliable, you may build a little only to find that it has to be torn down. In addition to being a waste of labor, it is also a waste of time. The amount of building and tearing down may neutralize one another, but the time wasted is irreparable. If a man is reliable, whatever is built upon him will be reliable, and no time will be wasted. Any collapse or damage in the work may be remedied by reconstruction, but five, ten, or twenty years may be lost in the process. This loss cannot be remedied. We have to pray that God would make us reliable men. We may not climb as high as Peter did, because such heights take time to attain. But at least we can be trustworthy and reliable, not building something that has to be torn down. Without such a reliable character, we cannot participate in God's work. When we are stable and trustworthy, we can meet the challenge of any responsibility that falls upon our shoulders. Otherwise, we will fall asleep when we are called upon to be vigilant. If a man is unreliable, always

being up and down, he will fail in the Lord's call for watchfulness and go to sleep. When he is tired, he will fall asleep, not caring whether there is a need for watchfulness. He will want eight hours of sleep and will settle for nothing less, no matter how much he is called upon to be watchful. He may get his sleep, but he will not realize the loss he has suffered through his sleep. Suppose you fall asleep when the Lord calls upon you to be watchful. What will you do when the Lord calls you to work? You will not have any sense of responsibility. If a man is not stable before the Lord, he is not reliable, and if he is not reliable, he will not have a sense of responsibility. When he feels good, he will work more. When he feels bad, he will go to sleep. He will have no sense of responsibility. Hence, stability in our character is a fundamental need in the work; only stable ones can work for the Lord. They work when they feel like it, and they work when they do not feel like it. They work when the sun shines, and they work when it rains. They work when they are very happy, and they work when they are very sad. These are the stable ones. Unstable ones are affected by everything; even the weather affects them. If our work is affected by our environment, we have failed the Lord. Before Him we must have a strong spirit.

Brothers and sisters, are you reliable? Are you stable? Are you unwavering? When you have learned all that God wants you to learn, you will have the keys. These keys first opened the door to the Jews, and then the door to the Gentiles, and the church is built up this way. We must remember the principle that God secures ministers before He builds the church. God first looks for ministers, and then He builds the church. The doors in many places can only be opened when God finds suitable and usable ministers. If His ministers and servants are not stable and reliable, these doors will not be opened.

Thank God that Peter saw his weakness through his failure. His fall was severe and his failure great. He went away and wept. He knew that he could not make it by himself. Many brothers and sisters are likewise fully conscious of their own weakness, instability, and frailty. Let us pray to the Lord, saying, "Lord, I cannot make it!" Many people pray for light, yet very often great failures are a source of great light. These failures can provide as much a light as a severe rebuke or a seething message. A man should prostrate himself before God's word. He should prostrate himself before a

severe rebuke. Likewise, he should prostrate himself before a serious failure. Such a failure is a light in itself. God shows through failures the kind of person one is. Peter wept bitterly. But God's mercy was upon him, and he became a real "Peter." He was changed from a weak and shaking person to a solid and stable person, and the door of Pentecost was opened through him. May the Lord be gracious to us so that we will witness a change in our character. Our character has to be changed, and the Lord can change our character. A lazy man can be changed into a diligent man; a talkative man can be changed into a man of few words; an insensitive man can be changed into a man who listens; a man who is afraid of sufferings can be changed into one who is fearless in the face of sufferings; a man who cannot control his body can be changed into one who is a master of his body. In the same way, a weak, shaky, and wobbly man can be changed into a strong, stable, and unwavering man. May the Lord have mercy on us.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Not Subjective

ONE

Subjectivity is another defect in the character of some of God's children, and in particular, of some workers for the Lord. If a person is subjective, he cannot do a good work.

What is the meaning of being subjective? Being subjective means to insist on one's own opinions and to refuse others' opinions. It means to have a preconceived idea before listening to others and to hold on to the idea even after hearing from others. Subjectivity means a reluctance to accept or to be corrected. It means to have one's own opinion from the very beginning and to always insist on this opinion. A subjective person arrives at his own judgment before he hears anything from the Lord, before the facts are unfolded, and before others present their opinions. He insists on his judgment even after hearing something from the Lord, after the facts are unfolded, and after others have presented their side of the matter. This is the meaning of being subjective. The root cause of subjectivity is a self that has never been broken. When a man's self is not broken, he has a stubborn view of things, and these opinions are hard to

break and correct.

TWO

What are the problems resulting from subjectivity? What losses does it bring to a man? If a brother or a sister is subjective, he or she will not be able to listen to others. We can learn to not be subjective by listening to others. We must be empty within before we can take in the Lord's word or others' words. If we are subjective, it is difficult for us to take in anything. It is essential for every Christian worker to cultivate the ability to hear what people have to say; he has to know others' affairs and to understand others' problems. We have previously said that a great problem with God's workers is that they cannot listen to others. The chief reason behind not being able to listen to others is subjectivity. When a person is subjective, he is filled up with all sorts of things. His opinions become an impregnable fortress, and his ideas are unchangeable. He is always filled with his own arguments and preoccupations. When a brother or a sister comes to him and tries to share a frustration with him or to unload a burden to him, he simply cannot understand what they are saying, even after listening for half a day. He cannot listen to others. This is one problem associated with subjectivity.

THREE

Another damaging effect of subjectivity is an inability to learn. A subjective person is very confident and clear about everything. He has made up his mind about everything already. He has formed an opinion about everything, and he is confident about everything. It is difficult for him to learn anything. When some young people first join the work, it is more difficult to teach them than it is to feed a child medicine. It seems that some things almost have to be forced down their throat. They are full of ideas, proposals, and ways. They fancy that they know all there is to know. Although they dare not claim to be omniscient, they act as if they are omniscient. It is harder to teach them something than it is to feed them bitter medicine. If a man needs to be spoon-fed every meal, how long can he survive? When we meet some brothers, we cannot help but sigh in our heart, "My brother, how many things can a person like you learn from the Lord?" The biggest problem with a subjective person is his inability to learn. This one thing alone can cost him dearly. Every time you

want such a one to learn something, it seems as if you almost have to fight with him. You may beat him down, and he may learn a little. But the next time you want him to learn something, you have to struggle with him all over again. This is a great frustration. One basic requirement of the Lord's worker is being able to remain objective; he has to be so objective that he can readily receive help from others. Brothers and sisters, our help comes from everywhere. There are so many things that we have to learn. Suppose we only learn one lesson a month, or one lesson every half a year, or one lesson a year. How long can we live? How many things can we learn in our lifetime? A subjective person finds it harder to learn as the years go by. His subjectivity increases as time goes by. Indeed, subjectivity is a big problem among us.

It is true that God's worker should be stable; his pathway should be straight and unwavering. But if his opinions, views, and judgments are also set and unyielding, he will have very little chance of learning any lesson, and his usefulness will be very limited. On the one hand, we need to be stable and unwavering before the Lord. On the other hand, we cannot be subjective. God's children should learn to not be subjective; they should learn to be flexible for God's move. Otherwise, it will be impossible for them to learn. In order to know whether or not a person is subjective, one only needs to find out whether he learns quickly or slowly, or if he can learn at all. One can tell if a person is subjective by the amount of spiritual things he learns and how often he learns them. The obstacle to learning anything is subjectivity. Subjectivity affects a person's ability to learn; it even stops him from learning anything.

The basic requirement for spiritual advance is openness to God. Our heart, mind, and spirit must be wide open to Him. Being open to Him means that we are not subjective. The primary meaning of being open is not being subjective. Of course, in order for our spirit to be open to God, something deeper than not being subjective is involved. But not being subjective is the first condition. As soon as we are subjective, our gates are closed. Not being subjective means that we are sensitive to God, that we can learn, and that we can receive impressions. It is hard for many people to receive any impression from God. God has to use a rod or a whip or even a hammer to hit such ones before they receive any impressions from Him. We should learn to understand God's will as soon

as His eyes turn. Many people are like horses and mules, who do not understand anything unless they are led by the bit and bridle. This is what it means to be subjective. A subjective person cannot pick up any signal from God. God may wrestle with him and allow him to come to a blind alley or a closed door, yet he is still arguing with God. He cannot quiet himself down to learn what he should learn. Many people are not meek and pliable enough before God. They are too hard and stubborn. They become a stumbling block to the work because they have not learned much or received much supply from the Lord all their life. They become a problem and a loss to the work.

FOUR

Another big problem of a subjective person is that he cannot receive any guidance from God. He has no way to know God's guidance, and he is completely ignorant of His leading. Every subjective person is as far from God's will as the north pole is from the south pole. It is impossible for him to know God's will, because he does not match the qualifications of those who are God's followers. It takes a pliable and diligent man with a listening ear to receive guidance from God. When God's word comes to such a man, he acts upon it immediately without any subjective views of his own. Balaam's heart erred because it was inclined towards riches. He became subjective in his judgment, and he insisted on his judgment. This is why Balaam prayed to God again and again until God told him to go. When a man's mind is set, it is hard for him to understand God's will. We must learn to walk in God's will. We must realize that God's will often requires that we stop immediately, or it may require that we march immediately. We often have planned out the whole journey, only to find that the Lord wants us to stop immediately. What should we do? If the Spirit of the Lord tells us to stop, are we willing to stop? A subjective man will not stop. A person who has learned to listen to God is not subjective in any way: He will go forward when God commands him to go forward, and stop when God tells him to stop. Do not think that this is a simple thing. A subjective man cannot readily go forward when God tells him to go forward. However, once he has picked up momentum, it is hard for God to stop him. This is where our problem lies. A strenuous effort must be made to push forward those who are subjective, and once they start moving, no one can stop them. This is not the way of the instructed, who

are pliable in the hands of God. When God tells them to move, they move. When God tells them to stop, they stop. These are the only ones who will receive guidance from God. Many people will not move until they receive harsh chastisement, and once they move, they never stop. They go on in the same direction continually. God has to stop them forcefully with His strong hand before they will stop. Their subjectivity prevents them from knowing God's will, much less carrying out His will.

In Abraham's offering up of Isaac we get a beautiful picture of a man who was not subjective. If Abraham had been a subjective man when God asked him to offer up Isaac, it would have been difficult for him to obey. He would have had many things to say. He would have reasoned after this fashion: "I had no son before. The possibility of having one never even occurred to me. I thought that Eliezer was enough. It was God who wanted me to have a son. I did not have a thought of a son and neither did Sarah. It was all God's idea. Now that He has given me a son, why would He want me to offer him for a burnt offering?" Brothers and sisters, a subjective man would have had every reason to reject this demand! But Abraham was so simple. Even such a demand presented no problem to him. He believed that God could raise his son from the dead. As he stood by the altar and raised the knife to slay his son, God prepared a ram which he could offer instead of his son (Gen. 22:10, 13). If Abraham had been subjective, such a demand would have presented a new problem to him. He would doubtless have been bewildered and would have wondered how he could be told to do one thing at one moment and just the opposite the next moment. But Abraham did not think this way. He was not subjective. With some people, it is difficult for them to get on the altar, and once they are on the altar, it is more difficult for them to get down. They spend years getting on the altar, and once they are on it, they insist on remaining there until they die. A subjective man will act according to his own will even when he is trying to obey God. Even God cannot stop him. A subjective man is forced into obedience, and his obedience is many times the result of self-effort. He cannot be turned around no matter how hard others try. God's will and commandment may direct him to take back what he has given, but he cannot.

It is interesting to note that when we identify our will with God's will, there often comes a time when God's will changes. If our own will cannot

change accordingly, it will be hard for us to act simply according to His word. This is where our biggest problem lies. Do you know how a man tames a horse? A wild horse will refuse any rider on its back. It is difficult to break a horse. In order to break it, a trained rider has to jump on its back and allow it to kick and struggle until it tires itself out. The rider has to use his skills to remain on the horse's back. He has to let the horse run, perhaps for miles, or hundreds of miles. When the horse realizes that it cannot get rid of its master, it will yield to his command. Such horse trainers can turn a wild horse into a fine show horse. The horse can trot around in a small circle with a rope tied to a pole in the center. It can balance itself so well that it will not go so far away as to break the rope nor so close as to allow slack in the rope. It can run around hundreds of times, always keeping the same radius. The trainer trains the horse until it can be maneuvered in this way. When he is done with his training, the horse can be directed to go anywhere. It can go through a small entrance or a big gate; it will always be obedient. Brothers and sisters, we are like wild horses, and it is a big thing for the Lord to train us. He needs to do much work before we can be tamed. After a horse is trained, it will no longer be subjective. It will be so trained that as soon as its rider tugs a little on the reins, it will know whether its master wants it to run or walk. It will go as its master directs, not only one or ten times around the corral, but hundreds of times.

Psalm 32:8-9 says, "I will instruct you and teach you concerning the way you should go;/I will counsel you; my eye is upon you./Do not be like a horse or like a mule, without understanding;/Whose trappings consist of bit and bridle to constrain them,/Else they do not come near you." This is very meaningful. We should be different from the horse or the mule. A dumb mule can be so trained that it can go wherever its master directs. It should be easier for God's children to be taught in the matter of divine guidance than it is to tame a horse. A horse, even when trained, is considered by God as a beast "without understanding." This is because it only knows the will of the master when it is kicked, pushed, or reined. As for us, we should look to the counsel of the Lord's eyes. This is something the horse and the mule cannot do. David said in this psalm, "I will counsel you; my eye is upon you" (v. 8). As soon as the Lord's eyes turn, we should know what He is saying. We should know even before His hand moves; we should know when His eyes turn only a little. Let us

pay special attention to the eyes spoken of in this verse. A subjective man has no place here. Brothers and sisters, do not think that our person and our character are small things. Please remember that if we are subjective, we cannot be objective with God. Without training, we will be subjective all our life long. We cannot expect to suddenly know what God wants us to do. We may be satisfied being a tamed horse, but God says that a horse and mule, even when tamed, are without understanding. This means that it is not enough to be tamed. We have to move as fast as the Lord's eyes move. As soon as we know our Master's wish, we should act upon it. Whenever He gives the signal, we should stop. If we are filled with our own ideas, views, and subjective notions, it will be impossible for us to wait on the Spirit of the Lord and to move when He moves and stop when He stops. The Lord often wants us to stop, but we do not stop. We cannot stop because our very self has become involved in the endeavor. Those who seek after God's will must keep their self at bay. Those who do God's will must also keep their self at bay. We should move when the Lord wants us to move, and stop when He wants us to stop. Our self should be kept at bay. As soon as we become subjective, the self becomes involved, and we are unable to stop when the Lord wants us to stop. The problem with many people is twofold: In the beginning they cannot move, and once they start they cannot stop. These are serious problems. The biggest trouble we have is our subjectivity. This is what keeps God's will from being manifested through us.

Understanding God's will has nothing to do with methods; it is a matter of the character of the person. A person will not understand God's will simply because someone else has told him the way to know His will. This is not possible. Only a right person armed with the right method can know God's will. If the person is wrong, he will not know God's will even if he has the right method. The understanding of God's will has to do with the person. Method alone cannot help us understand His will. This does not mean that understanding His will does not involve the use of any method. It means that the crucial factor in understanding God's will is our person. If our person is wrong, nothing will work even if we have the right methods. We must not be subjective. Before we can catch God's every move, we must be touched by the Lord and have our subjectivity dealt with to the extent that we have lost all of our self-opinions. If we cannot be flexible to move and stop at God's will, we cannot understand His will

and cannot be His servant. God's servants must be quick to turn with God's will. We should ignore loud demands or clamorous voices from without; they are not our concern. Flexibility and openness to God's changes, haltings, and leadings are basic requirements of a worker of the Lord. This is the only way God can guide us to His pathway.

FIVE

In regard to subjectivity, a further point should be noted: Our subjectivity must be dealt with by God before we will be fit to deal with others. God will lead us to deal with other men only when we ourselves are first dealt with. He will not commit anything to a subjective man. God cannot trust such a man. A subjective person cannot do God's will, and he has no way to lead others to do His will. If a subjective person is put into God's work to instruct others in the way of God, his own will comes out ten times stronger than does the Lord's. A subjective person wants everyone to listen to him. Unless a person is brought to the point where he has lost all interest in gaining a following, he cannot be used by the Lord. We should allow ourselves to be broken and smashed to the degree that we no longer crave obedience from others. We should not interfere with others' freedom, personal lives, or personal judgments. We have no interest in other people's life or affairs. As servants of the Lord, we must be dealt with by the Lord to such an extent. Only then can we be used by Him to speak as His deputy authority. Otherwise, there is a real threat of our usurping God's authority to carry out our own will, through which we would become a ruler, teacher, or father over God's children. The Lord said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them...It shall not be so among you" (Matt. 20:25-26). If a man has never been broken by the Lord, if he secretly cherishes his own ideas, demands, and hobbies, God cannot use him because he is untrustworthy. If God entrusts His flock to such a person, he will lead the flock to his own house. Many people are not worthy of God's trust; God cannot entrust anyone into their hands. If a man is interested only in his own ways, he cannot lead others into God's way. Our brother Paul was very pliable. He was single, and he knew that it was better to remain single than to be married. Yet he never criticized marriage. Brothers and sisters, how exercised was our brother before the Lord. If a man is subjective and if his subjectivity is never broken, he will surely insist on everyone being a

virgin and remaining unmarried. He will surely condemn every marriage. A subjective man can easily do this. But here was a man who was different. He could stand for what he did; he knew the value of what he was doing. Yet at the same time, he gave others the freedom to make their own choice. He wished that others would be spared of all sufferings of the flesh, yet he agreed that others should be married. Here was a man who was firm in the Lord, yet at the same time, he was soft and tender. In discussing the matter of marriage, he was still able to declare that the teaching of abstinence was a teaching of demons, even though he was a single man.

Brothers and sisters, we have to learn to take such a stand. We can never overemphasize a truth just because we feel that way, nor can we shut our mouth to a truth just because we feel differently. Once we give up trying to influence God's truth according to our feelings, we are qualified to work and to lead others according to the Lord's leading. A basic requirement for us to be in the work is to be broken and to have our subjectivity dealt with. If our subjectivity still dominates us, we will lead God's work astray as soon as it is put into our hands. This is terrible. It is a terrible thing for a person to act rashly and speak carelessly. We should learn to stop interfering with other people's business. We should never dictate the lives or affairs of others with our own subjectivity. God does not interfere with man's free will. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was placed in the garden of Eden. God told man not to eat of it, but He did not keep man away from it with a fiery sword. If the fiery sword in chapter three had been used in chapter two to guard the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, man would never have sinned. It would have been easy for God to do this. But He did not do this. Instead, He said, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). If man insisted on eating it, that was his own business.

We have to learn to not dominate others with our own thought. When others do not want to hear our word, we should turn away; we should not force them to listen to it. If we have a burden before the Lord, we should tell the brothers and sisters about it. It is good if they take our word. But if they do not take it, we should be happy to turn away. We should never impose our thought upon others. God has never done this, and neither

should we. If a man chooses to rebel against God, He allows him to take his way. If others do not want to take our way, why should we insist? We have to learn to give up our insistence. We have to allow others to turn away from our advice. If we have learned the proper lessons before the Lord, we will gladly allow others to take their own way. We should not force others to listen to us or to take our way. We should not force others to receive our help. We may be clear about our function, but we should not force others to accept our function. God never forces anyone, and we should not force anyone either. None of us can be subjective in the work of God. None of us should try to make others listen to us. Let us learn to be attentive before Him. The more others listen to us, the greater is our responsibility before the Lord. How great a responsibility we have to bear if we say a wrong word to others! Do not rejoice at others taking our word. We have to remember the tremendous responsibility that is upon our shoulders. It is too great a thing for others to listen to us. If others listen to us when our way is crooked and we are not clear about God's will, we are truly the blind leading the blind. Not only will the blind who follow us fall into the pit, but both who are blind, ourselves and our followers, will fall into the pit (Luke 6:39). Never think that only followers fall and that leaders perhaps can escape the fall. When the blind lead the blind, both fall into the pit. We should not think that it is easy to speak, easy to teach, and easy to advise others. We should not think that it is a simple thing to say, "You should do this," or "You should do that." If we become teachers to many, instructing them to do this and that, there is the danger that both we and they will end up in the pit. Hence, we have to learn to fear God. We should realize that the more others listen to us, the more we should hear God's word in fear and trembling. Even when we are one hundred twenty percent sure of something, we should only say it with seventy to eighty percent assurance. We should be afraid of making mistakes. The easier it is for a man to speak weighty words, the less weighty he is before the Lord. The more confidence a person has, the less trustworthy he is. We should never think that as long as others listen to us, everything will be fine. Everything is not fine when others listen to us. What will we do to these obedient ones? Where will we lead them? We have to realize the seriousness of our responsibility. This is why we have to learn to not be subjective. One problem with subjectivity is a craving for others' ears. A subjective person likes to have others listen to

him. He wants his ideas to be a source of direction for others and his opinions to be a source of light for others. But we have to realize that our opinions are not a source of light and our ideas are not a source of direction. We must learn to not lead others by the hand, learn to not force others to go our way, and learn to not impose obedience to God upon others. If the brothers and sisters are happy to go along with us, we should thank the Lord. If they want to choose their own ways, let them make their own choices. We should not try to drag others along with us. We should allow others to come and go as they wish. One characteristic of a man who knows God is a hesitation to force anyone to listen to him.

A subjective man can never do this. He cannot listen to what others have to say, and he cannot receive guidance from the Lord. He does not feel that he has to learn anything from anyone; therefore, God cannot trust him with any work. If we have made all the decisions already before we come to God, we will not find out God's decision. Only a pliable person can find out God's decision. We must drop many things before we can sense God's will. If a man has never learned to deny his subjectivity, and if he is full of his own opinions, ways, ideas, and reasons, the church will be split as soon as God's work is placed into his hands. Division in the church results from man's subjectivity. Many people can only work individually; they cannot participate in the work of the church. They can only have individual service, not Body service. Many people have never touched the matter of authority. As a result, they can never be an authority. From the first day that many people began to work, they have never submitted to anyone. Surely God cannot make them an authority over others. Brothers and sisters, we should pay special attention to this matter. When a young brother joins the work, we must first test him. A subjective person always considers himself to be the head, and he always wants to assume leadership over others. He always tries to impose his idea upon others. A man who is dealt with by the Lord is always faithful and always willing to speak, yet he will never try to impose his will upon others. He will never try to subject others to his will. On the one hand, he becomes stable through God. On the other hand, he is not subjective and does not impose anything upon others unilaterally. Everyone is free to obey God or disobey Him. We cannot force anyone to do anything. A man bears his own responsibility before God. We should always allow others to have the opportunity to choose for themselves.

May we all be pliable, always giving others the freedom to choose and always asking others what they would like to do. Our work is just to present the ways before men. What they choose is up to them. In everything we should give others the freedom to make their own choice. We should try our best not to make a choice for them.

SIX

Subjectivity can be expressed through the smallest things in our life. It is a nature, a habit. If a man's subjectivity is dealt with by the Lord, he will show a marked difference in the numerous small actions of his daily life. A subjective man is subjective in everything. He likes to control others. He likes to give his opinions, issue orders, and tell one to do this and another to do that. A subjective man has a solution for every problem. When a young worker of the Lord is put together with a few other brothers, you will immediately know whether or not he is a subjective person. If he is by himself, you cannot tell anything. But as soon as there are two persons, you will see that the one who is subjective always will try to be on top of the other. He will want to have a say in what to eat and what not to eat, what to wear and what not to wear, where to sleep and where not to sleep. He will always insist on this and that. He is omniscient and omnipotent. When two sisters are put in a room, we can tell immediately if one of them is subjective. If both of them are subjective, they will not get along with each other at all. If one is subjective, perhaps they can get along with each other. If both are subjective, neither one will be able to get along with the other. This does not mean that we should keep our mouth shut from now on. If difficulties arise in the work or problems arise with the workers, we have to be faithful. What I am saying is that after we have spoken and others have chosen to ignore our word, we should not force anything upon them. We should not feel hurt when others will not take our word. Many people treasure their own ideas too much. When others will not take their word, they feel hurt. This is the reaction of a subjective person. In order to be faithful, we have to say many things. But we do not say them because we are interested in meddling with others' affairs. We do not say them because our temperament or habit compels us to talk. We do not have to speak every time the opportunity arises. We can speak when there is a need, but we do not have to make a rule that we must speak all the time,

nor do we have to make a habit of speaking. It is wrong to speak whenever an opportunity arises. It is wrong to speak with an undisciplined tongue. God has not appointed us to be the teacher of all. Some people are used to speaking and teaching others. This clearly shows that they are very subjective. If a man's subjectivity is not broken, it is hard for him to work for the Lord.

A subjective man is not necessarily a faithful man. A faithful man speaks because he has to speak. He does not speak because he likes to speak or because he has a lust for speaking. A faithful man speaks because he does not want others to fall into error. He does not speak out of a lust for speaking. If a faithful man finds that his words are rejected, he does not feel dejected; he can turn away. But a subjective man is different. He has a lust to speak, and if he does not speak, he feels unhappy. He has a habit of opening his mouth every time he sees something. Do you see the difference? A subjective man speaks because he likes to speak; he likes to impose his will upon others. He likes to dominate others with his ideas and have others listen to his words. A subjective person finds it difficult to accept the rejection of his will. Brothers and sisters, a subjective man is totally different from a faithful man. We should be faithful. Many times, it is wrong if we do not open our mouth. But we must differentiate between faithfulness and subjectivity. A subjective person likes to meddle with others' affairs. He likes others to listen to his words. He likes to control others in everything. He gives orders to this person and directions to that person. He considers his methods the first and the best, and his ways the most perfect. He wants everybody to take his way. Many subjective persons cannot stand differences in others. Brothers and sisters, a subjective person is the narrowest kind of person in this world. A man can only be broad and generous after he has been dealt with by the Lord and his subjectivity has been removed. Only a broad person can tolerate those who are different from themselves. Subjectivity demands uniformity; it demands sameness. It cannot tolerate differences in others. If two subjective persons are put in a room, there will not be peace in the room. One wants to do one thing and the other wants to do another thing, and the room will be filled with arguments. One will think that he is bearing the cross, and the other will also think that he is bearing the cross. Both are having problems with the other, and both think that they are bearing the cross. This is what happens when two

subjective heads are put together. A subjective person always tries to take things in his hand; he wants to establish himself as the leader among God's people. He makes instant decisions on how things should be done. A subjective person likes to meddle in the smallest affair. He likes to interfere, to control. This is a basic problem with a subjective person. We know that God will not entrust things to such persons. I have never seen God entrusting things to a subjective person. God cannot use such ones. I have never seen a subjective person who has traveled any considerable length spiritually. His disposition blocks him from receiving any instruction. A disposition that refuses to be instructed is unteachable and useless.

A subjective person likes to take over and make proposals. If a person is subjective, he creates problems in God's work. Not only is he dull to learning and unfit for God's commissioning; his total energy is spent on his own subjectivity. As a result, he has no energy for God's work. When a man interferes with others' affairs, he becomes negligent of his own work, because other things fully occupy him. If a man keeps an eye on others' vineyards, his own vineyard surely will be neglected. Brothers and sisters, we do not have the time to indulge in subjectivity. God has entrusted enough ministry, responsibility, and work to us. We do not have the time to meddle with others' affairs. We have to focus our time and energy on the works that we should do. We are busy enough. Only those who are negligent in God's work and who give up their own responsibility before God have the energy to deal with the miscellaneous affairs of the other brothers and sisters. It is clear that all subjective persons have abandoned the work that God has assigned to them. They have allowed their own work to go unattended while busying themselves with others' business. If a worker always gives up his own work to take care of others' work, his own work will surely be poor. A subjective person can never be effective in the Lord's work. God cannot trust him, and even if He entrusts anything to him, it will not be properly carried out. It is difficult to remove a person's subjectivity, because his subjectivity is a matter of disposition. He is subjective in everything, not only in God's work, but in his personal life as well. He is subjective towards others' affairs. A subjective person is a very busy person in this world. He wants to be involved in everything. As a result, he cannot run a straight course before the Lord. He has his opinion, view, and way for everything. This presents a real spiritual

problem and a real spiritual barrier. We have to pray, "Lord, be gracious to me. Make me a pliable person before You. I want to be pliable and soft, not only before You, but before all the brothers and sisters." Paul was such a person. His letters were "weighty and strong." When it came to the matter of his testimony before God, he was weighty and strong. But when he came face to face with the Corinthians he was "weak and his speech contemptible" (2 Cor. 10:10). Paul was uncompromising in the testimony he bore. This is the reason his words were "weighty and strong." But when he talked with others, he was meek, not harsh. Brothers and sisters, we have to learn to differentiate between the two. In our ministry we have to be strong and weighty, but in ourselves we should not be subjective. "Some preach Christ even because of envy and strife, and some also because of good will, these out of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel. But the others announce Christ out of selfish ambition, not purely, thinking to raise up affliction in my bonds. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truthfulness, Christ is announced; and in this I rejoice; yes, and I will rejoice" (Phil. 1:15-18). Do you see the balance here? When others take the same way as we do, we thank the Lord for it. If others will not take the same way, but take a different way, we are still their brothers and sisters. We are not bothered by it. We have to maintain this balance. On the one hand, we have to be faithful to our testimony. On the other hand, we should not be subjective in ourselves. A faithful man is never subjective, and a subjective man is not necessarily faithful. We have to draw the line clearly between the two.

In summary, subjectivity is simply an unbroken self. Brothers and sisters, we have to pray for God's breaking work, praying that we will not be subjective in any way, whether towards others or towards our own affairs. The Lord has to crush us completely before we will be soft and meek. Without such a crushing, we will always be somewhat subjective. Some people may be sharper than others, but a subjective person is always opinionated, full of methods, and ready to take control of others. We have to allow the Lord to deal with us in a severe way at least once so that we can be crushed to the ground and never rise again. When a test comes again, we then will be faithful to our testimony. We will allow others the freedom to choose to follow or to not follow us. We will not have the compulsion to speak. We are not here to be a teacher to many. We

should not be so eager to speak, propose, make decisions, teach, or control the work. Brothers and sisters, we should be strong in our ministry, but at the same time, we should learn to be meek and not subjective before the Lord.

CHAPTER NINE

Towards Money

What should be the attitude of a Christian worker, a servant of God, towards money? This is quite a serious question, and unless a worker has a definite breakthrough in this matter, he cannot work for the Lord. If a worker has a problem towards money, he cannot go very far. A worker finds frequent occasions to touch money. What is at stake, therefore, is a very fundamental question.

Mammon stands in opposition to God, and we should reject its influence. This is the proper Christian view towards money. We must be on the alert lest we come under its power. No worker who is bound by the power of mammon can persuade others to be freed from its power. This is not possible. If we are bound and controlled by mammon, it will be impossible for us to help the brothers and sisters to be free of its control and bondage. A worker should hate laziness, and he should also loathe the power of mammon. Otherwise, he will be useless in God's work. Money is a great matter. Let us look at a few things related to money.

ONE

In the first place, let us note the relationship between money and a worker's pathway and teaching. In the Old Testament there is the history of Balaam, and in the New Testament there is the way and teaching of Balaam. Balaam is referred to in 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation. This shows us the amount of attention God pays to Balaam. Balaam was a prophet who worked for profit. In other words, he commercialized the prophetic ministry. He was not ignorant of his position. He was fully aware of it. He also was not ignorant of God's will. When Balak, the king of Moab, was set to destroy the people of God, Balaam was fully aware that God's people should not be cursed; he knew that they were a people blessed by Jehovah. But because he coveted Balak's promise, a promise to satisfy all of his wants, he went to God again and again to ask for permission. Eventually, God granted him the permission. Many people erroneously think that this episode is an example of waiting on God. As a matter of fact, Balaam would never have inquired of God at all had it not been for Balak's promise. He knew quite well that such a trip was not according to the Lord. God's thought was of blessing and gracious care; His thought was not of cursing. But Balaam inquired of God again and

again because he had received a promise from Balak. Later, God told him to go. But it was not God's will for him to go; it was God's permission for him to go. To God, if Balak's offer could generate so much prayer in Balaam, He would simply tell Balaam to go. Balaam undoubtedly was a prophet, but he allowed money to affect his pathway and lead him far astray.

Any Christian worker who has not resolved the issue of money within himself and who is still bound by the power of money is certain to relate his field of work to money. When he has to decide where he will work, his decision will surely be influenced by financial support. He will go where there is financial support, and he will not go where there is no financial support. His support becomes his guidance. If he only goes where there is support, surely he will not go to a poor place, or, if he goes at all, he will leave that place after a short period of time. If another place is rich in support, he will spontaneously be drawn to their support, and he will think that God is leading him there. Some prayers and guidance follow monetary support. This support becomes the focus of attention. Profit and money drove Balaam to bother God again and again. He kept bothering God about whether or not he should go. Over ten years ago, an elderly brother commented on the lamentable state of Christian affairs, saying, "See how many servants of God are after money! So many poor places are short of care, yet so many workers are frequenting big places which are already crowded with people. Is there something wrong with the guidance they have received?" This was a strong word. If a brother has not dealt with the problem of money, it will not be a surprise at all that his footsteps inevitably will be like those of Balaam. His pathway will be determined by the amount of his support. The amount of his support will become the direction for his pathway. If a place is poor, he will not visit it or will seldom visit it. Even if he visits the place, he will leave quickly. If a place is rich in support, he will visit more or will stay there permanently. Money will become the source of his guidance. To such ones God can only say, "Go as you wish." A worker who is not free from the influence of money is useless. If a worker cannot boast as Paul boasted with regard to money, he is useless. If a worker cannot be freed from money and its influence, he cannot be a minister of God; his way will surely be Balaam's way. Some people are easily touched by money; their pathway is easily affected by money. As a result, their way is the way of Balaam. The way

of Balaam is simply a way that is dictated by money. May the Lord be gracious to us so that we will all be delivered from money. We do not wish to see any of us becoming a beggar. May the location of our work not become the spot where we beg. Once it does, we become a slave to money. It is a pity and shame for God's servant to be led and controlled by money! It is a shame to seek for guidance not by prostrating at God's feet but by following the direction of money! If a man is not fully delivered from money, he may be deep in money's bondage when he says that he is under God's leading. This is too shameful! Of course, the matter of money is a very superficial matter. If the God we believe in is living, we should be able to go anywhere. But if He is not living, we might as well retreat quickly and do nothing at all. It is a shameful thing to preach a living God and yet have our pathway governed by money. This is a great shame!

In the New Testament Peter spoke of the way of Balaam. He showed us what it is: "Having eyes full of adultery and not ceasing from sin; enticing unstable souls, having a heart exercised for covetousness, children of curse" (2 Pet. 2:14). Here the emphasis is on the habitual exercise of covetousness. Covetousness is a matter of the heart, yet it can become a habit. When a man is taken over by covetousness once, twice, or many times, his covetousness becomes his habit. "Forsaking the straight way, they have gone astray, following the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness" (v. 15). What happens when a person falls into habitual covetousness? He forsakes the straight way, goes astray, and follows the way of Balaam, the son of Beor! Brothers and sisters, God has set before us "the straight way." Which way should we go? Some have forsaken the straight way, gone astray, and followed the way of Balaam. What is "the way of Balaam"? He was a prophet who loved the wages of unrighteousness. This shows us clearly that the way of Balaam is a way that involves the selling of one's prophetic ministry for a profit. But the gospel is not sold, and the prophetic ministry is not sold. We can neither sell God's gospel nor the ministry of the prophets. Yet here was a person who sold his prophetic ministry. His way was wrong. His heart was filled with covetousness. This is the reason he went astray as soon as temptation came. Balaam did not accept Balak's offer as a result of one thought of covetousness; it was the result of habitual coveting. Brothers and sisters, have you seen this point? It was a habit.

This was the reason he went astray as soon as Balak offered him the money. If the power of mammon is not eradicated from us, our feet will run after it as soon as its bait is dangled before us, and we will sacrifice our usefulness. If we want to run a straight course, we have to deny mammon absolutely. Otherwise, we outwardly may be seeking for leading, praying for guidance, and pursuing God's will while our feet remain on the wrong path. Balaam prayed, pursued God's will, and waited on God. Yet he still took the wrong way. Please remember that as long as money occupies a place in our heart and covetousness becomes a habit, we can pray all we want for God to stop us from going to a certain place, but money will eventually direct our footsteps. We will be unable to run a straight course.

Jude also speaks of Balaam. Verse 11 says, "For they have...rushed out in the error of Balaam for reward." These are strong words. Some have rushed out for reward. To rush means to run quickly, speedily, and hurriedly. Some have rushed out in the error of Balaam. God's children have to be fully delivered from the enticement of reward. Otherwise, they will have no choice but the way of error.

In addition to making reference to Balaam, 2 Peter 2:3 describes another condition: "In covetousness, with fabricated words, they will make merchandise of you, for whom the judgment of old is not idle, and their destruction does not slumber." Second Peter 2 deals with false prophets. What do false prophets do? In covetousness they fabricate words to make merchandise of the believers. They are covetous, and they seek profit. Hence, they fabricate lies. If a man's way is directed by money, sooner or later his teaching will also be directed by money. We can be certain of this. Such a person will say one thing to the poor and another thing to the rich. He will tell the poor men one kind of demand of the Lord, and when the rich men come around, he will tell them a different kind of demand of the Lord. His words are affected by his desire for profit. In other words, his teaching goes where the money is. God's Word is frank and strong. We are afraid that some have gone after the example of the false prophets and the false teachers. If a man's course of action is swayed and turned by the power of money, this man is a false prophet and a false teacher. No prophet, instructor, or teacher who is a faithful servant of God can be swayed by the power of money. If a man can be

bought with money, if he can be affected by money, and if money can change the course of his direction, he should cover himself with ashes and confess that he is a false prophet and a false teacher. He is a false servant, not a genuine servant of God. This is a very serious thing. We must be totally delivered from mammon. Those who are governed by the supply of money in their pathway and their speaking should be cut off from God's work.

Peter and Jude were not the only ones who spoke on this subject. Paul said the same thing to Timothy when he underscored this peril. First Timothy 6:3 says, "If anyone teaches different things and does not consent to healthy words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the teaching which is according to godliness." What is to become of the one who teaches different things, who teaches strange doctrines, and who does not consent to the healthy words of our Lord Jesus Christ? Verses 4 and 5 say, "He is blinded with pride, understanding nothing, but is diseased with questionings and contentions of words, out of which come envy, strife, slanders, evil suspicions, perpetual wranglings of men corrupted in mind and deprived of the truth, supposing godliness to be a means of gain." It is interesting to note that in church history all the heretical teachers, those who taught differently, took godliness as a means of gain. None of them were spent as much as Paul. They calculated how much they could get out for what they put in. May none of us try to gain anything from anyone through the gospel! Nothing in this world is more condemned by God than the pursuit for gain through godliness. Nothing can be more base than to engage in Christian work as a source of profit. This is most repugnant. Using godliness as a means of gain is most repugnant. Every worker must be completely free from all thoughts of profit before he can engage himself in the work. Brothers and sisters, if you want to work for the Lord, your mind must be completely free from the influence of money. Death and starvation should be more preferable than working for gain. Every worker of the Lord has to be very strong in this matter. If anyone entices us to take a compromising course in this matter, we should not give him an inch of ground. We have to follow our Lord in an absolute way. Brothers and sisters, we can sell our clothing and our possessions, but we can never sell our truth and our godliness. Unless we die to mammon and our mind is completely free from it, it is better not to touch the Lord's work at all. Verse 6 says, "But

godliness with contentment is great gain." This is where the real gain lies: Where there is godliness, there is contentment. When we have godliness, we ask for nothing more, we expect nothing more, and we are satisfied with what we have. This is gain, great gain. It is a shame for godliness to become a means for monetary gain. But godliness with contentment is great gain. Verses 7 through 10 are particularly important to workers of the Lord: "For we have brought nothing into the world, because neither can we carry anything out. But having food and covering, with these we will be content. But those who intend to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge men into destruction and ruin. For the love of money is a root of all evils, because of which some, aspiring after money, have been led away from the faith and pierced themselves through with many pains." Brothers and sisters, we should never make godliness a means of gain. We must be completely free from the influence of money. If we have trouble overcoming this, it would be better to look for another profession. We can never be so fallen as to follow money in our speaking and in our work. It would be better to take up another profession and serve the Lord in that way. There is nothing wrong in serving the Lord with other professions. No one can be careless in the matter of money, and no one can bring shame to the Lord's name through money. A worker must be clean with money. His heart must be fully delivered from it. He has to be absolute, because God's Word condemns most severely any uncleanliness towards money.

Jude 16 says, "These are murmurers, complainers, going on according to their own lusts; and their mouth speaks great swelling things, flattering persons for the sake of advantage." Many people speak great swelling things. They boast of the number of times their prayers are answered and of the number of times they have performed amazing miracles and works of wonders. They say these things "for the sake of advantage." Many people speak what others like to hear in order to flatter them for the sake of advantage. We have to deal with all motives that are driven by the thought of profit. This is a basic character trait of a worker of the Lord. A person who has compromised in the matter of money will compromise in all things. Towards money we must be tough, very tough, and must not give in to any corruption. As workers of the Lord, we have to be absolutely clean in the matter of money.

TWO

Let us now consider how the Lord Jesus trained His disciples. Luke 9 records His sending forth of the twelve disciples, and chapter ten records His sending forth of the seventy. Of the four Gospels, only Luke records the sending forth of the seventy. In sending forth the twelve, the Lord said, "Take nothing for the journey, neither a staff nor a bag nor bread nor money, nor have two tunics apiece" (9:3). The Lord told them to leave behind many things. When He commissioned the seventy, He said, "Do not carry a purse, nor a bag, nor sandals" (10:4). A common point in both cases is money. In other words, money should be a non-issue for a worker who sets out for his work. Later the Lord asked, "When I sent you without purse and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you? And they said, Nothing" (22:35). Following this the Lord said, "But now, let him who has a purse take it, likewise also a bag; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one" (v. 36). This is because the dispensation had changed. By that time the Lord Jesus had been rejected. While there was a chance for the Israelites to receive the Lord, there was no need for these things. The point to emphasize is that in carrying out his commission for the Lord, a worker should not pay attention to his wallet. His whole being should be given to the message, not to his wallet. We go out to testify that Jesus of Nazareth is God's appointed Lord. Our being is in the message, not in the purse. In other words, we are qualified to work only if we are completely free from money. If we go to every city and town to preach the gospel of the kingdom, we must not be like a camel. We cannot be a camel, stuck at the eye of the needle and barred from the kingdom, while telling others of the need to enter the kingdom by violence (Matt. 11:12). This is impossible.

What do the words do not carry mean? They tell us that the gospel principle contradicts the principle of the purse and the two tunics. When a man sets out to preach the gospel, he cannot set his mind on these things. For an ordinary journey, one needs a purse to hold his money, a staff for walking, and two tunics to change his clothes. All these things are necessary. This is the reason the Lord told His disciples to carry them in Luke 22. Why did He say that these are unnecessary when He sent out the twelve disciples in chapter nine and the seventy in chapter ten?

He forbade these things because a gospel preacher should not set his mind on these things. When he is sent, he should go. He should go if there are two tunics, and he should go if there is only one tunic. He should go with or without a staff, with or without money, and with or without a purse to carry his money. This is what it means to be a gospel preacher. This is the basic training the Lord gave the disciples when He sent out the twelve and then the seventy for their work. Brothers and sisters, we have to be clear. If a man's heart is on the gospel, these minor things will not be an issue to him at all. If these things become an issue to him, it is better that he not go out at all. In order to preach the gospel, our clothing, our purse, and our staff must not be a concern to us. If they are, we cannot preach the gospel. The gospel requires that we focus absolutely on the gospel; it requires so much of our attention that these things should become inconsequential to us. The gospel is the only thing that should occupy our hearts. When we set out for our work, we should be happy with or without the availability of hospitality. We have to stand on God's side, and we should bear a glorious testimony for the Lord. This is why the Lord said, "Into whatever house you enter, first say, Peace to this house" (10:5). How dignified this is. A worker is one who dispenses peace to others. He should honor his own position before the Lord. He can be poor, but he can never lose his dignity. No worker can be so wrong as to give up his dignity. If we go to a place and the people there do not receive us, what should we do? The Lord said, "As many as do not receive you, as you go out from that city, shake off the dust from your feet for a testimony against them" (9:5). Do you see the dignity of the servants of God? When they are turned away, they do not feel shamed and do not complain, saying, "What bad luck. We came to the wrong house." Instead, they shake off the dust from their feet. They do not even take a speck of dust from that city. God's servants must maintain their dignity. They can be poor, but they cannot lose their dignity. If our mind is not fully settled about this, we cannot have a share in God's work. As workers, we have to deal with the Lord properly regarding the matter of money. Otherwise, we cannot touch God's work, because mammon is a crucial matter.

We can find out more about the Lord's training of His disciples in the feeding of the five thousand and then the four thousand. On one of these occasions, He took His disciples with Him and preached to a large crowd

of five thousand, not including women and children. Toward the close of the day the disciples came to Him and said, "This place is deserted and the hour is already late. Send the crowds away that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves. But Jesus said to them, They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat" (Matt. 14:15-16). The disciples had hoped that the Lord would send the crowds away to get their own food. But the Lord said, "You give them something to eat." When one disciple heard this, he was shocked, and said, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that each one may take a little" (John 6:7). While they were counting the two hundred denarii, the Lord said, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see" (Mark 6:38). When they brought Him five loaves and two fishes, the Lord performed a miracle and fed them all. Brothers and sisters, all those who are counting their two hundred denarii are not qualified to work for the Lord. If money means so much to us, we cannot touch God's work. The Lord shows us in these verses that every worker should be glad to give away what he has. If money means a great deal to us, we will always calculate profit. A worker should be delivered from the power of mammon. Money should not exert any power or influence upon a worker of the Lord. During the three and a half years the Lord was with the twelve disciples, He gave Himself to them. This was the way He trained the twelve disciples. He showed them that what should be spent should be spent. God's work has nothing to do with profitability. It is wrong to view God's work with a commercial eye. Those who are always counting their money are not God's slaves; they are mammon's slaves. We have to learn to rescue ourselves from the power of mammon.

The disciples did not learn this lesson immediately. In Matthew 15, we see another occasion with four thousand people, excluding women and children. This time the condition was more serious. The crowd had been there for three days. What could the disciples do under such circumstances? The Lord told them, "I am moved with compassion for the crowd, because for three days now they have remained with Me and they do not have anything to eat" (v. 32). The word "and" means that the Lord Himself was also without food for those three days. He went on, "And I am not willing to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." But the disciples had not learned the lesson. They wondered how they could get enough food to feed the people. Man's concern is always

where food will come from. But the Lord asked them, "How many loaves do you have? And they said, Seven, and a few small fish" (v. 34). They brought Him the seven loaves and the few fish, and the Lord performed another miracle and fed the four thousand.

The Lord repeated this miracle because the twelve disciples needed to be trained twice. Had the Lord not fed the five thousand and four thousand, the disciples probably would not have been able to handle the situation at Pentecost. If a man has never experienced the feeding of five thousand and four thousand in the Gospels, he could never know about caring for the three thousand and five thousand in Acts. Those who run away at the sight of bears and lions will surely run away at the sight of Goliath. Those who cannot shepherd sheep will surely not be able to shepherd Israel. Here was a group of people who learned the lesson of feeding the five thousand and the four thousand. As a consequence, they had no problem at Pentecost when they were called upon to take care of the poor. Brothers and sisters, we have to go through the same training. Our hearts have to be enlarged. We can hold back what we spend, but God does not want us to hold back His miracles. Many people are too concerned about money. They do not give others the impression that they are servants of God. They do not resemble those who have been trained by God. A trained person will not make money an issue; he will not be that concerned about the money in his hand. Brothers and sisters, the more we count, the more we deviate from God's mark, and the poorer we become. This is not God's principle towards money. We need the training that the twelve and the seventy disciples received. One of the twelve eventually became a thief, a robber; he stole money. He did not learn his lesson, and money became a major issue to him. When he saw Mary pouring the pure nard out of the alabaster flask on the Lord, he considered it a waste. He said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" (John 12:5). To a calculating person, a flask of ointment can be sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor. But the Lord did not go along with this calculation. Instead, He said, "Truly I say to you, Wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this woman has done shall also be told as a memorial of her" (Matt. 26:13). The consummate result of the gospel is the breaking of the alabaster flask and the anointing of the Lord Jesus with the ointment worth three hundred denarii. In other words, when a

man receives the gospel and for Christ's sake does not count the cost of wasting everything on Him, it is a good thing in the Lord's sight. It is right even when he "wastes" himself on the Lord. Those who do not understand the gospel are always counting their money, but those who understand the gospel realize that it is right and proper to waste themselves on Him. It is right for the Lord to receive our "wasteful" sacrifice. Who was the one who considered it a waste? Judas. He was a man who never learned his lesson. His words were very reasonable. To man, there was no profit in spending three hundred denarii in this way! To Judas, three hundred denarii was enough to betray a man—he sold the Lord Jesus for a price of three hundred denarii. However, to him, the pouring out of the ointment was a waste, and he grieved over it. He wanted to gain something from it; he was a very calculating man. But those who have genuinely received the gospel and who are absolute for the Lord will sacrifice everything. Even if the sacrifice is too much in others' eyes, this sacrifice is made towards the Lord's gospel. Where the gospel is proclaimed, no one should bargain with the Lord. He said, "For the poor you have with you always, but you do not always have Me" (v. 11). The Lord was saying that there is nothing wrong about caring for the poor, but we cannot hold back anything when it comes to sacrificing for the Lord. Even if we overdo and go to the extreme, it is still not a waste to the Lord. A brother once said, "If a new believer tries to take the moderate way once he believes, he will have no spiritual future at all." Brothers and sisters, considerations of moderation can wait ten or twenty years, but when one first believes, he should waste himself on Him. If you are a new believer, you should offer everything you have to Him. You should pour out the entire alabaster flask of pure nard on the Lord. You have to sacrifice everything this way before you will have a way to go on. This was the training the disciples received. We have to learn to take up a little more suffering ourselves and waste more on the Lord and on others. As God's servants, we should be very generous towards money. We should go on, with or without money. Those who always count their money are not the right persons for the work.

In Acts 3:6 Peter said to the crippled man, "Silver and gold I do not possess." The Lord brought Peter and John to the point where they could claim, "Silver and gold I do not possess." Although we see much money being handled in chapter two, we find a testimony in chapter three:

"Silver and gold I do not possess." What did Peter say to the crippled man? "What I have, this I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene rise up and walk." They were so trained that even though so much money passed through their hand, they could still say, "Silver and gold I do not possess." Brothers and sisters, if we engage ourselves in the work at all, we have to be firm with regard to money. Once we are weak in this matter, we will be weak in other matters as well. An underlying factor for strong and steady workers is our trustworthiness before God in the matter of money. God can entrust such persons.

THREE

Let us come to the third point—Paul's attitude towards money. His own word on this subject is very clear. In Acts 20 he said to the Ephesians, "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing" (v. 33). This is a matter of motive. He did not covet anything. In his work for the Lord, he was able to boast that he never coveted anyone's possessions. He had no thought concerning anyone's gold, silver, or clothing. This is the first statement. Then he said, "You yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my needs and to those who are with me" (v. 34). This should be the common attitude of all servants of God. We must covet no man's silver or gold or clothing. Others' possessions are their own, and we have no desire for them. They can keep what they have. At the same time, we work to supply our own need and those of our co-workers. This does not mean that a worker of the Lord has no right to exercise his right in the gospel (1 Cor. 9:18). But it does mean that a worker of the Lord should view the gospel as such a serious and immense responsibility that he would rather offer his hands and his money to the work. This should be his desire before the Lord. If at all possible, his hands should be working. Of course Paul accepted gifts from others, but that had to do with another subject—the responsibility of the giver. We will come to that in a minute.

Paul's word to the Corinthians was very sweet. In 2 Corinthians 11:7 he said, "Or did I commit a sin, abasing myself that you might be exalted, because I announced the gospel of God to you free of charge?" He continued in verses 9 through 12: "And when I was present with you and lacked, I was not a burden to anyone; for the brothers who came from Macedonia filled up my lack, and in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and will keep myself. The truthfulness of Christ is in

me, that this boasting shall not be stopped as it regards me in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows. But what I do, I also will do, that I may cut off the opportunity of those desiring an opportunity, that in the thing in which they boast, they may be found even as we." Paul did not categorically deny all gifts, but in Achaia it was a matter of testimony. Some were criticizing, looking for opportunity, and boasting as if they were different from others. Paul did not want to give them an occasion for criticism. He said that he announced the gospel of God to them free of charge, that he was not a burden to them, not even when he lacked. He kept himself from being burdensome to them, and would continue to keep himself in this way. He would not allow himself to become a burden to them. This does not mean that he did not love them, because what he did, he would continue to do. But he acted in this way to cut off the opportunity of those desiring an opportunity, and to shut their mouths. This is the attitude of a worker towards money. Wherever we go, as soon as we sense any reluctance, we should cut off any opportunity for criticism. God's children must maintain their dignity in His work. The more a person loves money, the more we should give the gospel to him free of charge. The more a person holds on to his money, the less we should receive any gift from him. We should realize our position as servants of God. If we find anyone like the Achaians, who were reluctant and who were looking for opportunity to criticize, we should say to them as Paul seemingly said, "I will not be a burden to any one of you. If you want to send something to the poor in Jerusalem, I can take it to them. If Timothy comes, you can send him forth in his journey in peace. But as for myself, I must maintain my dignity as a worker of the Lord." If we are criticized for receiving any gift from anyone, we have lost our dignity as servants of the Lord altogether. We have to maintain our dignity as servants of God. In our service to the Lord, we cannot be careless with money. We have to be very strict in this matter; otherwise, we will not be able to do much for God.

Paul told us not only how he maintained his integrity, but also how he worked with his two hands to supply the needs of his co-workers. This shows us the principle of giving. Paul said, "These hands have ministered to my needs and to those who are with me" (Acts 20:34). No worker will be depleted by giving. If we keep all that we have received and only make provisions for ourselves, we do not know the meaning of

the work of a minister. If there is little offering from the purses of the co-workers, something is wrong. If a worker can only receive, that is, if his faith is exercised only to the point of his receiving, but does not extend to his giving, his function is limited. Brothers and sisters, our spiritual future has much to do with our attitude towards money. The worst attitude we can take is to gather only for ourselves and to do everything for ourselves. It seems a hard task to ask the Levites to offer. Yet the Levites have just as much responsibility to tithe as everyone else. It is true that the Levites had no inheritance in all the cities; they sojourned among the twelve tribes and lived by the altar. Some Levites might have been tempted to say, "I live by the altar. What do I have to give?" But God said that all the Levites should receive tithing and should also tithe. This stops all the servants of God from saying, "I have given up everything. Do I still have to offer from the meager income I receive?" If our eyes are always on our own needs, we will end up in financial straits and will not be able to supply the needs of our co-workers. We have to learn to give. We must be able to supply all of our brothers and sisters. If we keep money in our hands, no matter how little it may be, and if, at the same time, we expect God to constantly work on the other brothers and sisters, we will find that God does just the opposite; He will not entrust His money to our hands.

Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 6:10 are wonderful: "As poor yet enriching many." Here was a brother who really knew God. Seemingly he was poor, yet surprisingly he enriched many. Brothers and sisters, this is our way. When we work in a place and the brothers and sisters there have something to say about us, or if they have a wrong attitude towards us, we should maintain our dignity as workers. We should never accept their gifts. Instead, we should tell them plainly, "I cannot take your money. I am a servant of God. You have things to say about me, and I cannot use your money. As a servant of the Lord, I have to maintain God's glory. I cannot use your money." Even in extreme poverty we have to learn to give. If we want to receive more, we have to give more. The more we are able to give, the more we are able to receive. This is a spiritual principle. Often when we are in lack, we should give more, for as soon as the money that we have goes, the Lord's supply comes. Some brothers and sisters have many such experiences. They can testify that the more they give, the more they receive. We should not count how much is left in our hands. The Lord said, "Give, and it will be given to you" (Luke 6:38). This

is God's law. We cannot annul God's law. The Christian way of stewardship is different from that of the world. The world gains by saving; we gain by giving. We may be poor, but we can enrich others.

In 2 Corinthians 12:14 Paul said, "Behold, this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden." This was Paul's attitude. How stern he was toward himself! Some had spoken against Paul and had a problem with Paul. Therefore, when Paul was ready to go to them the third time, he was not a burden to them. In verse 14 he continued, saying, "For I do not seek what is yours but you." Was he being narrow-minded and mean? No. He continued in the same verse, saying, "For the children ought not to store up for the parents, but the parents for the children." Brothers and sisters, do you see how sweet Paul's attitude before God was? The Corinthians heard many rumors and said many things about Paul. Therefore, Paul was forced to decline their gifts, but even though he declined their gifts, he did not shrink from the responsibility of teaching them about money. Second Corinthians may be the book that touches the matter of money the most. Had Paul refrained from any speaking of money, some could have construed that Paul was offended by the matter. But he was not offended, because money had so little influence over him. He went on to teach the Corinthians about money. He told them to send the money to Jerusalem. He did not advise them not to send it. He was above money; therefore, he was above the Corinthians' attitude towards him personally. He refused their gift because he wanted to maintain his dignity. Yet he boasted to the Macedonians that the Corinthians were well prepared. At the same time, he entreated the brothers to make their promised blessing ready beforehand, lest they be put to shame by their unpreparedness when the Macedonians came to them (9:2, 4-5). His personal feelings were completely set aside. God's servants must be delivered from the influence of money. Had Paul not been delivered from money, the Corinthians would never have heard such a message. Paul would still have spoken to the Ephesians or the Philippians, but he would not have spoken to the Corinthians. But Paul still went after the Corinthians; he would not give up. He continued to talk to the Corinthians about money. He showed them that God could use their money, but that he himself would not; he did not want anything from them. In this matter, he did not become burdensome to them. However, he still expected them to have a

way to go on in this matter.

Brothers and sisters, can we differentiate between them and theirs whenever we communicate with others in the church? When we see the brothers, are we after them or after theirs? If they have a problem with us and we cannot gain their hearts, will we still support them, edify them, and pray for their growth? Paul had plenty of reasons to turn away from the Corinthians, but he came to them again and again, and even a third time. Yet he was not after their possessions. This is a great temptation to God's servants. We have to learn to do what our brother Paul did.

In 2 Corinthians 12:15-18 he continued, saying, "But I, I will most gladly spend and be utterly spent on behalf of your souls. If I love you more abundantly, am I loved less? But let it be so! I did not burden you; but, as some of you say, being crafty, I took you by guile. Did I take advantage of you through anyone whom I have sent to you? I entreated Titus and sent with him the brother. Titus did not take advantage of you, did he? Did we not walk in the same spirit? In the same steps?" Brothers and sisters, think of Paul's attitude: He most gladly spent and was utterly spent on their behalf. In preaching the gospel, it is not enough for us just to be spent. We have to spend; we have to give everything we have. It is always wrong to receive money in exchange for our preaching of the gospel. Rather, we have to be prepared to willingly spend our money for the gospel. If our money does not go into our preaching, something is wrong. If our money does go into our preaching, we are doing the right thing and are putting our money into a worthy cause. This is what Paul did. He was willing to be spent, and he was willing also to spend. He was willing to spend and be spent for their souls. When he was among them he was not a burden to anyone. Nor was Titus or the other brother a burden to anyone. He would not take advantage of anyone. The gospel is true—this is why we can spend our money on it. Brothers and sisters, we have to be like our brother Paul. We should not be a burden to anyone. On the contrary, we should be utterly spent for the gospel's sake. Because the gospel is true, it is right for us to spend and be utterly spent. Our gospel must be one which carries our money along with it. This is the proper way to go.

In spite of what we have said, Paul accepted the gift of the Macedonians and the Philippians. Under normal circumstances, it is right for a gospel

preacher to receive gifts. Paul accepted gifts from some places and refused gifts from other places. He was not bound in the matter of receiving gifts. He accepted the gift from the Macedonians. But when some criticized him and looked for opportunity to slander him in Achaia and Corinth, he refused their gift. This was Paul's way. We should be the same today. We can accept gifts from some places like Macedonia, and we should refuse gifts from other places that say things about us. Brothers and sisters, we have to maintain this stand before the Lord. We should not think that we can accept any kind of money. If someone is speaking behind our backs or if someone is seeking for an opportunity to criticize us, we simply cannot accept their gifts. In other places we may accept the gift, but not in that place.

Let us turn to Paul's letter to the Philippians to see his attitude in receiving offerings from the saints there. Philippians 4:15-17 says, "You yourselves also know, Philippians, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I went out from Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in the account of giving and receiving except you only; for even in Thessalonica you sent both once and again to my need. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit which increases to your account." This was Paul's attitude. It seems as if the Philippians were the only ones who supplied him. When he was in Corinth and Thessalonica, it was the Philippians who supplied him. Yet to the Philippians he said, "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit which increases to your account." He knew that God would make entries in the Philippians' account for the money they had spent. God would take note of the Philippians' money. This is why he did not ask for their money. Here was a man who had such an attitude towards the only ones who were supplying him. He did not seek the gift, but the fruit which increased to their account. The Macedonians had given again and again. But Paul's eyes were not on the money. We may not accept some gifts, but even when we do accept, we should speak like Paul did to the Philippians. We should pray for their fruit to increase to their account. It is altogether wrong for God's servants to be bound by money. We must be delivered from money.

Let us go on to see what Paul said in verse 18: "But I have received in full all things and abound; I have been filled." This was no ordinary financial report. An ordinary report usually highlights a lack so that others

will be motivated to give. But to the only church that was supporting him, our brother Paul said, "I have received in full all things and abound; I have been filled." Paul's words were seldom repetitious, but here he said, "I have received in full all things and abound; I have been filled." Brothers and sisters, please pay attention to our brother's attitude. He told the only church that was supporting him that he was full, that he was abounding, and that he was filled. He had enough; his only hope was that their gift would become "a sweet-smelling savor, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God" (v. 18). Here is a person with a beautiful spirit. He did not have any consciousness of money. Money did not touch him in any way.

Let us go on to verse 19, which is a very precious verse: "And my God will fill your every need according to His riches, in glory, in Christ Jesus." He was grateful for their support, but he did not lose his dignity. They offered up the money as a sacrifice to God; it was not for Paul personally, and it had nothing to do with him. At the same time, he blessed them: "My God will fill your every need according to His riches, in glory, in Christ Jesus." We cannot help but say, "To our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

FOUR

Finally, let us consider Paul's attitude in relation to funds that the church passed through his hands and which others wanted him to manage. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-4 he wrote, "Furthermore we make known to you, brothers, the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in much proving of affliction the abundance of their joy and the depth of their poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality; that according to their power, I testify, and beyond their power, of their own accord, with much entreaty they besought of us the grace and the fellowship of the ministry to the saints." God's children must be strict in this matter. When a worker goes to a place to work for the Lord, this must be his attitude whenever he touches money. The brothers in Macedonia offered financial assistance to the brothers suffering from famine in Jerusalem. First, Paul informed them of the calamity. After they heard it, they went beyond their ability in the depth of their poverty and affliction to care for the brothers in Jerusalem. What did they do? Paul said that with much entreaty they sought the grace and the fellowship of the ministry to

the saints. This was the attitude of the Macedonians in offering financial aid for the care of the saints' needs. They wanted to have a share in this grace. They did not care if they were in poverty and affliction themselves; they still wanted to have a share in this work. Because of this, they entreated Paul again and again. In other words, Paul did not allow them to give the first time. This shows a proper attitude. A worker of the Lord should not accept just any money that comes his way, even when it is not for his own use. It was true that the brothers in Jerusalem were in need, but it was not simply a matter of getting money and forwarding it to the saints. The Macedonian brothers were in dire need themselves, and Paul told them to take back their offering. But they came again and again; they pleaded with Paul again and again, with much entreaty, to be allowed to share in the grace of ministering to the saints. Both sides acted beautifully. This is the proper Christian way. On the one hand, the giver says, "Though I am poor and in need myself, I still will give. Though it is beyond my strength to give, I will still give." On the other hand, the worker says, "You should not give." This is beautiful! Eventually, the worker says, "If you really want to give, I have no way to stop you." This is the proper attitude of a worker. Paul was taking care of the affairs of the church. Although he saw the need in Jerusalem and wanted to take care of the brothers' need, his attitude was different from that of many workers today. He allowed the Macedonian churches to participate in the grace of ministering to the saints only after they had pleaded with him again and again.

In 2 Corinthians 8:16-22 Paul said, "But thanks be to God who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus, because he not only received the entreaty, but being more earnest, he also went forth of his own accord to you. And we sent together with him the brother whose praise in the gospel is throughout all the churches, and not only this, but who has also been selected by the churches as our fellow traveler in this grace which is being ministered by us, to the glory of the Lord Himself and to demonstrate our eagerness; avoiding this, that anyone should find fault with us in this abundance which is being ministered by us. For we exercise foresight for what is honorable not only in the sight of the Lord but also in the sight of men. And we sent with them our brother..." Here we see Paul's arrangement. In forwarding others' money to Jerusalem, he was very upright in his procedure. No servant of God can ever be

careless in the matter of money. What did Paul say? He said, "Avoiding this, that anyone should find fault with us in this abundance which is being ministered by us." Paul asked one, two, even three brothers to manage the money; he did not manage it himself. What did the three brothers do? He said, "For we exercise foresight for what is honorable not only in the sight of the Lord but also in the sight of men." In the administration of funds, the only way to avoid a problem is to let two or three persons be in charge.

Because money is such a serious matter, Paul, writing both to Timothy and Titus, declared that no covetous person should be allowed to hold the position of an elder (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7). In 1 Timothy 3:8 the same stipulation was made regarding the office of a deacon. No man is qualified to be an elder or a deacon who has not overcome money. A basic qualification for being an elder or a deacon is to not be covetous of money. We must deal solemnly with the matter of money. Peter wrote in the same strain as Paul. He said, "Shepherd the flock of God among you...not by seeking gain through base means but eagerly" (1 Pet. 5:2). No one who is covetous can shepherd the flock of God.

May the Lord be gracious to us so that we would deal thoroughly with the matter of money. Unless we settle the issue of covetousness, we will find ourselves in difficulties sooner or later. In fact, we will become useless in the way. If we do not settle this issue, we cannot deal with other issues, and we will surely face problems and troubles down the road. We must not be influenced by money in any way. Whenever we hear anyone criticizing us, we have to learn to reject their gift. At the same time, we have to learn to bear others' burdens. We should not only take care of our own needs and the needs of our co-workers, but we should take care of the needs of all the brothers and sisters as well. If we can handle the matter of money in a proper way, we will have done a great thing. Those who have not settled the basic issue of money can never work in a good way.

CHAPTER TEN

A Few Other Matters

In this chapter we will speak of a few other matters, namely: (1)

upholding the absoluteness of the truth, (2) taking care of our physical health, (3) daily habits, and (4) marriage and virginity.

ONE

Every worker of the Lord must uphold the absoluteness of the truth. This is possible only when a man is delivered from himself. Many brothers and sisters are not absolute to the truth; they are affected by people, things, and personal feelings. If a man is not absolute to the truth, he will, in the course of his work, sacrifice God's truth for man, himself, or his own desires. A basic requirement for being a servant of the Lord is to not sacrifice the truth. We can sacrifice ourselves and our desires, but we can never sacrifice the truth. The problems with many workers stem from the relationship with their friends, intimate acquaintances, and family. The truth is compromised by their friends, immediate family, or relatives. God cannot use such people. If the truth is the truth, it should not be compromised, whether by our own brothers, our relatives, or our intimate friends. Suppose the son of a Christian worker expresses a desire to be baptized. If his father realizes that this matter relates to the truth, he will pass this matter on to the leading brothers in the church and leave it to them to decide whether or not he is ready for baptism. But the problem is that the co-worker presumes that his son is qualified for baptism, and in so doing, he sacrifices the absoluteness of the truth. He has been influenced by the father-son relationship, and he is no longer absolute to the truth. If he is absolute to the truth, he will go along with the direction of the truth as it is laid out in the church; he will not bring his personal relationships into the situation. Consider another illustration: In a certain place a controversy arises. A number of the saints may be favorably disposed toward a particular group of brothers and side with them, whereas a number of others may have a preference for another group of people and line up on their side. Instead of sitting down and counting the cost of being absolute for the truth and of following the truth, they are influenced and directed by their own emotions. This does not mean that the brothers are not speaking about the truth. It only means that they are not absolute to the truth. They have not brushed the truth completely aside; they still have some care for the truth. But they are not absolute to the truth. Being absolute to the truth means that no personal feelings or family relationships are allowed to stand in the way of the truth. In

spiritual matters, the truth is compromised as soon as human relationships are taken into account. As soon as human relationships become involved, God's word and His commandments are discounted through human factors, and the truth is compromised.

The Bible contains many ordinances and commandments. These ordinances and commandments are from God, and God's servants need to preach and announce them. On the one hand, it is tiresome to consider those who are only speakers but not doers. On the other hand, we cannot be a servant of God if we cannot preach beyond what we can practice. This is because the truth is absolute. The standard of the divine Word must not be lowered to the level of our personal attainment. We cannot tamper with the truth in any way in order to justify our own deficiencies. This is what it means to be absolute to the truth. We have to transcend ourselves, our own feelings, and our own personal interest in our speaking. This is a high requirement for the servants of the Lord. We must beware of doing things one way as they affect other brothers and sisters but doing them another way as they are applied to our spouse or our children. The truth is always absolute. God wants us to uphold the absoluteness of the truth. If God's Word says something, it is so, no matter who is involved. We cannot make exceptions just because of some special relationships. If we do, we are lowering the standard of God's truth. I am not talking about speaking untruths; I am talking about sacrificing the absoluteness of the truth. We have to learn to uphold the absoluteness of the truth. We cannot forfeit its absoluteness just because someone is our relative. We are here to follow the truth, not man, and we are here to maintain the absoluteness of the truth.

Many difficulties arise in the church today because God's children sacrifice the truth. A local church became divided after a brother said, "I had no intention to be separated from you, but last night something happened in the church, and I was not informed of it. Today I will no longer meet with you." The truth is absolute. If the brother's separation of himself was right, he should have done so even if he had been informed of the matter. Likewise, if the brother's separation of himself was wrong, he should not have done so even when he was not informed of the matter. If he is absolute for the truth, the act of informing him bears no significance. If his separation is based on a lack of informing, man has

been elevated above the truth. Another place wanted to have separate tables and to break bread separately because a brother was offended when he asked a question in the meeting and did not receive an answer. If it was right for him to separate himself, he should have started another table much sooner. If it was wrong for him to separate himself, he should not make an excuse of not receiving an answer to his question. This is what it means to be absolute to the truth. If having separate tables is according to the truth, there should be separate tables, even if the brothers are attached to one another. If having separate tables is not according to the truth, there should not be separate tables, even if there are offenses. Brothers and sisters, have you seen this? We must deny all forms of self before we can serve the Lord. If there is any pride, selfishness, or thought of receiving respectable treatment as a condition for upholding God's word, we are putting ourselves above God's truth; we are saying that we are more important than His truth. This disqualifies us from His service. In our service to the Lord, we have to deny ourselves absolutely. Whether or not we like what is happening and whether or not we feel hurt about something have nothing to do with the issue. If something must be done one way, it must be done that way no matter how we feel. Even if we suffer greatly by doing so, we still have to do it. Even if others mistreat us, despise us, or count us worthless, we still have to do it. We cannot force God's truth to go our way just because we want to go that way. Man is too bold; he always forces God's truth to follow him.

We have to see the glory of God's truth. We cannot project our own feelings into His truth. When we stand beside God's truth, we should not just consider ourselves to be smaller than it; we should consider ourselves to be non-existent. If we involve the self even a little, we will end up with trouble immediately. A brother, who had been criticized in some quarters, came to the church and felt quite happy about the contacts he made. He felt that he had been unjustly criticized where he had been, but he did not really touch the truth before the Lord. He was merely impressed by a few of the brothers. Such a brother was very undisciplined in his conduct. Some time later another brother said to him, "Brother, you have been too loose," and he proceeded to point out some of the things that the new brother had done. This was a speaking of truth in love. But when the new brother heard this, he left, remarking in anger,

"No wonder so many people are against this church. It should be criticized." Brothers and sisters, this brother was not absolute to the truth. If he had been absolute to the truth, he would not have said this when he was rebuked by others. Because he was not absolute to the truth, he changed his tone as soon as he was rebuked.

What does it mean to be absolute to the truth? It means to set aside feelings, to ignore personal relationships, and to not stand for the self. The truth is absolute. Our personal feelings, relationships, experiences, and encounters should not be mixed up with it. Since truth is absolute, what is right is right and what is wrong is wrong. There is a brother who is a leader in many places. He has taken our way and has decided to stand for the testimony of the church. If the way we take is right, it is always right; it does not become right because this brother is taking this way. If the way we take is wrong, it cannot be made right simply because this brother is taking this way. Whether or not the way is right has nothing to do with this brother. Even if this brother becomes fallen, the way is still right because truth is absolute. However, many people have their eyes set only on this brother. They think that if this brother is right, the way he has chosen must be right as well, and if the brother is wrong, the way he has chosen also must be wrong. Are their eyes on the truth, or are they on the person? This does not mean that we can be careless. We should never be careless; we should uphold God's testimony. This is a fact. Yet at the same time, whether or not this way is the right way is based on truth, not on men. Does this mean that when other Christians sin we are no longer Christians? Does this mean that when other children of God fall, we are no longer children of God? Does this mean that when many children of God lose their testimonies, we are no longer believers? No, brothers and sisters, truth is absolute. Even if many Christians have failed, the Lord is still worthy of our trust, and we must still trust in Him. Even if many of God's children have sinned, we remain children of God; there should be no change. This does not mean that God's children have license to sin or that Christians have license to fail. It does mean, however, that the truth is absolute. If it is right to believe in the Lord, we should believe in Him even when others do not believe. If it is right to be a Christian, we should be a Christian even if all others have fallen. The issue is not what others are doing. The issue is whether or not something is the truth. Many divisions in the church, many problems in the work, and

many disputes among workers will cease when personal relationships, feelings, and problems are set aside.

It is not a small thing to be absolute to the truth. We cannot be indifferent about this. If we are loose in this, we will be loose in everything. In order to uphold the truth, we have to abandon ourselves completely. If we do not have such a heart and habit for the truth, we will have problems sooner or later. Some brothers say, "I thank God for bringing me to this meeting. I have received much help." This does not mean that this brother is absolute for the truth. He may only be emotionally attached to this place. When something unpleasant happens to him, he may change his mind and decide that he is in the wrong place. Truth, however, is absolute. If this place is right, it is right. If it is wrong, it is wrong. It cannot be right just because it is good to him, and wrong because it is not good to him. If the justification of a place is dependent on its treatment of him, he must be the most important thing in the whole world! Truth is not important to him; he is important! He is not absolute for the truth. This is where many problems come from. God demands that we be dealt with to the extent that we set ourselves and our feelings aside in everything. It matters little whether we feel happy or hurt. Our direction should never be affected by our own personal feelings. If God says it is right, it is right. If God says it is wrong, it is wrong. If God says this way is right, we have to take this way even if everyone refuses to take it. We do not take this way because it is exciting or because a certain brother has taken it. If this way is right, we should take it, even if none of the brothers take it. Truth is absolute, and no human being should influence us in any way. If we bring in the element of human consideration, we have made man greater than the truth.

All judgments are based on truth, not on individuals. Whenever the basis of judgment is shifted to an individual, we have compromised God's way and His truth. The basis of judgment is the Word of God; its foundation is the truth. We should act the same way, whether or not others treat us well. When we confront a situation, we should ask what God's truth is, not what our feelings are. Personal judgments and feelings should never come into play in God's work. If truth tells us that we should totally separate ourselves, we should sever ties with even our best friends. We may have been eating together and living together every day in the past.

But when the absoluteness of truth calls for a separation, we should obey. Human affection should not have a place. If truth dictates that we should not separate, we cannot separate even if we are arguing with each other and irritating each other every day. If we are together merely because of personal reasons, we do not know what the truth is, and we cannot go on.

Brothers and sisters, this is a very fundamental issue. The way ahead of us is very much related to the dealings we receive from the Lord. If we focus on how great and important we are, the truth will be sacrificed. In order to uphold God's truth, our self must go; we must keep the self at bay. We all have our own temperament and feelings. We cannot alter God's truth because of our temperament and feelings. No minister of God can sacrifice or compromise His truth for his own comfort. If we consider God's truth to be so low, we do not have a spiritual future with God. When a judge presides in court, he must be absolute to the law. A crime must be pronounced a crime, and an innocent man must be pronounced innocent. The judge cannot pronounce a criminal not guilty just because the criminal is his brother or friend. If he does this, there will be disorder. The law is absolute, and personal sentiments cannot be taken into consideration. It would be terrible if a defendant were judged guilty just because the judge happened to be his enemy. A judge must uphold the law. We must believe in God, serve Him, and maintain His truth. Our personal feelings cannot come in. I hope that we will remember that all of our personal feelings have to be denied. We must all be dealt with by the Lord. We must all say to Him, "Lord, I am nothing, but Your truth is absolute." If we do this, there will be no more disputes or problems in the work. One great advantage for the co-workers to uphold the absoluteness of God's truth is the great freedom they will have among themselves in speaking and working. Things will be done as they should be done, and there will be no need to worry about the reactions of others. If we all see the absoluteness of the truth, we will care for one thing only —whether or not something is according to God's will and decision. If it is according to God's will and decision, we will have no fear. But if we are not absolute for the truth, it will be hard for us to go on. When something comes up, we will consider Brother Wang's reaction, Brother Chow's thought, and Brother Liu's action. Since all three have different temperaments, we will have to compromise a little here and there. This is

terrible. The truth will be sacrificed. If this is how we do things, we will not be able to say much or make many decisions for fear of offending men. Problems will develop among us. If a company of men would only care for God's truth and would reject human methods altogether, that would be a blessed body of men indeed. If they would firmly reject human manipulation and diplomacy, not compromising or mitigating anything through human hands but doing things strictly according to God's will, we can be assured that this group would be full of God's blessing. If we are able to take the absolute way of truth among the co-workers, we will be able to say what we should say and do what we should do. If not, there will be much consideration, diplomacy, and change, and the church will cease to be the church.

Let us deal with this matter conscientiously before the Lord. It is a very crucial and serious matter. Let us remember that there is no place whatsoever for personal feelings and sentiments in the work of the Lord. Even if our personal sentiments can positively influence others to receive the truth, we should still keep them out of the work. We may influence a person to receive the truth by inviting him for dinner, but this is wrong. Truth is absolute. Out of the goodness of our hearts we may want to do something to uphold the truth, but truth requires no human hand to uphold it. It has its own standing, its own authority, and its own power, and it needs no human hand to uphold it. We do not have to lend truth a helping hand. We should not be afraid of anyone's rejection of the truth. We only need to learn to honor God's truth, to take the way of the truth, and to not compromise the truth in any way.

TWO

A worker of the Lord also has to pay attention to his own body. We know that Paul was a very gifted brother, and he prayed many times for others' healings. Yet he spoke of three persons who were never healed—Trophimus, Timothy, and himself. When Trophimus became ill, Paul did not pray for his healing, nor did he exercise his healing gift. Instead he said, "Trophimus I left at Miletus sick" (2 Tim. 4:20). As for Timothy, his stomach pain and his frequent illnesses never left him (1 Tim. 5:23). Paul did not exercise his gift or pray for Timothy's healing. He healed many people. It would be reasonable to assume that since so many had been healed, he should have healed Timothy as well. Timothy was a successor

to Paul's work, and he was indispensable. Yet Paul did not heal Timothy. His sickness was in God's hand; it was not in Paul's hand. What did he say? He said, "No longer drink water only, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent illnesses" (1 Tim. 5:23). In other words, Timothy needed to take care of his health. He needed to exercise care—eating what was good for him and refraining from what was not good for him, taking things that would relieve his stomach pain and abstaining from things that would upset it. This was Paul's word to Timothy. As for Paul himself, he spoke of a thorn in his flesh, concerning which he prayed to the Lord three times. Yet the Lord did not heal him. Instead He said, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor. 12:9). Trophimus's illness did not go away, Timothy's illness did not go away, and the thorn in Paul's flesh remained; their illnesses were not healed. With Paul, we do not see the "wrecking rock" being removed. Yet we see his vessel still sailing on. Although the rock—his sickness—was still present, God raised the water level, and his vessel was able to glide over the obstructing rock without suffering any damage. This was Paul's testimony.

Brothers and sisters, it takes ten or twenty years of training in God's hand before a man can become somewhat useful to Him. If we want to run a good race and be somewhat mature in the Lord, we need at least ten or twenty years of training. Yet some who do not take proper care of their own health may die before they reach that point. This is most unfortunate. Some do not start running until they have been in the Lord for twenty or thirty years. Then they touch the right way, and their usefulness begins to blossom. The church should not only have children and young men, but fathers as well. All those who desire to serve the Lord should consider it to be a great waste for a brother or a sister to die prematurely after spending many years and much effort to learn his or her lessons! We know that some vessels are broken and damaged halfway through the process. This is a pity. This is like Jeremiah's speaking concerning the vessels in the hand of the potter being spoiled (Jer. 18:4). When a potter turns his wheel and molds his vessels, some become damaged before they even reach the fire. They do not even pass the formative stage. This is a loss. The church has already suffered the loss of many who failed the test of trials and temptations. If the Lord is merciful to us, we can be spared from such damage, breakage, and

wreckage. The Lord may have more crosses for us, and His intention may be for us to become more useful in our latter years. It takes much time for the Lord to complete a trial in us. Some trials take a year or even a few years to complete. A child of God may not have the chance to go through too many trials in his lifetime. We can only experience a few trials. Many are crushed as soon as a trial comes. It is sad, as well as a loss, when a trial does not produce the desired result in them. With the passing of time, year after year and decade after decade, how many of God's children are safely preserved to reach the other side of their trials? We have to say that not too many are preserved. Do not think that this is a simple thing. Too many have fallen by the wayside! Of the six hundred thousand souls among the Israelites, only two entered Canaan alive [Joshua and Caleb], and two others entered Canaan dead [Jacob and Joseph]. So few were the ones who survived and who made it. What a pity that by the time the trials were almost over, they had died one by one! If it is the Lord's will that we die early, we have nothing to say. But if we die through our own neglect of our health, it is God's work that suffers. If the church is to be rich, it must have brothers who are in their seventies, eighties, and even nineties. If the Lord ordains that one or two of them go to Him early, we have nothing to say. But if we want to be useful in the work, we have to spend some time to take care of our body. We cannot be careless. It is a big problem if a worker has reached the end of his days by the time he is well trained! It is most unfortunate when a man falls just as he is about finished with his training. If all the workers of the Lord are this way, the work cannot go on. What a pity it is when the body becomes corrupt before the work ever begins, or when a person dies before he has ever become useful!

Brothers and sisters, we should not have the concept that we should neglect our body. It is true that we need a mind to suffer and that we need to reign over our body and put it under subjection. But we also should take care of our health if at all possible. It is easy to be loose, and it is hard to exercise care. We have to learn to eat healthy foods and to take care of our bodies in every possible way. When the Lord has a commission and there is a need in the work, we have to sacrifice ourselves. There is nothing we can say about this. But at the same time, we have to employ every means available to us to take care of our body. We have to remember that the loss of one person is the loss of ten to

twenty years of the Lord's training. There are not many periods of ten to twenty years in our lives. Many people start out somewhat useful and gifted in their service to the Lord, yet it is hard to say that they will have any usefulness in the ministry. It takes at least ten to twenty years before a person can become useful in the ministry. A person often has to wait ten or twenty years before he can become valuable and useful. Being truly useful is something that happens ten or twenty years later, and we are talking only about those people who are running a straight course. If the course is not straight, even ten or twenty years may not yield any fruit. It is not a simple thing to raise up a person in twenty years. God has to smite him and do a carving work on him many times before he can pass the test. He has to go through sufferings year after year, not just a few years, but twenty years, bearing the cross for twenty years, being dealt with for twenty years, being smitten for twenty years, and suffering under God's heavy hand for twenty years, before he can start to be useful to God. How difficult a task this is! Yet if a man does not take good care of his body, he may be gone by the time he is beginning to be useful. That would be very unfortunate and a great loss.

Once an elderly brother was asked, "What do you think was the most productive period of your life?" He thought for a while and then answered, "Between seventy and eighty years old." Indeed, spiritual usefulness grows with years. The longer we remain in the way of God's service, the more useful we become. We have seen many people who have been ruined, wrecked, damaged, or proven to be of little use along this way. We have seen some whose function blossomed only a little. A few will prove to be useful after twenty or thirty years. But by then they may be ready to depart from the world! It is a pity when a man dies just at the point when he is beginning to become useful! The more lessons a man learns before the Lord, the more useful he is. It is a great loss for such ones to pass away. In taking care of our health, there are many necessary precautions we have to take, many necessary things we have to pay attention to. We agree that we need a mind to suffer, and that such a mind is indispensable. Many times when we are put in a difficult situation, we have to be flexible. But, if at all possible, we should learn to take care of our bodies and should not be loose or careless about our own health.

Workers of the Lord should not eat for taste, but for nutrition. We should eat foods that have a high nutritional value and should eat less or nothing at all of those that have little nutritional value. When it is time for rest, we should learn to rest. We have enough strain upon us already. If we do not know how to rest, our bodies will not be relieved of its tension. If our stress cannot be relieved when we lay on our bed, what is the use of our sleep? It is useless. Many times our sitting down should be a kind of resting. But many people are not restful when they sit down, because they continue to be stressful and tense. A worker of the Lord should be strong enough to bear strain when circumstances make it necessary. At times strain can be as intense as fire. But when we find some time for respite, we should rest. It is impossible for anyone to be tense all the time. We have to learn to relax.

Brothers and sisters, when we are free, we have to learn to relax our muscles. While we are sleeping, all of our limbs should be relaxed. We should be able to stretch our capacity when there is the need for it, and when we do, we should be able to handle more stress than the strongest men. Our body has to obey us. But we cannot be under stress all the time. Our muscles and nerves often need relaxation and rest; we have to find opportunity to allow our body to rest. This is one way the body balances itself. If we do not find time to rest, we will push ourselves beyond the limit and go to an extreme. We are not men of extremes. Brothers and sisters, we have to learn to trust in the Lord regarding our body, yet at the same time we have to follow natural laws and rest. This is a very basic lesson. We have to learn to let go. If we learn to let go, we will find it easier to rest and sleep. Experienced ones have told us that counting the number of times one breathes can help a person to go to sleep. When we are asleep, our breathing is deep. It may not be that easy to control our sleep, but it is easy to control our breathing. We can count the number of times we breathe, and we should not breathe quickly, but slowly. We can learn to adjust our breathing to the sleeping mode. Our mind should be set not on sleeping but on breathing, on counting the number of breaths. First, we control our breathing to the speed we would breathe in our sleep. After a while, we will go to sleep. Many people are able to go to sleep with this method. In our sleep we breathe slowly and deeply. By controlling our breathing, making it slow and deep, we can induce sleep for ourselves. We often need to count

only up to a few hundred and then we are asleep. We have to believe that the body God has created for us is good enough to go to sleep. We have to trust in God, and we also have to trust in God's law in His creation. God has created a head for us that will go to sleep, and we should be able to go to sleep. We should try to relax our whole body. This will give us rest. If we are not able to rest, we will be constantly under tension, day and night. Such a condition will not sustain us to accomplish many things. We may be sick; we may be bound by more than one illness, but if we take care of our body a little more, we will save ourselves from many worries.

The same can be said about our eating. We should not overeat, and we should not be too restricted in the variety of food we eat. We should learn to eat all kinds of food. Some brothers and sisters cannot eat this and that and many other things. There are not too many things that they can eat; this is not a healthy habit. We have to learn to eat a wide variety of food. Many things can provide nourishment to our body. If we will only eat a few things, we are not doing our body any good. We may not feel that we are short in nutrition now, but when we become thirty or forty years old, our lack of certain nutrients will be manifested. Our health will be damaged, and our life will be shortened. Our life is governed by the things we eat. This is why we have to learn to eat a wide variety of food. Another advantage for having a wide variety in our diet is that we are not inconvenienced in any way when we are sent out in the work. Those who cannot accommodate a wide variety of food will not be able to tolerate many things when they are in the field. They cannot eat things that are too cold or too hot. They will encounter much trouble. It is a different story if we are sick; we have to take care of our health. But under ordinary circumstances, we have to learn to eat as many different kinds of food as possible. The Lord Jesus said, "Eat what is set before you" (Luke 10:8). This is a good guiding principle. Once a believer asked another believer on a ship, "Why did the Lord Jesus give loaves and fishes to the multitude?" The other replied, "The riches of the sea plus the riches of the land." This is a very good answer. God's children should learn to take all the riches of the sea and all the riches of the land. The range of food we eat should be wide; the variety should be great. Brothers and sisters, do not think that this is a small thing. If we do not control and discipline ourselves in this matter, our body will suffer. We have to make our body

our slave. At the beginning we may find this difficult; we may find some food unpalatable to our taste. But we have to discipline ourselves by forcing ourselves to eat those things. On the one hand, we have to have a mind to suffer. On the other hand, we have to learn to take care of our body. We have to be able to suffer hardship. When hardship comes our way, we have to be ready to sacrifice our whole being. Some brothers are afraid of hardship; they cannot take this and that and many other things. Such ones are useless in the hand of God. Similarly, we have no sympathy for those brothers who do not exercise care for their own body. Brothers and sisters, it is harder to be health conscious than to not be health conscious. Do not think that it is easy to talk about health. In order to take care of our body, we have to learn to control ourselves. A person must exercise self-control before he can be healthy. We have to learn to eat things that are beneficial to our body. Our eating cannot be dictated by our taste; it should be dictated by what our body needs. We have to learn to take good care of our body and to use it properly. We cannot allow our body to break down easily. The Lord has spent many years working on us; we cannot deal with our body lightly. We have to take care of all precautions against disease. If at all possible, and if the Lord so arranges, we should do our best to fulfill the requirements of good health and to eat things that are beneficial to our body. We should not expose our body to risks unnecessarily. Timothy was advised to take some wine, because that was beneficial to his health. Do not drink anything that is harmful to the body. Always take things that are beneficial to the body. This is a matter of principle. On the one hand, we have to deny self-love and be faithful unto death. On the other hand, when we do not have a specific charge from the Lord, we should take good care of our own body. When we go to a place to work, we should try our best to take care of our hygiene. But we should not burden the local brothers and sisters. When the environment is not up to the proper standard of hygiene, we have to learn to trust in God. But when circumstances allow, we should try our best to take care of hygiene. This will spare our body of much unnecessary damage.

THREE

A worker of the Lord has to pay attention to yet another thing—being flexible in his daily living. God's servants cannot have a set standard for

themselves, insisting on their own ways and views. If we want to serve the Lord properly, we have to maintain one principle: We do everything according to the Scripture and in a way that will not stumble anyone. In 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 Paul said, "For though I am free from all, I have enslaved myself to all that I might gain the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew in order that I might gain Jews; to those under law, as under law (though I myself am not under law), that I might gain those under law. To those without law, as without law (though I am not without law to God but within law to Christ), that I might gain those without law. To the weak I became weak that I might gain the weak. To all men I have become all things that I might by all means save some." For the sake of the gospel, Paul was all things to all men. This is a necessary character trait of one who serves the Lord.

Philippians 4:12 says, "I know also how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in everything and in all things I have learned the secret both to be filled and to hunger, both to abound and to lack." Man is prone to swing from one extreme to the other; he is prone to go to extremes. Some Christians think that the only right thing to do is to abound and to be filled. Others are just the opposite; they think that a man must suffer abasement, lack, and hunger. But Paul said that he had learned to be abased, and he had learned to abound. He had learned to be filled and to be in hunger. He had learned to abound and to lack. He had learned the secret in all these things. He said, "I am able to do all things in Him who empowers me" (v. 13). Paul was flexible in the outward things of his daily life. Whether it was this or that, he could accept everything.

Unfortunately, many brothers and sisters are very stubborn. Their daily habits are untouchable and unchangeable. Some people have to take a hot bath every day. Some people have to shave every day. If they are put in a situation where they cannot live according to their habitual ways, they will not be able to function. These may be very minor things, but they can become obstacles to the Lord's work. Those who are set in their habitual ways cannot be God's servants. A worker of the Lord cannot be lopsided. He can go on with or without a hot bath, with or without shaving for a few days, with or without the opportunity to change his shirt for many days. He can sleep on a hard bed or a soft bed. He should be at ease in any environment he is put into.

Not only should daily habits not be an issue to a worker, but other things such as personality and age should not be a hindrance to him either. Suppose in one place the people are very warm, while in another place the people are very cold. God's servant should function equally well in both places. If he is a cold person and he can only work among cold ones rather than among warm ones, he is disqualified from the work. Some people can only work with warm ones; they cannot work among cold people. Some people can only work among serious people; they cannot work among carefree ones. All such restrictions represent limitations to God's work. Some brothers can only minister to older ones; they have nothing to say when they are among children or younger ones. Such a lopsided personality hinders God's work. Our Lord received the old and blessed the young. God wants us to be like our Lord, receiving the old and blessing the young. Madam Guyon once said that a man in total union with God is able to be a counsel to the old man and a friend to a child. This is one lesson we have to learn.

Brothers and sisters, this again is related to the dealing of our self. The self has to be rubbed away to such an extent that we can allow God to put us in any situation. In this way we will no longer be inflexible and will no longer be partial to any way. Paul was able to be all things to all men because he was fully trained by the Lord. May we all learn to be dealt with by the Lord so that our daily habits and personality will not become rigid and unchangeable. May we not go to an extreme and may we not hinder or frustrate the Lord's work in any way.

FOUR

A worker of the Lord must also have a proper view and suitable resolution concerning the matter of virginity and marriage. Many people avoid talking about this. But this is an important issue with the Lord's worker, and we have to say something about it based on the teaching of the Bible.

Paul had a clear word about the matter of virginity in 1 Corinthians 7:25-35: "Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who has been shown mercy by the Lord to be faithful. I consider then that this is good because of the present necessity, that it is good for a man to be as he is. Have you been bound to a wife?

Do not seek a release. Have you been released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if the virgin marries, she has not sinned; but such ones will have affliction in the flesh, and I am trying to spare you. But this I say, brothers, the time is shortened. Henceforth both those who have wives should be as though they had none, and those who weep as though they did not weep, and those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, and those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use the world as though they did not abuse it; for the fashion of this world is passing away. But I desire you to be without care. The unmarried cares for the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but he who has married cares for the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and is distracted. Both the unmarried woman and the virgin care for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit; but she who has married cares for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. But this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a noose upon you but that you may be comely and may wait on the Lord without distraction." This shows us the advantage of remaining single. One can serve the Lord with more diligence, less distraction, and greater concentration to the work. A married person cannot match an unmarried person in this respect.

But not everyone is able to receive this word. We should pay attention to verses 36 through 40: "But if anyone thinks that he is behaving unbecomingly to his virgin daughter, if she is past the bloom of youth and thus it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let them marry. But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, and has authority with respect to his own will and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well. So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better. A wife is bound for so long a time as her husband lives; but should the husband fall asleep, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only to one in the Lord. But she is more blessed if she so remains, according to my opinion; but I think that I also have the Spirit of God." This is clear enough. If a man thinks that it is wrong to remain a virgin, and that the bloom of youth is past, and it must be so, he can act as he pleases. It is one's own decision whether or not he wants to remain single; others cannot make the decision for him. Of course, in order to remain single, in addition to having the resolve in the

heart, one must be "under no constraint, and [have] authority with respect to his own will." The main thing is what one resolves to do in his own heart.

Let us read again Matthew 19:10-12: "His disciples said to Him, If the case of the man with his wife is like this, it is not profitable to marry. And He said to them, Not all men can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born so from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs because of the kingdom of the heavens. He who can accept it, let him accept it." If we join the last part of verse 11 to the last part of verse 12, "Only to those to whom it has been given....He who can accept it, let him accept it," it will become clear to us that virginity is given to those who can accept it.

In order to avoid distraction and have adequate time to serve the Lord with diligence, it is better to remain single. Among the Lord's disciples, John remained single. Later Paul also remained single. But if one needs to be married, he can do so. It is not a sin to marry. The difference between being single and being married has nothing to do with sin. It is a matter of time, diligence, and distraction.

Marriage is holy, because the body is created by God, as well as all of the needs of the body. This is why marriage is holy. But any demand that man has outside marriage is sin. Why does a man have to be married? It is to avoid having relationships outside marriage. Hence, marriage is not a sin. On the contrary, it prevents sin. Marriage is not a fall. On the contrary, it is instituted to prevent falling.

Paul made this very clear in 1 Corinthians 7:1-9: "Now concerning the things of which you wrote: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of fornication, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife that which is due, and likewise also the wife to the husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise the husband also does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive each other, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and then be together again, that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. But

this I say by way of concession, not by way of command. Yet I wish all men to be even as I am myself; but each has his own gift from God, one in this way, the other in that. But I say to the unmarried and to the widows, It is good for them if they remain even as I am. But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with desire." This passage shows us that one reason for marriage is to prevent fornication. At the same time, it points out that God has given some the special gift of remaining single. But it is better for those who have not received this gift to marry in order to avoid falling into fornication.

We should not go at length into the subject of virginity. We know that Paul was a virgin. Yet he told Timothy that in later times teachings of deceiving spirits would come and forbid marriage. He said that this is a teaching of demons (1 Tim. 4:1, 3). On the one hand, we believe that it is a good thing to remain single. On the other hand, we have to maintain the balance in God's Word; we cannot say that marriage is something unclean. We must be clear that marriage is holy; it is something that God has ordained in His creation. The forbidding of marriage is a teaching of demons.

If a worker of the Lord is married, he should do his best to settle his family matters in such a way that he will have the least distraction. In this way he will be able to better give himself to the Lord's work. But he must take note of the clear separating line between his work and his family. He should never allow members of his family to touch his work. Of course, if some of them are also co-workers, that is a different story. He should never bring home the things pertaining to the work. A worker cannot be influenced by his family members concerning the work that he is doing. A brother once said that he went to a certain place to work because his wife had promised that he would go. This is astounding! How can a wife promise something for her husband, and how can the husband go because of the wife's promise? We cannot act on our family members' promise, and actually, we cannot even act on our co-workers' promise. Our family must be clearly separated from our work. A worker of the Lord cannot lightly pass on the spiritual problems of other brothers and sisters to his family. If his family members want to know anything, they should find out the same way that all the other brothers and sisters find out.

Many problems in the work arise through the loose talk of workers within their family.

Another point we should take note of is to maintain a proper relationship in our contact between the brothers and the sisters. If a brother has a preference to work among the sisters, he should be kept away from the work. Likewise, if a young sister has a preference to work among the brothers, she should also be kept away from the work. We have to be very strict with this principle. Under ordinary circumstances, brothers should work mostly with brothers and sisters with sisters. The Son of God left us such a pattern when He worked on earth. John 3—4 shows us a clear separating line in this matter. In chapter three the Lord received Nicodemus at night, while in chapter four He met the Samaritan woman during the day. In chapter three the Lord received Nicodemus in a house, and in chapter four He met the woman at the public well. If the settings of chapters three and four were switched, we would have very inappropriate settings. It is clear that the Lord spoke with Nicodemus under very different circumstances than those under which He spoke to the Samaritan woman. This leaves us with a good pattern.

We are not saying that brothers and sisters should not contact each other or have fellowship with one another. We are saying that a brother or a sister who has a preference and desire to be among the opposite sex should be discouraged from making such contact. Of course, in Christ there is no difference between male and female, and there is no separating wall between the brothers and the sisters among God's children. Between the two there should be good fellowship. But if a brother has a habit or preference to talk to sisters, or vice versa, we should deal with this situation immediately. I hope that the brothers and sisters will exercise a spontaneous restriction and limitation when they contact each other. If anyone goes beyond the proper boundary and engages in abnormal fellowship, we should deal with the situation in a strict way. May the Lord be gracious to us so that we will maintain a good testimony in this matter.

CHRIST BECOMING OUR WISDOM

Christ Becoming Our Wisdom

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:30

The Bible speaks of Christ as our life in many ways. But the meaning of the words "Christ is our life" is not that simple. First Corinthians 1:30 explains what Christ as our life means. This passage can be divided into two sections. The first section says, "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus." This speaks of our relationship with Christ. The second section says, "Who became wisdom to us from God." This speaks of Christ's relationship with us. Putting it another way, this verse speaks of how we are in Christ and also how Christ is in us. We must pay attention to these two things. Some Christians emphasize only the first of these two aspects, while others emphasize only the second aspect. Whether one emphasizes the first aspect or the second, any bias will result in problems and sickness to our Christian life. We must have a proper knowledge of both aspects. We must know how we can be in Christ and how Christ can be in us.

God has given us the Lord Jesus. His purpose is not for Him to be our teacher or a pattern that we follow, but for us to take Him as our life, so that His life can be manifested through us. If we do not have the life of Christ, we cannot be a Christian. If we have the life of Christ but do not know how this life has become our life, we cannot be a proper Christian and readily manifest His life. How then can we have Christ as our life? This is a very basic question. The Lord Jesus is God, and He is also a man. How can we have Him as our life? This seems to be impossible. We can never solve this problem. Only God can solve this problem. God is able to do what man cannot do. First Corinthians 1:30 tells us that this work has been accomplished by God alone. If God had not done this work, it would have been impossible for Christ to become our life. The first part of this verse says, "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus." The first part of the work was done by God. The second part says, "Who became wisdom to us from God." The second part of the work was also done by God. We cannot make the Lord Jesus our wisdom; He "became wisdom to us from God." Hence, Christ as our life is something that God Himself has done. Whether it is the first or the second part, nothing is possible

apart from God, and nothing will be accomplished apart from God. God has made Christ our life.

It Being Of God That We Are In Christ Jesus

God wants Christ to be our life. But how did He begin to do this? God did not first put Christ's life into us. Rather, He first put us into Christ. God first put us into Christ, and then put Christ into us. The first thing that God wants to do is build up our relationship with Christ. If we do not have a relationship with Christ, we cannot have Christ come into us to be our life. First we are in Christ, and then Christ can be in us. This is God's order of work.

Why did God put us in Christ? He put us there because we are sinful; we have the Adamic life within us. We are sinful and have the Adamic life in us; therefore, we must first be dealt with, before God can give us a new life. God cannot carry out this dealing in us directly. If He carried it out in us directly, we would die; we would not be able to live. If God dealt with our sins directly, there could be no other way and no other result than eternal death.

On the one hand, God wants to deal with our sins and our Adamic life. On the other hand, He does not wish to see us die. What then did He do? He put us in Christ by the operation of the might of His power. As a result, whatever He has done to Christ becomes His dealing with us. We are all included in Christ. Whatever God has done in Christ becomes His work in us. When God dealt with Christ, the result was the same as if He had dealt with us. This is the basic biblical truth concerning the Lord Jesus being our Savior.

God told Adam in the garden of Eden that when he disobeyed God's commandment and ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would receive a judgment from God. What was the judgment? God declared to Adam, "For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). It is a sin to eat the fruit forbidden by God, and the day that one sins, he will die. Death is the punishment for sin. If a man sins, he will suffer punishment. "For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." This means that those who sin will surely die. If a man sins, he will surely die. It is better for man not to sin. Once he sins, death will be the sure result. Sin is a fact which cannot be

overturned, and death is the inevitable result of sin; it is also something which cannot be overturned. What then should be done? On the one hand, God has to put us to death completely. On the other hand, He must cause us to live. This is the only way to salvation. Thank the Lord that He has established a salvation for us. This salvation involves sending a Savior to die on our behalf. This is why Christ had to be born. If Christ had not been born, He could not have died for us. Without the flesh, there could not have been the vicarious death. Christ became flesh, and therefore, He could die for us. Through His death, He bore our punishment and became our salvation. How could Christ die for us? He could die for us because God put us into Christ. God put us all into Christ; this is the most crucial teaching in the whole Bible. We cannot fathom and do not understand how God exercised His power and authority to put us into Christ. All we know is that 1 Corinthians 1:30 tells us clearly that "of Him you are in Christ Jesus." "Of Him [God]" means that this is something that God has done.

What does it mean for us to be in Christ? I will explain this with an illustration. Peking produces a certain kind of lacquer box with a number of boxes being in a set. Each box in the set fits into another one. Outwardly there is only one box. But when one opens up the box, there are more boxes inside that one box; within the big box are the smaller boxes. This is the way we are in Christ. Our being in Christ is in contrast to Christ being in us. We are all descendants of Adam, and we were all in Adam. Adam is like the big box, while we were like the small boxes. The many small boxes come out of that one big box. Out of the one Adam, we were produced. When one is opened, there are many. We are the many. When we put the many into the one, we see only the one. From our side, there are many individuals. We are the many individuals. From God's side, we are only one man in Adam. This is like the many small boxes contained in the one big box. Outwardly there is only one box. Because we are all in Adam, "the disobedience of one man" constituted many sinners. Because we are all one in Adam, every one of us is condemned. God saved us according to the same principle. He has put us all into Christ, and "through the obedience of the One the many will be constituted righteous." Because we are one in Christ, we have all received justification of life (Rom. 5:18-19). God considers all of us as one person in Adam. In the same way, He considers all of us as one

person in Christ. Adam is like one big box, while Christ is like a second big box. God has taken us out of the first big box and put us into the second big box. We are one in the first big box—Adam, and we are one in the second big box—Christ. The Bible calls the Lord Jesus "the second man" and "the last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:47, 45). The Lord Jesus is the last Adam, and God has included all of us in Him.

When Jesus of Nazareth was living as a man on earth, He was the unique One. But when He went to the cross, God included us all in Him. Therefore, when Jesus of Nazareth was crucified, that cross was not only His cross, but our cross as well. Because God put us into Christ, the cross is no longer just His cross, but a cross in which all those who are in Him have a part. We must realize that the cross of Christ is also our cross. If God had not put us into Christ, we would have nothing to do with the cross. Since God put us into Christ, we have a great deal to do with the cross. Thank and praise God that when Christ was crucified, we were included in Him. Since we are included in Him, His experience on the cross becomes our experience. This is what Romans 6:6 means when it says, "Our old man has been crucified with Him."

If we are not in Christ, we cannot be crucified together with Christ. Consequently, someone has said, "If we are not in Christ, we cannot be with Christ." This is a spiritual word as well as a scriptural word. We must remember that in order for us to be with Him, we have to be in Him. If we are not in Him first, we cannot be with Him. This is our fundamental faith, and we must be clear about it.

"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus." This is absolutely something that God has done. Yet we did not know this. In order for us to know, there was the need for the church to preach the gospel. The church announces to men this earth-shaking fact, that God has put men into Christ; when the Lord Jesus was crucified on the cross, God judged Him, and men were also judged in Him. Therefore, judgment is over as far as men are concerned. This is the gospel. The gospel tells us that God has done something in Christ. It tells us that God has included us in Christ. When He dealt with Christ, He also dealt with us. We have been dealt with in Him already. God has solved the problem of sin as well as the problem of ourselves. Thank the Lord that we died in Christ. This is why Romans 6:11 says, "So also you, reckon yourselves to be dead to sin, but living to

God in Christ Jesus."

We are dead in Christ Jesus. What do we do after we hear such a fact? We are persons with a will. After we believe in this fact, we should have some kind of expression. Therefore, we want to be baptized after we believe in the Lord and are saved. What is the meaning of baptism? Being baptized is being in Christ Jesus and being in His death (Rom. 6:3-4). In other words, God has put us into Christ, but we have to do something to show others that we are in Christ. Our baptism demonstrates to others the way we get into Christ. When we are baptized into the water, do we remain in the water? No, we come out of it quickly. Our coming out of the water signifies that we have been resurrected with Christ. Whoever comes out of the water testifies that he has resurrected. Hence, our baptism is a reenactment of the work that God accomplished for us in Christ. It is a performance to show others what God did for us in Christ. This is a spiritual performance.

When Christ was on the cross, God put us in Christ and terminated the old man in Adam. God had to terminate Adam; that account had to be settled and closed. We were men in Adam, and we could only be delivered from Adam through death. When we are joined to the death of Christ, we are terminated and delivered from Adam. This is the first aspect of God's work. The second aspect of God's work is to put Christ into us. First Corinthians 1:30 says, "Who became wisdom to us from God."

"Who Became...From God"

We have spoken of our being in Christ. Now we will speak on Christ being in us. How can Christ be in us? Christ is in us because of resurrection. Because the Lord Jesus has resurrected and because He is now in the Holy Spirit (He is not merely a man, but a man in the Spirit), He can be in us. The Lord said that His flesh is meat indeed and His blood is drink indeed. He can be eaten by us (John 6:53-56). If He were still a man like He was when He was on earth, He could not be eaten by us. We eat the fruit of the tree of life; we do not eat the tree of life itself. We cannot eat the tree; there is no way we can take the tree into us. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He was like the tree of life; there was no way for us to take Him into us. In the same way, there is no way for us

to take a person into us today. If the Lord Jesus were not a resurrected Lord, if He were only a Lord who once lived on the earth, He could only be Himself forever, while I could only be myself forever. There would be no way for us to receive Him. It would not matter how holy and lovely Jesus of Nazareth was; there would be no way for us to receive Him, because He would only be a man. But thank the Lord that He is not only a man today; He has died and resurrected. In the Holy Spirit, He has become the Lord whom we can receive. The Holy Spirit is the Lord's coming in another form (14:16-20). Another name for the Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of Jesus" (Acts 16:7). He is also called "the Spirit of Christ" (Rom. 8:9). When the Lord Jesus put on the Holy Spirit, He became a "receivable" Lord. If He had not become such a Lord, we would not be able to enjoy Him. Christ has resurrected and put on the Holy Spirit. When we receive the Holy Spirit, we receive Christ; in the same way, when we receive the Son, we receive the Father. When men in the past saw the Father, they saw the Son; in the same way, when men know the Spirit today, they know the Son. The Lord Jesus has resurrected, and He is in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we can receive Him into us to be our life. All those who have received the Lord Jesus, whether they are clear or not, have received this experience from God.

God has put us into Christ. This is the first thing. The second thing is that He has made Christ our wisdom. Neither of these two things have been done by us. We cannot get into Christ by ourselves, and we cannot put Christ into us. Both things could only be accomplished by God.

Christ became wisdom to us from God. What does this mean? First I would point out the proper punctuation for the second part of 1 Corinthians 1:30. According to the original language, there should be a colon after the words "wisdom to us from God." This means that wisdom includes the following three things: righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. First Corinthians 1—3 speaks of God's wisdom and man's wisdom. Wisdom is the subject, and righteousness, sanctification, and redemption are the explanation of how Christ becomes our wisdom.

What does this verse mean? In order to understand this verse, we must first consider what life is. Suppose a temptation comes and stirs you up. You know that you have to be patient. But where does this patience come from? Your life supplies you with patience. You need to have life before

you can exercise your patience. When you do not have life, you are dead, and there is no way for you to practice patience. You must supply and sustain your patience with life. Suppose you realize that laziness is wrong, and you want to be diligent. If you are diligent, your life is making you diligent. Suppose a man has encountered hardships, and you think that you should love him and help him. Where does this love come from? It is your life that compels you to love. Therefore, the inward reaction that is produced every time we encounter something is the result of the flow of life. These reactions originate from your life. The source of power for these reactions is life. Without life there can be no reaction. We only react when there is life. Every moment of our life we are dealing with things, and every moment we have reactions. We deal with the demands of the outward world moment by moment with our life. Moment by moment we are exercising our life.

God has not given us Christ so that He could just die for us on the cross; He has given Christ to us to be our life. Originally, we react to all the demands that are outside of us by exercising our own life; we act according to our own life. If our own life is strong enough, we make it. If our own life is not strong enough, we do not make it, or worse, we collapse. We react with our own life and deal with outward matters with our own life. But God has given Christ to us to be our life. Before we received the Lord Jesus, we lived by ourselves. After we receive the Lord Jesus, God wants Him to live inside of us and live for us. When the Lord Jesus becomes our life within, we do not have to live by our original life. It is not a matter of the Lord Jesus giving us commands, suggestions, or teachings and then us carrying them out. Rather, He becomes our life within and carries things out for us. From now on, we should live by His life. Formerly, we responded to outward demands with our own life. Now we should allow Christ's life to respond to them.

After understanding the meaning of Christ being our life, we now come to the question of Christ becoming our wisdom from God. Brothers and sisters, you have been a Christian for many years. Do you have anything other than your own wisdom? Have you received the Lord Jesus as your wisdom? Has the Lord Jesus been your wisdom once? How much have you known the Lord Jesus? This is the basic question, and we must be clear about it. This verse does not say that the Lord Jesus gives us

wisdom; it does not say that God has given us the Lord Jesus' wisdom. It does not say that we understand and know how to speak or act, even though we were once foolish, because God has given us wisdom. No, the Bible does not say this. The Bible says that Christ became wisdom to us from God. The word "became" is very important, and there is no better word than this word. We can take the story of Moses and Aaron as an example. Moses was afraid of speaking to the Israelites; he was afraid because he was not eloquent. He said that he was slow of speech and of a slow tongue; therefore, he dared not go. What did God say? He said, "Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother?....He shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth" (Exo. 4:14, 16). Does this mean that when Aaron became Moses' mouth, Moses became eloquent? No, Aaron only became Moses' mouth, but Moses was still Moses. (Of course, Moses spoke later. But that is a different story.) When Moses' eloquence failed, he could ask Aaron to speak for him. This is the meaning of Aaron becoming Moses' mouth. Aaron became Moses' mouth. The eloquence was still with Aaron; it was not with Moses. Moses needed Aaron to be the mouth, because his own mouth did not work as well. It does not mean that after Moses took Aaron as his mouth, his own mouth became eloquent.

After we see the meaning of Aaron becoming the mouth of Moses, we see the meaning of Christ becoming wisdom to us from God. It does not mean that Christ has made us wise. Rather, it means that we are foolish, but we allow the Lord to become our wisdom while we do not move. Originally, when there were demands from the outside, we reacted with our own life. Today when there are demands from the outside, we know that we cannot make it and should not react anymore. What then should we do? We should allow the Lord's life to react. It is not a matter of becoming better in ourselves; it is a matter of the Lord living on our behalf. Moses' mouth did not improve. Rather, Aaron became his mouth for him and spoke instead of him. Christ being our wisdom is like Aaron speaking on Moses' behalf. Suppose you are going to speak to someone. What are you going to do when you cannot say what you want to say? You may ask another one who has come with you to speak for you. You cannot speak yourself, and you ask him to speak; he meets the demand. While he is speaking, your mouth remains dumb; it has not improved, and you are still the same as before. We must never think that when

Christ becomes our wisdom, we become wise. We must remember that even when Christ has become our wisdom, we can still do nothing in ourselves.

Galatians 2:20 says, "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." This is a fact. This shows us how a Christian should live. He should live by not doing anything by himself, but by allowing Christ to do everything. In other words, let Aaron speak and Moses be quiet. Some people are not eloquent, yet they need to speak. What do they do? They ask you to speak for them. But while you are speaking, they are not satisfied; they interrupt with a word or two. This makes it very difficult for you. If Moses' mouth could not speak, he should take Aaron's mouth as his mouth. Thank the Lord that this is God's way of salvation. God did not change Moses' mouth; rather, He gave him a new mouth. God does not change a person's mouth; He gives him another mouth. God does not change a foolish man into a wise man; rather, He causes Christ to become wisdom to the foolish man. Brothers and sisters, this is salvation. God has not changed foolish men into wise; rather, He has made Christ our wisdom; Christ has become wisdom to us from God.

Suppose a matter needs great wisdom to handle and settle it. You may try this way and that way in vain; your little mind may be exhausted, yet you still cannot come up with a solution. Then you say, "Lord, I am foolish. If it is left up to me to do, I will surely not be able to make it. I can only look to You. You do it for me." After you have trusted in the Lord this way, the Lord may direct you to do something, say something, or take some action, and you may not even be aware of the great wisdom involved in doing these things. But after you have done them, one day you will say, "What I did that day was not something that I could have done by myself. What I said that day was not something that I could have said by myself." This means that you have not changed at all; it was the Lord who became your wisdom. This is Christ becoming wisdom to you. Originally, we had to handle things by ourselves, yet we could not handle them. So we allowed Christ to be our wisdom. We have to remember that Christ's wisdom does not become our wisdom. In addition, Christ is not giving us wisdom so that we can become wise. Instead, Christ in us is becoming wisdom to us. Wisdom belongs to the Lord and not to us. He is our wisdom; He is becoming our wisdom. Brothers and sisters, if we

know what it means for Christ to "become," we can live a proper life before the Lord.

We have previously said that Christ becoming our wisdom means three things: righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. What do these things mean? Let us first consider righteousness. Then we will speak on the other two.

Christ Becoming Our Righteousness

We need righteousness before God. Righteousness has a great deal to do with God. If we did not have to stand before God, the question of righteousness would not come in. Once we think about God, we think of righteousness. For example, when we have to meet people, we always think of our dress. In the same way, when a man meets God, he must have righteousness. Without righteousness, no one can see God. Hence, righteousness is a basic item in the Christian life. The matter of righteousness involves the means by which we come to God every time we approach Him. If a Christian has not settled this matter, he does not have a solid foundation. A Christian who has doubts about righteousness cannot come to God with assurance. Many Christians desire to grow, and they would like to go on in God's way. But one of the reasons they go back and forth is that they are not clear about righteousness. Righteousness is a simple matter, yet it is foundational. Brothers and sisters, if we are not clear about righteousness, we cannot go on in peace; we will always have trouble. Hence, we must be clear about the matter of righteousness.

We are often not sure by what means we can come to God. We think that our good behavior is our righteousness and that we come to God by good behavior. Some brothers and sisters think that if their behavior is good and they do well from morning to evening, they have righteousness that day. But if their behavior is not perfect, they have a problem with righteousness. The brothers and sisters who have this kind of thought take righteousness as their conduct.

When God opens our eyes, we will see that our righteousness before God has nothing to do with our conduct; it is something else. God's light is like a knife to us; it divides our righteousness from our conduct. Formerly, we thought that when we came to God, our conduct was our

righteousness. But now we see that when we come to God, Christ is our righteousness. Our righteousness is no longer our conduct; our righteousness is Christ. Thank the Lord that before God, our righteousness is Christ. Our conduct can improve, but our righteousness cannot improve. Our conduct is not perfect, but our righteousness is always perfect. Our righteousness is Christ, and we can come to God through Christ. Our conduct is not blameless, but praise the Lord, our righteousness is blameless because our righteousness is Christ.

We have to know that Christ as our righteousness is the greatest salvation. God has settled the matter of righteousness for us, and our position before God is secured. Brothers and sisters, we should have good behavior, and we should behave well. We should serve God more, and we should be diligent and bear the cross. But we have to realize that while our conduct can improve again and again, our righteousness before God cannot improve anymore. The means by which we can come to God today is the same means by which we can come to Him ten or twenty years from now. Our righteousness before God is not our own conduct; it is Christ. If a man does not have the revelation to see that Christ is his righteousness, he will not be able to come boldly before God. If he sees that his righteousness is a person, that his righteousness is Christ, he will be bold in approaching God. Brothers and sisters, we must remember that when we come to God, our righteousness is not our conduct. Our righteousness is not a thing; our righteousness is a person—Christ.

Christ Becoming Our Sanctification

Before God, our righteousness is not our conduct. But this does not mean that we do not have to care for our conduct while we live on earth. Our righteousness before God is settled, but what should we do about our conduct and living? We must see that God has made Christ not only our righteousness, but our sanctification as well. This sanctification is not a thing or condition, but a person—Christ. God has made Christ our sanctification.

Some Christians have a certain concept about sanctification. They think that sanctification is Christ helping them to be sanctified. This means that they are not holy, but they will become holy through Christ's help. First Corinthians 1:30 tells us that God has made Christ sanctification to us.

We do not have to try to be sanctified by ourselves. We do not become sanctified through the help of Christ. Christ Himself has become our sanctification. Our sanctification is the person of Christ, not the help of Christ.

Some Christians think that sanctification is Christ empowering them to become holy. They pray for the Lord to give them strength. They think that as long as they have the strength, they can be sanctified. But God's Word does not say that we can be sanctified. It does not say that Christ gives us the strength to be holy. God's Word tells us clearly that He has made Christ sanctification to us. Our sanctification is a gift. Our sanctification is a person. Our sanctification is not the result of a power from God. If we do not have the vision, we will not see the vast difference between these two things. This is not something that our mind can comprehend. If we do not have the revelation, it is useless even if our mind understands. God must show us that Christ does not come to help us to become holy; He does not give us the strength to be sanctified. Rather, He Himself is our sanctification.

Many Christians believe that there are two things related to sanctification. One is the power of sanctification, and the other is the fruit of sanctification. They think that a man must have the power of sanctification before he can bear the fruit of sanctification. According to this theory, where should we put Christ? Should Christ be on the side of power, which means that Christ as our power enables us to become sanctified? Yet God's speaking in 1 Corinthians 1:30 is totally different from this theory. Christ did not come to be our power of sanctification. Christ Himself is our sanctification. He did not come to be our power of sanctification to enable us to produce sanctification. He Himself is sanctification. I have to shout Hallelujah! He does not become our power of sanctification, which enables us to produce sanctification. Rather, we have Christ; therefore, we have sanctification. Brothers and sisters, if we say that sanctification is a thing, God's Word will tell us that Christ is that thing. Brothers and sisters, our thing is a living person. Our sanctification is a living person. Our thing is Christ; our sanctification is Christ.

We can take humility as an example. Suppose I am a very proud person. I am aware of my pride, yet I cannot humble myself. Therefore, I pray, "God, be merciful to me. Please send the Lord Jesus to help me so that I

can be humble." Brothers and sisters, have you seen this? I have made Christ my help in trying to be humble. I think that with His help I can become humble. Therefore, I ask Christ to help me to become humble. But this is my concept; this is not God's way of salvation. God does not ask Christ to help me to become humble. God gives me Christ, who is my humility. God has not given us Christ as a power so that we can produce humility; God has given us Christ to be our humility. Brothers and sisters, does the Lord have power? Yes, every one of us knows that He has power. Has He given us this power? Yes, He has given us this power. Then why are we still so weak? We have to realize that He has given all the power to us already, but we cannot use this power. The Lord's power is real, but we cannot use it. If we try to be humble by the Lord's power, we find that we cannot make it. At the most we perform some outward acts which we call humility. But inwardly, there is no such thing as humility. God's Word shows us that our humility is not the power of Christ, but Christ Himself.

What does it mean for us to say that humility is just the Lord Himself? It means that I do not have any humility and I cannot be humble. Even if the Lord gives me the strength to humble myself, I still cannot be humble. I can only say to the Lord, "You are my humility. I allow You to become my humility." Brothers and sisters, what is the meaning of Christ becoming my humility? Simply put, it means that Christ replaces me and expresses His own humility in my place. When we ask God for power to humble ourselves, we may be able to humble ourselves for a while, but this humility is merely good behavior, a good attitude, a good intention, and a good condition. This humility is not Christ. When we ask the Lord to be our humility, we lift up our heads and say to Him, "Lord, I do not have any humility in me. Even if You give me the strength to humble myself, I still would not have humility. Therefore Lord, I ask that You come and be my humility and that You be humble in my place." After we look to the Lord this way, any humility that we begin to have will be a spontaneous humility. Such humility will not be a work, but a living person —Christ Himself.

Take patience as an example. I do not have any patience, and I cannot be patient. My patience is just Christ Himself. The same is true with meekness. I do not have any meekness, and I cannot be meek. My

meekness is just Christ Himself. Brothers and sisters, have you seen this? God has made Christ my patience. God has made Christ my meekness. All our virtues are just Christ. Christian virtues are different from common human virtues. The virtues that we commonly speak of are individual things, but Christian virtues are not individual, fragmentary things, but a living person, who is Christ Himself. Our virtue is not plural in number, but singular in number. Our virtue is not fragmentary things, but a person. Brothers and sisters, if we do not have Christ, we do not have anything.

When Christ becomes our life within, He responds to all the demands outside of us. There is only one life, but because the demands outside of us are different, there are different kinds of responses. When pride comes, Christ is manifested as our humility. When anxiety comes, Christ is manifested as our patience. When jealousy comes, Christ is manifested as our love. From this one life issue all the virtues. Because the need in the environment varies, the manifestations of this life also vary. Daily we encounter many things. When the Lord manifests Himself in these things, we find Him in many virtues. Hence, the many virtues of Christians are not their own behavior, but the reflections of Christ and the manifestations of Christ. This is the meaning of Christ becoming our sanctification.

Hence, the Christian life is a matter of how much we know about Christ. It is not a matter of our humility, our patience, or our meekness. Everything depends on Christ. The more we know Christ, the more His virtues are manifested through us. Others may think that these are our virtues. But we know that they are nothing but Christ. A Christian has no virtue other than Christ. All Christian virtues are just Christ. Brothers and sisters, if we know Christ more, we will see that our virtues are just the outflow of Christ. Sister Wang's patience is Christ. Brother Chan's patience is also Christ. Brother Chow's love, Sister Hu's meekness, and Sister Liu's humility are not different virtues; they are Christ. The virtues manifested through different persons are different. But they are all Christ. Hallelujah! All of our virtues are just Christ! Everything that flows out of us is just Christ. The love that flows out of Brother Chow is Christ. The meekness that flows out of Sister Hu is Christ. The humility that flows out of Sister Liu is also Christ. The demands in the environment may be different, but

the supply within is the same. The outward manifestations are different, but the intrinsic nature is the same. No Christian virtue is a product of one's own work; every virtue is the outflow of Christ. It is Christ reflecting Himself out of us. Brothers and sisters, once we realize this, we will lift up our head to the Lord and say, "I have tried in the past to be a Christian by myself. I was wrong. Lord, I thank You. Now I know that You are my sanctification. I want You to live Yourself out of me."

Christ Becoming Our Redemption

Not only has Christ become righteousness to us from God, and not only has He become sanctification to us from God, but He has become redemption to us from God. The meaning of redemption is to buy back or to free by paying a ransom. There are three things which are indispensable in any act of redemption. The first is the person redeemed, the second is the redeemer, and the third is the price of redemption. All the redeemed ones were formerly sold under sin (Rom. 7:14); they were the slaves of sin. Now the Lord Jesus has paid the price of the blood (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6) and has redeemed us out of the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13). This shows us that the Lord is our Redeemer.

But we have to go on one step further. The Lord Jesus is not only our Redeemer, but also our redemption. If the Lord Jesus is only our Redeemer, He is still separated from the redeemed ones, in spite of the close relationship between the two—a relationship of grace, of saving our lives. The Lord Jesus has not only become our Redeemer but has become our redemption. This means that when we are redeemed, we are not only joined to a thing, but to a person. When we are redeemed, the Lord Jesus becomes one with us; the two become one. Our redemption is a person. When we have Him, we have redemption. Without Him we do not have redemption. If we want redemption, we need Him. Once we have Him, we have redemption because He is the redemption. Our redemption is not just a thing. Our redemption is a person who is joined to us.

Christ has become our redemption. Therefore, all those who have been washed by the blood can come boldly to God. While God judges the sinners, He can righteously pass over all those who are under the blood

of the Lamb (Exo. 12:12-13; Rom. 3:25-26). All the redeemed ones have experienced a full redemption. In God's eyes, all He sees is Christ. It is as if He does not see any person; all He sees is Christ. Christ is the slain Lamb; His blood removes man's sin-record before God. When a man comes to God through Christ, God will no longer condemn him, because Christ has satisfied God's righteous requirement on man's behalf. He has borne sin's punishment on man's behalf. Once a man has Christ, he has redemption. When God sees Christ, He sees redemption.

Christ is not only our redemption before God; He is also redemption within us. Christ as our redemption within is particularly related to our body. Christ as our redemption within not only delivers us from the law of sin in our members (Rom. 7:23; 8:2), but has become life to our body. Romans 8:11 says, "And if the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you." This does not mean that we will be resurrected after we die. It means that He will give life to our mortal bodies today. Second Corinthians 4:10-11 says, "Always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who are alive are always being delivered unto death for Jesus' sake that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh." The most outstanding thing here is that verse 11 seems to be a repetition of verse 10. Actually it is not a repetition. Verse 10 says that the life of Jesus is manifested in our body, while verse 11 says that the life of Jesus is manifested in our mortal bodies. With many believers, the life of Jesus may be manifested in their body, but may not be manifested in their mortal body. The difference here is great. Many believers are obedient and patient in times of sickness; they are not anxious, and they do not murmur. They feel the Lord's presence and manifest the Lord's virtues in their expression, their voice, and their actions. Indeed the life of Jesus is manifested in their body through the Holy Spirit. Yet they do not know that the Lord Jesus is able to heal their sickness. They do not know that the Lord Jesus' life is also for their body of humiliation. They receive grace from the Lord to endure the pain, but they do not receive the healing. They have the experience of verse 10, but do not have the experience of verse 11. Brothers and sisters, we have to realize that Christ is redemption to our body. For our mortal body to be made alive does not mean that the

nature of the body is changed or that we become immortal. The nature of the body remains the same, but a new life comes in to supply strength to the body. Originally, the natural life was the source of strength of our body. Now we are supplied by the life of Christ. When our body is sustained by the resurrection life of Christ, our body is enabled to work in a strong way.

Christ becoming our redemption is a big subject. Christ as our redemption is not merely a matter of Him being the life of our body today, but it affords us a great hope, which is "the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:21-23; 1 Cor. 15:50-54; Phil. 3:21). One day God will show everyone the way that He has redeemed the creation and the way that He made us His own. Then our body will be redeemed and will put off corruption to put on incorruption; we will no longer be under the bondage of corruption, and we will enter into the liberty of glory. Then the dead will rise up, and we will be changed. Our body of humiliation will be transfigured to be conformed to the body of His glory. Then we will see that our redemption is Christ! Who are those who have the assurance that they will be in the first (the best) resurrection? Who are those who have the assurance that their body will be transfigured one day? We believe and we have the assurance because Christ is our redemption.

First Corinthians 15:42-44 shows us that when a Christian dies, he is not buried, but is "sown." We know that to sow something and to bury something are two entirely different things. For example, when you bury a piece of copper in the ground, that is all there is to it; it will not grow up again. But if you sow a grain of wheat into the ground, it will grow after a few days. When a Christian dies, he is not like a piece of copper buried in the ground, but like a grain of wheat sown into the earth. One day he will spring up again. He can spring up again because he has the life of Christ within him. This life is a life that cannot be imprisoned by death, because the life of Christ is the resurrection life. This life is in the believer. This is why he will resurrect one day. Because Christ is our redemption, He will make us grow. Christ will not be imprisoned by death. A regenerated Christian has Christ within him. Christ is his redemption, and he will inherit a resurrected body which is incorruptible, glorious, strong, and spiritual.

This is not all. Because Christ is our redemption, some Christians will not

see death, but will be raptured. There was a young girl who once asked a preacher, "Does it not take a great effort for a Christian to be raptured away?" For a child, the rapture takes great effort. But we know that the rapture is not something according to our concept. A Christian is raptured because Christ is in him. Christ is his redemption, and Christ will take him away.

Christ as our life is the foundation of the Christian life. The first step in our salvation is regeneration. The last step in our salvation is the redemption of our body. But from beginning to end, the basis is Christ as our life. The relationship between Christ and us is a life relationship. In other words, it is an indissoluble relationship. Christ does not become something outside of us. He has come into us to be our life. A relationship in life is an indissoluble relationship. If we have not received Christ as our life, we have nothing to do with Christ. But since we have received Christ as our life, we have an indissoluble relationship with Him. After Adam sinned, God immediately guarded the way of the tree of life with the cherubim and a flaming sword which turned every way (Gen. 3:24). He did this because if Adam had eaten the fruit of the tree of life, he would have bonded an indissoluble relationship with God. Thank God that our relationship with Christ is a relationship which Adam did not have; it is an indissoluble relationship. Even God Himself cannot dissolve this relationship. This life lives in us all the time, and it is bringing us into glory, into eternity. What a great power this is! What a glorious hope this is!

May the Lord open our eyes to see that God has put us into Christ and made Christ our wisdom: righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. May the Lord show us that of all the gifts He has given us, none is greater than His Son. May the Lord show us that Christ is the gift and also all the gifts. He is the singular gift and also the plural gifts. We have to learn to know Christ as our wisdom. We have to learn to know Christ as our righteousness, we have to learn to know Christ as our sanctification, and we have to learn to know Christ as our redemption. May the Lord deliver us from foolishness and darkness so that we realize that there is no matter or thing in the spiritual realm. All we have is just Christ.

CHRIST IS ALL SPIRITUAL MATTERS AND THINGS

Introduction

Is It Christ, Or Is It Something Else?

The following five chapters are messages given by the Lord's servant some time ago. Because of the present urgent need of all the saints everywhere for these kinds of messages, we have published them today.

According to God's desire, plan, and redemption, He has ordained that His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, be all spiritual matters and things. When a man touches Him, he touches the reality of all spiritual matters and things. After a man gains Him, he gains all spiritual matters and things that God has prepared for him. But man has replaced Him with many so-called spiritual things. Although these many things, in man's eyes, belong to Him, they are nevertheless not Him. Rather, they are a replacement of Him. Therefore, they do not render man real help in his spiritual life.

We are facing a serious problem! What are we pursuing? What do we know, and what have we gained in the spiritual realm? Is it Christ, or is it something else? If it is Christ, we are touching the reality that God has ordained for us. If it is something else, no matter how good and valuable, we are merely touching vain and unprofitable things!

Today Christ is in the Spirit. In order to touch Him, we must be in spirit. We can use our mind to touch the things which are apart from Him. But in order to touch Him, we have to use the spirit. In order to touch the things that are apart from Him, we only need human zeal and cleverness. But in order to touch Him, we need God's revelation. We have to look to Him for His mercy and grace!

Witness Lee

CHAPTER ONE

Christ Is The Way, The Truth, And The Life

Scripture Reading: John 14:6

The Lord Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (KJV). This shows us something very clearly. What is the way that God has given us? It is Christ. What is the truth that God has given us? It is Christ. What is the life that God has given us? It is Christ. Christ is our way, Christ is our truth, and Christ is our life. Through Christ we go to the Father. In God’s eyes, everything that has to do with God is Christ, who is His Son. This is why our Lord said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.” What God has given us is just Christ; He has not given us many things apart from Christ. Many times, in spiritual matters, we see only things, and what we touch are merely things. These things are merely terms and letters to us; they do not have any spiritual value. May the Lord open our eyes so that we may know the Son of God. The characteristic of Christianity, the root of Christianity, and all its depth and riches are contained in the knowledge of the Son of God. It is not a matter of how many methods we know or how many doctrines we have or how much power we possess. It is a matter of how much we know God’s Son. If we know God’s Son, we have the way, we have the truth, and we have the life. Our power comes from our knowledge of the Son of God. God has given us His Son, not many individual items apart from His Son. The crux of the matter lies in our knowledge of the Son of God. Let us now consider the meaning of “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

Christ Is The Way

“I am the way.” A way can be considered as a method. The Lord meant that He is the way for us to go to the Father; He is the method by which we can go to the Father. If we have Him, we have the way. If we do not have Him, we do not have the way. If we have Him, we have the method. If we do not have Him, we do not have the method. Every true Christian has learned the lesson at least once that the Lord Jesus is the way; He is the method. If you are saved, you have gone to the Father through the Lord Jesus as your way. You at least have this experience. The Lord Jesus is the way, and no one can go to God except through Him. Every genuinely saved Christian knows that this is the only way that can be taken. Thank the Lord that many genuine Christians have at least learned one lesson, which is to go to God through His Son, Jesus of Nazareth. He is our way. We have taken this way at least once. This way is just Christ Himself; it is not a method apart from Christ. We need to see that

not only do we have to come to God through the Lord Jesus when we are saved, but that the Lord Jesus is still the way any time we go to God; there is not some method outside of the Lord Jesus.

Some Christians are merely seeking for some methods to spirituality. Once a man was preaching on the subject of victory through Christ versus victory through ourselves. After his message, another brother shook his hand and said, “I have failed all these years. But today, everything is well.” When the first brother asked why, he answered, “I have been seeking a method of victory. Thank the Lord. I have found the method! Victory is through Christ, not through ourselves!” The first brother told him bluntly, “If you have found a method, you will still fail.” What does this mean? The Lord Jesus told us, “I am the way.” In other words, the Lord Jesus is the method. A method is not something apart from the Lord Jesus. The method is the Lord Himself. If what we have is merely a method, it will not work. God has not given us a method; He has given us His own Son. We often hear of others’ experience and admire it. But we do not realize that they have touched the Lord, while we have only seen a method. As a result, we fail again and again. The basic reason for this is that we do not realize that the Lord Jesus is the way.

We must remember that believing in the Lord and believing in a formula are two different things. Some Christians experience God’s grace, and their eyes are opened. They see the kind of persons they are, and they drop themselves and believe in the Lord. They trust the Lord to do what they themselves cannot do. As a result they are satisfied in God, and they are liberated. A little while later, another person may come and, upon hearing the testimony of the first group, ask for God’s enlightening also. He asks for God to show him his worthlessness, and he learns to trust in God, to be humble, and to deny himself. But strangely, the first group of people experiences deliverance, while the last man does not. One group is liberated, but the man is not. This happens because the first group of brothers have faith in God; they have touched the Lord. However, the last brother does not have faith; he is merely copying the formula of faith. He has not received God, but a formula of faith. In other words, the last brother has received a method from the first group of brothers; he has not received the Lord. There is no power in methods; methods will not work. They are dead because methods are things; they

are not Christ Himself.

We have to remember that in spiritual matters, everything apart from Christ is death. Some brothers and sisters say, “It is so strange that when others have the faith, God answers their prayer. I believe just the same, but God has not answered my prayers. When others go to the Lord, the Lord is gracious to them. I do the same thing as they, but God does not grant the same grace to me.” It seems as if they are putting the blame on God. They do not realize that they are believing in a thing; therefore, it is dead. A formula is worthless, and a method is useless. Only when we have Christ will everything be living. Even if you have learned all the methods, that will still not make you a Christian. God’s children are produced by begetting; they are not produced by teaching.

The Lord Jesus said, “I am the way.” Christ is the way; He is the method. Brothers and sisters, is your way Christ? Are your methods Christ? Or is your way just a way, and your method just a method? Praise the Lord. If your method is Christ, everything will work out. But if your method is only a method, even though it may truly be a good method or even the best and most correct method, it is still dead, and it has no spiritual value at all. Many prayers are not answered and many testimonies of believers have no effect on us because we have not touched the Lord; we have merely copied other peoples’ methods. We have not touched the Lord ourselves.

Once a brother was preaching on Romans 6—8. After another brother heard it, he said: “Today I know the way to victory. I am clear. I believe that I will no longer fail as I did before.” Another brother came up to the preaching one and shook his head. The preacher asked him what he meant, and he said, “I cannot say what the first brother said. The Lord has opened my eyes, but I dare not say that I have seen Him, and I dare not say that I have not seen Him.” The second brother did not receive a method, but the Lord Himself. Eventually, he was able to stand. But the brother who thought that he would never fall eventually failed because he had merely gained a method; he did not gain the Lord. Therefore, it was worthless.

Many times, we are wrong even in the way that we listen to a message. We do not ask the Lord for revelation, and we do not ask to see the Lord.

Instead, we exercise our mind to remember a method. Actually, even if we followed the method exactly, we would still not see any result. Sometimes, we may think that we have not seen very much; we may not be so confident as to say that we have seen the Lord. But in fact, we have seen Him. This seeing will bring about a real change in us. Thank the Lord that this is the way. We have not learned a method; rather, we know the Lord. The Lord shows us clearly that He is the method. Every time we hear a message or a testimony, we should ask ourselves, “Have I met the Lord, or have I merely understood a method?” The mere understanding of a method will not save us; only the knowledge of the Lord as our method will save us. A testimony by others of how they have trusted the Lord will not save us; only our own trust in the Lord will save us. The words may be the same in both cases, but the facts are vastly different. The Lord is the Lord of life. Those who touch Him touch life, and only those who touch Him will live.

Christ Is The Truth

The Lord said that He is the way, and He also said that He is the truth. Truth is just Christ Himself. Truth is not words concerning Christ. Truth is not doctrines about Christ. Truth is just Christ Himself. Christians often consider expositions and explanations of Christ to be the truth. Actually, truth is not an exposition of a thing. Truth is just Christ Himself. The Lord said, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:32). Brothers and sisters, let us consider how many truths have set us free. God’s Word says that the truth shall set us free, that it shall liberate us. But many times, the truth is merely a doctrine to us; it is not Christ. Our eyes have not been opened to see Christ. What a pity that we have been preaching so many doctrines for ten years, yet we still have not seen. We may have heard many doctrines for ten years, yet we still have not seen. Men can speak about the doctrine of co-crucifixion, but others do not see the power of crucifixion in them. They can speak about the resurrection life, but others do not see the resurrection power in them. If what we preach are merely doctrines, then we only have things that are dead, not something that is living.

Once a person wrote a letter to a brother and said, “A brother has offended me. I do not know if I should forgive him. Therefore, I am writing to you. My heart is unbiased. If you say that I should forgive him, I will

forgive him. If you say that I should not forgive him, I will not forgive him." Brothers and sisters, do you think that this sounds like a Christian? Suppose I have a loved one who has died, and I write a letter to others, saying, "My loved one has died. Should I cry? If you say I should cry, I will cry. If you say I should not cry, I will not cry." If you heard this, you would surely laugh, because this is ridiculous. If one cries because others tell him to cry or does not cry because others tell him not to cry, his crying will be a performance, and his not crying will also be a performance. Both will be a performance, and both will be dead works without life. Here is a brother. You either forgive him or you do not forgive him. If you say, "I will forgive him if I know I should forgive him, and I will not forgive him if I know I should not forgive him," this is dead work based on dead teaching; it is even a kind of false performance.

Brothers and sisters, if we do not have the Lord living within us, and if it is not the Lord who is our truth, a teaching that guides our action is nothing but dead works; it is not life, and it is not living. Do you see the difference? The difference here is too great and too tremendous. Working requires that we exercise our memory, but life does not require us to exercise our memory. When we speak something out of life, we do not speak it because we remembered to speak it. A power within us motivates us to speak. The Lord is controlling us; a doctrine is not coaching or controlling us. The day will come when the Lord will open our eyes to see that spiritual reality is not apart from Christ. We do not present some doctrines to others. Rather, we lead others to Christ Himself. We do not need to remember a doctrine and then act according to it. Rather, Christ is living in us, and Christ is becoming our truth.

Once a brother offended another brother. The offended one could not contain himself, and he gave the other brother a severe scolding. After the scolding, his conscience bothered him, and he felt that he should go and apologize. Yet when he considered how the other brother had offended him, he could not help being angry again. Nevertheless, he felt that he had to apologize. So he prepared a letter to the other brother. The first thing he said in his letter was, "It was wrong for me to scold you." But he again recalled how the other brother was wrong to offend him, and he became angry again. After a while, he picked up the pen to start writing again. But while he was writing, he could not stop the hate and anger

toward the other brother. After he finished the letter, he was still angry when he sent it out. Outwardly, it seemed as though the letter was a very proper Christian letter. But this was merely the result of teachings; it was not the result of life. Although he had written his letter and had apologized, he was still angry at heart. When he saw the other brother, he might be able to greet him and might be able to shake hands with him, but inwardly he had not forgiven him, and his speaking would not be natural at all. Brothers and sisters, do you see the difference here? The Lord is the truth. If what we do is a teaching and not the Lord, it is dead. We should realize that spiritual things are living only when the Lord is there, and they are dead when the Lord is not there. When the Lord shines within us, when He becomes the One working within us, and when we realize this inwardly, what we have will be living.

Christ Is The Life

The Lord said that He is the way and the truth. Then He said that He is the life. We have mentioned briefly what it is for Christ to be the way and the truth. Now we have to speak some concerning Christ being our life. Wherever there is life, spontaneously there are works. But works cannot replace life. We have to be very clear that works are not life. Life does not require any effort of our own. Life is just Christ Himself. Many people try hard and exert considerable energy to be a Christian. Daily they strive toward this goal to the point of exhaustion. To them, the doctrines are strict; one has to be humble, meek, loving, forgiving, and enduring. These teachings are truly tiresome. They consider it a hard thing to be a Christian. This is especially true for young Christians, who find that the harder they try, the harder it is for them to live like a Christian. Brothers and sisters, if Christ is not the life, we surely have to do everything. But if Christ is the life, we do not have to do anything. Let me repeat: life is Christ Himself, and works cannot replace life.

Among God’s children, the greatest misunderstanding is to think that self-effort is life and that unless one exerts his own effort, he does not have life. But we have to realize that if there is life, there is no need of work. If there is life, everything will be lived out spontaneously. Consider how your eyes see. Consider how your ears hear. Your eyes see spontaneously, and your ears hear spontaneously because they all have life. Life is so spontaneous. We must be clear that where life is,

spontaneously there are works. However, works cannot replace life. Some works on the contrary prove the absence of life, or they prove that the life is weak. If it is life, it will surely result in good moral behavior. But good moral behavior cannot take the place of life. Suppose a brother is very gentle; he does not speak much, and he is neither too soft nor too hard. Some brothers may say, “This brother has quite a good life.” But these brothers have actually used the wrong words. The Lord said, “I am the life.” Although the brother may be gentle and quiet, his behavior is not life unless it issues from Christ. You can only say that he has a good temper. You can only say that he does not cause much trouble, or that he treats others politely, that he does not argue or quarrel. But you cannot say that this man has a good life. You cannot say that what he has issues from Christ, because what he has is natural; it is not life, and it is not Christ.

Some people hold to another concept. They think that life is power, and the Lord being their life means that the Lord gives them power to make them do good, behave well, and be a good Christian. They think that this is life. But God has shown us that power is not a thing. Our power is Christ; it is a person. Our power is not a drive to accomplish something; our power is a person. Our life is not only a power, but a person. It is Christ manifesting Himself from us, not us utilizing Christ to manifest the goodness that we desire to have. These two things are absolutely different, and we must distinguish between them clearly.

One brother went to meet in a place, and an elderly Christian asked him, “Why did you go to that place to meet?” The brother answered, “Because that place has life.” The elderly man asked, “Is our place not as noisy as the other place?” The brother responded, “No, it is not noisy at all.” The elderly man said, “What do you mean? If it is not noisy, how can it have life?” The brother answered, “It is not at all exciting, yet it has life. Life is not excitement; it is not emotional stimulation. Life is not a warm atmosphere or loud noise.” The elderly man said, “Perhaps young people like excitement, but my preference is for thoughtful messages. Whenever I hear a thoughtful message, I touch life. To me this is life.” The young brother replied, “I have also heard the kind of thoughtful messages that you speak of. But I did not touch life.” Brothers and sisters, this conversation shows us that life is not emotional stimulations, good

thoughts, wise words, clever words, logical words, or thoughtful words. All these may not be life.

Some may say, “This is strange. If life is not excitement and it is not thoughtful messages, what is life? What do you consider as life?” We admit that we cannot describe life with any better words. We can only say that there is something deeper than feelings and deeper than thoughts. When we touch this something, we become enlivened. This something is life. Brothers and sisters, what is life? Life is something deeper than the thoughts; thoughts cannot be compared with life. What is life? Life is something deeper than feelings; feelings cannot be compared to life. Thoughts and feelings are outward things. What then is life? The Lord said, “I am...the life.” One does not meet life when he walks into some excited atmosphere or some spiritually charged environment. We have to ask what is the source of such an atmosphere. Experience tells us that many people who are very good at creating a noisy atmosphere know very little about the Lord. Many excitable people know very little about the Lord. Christ is life; nothing else is life.

We have to learn to know life. Life is not a matter of excitement or thoughtful ideas. Life is an expression of the Lord Himself. We have to know the Lord. Nothing can be compared to our knowledge of the Lord. Whenever we know the Lord, we touch life. We have to realize before the Lord what it means for Christ to be life. Those who are excitable or who are smart are not necessarily the ones who know the Lord. But when there is a group of people who know the Lord in a particular way, who know what the Lord is like, their spiritual discernment of the Lord and their knowledge of the Lord will tell them that Christ is life. If we have such discernment and knowledge, we will be changed. If we know that the Lord is life, we will realize that in spiritual matters, natural energy is useless. If we know the Lord as life, we will look to Him alone. When we first believed in the Lord, we did not know what it meant to look to Him. But after we have learned some lessons, we begin to look to Him more and more, because we know that everything depends on Christ and not on us. When we first became Christians, we were after individual things, and we did not trust in the Lord. After we learned some lessons, we began to understand a little and began to realize that we have to learn to trust in the Lord. Trusting in the Lord does not mean trusting in Him for

individual things, but trusting in Him to do what we cannot do in ourselves. When we first became Christians, we felt that we had to do something, and that unless we did something, things would fall apart, and everything would collapse. We always tried to do everything by ourselves. But after we find out that Christ is our life, we realize that everything depends on Christ and not on our working. Then we learn to rest and to look to Him alone.

Brothers and sisters, we must remember that God does not give us individual things, one by one. He has given us His Son. We should always lift up our head and say to the Lord, “You are my way; You are my truth; You are my life. Lord, I have to deal with You alone, not with the things that belong to You.” Brothers and sisters, may the Lord be gracious to us and show us that spiritual matters are nothing but the Lord, that spiritual matters are nothing but Christ. Day by day, we have to realize that it is wrong for the way to be something that is apart from Christ. It is wrong for the truth to be something that is apart from Christ, and it is wrong for the life to be something that is apart from Christ. Yet how easy it is for us to take the way, the truth, and the life as separate things. We call a noisy atmosphere life. We call clear logic life. We call rich emotions life. We call outward behavior life. Actually, they are not life at all. We have to know that the Lord is the life. Christ is our life. It is the Lord who lives out this life from us. May the Lord deliver us from many fragmentary, outward matters so that we can touch the Lord Himself. May we see the Lord in everything, and may we see that our way is our knowledge of the Lord, our truth is our knowledge of the Lord, and our life is our knowledge of the Lord. May the Lord open our eyes, and may we be delivered from many outward things to see the Son of God. May we live in Him, and may He live in us. Amen!

CHAPTER TWO

Christ Is The Resurrection And The Life

Scripture Reading: John 11:25

What He Does Versus What He Is

Chapter eleven of the Gospel of John shows us how the Lord Jesus gave

life to a dead person; it shows us how the Lord Jesus resurrected a person from among the dead. The Lord can resurrect man, but He did not say, “I will resurrect the dead.” Instead, He said, “I am the resurrection.” After He said these words, He resurrected a man. Both Martha and Mary were there on that day. To them, it would have been better for the Lord Jesus to say, “It does not matter that your brother has died; I can resurrect him.” We like to hear this kind of word. Our desire and hope is that God will do something for us. We often pray, hope, and wait before God for a word concerning what He will do for us. But the Lord does not want to show us what He will do; He wants to show us what He *is.* What He can do is based on what He is. Martha believed in the Lord’s power. She said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died” (v. 21). Martha believed in God’s power, and she also believed in the Lord Jesus’ power, but she did not see that the Lord Himself is the resurrection and the life. We must see that everything God can do is included in what God *is.* The reason a man does not have God’s power is that he does not know what God is. “He who comes forward to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). All the power that God has is based upon what He “is.”

In John 11:25 the Lord Jesus was not saying that He can preserve a man’s life, but that He Himself is life. He was not telling us of His ability to resurrect men, but of the fact that He Himself is resurrection. May God open our eyes to see who the Lord is. We must see that in God’s eyes, Christ is our everything. Once we have this kind of understanding, it is possible to have genuine growth in spiritual things. We must realize that in God’s eyes, there is not any other object; the only object is Christ Himself! Whether or not we grow spiritually depends on whether we have truly touched spiritual reality. In other words, do we just know the individual things that God has done, or do we know God Himself?

John 11 does not say that the Lord Jesus resurrected Lazarus. Instead it says that the Lord Jesus was resurrection to Lazarus. Brothers and sisters, do you see the difference? The Lord was resurrection to Lazarus, and then Lazarus was resurrected. The Lord did not give resurrection as a thing to Lazarus; He became resurrection to Lazarus. In other words, what the Lord does is only the appearance; what He is is the reality of the matter. We are not saying that the Lord did not resurrect Lazarus. We are

saying that Lazarus resurrected because the Lord was resurrection to him.

We must remember that everything that God does in Christ is done in this principle. When the Lord is something to me, that something comes into existence. First He “is,” then He “has.” Many Christians separate the Grace-giver from the grace given by God. One day we will find out that the Grace-giver is the very gift given by God. God has not given us many things; He has only given us the Lord Jesus Himself. All spiritual things and all of God’s gifts are but Christ Himself. God does not give us something piece by piece. God has given us Christ Himself. One day God will open our eyes to see that everything is in Christ. How wonderful it will be if we see this.

In declaring who He is, the Lord said, “I am the resurrection and the life.” He is the resurrection. This is why His delaying did not cause a problem in the resurrection of Lazarus. In raising up Lazarus, the Lord was trying to lead men to the knowledge of Himself. The resurrection of Lazarus was not the greatest thing; the greatest thing is to know that the Lord Jesus is the resurrection. Many people believe that the Lord Jesus is the Life-giver. But it is altogether different to believe that the Lord Himself is life. He is not only the Life-giver; He is also the life. He is the Life-giver, and He is the life which He gives. He is not only the Lord who resurrects; He is resurrection itself. Once you see this, you will see that everything in Christ is living. God has only given Christ to man. We hope that at least a little light will shine on us so that we can know that the Lord is everything and know Him as such a Lord. He is the Grace-giver, and He is also the grace given. Our Lord said, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Resurrection and life encompass the whole Bible. It is wonderful to know the resurrection and the life. Let us now see what life is.

Christ Is The Life

God placed the man whom He had created in the garden of Eden. There were two options before the man. One was to receive life, and the other was to die. If man ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the result would be death. But if he ate of the fruit of the tree of life, he would receive life. The man created by God was good, but there was still one unresolved question—the question of life and death. In the

garden of Eden man could think and act, but he did not have life. We are not saying that he was not alive. As far as his natural life was concerned, man was alive. Genesis 2:7 speaks of man being a living soul. Nevertheless, as far as the life represented by the tree of life was concerned, man did not yet have life. The life we are speaking of is this life represented by the tree of life. At the time of Genesis 2, although man was alive, he had no life. Man had sound thoughts and sound feelings (these two being the most important elements of man's soul), but he did not have the life represented by the tree of life. From this we see that life is deeper than feelings and thoughts.

In Christianity, there are counterfeits to everything. There is false repentance, false confession, false salvation, false zeal, false love, false spiritual works, and false spiritual gifts. Everything can be counterfeited; even life can be counterfeited. Many Christians think that good feelings are life. They think that an exciting atmosphere and loud noises are life. If you ask them what life is, they will not separate life from feelings; they always mix the two together. They do not realize that life is deeper than feelings. Other Christians do not take feelings as life, yet they take mental activity as life. This means that if there are enough ideas in a message to invoke mental activity, enough words to stir up one's interest, and enough doctrines to inspire admiration, they think that this is life. But those who are experienced and who have learned some lessons tell us that life is deeper than feelings and mental activities. Neither is life a kind of activity. We cannot say that just because a person is lively, energetic, and active, he has life. These are merely activities; they are not life. They are merely the performing of some activities; they are not the living of a life. We are not saying that life does not express itself in mental activities, feelings, or actions. We are saying that life is not feelings, mental activities, or actions. The words that come out of one person's mouth may be life, while the same good words out of another person's mouth may only be nice ideas. One may just touch excitement in one person, while he may touch life in another person. Many brothers think that when they feel a certain way, they have life. But an experienced brother will tell you that this is not life. Many brothers think that when they have a certain idea, they have life. But an experienced brother will tell you that this is not life. Two brothers may understand and expound a scriptural passage in the same way, but the strange thing is that an experienced Christian will

sense a difference. One has both the right thought and life, while the other merely has the right thought. It is true that one often can touch life and mental thoughts at the same time. But we must not presume to think that touching the mind is equivalent to touching life. These are two different things. Many people think that because two people speak the same thing, they are therefore the same. But this is not necessarily true. It is possible that in one person we have the mind, while in the other person we do not have the mind, but life. Life is much deeper than mental activity; it is something deeper than good ideas. The Lord said, “I am the life.” Life is the Lord Himself. Life is not something other than Christ. If it is a thing, it is dead; it is not life. To many Christians, life is something they can produce out of themselves. But the Lord told us that He alone is the life.

We need the Lord’s mercy before we can see something concerning this matter. We can identify something as mental activity, we can identify something as feelings, and we can identify something as works. But we cannot identify what is life; there is no word to describe life clearly. We can only ask the Lord to show us what life is. Brothers and sisters, one day when the Lord opens our eyes, we will know what life is, and spontaneously we will touch the Lord.

Christ Is The Resurrection

Let us consider again what resurrection is. Whatever encounters death and still exists is resurrection. Resurrection is that which withstands death and endures death. After man ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, death came in and man died. Those who enter the grave never come out again. Once they go in, they never return. In the whole universe, of all men, only one came out of death. This One is our Lord. The Lord said, “I am...the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever” (Rev. 1:17-18). The Lord is the resurrected Lord. Resurrection is that which passes through death but is not imprisoned by death. In the Bible, the authority of death is described as a kind of imprisonment. To imprison someone is to confine him and not release him. Once man enters death, he cannot come out anymore. Death imprisons everyone who enters it. But death cannot imprison Him. This is the meaning of life, and this is the meaning of resurrection. Resurrection is the life that passes through death and rises

above death. Our Lord Jesus is the life. He became dead and was in Hades. He was in the deepest place of death. But death could not imprison Him. Death was unable to detain or keep Him. He came out of death! When life passes through death and is not imprisoned by death, this is resurrection.

Resurrection means that a life bears the mark of death, yet still lives; it is living, yet it also bears the mark of death. This is what is meant by resurrection.

Many people ask why is it that after His resurrection in John 20, the Lord Jesus left the mark of the nails in His hands and the mark of the spear in His side for Thomas to touch (v. 27). We have to realize that this is what is meant by resurrection. The Lord Jesus was not showing Thomas one who had never been wounded and one who had never died; He wanted Thomas to see that He was wounded but now alive. He wanted Thomas to see that He had died but now lived. The Lord has the mark of death in His body, yet He is now living. This is what is meant by resurrection.

We can apply this principle to ourselves. There are many things in us that do not have the mark of death; they cannot be considered as resurrection. Resurrection must be something that has the mark of death and yet is still living. Do not think that as long as you have eloquence, cleverness, and talent, everything will be all right. It is possible for you to have eloquence without the mark of death. It is possible for you to have wisdom without the mark of death, and it is possible for you to have talent without the mark of death. Whether or not others see the mark of death in our eloquence, cleverness, and talent determines whether we have resurrection. A brother may be very competent, capable, and apparently lively. However, he is too self-confident and self-assured. He thinks that everything put in his hands will be handled well. There is no mark of death with this person; one does not see any mark of death in his competence. Although he is self-confident, self-trusting, self-assured, and very energetic, the mark of death cannot be found in him. This does not mean that a person who has passed through resurrection has no ability in himself. It merely means that with such a person, there is the mark of death. He can still do things, but he dares not trust in himself anymore, and he has lost all confidence. His own energy has been weakened. This is resurrection.

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth and said, “I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling” (1 Cor. 2:3). This was spoken by a man who knew God. What a pity that among Christians, there are too many strong and self-confident ones! However, here is a man who said that he was “in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.” His body bore the mark of death, the seal of death.

Therefore, resurrection can never be separated from the cross. The cross removes something from us. Many things that originate from the self will not rise again once they have passed through the cross; they are lost in death. Whatever remains after it has passed through death, and whatever has the mark of death and is still living is resurrection. Resurrection must be something that has passed through death and whatever has passed through death must have suffered deprivation and loss. Brothers and sisters, if you really see what resurrection is, you will see what the cross is. You will see the stripping power of the cross. If you really know what resurrection is, you will find many things removed from you as you pass through the cross. If you really know what resurrection is, you will become another person; many things will be stripped from you. Only those things that have life will resurrect. Without life there is no possibility of resurrection. Suppose we cut a piece of wood into small segments and bury them into the ground. After some time, they will decay and become worthless. However, if we cut down a branch from a tree and plant it in the ground, after some time, it will germinate. In one case the sticks become rotten. In the other case the branch germinates. Anything that is dead rots, and anything that has life resurrects after it passes through death. Hence, the Lord’s resurrection was based upon His life. Because there is an incorruptible life in Him, death cannot imprison Him. Since there is something in Him which cannot die, death was cast away even while He was put into death. When we go through the cross experientially, many things will remain in death and not come out. Only the things which are of God will resurrect. When we touch the cross, we ourselves will be eliminated. The cross is a big minus; it subtracts many things.

Many brothers and sisters often ask, “How do I know whether I am dead or not? How do I know that the Lord has done something within me through the cross?” It is quite easy to answer this question. If the Lord

has done something within, you should have lost many things. But if you have been the same since the day you were saved, and if you are still as full as you were before, the cross has not done anything within you. If the cross has truly done something within, you will find that a great elimination work has been done; you will find that the Lord has done a thorough cleanup job in you. The result of this elimination is that you can no longer do what you could do before, and you are no longer capable of the things you were once capable of. You are no longer sure of what you had such assurance of before. Where you were bold before, now you become fearful. This proves that the Lord has done something within you. If resurrection is within you, many things have been left behind in the grave, because these things could not pass the test of death. Nothing in Adam can live once it passes through death. Anything that belongs to resurrection belongs to the Lord's life, the life which has passed through death and which has come out of death. Some things are lost through death, but are given back to us by the Lord. This is like the cutting of a branch from a tree. The branch seems to be dead. But when it is planted in the ground, after a period of time, it grows up again. This is resurrection. When we speak of having the mark of death on our body, it does not mean that we cannot speak or move anymore. Instead, it means that when we speak and move, we will not be as loose and self-confident as before. If a man has been touched by the Lord and dealt with by the cross, he will be weak, fearful, and trembling. He will not say, "I will do it," "I can do it," or "I can make it." From that time on, he will still work, but he will be very fearful of God when he works. He will still walk, but his walk will be a walk after God just as Abraham walked step by step with God. You will see the mark of the cross on such a man. Such a man will have been penetrated and pierced by God. He will not be as whole as he was before. There will be the mark of death on his body. This is resurrection.

Today God communicates with man in resurrection. Yet this resurrection includes the cross. Therefore, nothing that we have can contact God without passing through death. Everything in the natural realm has to pass through death. If we are not in resurrection, God cannot fellowship with us. He cannot contact us except on the side of resurrection. Hence, we have to pass through death to enter into resurrection. The life we have received is the resurrected life, and whatever we have that has to

do with God is in resurrection.

One problem frequently encountered in the spiritual realm is that man's service to God is often based on natural things. Seldom do we see his service based on things in resurrection. Many people are very enthusiastic, but few have an enthusiasm in resurrection, an enthusiasm that has passed through death and that is still alive. Much enthusiasm is the first enthusiasm, not the second enthusiasm. We can find many brothers who are diligent and capable, but their capability is the first capability, not the second capability; such capability has never passed through death. If we live before God by the things in the natural realm, we are not living in resurrection.

Some have asked what the Body of Christ is. The Body of Christ is none other than the place where His resurrection is testified. In other words, anything that is not in resurrection cannot share a part in the Body of Christ. The church is not the place where you bring one thing and I bring another thing. It is not the place where you contribute your cleverness and I contribute my ingenuity. The church is not the place where you contribute something natural and I contribute something natural. The church shuts out all natural things and accepts only the things that belong to resurrection. Whenever natural things come in, the church will no longer be the church. In the church we cannot have anything that does not belong to resurrection. Many brothers ask how the church can be one. We need to know that oneness can never come through man's ways. The oneness of the church can only be achieved when God's children know the cross and deal with the flesh and natural things. If a man does not know the cross, whatever way he tries is useless. If the church resorts to natural means and human ways, nothing will be achieved. The church cannot have the flesh, and the church cannot have anything natural. If the flesh and natural things are brought into the church, the church will no longer be the church. It is true that the church needs people who consecrate themselves and who are useful, but the mark of death must be there. When we are useful, and when we also have the mark of death on ourselves, we have resurrection. We need to see that not only has the Lord Himself resurrected, He wants a church in resurrection also.

In order to have such experiences, we must look to God to work in us.

We may be very familiar with many doctrines. However, if the Lord does not give us a fundamental blow, we will remain the same. Sometimes we fall and suffer pain, but this pain lasts only a couple of days or a few months. However, if we are broken by God in a fundamental way, and if we are broken deeply enough, we will not suffer pain for a few days or a few months, but we will have a scar over our entire life. We will remain crippled in God's eyes the rest of our life, and the mark of the cross will always be with us. Paul saw the vision once on his journey. Many years later, he still testified, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19). If some day the Lord has mercy on us and gives us a severe blow, our self will never rise again, and the scar will remain on us forever. We can touch the nail scars in the resurrected Lord's hands and the wounds in His side. Today scars will be found on those who know the Lord and who experience the Lord as their personal resurrection as well. These scars will not pass away, and these scars will strip them of all their boastings; they will not dare to be self-confident, self-assured, or boastful of their own strength. Once a person is knocked down by the Lord, he will never be able to rise again. We hope the mark of the cross will become more and more apparent on us. It cannot be a performance or a pretense. Performance and pretense are useless. Whatever we do by ourselves is easily forgotten after a short time. However, once we are put on the altar and killed by the knife, we will never be able to rise up again. If we experience a fundamental blow, we will see that we can do nothing, we are nothing, and we are finished. If there is the mark of death on us, that mark will be a proof that we know resurrection. Those who know the cross know resurrection. Resurrection is whatever remains after passing through the cross. Many things will never rise up again once they pass through the cross. They are gone forever. Resurrection is whatever can pass through the cross. Only these things have spiritual value. Many things are brought into the grave and stay in the grave; these things are dead. However, many things pass through the grave and are brought to the other side; they bear the mark of the cross, and they are the things of resurrection.

May the Lord grant us the true knowledge of Christ as our resurrection. May we not only know Christ as our life, but also know Christ as our resurrection. May the Lord eliminate the many things that belong to us. May the Lord not only grant us more life and more of the things which are

of Him, but may He eliminate all that we should not have. Many times we still live by our natural life and have not been broken by God. We have not seen God's discipline and have not known the cross. May the Lord have mercy on us. May the natural things in us be eliminated more and more, and may the things of resurrection be expressed more and more. May life and resurrection be a fact and not an ideal to us. Whenever we stretch out our own hands, may the Lord show us that there is no resurrection, but only naturalness and the flesh. May He show us the flesh by the way of resurrection. If we do not see this, may the Lord have mercy on us and grant grace to us. Amen!

CHAPTER THREE

Christ Is The Bread Of Life And The Light Of Life

Scripture Reading: John 6:35; 8:12

We have already briefly seen that all the spiritual things and all spiritual matters are Christ. God gives us Christ to be our spiritual things and matters. This is the crucial point in the spiritual life. Is our experience merely an experience? Or is our experience Christ? Is our righteousness merely righteousness? Or is our righteousness Christ? Is our holiness merely holiness? Or is our holiness Christ? Is our redemption merely redemption? Or is our redemption Christ? We often speak of the way, but the way we speak of may not be Christ Himself. We often speak of the truth, but we do not realize that Christ Himself is the truth. We often speak of the life, but the life we speak of may not be Christ Himself. In other words, we have many things other than Christ. This is the biggest spiritual problem among God's children. We say with our mouth that Christ is the centrality of all things, but in our living we still keep many things other than Christ, as if these things could help us live our Christian life. We must turn this concept around. We must realize that God has no intention for us to keep so many so-called spiritual things other than Christ. Under God's sovereign arrangement, there are things and matters, but God's things and matters are just Christ. Christ is all spiritual things. He is our righteousness; He does not give us a righteousness apart from Himself. He is our holiness; He does not give us a power apart from Himself that enables us to be holy. He is our redemption; He does

not give us a redemption apart from Himself. He is the way; He does not open a way for us apart from Himself. He is the truth; He does not present us a truth apart from Himself and then charge us to understand it. He is the life; He does not give us something called life apart from Himself. Brothers and sisters, the more we go on in God's way, the more we will discover that there is only one grace among all God's graces. There is only one gift among all God's gifts. The grace is Christ, and the gift is Christ. Thank God that He is showing us that Christ includes everything day by day. Formerly, we thought of the Lord as our Savior. Today we can say that He is not only our Savior, but our salvation as well. This is amazing, yet it is a fact. When we were first saved, we believed in the Lord Jesus as our Savior. Now we can say that the Lord Jesus is also our redemption and our salvation. More and more we discover that Christ is God's things and matters.

If we wrongly presume that what the Lord Jesus gives is different from the Lord Jesus Himself, and if we wrongly presume that grace and the One who gives grace are separate, these mistakes will cause us to suffer great spiritual damage. It will cut us off from the source of life. Therefore, we need to see more concerning Christ being our things and matters. In John 6:35 and 8:12, the Lord tells us that He is the bread of life and the light of life. Let us first see how He is the bread of life.

Christ Is The Bread Of Life

The Lord Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." He said this to those who looked for Him in Capernaum. They expected the Lord to give them food, and the Lord told them, "I am the bread of life." This means that He is not only the One who gives the bread of life, but He is the bread of life itself. The Giver and the gift are one, not two. Thank God, Christ is not only the Giver, but also the gift of God.

What is the significance of bread in the Bible? In the Bible bread means satisfaction. The Bible uses hunger to express man's dissatisfaction. In order to solve man's dissatisfaction, man must have bread. Whether or not God's children have the strength to go on depends upon whether they are satisfied within. Today if we feel satisfied within, we have strength. If we feel empty like a tire void of air, no one can drag us along. We cannot say that we do not have life, but we can be without strength.

Satisfaction gives us strength. Satisfaction enables us to walk. Such an inexplicable satisfaction makes us feel well.

Let us see what the bread of God's children is. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." The Lord Jesus gives life, and He also sustains life. Many Christians think that the bread is just an hour's prayer or an hour of reading the Bible; they do not realize that the bread is the Lord Jesus Himself. We do not mean that prayer or reading the Bible is useless, but we should remember that the Lord Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." This means that the bread of life is just Himself. Many times God's children are not satisfied because they do not realize that Christ is the bread of life. We often meet hungry people, those who are not satisfied with spiritual things. They are not satisfied with this, and they are not satisfied with that. Every day they are surrounded by dissatisfaction. We are not urging people to be proud or self-satisfied. Pride and self-satisfaction are one thing, but eating to the full and becoming satisfied is another. Some people have been dealt with by God; they live before God fearfully, and they are in weakness and trembling. They are not proud, yet they have touched the Lord and eaten to the full. They are satisfied before God, and this satisfaction is their power.

How then can we be filled? How can we be satisfied? We need to know that all satisfaction is related to Christ and all satisfaction is in life. Christ is the bread of life. Whenever we touch life in a real way, we are immediately satisfied. Whenever we offend life, we immediately feel inwardly collapsed. We need to mention some concrete examples to see how man can be satisfied.

Some brothers say, "I have been busily working for more than one year, running here and there. I have been so busy that my whole being is drained. I am hungry, and I hope to go some place for a spiritual retreat." But when we read John 4, we realize that there is something wrong with these words. The Lord Jesus Christ was wearied from His journey and sat by the well of Jacob. The disciples had gone into town to buy some food, which shows that the Lord was hungry. At the well He met a woman of Samaria. God's will was for the Lord to speak to her and save her, and the Lord did it accordingly. When the disciples came back with the food they had bought, they invited the Lord to eat, but the Lord said, "I have food to eat that you do not know about" (v. 32). The disciples thought that

someone else had given Him something to eat. Therefore, in the following verses the Lord said to the disciples, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work” (v. 34).

From this we see that working should only make us full; working should not make us hungry. Spiritual work should make us full every time we engage in it. If we become hungry every time we work, there must be something wrong. If we feel weak or deflated after we have worked, or if we feel that we are collapsing, it shows that there must be something wrong with our work. If our work is not separated from God’s will, and if our work is not according to ourselves, every time we work, we will not collapse, but we will increase in strength. Many times there is not an adequate preparation before the Lord, and we begin to work because there is a great need from outside or because of others’ urging. When we work under such circumstances, something within us will collapse, and we will not have the strength. After we finish such a work, there is no strength left within us, because something has gone wrong between us and the Lord. The more we participate in any work outside of God’s will, the more hungry we will become. In order for us to be satisfied, we must follow God’s will.

We must realize that Christ is our bread; our bread is not spiritual retreats or scriptural doctrines. We do not work until we become empty, and then go away for a rest; this is not our bread. Christ is our bread. We do not preach until we run out of teachings to speak about, and then go and find some new doctrines; this is not our bread. Our bread is Christ. Whether or not we are busy, if we have a word and the strength within, every time we stand up to speak for Christ, not only will the listeners be filled, but we will be filled as well. This is the result of the Lord working in us and in our life. This is why we touch the Lord. Eventually, after we are done, we will not feel any emptiness. Instead, we will feel that we have eaten a big meal and are full. It is wrong if we think that satisfaction depends on resting, on listening to messages, or on spiritual retreats. Food comes when we allow the Lord to do what He wants to do in us. The Lord is within us. Let us touch His life, and we will be satisfied.

In spiritual matters, one is not fed when he is at ease; he is fed when he is busy. While we are busy, we are fed. In spiritual matters, when we walk in the Lord’s will, the busier we are, the more we will eat. We will not

collapse through our busy schedules, and we will not become empty through these activities. I believe many brothers and sisters can testify of this. Suppose you talk to a person today, yet God has not moved in that direction; He has not spoken in you. Even though you may speak enthusiastically, after five or ten minutes of this kind of speaking, you will feel that something is wrong within. You may try to change the direction of your conversation because you feel that you cannot go on. Finally, when you leave, you will feel empty inside. There is nothing wrong with your words; the words are right, the attitude is also right, and you have tried your best to help. But the strange thing is that the more you speak, the emptier you become, and the more you feel that something has collapsed inside. When you leave, you will feel as though you have committed a big sin. Sometimes you may see some outward results and may feel that you have done a good work. But when these feelings pass away, you feel just as empty and hungry within. Whenever you do something by yourself, no matter how successful you are outwardly, inwardly you will feel deflated. Brothers and sisters, have you ever had this kind of deflated feeling? If your work is not done before the Lord, and if you are not following the Lord fearfully but are walking by yourself, even if you have the best motive or intention, you will still feel deflated and depleted of any spiritual vigor. You will feel as though the more you work, the more meaningless things become, and the more emptiness there is. Under such circumstances, the more others speak of your success, the worse you will feel inside. The more others praise you and mention the help they have received from you, the more you will hate yourself. This shows that your work is not a kind of bread, because it does not satisfy you. Brothers and sisters, those who know the bread are the ones who have found satisfaction in the Lord. Only Christ is the bread of life; only Christ can satisfy you. You will feel hungry with any work you have done if the work does not bring you in touch with the Lord. If you touch the Lord, if you touch life, and if you touch spiritual reality, whether or not you are busy, you will be able to say, “Thank and praise God. I have the bread. The Lord is my bread.” Brothers and sisters, have you seen this? This is absolutely not something outward. The question is not where you have gone, what you have done, what message you have spoken, or how long you have spent in spiritual devotions. The question is whether or not you have touched the Lord within. Whoever touches the Lord is

satisfied.

Some brothers and sisters may say, “What should I do? The Lord has not called me to preach in any place or to work in any place. Those who give messages and work have the opportunity to be filled. But we are not professional preachers and workers. Are we going to go hungry?” Brothers and sisters, thank God we do not have to be hungry. We may be doing only the smallest things; we may speak only ten or twenty sentences to others, or may speak only ten or twenty minutes to others. But as long as it is something out of the Lord, and as long as we do these things according to the Lord’s operation in us, we will feel relieved and satisfied after we have done them. It is the Lord who gives us a burden, and once we unload the burden, we feel satisfied and full within. Once we touch God, we are satisfied and fed. Therefore, brothers and sisters, the workers do not have the exclusive right to eat; everyone has the chance to eat. Every day we have the opportunity to eat, and every day we also have the opportunity to be satisfied. Christ is our bread. When we touch Him, we have bread.

Let me mention a deeper example. We often think that something is good or spiritual, but this thing is not the Lord’s will. When we carry it out, we feel empty inside. We can only be satisfied when we follow the Lord. Once a brother saw another brother walking in a wrong way. More than once he felt the need to clearly point out to the brother that the way he was taking was not a way of building up, but a way of corruption. However, he wanted to be a gentle Christian. He thought the best way was for him to smile and speak a few sweet-sounding words to persuade the brother. But every time he spoke in such a way, he felt like a glass with a hole in the bottom—everything had leaked out. In man’s eyes, he did quite well; he was gentle, and he did not try to hurt anyone. In man’s eyes, he was successful. Yet he felt hungry and unsatisfied. After two or three months, he felt wrong and came to the Lord and prayed for light. He asked the Lord to point out where he had gone wrong. One day he said to the Lord, “Lord, I will do whatever You want me to do.” The Lord listened to his prayer and showed him what he should do. Later the other brother came again, and this one rebuked him severely. According to his nature, whenever he said a severe word to others, he would suffer for a few days. But the strange thing was that this time, the more severely he

spoke, the more he felt he was touching the Lord. He also did not have to make a confession, which he always did after he rebuked others. Instead, he could praise the Lord. After he rebuked the other brother, he felt as though he had taken a good meal. This does not mean that we can rebuke others as much as we please. It is wrong to rebuke someone according to our will. However, it means that when we do anything according to the Lord's will, we are filled within, and we become stronger than ever. This shows us a fact: the good that we can perform by ourselves is not our food. We may think that as long as we can be gentle, everything will be fine. But experience tells us that even if we act gently, it is only our outward man who is doing it. It is a performance by our outward man, and this cannot become our food. Only when the Lord moves in us and we move according to His will, can we receive food. Whenever we touch life, we have food, and whenever we touch the Lord, we have satisfaction.

Christ Is The Light Of Life

The Lord not only said that He is the bread of life, but He also said that He is the light of life. Food is for satisfaction, while light is for seeing. When one is satisfied, he has the strength, and when one sees, he can walk. We have seen how Christ is the bread of life. Now let us consider how Christ is the light of life.

First, we have to point out that the light of life is not the knowledge of the Bible. Everyone knows that as Christians, we should read the Bible properly. But if we read the Bible as a book of knowledge, a textbook of theology, we will merely gain knowledge. If we read the Bible this way, we may gain some doctrines from the Bible which are truly scriptural. Yet these are mere letters. At the time the Lord was born in Bethlehem, many priests and scribes could memorize the books of the prophets, but they did not know Christ. Today even though we have one book more than they, the New Testament, it is still possible for men to know only the letters of the Bible without knowing Christ. We are not saying that we should not read the Bible. But we need to realize that when we read the Bible, it is possible that we will gain only knowledge instead of knowing Christ. Many of the priests and scribes had only dead knowledge; they did not know the living Lord. Many people think that the light of life is just knowledge, doctrines, theology, or church dogmas. Some persons say

that they have received some light, but the light they are speaking of is not necessarily the light of life. The light they are speaking of may only be interpretations of certain verses or certain teachings. At most they afford others a little more Bible knowledge. The light of life is not knowledge or anything other than the Lord Himself. The Lord said He Himself is the light of life. The light of life is the Lord Himself.

Brothers and sisters, many people can tell us from their experience that what they see in the light of life is often difficult to articulate. Interestingly, those who see it see it, yet they cannot say what they have actually seen. Once someone talked to a sister to find out if she was saved. He asked her a few questions. She answered, “When I was first saved, I did not know what it was, but I knew I was saved. If you believe that I am saved, I am saved, and if you do not believe that I am saved, I am still saved.” What she said is true. She was indeed saved, but she could not explain how she was saved. She knew it, but she could not explain it. Therefore, when the light comes, we may not be able to tell others many doctrines; it may be two or three years later before we can utter some doctrines or teachings. This light is the Lord Himself. When we see the Lord, we see the light.

What difference then does it make to us whether or not we see the light? What change will there be if we see the light? The difference is very great. If we truly see the light, we will fall to the ground. The light not only enlightens us but also kills us. Before Paul received the shining, it was not easy to put him on the ground. But once he received the shining, he fell. Some people always want to be humble. They try hard to be humble; they act humble in the way they speak and the way they act. But this kind of humility is very exhausting; even others feel exhausted for them. It is like a small child lifting a big dictionary; the book may not be very heavy, but it is exhausting for him to carry it. It is not easy for a proud man to be humble. It is not easy for us to fall down from the throne of pride. But once the light of the Lord shines on us, we fall immediately. We cannot explain it, but as soon as the light shines, we fall.

Teachings cannot make a man fall. A person can hear eight or ten teachings, and may even be able to recite them clearly and reasonably, but he remains the same. A message which should bring one to tears, or which should touch one’s carnal living and bring a man to his knees, can

be turned into a subject of study, and a person may think that he has received something spiritual. When a doctrine becomes a thing, a teaching becomes a thing, and words become a thing, the result is death; it is not light. One brother was so happy after he heard the teachings of Romans 6 that he thought he had seen Romans 6. But after a few days, he and his wife fell into a big argument. The Romans 6 that he saw was a thing; it was letters from a book; it was not the light. If what he saw was light, he would not have been the same. He would fall down in the light. Light is piercing; it can do what a man cannot do. A teaching will not do it, the brothers and sisters will not be able to help, and our own effort will not achieve it. But the minute the light shines, everything is solved. We may say that we are very stubborn, but once the light shines, we will become soft. When John saw the light, he became as dead (Rev. 1:16-17). When Daniel saw the light, he fell toward the ground as dead (Dan. 10:5-9). No one can see the Lord's face without falling down, and no one can see the Lord without becoming as dead. It is difficult to make ourselves die or to humble ourselves. But once the light shines, everything follows. The Lord's light kills. Once a man receives the Lord's light, he falls.

The Lord Jesus Himself is the light. Hence, when a man meets the Lord, he sees. When a man meets the Lord, he falls and becomes weak as though he were dead. With many people, their old personality is stubborn and has never been broken. It is useless for others to try to deal with their personality. It is also useless for them to try to deal with it themselves. However, once the Lord's light shines on them, they receive sight and become broken men. Whenever a man sees the Lord, he becomes weak. Whenever a man sees the Lord, he is broken and cannot survive. This is the meaning of light. Brothers and sisters, we must never substitute any other thing for the light. What we usually speak of as light is not necessarily light itself. Most things are mere teachings and so-called truth. They do not have any spiritual value to us. Once a brother who loved the Lord very much met a man who said to him, "I am very glad because I found the doctrine of sin in Romans." When the brother heard this he said, "Friend, did you only find the doctrine of sin in Romans today? I think you should have found the reality of sin in yourself long ago." Many people are looking for doctrines, but they have not found the reality. Doctrines are mere words, and they are death. They are not light,

they are not life, and they are not Christ.

When the light comes, the first thing it does is kill. We should not think that light only gives us sight. On the contrary, when the light comes, the first thing it does is to take away our sight. The light makes us see, but that is a later result. At first the light makes us blind and makes us fall; afterwards, we see. Anything that cannot make us fall to the ground is not the light. Anything that cannot humble us is not the light. Paul saw the light and fell to the ground, and his eyes could see nothing for three days (Acts 9:8-9). When we first encounter light, we become confused. When a person in darkness first sees light, he cannot distinguish anything; everything seems confusing to him. Anyone who is self-assured and who thinks he knows everything needs God's mercy, because such a man has never seen the light. All that he knows are doctrines and knowledge. Once he sees the true light he will say, "Lord, what do I know? I know nothing." The greater the revelation, the blinder one becomes, and the more severe a blow one suffers. Light makes a person humble; it makes a person fall. Only after this will a person see. If we have never suffered any blow and never been humbled, and if we have never been confused and never felt that we knew nothing, we have never encountered any light, and we are still in darkness. May the Lord have mercy on us so that His light may take away our self-assurance and so that we will not be so confident that we are right, that we are not wrong, and that we know so much. May we say before the Lord, "Lord, You are the light. Now I know that what I saw before was nothing but things."

Light is not something abstract; it is something very concrete. The Lord Jesus is the light. When the Lord Jesus was among us, He was light among us, the very light walking among us. What a pity that to some Christians so many things are abstract. They hear this and that doctrine, but everything is abstract to them. They only know some abstract doctrines, but have not received any practical help.

One brother was studying in a parochial school when he was young. He went to church often and heard the teaching concerning salvation many times. Yet he had never met anyone who was saved, nor was he himself saved. One day he met a man preaching the gospel. When he heard the gospel the man preached, he was saved. He had not been saved earlier because he had heard only abstract doctrines. On that day, he met a

genuinely saved person; he met something concrete, and he was saved.

One brother once related his experience of studying the Bible. He said, “I had heard many brothers and sisters speaking on sanctification, and I went to study the doctrine of sanctification. I found more than two hundred verses about holiness in the New Testament. I memorized them all and arranged them in proper order. Yet I still did not know what sanctification was; it was meaningless to me. Then one day I met an elderly sister who was a truly sanctified person. On that day my eyes were opened, and I saw what sanctification is. I met a person who was sanctification. The light was so bright that it hurt; when it came there was no way for me to escape. The light showed me the meaning of sanctification.”

From these experiences we can see that light is something concrete, living, and effective. If you merely convey doctrines to others, the result will be merely doctrines in them. This is dead, and this is not the light of life. The light of life will shine in their lives and will shine out from them. We must remember that with the Lord Jesus, light is something concrete. With us, it is also something concrete. This light is a living person. When this light appears, it is something living in us also.

Brothers and sisters, why does it seem as if God’s Word has lost its power in these days? Why does it appear so weak and abstract? The only reason is that there are too many doctrines! There is too much “truth” and too much knowledge of theology! We have to realize that only the living Lord can produce living persons. May the Lord truly have mercy on us to show us as the days go by that all things are dead and only the Lord is living. In Christianity even the nicest looking things, the sweetest sounding things, and the things men consider most spiritual are dead if they are outside of Christ. The Lord Himself should be everything in us. He Himself is everything. Only He is living. He is living in us, and when He is passed on to others, He will be living in them as well. May the Lord be merciful to us so that we will prostrate ourselves before Him. When we do this, we will know the Lord in a way different than we did before.

CHAPTER FOUR

Christ Is God's Matters And Things

Scripture Reading: John 1:29; 6:53; 8:12, 24, 28; 11:25; 14:6; 1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 3:4; 1 Tim. 1:1; Psa. 27:1

God's Goal And Means—Christ

God's goal is Christ, and Christ is also God's means. God uses Christ as the means to reach the goal, which is Christ. We can know and see God's goal particularly from the books of Ephesians and Colossians. In this message we would like to consider God's goal from these two books. There is one difference between these two books: Ephesians shows us that according to the economy of the fullness of the times, God wants to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth (1:10); Colossians shows us that God has not only made Christ to be Head over all things, but God has made Him all and in all (1:18; 3:11b). Colossians shows us that God's goal is Christ, and His means is also Christ. God's goal is for Christ to be Head over all things. In order to arrive at this, God must make Christ to be all. He must be all and, at the same time, He must be in all. Only then will all things be headed up, for if Christ is all and if Christ is in all, all things will be headed up spontaneously.

Please remember that in God's eyes, there are not many things. In God's eyes, there is only Christ. In God's eyes there is no matter and no thing; in God's eyes there is only Christ. What we ordinarily think of as matters and things do not exist in God's eyes. We may consider that there are many matters and things in this world. According to our worldly view, there are matters and there are things. But in God's eyes, Christ is everything. There is no matter, and there is no thing. Christ is all the matters, and Christ is all the things. When the day comes that Christ is in all matters and in all things, God's eternal purpose will be fulfilled.

I hope that you can see that Christ has headed up all things in Himself. This does not begin in the future when God's eternal purpose is fulfilled; it begins today through the church.

Tonight I will not go too deep; I will only touch this matter briefly. God has ordained that all matters and things will be headed up in Christ in the future. How can all things be headed up? God says that Christ is all

things. He is all, and at the same time, He is in all. When this happens, we will only see Christ in the world; we will not see matters and things anymore, because all matters and all things will have passed away.

Today in the church, God is starting to show us that Christ is all matters and things. When the church sees this, it will begin to live in the realm of the spirit. If the eyes of the church are set only on matters and things, it has not seen Christ yet.

The matters I am referring to are not the matters of the world, and the things I am referring to are not the things of the world. The matters and things I am referring to are spiritual matters and things.

The Revelation Of The Gospel Of John

Christ Being the Things of God

I would like to point out a very interesting thing here. The Gospel of John is the deepest Gospel; it is also the last Gospel written. It is the last book written in the New Testament. Many Epistles and books were written before the Gospel of John was written. John wrote his Gospel last. He wrote many things which are not found in the other Gospels. At the end he said that our understanding of Christ should be the same as God's understanding of Christ.

What we see in this book is not God's requirement for a lamb, or His gift of the bread of life. What we see is not just God's provision of a way, a truth, or a life. It is not a matter of the Lord having the power to restore man's life; it is not a matter of resurrection. It is not a matter of the Lord Jesus being able to give light, restore sight, and lead those who follow Him out of darkness. In the whole Gospel, we see only one great fact. This fact is that *Christ is all things.* The Gospel of John says that He is the light of the world; it does not say that He gives us light. It says that He is the bread of life; it does not say that He gives the bread of life. It says that He is the way; it does not say that He can show us the way. It says that He is the truth; it does not say that He can teach us a truth. It says that He is the life; it does not say that He can give us life. After Lazarus died, the Lord did not tell Martha and Mary that He had the power to resurrect their brother. Rather, He said that He is the resurrection.

Please remember that the bread of life is a thing, light is a thing, the way

is a thing, truth is a thing, and life, resurrection, and the lamb are all things. But in Christianity, we do not find individual things. In Christianity, there is only Christ! Christ is what it is all about.

Today we have to see one thing before the Lord. We have to realize that in our experience there are not many matters and things. In our experience, there is only Christ. He does not give us the light; He is our light. He does not lead us to a way; He is our way. He does not give us life; He is our life. He does not teach us to understand a truth; He is the truth. Brothers, do you see the difference? All that God has given us is Christ Himself.

One day I told a group of people a spiritual fact. As I was speaking, many eyes began to stare at me. I said, “Let me tell you one crucial fact: God’s Christ is God’s matters. God does not have matters; God only has Christ! He has not given us light; He has given us Christ. He has not given us food; He has given us Christ. He has not given us a way, a truth, and a life; He has given us Christ. God’s Christ is all things. Apart from Christ, God does not have any thing.”

WHAT PAUL KNEW

Christ Being Our Hope

I would like to point out that not only does the Lord Jesus’ own word testify to this, but Paul said the same thing. He knew the Lord, and he showed us one very interesting thing. He said to Timothy, “Christ Jesus our hope” (1 Tim. 1:1). I like this word. Do you like it? He did not say that our hope is in Christ Jesus. Rather, he said Christ Jesus is our hope. We do not put our hope in Him, and we do not draw hope from Him. Rather, Christ Jesus is our hope.

Christ Being Our Life

Again he said to the Colossians, “When Christ our life is manifested...” (Col. 3:4). He did not say, “When Christ is manifested.” Rather, he said, “When Christ our life is manifested.” He said that Christ is our life. A Christian does not have many matters; a Christian only has Christ.

Christ Being Our Wisdom: Righteousness, Sanctification, Redemption

This is not all. In these messages, the one verse that we emphasize more than any other verse is 1 Corinthians 1:30. What does it say? It says, “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom to us from God: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” God has not given us righteousness; He has given us Christ. Christ is our righteousness. God has not given us sanctification; He has given us Christ. Christ is our sanctification. God has not given us redemption; He has given us Christ. Christ is our redemption. God has not given us wisdom; He has given us Christ. Christ is our wisdom. This is why we say that the Christ of God is the things of God. God’s Christ is God’s matters and things. Apart from Christ, God does not have any matter or thing.

Christ Being Our Righteousness

If God were to say to us, “I have made the Lord Jesus the Lord of righteousness; He is the One who justifies you,” what would you say? You would say “Yes, He has justified us.” But God has not asked the Lord Jesus to be the Justifier; He has asked the Lord Jesus to be our righteousness. Is this good? This is excellent. He is not the Justifier, but our righteousness. He is our righteousness.

Christ Being Our Sanctification

Paul did not say that the Lord Jesus has become “the One that sanctifies.” Rather, he said that Christ is sanctification. The Lord Jesus is not sanctifying us; He Himself is becoming our sanctification. God has made the Lord Jesus our sanctification. Our sanctification is Christ. Our sanctification is not a thing; it is not an act or a behavior. Our sanctification is a person—Christ.

Christ Being Our Redemption

Again Paul did not say that the Lord is our Redeemer. He said that the Lord is our redemption. Is this not strange? First Corinthians 1:30 does not say that God has appointed the Lord Jesus to be a Redeemer. Rather, it says that the Lord Jesus is redemption.

Thank the Lord that our Redeemer is Christ, and our redemption is also Christ. The One who sanctifies is Christ, and our sanctification is also Christ. The One who justifies is Christ, and our righteousness is also Christ. The One who gives wisdom is Christ, and that wisdom is also

Christ!

WHAT DAVID KNEW

Christ Being Our Salvation

If I stand here and say to you, “The Lord Jesus is our Savior,” you will respond, “That is right. The Lord Jesus is our Savior.” But Psalm 27:1 tells us that the Lord is our salvation. It shows us that the Lord is our salvation and not our Savior. It is a fact that the Lord is our Savior. But God showed David that the Lord is our salvation. The Lord is our Savior, but He is also our salvation; He is that very thing. The Lord Jesus is the things of God. He is God’s matters and God’s things. The Lord Jesus Himself is the very thing that God has given us.

I have no intention of remaining too long on the exposition of the Bible. I am merely laying a foundation. If you spend some time to consider God’s Word, you will see that Christ is God’s things. God has not only given Him to be our Savior and our Redeemer. He has not only given Him to be the Lord of sanctification and the Lord of righteousness. He has given us Christ to be our things. Righteousness is a thing, sanctification is a thing, and justification is a thing, or a matter. But Christ is these matters or things.

There Being Only One Person In The Christianity Of Life

You may ask, “Brother, why do you have to spend so much time on all this?” I must tell you that this is the very difference between a Christianity of life and a Christianity of behavior. There is a vast difference between these two kinds of ways. The gap between these two ways is very great. One is spiritual, and the other is not. One is of God, and the other is of man’s mind. These are two entirely different things. If you study God’s Word, you will find that there is only one person in His Word; there are not many things. There is only the person; there are not matters and things. There is only one person—the Lord Jesus. Other than this person, one cannot find any other matter or thing.

The biggest problem with God’s children today is that the Christianity they know is a fragmented Christianity. One person receives a little grace. Another person receives a little gift. A third person picks up tongue-speaking, while a fourth person experiences some changes in his

behavior. Some have love, some have endurance, and some have humility. You may consider this as Christianity. Indeed, this is the Christianity that man speaks of today. But actually, this is not Christianity. Christianity is just Christ. Christianity is not a gift; it is not Christ giving you something. Christianity is just Christ Himself. Can you tell the difference between the two? These are absolutely two different ways; they are two entirely different ways. Christianity is not Christ giving you something. Christianity is Christ giving Himself to you. The problem is that in today‘s Christianity, man thinks only in terms of Christ’s gifts. When he was a sinner, Christ gave him grace and mercy. Now that he has become a Christian, Christ gives him endurance and Christ gives him humility and meekness. It seems as if Christ is giving him many things.

There Being No Non-Personified Things In Christianity

In God’s eyes, what is important is not the gifts of Christ. In God’s eyes, He has given us Christ Himself. God has not given us humility or endurance; He has given us the whole Christ. Christ is becoming our humility, and Christ is becoming our endurance and meekness. It is Christ, the living Lord. This is Christianity.

Please remember that there are no non-personified things in Christianity. We must never receive a merely non-personified thing. In Christianity, all things are personified, and that person is Christ. In other words, our endurance is not a thing; our endurance is a person. Our sanctification is not an experience; our sanctification is a person, something personified. Our justification is not an experience; our justification is a person. Our righteousness is not an act; our righteousness is a person. Our redemption and deliverance are not something that we receive at one time; our redemption and deliverance are a person. Our endurance, humility, meekness, love, etc., are the Lord Himself; they are not things. This is Christianity. Christ is everything to the saints today. There is no need to wait for that day to come.

Many people ask how we can say that Christ is all. If you know the Christianity of life, you will acknowledge that He is all. He does not give all, rather He is all. These are two entirely different things.

Why is it that God’s children fail so much today? They fail because they have only received a gift before the Lord; they have not received Christ.

They have received fragmentary things before the Lord; they have not received the Christ God has given them. They have received only matters and things; they have not received a person. I do not know how much you have seen before the Lord. But I can say that when this question is resolved, all questions are resolved.

When we were saved, many of us heard God's Word, which says that He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that we will not perish, but will have eternal life. When we heard such a word, we felt that we needed to be saved, and we went to God and prayed, "Lord, You have loved me and given Yourself to me. Can You give salvation to me also? You have become my Savior. Can You give me salvation also?" How foolish we were! We felt that having a Savior was not enough and that we needed salvation also! Many people have done this. And what do we do in our gospel preaching? We say that God has given us the Savior, yet when we repent, we pray, "God, grant me Your salvation." However, God has only one Son, and this Son is salvation. When we have the Savior, we have salvation. Do we still have to ask for salvation? Only a foolish man would say, "God, You have given me a Savior. Now please give me salvation."

"I AM..."

Today we are Christians, and we are saved; God has given Christ to us to be our life. But we constantly ask for one thing after another; we ask for one, two, three, ten, fifty, a hundred, ten thousand, a million, and ten million things. We think that these individual things are important. But God shows us that Christ is our everything.

This is why God's Word shows us that Christ's name is "I am." Perhaps I should not be speaking so much of this matter outside the Bible; we should consider more of what the Bible says about this.

Food

In the Gospel of John, the Lord said that He is the bread of life. We often ask God for food; we think that there is something called food. We are hungry, and we ask God, saying, "Please give us food." But it is so strange that those who ask for food never receive food. Those who ask for food are always hungry. Those who beg for food are the ones who are

always hungry. I cannot say that I have been serving the Lord for many years. But I can at least say that I have been serving Him for some years. During these years, I have never met a person who asked for food who received it. You may say, “Does this mean that God’s Word is wrong? Does not Luke 1:53 say that He will fill the hungry with good things?” I say, yes, it is true that the hungry ones will be filled with good things. But with what are the hungry ones filled? We have to realize that what fills us is not food, but Christ. We often feel hungry, and we have a need. We feel empty and believe that God has food. So we pray and hope to receive food. But we do not know how we can get the food. All we know is that we should contact the Lord, believe more, receive more, and enjoy more. But the amazing thing is that when we believe more, receive more, and look to Him more, we do not get the food that we hoped for, yet we are filled. We do not receive the food that we expected to receive. But through our looking to the Lord, and through contacting and receiving Him, we are filled. God’s food is Christ. His food is not just food. God has no matters; His food is just Christ. The Chinese have an idiomatic expression “Chien-pien-yi-lu,” which means “a thousand pages of the same thing.” It is not a good thing to be all the same. But before the Lord, all the things of God are “a thousand pages of the same thing.” No matter what we are seeking before the Lord, what He gives us is the same—Christ; He is “a thousand pages of the same thing.” He is the One who meets our need; things do not meet our need.

Righteousness and Sanctification

Many times, I can praise and rejoice for one reason only: my righteousness is not my conduct; my righteousness is a person, who is the Lord Jesus. Because the Lord Jesus has become my righteousness, every time I mention my righteousness, I can say that not only do I have righteousness or justification, but I can speak to my Righteousness, praise my Righteousness, and give glory to my Righteousness. Is this not a wonderful word? You may wonder how one can give glory to his righteousness. Yes, I often give glory to my Righteousness, because my Righteousness is the Lord Jesus. My sanctification is not my work. When I praise my Sanctification, I am not praising my work. No, I hate my work. Yet I can say that I praise my Sanctification, because my sanctification is my Lord. These are two entirely different things. Can you see this? It is

not things but the Lord.

God’s Tearing Down And His Building Up

We can find one fact in our spiritual experience. Some people have been Christians for one, two, three, five, or even twenty or thirty years. The strange thing is that when they first became Christians, they were very patient. But the more they went on as Christians, the more they could not control their temper, and the worse they became. I remember many people telling me that at the beginning, they were very patient; they could forgive, they could pray, and they could suffer any treatment from others. Others could treat them any way they wanted in school, at home, and at work. But now, they could not tolerate the same things anymore. In the past, they could do everything; now they cannot do them anymore. Sometimes they managed to hold back their temper, but something within them wanted revenge. We have seen too many examples of this kind. I can tell you a thousand, even ten thousand, stories like this one. Many people can testify that once they were humble, but they cannot be humble anymore. Once they were patient, but they cannot be patient anymore. Once they were loving, but they cannot be loving anymore. Once they were meek, but they have become stubborn. Once they were zealous, but they have become cold. They cannot explain this.

Brothers, we have to remember that God must take away everything that we have. When we first believed in the Lord, we felt that we lacked love, and we asked God for love. To put it in simple language, God gave us a “dose” of love, or a “packet” of love, so that we could love. It was a thing to us. We may have received plenty of these things. But God cannot allow love to remain forever as a thing in us; He has to put Christ into us. Therefore, He removes that love. Many people had a bad temper before they believed in the Lord; their temper was quick. After they picked up patience, patience became a thing, a gift, a salvation, or a spare part to them. As long as they had such a thing, they could work. During the first, second, and third year, these things may have served well. However, by the fifth year, or even as early as the third year, the situation began to change; the things themselves were gone. Today God is doing the same work in many of His children; He is removing all the things. Not only will He remove the worldly things; He will remove the spiritual things as well. Before you were saved, the matters and things of the world took the

place of Christ. After you were saved, spiritual matters and things took the place of Christ. One day, God will show you that “Christ is all the world to you.” Once God took away the things and matters of the world from you. Now he is taking away spiritual things and matters from you. He will take away your patience, your love, your power, your meekness, your humility, and everything that you have. He will show you that you do not live by patience but by a person. You will be patient because you have received a person, not because you have received a power. You will be humble, not because you have received a power, but because you have received a person. All the spiritual things have to go away. All the “its” have to go away.

For this reason, God’s tearing down work, as well as His building work, goes on daily in many of His children. Daily “things” are torn down, and Christ is built up. This is the way God deals with His children. In the past, God might have given you a thing; He might have given you a power for endurance. You were so sure of this experience that you could almost write down the words: “My problem with endurance is over.” Next you had to deal with humility, and God gave you another thing; He gave you the strength to humble yourself, and you were able to say that the problem of humility was also settled. When another thing is not settled, you pray daily before the Lord to try to solve it. You are always busy solving this and that problem. You are always trying to deal with this and that question. You are always dealing with individual problems. Brothers, God will take away many “things” from you; He will only give you One; He will only give you a person. This One will be your humility, your endurance, your meekness, and your love. He is the One who is. When you have Him, you can truly say, “God, You are the I am.” This is Christianity. God is continually tearing down and building up. He will continue this work until one day we can say that Christ is everything. One day the universe will confess that Christ is everything. But first God wants us to confess within ourselves that Christ is everything.

Forgive me for speaking something about myself. I care much for many people and bear much of the responsibility for their spiritual condition. When I met a brother who was wrong, I often tried to exhort him. But I could only say, “Brother, you are lacking in love. Next time, you have to love your brother.” He may have succeeded in loving, and I may have felt

great that I saw some result to my work. But actually, what he acquired was love and not Christ. Love to that brother was not a person but a thing, a behavior. This is a Christianity of behavior. It is human conduct; it is man who is working, seeking, hoping, praying, believing, receiving, gaining, and acquiring something called love. This is why I say that love is only a thing and a behavior to him. But if that love is Christ, it is a totally different story. Christ alone is everything; it is not him. Christ is loving; it is not him who is loving. This makes love a law of life instead of an act of the will. This is a different kind of Christianity.

I do not know whether you have seen the difference. What do you feel when you render some help to a brother and open his eyes and help him to go on with the Lord? The most difficult thing we face today is that many people are merely involved in the things of Christianity; they do not know Christ and have not realized that God's thing is just Christ.

The Second Stage Of Knowing

What does it mean to know Christ? I may say that knowing Christ is to know Him through matters and things. What does it mean to know Christ through matters and things? It means knowing that Christ is our matters and Christ is our things. Some people can say that they know Christ as their patience, Christ as their love, or Christ as their humility; this is knowing Christ. Once a person has this knowledge, he will have a thorough change. Once he has this change, he will say that his world does not consist of any thing anymore. I believe that some among us can say this, and some among us know what this means. In my world, my spiritual world, there are not many things. In my spiritual world, there is only Christ. I do not have any holiness; I only have Christ. But this does not mean that I am not holy; it means that Christ has become my holiness. If you have this experience, you will immediately see that Christ is the One who is. This is the focus of everything—Christ is the One who is. If you have this experience, you will be delivered from all the outward things. The only question now is whether or not you know Christ. It is not a question of prayer, exhortation, or encouragement.

I wish to see my co-workers paying more attention to this matter. It is not a matter of exhortation or encouragement. If you try to encourage someone, at the most you will stir him up to do something by himself. But

the only thing that counts is God opening man's eyes to know Christ. Even if I could repeat the things I have said a hundred times, it would still be useless. If God opens our eyes to see that Christ is the one thing we lack, everything is solved. Many people know Christ as the Lord of justification, but they still fear God and do not know that Christ is their righteousness. Many people know Christ as the Sanctifier, but they are still not sanctified. This is because they think that they lack sanctification. They think that the Lord is the One who sanctifies them, and they ask Him to give them the strength to become sanctified; they want to be sanctified. But while they are doing this, they find that they cannot make it. They cannot do it; they cannot be sanctified. Then God opens their eyes and gives them the light to see that Christ is their sanctification. God is not asking them to be sanctified; He is not giving them the strength to be sanctified. Rather, Christ becomes their sanctification. Christ in them has become their sanctification. When this happens, all problems will go away because He will be the "I am." I can afford to lose my power. But I cannot afford to lose Christ. My sanctification is not something I do in myself. My sanctification is something He has done in me. Once I know what Christ is to me, all the problems are solved. Christ is the One who is. I have nothing else to say. I have only one thing to tell you: Christ is the One who is.

The problem is that although many of us know that Christ is our Lord, we do not know that Christ is our matters and things. All those who know Him only as the Redeemer, Justifier, Sanctifier, or any other "-er," only know His work; they do not know what He is. But God wants us to know Him as redemption, sanctification, and righteousness.

Let me ask a question: Is the Lord Jesus you know your Savior or your salvation? Is the Lord you know your Redeemer or your redemption? Is He your Liberator or your liberation? Is He your Sanctifier or your sanctification? Is He your Justifier or your righteousness. Those who know Him as the "-er," only know Him in a superficial way. Those who know Him as matters and things enter the second stage of their knowing of Him, and their knowing of Him is higher and deeper.

The problem among God's children is that there are too many things. When we know the Lord as the One who is, our things will become a person, and everything will be settled. Then God's purpose, which He

intends to fulfill in eternity, will be fulfilled in us.

Whenever our holiness, redemption, regeneration, power, grace, and gift only remain as things, we are barely touching the periphery of Christianity. When we no longer see these things as things, but as the Lord Himself, we will begin to know God. Then we will begin to enter the goal of God's eternal purpose. From that point on, we will no longer see the many things of this world. We will see the Lord alone. He will become the One upon whom all the issues hinge.

This is why I said at the beginning that many people have things that are dead. Only when they understand what we are speaking of here will their things become personified. It is Him. Our regeneration is not a thing, but a person. We have a personified One, not a thing. Everything that I have is personified, because everything that I have is the Lord. First, the Lord leads us to know Him. Then He leads us to know that He is our things. When we are led to know Him as all things, we will be delivered from our own life, and we will be delivered even from the spiritual world and spiritual things. From that day on, we will truly say that the Lord is all and in all. We will truly say that He is everything in our living. If I am patient today, I am not the one who is patient, but Christ is my patience within me. When I love today, I am not the one who is trying to love. The power of love is not within me; rather, a person loves within me. If I can forgive today, it is not because I am forbearing, it is not because I have made any effort of my own, and it is not because I am capable. If I can forgive today, it is because there is One within me who is always forgiving. He is my forgiveness. We are humble not because we have told ourselves that we are too proud and that we have to be humble. We do not become humble by suppressing our pride or by making up our mind to be humble. Rather, a person is living out humility within us; He is our humility. This is why we can be humble. This is the law of life which we have been speaking of during the past few months. The law of life is nothing other than Christ becoming our things and Christ becoming our life.

Brothers and sisters, may the Lord open our eyes. We pray that He would truly open our eyes so that we would see. All things will eventually pass away, and only He will remain. Therefore, here in this place, we should only have Him alone.

CHAPTER FIVE

Christ Only—Not Matters Or Things

Scripture Reading: John 8:28; Col. 3:3-4; 1:16-20

Man's Thoughts And Demands

The first gift we received from God was the Son of God, who is Christ. But different people have different degrees of knowledge of God. Among God's children, some know the Lord Jesus as one of the many gifts of God, while others know Him as God's unique gift. Many people confess that the Lord Jesus is God's gift, which means that they recognize Him as God's unique gift. But many other people accept the Lord Jesus only as their first gift. Apart from the Lord Jesus, they still see many other gifts. There is the first gift, but there are also the second, the third, the fourth, the fifth, the tenth, the thousandth, and even the ten thousandth gift.

When many people believe in the Lord, they accept Him and they are saved. But after they are saved, they find that in spite of their salvation, they still have many shortcomings and needs.

Some people find that they have a quick temper. Although they are saved, they still have their temper. Some people find that they are very proud. Although they are saved, their pride still follows them. Many people find that they are weak and timid. Although they are saved, they are still timid.

Hence, among God's children, we very often find that after many believe in the Lord Jesus and are saved, they hope, ask, believe, and pray before the Lord, and subsequently receive many gifts. They regard the Lord Jesus as one of the many gifts. They consider the Lord Jesus as one from among many gifts of God; that is, He is only the first among many gifts.

It is very interesting that at the beginning of our pursuit of the Lord we see many needs in ourselves. We think that since we are Christians, we should not do this and that. We are very sure that we are genuine Christians, yet we still have many shortcomings. It does not matter what the shortcomings are; as long as there are shortcomings, we consider them as wrong, and we try all we can to deal with these shortcomings. For this reason, we pray before God, we hope, we believe, and we strive, and eventually we receive something. When this happens, it seems as

though we have overcome our shortcomings, and we rejoice in our heart that we have acquired a gift.

In this circumstance, many of God's children begin to think that the purpose of God's gifts and grace is just to fill up our lack. When some people hear this, they may ask, "If God's grace is not here to fill up our lack, what is it for?" Many people think that God's grace is for filling up our lack. This is like a Bible that has two thousand pages. If it is short one page, we try to make up the missing page. This is what we do when we try to use God's grace to fill up our lack. In other words, we think that we are lacking just a part; we think that we are lacking only a little and that as long as we can fill up that little part, we will be perfect. Some have said that they lack five things, and as soon as they have the five things, they will be satisfied. Some have said that they lack ten things, and as long as they have the ten things, they will be satisfied. Some may say that they have love and that they only need a little more humility, a little more patience, or a few other things. As soon as they have these few things, they say that everything will be fine. Man's thought is merely one of lack and shortage. What does he do? He prays to God and asks God to give him what he lacks.

But the problem is that many of us have come to realize that what we think we lack before the Lord and what we ask for are merely things. Our lack and our prayers are all centered around the matters and the things; they are all individual, countable objects. We say that we lack this or that, and if God will fill up our lack, everything will be all right.

We lack patience. But what kind of patience are we looking for? Most of the time our eyes do not look to heaven. If our eyes did look to heaven, we would be looking upward. But most of the time, we cannot look upward; we can only watch and look at what is around us. We sigh and say that certain people are good but that we are not like them. What they have is patience, and what we have is a temper. What they have is meekness, but what we have is pride. We wish that we could be as patient and meek as they. Once I prayed to the Lord—it might have been my first prayer—that God would give me a Bible like the one I saw in a certain brother's hand. We can only pray for things that we see. We can only pray after we have seen something, and we can only pray for what others already have. We cannot pray for something from heaven which

we have never seen. As a consequence, when we pray, we ask for patience like that of a certain person, or we ask for humility like that of another person. In our mind, we already have a picture of what humility is and what patience is.

If, when we were first saved, God had told us that He was going to pluck patience from a certain person and give it to us, would we not have been overjoyed? If we could have patience and humility on top of what we already had, we would have been satisfied and thought that we were perfect.

Patience is a thing to us; it is a thing that others possess. There is a certain thing called patience among the brothers and sisters, and we want it. We often hate ourselves, and we blame our parents for begetting us and giving us such a bad temper. We wish that we could be like certain persons, because they have something which we do not have. Many of God's children are after patience as a thing. They want something that will stop them from losing their temper. They think they need something called patience. With many people, patience is a thing. God has this thing, and it is found in many places on earth, but they do not have it. They think they need this thing, patience, so that they can become a patient person.

Here lies the basic difference between genuine Christianity and wrong Christianity. Many of God's children are looking for things which they think can be found everywhere except in themselves. They think that it is found in Mr. Chang, in Mr. Yu, in Mr. Hsu, or in this or that person, but not in them. They are pursuing after a thing that can be found on earth. This is Christianity in the mind of many. They are craving for and pursuing after things, and they have acquired things. Many people only acquire a thing; yet their heart rejoices and they thank the Lord because they have acquired it.

There Being Only Christ In The Spiritual World

Many Christians have not seen that there are not many things in the spiritual world; there is only Christ. There is no patience in the spiritual world; there is only Christ. There is no humility, sanctification, or light in the spiritual world; there is only Christ. There are not many things in the spiritual world; only Christ exists.

The Lord has to do a fundamental work in us. This is what we need before the Lord. If you would not misunderstand me, I will say that we need a second salvation. In our first salvation, we saw that our need was Christ and not works. We saw that salvation was through Christ and not through work. Now we need another strong and thorough vision: we do not need things; we need Christ. We need to have an experience as thorough and strong as our first salvation, and we need to have as many things torn down as when we were first saved. When many people were first saved, many things were torn down, and they gained Christ. In the same way, many things need to be torn down in them today. The difference is that what was torn down the first time were sinful things, while the things that need to be torn down now are spiritual things. The first time their pride, jealousy, vainglory, temper, and other sins were torn down. Now their patience, humility, and so-called holiness need to be torn down. These things must be torn down before they will see that Christ is their life and that He is the One who is. This inward Christianity is absolutely different from the Christianity that man commonly believes in.

If you would not be offended, I would say an honest word to you. In the past, many brothers and sisters have come to talk with me and have asked me many questions. I could only say to them, “You may think that you are better than many people, but I am afraid that you will be the same as you are tonight for the rest of your life. You have many things. You have a great deal of patience and humility. You are a very capable and nice person. You are loving, helpful, and forgiving. You are willing to do this and that. Humanly speaking, it is hard to find a Christian like you. But I must speak an honest word: you only have things. You have to realize that what is truly spiritual before the Lord are not things, but the Lord Jesus Christ. What you are, what you can do, or what you have does not matter; only Christ matters. The only thing that has any spiritual value is what Christ has accomplished in you.” In the spiritual world, there are not many things; there is only Christ. Christ is the matters and things of God.

Touching Christ Being Touching Life

Perhaps I can cover some practical experiences. Please excuse me for mentioning some of my personal experiences. During the past few days,

a brother encountered an accident at home. Because of my responsibility, I should naturally have gone to visit him. By visiting him, I would be able to help him by expressing my personal concerns and also save myself a considerable amount of work later—we should either want to be a loving Christian or not want to be a Christian at all. But the strange thing is that when I resolved to visit the brother, I became colder and colder within while I was on the road. Nothing seemed to respond within me. I immediately knew that I was trying to perform an act of love. I was trying to perform an act of brotherly love, but as I was doing it, I touched death. It was the right thing to do. It was a good thing, but it was not Christ. I was doing it myself. After I did this, the result was an inward death. I touched death within, and I became cold. I touched an act; I did not touch life. This was an act of love, but I did not find the Lord in the act; I could only say that I was the one who loved. Every time we touch Christ instead of a work, we touch life. But every time we touch a work, we will surely die. Any time we try to do something by ourselves, we will surely die.

We have to see that Christianity is just Christ. The Christian life is just Christ. We should not pile a thousand good things together and call them the Christian life. Even if we put all the patience on earth, all the humility, and the myriads of good things together, we still could not make a Christian. If we put the myriads of things together, all we would see is a list of things; we would not see Christ.

A few years ago, my co-workers were always teasing me about “face-saving.” I not only tried to save my own face, but others’ faces as well. I do not like to expose others, and I do not like others to feel bad when they leave my house. I do not like to embarrass others by what I say. Before others feel any embarrassment, I become embarrassed for them already. I like being a gentle person, but when I try to be a good and gentle person before my brothers, something within often tells me that I am dead. I immediately become dead. There is no more life in me, and I touch death. The only reason for this is that gentleness is a thing; it is something that I have worked up. It is not Christ. This is why I immediately fall into death. I touch a corpse. I become weakened and powerless. Something within collapses and tells me that everything is lost.

The problem is that, in God's eyes, whenever we are involved with a thing, we find nothing but death in it. Once we just have a thing, we immediately touch death because what we have is not Christ. But if we touch Christ, we will immediately touch life because Christ is life.

Only The Tree Of Life Being Living

We often become convicted in our work. Those who serve the Lord want to serve Him more. It is a good and right thing to serve the Lord. Our service to the Lord often demands that we suffer, sacrifice ourselves, and expend our energy and our money. But the strange thing is that when we do these things, we often do not touch life. Instead, we touch death, we become weakened, and we feel that something is wrong inside. Something within us tells us that we are wrong. Why are we wrong? While we are serving the Lord, while we are working and planning to do this and that for the Lord, we become weakened, and something within strongly rebukes us. Many times, the rebuke we suffer through sin is not as severe as the rebuke we suffer through doing many good things.

Many people think that the Lord within only rebukes them when they sin. But no! The Lord often rebukes us while we are doing good. The proper principle in God's eyes is not the principle of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but the principle of the tree of life. Being able to differentiate between good and evil is not enough. Everything hinges on life. All those who eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil will surely die the day they eat it; only the tree of life is living.

Two Kinds Of Christian Life

Among God's children, there are two kinds of Christian life. One kind is filled with things, and the other kind is just Christ. Outwardly, both kinds look equally good. One cannot detect much of a difference between the two. One talks about humility; the other also talks about humility. One talks about meekness, and the other also talks about meekness. One talks about love, and the other also talks about love. One talks about forgiveness, and the other also talks about forgiveness. Outwardly, both are more or less the same. They appear to be the same. But with one, we just have a list of things, while with the other, we have Christ. In reality, the two are entirely different.

With Christ, There Being The Need Of The Cross

I would like to point out that when we have things, we do not need the cross anymore. With Christ, there is the need of the cross. The cross restricts us not only from sin, but from our own activity as well. The cross not only tells us that we should not sin, but forbids us from our own activities. The problem with God's children is that they think everything is fine as long as they do something well. They have not seen that the good things are only things. God cares for Christ. Christ is the very good thing. He is the life. If He does not move, we cannot move. It is easy for us to say many comforting words to others. But if He has not said them, we should not, because once we do, we will touch death; we will be inwardly weakened and deflated, and we will collapse. We can help others in many ways. We can be very gentle, and others may consider us nice men. But when we act this way, something within us collapses, and we become weakened. Here we see the need of the cross. The many things we gain through good works do not require the cross. When we allow the Lord to live in us to be our everything, and when He becomes our things, we need the cross. When He does not move, we cannot move. We have to ask the Lord to deliver us from good and righteous acts as much as we ask Him to deliver us from sins. It is easy for us to ask God to deliver us from sins, because we have condemned sins already. But it is not easy to be delivered from the natural life, because many of us have not condemned the natural life in us. We have not seen the natural life, and we have not rejected it.

Christ Being The Healing

What does it mean for Christ to be our matters and things? What is the significance of having Christ as our matters and things? I think we can draw a good analogy from our physical body. Many people are very weak physically. They ask God to heal them. We find three kinds of results or three kinds of faith in this asking. Some people believe that God is their Healer. Others believe that God will give them health and heal them. But a third group believes that God is their healing.

How does a person pray when he has an illness? What does he seek after? He expects God to be his Healer. God is living, and he wants God to be his Healer, to touch him with His power, to be his Physician and

demonstrate His healing power and healing ability. If this is the case, his God is as far from him as his doctor is from him. I wonder if you have heard what I said. This is a crucial word. Many people want God to be their Healer, but the distance between God and such people is as great as the distance between them and their earthly doctors.

Other people are a little bit better. They want God to heal them and give them health. Then one day God heals them, and they recover. Many people pray, make supplications, and expect healings. But why are they continually weak? There are still many weak ones among us today. Many people expect God to be their Healer or to heal them. But having God as the Healer and being healed are outward experiences; they are merely things.

What is the result of these experiences? Many times God is willing to heal us. I am not saying that God will not heal us. God can deal with little children this way. But many times, He will not deal with us this way. When we first believed in the Lord, God might have been willing to be our Healer, and He might have been willing to heal us. But after we have believed in Him for a while, He will put us in His hands, and He will educate us and teach us. Then God will no longer be our healer and will no longer heal us. God reserves the best for those whom He considers the best; He becomes healing to them. He does not give them healing, but *becomes healing to them.* He does not become the healing God to them; He becomes the living God who is healing to them. God is our healing. I do not know how to put this in any better way. I can only say this most reverently before the Lord, that Christ is our healing.

The trouble is that many people only see healing as a thing. They think that this is something apart from Christ and that everything is over after He has performed the healing. You may remember the story of the woman who touched Christ and how He felt the power go out from Him. The Bible says that He perceived that power had gone out from Him (Luke 8:46). I take the liberty to make this word more plain by saying that Christ Himself went out. He was not performing a healing. Rather, He was the healing. When He became the healing, men were healed.

We often may be weak and may still have physical ailments. But we can lift up our head and say to the Lord, “Lord, I do not expect You to be my

Healer, only to go away after my sickness is gone. I do not expect You to heal me, and then find You gone even though the healing remains. Lord, I expect You to be my healing. It is true that You are my Healer, but I want You to be the Healer in me. It is true that You are my healing, but I want my healing to be something personified. My healing should be a person; it should be something personified. It is a person who becomes my health." God becomes my health. Christ becomes my health. Is there a difference between being healed and knowing Christ as my healing? The difference is great! When I learned this lesson, I found that I not only possessed something called healing, but I possessed a person who has become life to my body. Once I saw this, all problems were solved, and I saw that my body has much to do with the Lord. When I have a problem with the Lord, my body immediately has a problem with Him. If He wants to put us through His test or do anything else to us, there is nothing that we can do to resist Him. Everything that we have depends on the Lord. We can only look to Him; we can do nothing. This is absolutely different from making healing a thing.

I thank the Lord for healing me many times. I can say that I was sick on a certain day of a certain month of a certain year, and God healed me on a certain day of a certain month of a certain year. I can tell you many stories about how I was healed at a certain hour of a certain day in a certain month and a certain year. I can count many cases of healing. But those healings were small healings. They were isolated things, and they can be counted. Whether there is one case, two cases, ten cases, or twenty cases, they can be counted. But I can also tell you another story, that at a certain hour of a certain day in a certain month and certain year, God opened my eyes to see that Christ is my healing. This is something that cannot be repeated; it is something that cannot be quantified. Once is enough. It is not a thing that can be counted. It is a person, a personified healing. My healing is a person who is in me as my healing all the time. Praise the Lord that this is a fact. Having God heal me and having Him as my healing are two entirely different things. One is a thing; the other is a person.

Paul was not healed, but he received the healing. Can we see the difference between these two? Paul showed in 2 Corinthians 12 that he was not healed (v. 9). He did not receive the thing which we call healing.

But with Paul, we see One who was his healing continually. His weakness remained with him, but his healing also remained with him. His weakness was chronic, but his healing was abiding. What is a healing? To us, a healing is the removal of something. No, healing is not a removal; healing is acquiring something. Healing is not the removal of weakness but the presence of strength.

When I first saw this matter, the light came very slowly because my mind was filled with things; everything around me was a thing. I did not realize that the Lord wanted to be my thing, and I did not know that healing was not a thing. I only knew that the Lord promised me something; I did not know that the Lord wanted to be my healing. I only knew about the Lord's promise; I did not know about the Lord as my healing. One day I read Paul's story in 2 Corinthians. It was very strange to me. It would have been an easy thing for the Lord to grant him the healing. Removing the thorn was as easy for the Lord as a doctor removing germs. But why did the Lord not heal Paul? I prayed about this, and while I was praying, the Lord showed me one thing. In 1923 Brother Weigh invited me to preach at a certain place. In order to get there, I had to take a little boat along the Min River. The boats often became stuck to the riverbed because the water was too shallow and the rocks were big. The boat owner often had to tug the boat along. While I was praying, this scene suddenly appeared in my mind. I said, "God, it would be easy for You to remove the rocks. Would it not be wonderful if You removed the rocks, and the boat floated on the water instead?" I read 2 Corinthians 12 and realized that this was exactly how Paul prayed. The water was too shallow, and the rocks were exposed conspicuously; Paul prayed that God would remove the rocks so that he could sail on the water once again. But God answered by saying that He would not remove the rocks. Instead, He caused the water level to rise. When the water rises, the boat can pass over the rocks. This is what God is doing. Our problem and our prayer are that we are only for a thing—healing. But His answer is for Him to be our healing. When He is present, we can glide over our problems. Paul's weakness was still there; he did not use his own strength to fight it. If he fought with his own strength, he could only say that his own strength had tabernacled over him. But it was the power of Christ which tabernacled over him (v. 9). It was God who was working. There is a basic difference here. One is God giving me a thing, and the other is God Himself becoming my thing. God

in me becomes the thing that I need. God Himself is that very thing.

“Things” Cannot Go On Forever

The same is true with spiritual things. What do many people desire and seek after? They are after a “thing.” Many sisters have come to me and said that they want patience. I often felt that the word “patience” was too small to them. They wished they could be patient. They thought it would be wonderful if God gave them a dosage of patience and they took it and became patient. They sought patience. This is a dosage to them, and it will last for three to five days. But there is an expiration date on it. After a while, the word “patience” becomes smaller and smaller, until one day the word runs out. If it is a thing, there is always a day when it will run out. Even if it is something one receives through prayer, it will still run out. Sometimes to answer His children’s immediate need and to accommodate their foolishness, God answers their prayers. But God does not answer such prayers all the time. He will not go on this way forever.

In God’s world, there are not many “things.” Christ is all and in all. God only has Christ. He cannot allow patience, humility, or love to continue to exist as things by themselves on this earth forever. What does He want in the end? In the end He wants to show us that Christ is patience, Christ is humility, and Christ is love. He gives Christ, not “things.” One day when our relationship with the Lord becomes proper, the matter of patience will be settled. It is a matter of Christ, not a matter of patience. Once our relationship with Christ is normalized to the degree that God expects it to be, the matter of patience will be settled, the matter of pride will be settled, and ten thousand other matters will also be settled. The issue is Christ; the issue is not “things.”

The Knowing Of Christ

Hence, in God’s eyes everything depends on how we know Christ. What does it mean to know Christ? Some people know Christ as their love. Others know Christ as their humility. Some know Christ more, while others know Him less. Whatever “thing” you know Christ to be, that “thing” becomes your proper knowledge of Christ. This is the meaning of knowing Christ. The “knowledge of Christ” is not an abstract term; it is not something objective. Our knowing of Christ is positive and substantial.

We know Christ by knowing Him as the various “things”; we know that He is this to us or that He is that to us.

Some of you can stand up and testify, “I did not know what it was to be clean, because everything with me, from my heart to my head and thoughts, was all unclean. But thank the Lord that Christ has become my cleanliness. God has made Him cleanliness to me.” You can see immediately that this “thing” is not something that you have; this “thing” is Christ. When Christ lives in you, He brings this “thing” along with Him. It is something that He brings along with Him; it is not something that you have in yourself. This is genuine Christianity.

I must say bluntly that unless a child of God has his eyes opened to see that Christ is his things, he is not of much use, because all that he has is behavior. He is always the one who is doing the works. Even if he prays and God gives something to him, he only has temporary things that have no spiritual value in God’s eyes at all.

To some people, grace from God comes in the form of separate individual things. To others, who also have the experience of grace, their grace comes in the form of a person, who is the Son of God. One day you will say to God, “I thank You and praise You because the grace I have received is Christ. My grace is a person; it is something personified.” When you can tell the difference between these two things, you can tell the difference between life and death. Many brothers can only differentiate between right and wrong; they cannot differentiate between life and death. They can only differentiate between what is good and what is bad. There is only one simple explanation for this: they do not see that everything is in Christ. He, the person, is the matter. He, the person, is the thing. In the spiritual realm, there is only Christ; there are not many matters or things.

If God opens your eyes one day, you will see that this and that are things as soon as you touch them. This is very strange, yet it is very real. A man may be full of many things. He may be patient, meek, humble, faithful, loving, warm, forgiving, and merciful; he may be filled with many things. But what you see is only a big pile of things. You can at least tell the difference between a man’s ring and his finger. You can at least tell the difference between a man’s hat and his head, his glasses and his eyes,

or his clothes and his body. If you can tell the difference between these things, you should be able to tell the difference between a thing and Christ. If you have never seen this, you will be surprised by what I am saying. But if you have seen this, you will see that this is a simple matter. Everything that is a thing is dead in itself, and outwardly it produces nothing but death. It is dead in itself, and when you perform this thing, if you have any spiritual sense at all, you will feel dead as well. While you are doing it outwardly, you sense that the result is death and not life.

The only thing you can say about certain persons is that they are very good, that they are nice men. You can only see good and evil in them; you cannot see anything spiritual in them. You can only say that some brothers are good, that they are nice men, that they have a good temper, that they are patient, and that they can suffer and deny themselves. That is all you can say. If patience, suffering, self-denial, humility, and love are only things, you may love them, but the minute you touch them, you are deadened within, and something collapses within you. There is a reaction against these things. Life has a strong reacting power. Sometimes a person says a very nice word, yet it is something that should not have been said, and there is immediately a very violent reaction within you against it. Take the prayer meeting as an example. What does it mean for you to say amen? It means that you are touched by life. When a brother prays, and the prayer touches your life, spontaneously you respond with an amen from within. Other prayers may be very earnest; the words may be very nice and the tone very loud, yet the more the prayer goes on, the colder you feel within. You wish that the prayer would stop because the prayer is exactly like the person who prays. There may be a thing, but it brings nothing but death. Just as a thing is dead in you, it is also dead in others. Things have no spiritual value at all, because man is doing all the work.

If what we have said is true, there is nothing more we can do before the Lord. We can only look to Him; we cannot do anything or perform any work. Brothers and sisters, we should realize more and more that works are abominable in the eyes of God. If we are truly led by the Lord to go on in this way, we will surely find out one thing: God hates sin, and He also hates behavior. When man sins, God says he will perish. When man behaves, God says he cannot be saved. God rejects behavior as much

as He rejects sins. God only accepts one thing: His Son Jesus Christ. Only what Christ has done in us counts. Thank God that it is Him and not us. It is not we who are humble, but He. It is not we who love, but He. He does not give us the power; He is our power.

Brothers and sisters, I do not know what to say. I hope that the newly saved ones would pay special attention to this matter. As soon as you are delivered from the spiritual things, you will touch the Lord. The sooner you are delivered, the better it will be. The more you procrastinate, the more you will not see. Those who have many things piled upon them cannot see easily. God will have to do a great deal of work in chastising you and putting you down before He can take many things away from you and before you will take Christ. Nevertheless, as you advance somewhat in your Christian life, God will take things away day by day so that He can give you Christ.

I hope that this day will come. One day all the things in heaven and on earth will be headed up in Christ. One day God's Word will be fulfilled, and Christ will be all. Those who do not know that Christ is all today can never expect that Christ will be all. Today Christ is all my things already. He is already all things to me. God has given us His Son already. He has given us Himself. This is what He has given us. Today Christ has to be all in us. There must be no difference between Christ and things. Nothing can be considered a spiritual thing in itself. Only Christ is all. All things are Christ. Christ is all and in all. This has to start in the church; it has to start with us today. We can declare that He is all because we know and acknowledge that He is all. We can also declare that He is in all. He is in our patience, He is in our meekness, and He is in our love because He is in all. One day (and we hope that that day will quickly come) God's Son will be all and will head up all things because He is all and in all! In that day, we will know that what we learned today is for that day. May the Lord bless all of us!

PRAYER

O Lord, we pray for grace before You. Lord, we confess that our eyes are blind; we do not see clearly enough. We know about things, but we do not know Christ. Our Lord seems so far away from us. The things seem so real to us, while Christ does not seem real to us. Lord, we pray that

You would open our eyes so that Christ would become real to us, so that the things will pass away and life will fill us. Lord, we pray for deliverance from the many things, so that we can know the Lord as a person. May the Lord who is our person become our things so that everything in us becomes living and full of life, and so that others would see Christ when they see the things. Lord, we know that these two ways are entirely different. How different is the sinner's way from the way of the righteous. In the same manner, how different is the way of a genuine Christian from that of a false Christian. Many things need to be broken. You have to break us. Do not allow us to deceive ourselves, to think that we have seen it when we have not seen it, to think that we have touched the right way when we really have not touched it, to think that we are full of life when we are full of behavior, and to think that we are full of Christ when we are full of things. Lord, touch us. Lord, build up Yourself in us in a powerful way so that everything within and without us is just Christ, just Yourself.

Lord, bless these words so that they would bear fruit and would bring men back to Yourself in a rich way. May You utter what man cannot utter. May You cover man's weakness and forgive man's foolishness. May You gain something among us. We need to be laid bare. May tonight be the night when many are laid bare, when they see themselves as You see them. May a little light enter us, and may it shine through all falsehood and all performance so that we would see the replacements and everything that is not You. Bless Your own word, and glorify Your name. In the name of the Lord Jesus, amen.

CHRIST OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Scripture Reading: 2 Pet. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:30; Phil. 3:9

Introduction

We have already seen that a saved person should know a few things. First, he should know that he is a son of God. Second, he should know God's righteousness. Third, he should know the righteousness of Christ and that Christ has become the believers' righteousness. Now we want to

consider the difference between the righteousness of Christ and Christ as our righteousness. There is a big difference between these two things, and we must differentiate them clearly.

The Righteousness Of Christ

Most people think that after we become a Christian, everything of Christ becomes ours. But the Bible does not say that we are saved by the righteousness of Christ or that the righteousness of Christ has become our righteousness. The phrase the righteousness of Christ is only used in 2 Peter 1:1, in reference to Christ's own righteousness. Without the righteousness of Christ, we cannot have a Savior. Christ is the Savior because He is righteous. But His righteousness is only related to Him. The righteousness of Christ qualifies and enables Him to be our Savior.

When we read the Bible, we should not change what we read. We should not be satisfied with vague concepts and answers. During the past ten or more years, I have often asked others two questions: By what righteousness are we saved? By whose righteousness do we come to God? Many people could not give the proper answer. They would say that they are saved by the righteousness of Christ and that they come to God through Christ's righteousness. This is absolutely wrong. Let me put it this way: The righteousness of Jesus was the qualification which the Lord had before God when He was a man. This righteousness has absolutely nothing to do with us. We are not joined to the Lord in His walk in this world; we are joined to Him on the cross. Everything that the Lord did on earth has nothing to do with us. We must remember that a grain bears many grains only after it has fallen into the ground. Christians were joined to Christ at His death, not at His birth. When Christ was born in Bethlehem and lived on the earth, men could only follow Him from afar. They could only say, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" (John 1:29). Only when we come to Romans 6 do we see that we are joined to Him in the likeness of His death and resurrection (v. 5). Therefore, a Christian does not become righteous in the eyes of God through the righteousness of Christ, but through Christ Himself. We are saved through receiving Christ Himself.

Christ Becoming Our Righteousness

Once I was talking to a theological student. I said, "The Bible does not

say that we have put on the righteous garment of Christ. It only says that we have put on Christ." Galatians 3:27 says that we have put on Christ. Today we have not put on the righteousness of Christ, but Christ Himself. The righteousness of Christ is something that is in Christ Himself, and it is history. Today Christians come to God through putting on Christ. Christ Himself has become our righteousness, and we can come to God at any time because Christ lives forever.

How can we, as sinful persons with so many failures, come to God? Why should God answer our prayer? One sister did not feel that temper was a sin, and she would not deal with it. Later, she could not get over a particular matter, and she wanted to have a thorough dealing before the Lord. She called me by phone and made an appointment to talk to me. I told her to go and pray. She took my word and went to pray. Before she went to God, the subject of righteousness was not in her thought. However, as soon as she turned to God, the matter of righteousness came. She thought to herself, "With what kind of righteousness should I come to God?" Then she realized that her temper was a sin, and she acknowledged that she did not have any righteousness of her own. A new believer very often prays and asks, "What is my basis for coming to God?" Suppose you are in your bedroom. You can dress any way you like, but when you meet a guest, you have to properly attire yourself. No one ever dresses up to go to bed. This is because you are alone when you go to bed, and there is no need to dress up. But during the day you have to meet people; consequently, you have to dress up. In the same way, as soon as a man comes to God, he considers how he should dress. When a certain member of one's family is sick or in trouble and he is forced to come to God, he often suddenly remembers many sins that he has otherwise ignored.

How do we come to God? First Corinthians 1:30 is a great verse in the New Testament. This verse reveals that a Christian does not come to God through his own righteousness. Neither does he come to God with his many sins. Rather, he comes to God through Christ alone. A Christian's access to God is not based on his righteousness or his unrighteousness. This verse shows us clearly that Christ has become the righteousness of the believers. It is not something about Christ that has become our righteousness; rather, Christ Himself in His entirety has

become our righteousness. Something of Christ can never be as absolute and perfect as Christ Himself. When Christ Himself becomes our righteousness, God receives us.

The experience of many Christians follows a certain pattern: If they read the Bible in the morning and manage to control their temper during the day, they can pray in a strong way at night. But if they fail during the day, their prayer at night is very weak. Actually, even when we sin, Christ is still our righteousness. The fact has not changed, because we are in Christ. If we behave well today and think that we are more qualified to come to God, we are coming to Him by our own righteousness. This is a wrong concept. God does not receive us based on our righteousness, much less on our unrighteousness. His receiving is based on Christ. A Christian does not become more unrighteous through sinning, nor does he become more righteous through doing good. Sin does not diminish a Christian's righteousness, nor do good works increase his righteousness. Our righteousness before God is not dependent on our conduct, but on Christ Himself. Our righteousness before God never changes. Righteousness is a person; it is not a thing. The righteousness that a Christian has is the living Christ; it is not some dead object. Even if we committed all the sins of the world, our righteousness is still Christ Himself. Sooner or later every Christian must realize who this One is who is his righteousness.

Putting On Christ

The robe of righteousness is a good illustration, yet it is not a perfect illustration. In the Old Testament, Jacob cheated his father in order to receive his blessing. Jacob's brother was a hairy man, but he was a smooth man. Rebekah gave to Jacob the coat of Esau and covered his hands and neck with the skin of goats in an effort to steal his father's blessing. This is a disguise; it is falsehood. This is not the way Christians come before God. We have not put on a robe of righteousness; we have put on Christ Himself. We have not put on the garment of Christ; we have put on Christ Himself. Galatians 3:27 speaks of the putting on of Christ. The righteousness which we now have far exceeds our own righteousness. It is Christ Himself becoming our righteousness. Hence we are perfect, and God can now accept us.

What is our basis when we come to God? What is in our mind when we come before Him? Are we fearful when we think of our sin and bold when we think of our righteousness? Or do we think of Christ? Many people are occupied with either their sins or their righteousnesses. Let me allude to the sister that I spoke of earlier. I eventually went to her home and asked about her prayer life. She answered, "I cannot pray well because I have a bad temper." I said, "God does not answer you when you have a bad temper, and He does not answer you when you have a good temper either." She could not understand my word. I sat in my chair and said, in an apparently arrogant way, "I am better than you are in one thing: I have confidence that the Lord answers my prayer. What do you think?" She said, "I do not believe this. This is only what you claim." I said, "I may be as good or as bad as you are, or I may be worse than you are. But the righteousness that I have believed and received is different from yours. I come to God through Christ as my righteousness, not through the righteousness of Christ. Before the Lord I have my own righteousnesses as well as my own unrighteousnesses. Of course, my own unrighteousnesses cannot be reckoned as righteous in His eyes, but my righteousness cannot be reckoned as righteous in His eyes either. This has nothing to do with me loving Him but with Him loving me. I do not preserve myself; He preserves me. It is not my hands that are holding Him but His hands that are holding me. It is not a matter of my faithfulness but His faithfulness." I may have sinned more than all of you sitting here, but I can be bold before the Lord because my righteousness is Christ alone.

A new believer's condition can be quite high, like Paul's experience in the third heavens. At other times it can be quite low, as if he has descended into the abyss. However, we have to realize that the problem of sin has been dealt with by Christ on the cross, and the problem of righteousness has also been settled by Christ on the throne. The righteousness that God has given us is just Christ. Once He gives Christ to us, He will never change His mind. In Christ, God cannot find anyone more advanced than He has already found. This is why our heart rejoices today. When we first believed, the basis of our coming to God was Christ. After being a believer for many years, the basis of our coming to God is still Christ. Our advancement cannot make us more qualified to come to God, and our evil cannot make us less qualified to come to God. Hebrews 4:16 says

that we can come forward boldly to God at any time.

Our Righteousness And Our Conduct

I have been a Christian for over twenty years. My conduct has changed, but my righteousness has never changed. It will not change in another twenty years because my righteousness is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Even if I become as fallen as Demas or Alexander the coppersmith, I will not be more unrighteous than I already am. On the other hand, even if I suffer as much as Paul did, love the Lord as much as John did, and am as bold as Peter was, it will not increase my righteousness at all. My conduct may improve, but my righteousness can never improve. I can advance in holiness, but I cannot advance in my righteousness, because the righteousness that God has given me is already perfect. This righteousness is just Christ. I am the most righteous person on earth because my righteousness is just Christ. Just as Christ never changes and is well pleasing to God, I cannot change, and I am well pleasing to Him.

Once this issue is settled, all the problems that a Christian faces are settled. We have seen that righteousness has nothing to do with sin. Sin is one thing, righteousness is another. If our coming to God is based on this righteousness, Satan can do nothing to accuse us. I hope that we will not take these words as just a kind of doctrine. In the course of our fellowship with God, we have to see something new. We have to see that man's condition before God can be good or bad, but his position before God can never change. If our life as a Christian lasts for twenty or thirty more years on this earth, we may become more advanced, holy, spiritual, or mature, but our righteousness will not change. It will not afford us more boldness, nor will it take away any of our boldness, because our righteousness is simply Christ Himself.

CHURCH AFFAIRS

<TOPIC SKIPPED>