LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE ONE

THE BACKGROUND AND POSITION OF THE BOOK

In the book of Colossians Christ is unveiled to a fuller extent than in any other book in the Bible. In this short book many terms and expressions are used to describe Christ. Before we consider the revelation of Christ in Colossians, we need to pay attention to the background and position of this book, both of which are crucial.

I. THE BACKGROUND

Three verses, all of which are warnings, enable us to see the situation which caused this Epistle to be written--Colossians 2:8, 16, and 18. Colossians 2:8 says, "Beware that no one carries you off as spoil through his philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ." This verse mentions four negative things which can cause us to be carried off as captives: philosophy, empty deceit, tradition, and the elements of the world. In the eyes of fallen mankind, philosophy is very good; it is the most highly developed product of culture. The elements of the world, elementary principles of certain teachings, may also be highly regarded by society. Nevertheless, philosophy, deceit, tradition, and the elements of the world can cause us to be carried off as prey.

In 2:16 Paul says, "Let no one therefore judge you in eating and in drinking or in respect of a feast or of a new moon or of Sabbaths." Here Paul lists a number of things that are positive: eating, drinking, feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths. He warned the Colossians not to let anyone judge them with respect to these things.

In verse 18 Paul goes on to say, "Let no one purposely

defraud you of your prize, in humility and worship of the angels, standing on things which he has seen, vainly puffed up by the mind of his flesh." The prize spoken of in this verse is Christ as our enjoyment. It is possible to be defrauded of this prize through humility, a very positive human virtue.

A. Asceticism Having Saturated the Church at Colosse

The reason Paul gave these warnings was that the church in Colosse had been saturated with asceticism. This asceticism was related to legality of ordinances (2:20-21) and to Judaistic observances (2:16).

B. Mysticism Having Invaded the Church at Colosse

Furthermore, mysticism had invaded the church. This mysticism was related to Gnosticism, which was composed of Egyptian, Babylonian, Jewish, and Greek philosophies (2:8) and to the worship of angels (2:18).

The vital point concerning the background of the book of Colossians is that culture had been brought into the church life. The population of Colosse was a mixture of Gentiles and Jews. The Gentiles and the Jews had different cultures. For the most part, the Gentiles were under the influence of Greek culture with its philosophy. At that time, however, Greek philosophy was no longer pure. Rather it was a mingling of various philosophies. Furthermore, the Gentile culture was at least somewhat blended with Jewish religious concepts.

This mixture of cultures flooded the church at Colosse. The church should be a house filled with Christ and constituted with Him. Instead, the church there had been invaded by culture. To a large extent, Christ as the unique element in the church life was being replaced by various aspects of this mixed culture. The constituent of the

church should be Christ and Christ alone, for the church is the Body of Christ. Therefore, the content of the church should be nothing other than Christ Himself. Nevertheless, the good elements of culture, especially philosophy and religion, had invaded the church and saturated it.

In particular, a type of religious asceticism had made inroads into the church life. Verses 20 and 21, which speak of ordinances regarding handling, tasting, and touching, refer to this. We know that this asceticism was religious in nature because it was related to the worship of angels (2:18). Hence, the asceticism that flooded the church in Colosse was not crude, but refined and cultured.

To some, the worship of angels may seem quite good, far superior to the worship of reptiles, birds, and beasts. Nevertheless, angel worship is idolatry, although a somewhat refined type of idolatry. People of high culture do not worship animals, but they may be open to worship angels. Some justify such a practice by saying that they do not worship idols, but, in humility, worship the heavenly servants of God. Regarding themselves as too low to worship God directly, they may feel that they must worship Him through an intermediary. This concept has been assimilated into Catholicism, which teaches that we may need the help of an intermediary in order to contact God. In principle at least, Catholicism has adopted the practice of using an intermediary in the worship of God.

It is the subtlety of the enemy to flood the church with the elements of culture. This is what he was doing when the book of Colossians was written. His strategy was to send a mixture of Jewish religion and Gentile philosophy into the church and to saturate the church with this cultural mixture. From the human point of view, this culture, particularly its asceticism, was very good. Asceticism has a good purpose and goal; it attempts to enable people to deal with their lusts. However, we must see that Satan's strategy in flooding the church with culture is to use the most highly developed aspects of culture to replace Christ.

Do not think that this phenomenon was limited to the

first century. It is still with us today. In today's Christianity Christ has been almost altogether replaced by other things, especially by good things. The name of Christ may be found in Christianity, but the reality of Christ may be absent. Many things have become substitutes for Christ. For example, even the teaching of the Bible is used by the enemy of God as such a substitute for Christ Himself. Many Christians study the Bible without contacting Christ. Due to Satan's subtlety, any kind of Christian work can also replace Christ Himself. Christian work should minister Christ. However, some Christian works make their particular goal a substitute for Christ.

In today's religion some pastors and ministers may allow their own personalities to replace Christ. Certain Christian workers have attractive, powerful personalities. They use their personalities to draw people not to Christ, but to themselves. This is the reason that many Christians compliment and even praise the personalities of certain pastors. Those who do not have such a strong personality may attract people by their niceness or their humility. Christians may choose to attend a particular so-called church because the minister there is kind and sympathetic.

We in the Lord's recovery may substitute the good aspects of our character or behavior for Christ. If anyone who serves the Lord is sinful or proud, others will be frustrated from coming to the Lord. But the natural meekness or humility of such a serving one is even more damaging and frustrating than his sinfulness or pride. Everyone realizes that nothing sinful can be related to Christ. But not many can discern the difference between good character or behavior and Christ Himself. On the contrary, many identify excellent behavior with Christ. Hence, if we are short of revelation, our good character may become a substitute for Christ.

Because the church is composed of human beings, it is difficult for the church to be separated from society, which is a composition of culture. Yes, as the church, we are

separated from the world; we are in the world, but not of the world. However, the church must remain in society. The believers should not live like monks or nuns. In order to have the church life, we must have a normal human living. The issue at hand is how a unit of people can be in society without being influenced by culture. How can we be saved from the influence of our cultural background? As believers in the Lord, we do love one another. Nevertheless, we may have a special love for those with a back-ground similar to ours. Through such an influence operating in the church life, Christ is replaced by culture.

When Paul wrote the Epistle to the Colossians, a number of isms were exerting their influence: Judaism, asceticism, mysticism, Gnosticism. These isms were among the highest products of both Jewish and Gentile cultures. Being good things, they spontaneously became replacements for Christ. Therefore, Paul's purpose in the book of Colossians is to show that in the church nothing should be allowed to be a substitute for Christ. The church life must be constituted uniquely of Christ. He should be our only constituent and our very constitution. This is the reason that in this short Epistle a number of elevated expressions are used to describe Christ. For example, He is called the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, the firstborn from among the dead, and the body of all the shadows. In 3:10 and 11, Paul says that in the new man there is no possibility of having Greek or Jew, circumcision or uncircumcision, barbarian or Scythian, slave or freeman. Rather, in the new man Christ is all and in all. This means that Christ must be everyone and in everyone. In the new man there is no room for Chinese, Japanese, American, British, French, or Germans. Christ must be every one of us. In the new man Christ must be you and me. Not only must culture go, but even we have to go. It is crucial that we see this revelation.

We need to heed Paul's warning to beware of anything that will carry us away from Christ. Sisters, beware of your kindness, gentleness, and sympathy. Beware of any

human virtues that replace Christ. Brothers, beware of your sound mind, strong will, boldness, and any other virtues that are substitutes for Christ. What subtlety of the enemy to tempt us into trying to be nice, gentle, mild, or attractive! Nevertheless, many preachers and ministers teach and practice this very thing. It seems that such kind, humble, cultivated people attract others to the Lord. Actually, they succeed only in attracting people to themselves. No one drawn to them is truly gained by the Lord. I am concerned that even in the churches in the Lord's recovery some may be attracted to the church life not by Christ, but by the character or behavior of certain brothers or sisters.

The main point in the Epistle of Colossians is the fact that in the eyes of God nothing counts except Christ. This fact excludes both good things and bad things, both sinful things and cultured things. In particular, it eliminates all the good aspects of culture. We have pointed out again and again that the enemy of God utilizes culture to replace Christ. This is offensive to God. If Satan cannot corrupt us with evil things, God knows that he will try to use the good aspects of culture to replace Christ. Among today's Christians, where can you find a group of believers with whom you can sense nothing but Christ? Among the various Christian groups we see many good points. However, these good things are not the Person of Christ Himself, but something that has replaced Him in a subtle way. For this reason, in many groups of Christians it is difficult to meet Christ. Some may preach Christ or teach the doctrines regarding Christ, but even this preaching and teaching becomes a substitute for Christ Himself. If we have a clear view of the situation among Christians today, we shall realize that the background of the book of Colossians exactly corresponds to today's situation. This book was written for us, not only for the saints at Colosse.

If we have a clear understanding of the background of this Epistle, we shall realize that the only way for us to take is the way of the cross. The cross is both a narrow way and a highway. For those not willing to take the

cross, the cross is a narrow way. But for those who are willing to take this way, the cross becomes a highway. In the church we all should be nothing and nobody. This was Paul's attitude when he said that we have died and have been buried. To lay hold of this, we need revelation. Whatever we are, whatever we have, and whatever we do can become a substitute for Christ. The better we are or the more capable we are of doing things, the more Christ may be replaced in our experience. Through the cross, we need to become nothing, to have nothing, and to be able to do nothing. Otherwise, what we are, what we have, or what we can do will become a substitute for Christ. Then in our Christian life Christ will not be all in all. The book of Colossians teaches us that in the church life Christ must be all and in all. Everything that is not Christ must go.

II. THE POSITION

A. The Cluster of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians Being the Heart of the Bible

Just as there is a heart in our physical body, so there is a heart in the Bible also. The heart of the Bible is not the book of Genesis or the book of Revelation, nor even the Gospels. It is a cluster of four books: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. These books were, of course, written according to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, their sequence in the arrangement of the New Testament books is most significant. If you read the New Testament carefully, you will realize that these four books stand out. Before Galatians is the book of 2 Corinthians. There seems to be no connection between 2 Corinthians and Galatians. However, as we read through the New Testament, we sense that Galatians is the beginning of something new and that this book is connected to Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. In particular, Ephesians and Colossians are sister books.

When we turn from Colossians to 1 Thessalonians, we also sense that there is no connection between these books. Hence, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians are a cluster of books that make up the very heart of the Bible.

The essential subject of these four books is Christ and the church. We have seen that the church is composed of human beings who live in society. As such an entity, it is difficult for the church to stay away from the influence of culture. For this reason, in these books concerning Christ and the church, two of them, Galatians and Colossians, show the damage caused by the law, Jewish religion, and other substitutes for Christ such as asceticism, mysticism, and Gnosticism.

B. Galatians Revealing Christ versus Religion with Its Law

According to Galatians, the Jewish religion, the typical religion, was formed according to God's oracle. But this fundamental religion with its law became a replacement for Christ. Hence, in Galatians there is a strong emphasis upon the danger of the law replacing Christ. In Galatians 1 Paul testifies that he was once a leading religionist among the Jews. He was zealous for God and blameless according to the law. But one day it pleased God to reveal His Son, Christ, in Paul. As a result, Paul came to realize that Judaism is contrary to Christ and that Christ is versus religion with its law. Paul could then declare that he was dead to the law and had nothing to do with it. He had been crucified with Christ, and Christ now lived within him (2:20). Furthermore, in chapter six he said that he suffered persecution simply because he did not teach circumcision. Then he went on to say that the world, meaning specifically the religious world, was dead to him and that he was dead to the world. Between Paul and the Jewish religion there was the dividing line of the cross. As far as Paul was concerned, the entire religious world was on the cross. Moreover, to the Jews, Paul also was on the cross. As a man in Christ, he bore upon him the mark of

Christ's death. No longer was he in the Jewish religion,

but was absolutely in Christ and for Christ. Hence, Galatians reveals that Christ is versus religion, the law, and circumcision.

C. Colossians Unveiling Christ versus Human Philosophies with Tradition and Asceticism

We have pointed out that in Colossians Christ is revealed to the uttermost, much more than in Galatians. In Galatians Paul speaks of Christ being revealed in us, of Christ living in us, and of Christ being formed in us. But in Colossians he uses a number of special terms for Christ: the portion of the saints, the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. In this short book, one aspect of Christ after another is unfolded. Therefore, Colossians reveals that Christ is profound and all-inclusive. The all-inclusive Christ transcends our understanding. Our need is to be infused, saturated, and permeated with Him until in our experience Christ is everything to us: our food, our drink, our feasts, our holy days, our Sabbath, our new moon, our everything. We must not allow anything to replace Christ or to be a substitute for Him. This is the central point of Colossians. Whereas Galatians reveals that Christ is versus religion and the law, Colossians reveals that Christ is versus everything because He Himself is the reality of every positive thing.

D. Philippians Stressing the Living Out of Christ

The book of Philippians emphasizes the matter of living Christ. In Philippians 1:21 Paul declares, "To me to live is Christ." For Paul, to live was not human virtues such as meekness or humility; to live was Christ.

E. Ephesians Revealing the Church

Ephesians deals specifically with the church. The issue, the result, of our living Christ is that the church is produced and built up in a practical way.

We all need to spend more time on the four books that compose the heart of the Bible. Viewing these books as a cluster, we see that we should care only for Christ, not for religion or culture. For us to live is not religion, philosophy, or any ism. In our living, Christ must be all and in all. The result of such a living is the church. Therefore, the heart of the Bible, as seen in this cluster of books, is Christ and the church.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE TWO

INTRODUCTION

Colossians 1:1-8 is the introduction to this Epistle. As the introduction, these verses disclose the purpose and subject of the book. Paul's purpose and subject are not stated explicitly, but rather indirectly through various indications to be found in these verses.

THREE INDICATIONS

The first of these indications is the phrase "the hope which is being laid up for you in the heavens" (v. 5). Another indication is found in the words "the word of the truth of the gospel" (v. 5). Notice that here Paul says the word of the truth of the gospel, not simply the word of the gospel. A third indication is seen in the words "fully knew the grace of God in truth" (v. 6). The word fully is an adverb that modifies the verb knew. What do the words "in truth" modify? According to many versions, this phrase modifies the word grace. Others regard it as an adverb modifying the predicate knew. If we understand truth here as reality, not just as sincerity, then it is correct to regard the words "in truth" as modifying the predicate knew. According to this understanding, Paul is saying that we must know the grace of God in its reality.

THE HOPE BEING LAID UP FOR US

Let us now consider the hope mentioned in verse 5. Hope, faith, and love in verses 4 and 5 are the three things which the apostle stressed in 1 Corinthians 13:13. The emphasis there was on love because of the Corinthian situation. The emphasis here is on hope, which, strictly

speaking, is Christ Himself (v. 27), for the revelation of Christ as everything to us.

Some think that the hope that is being laid up for us in the heavens refers to a particular blessing or some kind of glorious enjoyment. When I was young, I was told that, according to John 14, the Lord Jesus is preparing a wonderful mansion for us in heaven and that this is the hope laid up for us. What a mistake! Our hope is Christ Himself. Ac-cording to verse 27, Christ in us is the hope of glory. On the one hand, He is in the heavens, but, on the other hand, He is in us to be our hope.

FAITH AND LOVE

If we would understand this fully, we need to consider the faith and love spoken of in verse 4. Paul says, "Having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and the love which you have unto all the saints." Faith is to realize and receive what is in Christ, love is to experience and enjoy what we have received of Christ, and hope is to expect and wait for the glorification in Christ. Every genuine Christian has faith in the Lord Jesus and love toward all the saints. These two things prove that we are real Christians. Suppose I contact a certain person and tell him that I am one who believes in the Lord Jesus. If he does not respond to me in love, he himself may not be a genuine believer in the Lord. Love for the saints must always go along with faith in the Lord Jesus. They cannot be divorced.

From the time we first believe in Christ, we spontaneously have love for other believers, no matter what their nationality may be. According to my nature and my background, I could never love the Japanese. When I was a youth, I actually hated them because of the damage Japan had caused to China. But after I had been saved and had entered into the Lord's ministry, I was invited to visit some Japanese brothers in Manchuria. I attended a small gathering held in the home of a Japanese believer. As soon as I entered into the room, spontaneously a love for those brothers welled up within me. My hatred for the

Japanese vanished. Those brothers believed in the Lord Jesus, and I believed in Him also. Therefore, we could love one another as fellow believers in Christ. This love is not a natural love, but a love that comes out of our faith in the Lord Jesus. We have to love all the saints, just as the Colossians loved all the saints, regardless of their nationality and regardless of whether they were Jew or Gentile.

In the Lord's recovery there are many nationalities. Humanly speaking, it is impossible for us to be one. However, we praise the Lord that no matter what our nationality may be, we love one another because we all have faith in the Lord Jesus. When I contact brothers from Japan, I do not have any consciousness that they are Japanese brothers and that I am a Chinese brother. On the contrary, I simply have the sense that we are all holy brothers in Christ.

LIVING CHRIST AND LAYING UP HOPE

The reason we can love those whom we could never love naturally is that hope is being laid up for us in the heavens. If I had been the writer of Colossians, I would have said "because of the hope in the heavens." Paul, however, inserted the words "being laid up for you." This matter of hope being laid up for us in the heavens is actually very subjective. It has very much to do with our daily living. According to the context, the laying up of hope in the heavens has a great deal to do with how we live today. The more we love the saints, the more hope is laid up for us in the heavens. However, if we do not love the saints, there will be very little hope laid up for us.

Suppose a certain brother loves all the saints, no matter what their nationality or cultural background may be. Another brother, on the contrary, loves the saints selectively, according to his taste and preference. The one loves all who have faith in Christ, whereas the other loves only a select number of the saints. When the Lord Jesus comes, which brother will have the greater hope? Certainly

it will be the one who loves all the saints. This indicates that how much hope Christ will be to us depends on our living Christ today.

The more we live Christ now, the more hope will be laid up for us in the heavens for our glorification. However, if day by day we do not live Christ, Christ will be there in the heavens, but He will not be laid up as a glory for us. For example, if you deposit a certain amount of the money you earn in the bank, some savings will be laid up for you in your bank account. But if you fail to earn money and have nothing to deposit in the bank, there will be no savings laid up for you. In the same principle, the amount of hope that is being laid up for us in the heavens depends on how much we are living Christ. We need to be those who love the saints without partiality because of the One who is our hope. Such a living is the laying up for ourselves of hope in the heavens.

In this Epistle Paul seemed to be saying, "Dear Colossians, if you follow the Jewish observances or the Gentile ordinances, you will not lay up anything for yourselves in the heavens as a hope. You need to live by Christ. One day, Christ who is our life will appear in glory. At present, both you and Christ are hidden in God. He is your inner life. But He will appear in glory, and you will appear with Him. However, I must warn you of the importance of living by Christ today."

Yes, in 3:4 Paul says that Christ is our life and that when Christ is manifested, we shall be manifested with Him in glory. But suppose we do not live by Him; instead we live by the self and by our preferences, loving only those saints who match our taste. To love the saints selectively is to live by the self, not by Christ. If we have this kind of living, we shall not be happy when the Lord Jesus Christ appears in glory. Once again I say that how much we shall enjoy Christ as our hope of glory depends on how much we live Him out today. Therefore, the laying up of the hope in the heavens depends on our living.

If we live Christ and are one with Him, we should be

able to say, "Lord Jesus, I love You, and I take You as my life and as my person. Lord, I want to be with You in Your glory and see You face to face. I want to enjoy Your presence, even Your physical presence, in a practical way. Lord, I'm waiting for this and I'm expecting this." If you contact the Lord in this way day by day, you will be very happy at His coming.

Suppose, however, that you do not care for the Lord or contact Him. You may not sin or go into the world, but you continually live by the self. You respect the Lord Jesus as the Savior and as the Lord. But although you honor Him, He is not dear or precious to you, and you do not have intimate fellowship with Him. You neither live Him nor take Him as your person. Do you think that, if this is your daily living with respect to the Lord Jesus, you will be excited and shout praises at His coming? Certainly not! Rather, you will withdraw from Him in shame. Whether or not Christ's coming back will be glory to you depends on how much hope you have laid up in the heavens by living Christ today.

CHRIST OUR LIFE

To lay up hope in the heavens is to live Christ and to take Him as our person. Colossians 3:4 is the only verse in the Bible which says that Christ is our life. In John 14:6 the Lord Jesus says, "I am the life." But in 3:4 Paul says that Christ is our life, an expression which is very subjective. Since Christ is our life, we must live by Him and thereby lay up hope for ourselves in the heavens. This is what it means to love all the saints because of the hope which is laid up for us in the heavens.

THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL

In 1:5 Paul goes on to say "of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel." The truth of the gospel is the reality, the real facts, not the doctrine of the gospel. The word, not the truth, may be considered the doctrine of the gospel. In our preaching of the gospel there

must be not only the word of the gospel, but also the truth of the gospel, which is Christ Himself. Christ, the reality of the gospel, must be the reality in our preaching.

However, in much gospel preaching there is only the word, perhaps the eloquent or persuasive word, but no reality. This means that Christ is not ministered as reality to those who hear. Our gospel preaching must be different. Although we may be slow in speech, the listeners must be able to sense that the reality of Christ is being infused into them. Those under such a preaching of the gospel will soak in Christ as their reality.

We need to tell the Lord in prayer that what we desire is not knowledge in letters, but His presence with Himself being infused into us and ourselves being saturated with Him. We want to be under His heavenly shining. The longer we stay under His shining, the more reality will saturate and pervade us. This is the truth which is Christ Himself.

Because the Colossians had heard the word of the truth, the reality, of the gospel, they could lay up for themselves a hope in the heavens by living Christ in loving the saints. By taking Christ as their life, they could love those whom it was humanly impossible for them to love. They could enjoy Christ as life by soaking Him in as the truth of the gospel. In this way, they could experience Christ as their hope. Therefore, in these verses both the hope and the truth are the Christ we experience subjectively.

THE FRUIT OF THE GOSPEL

Verse 6 continues, "Which is come to you, as also in all the world it is bearing fruit and growing, as also in you, since the day you heard and fully knew the grace of God in truth." The love for the saints is the fruit borne by the gospel. When the gospel is preached in reality, it bears fruit. In those who receive it, it produces love for all believers.

The church in Colosse was composed of both Jews and

Gentiles. Humanly speaking, the Jews and the Gentiles despised and hated each other. But after the Colossians had believed in the Lord Jesus, the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers came to love one another. Although such a love is a human impossibility, it is a fruit of the gospel. This gospel which grows and bears fruit is also Christ Himself. It was Christ who was growing in the Colossians from the day they first heard the word of the truth of the gospel.

FULLY KNOWING THE GRACE OF GOD IN TRUTH

In this verse Paul says that the Colossians "fully knew the grace of God in truth." To know the grace of God fully is to know it in full, not in part. The grace of God is what God is to us and what God gives to us in Christ (John 1:17; 1 Cor. 15:10). Actually, grace is Christ Himself. In the first chapter of the Gospel of John we are told that the Word which was with God and which was God became flesh and tabernacled among us, full of grace and truth (vv. 1, 14). Furthermore, of His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace (v. 16). Truth here means reality. To know the grace of God in truth is to know it in its reality experientially, not just in word or in doctrine mentally. Truth is Christ as reality, and grace is Christ as our enjoyment. As we experience Christ and enjoy Him, Christ as the truth becomes our grace. The way the gospel grows in us and bears fruit is through our enjoying Christ and experiencing Him as our grace.

In these few verses we see that Christ is so much to us: our hope, our truth, our reality, and our grace. Only when Christ becomes grace to us can we enjoy Him and experience Him. The more we enjoy and experience Christ, the more we grow, bear fruit, live by Him, and lay up hope for ourselves in the heavens.

The words "in truth" may be regarded either as an adverb modifying the predicate knew or as an adjective modifying the noun grace. The grace of God is in truth, in reality, not in mere doctrine or knowledge. As we listen to

messages given in the Lord's recovery, we often enjoy grace in reality. Through such a ministry of the Word, grace in reality is infused into us. Because this grace is solid and substantial, we can taste it, enjoy it, and live by it.

If we take the words "in truth" as an adverb modifying knew, we see that our knowledge of grace should not be in doctrine, but in reality. This means that our knowing Christ as grace must be in reality. In the gospel Christ is conveyed to us and infused into us both as truth and as grace. We have Christ as our reality, and this reality is our enjoyment. As we live by the Christ whom we experience as truth and grace, we lay up for ourselves hope in the heavens.

A MINISTER OF CHRIST

In verse 7 Paul says, "As you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow-slave, who is a minister of Christ faithful for you." Here Paul points out that Epaphras was a minister of Christ. A minister of Christ is not only a servant of Christ who serves Christ, but a serving one who serves others with Christ by ministering Christ to them.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE THREE

THE APOSTLE'S PRAYER

The subject of the book of Colossians is the all-inclusive Christ. In his introductory word (1:1-8) Paul indicates that Christ is our hope, reality, and grace. In his prayer and thanksgiving (1:9-14) he gives further indications that Christ is the all-inclusive One. Let us first consider Paul's prayer (vv. 9-11) and then his thanksgiving (vv. 12-14).

I. THE APOSTLE'S PRAYER FOR THE SAINTS TO BE FILLED WITH THE FULL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WILL

Verse 9 says, "Therefore we also, since the day we heard of it, do not cease praying and asking on your behalf, that you may be filled with the full knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." God's will here refers to the will of His eternal purpose, of His economy concerning Christ (Eph. 1:5, 9, 11), not His will in minor things.

A. Concerning the All-inclusive Christ as Our Portion

Years ago, when young saints asked about things such as marriage or employment, I referred them to this verse in Colossians. I told them that they should seek spiritual knowledge in order to know God's will. But the will of God here is not focused on things such as marriage, jobs, or housing; it is concerned with the all-inclusive Christ as our portion. The will of God for us is that we know the all-inclusive Christ, experience Him, and live Him as our life.

To know Christ in this way is to have the full knowledge of God's will.

B. In All Spiritual Wisdom

To know and experience the all-inclusive Christ requires all spiritual wisdom and understanding. The words "all" and "spiritual" modify both wisdom and understanding. Spiritual wisdom and understanding are of the Spirit of God in our spirit in contrast to Gnostic philosophy, which is merely in the darkened human mind. Wisdom is in our spirit to perceive God's eternal will; spiritual understanding is in our mind, renewed by the Spirit, to understand and interpret what we perceive in our spirit.

Wisdom is the intuition in our spirit, whereas understanding is the realization in our mind. Through the intuition in our spirit, we sense something concerning Christ. Along with this, we need our mind to interpret what we sense in our spirit in order to have understanding. Then we shall have the utterance to speak forth what we sense and understand. This requires the exercise of all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

The will of God is profound in relation to our knowing, experiencing, and living the all-inclusive Christ. In verse 9 Paul was not praying that the Colossians would know whom to marry, where to live, or what kind of job they should have. His heart was not occupied with such trivial things. In this verse God's will refers to Christ. It was not God's will for the Colossians to follow Judaistic observances, Gentile ordinances, or human philosophies. Further-more, it was not God's will for them to practice asceticism, to treat the body severely in order to bridle the indulgence of the flesh. God's will for the Colossians was to know Christ, to experience Christ, to enjoy Christ, to live Christ, and to have Christ become their life and their person. God's will for us today is exactly the same. It seems as if Paul was saying, "Colossians, you have been distracted, misled, and defrauded by Gnosticism,

mysticism, asceticism, observances, and ordinances. You need to be filled with the full knowledge of God's will. God's will is that the all-inclusive Christ be your portion."

If we know that God's will is for us to be saturated with Christ, then we have the proper knowledge of God's will. Whatever we do should be done in the will of God. We should marry in Christ, work in Christ, and move in Christ. Christ should be our life and our person. This is the will of God.

C. To Walk Worthily of the Lord

In verse 10 Paul says, "To walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work and growing by the full knowledge of God." Walking worthily of the Lord results from the full knowledge of God's will. If we know that God's will is for us to be saturated with Christ, to take Christ as our life and our person, and to live Christ, spontaneously our walk will be worthy of the Lord. Some think that to walk worthily of the Lord is to be humble, nice, and generous. However, a worthy walk is a walk in which we live Christ. We can be humble, nice and generous without living by Christ. Only by living out Christ can we walk worthily of the Lord. Christ is the will of God, and He should also be our walk.

1. Unto All Pleasing

A walk worthy of the Lord is "unto all pleasing"; it is pleasing to the Lord in all ways. God the Father is pleased with the Son (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). In Galatians 1:15 and 16 Paul says that it pleased God to reveal Christ, the Son, in him. Nothing is more pleasing to God the Father than for us to live Christ. Apart from Christ, nothing can please the Father.

The only time we are fully happy is when we are living Christ. If we are humble or kind in a natural way, we are not happy. But if we take Christ as our life and our person and live Him out, we shall be the happiest people on

earth. To live Christ is pleasing not only to the Father, but also to us. The most pleasant thing is to live Christ, to enjoy Christ, and to experience Christ.

2. Bearing Fruit unto Every Good Work

If we walk worthily of the Lord, we shall bear fruit unto every good work. Do not understand this according to the natural concept. Bearing fruit here refers to living Christ, growing Christ, expressing Christ, and producing Christ in every respect. This is the good work Paul has in mind.

3. Growing by the Full Knowledge of God

This kind of work is related to "growing by the full knowledge of God." This knowledge is not the knowledge in letters in the mind, but the living knowledge of God in spirit, by means of which we grow in life. We need such a knowledge in order to live, grow, and produce Christ.

Christ is not only the will of God and our walk, but He is also every good work and even the full knowledge of God. Once again we see that Christ is all-inclusive. The more we get into the book of Colossians, the more we see that Christ is hope, truth, grace, the will of God, and everything to us.

4. Empowered with All Power

In verse 11 Paul goes on to say, "Empowered with all power, according to the might of His glory, unto all endurance and longsuffering with joy." This power is not only the power of Christ's resurrection (Phil. 3:10), but Christ Himself. Within us we have Christ as a dynamo that continually empowers us "according to the might of His glory." This is the might that expresses God's glory; it glorifies God in His might. With this might we are empowered.

By Christ we are empowered "unto all endurance and longsuffering with joy." Because of this marvelous power,

we can be joyful even in sufferings. By means of this power we can take with joy whatever may happen to us. We have reason to be joyful because we have the resurrected Christ as the power within us. If we are joyful during times of affliction, we shall not age so quickly. Instead, we shall look younger than our years.

The Apostle Paul did not pray that the Colossians would have the best husbands or wives, the best houses, and the best jobs. Furthermore, he did not pray that the Colossians would be kept from suffering. To the contrary, he prayed that they would be empowered to all endurance and longsuffering with joy; that is, he prayed that they would have the capacity to suffer long with joy. To suffer long in joy is to endure suffering in Christ. Suffering may actually help us to have an increased enjoyment of Christ. Christ is the joy, the endurance, and the longsuffering. Therefore, Paul's prayer is altogether a prayer for the experience of Christ.

II. THE APOSTLE'S THANKSGIVING

A. To the Father

In 1:12-14 we come to Paul's thanksgiving. In his prayer Paul gave thanks to the Father, who is the origin and source of all blessing. By his thanks to the Father, he brings us to his subject--the all-inclusive Christ.

B. For Qualifying Us to Share the Portion of the Saints in the Light

In contrast to many Christians today, Paul did not give thanks for things such as healing, health, housing, family life, or a job. Rather, he gave thanks to the Father for qualifying us "for a share of the portion of the saints in the light." The book of Colossians concerns Christ, the Head of the Body. Hence, the portion of the saints here is the all-inclusive Christ for their enjoyment. The Father has qualified us not to inherit some heavenly mansion, but to

have a share in Christ as the all-inclusive portion of the saints. We can boldly declare that Christ is our all-inclusive portion.

The Greek word rendered portion in this verse corresponds to the Hebrew word used for the allotment of the good land. After the children of Israel had entered into the land of Canaan, each of the tribes was given an allotment of the land. Of course, our portion, our allotment, today is not a physical land in Palestine; it is the all-inclusive Christ. How we must thank the Father for giving us Christ as our divine allotment!

Each of the tribes had an allotment of the good land, and the members of each tribe had a share of this allotment. In the same principle, we have a share of the portion of the saints. This means that we all have a share in Christ.

In verse 12 Paul points out that our share of the portion of the saints is in the light. Light here is in contrast to darkness in the following verse. When we were under Satan's authority, we were in darkness. But now we are in the kingdom of Christ, enjoying Him in light.

C. For Delivering Us out of the Authority of Darkness and Transferring Us into the Kingdom of the Son of His Love

Verse 13 is the explanation and definition of how the Father has qualified us for a share of the portion of the saints. This verse says that the Father "delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love." For Christ to be the Head of the Body, and for us, His believers, to be the members of His Body, He needed to deliver us out of the authority of darkness, the kingdom of Satan (Matt. 12:26), and transfer us into the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of God's Beloved. This is to qualify us to partake of Christ as our portion.

If we were still under the authority of darkness, we would not be qualified to share in Christ. But the Father has delivered us out of the authority of darkness. Praise Him that we are no longer in the satanic kingdom! Being delivered from the authority of darkness was the first step to be qualified to have a share in Christ.

The second step was to he transferred into the kingdom of the Son of God's love. We have undergone both a deliverance and a transfer. Because Satan is darkness and Christ, the Son of God, is light, therefore Satan's kingdom is the authority of darkness, whereas the kingdom of the Son of God is the kingdom of light. By being delivered out of Satan's kingdom and transferred into Christ's kingdom we have been qualified for a share of the portion of the saints.

D. For the Redemption, the Forgiveness of Sins

In verse 14 Paul continues, "In Whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." The deliverance in verse 13 deals with Satan's authority over us by destroying his evil power, whereas the redemption in this verse deals with our sins by fulfilling God's righteous requirement. The forgiveness of sins is the redemption which we have in Christ. Christ's death has accomplished redemption unto the forgiveness of our sins.

In Christ, the Son of God's love, we have redemption and forgiveness. When we believed in Christ as our Redeemer, God immediately delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of light. Here in the light we are qualified for a share of the portion of the saints. This means we are qualified to enjoy Christ. Because this qualification is an accomplished fact, there is no need for us to pray about it. On the contrary, with Paul we should simply thank the Father for this. However, there is the need for us to pray concerning knowing the will of God and walking worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing. Now that we are in the kingdom of the

Son of God's love, enjoying Him in the light, we must go on to know Him in full and to walk worthily of Him.

The subject of Colossians is the all-inclusive Christ, the Christ who is everything to us. Day by day we may enjoy Him as our portion.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FOUR

DELIVERED OUT OF THE AUTHORITY OF DARKNESS AND TRANSFERRED INTO THE KINGDOM OF THE SON OF HIS LOVE

In 1:13 Paul says, "Who delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love." Paul's word here corresponds to the word given him by the Lord on the way to Damascus. According to Acts 26:18, the Lord charged Paul, "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the authority of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Gk.). Both in this verse and in Colossians 1:12 and 13 Paul speaks of darkness, light, authority, those who are sanctified, and the portion or the inheritance. No doubt, Paul's word to the Colossians reflects the Lord's word to him at the time of his conversion.

Years ago, I thought that the authority of darkness referred only to evil things such as gambling, stealing, and fornication. Later I realized that the authority of darkness here includes a great deal more than this. In the book of Colossians the authority of darkness refers not to evil things, but to religious observances, Gentile ordinances, and Gnostic philosophy. In chapter two Paul linked idolatry, the worship of angels, to philosophy, mysticism, Gnosticism, and asceticism. Asceticism denotes the practice of treating the body severely in order to bridle the indulgence of the flesh. This kind of practice is found in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Catholicism. As we shall see later, ascetism is of no value against the indulgence of the flesh (2:23). Religious observances, asceticism, and

philosophies are not evil. Some observances are even based on God's commandments in the Old Testament; for example, the regulations concerning eating. Nevertheless, when Paul says that the Father has delivered us out of the authority of darkness, he means the darkness of these very observances, ordinances, philosophies, and ascetic practices. All of us regard gambling casinos as under the authority of darkness. But not many think that philosophies or ethical teachings are also part of this authority. Therefore, it is crucial that we understand Paul's use of this term in the book of Colossians.

I. DELIVERED OUT OF THE AUTHORITY OF DARKNESS

A. The Authority of Darkness Being the Authority of Satan, the Authority of Evil in the Heavenlies

The authority of darkness denotes the authority of Satan. God is light, and Satan is darkness. Satan's authority of darkness is the authority of evil in the heavenlies, in the air (Eph. 6:12). This evil refers to something that is in rebellion against God. The authority of evil, of rebellion, in the heavenlies is the kingdom of Satan, the authority of darkness (Matt. 12:26).

B. Related to Death

Darkness is related to death. Where darkness is, there death is also. This darkness is opposed to light, which is related to life. Satan, darkness, and death stand in opposition to God, light, and life. According to 1 Peter 2:9, we have been called out of darkness into God's marvelous light. Darkness is Satan as death, but light is God Himself as life.

C. Delivered from the Devil, Who Has the Might of Death

To be delivered out of the authority of darkness is to be delivered from the Devil, who has the might of death (Heb. 2:14; John 17:15). We have been delivered from the Devil, Satan, by the death of Christ (Col. 2:15) and by the life of Christ in resurrection (John 5:24)

We have seen that the authority of darkness is the kingdom of Satan and that Satan himself is darkness. The kingdom of Satan is a system. Not everything in this system is evil. On the contrary, many things are good, or at least are considered good by society. Satan uses various things, both good and evil, to systematize people and to keep them in his system. For those who are fond of gambling, Satan uses gambling to systematize them. Therefore, in his kingdom there is a ministry, a department, of gambling. However, Satan realizes that others may appreciate knowledge. In order to systematize them, Satan has a department of knowledge in his kingdom. Most people condemn gambling, but hardly anyone condemns knowledge. If we encourage others to stay away from the evil aspects of Satan's system, we shall be appreciated. Satan systematizes some people by luring them into practicing evil, but he systematizes others through their efforts to suppress evil.

Another department of the kingdom of Satan is the ministry of philosophy. After speaking of the authority of darkness, Paul goes on to mention ordinances, observances, philosophies, and the elements of the world, all of which are aspects of this satanic authority. Today a great many people are held under Satan's control by philosophy. For this reason, it is often easier to bring a gambler to Christ than a person devoted to philosophy. In China we found it difficult to convert the followers of Confucius. Satan used the ethical teachings of Confucianism to systematize and to control large numbers of Chinese. Satan controlled them and kept them under his authority through ethical philosophy.

The Jews and the Moslems vigorously oppose the gospel of Christ. The Moslems are controlled not by evil things, but by the principles of Islam. In a sense, these principles are good; however, in another sense, they are dreadful.

Mormons, who are known to be honest, ethical, and

moral in their daily living, also are controlled by seemingly good things. The Mormons not only refrain from drinking alcoholic beverages, but do not even drink coffee or tea. How strict and upright they seem to be! However, Mormonism is part of the authority of darkness, and the Mormons are held and controlled in darkness by Satan.

At the time of Paul, Judaism had become a major part of the authority of darkness. When Paul, a leading religionist in Judaism, was on the road to Damascus, he was fully under this authority. Then the Lord appeared to him and charged him to open the eyes of others so that they might turn from darkness to light. As a result of Paul's confrontation with Christ, he was blinded temporarily. This blindness indicated that he was formerly among the blind. Now, having been brought to Christ, he must seek to turn others from darkness to light, from the authority of Satan unto God. Before Paul was saved, he was under the authority of Satan. The Jewish religion was the authority of darkness through which Paul was controlled.

If we would have the proper understanding of Colossians 1:13, we need to consider this verse in the context of the whole Epistle. Considering the book as a whole, we see that the authority of darkness includes the Jewish religion with its observances, especially circumcision; it also includes Gentile ordinances, philosophy, mysticism, and asceticism. Throughout the world today people are under darkness, just as they were when the book of Colossians was written. To be in darkness is simply to be without light. Every university and every social group is under the authority of darkness. Every aspect of society, including Christianity, is in darkness. Do not think that darkness is found only where there is evil. Paul was telling the Colossians that God had delivered them out from under the authority of darkness, that is, out from legalities, ordinances, practices, asceticism, mysticism, and philosophy. Although these include the highest products of culture, they are nonetheless the authority of darkness by which Satan controls people.

We need to ask ourselves how much we are still under the authority of darkness. We may talk a lot about living Christ, but how much do we really live by Him? In our daily lives, many of us are still under some aspect of the satanic authority of darkness. Unconsciously, subconsciously, and spontaneously we live according to the self, not according to Christ. How much of each day do you live in the spirit and walk according to the spirit? How much time do you still live and walk in the self? Whenever we live in the self, we are under the control of the authority of darkness and are systematized by Satan. We are under Satan's control whenever we are in the natural man or live according to the self. Because of this satanic control, many have the sense that they are in darkness, that they have no light. The reason they are under darkness is that they are still controlled in some way by the authority of darkness. All of mankind, religious and nonreligious ones alike, are in darkness. In this darkness Satan's authority is exercised in various ways to systematize people and to control them.

Satan has many ways to control Christians. New ones who visit our meetings may be under the authority of darkness, especially the darkness of doctrine and of doctrinal understanding. Most Christians are under some form of doctrinal control. They are not aware that this control is the authority of darkness.

Others are under the authority of darkness because they live according to some natural virtue. They may be kind or humble in a natural way. However, even through virtues such as these, Satan may control us and hold us under the authority of darkness. Some do not receive light because they are under the darkness of their natural virtue. Every natural virtue is an aspect of the authority of darkness.

Many saints are controlled by their disposition, either by a quick disposition or by a slow one. Whatever our disposition may be, Satan can use it to control us.

When you read this word about the scope of the authority of darkness and about all the ways Satan uses

to keep us in darkness and to control us, you may wonder how we should live. It may seem that we have no way to go on. Whatever we are, whatever we do, whatever we think, and whatever we say--all is under the authority of darkness. This is our actual situation. The only thing we can do is go to the cross and allow the cross to deal with every aspect of the satanic authority of darkness. The cross is our unique way. We also must believe Paul's word in 1:13. We have already been delivered out of the authority of darkness.

II. TRANSFERRED INTO THE KINGDOM OF THE SON OF HIS LOVE

A. The Kingdom of the Son Being the Authority of Christ

We have been not only delivered out of the authority of darkness, but also transferred into the kingdom of the Son of God's love. The kingdom of the Son is the authority of Christ (Rev. 11:15; 12:10).

B. The Son of the Father Being the Expression of the Father as the Source of Life

The Son of the Father is the expression of the Father as the source of life (John 1:18, 4; 1 John 1:2). The Father as the source of life is expressed in the Son.

The Son of the Father's love is the object of the Father's love to be the embodiment of life to us in the divine love with the authority in resurrection. The Son, as the embodiment of the divine life, is the object of the Father's love. The divine life embodied in the Son is given to us in the divine love. Therefore, the object of the divine love becomes to us the embodiment of life in the divine love with the authority in resurrection. This is the kingdom of the Son of His love.

It is easier to give an illustration of the kingdom of the Son of His love than it is to give an adequate definition of it. Consider your experience. Coming to realize that the Lord Jesus is so loving and lovable, we began to love Him.

As we love the Lord Jesus, we are conscious of a sweet sense of love. Not only does this sense of love include the Lord Jesus, but it also includes us. We realize that we also are the objects of the divine love. As objects of this divine love, we spontaneously come under a certain control or ruling. Before we began to love the Lord Jesus, we were free to do whatever we wanted. But the more we say, "Lord Jesus, I love You," the less freedom we have. Before we began to love the Lord Jesus, we did not sense this ruling or restriction. We could mistreat people or engage in worldly entertainments without any sense of inward restriction. But as those who love the Lord Jesus, we have come under His rule. This rule is not harsh; on the contrary, it is sweet and pleasant. Oh, we are restricted and ruled in such a sweet way! Because of the pleasantness of the Lord's rule in us, we do not care even to speak a vain word or to have a thought that is displeasing to Him. We are ruled and restricted to the uttermost in the sweetness of love. This is the kingdom of the Son of His love.

The more we are willing to be restricted and ruled by the Lord Jesus out of our love for Him, the more we shall grow in life, even in the abundance of life. This indicates that the kingdom of the Son of His love is for our enjoyment of Christ as life. Here we are freed from everything other than Christ, not only from evil things, but also from things such as philosophy, ordinances, observances, and asceticism. When we were holding to our philosophy, ethics, asceticism, and ordinances, we were under the authority of darkness. But God has delivered us out of this authority and has transferred us into a kingdom of love that is full of life and light. Here we have no observances, rituals, ordinances, practices, philosophies, mysticism, Gnosticism, or asceticism. We just have Christ, the Son of His love. Here we have love, light, and life. This is to live by Christ.

To live by Christ means that we do not live by anything other than Christ. If we see what it is to live by Christ, we shall realize that many of us are still under some form of

control established by the self, a control set up and carried out by the self. This kind of control is the authority of darkness. If we are under this authority, we receive no light in reading the Bible, and we have no utterance in prayer. Although the Father has delivered us out of the authority of darkness, out of our natural thought, emotion, preference, and behavior, we may still remain in some aspect of our natural being. This causes us to be held under the authority of darkness. Because, in actuality, we are under the authority and control of darkness and are not in the kingdom of the Son of His love in a practical way, we have little enjoyment of Christ as the portion of the saints.

I can testify that by the Lord's mercy I am not controlled by the darkness. Others may sometimes wonder why, in certain respects, I do not seem consistent. The reason is that I am not under the control of any aspect of darkness. Concerning matters that are not sinful, I am flexible and may give one answer at one time and a different answer at another time. Remember, the book of Colossians does not deal with sin, but with ordinances, practices, and philosophies. Suppose a brother asks me about eating a certain kind of thing. I may tell him that he has the liberty to eat whatever he desires. But to another brother asking the same question I may give a different answer, an answer appropriate to his situation. It may appear that I am not consistent. Actually, it is not a matter of consistency, but of refusing to be under the control of the authority of darkness through ordinances and observances.

To insist on a particular ordinance or practice is to be under the authority of darkness. Our Father has delivered us from the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love. Here we are restricted by the divine love in the divine life. Instead of ordinances, observances, religion, or isms, we have Christ and Christ alone. If we see this, there will be no disputes or divisions in the church life.

If we have anything divisive among us, that is an indication that some element of the authority of darkness

is still with us. The division and confusion among Christians today are the result of the influence of the authority of darkness. If we have seen what it is to live by Christ. we shall not have observances or ordinances. This does not mean that we do not honor the holy Word. We believe and honor the Bible, but we do not take the Bible as a book of observances and ordinances. Instead, we take it as the revelation of the living Christ.

To be transferred into the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love is to be transferred into the Son who is life to us (1 John 5:12). The Son in resurrection (1 Pet. 1:3; Rom. 6:4-5) is now the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b). He rules us in His resurrection life with love. This is the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love. When we live by the Son as our life in resurrection, we are living in His king-dom, enjoying Him in the Father's love.

We have been transferred into a realm where we are ruled in love with life. Here, under the heavenly ruling and restriction, we have genuine freedom, the proper freedom in love, with life, and under light. This is what it means to be delivered out of the authority of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of the Son of His love. Here in this kingdom we enjoy Christ and have the church life. Here there is no opinion or division. Here we have one thing: the church life with Christ as everything to us. This is the revelation of the book of Colossians.

In Colossians the authority of darkness refers to the good aspects of culture and of our character, disposition, and natural being. The authority of darkness includes our virtues, religion, philosophy, observances, ordinances, principles, and ethical standards. God has delivered us out of all this and has transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, where we live under a heavenly rule and restriction. In this kingdom we are not under a harsh rule, but under the loving rule of the Son. Here we do not sense that we are under righteousness, power, or authority, but under the loving and lovable Lord Jesus. The more we tell the Lord Jesus that we love Him, the more we are freed on

the one hand, and the more we are restricted and ruled on the other hand. Because we love Him, we desire to take Him as our person and as our life. This is the proper Christian life for the church life.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FIVE

CHRIST--THE PREEMINENT AND ALL-INCLUSIVE ONE, THE CENTRALITY AND UNIVERSALITY OF GOD

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:15, 18; 3:11

THE BACKGROUND--THE AUTHORITY OF DARKNESS

In His dealings with the Jewish religionists, the Lord Jesus declared that they were blind (Matt. 15:14; 23:16, 17, 19, 24, 26). In John 12:46 the Lord Jesus said, "I have come a light into the world, that every one who believes in Me may not remain in darkness." The Lord let the people know that without Him they were in darkness. Furthermore, in John 8:12 He declared, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall by no means walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." The Lord's word here indicates that anyone who does not receive Him as life will not have any light, but will walk in darkness.

The Gospels indicate clearly that the Jewish religion which was formed and constituted according to God's Word had become darkness. With this darkness there was an authority, the authority identified by Paul in Colossians 1:13 as the authority of darkness. The Pharisees and priests were under this authority of darkness. In fact, this satanic authority of darkness controlled all of Judaism; it controlled the temple, the priesthood, and even the understanding of the Scriptures. Judaism was altogether under the control of the authority of darkness. In the Gospels this darkness is related not to the Gentile world, but to the Jewish religion, to the religion formed according to the Scriptures.

Even more than the four Gospels, the book of Acts

reveals that the Jewish religion had become altogether the authority of darkness under which people were controlled. The Jewish religionists were responsible for casting the apostles into prison and for killing Stephen. Saul of Tarsus was one of these religionists under the control of the authority of darkness. As he was carrying out the will of the authority of darkness through aggressively persecuting those who called on the name of the Lord Jesus, he was confronted by the Lord on the way to Damascus. As Paul testified later, he "saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun" shining round about him (Acts 26:13). Furthermore, the Lord spoke to him, saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 26:14). Through the shining of this light and the Lord's speaking, Saul of Tarsus was delivered out of the authority of darkness and was transferred into another realm, a realm of light, which is the kingdom of the Son of God's love.

According to the New Testament, the Son of God is the expression of the divine life and its embodiment. This means that the kingdom of the Son is a realm of life. The fact that the kingdom into which we have been transferred is the kingdom of the Son of God's love indicates that this realm of life is in love, not in fear. The kingdom in which we find ourselves today is a realm full of life, light, and love.

Just as the Jewish religion has become a part of the authority of darkness, so the church also has fallen under the prevailing authority of darkness. Degradation began to take place not long after the church had come into existence. In 1 Corinthians we see evil things such as division, fornication, and lawsuits. Colossians, on the contrary, deals not with sinful things, but with religion, observances, ordinances, and philosophy. Although the saints in Colosse did not fall into evil things, they did come under the authority of darkness by allowing the highest products of culture to invade the church.

As he was writing the Epistle to the Colossians, Paul seemed to be saying, "Dear saints at Colosse, before I

believed in Christ, I spent years under the authority of darkness in Judaism. But one day I was delivered out of that authority and transferred into the kingdom of the Son of God's love. Through the preaching of the gospel, you also have been delivered out of the authority of darkness and transferred into the same wonderful realm that I am in. Why then have you gone back to the very things from which you have been delivered? You have returned to the Jewish religion and Greek philosophy. You have once again come under those concepts that used to control your thought and life in the past. This means you are now under the very authority of darkness from which you have been delivered. You have been carried off as a spoil, as a prey. Why do you still observe new moons, Sabbaths, and regulations concerning eating and drinking? Don't you know all that is the authority of darkness?" Paul knew that the saints in Colosse had again fallen under the satanic authority of darkness.

In the same principle, the Catholic Church, the Protestant denominations, and the various independent Christian groups are to a certain extent under the authority of darkness today. They are in darkness because for the most part they have Christ in name, but not in reality. Christ is the unique light. Apart from Him, there is no light. The reason so many Christians are in darkness is that they do not have Christ in an experiential way. Those in the seminaries may study theology and Christology, but they may not have the genuine experience of God and of Christ. Therefore, they are without light.

Many believers insist that the Bible is full of light. This, of course, is true. But if we do not read the Word in the Lord's presence, even our reading of the Scriptures will be in darkness. We shall be like the Pharisees addressed by the Lord Jesus in John 5:39 and 40: "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is these that testify concerning Me; and you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." It is possible to have the Bible in our hand and yet still be

blind and in darkness. The religionists were offended when Christ told them they were blind (John 9:39-41). They thought they were in light because they had the Scriptures in an outward way. But actually they were blind because they did not have Christ, who alone is the light of the world. Any place where the Lord Jesus is not present is under the authority of darkness.

We need to apply this principle to ourselves. Any part of our being or of our daily life that is without Christ is in darkness. If we in the Lord's recovery do not have Christ experientially and in a practical way in our daily walk, we are in darkness. Do not think simply because you hear so many messages and teachings you are in the light. It is very possible that you are still in darkness.

For example, we may still be under the authority of darkness in our married life. When a brother is exchanging words with his wife, both he and his wife are in darkness. Because they are in darkness, they accuse and blame each other. The same is true when there are arguments between brothers or between sisters. Our experience testifies that whenever we live, walk. and behave in the self, we are in darkness. There is no need to commit some gross sin in order to be in darkness. Simply living according to the self puts us in darkness, for it causes us to be separated from Christ.

We should never think that darkness prevails only in Judaism, in Catholicism, or in the denominations and divisions, but not in us. It is possible that we ourselves may still be under the authority of darkness. Whenever we are in the natural man, not taking Christ as our person and living by Him, we are in darkness. We must remember that He alone is light. He must saturate and prevail in every aspect of our daily living. Otherwise, at least certain parts of our daily walk will not be filled with Christ, and those parts of our life will be in darkness.

Our homes have many rooms. Some rooms may be in the light, whereas others may be dark. The same may be true of our inner being and of our daily living. In certain

respects, our life and our walk may be bright, full of light, because Christ occupies the prevailing position there. However, in other parts of our being or in other aspects of our living, we may be closed to the Lord and not allow Him to touch us. Those parts of our life and living that are closed off from Christ are spontaneously in darkness because Christ, the One who is the very light, has no place. Only when Christ occupies every part of us and every aspect of our daily walk can we be wholly in the light and altogether be delivered from the control of the authority of darkness.

The mistake the Colossians were making was that of receiving and following something other than Christ. To accept something in place of Christ is not only to be in darkness, but also to be under the controlling authority of darkness. Anything that is a substitute for Christ--philosophy, religion, character, virtues, concepts, opinions--becomes the authority of darkness to control us. At Colosse, the authority of darkness was Jewish religious observances, pagan ordinances, philosophy, mysticism, and asceticism. Although these things seemed to be good, they were actually the authority of darkness because they replaced Christ. They caused Christ, the light, to be set aside. Therefore, darkness became prevailing once again and controlled the saints in the church. This was the situation in Colosse, and may also be the situation today.

THE PREEMINENCE AND ALL-INCLUSIVENESS OF CHRIST

With this as the background, we need to see that Christ is the preeminent and all-inclusive One, the centrality and universality of God. The book of Colossians reveals that Christ is preeminent, that He has the first place in everything. Both in the first creation and in the new creation Christ occupies the first place. In 1:15 we are told that Christ is the "firstborn of all creation," and in 1:18, that He is the "firstborn from among the dead." The new creation of God is by resurrection. For Christ to be

preeminent in the new creation means that He is the first in resurrection. He is the first both in creation and in resurrection. This means that He is the first in the old creation, the universe, and in the new creation, the church. The universe is the environment in which the church exists as the Body of Christ to express Christ in full. Christ is not only first in the church, the Body, but also first in the environment, the universe. This means that He is first in every-thing.

Colossians 1:19 says, "For in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell." What is the fullness spoken of in this verse? Many would answer that it is the fullness of the Godhead. Although this is correct, here Paul does not modify the word fullness by a phrase such as "of the Godhead" or "of God." He simply says that all the fullness was pleased, was happy, to dwell in Christ. There is something in this universe known as the fullness, and this fullness is pleased to dwell in the preeminent, all-inclusive Christ.

Many Christians fail to distinguish between the fullness and the riches. When they speak of the fullness of the Spirit, they mean the riches of the Spirit. In 1:19 fullness does not denote the riches of what God is, but the expression of those riches. All the expression of the rich being of God, both in creation and in the church, dwells in Christ. All creation and all the church are filled with Christ as such an expression of God's riches. Such a fullness is pleased with this. This is pleasant to Christ.

Fullness here means expression. If something has no fullness, it cannot be expressed. But if a thing has fullness, it can be expressed. For example, if I have very little love, my love cannot be expressed. But if my love is full, the fullness of my love will be its expression. In the same principle, the fullness is the expression of all that God is.

In 1:19 Paul speaks of the fullness as the fullness, using no word to modify it. This indicates that he is speaking of the unique fullness. To modify the fullness in any way would imply that it is not unique. In order to preserve the

uniqueness of the fullness, Paul did not use a modifier. Hence, the fullness here is simply the fullness.

The fullness, the expression of God, is a person. Many of the personal pronouns in the verses following 1:19 refer to the fullness as a person. This indicates that the fullness is the expression of God, even God Himself. In this fullness the Son is preeminent, for all the fullness is pleased to dwell in Him. Therefore, He must have the first place in the environment and in the church. He is the preeminent One.

He is also the all-inclusive One. Christ is the reality of all the positive things in the universe. If we know the Bible and God's economy, we shall realize that Christ is the heavens, the earth, the sun, life, light, the star, trees, flowers, water, air, and food. The material things are pictures of what He is to us. Furthermore, Christ is all the divine attributes, such as power, holiness, righteousness, kindness, and love. He is also the human virtues. such as humility and patience. Moreover, He is the church and every member of the church, God's building and every stone in the building. This means that Christ is you and me.

Some twist our words and falsely accuse us of teaching pantheism. Pantheism is the satanic belief that identifies God with the universe. This is devilish, and we repudiate it without reservation. But according to the revelation of the Bible, we must testify that Christ, the all-inclusive One, is the reality of all positive things. When we say that Christ is you and me, we do not mean that we are God or that we shall ever become God. Likewise, when we say that Christ is the real food (see John 6:55), we do not mean that physical food is God. Such a concept is not only absurd, but also satanic. Those who accuse us of teaching pan-theism have never seen the all-inclusiveness of Christ.

As the all-inclusive One, Christ is the centrality and universality of God. This expression was first used by Brother Nee in 1934, at the third overcomer conference held in Shanghai. He pointed out from the book of

Colossians that the all-inclusive Christ is the center and the circumference of God's purpose. Christ is both the centrality and universality of God's purpose. He is the hub and also the rim. In other words, Christ is all. Again I say that this is not pantheism. It is simply a statement of the fact that Christ is both the center and the circumference of God's economy.

When I first heard Brother Nee speak of the centrality and universality of Christ, I was greatly surprised. Never before had I heard such a thing. From my experience in the years since 1934 I can testify that Christ truly is the center and the circumference, the centrality and universality of God's economy. In God's economy Christ is everything.

The saints in Colosse were wrong in turning to religion and philosophy. Such things are against God's economy, where there is room only for Christ, the One who is all and in all.

I. CHRIST IN THE GOSPELS

A. Incarnated to Put On the Old Creation

Let us now, in the way of an overall survey, look at Christ in the Gospels, in the Acts, in the Epistles, in Revelation, and then in Colossians. In the Gospels we see that Christ was incarnated to put on the old creation. John 1:14 says that the Word became flesh. Flesh here denotes man of the old creation. Strictly speaking, God did not create the flesh; He created a body for man. But through the fall, sin entered into man's body and caused it to become flesh. Hence, the flesh in John 1:14 refers to man as part of the old creation. Man, the head of creation, had become flesh. By incarnation Christ became a man and thereby put on the old creation.

B. Passing through Human Living to Express God

Throughout His human living, Christ expressed God. John 1:18 says that no one has ever seen God, but the Son has declared Him. During the thirty-three and a half years

of His life on earth, Christ declared God and expressed Him.

C. Crucified to Terminate the Old Creation

When Christ was crucified, He terminated the old creation. If a Jew were asked what happened when Jesus was crucified, he would probably answer that a man named Jesus of Nazareth died on the cross. A new Christian may say that it was his Savior who was crucified. A more advanced Christian may reply that not only was Christ crucified as his Savior, but that he himself also was crucified with Christ. An even more advanced Christian may answer that Christ, the self, Satan, and the world were all dealt with on the cross. However, not even this answer is sufficient. On the cross, Christ crucified sin, Satan, the world, the old man, and the entire creation. Moreover, the law of commandments in ordinances was also crucified there. Therefore, the death of Christ terminated the entire old creation.

D. Resurrected to Produce the Church, the New Creation

According to the Gospels, Christ was resurrected to produce the church, the new creation. He was the one grain of wheat that fell into the ground and produced many grains in resurrection to form the church (John 12:24).

II. CHRIST IN THE ACTS

In the Acts we see that Christ has been exalted to be the Head over all things to the church. Acts also reveals that after His exaltation Christ descended as the Spirit to carry out God's intention. Furthermore, the book of Acts reveals that Christ has been propagated to bring the church into existence.

III. CHRIST IN THE EPISTLES

In the Epistles we see that Christ is our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30), our life (1 John 5:12), our life supply (Phil.

1:19), our holiness (1 Cor. 1:30), our redemption (1 Cor. 1:30), and our glory (1 Tim. 1:1). All these aspects of Christ

indicate that we shall experience a full transformation resulting in glorification.

IV. CHRIST IN REVELATION

In the book of Revelation we see that Christ is the testimony of the churches. In the churches we testify only to Christ. Furthermore, in Revelation we see that Christ is the King in the coming kingdom and, ultimately, the center of the New Jerusalem in eternity.

V. CHRIST IN THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS

We have seen that in the book of Colossians Christ is the preeminent One (1:15, 18) and the all-inclusive One (3:11). He is the centrality and universality of God's economy. In Colossians Paul uses a number of unique expressions to describe Christ, expressions that are not found elsewhere in the Scriptures. This indicates that in Colossians we have the highest revelation of Christ found in the Bible. This book is like Mount Zion, the highest peak among the mountains. We appreciate this book because, in a unique way, it presents Christ as the preeminent and all-inclusive One, the centrality and universality of God.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE SIX

CHRIST--THE PORTION OF THE SAINTS

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:12-14; Gen. 12:2b, 3b, 7; Gal. 3:14

In this message we shall consider Christ as the portion of the saints. In 1:12 Paul says. "Giving thanks to the Father, Who qualified you for a share of the portion of the saints in the light." As we shall see, the portion of the saints is the all-inclusive Christ for our enjoyment.

THE PROMISE OF THE LAND

According to the book of Genesis, no promises were given that involved blessing or enjoyment before the call of Abraham. Of course, in Genesis 3:15 there is the promise that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. This promise, however, does not involve a promise of blessing or enjoyment. In chapters four through eleven of Genesis there is no record of such a promise. A promise of blessing is first mentioned in Genesis 12, at the time God called Abraham out of his country and his father's house. Here the Lord specifically mentions the land (Gen. 12:1).

We may be familiar with the story of Abraham and assume that we understand everything related to it. As we read of God's calling of Abraham and of the promises made to him, we may take things for granted. Thus, when we read about the land, we may have no impression of its significance. However, if we read the Word carefully, we shall surely realize that God's promise to Abraham concerning the land is striking and very important. This promise made in Genesis is a seed that grows and develops throughout the Old Testament. In a very real sense, apart from the first eleven chapters of Genesis, the entire Old

Testament is a story about the land of Canaan. The subject of the Old Testament is this good land, the land flowing with milk and honey. Nevertheless, few Christians pay adequate attention to this.

When I was with the Brethren, I was encouraged to study typology and prophecy. However, three important matters were not brought to my attention, and I received no help with respect to them. These three matters were God's creation of man in His own image, after His likeness, and with His dominion; the tree of life, the river with the precious materials, and the bride built from Adam's rib; and the promise of the good land. Only after I had been a Christian for years did I begin to focus my attention on these things. Those familiar with my messages realize that, in one way or other, they deal with these three things.

God's promise to Abraham with respect to the good land is of great significance. When Paul was writing the Epistle to the Colossians and was speaking of the portion of the saints, he no doubt had in mind the picture of the allotting of the good land to the children of Israel in the Old Testament. The Greek word rendered portion in 1:12 can be also rendered lot. Paul used this term with the Old Testament record of the land as the background. God gave His chosen people, the children of Israel, the good land for their inheritance and enjoyment. The land meant everything to them. In fact, the question of the land is a serious issue in the Middle East even today. The problem in the Middle East regarding Israel and the surrounding nations is a problem of the land.

THE SEED AND THE LAND

The promise to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 was the promise of the seed of the woman. But the promise God made to Abraham was not only that of the seed, but also that of the land. The seed promised in Genesis 3:15 becomes the land in Genesis 12. When the children of Israel entered into the land of Canaan, they inherited not

only the seed. but also the land. We may interpret the seed both as a person and also as a seed sown into soil. This means that Christ is not only a descendant, but a seed sown into the land. Christ is both the seed and the land.

In Colossians do we have Christ as the seed or the land? In this book Christ is both the seed and the land. Colossians 2:7 says that we have been rooted in Christ. This indicates that He is the land. But in 3:4 we are told that Christ is our life. This indicates that He is also the seed. However, in Colossians Christ is revealed more as the land than as the seed. Christ is our portion, our lot, our everything, just as the land was all things to the children of Israel. The land provided whatever the children of Israel needed: milk, honey, water, cattle, grain, minerals. In writing this Epistle, Paul employed the concept of the all-inclusive land in order to charge the misled Colossians not to take anything other than Christ Himself. Anything that is not Christ is related to the authority of darkness, and we should not accept it. Rather, we should simply remain in the good land and not allow any foreign element to come in. Christ alone is our portion, and we should accept only what is of Him.

THE SPIRIT BEING THE GOOD LAND

Before Paul wrote Colossians, he wrote the Epistle to the Galatians. In Galatians 3:14 he says, "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Some Christian teachers believe that the blessing of Abraham refers to justification by faith. According to the context, however, this blessing must refer to the good land. In Genesis 12 the blessing God promised to give Abraham was the land. In Galatians 3:14 Paul links the blessing of Abraham to the promise of the Spirit. This indicates that the promise of Abraham, the promise of the good land, is the Spirit. Hence, the Spirit is the good land.

In Galatians 3:14 Paul speaks of the Spirit. This should remind us of John 7:39. This verse says. "The Spirit was

not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified." The Spirit in Galatians 3:14 and John 7:39 is the ultimate expression of the Triune God. The Spirit is a unique term which denotes the processed God. The Father is the source. The Son of God as the course was incarnated, lived on earth, was crucified, and on the third day was resurrected. Incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection are all aspects of a process. In resurrection, Christ, the last Adam, became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). According to John 1:14, the Word, who was God, became flesh. According to 1 Corinthians 15:45, the last Adam, who is Christ, became the life-giving Spirit. Many Christian teachers argue that the life-giving Spirit in this verse is not the Holy Spirit. To believe this is to believe that there are two Spirits who can give life, the Holy Spirit and the life-giving Spirit. The life-giving Spirit is no doubt the very Holy Spirit who gives life. This Spirit is the ultimate consummation of the processed God. This Spirit is nothing less than the all-inclusive Christ. As the good land is an all-inclusive type of Christ, and as Christ has become the Spirit, so the Spirit, the all-inclusive Spirit as the processed God, is eventually the good land to us, the New Testament believers, as a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that all the nations of the earth would be blessed in him (Gen. 12:3).

According to Galatians 3:14, the promise is the promise of the Spirit. But Galatians 3:16 says that the promises were made to Abraham's seed, which is Christ. It is difficult to reconcile these verses. On the one hand, the Spirit is the all-inclusive Christ. On the other hand, this promise, this Spirit, was given to Christ as the seed. Although this is difficult to explain doctrinally, it is rather easy to understand according to experience. When we believed in the Lord Jesus, we received Him as the seed, as life. However, this seed is the all-inclusive, life-giving Spirit, the reality of the good land. This means that the very Christ whom we received as the seed is the Spirit typified by the good land. Christ came into us as the seed. But as we live by Him, He becomes the land which is our portion.

DELIVERED OUT OF THE AUTHORITY OF DARKNESS AND TRANSFERRED INTO THE ALL-INCLUSIVE CHRIST

Just as the good land was the portion of the children of Israel, so Christ today is the portion of the saints. We have pointed out that as Paul was composing 1:12 he had in mind the type of the land of Canaan. In 1:13 he goes on to say, "Who delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love." This verse reminds us of the way the children of Israel were delivered out of Egypt and transferred into the good land. Thus, Paul's concept in 1:13 is the same as that revealed in the exodus from Egypt and in the entering into the good land. In ancient times, God delivered His people out of Egypt and brought them into the good land. God the Father has done the same thing with us. He has delivered us out of the authority of darkness, typified by Pharaoh and Egypt, and has transferred us into the all-inclusive Christ, typified by the good land. Just as the children of Israel were transferred out of Egypt into a land flowing with milk and honey, a land where there was no tyranny, so we have been transferred into a marvelous realm, called the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love. Therefore, to be qualified for a share of the portion of the saints is actually to enter into the good land. Paul's composition of 1:12 and 13 is thus according to the picture in the Old Testament.

THE PASSOVER, THE MANNA, AND THE LAND

In writing 1 Corinthians Paul also used pictures from the Old Testament. In 1 Corinthians 5:7 we see that Christ is the Passover, and in 10:3 and 4, that He is the manna. According to the pictures in the Old Testament, it was by the passover lamb that the children of Israel were delivered from Egypt, and it was by the manna that they were sustained in the wilderness. The tabernacle erected in the wilderness typifies the movable church life. This kind of church life is not solid or well established. After the children of Israel had entered into the good land and had

enjoyed the blessing promised to Abraham, they built the temple with stone, by the unsearchably rich supply of the good land. The temple typifies the solid church life. In 1 Corinthians we have the church typified by the tabernacle, but in Colossians and Ephesians, the church typified by the temple. The Christ we enjoy in Colossians is not simply the lamb and the manna, but the good land, the lot, the portion of the saints.

Many Christian teachers speak about the passover, the manna, and the tabernacle. But I doubt that any have seen that the good land is a type of the all-inclusive Christ. This type of Christ can be fulfilled only by the Spirit. Christians may know the Spirit of God, but they may not know the Spirit, the all-inclusive, life-giving Spirit as the ultimate expression of the processed Triune God as the fulfillment of the promise of the good land. For us, the good land promised by God to Abraham is the Spirit. In other words, the Spirit is the blessing God promised to Abraham.

WALKING IN SPIRIT

In Galatians 5:16 Paul charges us to walk in spirit. The spirit should be our realm, the sphere, in which we walk. Furthermore, in Galatians 5:25 Paul says, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in spirit" (Gk.). This indicates that the Spirit is our good land. The Christ revealed in the New Testament, especially in Colossians, is the all-inclusive land. This land is Christ as the all-inclusive Spirit. Hallelujah, we have received a share in such a portion!

THE NEED FOR AN EXODUS

If we see this, we shall not allow things other than Christ to invade the church. The Colossians were troubled by ordinances, practices, philosophy, and asceticism because they did not see that Christ as the all-inclusive Spirit was their portion, their good land. In place of this portion, they accepted observances, ordinances, and philosophy. In principle, the same is true of today's

Christianity. Christianity has been invaded by culture. Not one part of Christianity has been exempt from this. All of Christianity has been flooded by culture. The purpose of the Lord's recovery is to bring us out of all this to Christ Himself. At first, the world was Egypt. Now the religion of Christianity has become an Egypt where God's people are held in bondage. The Lord's people today need an exodus. Many of us can testify that when we came into the church life, we made an exodus and were delivered out of the authority of darkness.

ONLY CHRIST

When the children of Israel were wandering in the wilderness, they remembered the flavor of the leeks, onions, and garlic they enjoyed in Egypt, and they still longed to eat that kind of food. But when the children of Israel entered into the good land, nothing with an Egyptian flavor was brought into Canaan. That would have been blasphemous to God. To bring into the church something other than Christ is also a blasphemy. In the good land there are no Egyptian leeks, onions, and garlic. In the good land we enjoy only the produce of the land. In the same principle, there is no worldly "garlic" in the church life, only Christ as the portion of the saints. If we see this, we shall be kept from bringing any foreign element into the Body of Christ.

We have seen that the portion of the saints is Christ as the good land, the all-inclusive Christ as the life-giving Spirit. Firstly, Christ is the seed that gives us life. Then He becomes the kingdom, the realm, the sphere, in which we live and walk, Therefore, Christ is our seed and our land, our life and our realm. This is Christ as the portion of the saints.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE SEVEN

PARTAKING OF CHRIST IN THE LIGHT

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:12-13; Gen. 1:3; Psa. 36:9; 119:105; Isa. 2:5; Matt. 4:16; John 1:4; Acts 26:18; 1 John 1:5; Rev. 21:23

In 1:12 Paul says that the Father has qualified us "for a share of the portion of the saints in the light." Many may read this verse without paying attention to the phrase "in the light." Christ, our portion, is to be enjoyed by us in the light. In this message we need to consider what it is to partake of Christ, the portion of the saints, in the light.

The Bible reveals that when God restored the universe He had judged because of the rebellion of Satan, the first thing He did was to cause light to appear. Darkness had been on the surface of the deep. Then God said, "Let there be light," and light came forth (Gen. 1:3). This took place on the first day. On the fourth day we see a more solid form of light: the sun, the moon, and the stars. The light on the first day was rather abstract and unsubstantial, but on the fourth day we have the solid luminaries. By this we see that the re-creation of the universe, or its restoration, was carried out by light.

References to light abound in the Old Testament. Psalm 36:9 says, "In thy light shall we see light." In Psalm 119:105 the psalmist declares, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Furthermore, Isaiah 2:5 says, "O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord."

Although the Bible has much to say about light, it is difficult to give an adequate definition of light. Light is real and substantial, yet it is mysterious. Nevertheless, the Bible indicates that light was a basic factor in the

restoration of the universe and that light is necessary for God's people to walk in His presence.

Matthew 4:16 says that when Jesus was walking through Galilee, the "people sitting in darkness saw a great light, and to those sitting in the region and shadow of death, to them light sprang up." In John 8:12 the Lord Jesus said that He is the light of the world and that whoever follows Him will not walk in darkness, but have the light of life. However, if we do not follow Him as the light, we shall be in darkness. Furthermore, at the time of Paul's conversion, the Lord Jesus told him to open the eyes of people so that they may turn from darkness to light (Acts 26:18). This indicates that unbelievers, whether Jews or Gentiles, are in darkness. Anyone who does not believe in the Lord Jesus is in darkness and needs to turn from darkness to light. Furthermore, 1 John 1:5 says that God is light and that in Him there is no darkness. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in darkness, we lie. Since God is light, if we have fellowship with Him, we also shall be in the light.

I. THE LIGHT

The Bible reveals that the light is related to God, the Word of God, Christ, the life of Christ, the believers, and the church.

A. God

We have pointed out that 1 John 1:5 says that God is light. He alone is the source of light. The Word of God, Christ, the life of Christ, the believers, and the church can all be light because they have God as their source.

B. The Word of God

Psalm 119:105 says that the Word of God is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, and 119:130 says that the entrance of God's words gives light. The Word of God is light because it contains God. If the Bible did not contain

God, the words of the Bible could not enlighten us. The source of the Bible is God, and God is light. Therefore, the words of the Bible are the shining of light.

C. Christ

In John 9:5 the Lord Jesus said, "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." God and Christ are one. Since God is light, Christ also is light. Christ is the light of the world in a very definite way. The world in John 9:5 denotes society, mankind. Thus, Christ is the light not just in a general way, but in a definite way as the light of society, of mankind.

D. The Life of Christ

The life of Christ is also light. John 1:4 says, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." When we receive Christ as life, this life becomes light in us, shining upon us and enlightening us from within.

E. The Believers

Those who believe in Christ are also the light. Speaking of the believers, the Lord Jesus said, "You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). In Philippians 2:15 Paul says that the believers "shine as lights in the world." The Greek for lights is better rendered luminaries. A luminary does not have light in itself; it reflects light that comes from another source. The believers are luminaries. In ourselves we have no light. The light comes from the oil, the Spirit, burning within us. The source of our light is not ourselves, but Christ as the Spirit.

F. The Church

In Revelation 1:20 we see that the church is a lampstand, a stand that holds and supports a burning lamp. The lamp is Christ with God in Him as light (Rev. 21:23). In the universe there is one light, God Himself. The Triune God is the unique light.

II. PARTAKING OF CHRIST IN THE LIGHT

Colossians 1:12 indicates that we partake of Christ as the portion of the saints in the light. Since God alone is light, we must turn to God and be in His presence in order to partake of Christ. We have been called into the marvelous light of God (1 Pet. 2:9). Before we were saved, we were altogether in darkness. Everything related to us and our human situation was in darkness. When the gospel came to us, it came with light. This caused us to repent to God. As we repented, we spontaneously opened to Him. At the time we repented and were saved, we experienced something shining within us. We believed in the Lord Jesus and thanked Him for dying on our behalf, and we received Him as our Savior and Lord. In this way, the inner shining was intensified. Therefore, at the time of our conversion, light entered into us. Many of us can testify that in the days following our conversion we experienced such a light. In that light Christ became our portion. Although we did not have this kind of knowledge at the time, we did have this experience.

However, after we were saved, we were distracted from this inner shining. Many of us were encouraged by diligent Christian workers to pay attention to doctrine and Bible teaching. Hence, instead of remaining in the presence of the Lord and treasuring the inner shining, we turned to good things that are not Christ Himself. We exchanged the presence of Christ for doctrine, for some type of observance or practice, and thereby lost the inner shining. The result was that once again we were in darkness. Before we were saved, we were in the horrible darkness of the world. But after we were saved, we were in the darkness of teachings, observances, works, formalities, and religious rituals. Some of these things may be good, but they are not Christ Himself. Having been distracted from God as the light, we lost the enjoyment of Christ as our portion.

In more than fifty years of contacting Christians, it has been hard to find any who speak of the enjoyment of

Christ. Do you know of Christians who testify of Christ as their portion and who encourage others to partake of Christ and to enjoy Him? When I was young, I was taught to follow Christ and to walk in His steps. I was also charged to worship Him as the Lord and Master in the heavens. But I was never told that I could enjoy Christ. I was not taught that Christ is my life supply and the portion for my enjoyment.

When we were saved, we had a sense of the sweetness of Christ. Deep within, we realized how enjoyable Christ is. Then through the help of pastors, ministers, and Christian workers, many of us were distracted and led away from the enjoyment of Christ. We turned from the inner sense of the sweetness of Christ to religious duty. This brought us into darkness again, and the inward shining ceased. Many of us spent years in this condition. But one day, out of desperation, we laid aside our religious duty, turned to the Lord, and cried out to Him. We asked Him what had happened to us. By turning to the Lord, we turned once more from darkness to light. Then, in the light, we again began to enjoy Christ as the portion of the saints.

The only way to partake of Christ and to enjoy Him is in the light. God and Christ are light. When we turn to the Lord and come into His presence, we are in the light and spontaneously begin to enjoy Him as our portion.

All Christians should read the Bible. However, it is possible to be in darkness even when we are reading the holy Word. We may read the Scriptures without being in the presence of the Lord. If we do this, the more we study the Bible, the more we shall be in darkness, removed from the Lord's presence. The proper way to read the Scriptures is not only with the mind, but also with our seeking spirit, looking to the Lord's countenance as we read. By pray-reading the Word we are brought into the Lord's presence in this way. When we read the Bible in a pray-reading spirit, opening ourselves to the Lord, we are brought into His presence. Spontaneously we are in the light, and Christ becomes our portion.

No matter what kind of disposition we may have, we have one weakness in common: we all like to argue. But whenever we argue, we are brought into darkness. Because we are not in the light, we cannot enjoy Christ as our portion. After arguing, we need to repent and make a thorough confession to the Lord. Through repentance and confession we are brought back to the light and to Christ as our portion.

If we are in darkness because of arguing with someone, we cannot enjoy Christ. We may come to the meetings, but we have no enjoyment of Christ, because we are not in the light. Christ cannot be our portion in darkness. He can only be our passover. However, even for Christ to be our passover requires that we repent and confess. If we would enjoy Christ as our portion, we cannot stay in Egypt in darkness, but must turn wholly to God.

Because I have found that arguing puts me in darkness, I cannot bear to argue. Time after time, I am forced to stop speaking because of the threat of darkness. I pray to the Lord and ask Him to forgive me for expressing the self. Through such repentance and confession the light returns and I am able to continue to enjoy Christ.

Light is the presence of God. If we would be in light, we must turn to Him from within. Then His presence will become the shining light. In this way Christ becomes the portion of the saints in a practical way.

If we would fellowship with God, we must walk in the light (1 John 1:7). In many things we may be able to pretend, but in this matter of enjoying Christ in the light there is no room for pretense. You may deceive others, but you cannot deceive the Lord. He is too real, genuine, honest, and practical.

In Isaiah 2:5 the prophet sounded forth a call, "O house of Jacob, come ye and let us walk in the light of the Lord." During Isaiah's time, the children of Israel were occupied with their religion, but they had lost the light of the Lord because their heart had turned from Him. They had the temple, the priesthood, and the sacrifices. But because they

had turned their heart away from God, they were in darkness. They were not walking in the light. Therefore, Isaiah called them to come and walk in the light of the Lord. This was a call to repent and to confess in order to be brought into the Lord's presence.

Psalm 36:8 and 9 describe a person who has returned to the Lord and who is in the Lord's presence. Such a one is satisfied with the fatness of God's house and drinks of the river of the Lord's pleasures. He knows the Lord as the fountain of life, and in the light of the Lord he sees light. In this light the portion of the saints becomes his enjoyment. We need to abide in Christ and walk in the light of life (John 8:12) that we may partake of Christ in the light (Eph. 5:14).

We need to have more and more contact with the Lord. We need to read His Word with an unveiled face and an open heart. As we fellowship with the Lord and follow the inner anointing, we shall experience Him as the life within us in a practical way. This life is the light. If we follow the inner anointing, we shall be in light. We are also brought into the light by fellowshipping with others in a genuine way. In fellowship there is the shining of light. Moreover, we need to be in the church life and attend the meetings, for in the church and in the meetings we are in the light. In the meetings of the church we often have the sense deep within that we are in the light enjoying Christ as our portion. All these are means by which we may be in the light to enjoy Christ as the portion of the saints.

Now we can understand why after Paul speaks of light in Colossians 1:12, he goes on in the next verse to speak of the authority of darkness. It seems as if Paul was telling the Colossians, "You have been delivered out of the authority of darkness. But now you have gone back into darkness. You have lost the very light into which you had been transferred." We have pointed out that in Colossians the authority of darkness includes observances, ordinances, philosophy, and the various isms. Through the influence of

these things, the Colossians were carried off as a prey, just as the children of Israel were carried away from the good land into Babylon. In a sense, many Christians today have been carried away from the kingdom of the Son of God's love, away from the realm of light, the sphere of light. As a result, they have lost the enjoyment of Christ as the portion of the saints.

III. THE LIGHT OF LIFE

BEING THE REALM OF LIFE

Light is a realm, a sphere. The realm of light is a realm of life. This means that the light of life is the sphere, the realm, of life. This realm of life and light is the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love. Light rules by its enlightening. Hence, when the light of life shines and rules, it is a kingdom. When we are in the light, we are in the realm of life, in the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love. This kingdom is in contrast to the authority of darkness, which is the kingdom of Satan. The New Jerusalem will be the ultimate consummation of the realm of life. The whole city will be a realm of life, full of light. This realm will be the light of life.

Darkness is dissipated by light (Gen. 1:2-3; Rev. 21:24; 22:5). When light comes, darkness is scattered.

If you pray-read the verses we have covered in this message, you will learn how to be in the light enjoying Christ as the portion of the saints in your practical experience. May we all practice to enter into the light where we enjoy Christ as the portion of the saints.

LIFE STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE EIGHT

CHRIST--THE FIRSTBORN OF ALL CREATION

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:15-17; Rev. 3:14

In this message we shall consider what it means for Christ to be the firstborn of all creation (1:15-17). The main purpose of the book of Colossians is to show that Christ is everything, that He is all. In the universe everything that exists is included under one of two basic headings: the Creator and the creation. In order to show us that Christ is all, the Bible tells us that Christ is both the Creator and the firstborn of all creation. If He were only the Creator but not the firstborn of creation, then He would not be all.

THE HERESY OF ANGEL WORSHIP

In Colossians Paul deals with such things as Jewish observances, Gentile ordinances, mysticism, Gnosticism, and asceticism. Of all the negative things that he deals with, one stands out as especially serious--the worship of angels, which is a form of idolatry. To worship anything other than God, including such creatures as angels, is idolatry. Nevertheless, because they regarded themselves and others as being unworthy to contact God directly, certain heretical teachers in Colosse advocated angel worship. They taught that God is very high and that we are very low, that God is glorious and that man is corrupt. Therefore, according to their heretical teaching, we could not be worthy to contact God directly. According to them, we must have some kind of intermediary. These teachers said that the angels are the intermediaries between us and God. This was the concept behind the angel worship that had invaded the church in Colosse.

The angel worship Paul dealt with in this Epistle was related to a sense of humility. Some thought it was a sign of humility to believe that they were not worthy to worship God directly. Apparently they had some ground in the Bible for their position. The Bible records that the law was not given to Moses by God directly; it was given through the mediation of angels (Gal. 3:19). Hence, in the giving of the law the angels functioned as intermediaries. The heretical teachers went on to say that the angels should be the intermediaries between God and fallen man. They encouraged the saints to show humility by following this way of worship. It seems as if these teachers were telling those in Colosse, "You shouldn't be so proud as to think that you can go directly to God. You must humble yourselves and recognize your need of angels to serve as intermediaries be-tween you and God." Paul was fighting against such a concept when he said, "Let no one purposely defraud you of your prize, in humility and worship of the angels" (2:18). We should not be carried away by someone's humility or by a teaching regarding angel worship.

THE HEAD OF ALL RULE AND AUTHORITY

In 2:9 and 10 Paul says, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and you in Him are made full, Who is the Head of all rule and authority." The words rule and authority refer to the angels. Christ is the Head of all the angels, not only of subordinate angels, but of those angels that have rule, power, and authority.

We need to see why Paul inserts the phrase in 2:10, "Who is the Head of all rule and authority." It is rather easy for us to understand that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily, that is, in bodily form (2:9). When Christ was on earth, He had a physical body, and in that body all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt. Because the fullness dwells in Him and because we are in Him, it follows that in Him we are made full (2:10). But then Paul suddenly speaks of Christ being the Head of all rule and authority. The One in whom all the fullness of the

God-head dwells and the One in whom we are made full is the very Head of all rule and authority. It is crucial that we see the significance of this.

In order to understand the insertion of this clause, we need to consider it in the context of the whole book. Colossians reveals that Christ is all. Paul emphasized this to the Colossians because they had accepted the heresy of angel worship. Apparently the saints in Colosse did not think that Christ could be the intermediary between them and God. To their concept, Christ was too exalted to help them in this way. Hence, they felt they needed angels as intermediaries. This was the reason Paul told them that Christ is the Head of all angels. As long as we have Christ, who is everything, there is no need for us to rely on angels. If we need an intermediary, Christ is our intermediary. This is not the function of angels. Yes, God is high, and we are very low. But this does not mean that we need angels as intermediaries. In Christ we have been made full; we are short of nothing. Because the Colossians were regarding angels as intermediaries, they needed to see that Christ is the Head of all the angels. Christ is everything. As long as they had Him, they had been made full. Both doctrinally and experientially, we should be able to testify that in Christ we have been made full and are short of nothing. In Christ we have God, righteousness, life, and all the positive things in the whole universe. By having Christ we have the One who is the Head of all angels. How mistaken the Colossians were in accepting the heresy of angel worship! Because Christ is all, we should go to Him for everything we need. Now we see that Paul added a clause in 2:10 in order to impress the Colossians with the fact that we do not need angels as intermediaries because our Christ is the Head of all rule and authority. He is the Head of all angels.

Colossians reveals that Christ is everything, both the Creator and the firstborn of all creation. If Christ were only the Creator but not anything of the creation, He would not be all. Thus, the fullness, the expression of the Triune God, would not be complete. Paul's concept in Colossians is

profound. The fullness, the full expression of the Triune God, dwells in Christ. As the One who is all, He is both the Creator and the firstborn of all creation. This is a basic principle.

THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD

Colossians 1:15 says that Christ is the "image of the invisible God." Then, in the very same verse, Paul says that Christ is the "firstborn of all creation." Why does he put these two matters together, the image of the invisible God and the firstborn of all creation? God is invisible. But the Son of His love, "the effulgence of His glory and the express image of His substance" (Heb. 1:3), is His image, expressing what He is. The image here does not mean a physical form, but an expression of God's being in all His attributes and virtues. This interpretation is confirmed by Colossians 3:10 and 2 Corinthians 3:18.

To say that Christ, the all-inclusive One, is the image of God implies that He is the very God, the Creator. When we see Christ, we see the expression of the invisible God, for He Himself is God. If I had written the Epistle to the Colossians, I would have said simply that Christ is God the Creator. Paul, however, did not write in such a simple way. He said that Christ is the image of the invisible God, God Himself expressed.

FIRST AMONG ALL CREATURES

In 1:15 Paul goes on to say that Christ is the firstborn of all creation. This means that in creation Christ is the first. Christ as God is the Creator. However, as man, sharing the created blood and flesh (Heb. 2:14), He is part of the creation. "Firstborn of all creation" refers to Christ's pre-eminence in all creation, since from this verse through verse 18 the apostle stresses the first place of Christ in all things. This verse reveals that Christ is not only the Creator, but also the first among all created things, the first among all creatures.

Some insist that Christ is only the Creator, not a

creature. But the Bible reveals that Christ is both the Creator and a creature, for He is both God and man. As God, Christ is the Creator, but as man, He is a creature. How could He have flesh, blood, and bones if He were not a creature? Did not Christ become a man? Did He not take on a body with flesh, blood, and bones? Certainly He did. Those who oppose this teaching are short of knowledge. Actually, they are heretical, because they do not believe that Christ truly became a man. Rather, they believe only that He is God, and such a belief is heresy. Our Christ is God, has always been God, and always will be God. But through incarnation He became a man. Otherwise He could not have been arrested, tried, and crucified; and He could not have shed His blood on the cross for our sins. Praise the Lord for the truth that our Christ is both God and man!

As God, Christ is eternal and did not need to be born. But in 1:15 He is called the firstborn of all creation. Anything that requires birth must be a creature, part of creation. If Christ were only God and not man, He could not have been born, for God is infinite and eternal, without beginning or ending. But as a man, Christ had to be born. Hallelujah, Christ was born as a man! Isaiah 9:6 says, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given...and his name shall be called The mighty God, The everlasting Father...." As the child born to us, Christ is called the mighty God. As the Son given to us, His name is called the eternal Father. As the mighty God and the eternal Father, Christ is eternal. But as the child and a son, He had to be born. Some argue that Christ was born, but not created. According to the Bible, birth is the carrying out of creation. Therefore, to be born is to be created.

NO TIME ELEMENT WITH GOD

Some may wonder how Christ could be the firstborn of all creation since He was born less than two thousand years ago, not at the very beginning of creation. If we would understand this properly, we need to realize that

with God there is no time element. For example, according to our estimate of time, Christ was crucified about two thousand years ago. But Revelation 13:8 says that Christ was slain from the foundation of the world. Both are right. However, God's reckoning is much more important than ours. In the eyes of God, Christ was crucified from the foundation of the world. In eternity, God foresaw the fall of man. Therefore, also in eternity, He made preparation for the accomplishment of redemption.

The difference between God's estimate of time and ours also helps us understand why Christ is called the second man (1 Cor. 15:47). From our point of view, the second man was Cain, the son of the first Adam. But from God's point of view, the second man is Christ.

We may apply this matter of the different ways of reckoning time to Christ as the firstborn of all creation. Ac-cording to our sense of time, Christ was born in Bethlehem approximately two thousand years ago. But in the eyes of God, the Lord Jesus was born before the foundation of the world. If He was slain from the foundation of the world, certainly He must have been born before then. Therefore, according to God's perspective in eternity, Christ was born in eternity past. This is the reason that, according to God's viewpoint, Christ has always been the first of all creatures. God foresaw the day that Christ would be born in a manger in Bethlehem. Because Christ is the first among the creatures, we can say that as the all-inclusive One He is both the Creator and part of creation.

FAITHFUL TO THE TRUTH

In a previous message I pointed out that in 1934 Brother Nee gave a series of messages in Shanghai on the centrality and universality of Christ. At Brother Nee's request, I polished my notes of these messages and prepared them to be printed in Brother Nee's paper called *The Present Testimony*. When this material was translated into English, the translator took the liberty of interpreting

Brother Nee's concept regarding Christ as the first of the creatures in a way to which Brother Nee would never have agreed. Instead of saying, as Brother Nee did, that "the Son is the number one of the creatures," the translator says that "the Son is the head of all creation." Surely this is not a faithful translation, but an interpretation according to the concept of the translator.

Brother Nee had the boldness to say just what the Bible says. During that conference in 1934 we read from Brother Nee's Chinese translation of Colossians 1. In this translation he made it very definite that Christ is the first of all creatures. This is an example of Brother Nee's boldness for the truth. He did not care for what men say; he cared only for what the Bible says. Nevertheless, the translator of these messages changed Brother Nee's words in order to avoid trouble with certain theological concepts. This is not faithful to Brother Nee's ministry.

If we care for the truth, we shall testify that Christ, the image of the invisible God, the very Creator, as the first-born of all creation, is the first among all creatures. In this sense, Christ is not only the Creator, but also part of creation.

IN HIM, THROUGH HIM, AND UNTO HIM

Colossians 1:16 says, "Because in Him were all things created in the heavens and on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or lordships or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and unto Him." "In Him" means in the power of Christ's Person. All things were created in the power of what Christ is. All creation bears the characteristics of Christ's intrinsic power. (See note on this verse in Darby's *New Translation*.) "Through Him" indicates that Christ is the active instrument through which the creation of all things was processed. Finally, "unto Him" indicates that Christ is the end of all creation. All things were created for His possession.

BEFORE ALL THINGS

In verse 17 Paul goes on to say, "And He is before all things " This indicates His eternal preexistence.

ALL THINGS SUBSISTING IN HIM

Moreover, verse 17 says that "all things subsist together in Him." For all things to subsist together in Christ means that they exist together by Christ as the holding center, just as the spokes of a wheel are held together by the hub at their center.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE NINE

CHRIST--FIRSTBORN FROM AMONG THE DEAD

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:18-23

We have seen that the book of Colossians reveals that Christ is everything. In the universe there is God the Creator, and there is the creation. According to 1:15, Christ is the image of the invisible God. This means that He is nothing less than God Himself in full expression. Further-more, Christ is the firstborn of creation, the first among all God's creatures.

God has accomplished two creations, the old creation and the new creation. The old creation includes heaven, earth, mankind, and millions of different items. The new creation is the church, the Body of Christ. Verses 15 through 17 unveil Christ as the first in the original creation, as the One who has the preeminence among all creatures. Verse 18 shows that Christ is the first in resurrection as the Head of the Body. He is the One who has the first place in the church.

The first creation came into being through the speaking of God. In the words of Romans 4:17, God called the things not being as being. The new creation, on the contrary, came into being through resurrection, through the death and resurrection of the old creation. In this new creation, the church, Christ is the firstborn from among the dead.

THE TWO BIRTHS OF CHRIST

As the Son of God, Christ has passed through two births. The first birth took place at His incarnation, and the second, in His resurrection. All Christians realize that Christ was born through incarnation, but not many regard

His resurrection also as a birth. Acts 13:33 indicates that Christ was begotten, or born, in resurrection. Through resurrection He was begotten as the Son of God. However, before His incarnation, in eternity, He was already the Son of God. Why then did He need to be born the Son of God in resurrection? Before His incarnation, Christ was not a man. He was simply the infinite, eternal God. But in the fullness of time, Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary, and nine months later He was born in a manger in Bethlehem. According to John 1:14, the Word who is Christ became flesh. This means that He took the step of becoming a man. How marvelous that through incarnation the infinite, eternal God became a man! However, in becoming man, He did not cease to be God.

After living on earth for thirty-three and a half years, Christ was crucified. Then in resurrection He took a second step to be born the second time and become the firstborn Son of God. Before His resurrection, Christ was the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16). But through resurrection the only begotten Son became the firstborn among many brothers (Rom. 8:29). According to Hebrews 2:10, God is leading many sons into glory. These many sons are the many brothers of Christ as the firstborn Son.

Through the two births of Christ, divinity has been brought into humanity, and humanity has been brought into divinity. By the incarnation of Christ God was brought into man. Prior to Christ's incarnation, God was outside of man. However, through Christ's incarnation God was brought into humanity. We may say that with the birth of Christ God was born into man. Therefore, by Christ's first birth in incarnation God was brought into man and became one with man. Then through Christ's resurrection man was brought into God. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, God was living in a man, for God was in Him. Now, through Christ's resurrection, man has been brought into God. Hallelujah, as a man Christ is in the heavens! God has been brought into man, and man has been brought into God. What a transaction! What marvelous two-way traffic!

In this two-way traffic God came into man through incarnation, and man was brought into God through resurrection.

Have you ever heard that Christ, the Son of God, has passed through two births? You may have heard that you needed a second birth, the birth in the spirit through the Holy Spirit, but not that Christ was born twice, first in incarnation and then in resurrection. In eternity Christ was God. Through His incarnation He became a man, and through resurrection He became the firstborn Son of God.

OUR EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST'S TWO BIRTHS

Through Christ, God has been brought into us, and we have been brought into God. Praise Him for such a mingling! When we were born again, simultaneously Christ was born into us, and we were brought into God. Therefore, in our Christian life we have an inward and personal experience of both of the births of Christ. With Christ, His birth in resurrection came thirty-three and a half years after His birth through incarnation. However, in our experience of Christ, God was brought into us and we were brought into God at the same time. Praise the Lord for the marvelous traffic between God and us!

Colossians 1:19 says that all the fullness was pleased to dwell in Christ, and 2:9 declares that in Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. In 2:10 Paul goes on to say that in Christ we are made full. Because all the fullness dwells in Christ and because we have been put into Christ, we have been made full, filled with the divine riches. Hallelujah, in Christ we are made full! In a very real sense, we who believe in Christ are complex, for we are in the One who is very complex. If He were not complex, there would have been no disputes regarding His Person.

THE ALL-INCLUSIVE ONE

Christology is the theological study of the Person of Christ. Some teach the truth that Christ is both God and man. Others, however, teach that Christ is God, but not

man or that He is man, but not God. There is no need for disputes concerning the Person of Christ. He is all-inclusive. He is God, man, and the reality of every positive thing in the universe. If we see that Christ is everything, we shall not argue about Him. A number of verses indicate clearly that Christ is God. For example, Romans 9:5 speaks of "Christ, Who is over all, God blessed forever." At a certain time Christ became a man. Then through death and resurrection He became the firstborn Son of God.

In His life on earth, the Lord Jesus was among His disciples, but He was not in them. Hence, it was necessary for Him to pass through death and resurrection in order to come into His disciples as the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), the Spirit of reality (John 14:17). In John 14 through 16 the disciples were troubled by the fact that the Lord was leaving them. It seems that He was telling them, "If I do not go, there will be no way for Me to come into you. I must pass through death and resurrection in order to become the life-giving Spirit. Then I shall be in you forever." On the day of His resurrection, the Lord appeared to the disciples, breathed into them, and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). This is the Spirit promised in 14:16-17, 26; 15:26 and 16:7, 13. The Lord's breathing of the Holy Spirit into the disciples was the fulfillment of His promise of the Holy Spirit as the Comforter. By breathing the Spirit, the holy breath, the life-giving Spirit, into the disciples, the Lord imparted Himself into them as life and every positive thing.

As the Son of God, Christ took two extraordinary steps. Firstly, He took the step of incarnation to become a man for the accomplishment of redemption and for the termination of the old creation. Secondly, in resurrection He be-came the life-giving Spirit in order to regenerate us to produce the church, God's new creation.

THE PREEMINENT ONE

In both the old creation and the new creation Christ is the first and occupies the first place, the place of

preeminence. Both in the universe and in the church, Christ is the preeminent One. If we see this as a vision, not as a mere doctrine, our living and our church life will be revolutionized. We shall realize that in all things Christ must be the first.

In 1:18 Paul says, "That He might have the first place in all things." In the Bible to be the first is to be all. Since Christ is the first both in the universe and in the church, He must be all things in the universe and the church. As the first, He is all.

God's way of reckoning in this matter is different from ours. According to our estimation, if Christ is the first, then something else should be the second, third, and others in sequence. However, from God's point of view, for Christ to be the first means that He is all.

The first Adam included not only Adam as an individual, but all of mankind. In the same principle, in the eyes of God, the firstborn of the Egyptians included all the Egyptians. The firstborn includes all. Therefore, for Christ to be the firstborn in the universe means that He is every-thing in the universe. In like manner, for Christ to be the firstborn in resurrection means that He is everything in resurrection. For Christ to be the firstborn both of the old creation and of the new creation means that He is every-thing both in the old creation and in the new creation. This corresponds to Paul's word in 3:11, where he says that in the new man, in the new creation, "There cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all and in all." In the new man Christ is everyone and in everyone. In the new creation there is room only for Christ.

HAVING THE ONE WHO IS ALL

In this Epistle Paul seemed to be telling the Colossians, "Why are you so foolish? You have received Christ, the One who is everything. He is the first in the old creation and in the new creation. What need is there for you to take in something else? Why do you worship angels and turn to

Gnostic philosophy? Why do you follow the elements of the world? Don't you know that the very Christ you have received and now possess is everything? He is the Head of all the angels, and you are in Him. In Him you have been made full."

Chapters two and three reveal that the Colossians had turned to various isms--Gnosticism, mysticism, legal-ism, and asceticism. These isms are the elements of the world. Because we have the all-inclusive Christ, we do not need isms. We do not need philosophies, theories, and practices, for we have the One who is all in all. Christ is profound. What philosophy can equal Him? All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Him (2:3).

This Christ is the image of God, the full expression of God. He is not the hidden God, the concealed, mysterious God; He is God expressed, the image of the invisible God. Furthermore, He is the first among God's creation. As we have pointed out, this indicates that He is everything. He is the alpha, the omega, and all the letters in between (Rev. 22:13). He is everything in the universe, and He is the first in the new creation, the church.

INFUSED AND SATURATED

Perhaps you are wondering how this understanding of Christ can help you in a practical way. If for a period of thirty days you are occupied with the revelation of Christ in Colossians, you will be revolutionized, reconstituted, and transformed. Pray over these messages on Colossians and have fellowship concerning them, and you will see what a difference it will make in you. I can testify that it makes a tremendous difference when the vision of the all-inclusiveness of Christ pervades our being. When you see this vision, you will hate everything that issues from the self. You will despise not only your hatred, but even your love, kindness, and patience. As this vision causes you to hate the self, it will constrain you to love the Lord. You will say, "Lord Jesus, I love You because You are everything.

Lord, there is no need for me to struggle or strive to do any-thing. O Lord, You are so much to me. You are God, You are the firstborn of all creation, and You are the firstborn from among the dead." I suggest that you pray-read Colossians for thirty days. Pray until all the aspects of Christ re-vealed in this book saturate your being. We do not need regulations or teachings--we need to be infused and saturated with Christ as the all-inclusive One.

If Christ is infused into you, you will drop everything that is not Christ, and you will be constituted with Christ in your very being. Religion gives people doctrines and teaches them how to behave. The book of Colossians, on the contrary, speaks of the all-inclusive Christ. This Christ is already in us, but we need to see Him, know Him, be filled with Him, be saturated with Him, and become absolutely one with Him.

THE FULL ENJOYMENT OF CHRIST

In Him we are made full. We may be familiar with these words in 2:10, but, sorry to say, we may take them for granted. Have you seen that in Christ you are made full? I doubt that many see the reality of this verse. We may know this as a doctrine, but not as an experience. In our actual living, we may not yet be full. Thus far, our partaking of the unsearchable riches of Christ has been very limited. Christ is our good land, but we do not yet enjoy Him in full as this land. Paul's purpose in Colossians is to bring us into the full enjoyment of Christ as the all-inclusive land.

ALL THINGS RECONCILED TO GOD

In 1:20 Paul goes on to say, "And through Him to reconcile all things to Him, making peace through the blood of His cross--through Him, whether things on the earth or things in the heavens." "Through Him" means through Christ as the active instrument through which the reconciliation was processed. To reconcile all things to God is to make peace with God for all things. This was accomplished through the blood of the cross of Christ.

Not only the things on the earth but also things in the heavens needed to be reconciled to God. This indicates that things in the heavens also are not right with God due to the rebellion of Satan, the archangel, and the angels who followed him. His rebellion has contaminated the heavens.

Verse 21 says, "And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by evil works." Because we were sinners, we needed redemption. Because we were also enemies of God, we needed reconciliation to Him. Our enmity toward God was mainly in our corrupted mind.

In the body of His flesh Christ has reconciled us to God in order to present us holy, blameless, and without reproach before God (v. 22). However, we still need to "continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast and not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (v. 23). The faith here does not denote the act of believing, but the object of our belief.

Here Paul speaks of the hope of the gospel. Christ in us is the hope of glory (v. 27), from whom we should not be moved away.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE TEN

CHRIST'S RELATIONSHIP TO CREATION

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:15-19

THE MEANS OF CREATION

In the traditional teaching prevailing in Christianity, Christ is considered to be the Creator. Although as God Christ is the Creator, no verse in the Bible says explicitly that Christ created the heavens, the earth, and all the things in the universe. When some hear this, they may won-der about John 1:3. This verse says, "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being which has come into being." This verse does not say that Christ created all things. It says that all things came into existence through Christ. The King James Version of this verse says, "All things were made by him." This, how-ever, is not an accurate translation. The Greek preposition should be rendered through and not by. Hence, this verse does not say that all things were created by Christ, but that all things came into existence through Christ. This indicates that Christ is the means of creation.

Some may think that Hebrews 1:10-12 says that Christ is the Creator. However, these verses are a quotation from Psalm 102 that indicates that God is the Creator. Here they are quoted to prove that Christ is God.

Christ is in fact the Creator of all things. But the point we are emphasizing here is that the Bible does not say specifically that Christ is the Creator. Rather, the Bible speaks of Christ as the means of creation, as the means through which all things came into being. If we speak of creation in a general sense, it is correct to say that Christ is the Creator. But if we wish to speak more definitely, it is better to say that Christ is the means of creation.

Colossians 1:16 says, "In Him were all things created." The King James Version says, "By him were all things created." This rendering is not accurate. The Greek preposition used here is more accurately translated by the English word in. To say that all things were created in Christ indicates that He is the means of the creation of all things. However, if this verse is rendered, "By him were all things created," it will say that Christ is the Creator, not the means of creation.

CHRIST EXPRESSING GOD IN CREATION

In 1:15 Paul says that Christ is the image of the invisible God. This means that Christ is the expression of the unseen God. At this point we need to ask in what way Christ expresses God. The answer is that He expresses God in creation. However, Christ does not express God in creation simply by creating all things in an objective way. If Christ were merely an objective Creator, not the subjective means of creation, Christ could not express God in creation. Keep in mind that all things were created not by Christ, but through Christ. This points to a process that took place in Christ.

In his note on Colossians 1:16 in his New Translation, J. N. Darby says that the words "in Him" mean in the power of Christ's Person. As Darby says, "He was the one whose intrinsic power characterized the creation." Commenting on the meaning of the Greek preposition used in the phrase "in Him were all things created," Darby says that it is "used generally for the character in which a thing is done" (Collected Writings, Vol. 33, p. 87). He also states that the "creation of all things was characterized and wrought by the inherent power which is in the Lord Jesus Christ, and all things subsist together as one ordered and law-governed whole by the same constant and inherent power" (Collected Writings, Vol. 31, p. 188).

Christ is the active instrument through which creation was processed. In this process God's power is expressed; it is made manifest. This is revealed clearly in Romans 1:20.

This verse says that the "invisible things of Him from the creation of the world, being apprehended by the things made, are clearly seen, both His eternal power and divine nature." In all created things God's power is made manifest. Hence, in Darby's words, creation bears the characteristics of Christ's intrinsic power.

SUBJECTIVELY RELATED TO CREATION

Christ is related to creation in a subjective way. Christ did not create the universe merely in an objective way as an objective Creator. He did not, so to speak, stand apart and call everything into being. On the contrary, the process of creation took place in Him, that is, in the power of His Person. Christ is the unique power in the universe. His very Person is this power. Therefore, creation was processed in Him. This means that He was not simply an objective Creator, but also the subjective instrument through which creation was processed. For this reason, creation bears the characteristics of Christ's intrinsic power. Instead of saying that Christ created the universe, the Bible says that all things came into being through Him or were created in Him. The words "by Him" are objective, whereas the words "through Him" and "in Him" are subjective.

The use of gasoline as the source of power in an automobile may be a helpful illustration. An automobile is operated by the driver, but it receives its power supply from gasoline. Since gasoline provides the power, an automobile bears the characteristics of the power of gasoline. But gasoline does not supply an automobile as an objective power; it empowers it subjectively by operating within certain mechanical parts of the automobile. If the power of gasoline were objective, an automobile would not bear the characteristics of the intrinsic power of gasoline. But since gasoline is subjectively related to the automobile, the vehicle driven by it bears the characteristics of its intrinsic power.

The King James Version of Colossians 1:16 says that all things have been created for Him. It is better to render the

Greek "unto Him.!" "For Him" is objective, but "unto Him" is subjective. All things have been created in Christ; through Christ, and, ultimately, unto Christ. These expressions indicate that Christ has a subjective relationship to creation. Creation is not simply for Him; it is also unto Him. This means that it consummates in Him. The three prepositions in, through, and unto were used by Paul to point out the subjective relationship of Christ to creation. Creation took place in the power of Christ's Person, through Him as the active instrument, and unto Him as its consummation. Such a relationship is altogether subjective. Because of His subjective relationship to creation, Christ expresses God in creation. Creation expresses the characteristics of Christ who is the image of the invisible God.

ALL THINGS SUBSISTING IN CHRIST

In verse 17 Paul goes on to say, "All things subsist together in Him." This means that all things exist together by Christ as the holding center. For creation to subsist in Christ is a further indication that Christ is subjectively related to creation.

It is important to differentiate between the words exist, consist, and subsist. Colossians 1:17 does not say that all things exist in Christ or consist in Him; it says that all things subsist in Him. To exist is to be, to consist is to be composed or constituted, and to subsist is to hold together for existence. Imagine a wheel with its rim, spokes, and hub. All the spokes subsist together in the hub. The only way for the spokes to subsist is to be held together at the hub in the center of the wheel. This illustrates Christ's relationship to creation with respect to the fact that all things subsist in Himself.

We have pointed out that all things came into being in Christ, through Christ, and unto Christ. Nothing should be regarded as separate from Him. All things were made in the intrinsic power of Christ's Person, through Him as the active instrument, and unto Him as the consummate goal.

Furthermore, all things subsist, are held together, in Him as the hub. Because all things were created in Christ, through Christ, and unto Christ and because all things subsist in Christ, God can be expressed in creation through Christ who is the image of the invisible God.

ALL THE FULLNESS

In 1:19 Paul says, "For in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell." The fullness here is virtually the equivalent of the image in verse 15. The image of the invisible God is the full expression of the unseen God. For the fullness to dwell in Christ means that all the expression of God, all of His image, was pleased to dwell in Him.

Verses 15 through 19 make up one section of the Epistle to the Colossians. In this section Christ is revealed as the first both in the old creation and in the new creation. As the One who is first in both of God's creations, Christ is the expression of God. God is expressed in Him because all things have come into being in Him, through Him, and unto Him, and they subsist in Him. This is true not only of the old creation, but even the more of the new creation. The new creation, the church, is Christ's Body, of which He is the Head. Through His subjective relationship to creation, Christ is the fullness of the unseen God, the image of the invisible God. The fullness in verse 19 is not a thing; it is a person who is the expression, the image, of the Triune God.

In verses 20 through 22, it is difficult to determine to whom the various pronouns refer. Verses 19 and 20 say that in Christ the fullness was pleased to dwell, and "through Him to reconcile all things to Him." If the fullness were not a person, how could it be pleased to dwell in Christ? The fact that the fullness can be pleased indicates that it is a person. The fullness was pleased not only to dwell in Christ, but through Him to reconcile all things to Him. In verses 19 and 20 two infinitives--to dwell and to reconcile--are joined by a conjunction. Hence, the fullness was pleased to dwell and to reconcile. The phrase "through

Him" is used twice in verse 20. Both times it refers to Christ as the active instrument through which reconciliation was processed. But what is the antecedent of the pronoun Him, to whom all things are reconciled? The antecedent is the fullness spoken of in verse 19. This is the reason that in his New Translation, J. N. Darby uses the pronouns itself and it, in verses 20 and 22, to refer to the fullness in verse 19. The Greek pronouns, however, should not be regarded as neuter, but as masculine. This means that instead of saying "it," we should say "him." Therefore, all things have been reconciled to the fullness. In verses 21 and 22, we who were enemies have been reconciled by the fullness in the body of flesh through death so that we may be presented holy and blameless and without reproach before the fullness. How meaningful is this understanding of the passage! It is the fullness that dwells in Christ, it is the fullness that reconciles us, and it is to the fullness that we shall be presented. This fullness is God Himself expressed. This fullness was pleased to dwell in Christ, to reconcile us, and to present us to Himself.

THE EXPRESSION OF GOD IN ALL HIS RICH BEING

The Christ revealed in Colossians is all-inclusive. He is not only God, but also the firstborn of creation. All things came into being in Him and through Him. Furthermore, all things are unto Him and subsist in Him. Therefore, through Him is expressed all that God is. We have seen that all the fullness in verse 19 does not denote the riches of what God is, but the expression of those riches. The full expression of God in all His rich being, both in creation and in the church, dwells in Christ. The rich being of God is expressed both in the old creation and in the new creation through Christ as the One in whom, through whom, and unto whom all things came into being and as the One in whom all things subsist. It is in such a way that the invisible God is expressed.

When we consider the universe and the church, the old creation and the new creation, we see all the fullness of the Triune God. We behold the expression of the Triune God. This fullness was pleased to dwell in the Son and to reconcile all things to Himself for His expression. Furthermore, this fullness will present us holy, blameless, and without reproach to Himself so that He may have His expression in the new creation.

THE SON OF THE FATHER'S LOVE

BEING THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD

Colossians 1:15 says, "Who is the image of the invisible God, firstborn of all creation." The relative pronoun who refers to the Son of God's love (v. 13). This means that the Son of the Father's love is the image of the invisible God. In verse 15 Paul puts the phrase "firstborn of all creation" in apposition to the phrase "the image of the invisible God." Grammatically this indicates that these expressions are synonymous. The image of the invisible God is the firstborn of all creation. The fact that verse 16 begins with the word because indicates that it gives the reason Paul said that the image of God is the firstborn of all creation. The reason is that "in Him were all things created in the heavens and on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or lordships or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and unto Him." Why is the image of the invisible God the firstborn of all creation? He is the firstborn because all things were created in Him, through Him, and unto Him.

We have seen that as the image of God Christ is the expression of God. If a person had no physical form or image, he could not be expressed. A person is expressed through his physical image. Although God is invisible, He is expressed through His image, which is His Son. The Son of the Father's love is the expression of the invisible God. This expression is firstly the firstborn of all creation, because all things were created in Him, through Him, and unto Him. The creation that came into existence through

Him expresses God's eternal power and divine nature. Both the divine nature and the eternal power are the expression of the invisible God. If you study the universe in a thoughtful way, you will confess that it testifies of the eternal power and of the divine nature. Even many scientists realize that in creation some kind of extraordinary power exists. This power is Christ as the image of the invisible God.

The three prepositions used in verse 16--in, through, and unto--indicate that creation is subjectively related to Christ. There is a subjective relationship between creation and Christ because of the process of creation and because of the goal, the consummation, of creation. In Christ and through Christ creation came into being. This indicates that creation is subjectively related to Christ because of the process by which it came into existence. Moreover, all of creation is unto Christ. This indicates that creation is subjectively related to Christ as the consummation, the goal, of its existence. Both in the process of creation and in the goal of creation Christ is expressed. Therefore, creation cannot be separated from Christ as the image of the invisible God.

CHRIST AS CREATOR AND AS THE MEANS OF CREATION

Christ is both God and Christ. As God He is the Creator, but as Christ He is God's anointed One and appointed One. As God's anointed and appointed One, Christ carries out God's commission. As God Christ is the Creator, but as Christ He is the instrument, the means, of creation. Therefore, in John 1:3, the emphasis is not that Christ is the Creator, but that He is the means through which creation was processed and came into existence. The same is true of Colossians 1:16. The process of creation was carried out in Him, through Him, and unto Him. He is the means, the instrument, through which and in which creation came into existence.

HOW CHRIST, THE IMAGE OF GOD, EXPRESSES GOD

Verses 16 through 18 are a definition of verse 15. The items found in these verses are related to Christ as the image of the invisible God. This means that Christ as the image of God is related to the process and goal of creation, to the firstborn of creation, to the subsistence of creation, and to the firstborn from among the dead. The issue of these items is all the fullness, the fullness in the old creation and the fullness in the new creation, spoken of in verse 19. Hence, the fullness in verse 19 is the image in verse 15.

How does Christ, the image of the invisible God, express God? As the Son of the Father's love, He expresses the Triune God because He is the One through whom both the old creation and the new creation came into being. Furthermore, He expresses the Triune God because He is the firstborn of both creations. This makes Him the full expression of God. All the fullness in verse 19 denotes the very Person of Christ. This is the reason that in the following verse Paul uses a masculine pronoun to refer to the fullness.

Praise the Lord that Christ is all-inclusive! In Paul's words in Colossians, Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, and the firstborn from among the dead. As the Son of the Father's love, He is the full expression of God, seen both in the old creation and in the new creation. As God, Christ has no beginning. But as the firstborn of creation, He had a beginning. Let us set aside the natural concept, believe the pure Word of God, and praise the Lord that as the all-inclusive One He is the full expression of the Triune God.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE ELEVEN

THE STEWARDSHIP OF GOD

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:24-26

In 1:25 Paul says that he "became a minister according to the stewardship of God. " For the sake of the full expression of God, there is the need for the stewardship of God.

It is important to understand accurately the meaning of stewardship. The Greek word rendered stewardship here, oikonomia, is the same word rendered dispensation in Ephesians 1:10 and 3:9. The word also appears in Ephesians 3:2, where Paul speaks of the stewardship of grace which had been given to him. According to ancient usage, oikonomia denoted a stewardship, a dispensation, or an administration. At the time of Paul, many rich families had stewards whose responsibility was to distribute food and other supplies to members of the household. Our Father has a great family, a divine household. Because our Father has such vast riches, there is the need in His household for many stewards to dispense these riches to His children. This dispensing is the stewardship. Hence, a stewardship is a dispensation.

The word dispensation here does not denote an age or means by which God deals with people; it refers to God's dispensing of His riches into His chosen ones. This dispensation is the stewardship with the dispensing ministry of the ministers of God. This ministry of dispensing is also God's administration. Today God administrates by dispensing Himself into us. This stewardship, this dispensation, this administration, is God's economy. In the New Testament economy of God there is the desperate need of the stewardship of God.

We have pointed out that stewardship refers to the dispensation of wealth in a royal or upper-class family.

God's royal family is rich in Christ. According to the Epistle to the Colossians, God's family is especially rich in Christ as the all-inclusive and preeminent One, as the One who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, and the firstborn from among the dead. The riches of such a Christ, who is the full expression of the Triune God, need to be dispensed into the members of God's family. This serv-ice of dispensing, which in 1:25 is called the stewardship of God, was the work of the Apostle Paul. It also should be our work today.

Not many ministers or workers in today's Christianity carry out the stewardship of God. This means that not many are actually dispensing the riches of Christ into the members of God's royal family. The stewardship of God is needed for this rich, all-inclusive, preeminent Christ to be dispensed into the members of His Body.

This stewardship is the ministry in the New Testament. The New Testament ministry is the dispensing of the unsearchable riches of the all-inclusive Christ into the members of God's family. The Apostle Paul dispensed the riches of Christ into the saints. This is what we are doing in the ministry today.

The stewardship of God is according to the economy of God. With God it is a matter of economy; with us it is a matter of stewardship. All the saints, no matter how insignificant they may seem to be, have a ministry according to God's economy. This means that every saint can dispense the riches of Christ into others.

The desire of God's heart is to dispense Himself into man. This is the central point of the whole Bible. God's economy is to carry out the dispensing of Himself into man. We share in this economy through our stewardship, our ministry of dispensing the riches of Christ. After the riches of Christ have been dispensed into us, we need to take up the burden to dispense them into others. With God these riches are His economy; with us they are the steward-ship; and when they are dispensed by us into others, they become God's dispensation. When God's economy reaches us, it becomes our stewardship. When we carry out our

stewardship by dispensing Christ into others, it becomes the dispensation of God into them. Hence, we have the economy, the stewardship, and the dispensation.

Those who bear responsibility in the local churches need to share in the stewardship of God. This means that the elders should be those who take the lead to dispense the riches of Christ into others. Although Christ is all-inclusive and preeminent, there is still the need for Him to be dispensed into the members of God's family. This dispensation takes place through the stewardship. Hence, between the unsearchably rich Christ and the members of His Body, there is the need of the stewardship. All those who take the lead in the Lord's recovery and have responsibility for the care of the churches need to realize that they have a part in such a divine stewardship. We are not here to carry on an ordinary Christian work. For instance, we are not concerned merely with teaching the Bible in an out-ward way. Rather, we desire to serve the riches of Christ to all the members of God's family. In our conversation with one another, we need to minister the riches of Christ. Even when we are invited to the homes of the saints for dinner, we need to dispense the riches of Christ. This is the stewardship of God.

Every member of the Body of Christ has a part in this stewardship. In Ephesians 3:8 Paul refers to himself as "less than the least of all saints." This indicates that Paul was even smaller than we are. If Paul could be a steward, then we also can be stewards and dispense the riches of Christ into others. In preaching the gospel, for example, we should not be concerned merely with winning souls. Rather, we should preach the gospel to carry out the stewardship of dispensing the riches of Christ into others. Day by day we need to fulfill our stewardship by dispensing the Triune God into man. Praise the Lord that we all have a share in this stewardship! We all have the privilege of dispensing the unsearchable riches of Christ into others. Therefore, we should not merely preach the gospel or teach the Bible; we should also impart the riches of Christ to others.

We have many opportunities to minister the riches of Christ to the saints. Suppose we are helping a family to move. We should not simply move the furniture, but we should supply the riches of Christ to the members of the family, especially to the sister. If we help in the moving without dispensing the riches of Christ, we may actually make things difficult for others. Our intention in helping a family move their belongings should be to dispense the riches of Christ. All our activity with respect to such a service should be with Christ.

Another opportunity to minister the riches of Christ to others is in giving or receiving hospitality. Both the hosts and the guests should minister the riches of Christ.

May the Lord open our eyes to see that we all have part in the stewardship of God. In every aspect of the practical church life, even in such things as ushering and cleaning the meeting hall, we need to dispense Christ into others. Firstly, we need to be filled with Christ and then minister the riches of Christ to others. This is our stewardship.

I. THE STEWARD'S SUFFERINGS

In 1:24 Paul says, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf, and fill up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His Body, which is the church." The afflictions of Christ are of two categories: those for accomplishing redemption, which have been completed by Christ Himself; and those for producing and building the church, which need to be filled up by the apostles and the believers.

The fact that Paul mentions the afflictions of Christ in connection with the stewardship of God indicates that the stewardship can be carried out only through suffering. If we desire to share in the stewardship of God, we must be prepared to suffer. All those who participate in the service of the church or in the ministry must be ready to partake of the afflictions of a steward. This means that we must be willing to pay whatever price is necessary to fulfill our stewardship.

We have pointed out that when we give or receive

hospitality, we need to carry out our stewardship by dispensing the riches of Christ into others. However, to pro-vide hospitality may involve a kind of suffering. In like manner, to be the guest in someone's home also may be a cause of suffering. I have been a guest in the homes of many saints. The hosts have invariably taken care of me in a marvelous way, doing everything necessary to meet my needs. Nevertheless, I suffered simply because I was not in my own home. No matter how adequate the hospitality may be, I am always glad to be back home. However, I am happy to testify that many have spoken of the nourishment, edification, and strengthening they have received through sharing in hospitality, as either a host or a guest. This indicates that to carry out the stewardship of God by dispensing the riches of Christ into the members of God's royal family is worth any kind of suffering, great or small. As we shall point out in the following message, the sufferings in which we share are for the building up of the Body of Christ. They are in no way related to the accomplishment of redemption.

II. THE STEWARD BEING A MINISTER

A. Of the Church

Speaking of the Body of Christ, the church, Paul says in 1:25, "Of which I became a minister according to the stewardship of God, which was given to me for you, to complete the word of God." Here Paul says that, as a steward, he became a minister of the church.

B. To Complete the Word of God

In 1:25 Paul also speaks of completing the word of God. The word of God is the divine revelation, which was not completed until the New Testament was written. In the New Testament the apostles, especially the Apostle Paul, completed the word of God in the mystery of God, which is Christ, and in the mystery of Christ, which is the church, to give us a full revelation of God's economy. According to 1:26, the word of God is the "mystery which has been hidden from the ages and from the generations, but now has

been manifested to His saints." This hidden mystery is related to Christ and the church, the Head and the Body. The unveiling of this mystery through the Apostle Paul is a major part of the completion of the word of God as the divine revelation.

"From the ages" means from eternity, and "from the generations" means from the times. The mystery concerning Christ and the church was hidden from eternity and from all the times until the New Testament age, when it is being manifested to the saints, including all of us, the believers in Christ.

Prior to the time of Paul, the divine revelation had not been completed. Before Paul came forth to minister, God's revelation had already been given in the Old Testament. Furthermore, God had revealed Himself through the events recorded in the Gospels and in part of the Acts. However, it was necessary for Paul to write a number of Epistles concerning Christ as the mystery of God and concerning the church as the mystery of Christ in order for the divine revelation to be complete. This completion of the divine revelation is seen especially in four of his Epistles: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians.

Although the divine revelation was completed through the apostles, especially through Paul, in a practical sense it also needs to be completed through us today. This means that as we contact people, we must progressively, continually, and gradually preach the word in full. To preach the word in full, or to fully preach the word, is to complete the word. Among so many Christians today there is surely a great need for such a completing of the word. Recently, a magazine stated that in the United States there are fifty million regenerated Christians. How many of them know God's purpose in saving them? Very few. In Christianity the word of God has been preached, but it has not been preached in full. The preaching of today's Christianity has not completed the word of God. Hence, there is an urgent need for this completion.

We have pointed out that the word of God which needs completion is the mystery spoken of in 1:26. Many

Christians preach the word of God, but very few tell people what God's mystery is. The word of God preached in the full gospel is not related to escaping hell and going to heaven; neither is it related to peace, joy, and a happy life. The word that needs to be completed is "the mystery which has been hidden from the ages and from the generations." This mystery is concealed, hidden. If it were not hidden, it would no longer be a mystery. The mystery concealed from ages and generations is the word of God that must now be completed through the preaching of the saints. This concealed mystery, which has been made manifest to God's saints, is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (v. 27). Although I have heard the preaching of the gospel for years, I have rarely heard a message saying that when someone believes in Jesus Christ, Christ will not only save him, but also come into his spirit and remain there as his life. Most of the preaching in today's Christianity is not like this. Thus, there is the need for the completion of the word of God.

If we do not minister the riches of Christ to others, their knowledge of the divine revelation will be lacking. As far as the revelation itself is concerned, there is no lack. Every-thing was completed centuries ago. However, in practice, there may still be a lack, especially if we do not fulfill our part of the stewardship of God. We all need to fulfill our responsibility to complete the word of God.

The new ones in the Lord's recovery need the completion of the word of God. For example, a new one may firmly believe that Christ is God and the Creator. However, he may not realize the all-inclusiveness of Christ and experience Him as such an all-inclusive One. He may not realize that, as a man, Christ is also a creature. When he hears about this aspect of Christ, he may be troubled. This indicates that someone needs to complete the word of God to him in this matter and point out that, although Christ is God, He is still a man. He is all-inclusive. In 1 Timothy 2:5 Paul speaks of the man Christ Jesus. Furthermore, after the ascension of Christ, Stephen saw the Son of Man in the heavens (Acts 7:56). Surely a man is a creature with flesh

and bones. After His resurrection, the Lord showed His disciples that He had a body of flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). Since the resurrected Christ is still a man with such a body, it is correct to say that He is a creature. Nevertheless, due to the influence of religious tradition, many believers may be reluctant to make such a statement about Christ. To them, such a teaching may be heretical. We need to help them take the pure Word of God and believe whatever it says. This means that we need to help them have the completion of the word of God.

In the Lord's recovery we need more stewards who are able to complete the word of God. We all must bear the burden for this. We need to spend more time in the Lord's presence so that He may become our portion for our enjoyment and so that we may have the riches of Christ to minister to others. In this way we shall become those who complete the word of God. Then through our ministry other believers will be nourished, strengthened, confirmed, and built up.

The Body is built up as all the members carry out the stewardship of ministering the riches of Christ. May there be such a mutual stewardship among us. You minister the riches of Christ to others, and they minister Christ to you. If this is our situation, we all shall be nourished and enjoy Christ more than ever. Then through the stewardship of dispensing the riches of Christ, the church will be built up in a practical way.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE TWELVE

FILLING UP WHAT IS LACKING OF THE AFFLICTIONS OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:24; 1 Pet. 3:18; Heb. 9:26; Isa. 53:3-5, 7-8; John 12:24; Luke 12:50; Phil. 3:10; Rev. 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:10; 2 Cor. 1:5-6

In 1:24 Paul says, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf, and fill up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His Body, which is the church." When I first read this verse, I was surprised and troubled. I wondered how there could be any lack in the sufferings of Christ. At the time, I was fully under the religious concept that it was impossible for Christ to have any lack. Nevertheless, in this verse Paul says clearly that he was to "fill up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ."

TWO KINDS OF SUFFERING

Are not the sufferings of Christ already complete? How can it be necessary for the afflictions of Christ on behalf of the Body to be completed? The Lord Jesus underwent two kinds of suffering: the suffering for redemption and the suffering for producing and building up the Body, the church. None of us can have any share in His suffering for redemption. To say that we can participate in this suffering is to speak blasphemy. He alone is the Redeemer, and the suffering for redemption was fully accomplished by Him. We are neither qualified nor positioned to share in the Lord's suffering for redemption. In typology, on the day of atonement, only the high priest, who made atonement for the people, was allowed to enter into the Holy of Holies. The high priest was a figure of Christ as the unique One capable of accomplishing redemption and qualified to do it.

A number of verses speak of Christ's sufferings for the

accomplishment of redemption. For example, 1 Peter 3:18 says, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." Christ, the righteous One, died for the unrighteous ones. He was the only One qualified to bear this kind of affliction. Hebrews 9:26 and Isaiah 53:3-5, 7-8 also indicate that Christ suffered to accomplish redemption on our behalf. In this suffering we have no share. It was borne by Christ alone.

Although we cannot participate in Christ's suffering for redemption, if we are faithful to Him, we must share in His suffering for the producing and building up of His Body. Paul was a pattern for us in this matter. Immediately after his conversion, he began to share in this suffering of Christ, to partake of the afflictions of Christ for the sake of His Body.

This is contrary to the concept that nothing related to Christ can be lacking. According to this concept, whatever Christ is and does is complete. But here is a word telling us that at least one thing related to Christ is lacking--His afflictions for producing and building up His Body. For the producing of His Body, Christ suffered a great deal. But because this suffering has not been completed by Christ Himself, there is the need for His faithful ones to make up this shortage. Paul did not suffer for redemption, but he did suffer for the producing and building up of the Body of Christ.

The Apostle Paul was a pattern for the believers to follow (1 Tim. 1:16). We must consider Paul as a pattern, not as someone who was so high that no one else can be like he was. Because by the Lord's mercy Paul was set up to be a pattern for us, whatever he was, we can be also. We must believe in the Lord's mercy. If the mercy of the Lord made Paul a pattern, then His mercy can accomplish in us the same thing that it did in Paul. This means that just as Paul suffered for the producing and building up of the Body of Christ, so we must also suffer for the church.

Christ, of course, took the lead to suffer for the producing and building up of His Body. But the apostles and believers must follow Christ's footsteps in suffering this

kind of affliction. In John 12:24 the Lord Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." This verse does not speak of Christ's redeeming death, but of His producing, generating death. Christ fell into the ground and died as a grain of wheat in order to produce many grains for the church. According to John 12:26, those who desire to serve Him must follow Him in this regard.

In Luke 12:50 the Lord Jesus said, "But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straightened till it be accomplished! " The word baptism in this verse refers to Christ's all-inclusive death on the cross, a death that was not only for redemption, but also for producing the Body through the release of the divine life. As the Lord's word to His disciples in Mark 10:38 and 39 makes clear, they also were to share in the baptism with which He Himself was to be baptized.

In Philippians 3:10 Paul speaks of knowing the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. These sufferings are not for redemption, but for the building up of the Body. We cannot have fellowship in Christ's sufferings for redemption, but we need to have much fellowship in Christ's sufferings for the church.

A JOINT PARTAKER OF TRIBULATION IN JESUS

In Revelation 1:9 John says that he was a "joint partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus." To say that we are joint partakers in the tribulation, kingdom, and endurance in Jesus indicates that we are suffering. When Jesus lived on earth as a man, He suffered continually. According to the history of His life, His name Jesus denotes a suffering person, a man of sorrows (Isa. 53:3). Therefore, to be a joint partaker of tribulation in Jesus is to suffer and to be persecuted as we follow Jesus the Nazarene. The book of Revelation is for those who are suffering tribulation in Jesus. As we wait for the coming of the Lord, we must be willing to suffer. This suffering is for the Body, the church. We must participate

in the sufferings of Jesus for the sake of the church.

When Jesus was on earth, He was persecuted by the Jewish religion, a religion formed according to God's oracles. John 5:16 says that the Jews persecuted Jesus because He broke their Sabbath. Religious people cannot tolerate the breaking of their regulations. Any violation of their religious regulations will stir up persecution. When Jesus broke the Sabbath, the Jewish religionists persecuted Him and even sought to kill Him. Eventually, religion succeeded in sentencing Jesus to death.

Just as religion persecuted Jesus, it also persecutes the followers of Jesus. We know from the book of Acts that the Jews in the synagogues stood up in opposition to the apostles. Paul suffered this kind of persecution very much. John, the writer of Revelation, also experienced it. John was exiled to the island of Patmos "for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." He became a joint partaker in the suffering, the affliction, in Jesus.

The persecution against the Lord Jesus originated not with the secular world, but with the religious world. In the book of Acts we see that the situation was the same regarding the persecution of the apostles. The opposition did not come mainly from the Gentiles, but from the Jewish religion. In like manner, a great many martyrs have suffered persecution at the hand of religion. Religion always persecutes the genuine followers of Jesus. Now it is our turn to undergo this persecution, this suffering for the building up of the Body of Christ. During the years I was with Brother Nee in China, I saw how much he was persecuted by religion. The rumors, opposition, and condemnation came from the religious people. In his subtlety, Satan, the Devil, uses religion to oppose and to persecute those who follow the Lord Jesus. Therefore, like John on the island of Patmos, we also must be joint partakers in the tribulation in Jesus. In this way we make up what is lacking of the afflictions of Christ for the church.

SUFFERING FOR THE SAINTS

In 2 Timothy 2:10 Paul says, "Therefore I endure all

things for the elect's sake." This verse is a further indication that Paul suffered for the sake of the elect, God's chosen people.

Furthermore, 2 Corinthians 1:5 and 6 say, "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation." This is another indication of how much Paul suffered for the saints.

THE GOAL OF OUR WORK

We need to follow the early apostles in making up the lack of Christ's afflictions for the church. We also need to share in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings for the building up of the church. The goal of our Christian work must be the building up of the church. However, if we care only for such activities as preaching the gospel or teaching the Bible, we may be welcomed and appreciated. But if the goal of our preaching and teaching is the building up of the church, we shall be opposed by the religious ones.

What is our goal in preaching the gospel? It is not simply to save sinners from hell. It is to obtain material for the building up of the Body of Christ. When I was in religion, I heard many messages encouraging us to preach the gospel. We were always asked to consider God's love and sympathy for pitiful sinners, and we were told to have the same feeling toward them. Sometimes preachers would say, "Thousands are going to hell every day. Is your heart untouched by this?" Some would be inspired by this preaching and with tears respond to the altar call to become ministers of the gospel. The term "soul winning" is very common in today's Christianity. But what is the purpose of soul winning? Have you ever heard that soul winning is for Body building? Nevertheless, Paul's goal in preaching the gospel was the building up of the Body. This is why he was persecuted and why he suffered.

Surely the Jews were the people of God during the time

of the Lord Jesus on earth. Did they not daily offer up sacrifices to God? Did they not have the temple which was built according to God's revelation and instruction? The answer to these questions is yes. But one day Jesus came. He did not care for the temple in the way the Jewish religionists did. When His disciples were admiring the buildings of the temple, He said, "A stone shall by no means be left upon a stone which shall not be thrown down" (Matt. 24:2). Who could have dared to say this? If you had been there and had spoken these words, the Jews would have killed you. This was the reason they persecuted the Lord Jesus.

In the book of Acts we see that those in the Jewish synagogues accused the Apostle Paul of being a "pestilent fellow" (Acts 24:5). Wherever Paul went, he caused trouble. Therefore, he was opposed by the religious people, by the so-called people of God.

It is the same today. If we preach the gospel only for the sake of soul winning and rescuing people from hell, we probably shall not suffer very much. In fact, we may find ourselves welcomed in many places. However, if we take the building of the Body as the goal of gospel preaching, we must be prepared to suffer, even to be opposed and persecuted. Religion does not agree with the building up of the Body. Some Christians have even lied about us, classifying us with those in cults and evil, blasphemous movements. In 2 Corinthians 6:8 Paul said that he had experienced both evil report and good report. If, as you serve the Lord, others give only good reports concerning you, I would question your faithfulness to the Lord. If you are faithful to the Lord, today's religion will criticize you and spread evil reports about you.

Apparently, religion is for God; actually, it is against God's economy. Nothing is more subtle and damaging to God's economy than religion. Winning souls does not affect religion; rather, it helps it a great deal. But whenever you talk about the building up of the Body, religion is threatened.

Consider what Paul did when he was Saul of Tarsus. He

was a leader in his religion, and he did everything possible to derive benefit from that religion. However, on the way to Damascus, he was caught by the Lord. After his conversion, whatever he did amounted to a tearing down of religion. Paul was bold. The Lord Jesus annulled the Sabbath day, but Paul annulled something even more important to Judaism--Paul annulled circumcision. The Jews condemned Paul for teaching others to discontinue the practice of circumcision. If Paul had been concerned only with soul winning, he would not have offended people. Paul did not say, "I must keep all the doors open. Therefore, I shouldn't say a word about circumcision. I must not say anything contrary to the Jewish religion. For the sake of soul winning, I must maintain a good relationship with the religious people." If Paul's concern was merely the saving of souls, this could have been his practice. But since he was for the building up of the Body, there was no way for him to do this. For the sake of the producing and building up of the Body of Christ, Paul shared in the sufferings of Christ.

Often people have told me that they appreciated my ministry with the exception of my ministry concerning the church. Some have even pleaded with me not to speak of the church. One instance of this took place in Texas in 1964. I had been invited to Dallas to speak to a certain group of Christians. One evening after the meeting, my host said to me, "Brother Lee, we appreciate your ministry. However, we wish to make it clear that this audience cannot accept any word about the church. In your messages, please don't say anything about the church." I replied, "It is important for you to realize that the more I minister on Christ as life, the more the saints will hunger for the church." During the last meeting, I had the Lord's leading to speak on the Body from Romans 12. I knew that if I did not speak regarding the church, I would not be faithful to the Lord or honest to the audience. Although I knew my host and others would be offended, I proceeded to speak a strong word about the church life. Unhappy with my speaking, my host did not even rise up to see us off

when we departed early the next morning. Nevertheless, one brother was greatly helped by that message on the church and, as a result, was encouraged to turn to the way of the Lord's recovery.

For the sake of the Body of Christ, the church, we need to fill up what is lacking of the afflictions of Christ. I can testify that I have been attacked and opposed simply because of my stand for the recovery of the church life. If you choose to stand for the church, be prepared for attack, misunderstanding, and rumors. Many evil things will be spoken concerning you. The reason for this is that the matter of the church stirs up the authority of darkness. Therefore, those who stand for the church must be prepared for the attack of the enemy. The Lord Jesus said, "On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). This word indicates that the gates of Hades, the power of darkness, will do everything possible to frustrate the building up of the church. Praise the Lord that He has promised that the gates of Hades will not prevail!

If we are faithful and honest with respect to the Lord's ministry and the stewardship of God for the building up of the church, we shall suffer attack, opposition, and evil speaking. In view of this, we need to look to the Lord that we may be covered by His prevailing blood. We also need to pray that the Lord may hide us in Himself as our high tower. As we hide in the Lord during times of suffering and affliction, we share in the fellowship of His sufferings. In this way we fill up what is lacking of the afflictions of Christ for the sake of the church.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE THIRTEEN

COMPLETING THE WORD OF GOD

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:25; 1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:17; 13:14; Eph. 3:14-19

In 1:25 Paul says, "Of which I became a minister according to the stewardship of God, which was given to me for you, to complete the word of God." In this message we shall consider the matter of completing the word of God.

I. THE WORD OF GOD INCLUDING THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE WORD PREACHED BY THE EARLY DISCIPLES

At the time of Paul, the word of God included the Old Testament and the word preached by the early disciples. In Acts 4:29 the disciples prayed that they might preach God's word with boldness. According to Acts 4:31, "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spake the word of God with boldness." In Acts 6:4 we see that the apostles gave themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. Acts 6:7 tells us that "the word of God increased." Those who were scattered because of the persecution against the church following the death of Stephen "went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). Furthermore, Acts 12:24 says that "the word of God grew and multiplied."

Although the word of God preached by the early disciples grew and multiplied, it was not yet completed according to God's economy. For this completion, God's revelation to Paul was needed. Because the Jews have only the Old Testament, they do not have the complete oracle of God. Moreover, although Christians have both the Old Testament and the New Testament, in actuality many of

them do not have the complete revelation of God. In their experience and in their understanding, they may have only the Gospels, Acts, and part of Romans. Many have studied the Bible, but still lack an adequate understanding of the divine revelation.

According to the stewardship of God, Paul became a minister of the church to complete the word of God. Consider what a lack there would be if we did not have the Epistles of Paul. Without them, there would be no completion of the word of God. Paul's stewardship was to complete the word of God in order to dispense Christ with all His riches into the churches. The revelation given to Paul was for the completion of God's word. Therefore, it is crucial that we all know the revelation that was given to Paul.

II. GOD'S REVELATION TO PAUL

A. Christ Being the Mystery of God

Paul received the revelation of Christ as the mystery of God. In 2:2 he speaks of the "full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ." This term, the mystery of God, is not found in the Old Testament. The Gospels do not record any time that it was used by the Lord Jesus. It was first used by Paul in his Epistles. The mystery of God is Christ as the embodiment of God. Colossians 2:9 says, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

As the mystery of God, Christ must be both the embodiment of God and the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:17). All fundamental Christian teachers believe that Christ is the embodiment of God, but very few see that He is also the life-giving Spirit. In order for us to know Christ in reality as the embodiment of God, we need to experience Him as the life-giving Spirit. Because the enemy knows the crucial significance of this, he attacks this point intensely. If we do not realize that Christ is the life-giving Spirit, the fact that Christ is the embodiment of God is merely doctrine or theory. It is just an objective teaching not at all related to our Christian experience. If this is the situation. there is no way for theory to become

reality. The reality of Christ as the embodiment of God is in Christ as the life-giving Spirit.

In John 14:16 through 18 the Lord Jesus said, "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever; even the Spirit of reality, Whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him; but you know Him, because He abides with you and shall be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I am coming to you." The One who is the Spirit of reality in verse 17 becomes the very One who is the Lord Himself in verse 18; He becomes I. This indicates that after His resurrection the Lord became the Spirit of reality. First Corinthians 15:45, which deals with the matter of resurrection, confirms this by saying that the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit. Paul was bold and not at all ambiguous in declaring the fact that Christ is the Spirit. To the natural mind it is not logical that the last Adam, a man in the flesh, could become a life-giving Spirit. Nevertheless, Paul uncompromisingly declared this fact. Furthermore, in 2 Corinthians 3:17 he said, "Now the Lord is that Spirit." According to the context of the whole chapter, the Spirit in verse 17 is the Spirit who gives life in verse 6. Furthermore, in 2 Timothy 4:22 Paul clearly said, "The Lord be with thy spirit." How clear is Paul's word!

In 1964 I was warned by an intimate friend not to teach that Christ is the Spirit. This one admitted that the Bible teaches that Christ is the Spirit. However, because religious tradition makes others unwilling to accept this fact, he was not bold to declare it. I told my friend, "If I do not teach that Christ is the life-giving Spirit, I have no ministry. I came to this country with the burden mainly to minister along this line." Later that year I gave a series of messages on Christ as the Spirit. These messages are printed in The Economy of God.

Many of us can testify of the help we have received in life through realizing that our Lord today is the life-giving Spirit in our spirit. If Christ were not the Spirit in our spirit, how could we experience Him as our life? We would

have no experience of Christ as life. Instead, we would simply have another form of religious practice. But because we have Christ as the life-giving Spirit, we do not have a religion. We have the living Christ in our experience. On the one hand, He is the embodiment of the fullness of God and, on the other hand, He is the life-giving Spirit indwelling our spirit. This revelation of Christ is part of the revelation given to Paul for the completion of the word of God.

B. The Dispensation of God

Paul was also given the revelation concerning the dispensation of God (2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 3:14-19). The word dispensation has been damaged through misuse. To many Christians it refers simply to the ways in which God deals with people, ways that are called dispensations. When we use the word dispensation, however, we use it with the meaning of dispensing. In His economy, God is dispensing Himself into us. Paul was the first to speak of God's dispensation, and his writings reveal that God is now dispensing Himself into our being. For example, 2 Corinthians 13:14 says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all" (Gk.). This is the dispensing of the Triune God into our being. Where else in the Bible can you find such a clear word concerning the dispensation of the Triune God into the believers? In this verse we have the Father as the source, the Son as the course, and the Spirit as the flow. What a dispensation!

In Ephesians 3:14-19 Paul also speaks of God's dispensation. He prays to the Father that we may be strengthened with power by His Spirit into our inner man so that Christ may make His home in our hearts. The result is that we are rooted and grounded in love and are strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, length, height, and depth, and to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ so that we may be filled unto all the fullness of God. In these verses Paul

speaks of the Triune God--the Father, the Spirit, and Christ (the Son). Through the dispensation of the Triune God into our being, we become the fullness of God, His expression.

C. The Church Being the Mystery of Christ

In Ephesians 3:4 Paul speaks of the mystery of Christ. The mystery of God in Colossians 2:2 is Christ, whereas the mystery of Christ in Ephesians 3:4 is the church. In Ephesians 1:22 and 23 Paul says that the church is the Body of Christ, His fullness. Paul was the first to use such a term to describe the church. Nowhere in the writings of Peter or John are we told that the church is the Body. Although Paul came on the scene later than the original apostles, he was bold to speak forth the divine revelation and dared to use terminology that had not been used before. Recognizing this, Peter recommended Paul, saying in his second Epistle, "Even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood" (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Peter could write these words even though he had once been rebuked by Paul (Gal. 2:11). Because Paul was not afraid to utter the revelation God had given him regarding the church, he was the kind of person the Lord could use to complete His word.

Another revolutionary term used by Paul concerning the church is the new man (Col. 3:10). Paul received the revelation that the church is the new man with Christ as the constituent. Only Paul had the boldness to use such a term.

There is an urgent need today for the completion of the word of God. Although Paul was used in the completion of the divine revelation centuries ago, there is still the need for its completion in a practical way among Christians today. In most Christian groups there is very little ministry of Christ as life. Furthermore, not many dare to face the issue of the church. Through his subtlety, Satan, the

enemy of God, is seeking to nullify the completion of the word of God. The enemy may allow Christians to preach what is revealed in the Old Testament, in the Gospels, and in the Acts. But he cannot tolerate the teaching concerning Christ as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit or concerning the church as the mystery of Christ. Anyone who ministers along this line will be attacked by the enemy.

Because of my stand for the church, I have been the target of many evil rumors. I have been accused of twisting Brother Nee's teaching about the church life. Some claim that after World War II Brother Nee changed his concept regarding the ground of the church. According to this rumor, because I have not changed my attitude about the church ground, I have become different from Brother Nee in this matter. As an exposure of this false report, we put out *Further Talks on the Church Life*, which includes a number of messages on the church given by Brother Nee after World War II. Each of these messages is documented with the date and the place. After this book was released, the opposers changed their strategy and began to say that this book is not an accurate translation, but my own interpretation. However, those familiar with both English and Chinese can testify that the translation is very accurate and true to the original. These rumors show that Satan attacks those today who stand for the revelation given by God to Paul, in particular for the revelation concerning Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ.

Many oppose us because they have been drugged by religious tradition. Under the influence of this tradition, they condemn as heretical the teaching that corresponds to the word completed by the Apostle Paul. Many of us can testify that in Christianity we did not receive the complete revelation, the completed word of God. It is the subtlety of the enemy to veil the word which was completed through Paul. For this reason, we are burdened for the completion of the word of God.

In 1:29 Paul said that he labored, "struggling according

to His operation which operates in me in power." Paul labored and struggled for the completion of the word of God. The Greek word indicates that he was wrestling, engaging in combat, for this completion. We can frankly testify that we also are wrestling for the completion of the revelation given to Paul. Apparently in the Lord's ministry we are working; actually we are fighting against religion with its tradition. We need to be clear, however, that our wrestling is not against blood and flesh, but against the evil powers in the heavenlies, against the gates of Hades that seek to destroy the church. As we struggle and fight, our burden, our stewardship, is to complete the word of God. What we are ministering today is the completion of the divine revelation given to Paul.

We need to point out again and again that this revelation concerns Christ as the embodiment of God and the church as the expression of Christ. Although there are a great many Christian activities in this country, there is hardly any completing of the word of God. Who is bearing the burden to declare that Christ the Savior is the life-giving Spirit imparting the divine life into us? Who is discharging the burden to tell the Lord's people that they should be the living Body to express Christ on the proper ground in each locality? We in the Lord's recovery must take up the responsibility for this. The goal of the Lord's recovery is the completion of the word of God. I hope that many brothers will rise up to fulfill this ministry.

Today there is much gospel preaching, Bible teaching, and Christian work, but where is the completion of the word of God? There are thousands of so-called churches, but there is no completion of God's word. Without the completion of the word of God, God's purpose cannot be fulfilled, and Christ cannot obtain His Bride or come with His kingdom. We need to experience Christ as the all-inclusive, life-giving Spirit and stand with the church on the proper ground. No matter how much we are opposed and attacked, we must stand with the church and experience Christ in our daily life.

III. THE COMPLETION OF THE WORD OF GOD

The completion of the word of God includes the great mystery of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32); the full revelation concerning Christ, the Head (Col. 1:26-27; 2:19; 3:11); and the full revelation concerning the church, the Body (Eph. 3:3-6). Not only should these matters be impressed upon us; they should be infused into our being. May the Lord make us all clear concerning His recovery and concerning the wrestling for the completion of the word of God. If we would be those who complete the word of God, we must minister Christ as the life-giving Spirit and stand with the church as the living expression of Christ on the proper ground of locality. This is our burden, our ministry, and our warfare.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FOURTEEN

CHRIST--THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S ECONOMY

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:25-29

In this message we come to the mystery of God's economy, the mystery that is actually Christ Himself.

In 1:25 Paul speaks of the stewardship of God. The Greek word rendered stewardship, oikonomia, may also be rendered economy or administration. The stewardship is the economy, and God's economy is His dispensation. God's intention in His economy is to dispense Himself--the Father, the Son, and the Spirit--into His chosen people.

Christ is the mystery, the secret, and the crucial focus, of the divine economy. This means that the secret of the dispensation of the Triune God into God's chosen people is Christ Himself. Christ is the focal point of God's dispensation. God's dispensation is altogether related to Christ and focused on Him.

For centuries, Christians have been reading the Epistles of Paul, but very few have seen the matter of God's economy and Christ as the mystery of this economy. I can testify that I read Ephesians and Colossians for years before I began to see that Christ is the mystery of God's economy. Early in my Christian life, I did not see that Christ is the secret of God's dispensation. This matter is hidden and is not according to our natural concept. In order to see it we need to pray and to exercise our spirit as we study the Epistle of Colossians in a detailed way. Let us now consider 1:25-29 in some detail.

A MINISTER OF THE CHURCH

Verse 25 says, "Of which I became a minister according

to the stewardship of God, which was given to me for you, to complete the word of God." The word "which" refers to the church in verse 24. This indicates that Paul became a minister, not of a certain mission work or of a particular work of teaching and preaching, but of the church. The word minister describes one who serves. Paul became such a minister of the church according to the stewardship, the economy, the dispensation, of God. This stewardship was given to Paul for the church. The goal of God's stewardship for the church was to complete the word of God.

THE MYSTERY MANIFESTED TO THE SAINTS

Notice that verse 25 does not end with a period, but with a comma. Then in verse 26 Paul continues, "The mystery which has been hidden from the ages and from the generations, but now has been manifested to His saints." According to grammar, the mystery in verse 26 is in apposition to the word of God in verse 25. This means that the word of God is the very mystery which has been hidden from the ages and generations, but is now made manifest to the saints. The ages here denote eternity, whereas the generations denote the times. The mystery concerning Christ and the church had been hidden from eternity and from all times until the New Testament age, when it was manifested to the saints, the believers in Christ.

It is important that in verse 26 Paul does not say that the mystery has been manifested to the apostles; he says that it has been manifested to the saints. Due to the influence of religious tradition, many believe that such things as God's economy cannot be understood by the so-called laymen. How we thank the Lord that the mystery has been manifested to the saints, to all those who believe in Christ! Even the youngest ones among us have both the position to see this mystery and the privilege of seeing it. We have the privilege of seeing something that was not revealed to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, or to the prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah. Praise the Lord that we can know the completion of the word of

God! We can know Christ as the mystery of God's economy and the Body as Christ's fullness. Furthermore, we can know that the church is the new man with Christ as the content and constituent. None of these things was made known to God's people in the Old Testament age.

Today we focus our attention upon Christ as the mystery of God and upon the church as the mystery of Christ. As the mystery of God, the all-inclusive Christ is the embodiment of God and also the life-giving Spirit. As the mystery of Christ, the church is the Body of Christ, His fullness, and the new man to be the full expression of Christ as well. This is the mystery that has been made manifest to the saints.

Paul's writing in this Epistle is quite complex. He uses many long sentences with various clauses and relative pronouns. Actually, verses 24 through 29 should be regarded as a single sentence. In verse 27, the continuation of verse 26, Paul says, "To whom God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." The word "whom" at the beginning of this verse refers to the saints mentioned in the preceding verse. To us God has willed to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery. This mystery, which is Christ in us as the hope of glory, is made known among the nations. The word "which" in verse 27 refers to the mystery. This mystery full of glory among the nations is Christ in us. Christ in us is mysterious and glorious as well. Because Paul was dealing with matters deep and profound, his writing was complex, and his sentences were long.

THE RICHES OF THE GLORY OF THE MYSTERY

Let us now pay closer attention to the riches of the glory of the mystery spoken of in verse 27. The riches of this mystery among the nations are the riches of all that Christ is to the Gentile believers (Eph. 3:8). At the time Paul wrote to the Colossians, the Jews regarded the

Gentiles, the nations, as swine. Nevertheless, Paul says that God has willed to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, that is, among the Gentile "swine." Various terms could be used to describe the Gentiles: sinners, rebels, enemies of God, sons of disobedience, sons of wrath. Before we were saved, we were in this category. But even among such people God has willed to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery.

After you were saved, did you not have the sense that you had entered into glory? Many of us had this kind of experience. Although we were sinners, enemies, and rebels, we have become sons of God. We are also heirs of God, joint partakers of Christ, and even the members of Christ. Furthermore, the New Testament reveals that we are priests and kings. As heirs of God, we shall inherit not only God Himself, but all things. We are sons of God, heirs of God, partners of Christ, and priests and kings. What a glory this is!

If we see this glory, we shall also know the riches of the glory, even though we lack the language to utter these riches adequately. These riches include the divine life, the divine nature, the anointing, and the all-inclusive Spirit. Other aspects of the riches are righteousness, justification, holiness, sanctification, transformation, glorification, comfort, and the divine Presence. It is impossible to list all the riches. They are beyond counting. These are the riches of the unique glory, the glory that is ours because we are sons and heirs of God, partners of Christ, and priests and kings.

The key to the riches of glory is Christ Himself. Although the Jews in ancient times were the people of God and not Gentile "swine," they did not recognize the Lord Jesus as their Messiah. To many Jews today, the term Messiah has no reality. When their Messiah comes and they recognize Him, He will only be among them. But 1:27 indicates that Christ is not merely among us; He is in us. To us Christ is not only the objective One, but also the subjective One dwelling in us. We need to tell the Jews that instead of waiting for their Messiah to come only in

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outward way, they too can have Christ, the true Messiah, dwelling in them right now and thereby become sons of God. The Jews who receive Christ into them will not only be the people of God chosen by Him, but also the sons of God regenerated by Him. What a glory it is to be indwelt by Christ!

As believers in Christ, we know the riches of the glory of this mystery. We cannot exhaust the items of the riches of such a glory. All the blessings in the Bible are included in the riches of this glory, which is our portion. This glory is the glory of the mystery among the nations, and this mystery is Christ in us. The Christ who dwells within us is the mystery full of glory, with countless riches. This is the key point in the book of Colossians.

BACK TO THE MYSTERY

Those in Colosse, however, had lost the vision of this mystery and had become distracted by philosophy, observances, ordinances, and practices. They had been defrauded and carried away as spoil from their prize, the enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ. Like the Colossians, today's Christians have also lost the vision of the glory of Christ as the mystery of God's economy. The vast majority of genuine Christians have been distracted and carried away to things other than Christ Himself. Because the Colossians had been distracted, Paul wrote to say that the mystery hidden from the ages and from the generations has been made manifest to the saints. This mystery is the all-inclusive Christ who indwells us. Because we have the One who is all in all, we have no need to turn to philosophies, ordinances, observances, and practices. How I look to the Lord that we all may be brought back to this mystery! Let us forget everything other than Christ and care only for Him. Christ, the mystery among the Gentiles, has a glory filled with riches.

THE HOPE OF GLORY

In verse 27 Paul says that Christ in us is the hope of

glory. Christ is the mystery which is full of glory now. This glory will be manifested to its fullest extent when Christ returns to glorify His saints (Rom. 8:30). Hence, it is a hope, the hope of glory. Christ Himself is also this hope of glory.

Today we may live in Christ, by Christ, and with Christ. We may live Him, grow Him, and produce Him. At the same time, He is our hope of glory. If we see the vision that the all-inclusive Christ who indwells us is our hope of glory, our living will be revolutionized. We shall say, "Lord, from now on I won't care for anything other than You. I won't care for doctrines, ordinances, regulations, or traditions. I don't care for religion, philosophy, or the elements of the world. Lord, I care only for You as the embodiment of God and as the life-giving Spirit in my spirit. Because you are so real, living, and practical in my spirit, I can live by You and with You. Lord, my only desire is to experience You in this way."

Eventually, the New Testament charges us to walk according to the mingled spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25; Rom. 8:4). We need to walk according to the Christ who is the very glory filled with riches. Oh, may we all see this vision! Once we have seen this vision, it will control every aspect of our daily walk.

If we see this vision, we shall also realize how much Christians today have been distracted to things other than Christ. They may pay their attention to good things, scriptural things, fundamental things, even spiritual things. Nevertheless, these things are not Christ Himself. It is crucial that we see the Christ who is the mystery hidden from eternity but now made manifest to the saints in the New Testament age. God has willed to make known among the nations the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in us as the hope of glory. This mystery is the key to our Christian life and also to the church life.

PRESENTING EVERY MAN FULL-GROWN IN CHRIST

In verse 28 Paul says that he announced Christ. Here Paul does not say that he taught Christ or preached Christ,

but that he announced Christ. As he announced Him, he was "warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom" in order to "present every man full-grown in Christ." Paul's ministry, whether in announcing Christ or in warning and teaching every man in all wisdom, was to minister Christ to others so that they could be perfect and complete by maturing with Christ unto full growth.

To become full-grown in Christ is a matter of life. Christ must be added into us. Then we need to grow in Christ and gradually gain more of the stature of Christ. Eventually, as Christ is wrought into us, we shall become full-grown in Christ.

The goal of Paul's ministry was to present every man full-grown in Christ. Whenever I consider this phrase, "present every man full-grown," as used in this verse, I sense how short I am. I am warned by the Spirit within me regarding my ministry. I am concerned about how many I shall be able to present full-grown in Christ. The burden of this responsibility weighs upon me greatly. Inwardly I am charged to announce Christ and to warn others and teach them regarding Christ so that I may present them full-grown in Christ.

Paul's concept in 1:28 is completely different from that held by Christian ministers and pastors today. Paul's concept concerning his ministry was that of dispensing Christ into others so that they may grow in Christ to maturity. He knew that Christ had to be added into the believers until they became full-grown in Christ. We need to have the same concept as Paul. As the elders care for the saints in the churches, they should seek to present all the dear ones full-grown in Christ.

STRUGGLING ACCORDING TO HIS OPERATION

In verse 29 Paul goes on to say, "For which also I labor, struggling according to His operation which operates in me in power." I believe that the words "for which" refer to the matter of presenting every man full-grown in Christ. For such a presentation Paul labored, struggled, fought, and

wrestled. Paul's struggling, however, was according to Christ's operation within him. Hallelujah, the indwelling Christ is operating within us! This operating is His energizing. As He energizes us from within, we need to labor in cooperation with His operating.

The operation of Christ operates in power. The Greek word for power is the source of the English word dynamo. This power is no doubt the power of the resurrection life (Phil. 3:10), which operates within the apostle and all the believers (Eph. 1:19; 3:7, 20). By such an inward operating power of life Christ operates within us. This power is different from God's creating power. God's creating power is the source of the material things in our environment, whereas God's resurrection power accomplishes the spiritual things for the church within our being. Paul labored, struggled, wrestled, and fought according to this resurrection power. By means of the operation in this power he carried out his ministry to present every saint full-grown in Christ.

May our eyes be opened to see that the goal of our work and ministry must be to minister Christ to others so that they may grow with the measure of Christ, who is the mystery of God's economy.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FIFTEEN

CHRIST IN YOU THE HOPE OF GLORY

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:26-27, 12, 15, 18-19; 2:2, 9, 16-17; 3:11; John 14:17, 20; 1 Cor. 15:45b; Phil. 1:19; 2 Tim. 4:22; 1 Cor. 6:17; Col. 3:4; Eph. 3:17a; Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:21; 2 Thes. 1:10a

In the foregoing message we saw that Christ is the mystery of God's economy. In this message we shall go on to see that Christ in us is the hope of glory. In order to be impressed with this aspect of Christ, we need to pay attention to a number of crucial points regarding Christ that are covered in Colossians.

I. CHRIST, THE PORTION OF THE SAINTS

Christ is the portion of the saints. Colossians 1:12 says, "Giving thanks to the Father, Who qualified you for a share of the portion of the saints in the light." This is the first aspect of Christ presented in this Epistle. The word portion denotes Christ as the lot of the saints in the good land, flowing with milk and honey. The very Christ who in-dwells us is such a good land. He is the all-inclusive Christ for our enjoyment.

II. CHRIST, THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD

According to 1:15, Christ is also the image of the invisible God. This means that Christ is the expression of God. Although God is invisible, He is expressed in Christ. The very Christ who is our good land is also the image of the Triune God, His expression. As God's expression, Christ is the image of God.

III. CHRIST, THE FIRSTBORN OF ALL CREATION

Colossians 1:15 also says that Christ is the "firstborn of all creation." The invisible God is expressed in His

creation. Romans 1:20 says, "For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world, being apprehended by the things made, are clearly seen, both His eternal power and divine nature." God is expressed through His creation, and Christ is the firstborn of this creation. Thus, Christ is the means by which God expresses Himself. The fact that the image of God and the firstborn of creation are mentioned in the same verse indicates that the image of God is related to creation. This indicates clearly that as the first-born of God's creation, Christ is the image of God, His expression.

IV. CHRIST, THE FIRSTBORN FROM AMONG THE DEAD

There are two creations of God: the old creation and the new creation. Unbelievers know only of the first creation, the creation of the universe. However, according to the Bible, God also has a new creation, which is the church. Christ is the firstborn not only of the old creation, but also of the new creation. As the firstborn of both creations, Christ is God's expression.

Verses 15 through 20 are closely connected and express one complete thought. In verses 15 and 16 we see that Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, because all things were created in Him. Notice that verses 17 and 18 each begin with the conjunction "and." Finally, in verse 19, Paul presents the conclusion of this line of thought: "For in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell."

Paul's use of the word all in the phrase "all the fullness" indicates that the fullness both in the old creation and in the new creation dwells in Christ. We have pointed out that fullness is equal to image and also to expression. According to New Testament usage, the fullness also denotes the Body. In Ephesians 1:23 Paul says that the church is Christ's Body, "the fullness of the One Who fills all in all." The Body is the fullness, the fullness is the expression, and the expression is the image. If we would understand Colossians 1:15-20, we must see

that the image in verse 15 denotes the very fullness as the expression in verse 19. Hence, the image of God is the expression of God, and this expression is the fullness of God. The fullness of God is seen in the old creation because Christ is the first-born of creation and also in the new creation because Christ is the firstborn from among the dead. For this reason, verse 19 speaks of all the fullness. All the fullness was pleased to dwell in the all-inclusive Christ.

If we have the proper spiritual perspective, we shall see Christ when we look at the universe. Likewise, when we consider the church, we shall also see Christ. Both in the universe and in the church there is the fullness of God, His expression. This expression is the very Christ who is the image of the invisible God.

Every thoughtful person realizes that there is some kind of expression in the universe. The more we consider the universe, the more we are conscious that it is the expression of something. According to Colossians, the universe is the expression of the fullness of the invisible God. In the same principle, when we view the proper church life, we are also conscious of a certain expression. This expression is also that of the image of the invisible God. This image is Christ. Because Christ is the firstborn of both the old creation and the new creation, He is the expression of the invisible God.

V. CHRIST, IN WHOM ALL THE FULLNESS WAS PLEASED TO DWELL

Colossians 1:19 says that all the fullness was pleased to dwell in Christ. This thought is echoed in 2:9, where Paul says, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." The fullness both in the old creation and in the new creation dwells in Christ. This fullness refers not to the riches of God, but to the expression of these riches. The expression of God's riches dwells in Christ.

Many Christians speak of the indwelling Christ without realizing that the Christ who indwells them is the all-inclusive One. If some were asked what kind of Christ

lives in them, they would speak only of Christ as the Savior and the Redeemer. This, of course, is not wrong, but it is very inadequate. When Paul says, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (1:27), he is referring to a very rich Christ, to the Christ who is our good land, the expression of the invisible God, the firstborn of both the old creation and the new creation, and the One in whom all the fullness is pleased to dwell. Even these items do not exhaust all that Christ is. It is the Christ with all these aspects who dwells in us to be our hope of glory.

VI. CHRIST, THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S ECONOMY

Many Christians, even Christian pastors and ministers, do not know what the mystery of God's economy is. Some are not even familiar with this term. The mystery of God's economy is Christ. The Christ who indwells us is the mystery of this economy, an economy that involves God's administration of the whole universe. How profound! God has a universal economy, and the center, the focal point, of this economy is Christ. Furthermore, this economy is abstract, profound, and mysterious. The mystery of this universal economy, its indescribable element, is Christ. The Colossians were very foolish in turning from such a Christ to Gnosticism, mysticism, and asceticism. What need did they have for philosophy when they had the very Christ who is the mystery of God's universal economy? How vital it is for us to realize that the very Christ who is the mystery of God's economy dwells in us!

VII. CHRIST, THE MYSTERY OF GOD

In 2:2 Paul speaks of the "full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ." As the mystery of God, Christ is the embodiment of God and also the life-giving Spirit. Although we find it easy to speak of many things, it is difficult for us to speak of Christ as God's mystery. Concerning this, our mind is like a block of marble that is not able to absorb liquid. Although we may hear message after message about Christ as the mystery of God, we may not apprehend anything we hear. Many years ago I met a

certain brother who was fond of repeating the phrase,

"Christ in me, the hope of glory." However, this brother had very little knowledge of Christ. Although he liked to talk about the indwelling Christ, he did not truly know Christ in this aspect. He did not realize that the Christ who lived in Him is the very mystery of God.

VIII. CHRIST, THE REALITY OF ALL POSITIVE THINGS

Colossians 2:16 and 17 say, "Let no one therefore judge you in eating and in drinking or in respect of a feast or of a new moon or of Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ." These verses indicate that Christ is the reality of all positive things. He is the real sun, air, water, food, flowers, and trees. Compared to Christ, all the different trees are shadows. He is the real apple tree, fig tree, olive tree, pomegranate tree, and vine tree. In fact, He is the tree of life. He is also the reality of all the positive people in the Old Testament. For example, He is both the greater Solomon and the greater Jonah (Matt. 12:41-42).

In this Epistle, Paul was telling the Colossians that they were misguided in turning away from such an all-inclusive Christ to philosophy, observances, and the worship of angels. Why should they be subject to regulations about eating, drinking, feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths when all such things are shadows of spiritual things in Christ? There was no need for the Colossians to go back to those things because they had Christ, and Christ is every-thing.

IX. CHRIST, THE CONSTITUENT OF THE NEW MAN

In 3:10 and 11 Paul speaks of the new man, "where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all and in all." This indicates that Christ is the constituent of the new man. The new man is constituted with Christ as his essence and his very element. There was no need for the Colossians to be occupied with natural or cultural differences among the various peoples. In the new man there is room only for Christ. Because Christ is all

and in all in the new man, there is no room for the natural man in any way. Christ is every member, and He is in every member. The Christ who indwells us is such a constituent of the new man.

X. CHRIST IN YOU

What a Christ we have within us! The Christ who indwells us has all the aspects covered in this message. He is the portion of the saints, the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, the firstborn from among the dead, the One in whom God's fullness dwells, the mystery of God's economy, the mystery of God, the reality of all positive things, and the constituent of the new man. Although all these aspects of Christ are revealed in the book of Colossians, we did not see most of them because they are not according to our natural concept. What corresponds to our concept is Paul's teaching about wives submitting to their husbands, and husbands loving their wives. Even without reading the Scriptures, we have concepts about these matters. Instead of taking Paul's word in Colossians for granted, we should dig into this book in order to discover for ourselves all these aspects of Christ. Then we need to praise the Lord and worship Him according to these aspects. We should say, "Lord, I worship You that You are the portion of the saints. I praise You that You are the image of the invisible God." How good to worship the Lord in this way!

If we know Christ in all these aspects, the praise we offer at the Lord's table meeting will be uplifted. I have been attending the meeting for the Lord's table for more than forty-seven years, and in all these meetings I have listened to the saints praising the Lord. Most of the praises have been on an elementary level. For example, in meeting after meeting the saints may praise the Lord for the blood. This certainly is not wrong. But if we remain on this level, our praise will be shallow. We need to remember the Lord and to praise Him according to the revelation contained in the book of Colossians. We need to use expressions such as those in this stanza from hymn #189 in the hymnal:

Thou art the Son beloved,
The image of our God;
Thou art the saints' dear portion,
Imparted through Thy blood.
Among all God's creation
Thou art the firstborn One;
By thee all was created,
All for thyself to own.

At the Lord's table we need to remember the Lord as the portion of the saints, as the image of God, as the mystery of God's economy, and as the reality of all positive things. May the Lord enrich our praise!

A. The Processed God

The all-inclusive Christ who indwells us is the processed God (John 14:8-11, 16-20; Matt. 28:19). He has been processed through incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection, and now He is in ascension.

B. The Life-giving Spirit

As we have pointed out repeatedly, the indwelling Christ is also the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). This Spirit, the all-inclusive Spirit with the bountiful supply (Phil. 1:19), is also the compound Spirit. In Exodus 30:23-30 we have a picture of this compound Spirit. According to this portion of the Word, the holy anointing oil was made by blending four spices with olive oil. Together the spices and the oil formed a compound, an ointment used to anoint the priests, the tabernacle, and everything related to the tabernacle. The oil typifies the Spirit of God, and the four spices typify Christ in his divinity and His humanity with the effectiveness of His death and the power of His resurrection. The compound Spirit typified by the ointment is the very Spirit spoken of in John 7:39. At the time of John 7:39, the compound Spirit was "not yet" because Jesus had not yet been glorified. Now, after the glorification of Christ, the Spirit is no longer simply the Spirit of God; He is the compound Spirit, the Spirit of God

com-pounded with Christ's humanity, the effectiveness of His death, and the power of His resurrection. As the processed God, Christ is such a compound, all-inclusive, life-giving Spirit.

C. Dwelling in Our Spirit

Christ now dwells in our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22) to be one spirit with us (1 Cor. 6:17). As the life-giving Spirit mingled with our spirit, He is our life and our person (Col. 3:4; Eph. 3:17).

XI. THE HOPE OF GLORY

In 1:27 Paul says not only that Christ dwells within us, but also that He dwells within us as our hope of glory. Christ can be our hope of glory because He dwells in our spirit to be our life and our person. According to 3:4, when Christ our life is manifested, we also shall be manifested with Him in glory. He will appear to be glorified in our redeemed and transfigured body (Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:21; 2 Thes. 1:10). When Christ comes, we shall be glorified in Him, and He will be glorified in us. This indicates that the indwelling Christ will saturate our entire being, including our physical body. This will cause our body to be transfigured and to become like His glorious body. At that time Christ will be glorified in us. This is Christ in us as the hope of glory.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE SIXTEEN

PRESENTING EVERY MAN FULL-GROWN IN CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:25-28, 2:4, 9; 3:4a, Eph. 3:8-11, 4; 1:23; John 6:57b; 14:19b; Gal. 2:20a; Eph. 4:15, 13b

Speaking of Christ who dwells in us as the hope of glory, Paul says in 1:28, "Whom we announce, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man full-grown in Christ." The Greek word rendered full-grown may also be translated mature, complete, or perfect. Paul's ministry was to impart Christ to others so that they may be perfect and complete by maturing in Christ unto full growth. However, many Christian workers today do not have any concept of presenting every man full-grown in Christ. The goal of their work is some-thing other than this. But we must have the same goal that Paul had.

Even in preaching the gospel, our aim should be to impart life in order to present others mature, full-grown, in Christ. As we preach the gospel to unbelievers, minister Christ to them, and help them to receive the Lord, our goal is not merely that they should be saved from the lake of fire and from God's condemnation. Our goal is not only for them to experience God's forgiveness; it is to minister Christ into them so that they may eventually be presented full-grown in Christ. If we fail to impart Christ to others as we preach the gospel, our gospel preaching will fall short of God's standard. Christ must be infused into all those to whom we speak. Imparting Christ should be our aim in our gospel preaching.

We should have the same goal in our fellowship with the saints. As we contact the saints, our goal should be to

minister Christ into them so that they may mature in Him. Let us now consider several matters related to presenting others mature in Christ.

I. BY MINISTERING CHRIST AS THE PORTION OF THE SAINTS

If we would present others full-grown in Christ, we must minister Christ to them as the portion of the saints (1:12). The Christ we minister must be the all-inclusive One, the centrality and universality of God's economy (1:15, 18-19, 27; 2:4, 9, 16-17; 3:4, 11). If we do not experience Christ in a full way, we shall find it difficult to minister Christ to others. For example, if we do not experience living by Christ, we cannot help anyone else to live by Christ. But if in our daily living we live Christ, grow Christ, and produce Christ, we shall spontaneously infuse Christ into others as we contact them. The more we take Christ as our life and our person, the more we shall be able to minis-ter Christ to others. Having become those who experience Christ and live by Him, we shall influence others to do the same. We need to enjoy Christ as our good land, labor on Him, live in Him, walk in Him, and have our being in Him. If we are such persons, we shall transfuse into others the very Christ whom we experience and by whom we live. In the Lord's recovery what we need is not simply more labor to bring others into the church life. We need to minister the riches of Christ into others so that they may grow and mature. For this we ourselves need to experience more of Christ as the portion of the saints.

II. BY MINISTERING THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH

Secondly, to present every man full-grown in Christ, we need to minister the unsearchable riches of Christ for the building up of the church to fulfill God's eternal purpose (Eph. 3:8-11). It is possible to be what everyone would consider a good brother or sister, but still be short of the riches of Christ. In my contact with saints as I have

traveled, I have met many who lacked the riches of Christ in their daily living, although everyone would consider them very good brothers and sisters. May the Lord awaken within us the aspiration to be rich in Christ. We need to pray, "Lord, I don't want to be one who seems to be good, but who is poor as far as the riches of Christ are concerned. Lord, for the building up of the church, cause me to be filled with the riches of Christ."

I thank the Lord for those saints whose living is characterized by the riches of Christ. Such brothers and sisters are transparent. Those who are short of the riches of Christ, on the contrary, are opaque, altogether lacking in transparency. But those who have the riches of Christ are crystal clear. Whenever you bring something to them in fellowship, the matter becomes clear to you because they themselves are so transparent. Those who enjoy the riches of Christ become clear as crystal. The more we experience the riches of Christ, the more transparent we shall become. May we all desire to be those who are rich in Christ and fully transparent! May we pray, "Lord, make me a member of the Body who is rich in Your life and who is transparent. Save me from being a member who is good, but who is short of Christ."

Only those who are rich in Christ can build up the Body for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. We must admit that we still do not have very much building among us. We may be more concerned about our individual spirituality and growth than about the building up of the church. If we are short of Christ and lacking in transparency, we shall have little concern for the building up of the church. But if we are filled with the riches of Christ and thereby become transparent, we shall be deeply concerned for the building up of the church so that God's purpose may be fulfilled.

III. BY COMPLETING THE WORD OF GOD

We present others full-grown in Christ by completing the Word of God with the full revelation of Christ and the

church (1:25-27). To present others mature in Christ we must help them to have the completion of the Word of God concerning Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ. However, if we consider our situation, we shall realize that not many of us are able to complete the Word in this way. For this reason I am burdened that we would be stirred up to pursue the Lord. We need to hunger and thirst after Him, to pursue Him until we are filled with His riches. We need to pray, "Lord Jesus, we don't want to be indifferent or lukewarm. We long to be absolute with You and to seek You to the uttermost." If we pursue the Lord in such a way, we shall see more regarding Christ and the church. But if we continue to be short of the riches of Christ, we shall not have in our own experience the completion of the Word of God. Hence, there is the desperate need for us to pray and to labor on Christ for the completing of the Word of God concerning Christ and the church.

IV. BY MINISTERING CHRIST AS THE MYSTERY OF GOD

Fourthly, we need to minister Christ as the mystery of God, that is, as the embodiment of God (2:2, 9). We need to share with others from our experience how Christ is the embodiment of the Triune God. We need to be able to testify how we daily experience Christ as the Father, Son, and Spirit. Because we have Christ, we also have the Father. Because we are in Christ, we are also in the Spirit. The Spirit who moves within us actually is Christ Himself. Day by day we should be one spirit with the Lord and experience His being one with us (1 Cor. 6:17). More and more our experience must be that in every aspect of our daily living, wherever we may be, we are one spirit with the Lord. This should not be a doctrine or theory; it must be our practical Christian living.

Concerning my ministry, I often pray like this: "Lord, give me the grace to be one spirit with You as I speak. Lord, I pray that You will speak in my speaking. I believe,

Lord, that You are one Spirit with me. But I ask that as I minis-ter the Word I shall be one spirit with You." Whatever impact this ministry has comes from such a oneness with the Lord.

The Lord is the embodiment of the Triune God. This means that all the riches of the Father are embodied in the Son. Furthermore, the Son is realized in a full way as the Spirit, who is now one spirit with us. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:17, "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." The matter of being one spirit with the Lord should not be a mere doctrine to us. On the contrary, it must be our daily, practical experience. In our experience we must know what it is to be one spirit with the Lord, who is the embodiment of the Triune God. If we experience Christ as the embodiment of God, we shall be able to minister Christ to others for their nourishment and enrichment. As we minister Christ to others in this way, they will grow in Him. Growth comes by eating. If others feed on the Christ we minister to them as the mystery of God, they will be perfected and mature in Christ.

V. BY MINISTERING THE CHURCH AS THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

If we would present others mature in Christ, we must minister the church as the mystery of Christ, as the expression of Christ (Eph. 3:4, 1:23). In his subtlety, Satan has caused many seeking Christians to avoid the matter of the church.

My experience with Brother T. Austin-Sparks illustrates how persistently some avoid the church matter. At our invitation, he came to Taiwan in 1955. We had a wonderful time together as he ministered on Christ. He could clearly echo what we had seen about Christ. In 1957 he came to Taiwan a second time. On this visit he touched the church ground, the standing of the church, in a negative way. In 1958 I accepted his invitation to visit him in England. During the days we were together, we had many long conversations about the church. However, he could not change my mind, and I could not change his

concept. He tried his best to avoid the subject of the church, but my concept was that we must labor for the building up of the churches. His intention was to convince us that we should give up the ground of the church. But I pointed out to him that it was impossible for us to have the church practically without the ground of the church. Brother Sparks tried to assure me that he was not opposed to the church. He went on to tell me that during the early years of his ministry, he was invited to speak in Edinburgh. When he spoke about Christ, the meeting hall was crowded, and the audience was responsive. But when he spoke about the church, the number of people decreased. This caused him to feel that it was not profitable for him to speak on the church.

I went on to ask Brother Sparks how we could practice the principles we both had seen concerning the Lord's Body. He admitted that these principles could not be put into practice in the denominations. But he would not admit that they could be put into practice only on the proper ground of the church. Instead, he emphasized the fact that the church can be produced only by much prayer and through the Spirit. Then I said to him, "Do you think that so many churches on the island of Taiwan did not all come into existence by prayer and through the Spirit?" I asked him what a group of saints should do after they had prayed regarding the church. Still he would not admit that they should take the standing of the church on the ground of oneness. He simply said that they needed to be assured that any move they made was of the Spirit. This was the conclusion of our conversation about the church.

I tried my best to convince him concerning the church, and he tried his best to avoid the church. Eventually, neither of us would change our position.

Today a battle is raging over the church as the expression of Christ. Due to the subtlety of the enemy, most Christian bookstores will sell Brother Nee's books on spirituality, but not his books on the church. Christians, however, cannot become full-grown without the church life. Brother Nee's books related to spiritual matters have been

popular with Christians around the world for many years. But the popularity of these books has not caused the condition of Christianity to improve very much. Without the church life, the help people received from Brother Nee's books would eventually leak away because the church life is the only proper vessel to preserve this help. For some, the spiritual books by Brother Nee for the most part supply new doctrinal concepts. Not much is gained for the fulfillment of God's purpose. Does the Lord want people who only seek after spirituality, but who do not participate in the proper church life? Certainly not! Apart from the church, God's purpose cannot be fulfilled. Because we realize this, the Lord's burden concerning the church presses heavily upon us. We need to practice the church life for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. We also need to be faithful to minister the church as the mystery of Christ, as the very expression of Christ.

The Lord's desire is to have the Body, the church. He does not want the church in terminology--He wants the church in practicality. In order for the church life to be practical, there must be local churches. This is made clear in *The Practical Expression of the Church*. Today the practical expression of the church can only be in the local churches. Oh, may we all learn to minister the church as the mystery of Christ, as His expression, in order that others may be presented full-grown in Christ!

Some have claimed that the ministry concerning the church has no future because the opposition against it is so widespread and intense. Certainly if this ministry is simply the work of man, it has no future. But if this ministry is the ministry in the Lord's recovery, the future will be bright. The more others advise us not to minister on the church, the more we must be faithful to minister regarding it. We must be bold and faithful to speak not only of Christ, the Head, but also of the church, His Body. We must not follow today's Christianity. On the contrary, we must follow the pure Word to minister the church as the mystery of Christ.

VI. BY MINISTERING CHRIST AS LIFE TO HIS MEMBERS

Finally, we need to minister Christ as life to His members so that they may live by Him and grow with Him unto maturity. Colossians 3:4 says that Christ is our life, and in John 6:57; 14:19; and Galatians 2:20 we see that we need to live by Him. Then we shall grow with Him unto maturity (Eph. 4:15, 13).

If we desire to present others full-grown in Christ, we must minister to them all the matters we have considered in this message. What a great need there is for the believers to be infused with all the things related to God's economy! If we are faithful to minister these crucial points, we shall be able to present others full-grown in Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE SEVENTEEN

STRUGGLING ACCORDING TO THE OPERATION OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:28-29; 2:1-2; Eph. 3:20; 1:19-22

In this message we shall consider the matter of struggling according to the operation of Christ (1:29). We have pointed out that Paul labored to present every man full-grown in Christ. Presenting others full-grown in Christ is a very difficult task, a task which can be accomplished only by struggling according to Christ's operation.

THE PRINCIPLE ORDAINED BY GOD

Some may think that the way to present others full-grown in Christ is to pray. However, it is possible to have a superstitious understanding of prayer. For example, suppose someone thinks that meals can be prepared only by prayer and that there is no need to go shopping or to cook food. Such a concept is superstitious. In presenting others full-grown in Christ we need to follow the principle set up in Genesis 2: Man tills the ground, and God sends the rain (v. 5). On the one hand, we must till the ground. On the other hand, only God can send the rain. As we trust in God and look to Him for the rain, we should be faithful in our responsibility to till the ground. This means that we must fulfill the principle ordained by God. If we depend only on our work of tilling the ground and do not trust in the Lord to send the rain, we are wrong. But we are also wrong if we only pray to the Lord for rain and do not fulfill our responsibility to till the ground. Applying this principle to the matter of presenting every man full-

grown in Christ, we see that we should not merely pray, but also labor according to Christ's operation.

STRUGGLING FOR THE HEARTS TO BE COMFORTED

In 2:1 Paul says, "For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you, and for those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh." This verse indicates that Paul was struggling, agonizing, wrestling, to see a particular matter accomplished among the Colossians and Laodiceans. Verse 2 shows the object of Paul's struggle: "That their hearts may be comforted, being knit together in love and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, unto the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ." For years I could not understand why Paul spoke about hearts being comforted immediately after giving such a high vision of Christ. Not knowing how to connect the vision in chapter one to this word in chapter two, I spent a great deal of time to find out why such a word was inserted. Paul did not say that he struggled so that the Colossians and Laodiceans would see the vision of Christ given in chapter one. According to my concept, this is what he should have said. If verse 2 had been written in this way, it would have been much easier for me to understand. Nevertheless, Paul did not say that he struggled so that the saints would exercise their spirits to see what he had shared with them concerning Christ. He struggled that their hearts might be comforted.

Why was it necessary for the hearts of the Colossians to be comforted, knit together in love and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding? It took years before I could answer this question. Assurance implies two things: faith and knowledge. When we have faith and knowledge, we have certainty about what we believe. This certainty then becomes our assurance. Paul wrestled so that the hearts of the Colossians would have full assurance.

The words "unto the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ" are in apposition to "unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding." The second "unto" equals the

first. Although I could understand certain of these details, I could not understand the verse as a whole. I simply did not know the reason for this word.

We thank the Lord that, through the years, He has shown us the reason. As we consider this reason, let us recall that, as sister books, Ephesians is concerned with the church as the Body, whereas Colossians deals with Christ as the Head. Ephesians places great emphasis on the human spirit; it uses the phrase "in spirit" repeatedly. Colossians, however, refers to the human spirit only once (2:5). In Colossians the heart is of crucial significance. Here Paul emphasizes the importance of the heart in receiving the revelation concerning Christ. For years we have spoken about turning to the spirit, exercising the spirit, and abiding in the spirit. However, we have not given as much attention to taking care of the heart. Paul knew that if we would present others full-grown in Christ, we must be concerned about the condition of their hearts. The fact that he concludes chapter one with a word about presenting every man mature in Christ and opens chapter two with a word about the comforting of the hearts indicates that presenting others full-grown in the Lord has much to do with the heart.

Because of the different observances, ordinances, and philosophies that had crept into the church life, the hearts of the saints in Colosse had been hurt; they had become cold and dissatisfied. Whenever such things come in, the result is always dissension and division. We must guard the door of the church lest such things enter in and cause harm. The church in Colosse had been invaded by Jewish ordinances and observances and by pagan philosophy, mysticism, and asceticism. These things caused the saints to become opinionated, dissenting, and dissatisfied. They also caused the hearts of the saints to be hurt and to become cold, divided, and separated from one another. Therefore, Paul struggled on behalf of the saints that their hearts would be comforted and knit together in love.

In this verse to be comforted means to be cherished, that is, to be lovingly warmed up. Ephesians 5:29 says that Christ nourishes and cherishes His church. To

nourish is to feed, and to cherish is to make warm. How the saints in

Colosse needed the Lord's cherishing! Their hearts needed to be comforted, to be warmed.

Paul speaks of the hearts being knit together in love. The words "knit together in love" indicate that some kind of separation had taken place and that there had been a loss of love. The different observances, ordinances, and philosophies that had crept in had caused this loss of love.

THE HEART AND THE MIND

In this verse Paul deals with two crucial organs of our inner being: the heart and the mind. (The word understanding implies the mind.) Once the heart has been hurt and has become cold and divided, it is easy for the mind to be distracted or even attacked by the enemy. When the mind is in such a condition, it cannot understand the word that is ministered concerning Christ and God's economy.

Problems in the heart are often the cause of mental problems. If a person's mind is under attack by the enemy, this is an indication that his heart is wrong in some way. Whenever the heart is wrong, it is easy for the mind to be in darkness or subject to attack. This is an important principle. Most cases of mental illness have their source in problems that exist in the heart. More than forty years ago, the superintendent of a large mental hospital told me that, according to his experience and observation, mental problems are caused by problems related to greed for money and sex. These are problems of the heart. Greed for money causes problems in the hearts of some, whereas lust causes problems in the hearts of others. Such problems cause the mind to come under attack. Through years of experience, we have learned that mental illness can be traced to problems in the heart. The mind is attacked because the heart is wrong. Perhaps someone has a certain ambition or desire in his heart. If this ambition or desire is not fulfilled and is not dealt with, the mind may be attacked.

Paul no doubt realized this; he knew that it was crucial for the hearts of the Colossians to be comforted and knit together in love. If their hearts were cared for in a proper

way, the saints would have the riches of the full assurance of understanding. Their minds would once again function normally to understand spiritual things. When our hearts are comforted, our minds will function properly. But if there is a problem in our heart, there will be a problem in our mind also. The heart regulates the mind. Whether the mind is normal or abnormal depends on the condition of the heart.

The relationship with the saints in the church life tests what is in our hearts. If our hearts are possessed by certain ambitions, desires, and goals, our minds will not be normal and will cause us to have problems with others. For example, if my mind is under attack because of a problem in my heart, I may be very displeased if a brother does not greet me with a smile. I may be further troubled if this same brother invites another brother to lunch with him, but does not invite me. I may become quite angry over the situation. This anger is not caused by temper; it is caused by the problem in my heart. In my heart I may desire respect, honor, and position. This may cause me to feel that others should show respect for me by greeting me in a pleasant way. However, if I have no problem in my heart, I shall not be troubled if a brother does not smile at me or does not include me in a certain activity. If our heart is right, we shall be happy in the church life, no matter what happens to us. But if there is a problem in our heart, we shall be displeased with the church. This is a very serious matter.

FULL ASSURANCE OF UNDERSTANDING

For the heart to be knit together with others in love involves the emotion, whereas to have the riches of the full assurance of the understanding involves the mind. If we do not have a proper heart, we shall not be able to receive the revelation concerning Christ. To see the vision of Christ we need a heart that is comforted, cherished, and knit together with others in love and unto all the riches of the full assurance of understanding. How happy I am that the hearts of the saints in the Lord's recovery have been

comforted and knit together! Because our hearts have been knit together in love and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, we can receive the revelation in the book of Colossians.

The riches of the full assurance of understanding equal the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ. When our hearts have been comforted and our minds function normally, we shall have the full knowledge of Christ as the mystery of God.

Now we can see why Paul struggled for the hearts of the Colossians to be comforted. He knew that this is the only way the saints can have the full assurance of understanding. Because our hearts have been cherished and knit together, we in the Lord's recovery have such an assurance. This assurance gives us the full knowledge of Christ as the mystery of God. May the Lord daily cherish our hearts that we may have a healthy church life! When our hearts are happy, it seems that all the brothers and sisters are wonderful. But when our hearts are not happy, the opposite seems to be the case. How important it is for our hearts to be cherished by the Lord!

THE FIRST STEP IN PRESENTING OTHERS FULL-GROWN IN CHRIST

Only after their hearts had been comforted could the Colossians receive the revelation concerning Christ. Because this matter is so important, this book emphasizes the heart instead of the spirit. We cannot present others full-grown in Christ unless their hearts have been comforted. If their hearts have not been cherished, they will not be able to receive anything we minister to them concerning Christ. Therefore, the first step in presenting others full-grown in Christ is to comfort their hearts unto all the riches of the full assurance of understanding. Especially the leading ones should look to the Lord for the grace to be able to comfort all the distracted, dissatisfied, and disappointed hearts. When the hearts of the saints have been comforted, it will be easy for us to minister the riches of Christ to

them. But if the saints have problems in their hearts, they will have trouble with their minds. The only way to solve the problems in the mind is for the hearts to be adjusted through the Lord's cherishing. This is a crucial lesson for us all to learn.

PAUL'S STRUGGLE

In 1:29 Paul said that he struggled according to Christ's operation within him. This struggle was his labor to pre-sent every man full-grown in Christ. He endeavored to do this by announcing Christ, by warning every man, and by teaching every man in all wisdom.

CHRIST'S OPERATION

According to 1:29, the operation of Christ operates in us in power. There is a difference between Christ operating in us and Christ's operation operating in us. Because Christ as the hope of glory operates in us, there is an operation which also operates in us. Christ Himself operates in us. But Christ operating in us causes an operation which also operates in us. This operation operates in us in power.

Every saved person has at least some experience of Christ's operation. To be saved is not merely to have our sins forgiven and to be justified by God. It is also to have Christ imparted into us. The Christ who dwells in us also operates in us. As we have pointed out, His operating becomes the operation that operates in us. Paul's struggling for the saints was according to this operation.

Some saints may feel that they sense very little of Christ's operation within them. The reason for this lack is the shortage of prayer. We need to go to the Lord with a repentant heart and say, "Lord, I am still so natural, so much in the self and in the old man. Lord, forgive me and cleanse me with Your precious blood. Lord, I desire to be enlightened, purified, and made transparent. I ask You to show me what You want of me. Expose me so that I may be filled with You." If we pray in this way, Christ's operation will have a way to operate within us.

I can testify that I am energized by Christ's operation. The more I pray, the more His operation energizes me. However, if I fail to pray, I would become cold and quiet. The reason you may sense little of Christ's operation within you is that you strive too much and pray too little to contact the Lord. By opening to the Lord in prayer, you give ground for Christ's operation to operate within you. Then you will be able to struggle according to this operation to present others mature in Christ.

Christ's operation operates in power. Paul refers to this power in Ephesians 3:7 and 20. In Ephesians 3:7 he speaks of "the operation of His power," and in 3:20, of the "power which operates in us." This power is the power of resurrection life (Phil. 3:10) within the believers (Eph. 1:19). It is the very power that operated in Christ to raise Him from the dead, to seat Him at God's right hand in the heavenlies, and to subject all things under His feet (Eph. 1:20-22). Hence, this power is the resurrection power, the transcending power, and the subduing power. According to Christ's operation in such a power, we may struggle to present others full-grown in Christ.

What Paul did in struggling to present others full-grown in Christ is an example which serves for the perfecting of the saints for the building up of the Body of Christ. It is to struggle according to the operation of Christ that operates in us, that is, to labor by the resurrecting, transcending, and subduing power within us.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE EIGHTEEN

CHRIST--THE MYSTERY OF GOD

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:2-3, 9; 1:19

At the end of 2:2 Paul speaks of the "full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ." The book of Ephesians is on the mystery of Christ, which is the church, the Body (Eph. 3:4). This book is on the mystery of God, which is Christ, the Head. It is crucial that we know Christ not only as our Savior and Lord, but also as the mystery of God.

All Christians love the Lord Jesus. The only difference among them in this matter is the degree of their love for Him. Even a backsliding believer loves the Lord to a certain extent. How much we love the Lord depends on how much we know Him and how much we realize concerning Him. For example, a child may appreciate a little box made to contain a diamond ring more than the ring itself. This shows that the degree of love is determined by the degree of appreciation. The more we know the Lord Jesus and appreciate Him, the more we shall love Him. Hence, we need to go on to know the Lord Jesus not only as our Savior and Lord, but also as the mystery of God.

If we would know Christ as the mystery of God, we need to have the full experience of everything covered in 2:2. In this verse Paul says, "That their hearts may be comforted, being knit together in love and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, unto the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ." The word "unto" means "resulting in." If the hearts of the Colossians were comforted and knit together in love, the result would be all the riches of the full assurance of understanding, an understanding no doubt related to the mystery of God, Christ.

THE NEED TO EXERCISE OUR WHOLE BEING

We cannot contact the Lord or know Him as God's

mystery without exercising our spirit. As we shall see, our whole being needs to be exercised. Every aspect of man's being--spirit, soul, and body--is complicated. If you spend time examining your face in a mirror, you will be impressed with the complexity of your physical body. Human beings are not simple organisms. In our soul we have the mind, the emotion, and the will. Furthermore, in our spirit we have the conscience, the intuition, and the fellowship. Every part of our complex being must be exercised to receive the revelation of Christ as the mystery of God.

God Himself is a mystery, and Christ is the mystery of this mystery. Surely we cannot fathom such a mystery simply by reading the letter of the Scriptures. Since Christ dwells in our spirit, we need to exercise our spirit in order to know Him as the mystery of God. Never regard Christ as a mere object to be known in an outward way. As the crucified and resurrected One, He is living both on the throne in the heavens and in our spirit as well. Hence, it is of ut-most importance that we exercise our spirit to contact Him. This means that we must open up from the depths of our being and call on Him. Our spirit is our deepest part, deeper than the heart and all the parts of the soul. Therefore, to exercise our spirit is to open the deepest part of our being to call on the name of the Lord Jesus and to contact Him as the living One within us.

We are complex, but Christ is far more complex. To know Him, we must not only exercise our spirit, but also have our heart comforted. This means that our heart must be cherished, warmed. Moreover, our mind must be sober, our emotion must be regulated, and our will must be subdued. Every part of our inner being must be proper and function in a normal way. This is the reason Paul speaks of the hearts being comforted in relation to having the full knowledge of Christ as the mystery of God.

In 2:2 Paul goes on to speak of all the riches of the full assurance of understanding. The comforting of the heart must have a result. In this case the result is having all the riches of the full assurance of understanding. We need to have such an assurance, for example, concerning the

ground of the church. Some saints claim to know the church ground and to be committed to it. However, they are actually quite wishy-washy and have no certainty related to the ground of the church. They have faith, but they do not have the certainty which gives us full assurance.

Allow me to testify of my experience about becoming assured regarding the ground of the church. In 1932 we began to practice the church life in Chefoo, my home-town. After several months, opposition rose up against us. Before we began to practice the church life, I was loved and respected by the Christian leaders in that city. They regarded me as one who was for the Lord Jesus in an absolute way. However, the attitude of those leaders toward me began to change when more and more of the promising ones began to come into the church. This troubled those Christian leaders, and negative rumors were circulated about us. Furthermore, those who once respected me no longer greeted me when they saw me on the street. Deeply concerned about this, I went to the Lord and inquired about the situation. I asked Him to show me what was wrong. I spent more than a month thoroughly considering the matter before the Lord. Eventually I concluded that if I were to be a man, I had to believe in the Lord Jesus; that if I were to believe in the Lord, I had to love Him; and that if I were to love Him, I had to take the way of the church. As a result, I received the full assurance concerning the ground of the church. I had not only faith, but also the knowledge which caused me to have certainty. For more than forty-six years I have not changed my position with respect to the church ground, no matter how much I have suffered because of the stand I have taken. Some co-workers who used to be close to me betrayed me because they were afraid to face opposition regarding the church ground. Some of them had even given messages on the ground of the church. But actually they were wishy-washy. They did not have the full assurance of understanding that Paul speaks of in 2:2. Paul realized that concerning the mystery of God, Christ, the believers

needed certainty, the assurance that comes from faith and knowledge. Those who have such an assurance are not wishy-washy in this matter.

After making my decision about the ground of the church, I spent some time with Brother Nee in Shanghai during a period of turmoil. Attempting to comfort him, I said, "Brother Nee, I am one with you because you are taking the Lord's way. I assure you, even if you turn from this way, I will not change my mind. I have the full assurance concerning the Lord's way in the church." This is the full assurance of understanding that Paul speaks of in 2:2. Concerning Christ as the mystery of God, we need faith, knowledge, certainty, and thorough understanding.

The Colossians did not have the full assurance concerning Christ. Otherwise, they would not have turned to the worship of angels or taken in such things as observances, ordinances, and philosophies. On the one hand, they had received Christ and knew something about Him. On the other hand, their knowledge of Christ was not with the full assurance of understanding. The Colossians definitely believed in the Lord Jesus and held to the faith. But they did not have all the riches of the full assurance of understanding. They knew that Christ was the Son of God, and they had received Him. However, because they were rather wishy-washy, they also accepted various observances, ordinances, and philosophies.

If we would have all the riches of the full assurance of understanding concerning Christ as the mystery of God, every part of our being must be exercised. We should not be wishy-washy in any way. I am concerned for those in the Lord's recovery who have never exercised themselves in a full way. Due to this lack of exercise, they may not have the full assurance of understanding concerning the recovery.

Certain ones were with us for years. While they were with us, they praised the Lord for His recovery and declared that they were absolutely for the church life. But they eventually turned against the recovery and even condemned it. The reason for such a change is that they never had a thorough exercise concerning the Lord's

recovery and never received the full assurance of understanding regarding it.

How much we need to be exercised to know Christ as the mystery of God! We should be able to say, "Lord Jesus, apart from You I have no heart for anything. Lord, my mind, will, and emotion are absolutely for You. I know what I believe, and I know what I am doing in Your recovery. I am willing to lay down my life for You. If I had ten lives, I would give every one of them for the recovery. Every fiber of my being, Lord, is for You." If you exercise your whole being in this way, you will have the full assurance of understanding. You will not have any doubt about what you are doing or about the way you are taking. You will have the kind of assurance martyrs have when they lay down their lives for the Lord.

ALL THE RICHES OF THE FULL ASSURANCE OF UNDERSTANDING

In 2:2 Paul speaks not only of the full assurance, but of all the riches of the full assurance of understanding. As we consider this, let us once again use the ground of the church as an example. Some saints may have the full assurance concerning the church ground, but they may not have the riches in their understanding. When they speak about the ground of the church, they have little to say. The reason for this is the lack of the riches in their understanding. If we have the riches of the full assurance of understanding with respect to the truth of the ground of oneness, we shall have much to say concerning it. Regarding the ground of the church, we need to be exercised until we have all the riches of the full assurance of understanding.

The principle is the same with knowing Christ as the mystery of God. We need to be exercised to such an extent that we always have something to say about Christ as the mystery of God. How inexhaustible Christ is! If we have all the riches of the full assurance of understanding concerning Him, we shall never be short of things to say about Him. The riches of understanding will give us rich utterance.

I wish to emphasize again and again that such riches only come through the exercise of our inner being. In particular, we need to exercise our understanding in studying the Bible. Do not study the Word in a superficial way, and do not take things for granted. Instead, exercise yourself over every phrase, sometimes even over every word. For example, in 1:12 Paul speaks of the portion of the saints in the light. We need to ask why he uses the phrase "in the light." We need to inquire of the Lord and dig into the Word until we have the riches of the full assurance of understanding. To know Christ as the embodiment of God requires such an exercise of our being.

As we exercise over the Word, we shall receive light. For instance, we may exercise over the matter of the comforting of the hearts in 2:2. Eventually, we shall be enlightened. I repeat, our whole being--our spirit, heart, soul, mind, emotion, and will--must be exercised in the Word. Then we shall love the Lord with our whole being and have all the riches of the full assurance of understanding concerning Christ as the mystery of God.

THE TREASURES OF WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE HIDDEN IN CHRIST

Concerning Christ as the mystery of God, Paul says, "In Whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden" (2:3). According to history, the influence of Gnostic teaching, implying Greek philosophy, invaded the Gentile churches in Paul's time. Hence, Paul told the Colossians that all the treasures of real wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ. This is the spiritual wisdom and knowledge of the divine economy concerning Christ and the church. Wisdom is related to our spirit, and knowledge is related to our mind (Eph. 1:8, 17).

God is the unique source of wisdom and knowledge. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in the very Christ who is the mystery of God. Because the church at Colosse had been invaded by pagan philosophy, Paul was helping the Colossians trace wisdom and knowledge to their true source in God. Christ is the mystery of God, who

alone is the source of all wisdom and knowledge. It seems as if Paul wanted to say, "Colossians, since you have received the Christ in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden, why do you still need philosophy? Why do you accept the teaching of Gnosticism? You do this because you do not have the full assurance concerning what you believe. You have faith, but you don't have certainty." Paul knew that the hearts of the Colossians needed to be comforted and knit together in love so that they could have all the riches of the full assurance of understanding. If they had such an assurance, they would know all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are hidden in Christ.

The fact that wisdom and knowledge are embodied in Christ is proved by His spoken words, especially those recorded in the Gospels of Matthew and John. In these books, the Lord spoke about the kingdom and about life. The Lord's words recorded in these books contain the highest philosophy. None of the teachings of the philosophers, including the ethical teachings of Confucius, compare to them. The concept in the Lord's words is too deep and profound. Anyone who makes a thorough study of philosophy will have to admit that the highest philosophy is that found in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Truly all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in Him.

If we exercise our being to contact the Lord, Christ as the life-giving Spirit will saturate our spirit and our mind. Then we also shall have in our experience the wisdom and knowledge that are hidden in Christ. In this way we experience Him as the mystery of God. We should not be like the Colossians, who allowed pagan philosophy to defraud them of the wisdom and knowledge hidden in Christ.

THE EMBODIMENT OF THE FULLNESS OF THE GODHEAD

As the mystery of God, Christ is also the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead. In 1:19 Paul says, "For in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell." Then in 2:9 he

says, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Fullness in these verses refers not to the riches of God, but to the expression of the riches of God. What dwells in Christ is not only the riches of the Godhead, but the expression of the riches of what God is. It is crucial for us to see that the fullness of the Godhead is the expression of the Godhead, that is, the expression of what God is. The Godhead is expressed both in the old creation, the universe, and in the new creation, the church. Notice that both in 1:19 and 2:9 Paul uses the word "all" to describe fullness. All the fullness, all the expression, is in the old creation and in the new creation.

The word Godhead in 2:9 refers to deity, which is different from divinity in Romans 1:20. This reference to deity strongly indicates the deity of Christ. Such a deity is with the fullness of the Godhead versus the tradition of man and the elements of the world.

In 1:19 and in 2:9 we see two aspects of all the fullness. According to 1:19, all the fullness was pleased to dwell in Christ. According to 2:9, all the fullness dwells in Christ bodily. This implies the physical body which Christ put on in His humanity. It indicates that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ as the One who has a human body. Before His incarnation, the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Him as the eternal Word, but it did not dwell in Him bodily. After He became incarnate, clothed with a human body, the fullness of the Godhead began to dwell in a bodily way, and in His glorified body (Phil. 3:21) now and forever it dwells.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE NINETEEN

THE EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST AS THE MYSTERY OF GOD

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:2-9

In this message we come to the matter of the experience of Christ as the mystery of God. We shall consider a number of points which help us experience Christ in this way.

I. TO HAVE THE FULL KNOWLEDGE OF HIM AS THE MYSTERY OF GOD

If we would experience Christ as the mystery of God, we need to have the full knowledge of Him as God's mystery. We have pointed out that Paul struggled for the Colossians that their hearts would be comforted "unto the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ" (2:2). In order to have the full knowledge of such a mystery, our whole being needs to be exercised. If we simply believe in Christ without loving Him, we cannot have this knowledge. Likewise, if we love Him partially but not wholly, we cannot have the full knowledge of Him. We need to love the Lord Jesus with our whole being. For this reason, Mark 12:30, quoting Deuteronomy 6:5, says, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." When our entire being is exercised to love the Lord Jesus, we shall gain the full knowledge of Him.

Some Christians are fond of the hymn, "Oh, how I love Jesus." However, this hymn may be sung in a superficial way; it is not according to the full knowledge of Christ as the mystery of God. Only by exercising our entire being can we know Christ in this way.

I recommend that all the saints in the Lord's recovery study three crucial books in the New Testament: Matthew, John, and Hebrews. A number of helpful Life-study Messages have been given on these books. The studies on John and Hebrews are especially thorough. If you spend adequate time on these three books, you will gain a consider-able amount of knowledge concerning Christ.

II. TO RECEIVE HIM

In 2:6 Paul says that the Colossians "have received Christ Jesus the Lord." Christ is the portion of the saints (1:12) for our enjoyment. To believe in Him is to receive Him. As the all-inclusive Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17), He enters into us and dwells in our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22) to be everything to us.

Once we have received Christ Jesus, we need not receive Him again. But we must apply what we have received. However, only a very small percentage of those who have received Christ apply Him. We all must practice to apply the living Christ in a practical way day by day. To employ a common term, we need to use Christ. For more than fifty years, I have been learning how to use Christ. I can testify that this is difficult because by birth it is not natural for us to use Christ, nor does our training condition us to use Him. Recently, most of my confession to the Lord has been related to my failure to apply Him. The hardest lesson for us to learn as Christians is to apply Christ and to use Him. We have heard a number of messages on living Christ, growing Christ, and producing Christ. Nevertheless, in our daily living we spontaneously use the self instead of Christ. There is no need for us to try to use the self; we use it automatically and spontaneously.

In the Gospels the Lord charges us to "watch and pray." I have spent a number of years considering this word. At first I thought that this command was not necessary. But eventually I learned that I certainly need to watch and pray, especially in the matter of applying Christ. As we are waking up in the morning, we need to be watchful not to do

anything without applying Christ. Often as we wake up early in the morning, it seems that demons are swarming around the headboard of the bed. Although we are protected by the Lord and covered with His prevailing blood, we still need to be watchful and resist the evil thoughts injected into us by the enemy. Do not think about anything without applying Christ. We certainly need to be on the alert; that is, we need to be watchful and to pray. But very few Christians watch and pray in order to apply Christ.

Although we have all received the Lord Jesus, we are very short in using Him, in applying Him. If we fail to apply Him, then in a practical way in our daily living there is little significance to having received Him. Our experience of Christ should not be so superficial, and we should not take so many things for granted. We are thankful for God's salvation in Christ, and we are grateful that we have received Him. But now we must go on to apply the very One we have received.

III. TO BE ROOTED IN HIM

In 2:7 Paul speaks of having been rooted in Christ. To be rooted in Him is for the growth in life. In this verse Paul views the believers as plants who have been rooted in Christ as the soil. However, many Christians have not been rooted in Christ adequately.

If we have been rooted in Christ properly, there will be no need to talk much about the ground of the church. The ground of the church is oneness. But the base of this oneness is the one Spirit, the one Lord, and the one God and Father, as mentioned by Paul in Ephesians 4. If we have been truly rooted in Christ, in our experience He will be the base of our oneness. Some Seventh Day Adventists consider the keeping of the Sabbath another testimony on earth in addition to the local churches. Such a statement indicates a lack of being rooted in Christ. If we have been rooted in Him deeply and properly, we would never say

that God has set up another testimony. God's unique testimony is Jesus Christ. If we have been rooted in Him, nothing will be able to distract us from Him. We all should be able to say, "Lord Jesus, I thank You that I have been rooted in You. I have no standing apart from You." In the Lord's recovery we can testify that our ground is Christ and Christ alone.

If we consider the situation of today's Christianity, we shall see that the various denominations and independent groups have something other than Christ as their ground. The Seventh Day Adventists have as their ground the keeping of the seventh day, whereas the ground of the Baptist denomination is baptism by immersion. Some denominations, such as the Church of Christ, go so far as to insist that only in their water can a believer be baptized properly. Although some groups insist on baptism by immersion, others oppose it; they claim that baptism is strictly spiritual and in the Spirit.

In 1964 I met a man who argued strongly against baptism in water. He insisted that the baptism spoken of in Romans 6 refers to baptism in the Spirit. He interpreted every New Testament reference to baptism after John the Baptist as baptism in the Spirit. He even became quite angry when his position was challenged according to certain verses. A few days later as I was ministering in a certain place, I was challenged by a woman from the Church of Christ concerning water baptism. Just a few days prior, a man argued with me about baptism in the Spirit. Now a woman boldly asked about water baptism. Neither this man nor this woman had been adequately rooted in Christ. This illustrates the shameful fact that Christians are divided because they take as their ground something other than Christ.

Paul realized the importance of being rooted in Christ. He knew that it was a serious matter to be transplanted from Christ and to be rooted in something else, such as heathen philosophy or Jewish ordinances. He wanted the Colossians to see that philosophy was not the soil in which

they had been rooted. They had been rooted in Christ. He is our unique soil.

IV. TO BE BUILT UP IN HIM

Having been rooted in Christ, we now are "being built up in Him" (2:7). To be built up is for the building of the Body. Although we have been rooted, we are still in the process of being built up. This is a corporate matter as well as a personal matter. A building is not composed merely of one item, but of many items that have been fitted together. We need to be rooted in Christ and also built up in the church.

Paul was concerned lest the Colossians be distracted from Christ and the church. They had been rooted in Christ, but they still had to go on to be built up in the church. In order to be built up corporately, the Colossians had to forsake the Judaistic observances and the heathen ordinances and philosophies. Otherwise, they would have been transplanted from Christ and rooted in something else. Furthermore, they would have been led astray from the church life. Whenever we take in some kind of philosophy, ordinance, observance, or practice in place of Christ, the church life is annulled. We are divided from those believers who have different opinions concerning these matters. Those who are preoccupied with such things will eventually cease to care about the church life.

In principle, this is what happened to some saints among us who were influenced by certain concepts. As a result of this influence, they lost their heart for the church life. It was no longer possible for them to be built up in a corporate way. How crucial it is to be rooted in Christ and to be built up in Christ and in the church! In this way we experience Christ as the mystery of God.

V. TO BE ESTABLISHED IN THE FAITH ABOUNDING IN THANKSGIVING

Verse 7 concludes with the words, "Being established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."

The words "in the faith" here mean in our faith, the subjective faith by which we believe. If we are distracted from Christ and turn our attention to things that replace Him, our faith will be weakened, perhaps even shaken. But if we remain in Christ and are built up in the church, our faith will be strengthened.

Those who become dissenting and forsake the church life experience a weakening of their faith. Outwardly they may proclaim to have sweet fellowship with the Lord, but inwardly their faith has waned. When they are alone, they may wonder what is happening inside them. They are troubled by doubts, and they know deep within that they have lost their fellowship with the Lord. Because they have so many doubts and questions, they cannot be established in their faith. By contrast, those who remain in Christ and the church have strong faith and firm assurance.

We have pointed out that "the faith" in verse 7 refers to our faith, the subjective faith. Why does Paul say "the faith" when he is actually speaking of our faith? The answer is that he regards the faith as our faith, and our faith as the faith. We cannot be established in someone else's faith; we must be established in our own faith. This means that our faith must become the faith and that the faith must be ours. We are established in our faith, which is the faith.

The way to be established in the faith is by abounding in thanksgiving. When we are right with the Lord and in fellowship with Him, we are filled with thanksgiving. But when we are not right with the Lord, we are not able to give thanks. If you ask the dissenting ones if they are abounding with thanksgiving, their mouths will be stopped. If we claim to have good fellowship with the Lord but cannot render thanks to Him, then our claim is false.

According to this verse, the words "abounding in thanksgiving" are related to "being established in the faith." This indicates that whether or not we have been established in the faith depends on whether or not we are abounding in thanksgiving. If we do a certain thing in

fellowship with the Lord, we shall be filled with thanksgiving. However, if we do anything that is apart from Him, we shall not be able to give thanks. For example, are you able to thank the Lord when you participate in a particular form of worldly entertainment? You may claim to be happy, but you cannot honestly thank the Lord. Sometimes it seems that we can thank the Lord for a certain thing, but after a little while we repent of the very thing for which we have given thanks. We must not deceive ourselves. Instead, we should check if we are abounding in thanksgiving. If we are, then we are being established in the faith.

VI. TO WALK IN HIM

Another way to experience Christ as the mystery of God is to "walk in Him" (2:6). As we have received Christ, we should walk in Him. To walk is to live, to act, to behave, and to have our being. We should walk, live, and act in Christ so that we may enjoy His riches, just as the children of Israel lived in the good land and enjoyed all its rich produce.

In our experience Christ should be the good land in which we live and walk. This should not merely be a doctrine to us. We need to pray, "Lord, I want to live and walk in You. Lord, I pray that You will be the good land to me in my experience, and that every aspect of my living may be in You."

VII. NOT TO BE DELUDED AND CARRIED OFF FROM HIM

In 2:4 Paul says, "This I say that no one may delude you with persuasive speech." In verse 8 he goes on to say, "Beware that no one carries you off as spoil through his philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ." If we would experience Christ as the mystery of God, we must take care not to be deluded or carried off from Him. We should not be led away to

anything that replaces Christ. We need to remain in Him. As long as we remain in Christ, we shall also remain in the church. Christ must be our only base, our only ground and standing.

In the past few years some were distracted by certain things which they took as their ground instead of Christ. The issue is not whether these things were right or wrong. It is that they were used as a standing in place of Christ. Christ should be our unique focus. We should not allow anything, even the most correct and scriptural things, to replace Him. If we care for anything instead of Christ, we shall be deluded and carried off from Him and thereby become present-day Colossians. Any who have been deluded and carried away from Christ need to receive Paul's word in this book and return to the all-inclusive Christ. May we all experience Him as the mystery of God!

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY

TO WALK IN CHRIST, THE MYSTERY OF GOD

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:6; Deut. 8-7-10; Rom. 8:11; 2 Tim. 4:22; Phil. 1:19; 1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:6, 4; Gal. 5:16, 25

In the previous message we spoke about experiencing Christ as the mystery of God. Now we shall go on to consider how to walk in such a Christ. In 2:6 Paul says, "As therefore you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in Him." To walk in Christ as the mystery of God is to live, act, behave, and have our being in Him.

In chapter one of Colossians Paul presents a profound revelation of Christ. The first aspect of Christ unveiled in this chapter is Christ as the portion of the saints (v. 12). The good land in the Old Testament typifies Christ as the saints' portion or lot. In this chapter Paul also shows that Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, the Head of the Body, the firstborn from among the dead, and the One in whom all the fullness is pleased to dwell.

Paul opens chapter two with a word about his great struggle for the Colossians that their hearts would be comforted "unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, unto the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ" (v. 2). Only when the hearts of the saints in Colosse were comforted, cherished, and warmed, could they have a proper understanding of Christ. This would enable them to have the genuine experience of Christ. The Colossians needed a comforted heart and a sober mind in order to have the full knowledge of the Christ they had received and from whom they had been distracted. This Christ, the mystery of God, is the One in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (v. 3). Furthermore, He is the One in whom all the fullness of the

Godhead dwells bodily (2:9). Once the Colossians had the full assurance of understanding concerning the all-inclusive Christ, they could then walk in Him.

We have pointed out that the word walk in 2:6 means to live, act, behave, and have our being. The One in whom we are to walk is the all-inclusive One who is revealed in a profound way in chapter one. As such a One, Christ is the portion of the saints and the mystery of God's economy. Like the Colossians, we need to be exhorted to walk in the Christ who is everything to us.

OUR GOOD LAND

As Paul was writing this chapter of Colossians, he was considering the picture of the good land in the Old Testament as a type of the all-inclusive Christ. There is a suggestion of this in 1:12, where Paul says that Christ is the portion of the saints. Then in 2:6 Paul tells us to walk in Christ. This implies that Christ is the land, the territory, the realm, in which we may walk. Furthermore, his reference to being rooted in Christ in 2:7 also indicates that he was thinking of the good land. In order to be rooted in Christ, He must be our land, our soil. All these are indications that the Christ revealed in Colossians is our good land.

Paul had a strong background in the Old Testament. As he was writing such Epistles as Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, and Hebrews, he must have had the Old Testament Scriptures very much in mind, and he wrote many things according to them. In particular, as Paul was writing the book of Colossians, he had before him the picture of the land of Canaan. He was aware that God's chosen people in Old Testament times enjoyed the good land as their portion. Furthermore, he realized that the good land was everything to them. It was through the good land that they could worship God and build the temple for God's testimony and for His unique dwelling place. It was through the good land that God's purpose could be fulfilled through the children of Israel. Fully realizing what the

good land meant to God's chosen people, Paul composed the Epistle to the Colossians with the portrait of the good land in mind. Therefore, if we would experience the all-inclusive Christ as revealed in this book, we need to realize that such a Christ is typified by the land of Canaan. The Christ who is typified by the good land is the processed Triune God as the life-giving Spirit. I admit that I emphasize this point again and again. This is my commission and burden from the Lord.

If we would walk in Christ as the mystery of God, we must see that, according to Paul's concept, the Christ in whom we are to walk is the good land. Concerning this matter, we need the full assurance of understanding. Message after message could be given on the subject of Christ as the good land. This matter is inexhaustible.

The first major conference held in the United States in December, 1962, was on the all-inclusive Christ typified by the land of Canaan. Those messages have been published as *The All-Inclusive Christ*. A very good hymn on the experience of Christ as life was inspired by these messages. The last stanza of this hymn (Hymns #499) is given below:

> Oh, what a prize! Oh, what a gain!
> Christ is the goal toward which I press.
> Nothing I treasure, nor aught desire,
> But Christ of all-inclusiveness.
> My hope, my glory, and my crown
> Is Christ, the One of peerlessness.

In that conference a number of messages were given on Deuteronomy 8:7-10. Based on these verses, we considered the unsearchable riches of the land: the water, the food, and the minerals. What we shared in those messages was only an introductory word. A great deal remains to be said about the riches of Christ typified by the land of Canaan.

Students of the Word realize that the Bible is not easy to understand. When I was a young Christian, I told the Lord that I did not agree with the way He wrote the Bible. According to my opinion, He should have written it in a systematic way, covering each of the major points systematically and putting all the material together under

various major headings and subdivisions. Nevertheless, we

must recognize that the Lord's way is the best. In the Bible the Lord speaks about a particular subject in various places. Take justification as an example. This subject is covered in more than one book. Because our capacity is so limited, the Lord knew that He could reveal only a little at a time concerning spiritual matters such as justification. This is true all the more of the revelation of Christ as our good land.

AN ALL-INCLUSIVE TYPE OF CHRIST

On the one hand, the good land is revealed in the Old Testament. On the other hand, it is concealed there. Although this statement appears contradictory, actually it is not. Because Deuteronomy describes the good land, we may say that the good land is revealed in the Old Testament. But because the meaning and significance of the good land are concealed, we may also say that the land is concealed in the Scriptures. As the Lord's children, supplied by His mercy and grace, delved into the Word, they began to realize that the good land promised by God to His chosen people is a type of Christ. If the Passover enjoyed in Egypt and the manna experienced in the wilderness were types of Christ, then the good land must also be a type of Christ.

In Joshua 5:11 and 12 we see a hint that the good land typifies Christ as the continuation of the manna. Verse 11 says that the children of Israel ate of the produce of the land. Verse 12 is especially clear: "And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the produce of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year" (Heb.). Manna was a type of Christ as the life supply for God's people. As these verses in Joshua point out, the produce of the good land is the continuation of the manna. Therefore, if the manna typified Christ, the produce of the good land must also typify Him. By means of the supply of manna in the wilderness, God's people were able to build the tabernacle as God's dwelling place. In the same principle, through the supply of the rich produce of the land they were able to build the temple as a more solid

dwelling place for God. No doubt, the good land enjoyed by the children of Israel is a significant type of Christ, for through the enjoyment of it the temple was built. We may even say that it is the ultimate type of Christ found in the Scriptures. It is a complete and all-inclusive type of Christ.

To have our hearts comforted and knit together in love unto the full knowledge of Christ as the mystery of God includes having the full knowledge of Christ as typified by the good land. We need to know in detail how Christ is typified by all the items mentioned in Deuteronomy 8:7-11. He is the water that springs from valleys and hills. He is the wheat and the barley, which signify respectively the incarnated and crucified Christ and the resurrected Christ. We must go on to see how Christ is typified by the wine, oil, figs, pomegranates, and minerals. Without these verses in Deuteronomy 8, we would be short in our understanding of the all-inclusiveness of Christ.

The land is the crucial focus of the Old Testament. This is the reason that in the Old Testament the Lord speaks of the land again and again. He called out Abraham and told him that He would bring him into a certain land, which was the land of Canaan. Consider how many times from Genesis 12 to the end of the Old Testament the Lord referred to the land. Actually, the center of the Old Testament is the temple within the city built in the good land. If we know the Scriptures and have light from God, we shall realize that the center of God's eternal plan, speaking according to the type, is the land with its temple and city. Beginning with the book of Genesis, the Old Testament takes the land as the center and mentions again and again something related to the land. As we have pointed out repeatedly, the land is the figure of the all-inclusive Christ, a type of Christ as everything to us.

THE BATTLE FOR THE LAND

Satan, has been doing his utmost continually to frustrate the people of God from enjoying the good land. He will do whatever he can to spoil the enjoyment of Christ as

the land. Not long after God created the heavens and the earth, with the intention of giving the earth to mankind as an enjoyment, Satan did something to frustrate Him. Because of Satan's rebellion, God had to judge the universe, and due to that judgment the earth was buried beneath the waters of the deep. After a period of time, God came in to work and to recover the land from the waters of the deep. Upon this recovered land, an abundance of life came into being, and there came forth a life with the image of God, a life committed with the authority of God. However, not long afterward the enemy of God came in again to deceive man and to put God in a position where judgment upon the earth was again imperative. At the time of Noah, the recovered earth was once more put under the waters of the deep. Speaking according to the type, man was separated from the enjoyment of Christ as signified by the land. But through the redemption of the ark, Noah and his family obtained the right to possess the land and enjoy all its riches. The flood separated the people from the earth, but the ark brought Noah and his family back to the enjoyment of the earth. Once again man took possession of the land and enjoyed its riches.

However, it was not too long before the enemy did something further to spoil the enjoyment of the earth, this time through the rebellion at Babel. Therefore, out of the fallen race made rebellious by Satan, God called one man, Abraham, and told him that He would bring him into a certain land. However, even this chosen one gradually drifted away from the land into Egypt, and the Lord had to bring him back to the land. Eventually, his descendants left this land and went down into Egypt. After a long period of time, the Lord brought His people out of Egypt and back to the good land. Centuries later, the enemy moved again and sent the army from Babylon to spoil the land and capture the people. But after seventy years the Lord brought them back once more to the good land. By all this we see that the history of the Old Testament is related to the land. God's work is always to recover the land, whereas the enemy's work is always to frustrate, spoil, and hinder the enjoyment of the land and do something to

bring the land into chaos. The enemy's intention is to assault the land and take it over. But after the enemy makes his attempt, God moves to fight for His people and to re-cover the land again.

WALKING IN THE ALL-INCLUSIVE SPIRIT

We need to be deeply impressed that this good land typifies the all-inclusive Christ. We have pointed out that in Colossians 2:7 Paul says that we have been rooted in Christ. If we have been rooted in Christ, then He must be our soil, our earth. Have you ever realized that Christ is the very land in which you are rooted, that you are a plant rooted in Christ as the soil? I deeply feel that most of the Lord's children are still in Egypt. They have experienced the Lord only as the Passover lamb. Others have come out of Egypt and enjoy Christ as their daily manna as they wander in the wilderness. But very few believers experience Christ as the realm, the sphere, in which they walk. May the Lord open our eyes to see that Christ is our good land and that we must daily walk in Him!

In Galatians 3:14 Paul says, "That the blessing of Abraham might come to the nations in Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Here Paul refers to the blessing of Abraham and the promise of the Spirit. This blessing refers to the good land, and the fulfillment of this blessing for us today is Christ as the all-inclusive Spirit. Therefore, according to Paul's concept, to walk in Christ as the good land is to walk in the all-inclusive Spirit.

In Colossians 2:6 Paul tells us to walk in Christ, but in Galatians 5:16 He charges us to walk by the Spirit. Furthermore, in Romans 8:4 he speaks of walking according to spirit. These verses indicate that the good land for us today is the all-inclusive Spirit who indwells our spirit. This all-inclusive Spirit is the all-inclusive Christ as the processed Triune God. After being processed, the Triune God is the all-inclusive Christ as the all-inclusive Spirit for us to experience. Today this all-inclusive Spirit indwells our spirit to be our good land.

A number of books written by Paul, including Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Philippians, indicate that Christ today is the all-inclusive Spirit. Christ is the embodiment of God and the expression of God. Through incarnation, He became the last Adam, who was crucified on the cross for our redemption. In resurrection this last Adam became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Therefore, in 2 Corinthians 3:17 Paul says, "Now the Lord is that Spirit." Because Christ as the life-giving Spirit dwells in our spirit, we are one spirit with Him. In 2 Timothy 4:22 Paul says, "The Lord be with thy spirit," and in 1 Corinthians 6:17, "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." Therefore, Christ as the all-inclusive good land is now in our spirit. Concerning this, we all need the riches of the full assurance of understanding.

Having the full assurance that the all-inclusive Spirit is mingled with our spirit, we should set our minds on this mingled spirit (Rom. 8:6). By doing this, we are spontaneously setting our minds on Christ. Then we must go on to walk in this mingled spirit. This means that we must live, move, behave, and have our being according to the spirit. In this way we shall experience Christ and enjoy Him as the good land. Nothing in the New Testament is more central, crucial, and vital than walking according to the mingled spirit. Christ as the all-inclusive Spirit dwells in our spirit to be our life, our person, and our everything. Our need today is to return to Him, to set our minds on the spirit, and to walk according to the spirit. This is to walk in Christ as the mystery of God.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-ONE

NOT TO BE DELUDED AND CARRIED OFF FROM CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:4, 8

According to typology, the children of Israel enjoyed Christ in three stages: in Egypt, in the wilderness, and in the good land. The Passover enjoyed in Egypt was not only for their redemption; it also strengthened them to make their exodus from Egypt. In the wilderness God's people were sustained by manna, which enabled them to build God's tabernacle and to carry it as a testimony. After the children of Israel entered into the good land, they began to enjoy the rich produce of the land. This produce made it possible for them to build the temple for a more solid testimony. Speaking according to the type, the temple in the good land is the focus of God's purpose on earth. God desires to have a dwelling place among His chosen people for His expression. God's purpose is fulfilled neither by the enjoyment of Christ as the Passover lamb in Egypt nor by the enjoyment of Christ as manna in the wilderness. His purpose is fulfilled only when His people enjoy Christ as their good land.

In 1 Corinthians we see that Paul dealt with the Corinthians according to the first two stages of the enjoyment of Christ, but not according to the third stage. In 1 Corinthians 5:7 he says, "For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us." In the following verse he charges us to "keep the feast." These verses point to the enjoyment of Christ as the Passover in Egypt. In 1 Corinthians 10:3 and 4 Paul refers to spiritual food and spiritual drink. This refers to the enjoyment of Christ in the wilderness. In 1 Corinthians there is no mention of the

third stage of the enjoyment of Christ. But in Colossians Paul regarded the believers as being in this stage of the enjoyment of Christ.

Because the Corinthians were not in the third stage of the enjoyment of Christ, the church life in that locality was a tabernacle church life, a church life that was portable and that lacked a solid foundation. By contrast, the church life in Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians is that of the temple. It is a settled church life with a solid foundation. Stone was not used in the building of the tabernacle, but a great deal of stone was used in constructing the temple. For this reason, the temple, the enlargement of the tabernacle, was solid and settled.

The church life in Colossians and Ephesians is more solid than that in 1 Corinthians because in these Epistles the enjoyment of Christ is not elementary. It is not merely the enjoyment of Christ as the Passover or as the manna, but the enjoyment of Christ as the good land, as the portion of the saints. Today some churches may be in the first or second stage of the enjoyment of Christ, whereas others may be in the third stage.

If we would enter into the good land, we must conquer and subdue all the enemies typified by the seven tribes. These enemies are the evil rulers, authorities, principalities, and powers in the air. After these enemies have been defeated, we shall have peace, and in this peace the temple can be built.

I. NOT TO BE DELUDED

A. By Judaizers or by Gnostics

Although the Colossians were in Christ as the good land, they had been deluded, deceived. This was the reason that Paul said in 2:4, "This I say that no one may delude you with persuasive speech."

In order for believers to be deluded, something close to the truth must be used to deceive them. For example, counterfeit money or forged checks are deceptive because their appearance is close to that of the real things. People would never be deceived by money or by checks that are

obviously false. In like manner, the Colossians were deceived by observances and practices that were close to the experience of Christ. Furthermore, certain aspects of Gnosticism were similar to the teachings of the Bible. For this reason, the Colossians could be deceived.

It is very easy to be deceived by something that is close to the real thing, by a counterfeit that is almost identical to something genuine. Without the proper discernment, it is difficult to see the difference between the teachings in the New Testament and ethical teachings like those of Confucius. When I was young, I heard a missionary say that the ethical teachings of Confucius were the same as some teachings in the Bible. The Bible teaches that wives should submit to their husbands. Confucius, however, teaches a threefold submission. Firstly, a woman is to submit to her father; then to her husband; and then, should her husband die, to her son. Concerning submission, the teachings of Confucius and the teachings of the Bible appear to be the same in principle. If we do not have discernment, we could be led astray from Christ by ethical teachings that appear to be the same as those of the Bible.

Many aspects of the Jewish religion are very good. Take, for example, the dietary regulations in Leviticus 11 and the commandment to keep the Sabbath. It seems right that, just as God rested on the seventh day after laboring for six days, man should have a day of rest after six days of labor. However, there is a problem here. According to the Bible, should we labor first and then rest, or should we rest first and then labor? We may think that because God rested after working for six days, we should do the same. But if we have light from God, we shall see that in the Scriptures God first labors and then rests, but man first rests and then works. Man was created on the sixth day, toward the end of the six days of God's labor. After the creation of man, God rested, and man rested with God. This indicates that as soon as man came into being, he had a time of rest. Therefore, according to the principle in the Bible, we are to rest before we work. In the New Testament we see that first we receive grace, and then we

work. To

work before receiving grace is to live according to the law. But to receive grace before we work is according to God's salvation by grace. If we are not clear about this, we may be deceived by the teaching of the Seventh Day Adventists regarding the keeping of the Sabbath. We need to tell the Seventh Day Adventists that with God work came before rest, but with us rest comes before work. According to the New Testament, receiving grace precedes working. If we do not receive grace as the capital, we shall have nothing with which to work. We cannot work unless we first receive grace. This is a basic principle.

These examples show that certain observances and teachings are similar to some aspects of God's salvation. This was the reason that the believers in Colosse could be deceived by Jewish observances and pagan teachings and could allow those things to pervade the church life. I am concerned that the young ones may be deluded by those who advocate certain teachings or practices. We need to have a thorough understanding of the basic principles in the New Testament. Then we shall have the wisdom and the knowledge to convince and subdue those who attempt to delude us.

Paul opens 2:4 with the words, "This I say." These words refer to what Paul has covered in verses 2 and 3 concerning the riches of the full assurance of understanding, the full knowledge of Christ as the mystery of God, and the fact that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ. Paul emphasized these things so that the saints at Colosse would not be deluded. If we have seen the revelation of Christ in Colossians 1, we shall not be deceived by teachings concerning such things as water baptism and the observance of the Sabbath. We shall know that the all-inclusive Christ is the focus of God's economy and everything to us. If we have a clear vision of Christ, no one will be able to delude us or deceive us.

B. With Persuasive Speech

In verse 4 Paul specifically refers to "persuasive speech." Usually those who deceive others are eloquent and persuasive in speech. Beware of eloquence. A speaker may be very eloquent, but there may be no reality in his speech. Instead of being taken in by a speaker's eloquence, we should ask if there is reality in his speaking.

Sister M. E. Barber helped Brother Nee to learn this important lesson. When he was young, Brother Nee was attracted by the eloquence and knowledge of certain visiting preachers. Whenever Brother Nee expressed his admiration for a speaker's eloquence, Sister Barber would point out that although that preacher was eloquent and knowledgeable, there was no life ministered in his speaking. On one occasion in particular, Brother Nee thought that a certain preacher's message was marvelous, and he was confident that Sister Barber would agree. Nevertheless, Sister Barber still pointed out that the message was void of life and reality. From that time onward, Brother Nee no longer appreciated the empty speech of eloquent preachers. May we also learn not to be deluded by persuasive speech.

If we see the vision of the all-inclusive Christ presented in the book of Colossians, we shall not be deluded by anything. No matter how excellent or how scriptural a thing may be, it will not be able to lead us away from Christ. It is crucial that we have such a view of Christ in God's economy.

The situation of the church at Colosse was very different from that of the church in Corinth. In Corinth, the standard was low, there were divisions, and some saints were involved in lawsuits, some even in fornication. But at Colosse the standard of behavior was much higher. As we have pointed out, the problem at Colosse was that the church had been invaded by culture, especially by Gnosticism and the Judaistic observances. These things were very refined, and for this very reason they were deceitful. Hence, we in the Lord's recovery today must be cautious of those who appear to be highly cultured and

well-educated and who speak in a gentle and humble manner. Those who are the most deceitful usually seem to be very nice. No doubt, when the serpent approached Eve

in the garden, he spoke in a very refined way. Be on the alert lest you are deluded through the persuasive speech of cultured people. Only when we have a clear view of the place of the all-inclusive Christ in God's economy shall we be able to see through delusion and deception.

II. NOT TO BE CARRIED OFF AS CAPTIVE

In verse 8 Paul goes on to say, "Beware that no one carries you off as spoil through his philosophy and empty deceit." The first step, seen in verse 4, is to be deluded; the second step, seen in verse 8, is to be carried off as spoil. The word spoil here does not mean to damage; it means to be a prey or a captive. Those who are carried off as spoil are carried off into captivity.

A. Through Philosophy and Empty Deceit

We need to beware that no one carries us off as spoil through his philosophy. In Greek the word rendered "his" is the emphatic article. Hence, it denotes a particular philosophy. The philosophy through which the believers at Colosse were carried off as spoil was Gnosticism, a mixture of Jewish, oriental, and Greek philosophies. As Paul indicates, Gnosticism is empty deceit. Actually, every form of deceit is empty. Nothing that is real, that has real content, can be a deceit.

B. According to the Tradition of Men

The philosophy and empty deceit in this verse is "according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ." The source of the Gnostic teaching at Colosse was the tradition of men. It did not depend on the revealed writings of God, but on the traditional practices of men. Many cultural traditions are good. Otherwise, no one would care for them. We need to have a keen discernment to be kept from being deceived by the traditions in Catholicism and the denominations. One principle we should follow is that of testing everything with the Bible. We should care only for God's direct revelation in the holy Word, not for anything

that is according to the tradition of men. We need not accept anything inherited from men as a tradition if it does not correspond to the divine revelation in the Bible.

Today's Roman Catholics are bound by their traditions. Instead of referring to what the Bible says or to what God says, they often stand on what the church says or on what is taught by the priests and nuns. On some occasions I have pointed out to certain Catholics the error of worshipping Mary and have shown them that this is not according to the Bible. Nevertheless, they said that the worship of Mary is according to the teaching of the Catholic church. Other Catholic traditions are related to placing candles before images and praying to the saints to shorten the time that a relative must spend in purgatory. Although practices of this kind are not according to the Bible, Catholics follow them because of tradition. The traditions of men are also found in the denominations and in the independent Christian groups, where many believers care more for the tradition of men than for the Word of God.

C. According to the Elements of the World

The philosophy and empty deceit are not only according to the tradition of men, but also according to the elements of the world. Here and in 2:20 and Galatians 4:3, this expression does not refer to substances; it refers to the rudimentary teachings of both Jews and Gentiles, teachings that consist of ritualistic observances in meats, drinks, washings, and asceticism. In the eyes of Paul, the traditions of men were merely elementary principles. These traditions are included with the elementary principles of the world.

D. Not According to Christ

Paul concludes verse 8 by saying that the philosophy and empty deceit are not according to Christ. Christ is the governing principle of all genuine wisdom and knowledge, the reality of all genuine teaching, and the only measure of

all concepts acceptable to God. The book of Colossians focuses on Christ as our everything.

To fall short of being according to Christ, firstly means that we do not take Christ as life (3:4). Secondly, it means that we do not hold Christ as the Head of the Body. Furthermore, it is not to know Christ as the mystery of God (2:2), nor to experience the indwelling Christ as the hope of glory (1:27). Finally, to be not according to Christ means that we do not walk in Christ (2:6).

If we take Christ as life, hold Him as the Head of the Body, know Him as the mystery of God, experience Him as the hope of glory, and walk in Him as the all-inclusive Spirit, then we shall not be deceived by anything or by anyone. Those who do not experience Christ in these aspects can easily be deceived. If you analyze the situation of those who have been deluded and carried off as spoil, you will realize that they did not experience Christ in these five ways. They did not realize that Christ alone is everything in God's economy, and they did not take Christ as their life or as their Head. Furthermore, they did not experience the indwelling Christ as their hope of glory, nor did they live, move, and have their being in Christ. As a result, they were defenseless, and eventually were deluded and carried off into captivity. Our defense against deception is the Christ who is our life, our Head, the mystery of God, the hope of glory, and the good land in which we walk.

I believe that all these messages on the all-inclusive Christ will help to guard us against delusion and against being carried off as prey. They will build up a strong defense for us in the Lord's recovery. Without such a defense, we can easily be deluded and carried off as spoil. But if we experience Christ as the center of God's economy in all these aspects, we shall be protected, and we shall not be deluded or carried off as spoil.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-TWO

MADE FULL AND CIRCUMCISED IN CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:9-12, 18, 20-22; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 3:8

After warning us to beware that no one carries us off as spoil through philosophy and empty deceit, Paul tells us that in Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (2:9). Then in verse 10 he goes on to say, "And you in Him are made full, Who is the Head of all rule and authority." In Christ we lack nothing, for in Him we have been perfected and completed. There is no reason for us to turn to anything other than Christ. As we shall see, in speaking these words Paul was dealing with the matter of angel worship.

Then in verse 11 Paul says that we were circumcised in Christ. To be made full in Him is positive, whereas to be circumcised is to deal with something negative, in particular, the flesh, the self, and the natural man. All these things have been removed by the circumcision which is in Christ. In this message we need to consider how in Christ, on the positive side, we have been made full and, on the negative side, we have been circumcised.

I. MADE FULL IN CHRIST

A. Christ as the Embodiment of All the Fullness of the Godhead

In 2:9 Paul says, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." This means that Christ is the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead, that the fullness of the Triune God dwells in Christ in a bodily form. The fact that the fullness of the Godhead dwells in

Christ bodily means that it dwells in Him in a way that is both real and practical.

B. Made Full in Christ

Because all the fullness of the Godhead is in Christ and because we have been placed in Him (1 Cor. 1:30), we have been made full in Him. The New Testament reveals clearly that all those who believe in Christ have been put into Christ. Therefore, we are identified with Him and one with Him. The result is that all He is and all He has belongs to us, and all that He has experienced is our history. We inherit all that Christ has experienced and passed through. Furthermore, because we are one with Him, we partake of all that He has accomplished, obtained, and attained.

Marriage is an illustration of this. Suppose a poor woman marries a very rich man. Because she is joined to her husband and identified with him, she partakes of all that he is and has. Likewise, we are members of the all-inclusive Christ. We have been put into Him, identified with Him, truly "married" to Him. Hence, we are one with Him. All that He has passed through is now our history, and all that He has obtained and attained is our inheritance. We are in such a Christ, and He is in us. We have been placed into Him, we are one with Him, and we receive all that He is and has.

Although some Christians have a doctrinal knowledge of this, a mere mental understanding of our union with Christ is not adequate. We need to exercise faith in order to partake of all that is ours in Christ. We should not consider ourselves poor, just as a poor woman who has married a rich man should no longer think of herself as poor. Even though she may feel poor, she must practice applying the fact that the riches of her husband belong to her. In like manner, because we are one with Christ, we should not regard ourselves as in poverty. To the contrary, we need to have a full realization of what we have in Christ.

In their prayers, some Christians like to declare how poor, pitiful, and low they are. This kind of prayer is without faith or assurance. We need to believe with full assurance that we are one with the rich, all-inclusive Christ, with the One who is the embodiment of all the fullness of the Triune God. If we realize this with full assurance, we shall never consider ourselves poor.

Do not believe your feelings about yourself, but look away to Christ. Exercise your faith to realize what He is, what He has passed through, what He has obtained and attained, and where He is today. Since He is in the third heaven and we are one with Him, we are in the third heaven also. In Christ we are not only millionaires--we are billionaires. We have been placed into the Christ who is unsearchably rich.

In this Christ we are made perfect, complete. In Him we do not lack anything. Do not talk about how much you lack. Because you are in Christ, you lack nothing. In Him is the fullness, the perfection, the completion. Actually, He Himself is the fullness, perfection, and completion. Because we are in Him, we are complete and perfect; we lack nothing. We are those who possess the riches of Christ.

In Ephesians 3:8 Paul speaks of the unsearchable riches of Christ. We are more than billionaires because the riches we have are greater than can be counted. We simply have no idea what vast riches we possess in Christ. Often we have prayed, "Lord, I am poor and pitiful." But not many have prayed in this way: "Lord, I thank You that I am rich, complete, and full. Lord Jesus, because I am in You, I am richer than the wealthiest billionaire. I am short of nothing." I hope that after reading this message, you will begin to pray in this way. Tell the Lord, the angels, and even the demons that you are richer than any earthly billionaire because you are in the Christ whose riches are unsearchable.

C. Christ as the Head of All Rule and Authority

In 2:10 Paul says that Christ is the Head of all rule and authority. The rule and authority spoken of here are the

angelic powers, in particular the fallen angels who still occupy positions of power. According to the full revelation of the Bible, after God created the universe, He placed it under the control of an archangel and other leading angels. When this archangel rebelled against God and became Satan, many of the leading angels who assisted him in ruling the universe became the evil rulers and authorities in the heavenlies. These are described in Ephesians 6:12 as the rulers, the authorities, the world-rulers of this darkness, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies. These angelic powers rule over the nations. For this reason, in the book of Daniel there is mention both of the prince of Greece and of the prince of Persia. (A prince here denotes one of the angelic powers or rulers.). This means that all the nations on earth today are under the rule of authorities in the heavenlies; however, not all of these are evil. But Christ is the Head of all rule and authority.

Since Christ is our perfection and completion, we do not need other rules and authorities as objects of adoration, for He is the Head of all these. Remember that the Colossians had been led astray to the worship of angels. Therefore, Paul told them that since Christ is the Head of all the angels and since we are in Him, there is no need for us to worship angels.

The Colossians were worshipping angels because they fell under the influence of the heretical teaching that God is too exalted to be worshipped directly by lowly human beings. According to this false doctrine, we must humble ourselves and worship the angels as mediators between us and God. Those who worship angels in this way argue that they are still worshipping God, not idols. They claim simply to be worshipping God through the mediation of angels, who are superior to us. This heresy became prevailing in Asia Minor. Therefore, Paul was burdened to point out their error. How wrong the Colossians were in taking the angels as mediators! There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5). Since the Colossians were in the very One who is the Head of all

angels and since they had been made full in Him, they were not short of anything. They had no need of angels to be mediators. Angels are to serve us and to protect us, but they are not mediators between us and God. All the saints have at least one angel, one angelic bodyguard, assigned to serve them and protect them. This is proved by the Lord's word in Matthew 18:10 where He charges us not to despise "one of these little ones, for...their angels in the heavens always behold the face of My Father Who is in the heavens." Furthermore, when Peter was released from prison and was knocking at the door of the gate, those inside the house told the young woman, who kept saying that Peter was knocking, "It is his angel" (Acts 12:15). Although the angels serve us and may protect us, we should not regard them as mediators. Because they are servants, we should not worship them. We are identified with the One who is the Head of all the angels, and in Him we have been made full. If we are clear about this, we shall never be deluded into worshipping angels. Rather, we shall have the proper knowledge that, in a very real sense, because we are one with the Head of the angels, we are higher than they are. Actually, we are partners of the Christ who is the Head over them, and in Him we are complete.

This fact of having been made full in Christ is versus the worship of angels. Because we are one with Christ, we should never worship angels.

II. CIRCUMCISED IN CHRIST

A. With a Circumcision Not Made with Hands

In verse 11 Paul says, "In Whom also you were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ." Here Paul speaks of a circumcision not made with hands. This certainly is different from that practiced by the Jews, which was carried out with a knife. In

addition to that physical circumcision, there is another kind of circumcision, the circumcision in Christ, which is not made with hands. This is spiritual circumcision and refers to the proper baptism, which puts off the body of the flesh by the effectual virtue of the death of Christ. As we shall see, this is versus asceticism.

The circumcision in Christ involves the death of Christ and the power of the Spirit. When Christ was crucified on the cross, His crucifixion was the genuine, practical, and universal circumcision. His crucifixion cut off all the negative things. These negative things include our flesh, our natural man, and the self. However, along with the death of Christ we need the Spirit as the power. If we have Christ's crucifixion without the Spirit as the power, we shall have no means to apply Christ's crucifixion to us and to execute its effect upon us. The crucifixion of Christ becomes practical and effective by means of the Spirit. By the Spirit as the power, Christ's crucifixion is applied to us. Then under the power of the Spirit, we are circumcised in an actual and practical way. This is the circumcision in Christ, a circumcision not made with hands. It is a circumcision not made with hands because it was accomplished by the death of Christ, and it is applied, executed, and carried out by the powerful Spirit. This is the circumcision we have all received.

In Christ, on the one hand, we have been made full, and, on the other hand, we have been circumcised. Because we have been made full in Him, we are short of nothing. Because we have been circumcised in Him, all the negative things have been removed. Regarding the positive things, we are complete. Regarding the negative things, everything has been cleared up, and we have no problems. Therefore, regarding the positive things, we are not short of anything, and regarding the negative things, we are no longer troubled by anything.

However, we need to exercise faith and not look at ourselves. We must turn our eyes away from our feelings and from our apparent situation. According to our apparent

situation, we are short of everything positive and are troubled by everything negative. But according to the facts, we are not in ourselves--we are in Christ. Because we are in Him, we have been made full positively, and we have been circumcised to clear away the negative things.

B. In the Putting Off of the Body of the Flesh

In verse 11 Paul speaks of "the putting off of the body of the flesh." This means to strip off something, as to strip off clothing. The circumcision that took place by the death of Christ and is applied by the powerful Spirit accomplishes the putting off of the body of the flesh. Our body of flesh was crucified on the cross with Christ and has been put off. Regarding this, we must again exercise our faith and not consider our self and our apparent situation. Let us exercise faith and say, "Amen! The body of the flesh has been put off on the cross and by the powerful Spirit."

C. In the Circumcision of Christ

This circumcision must be in the circumcision of Christ, not with a circumcision made with hands. The circumcision of Christ is by His crucifixion. Our flesh has been crossed out by His death on the cross.

D. Through Baptism

Furthermore, the circumcision in Christ takes place through baptism. In verse 12 Paul says, "Buried together with Him in baptism, in Whom also you were raised together through the faith of the operation of God, Who raised Him from among the dead." We have been buried together with Christ in baptism. To be buried in baptism is to put off the body of the flesh, to disrobe or strip it off. Moreover, in Christ we have been raised together through the faith of the operation of God. In baptism there is the burial aspect, which is the termination of our flesh, and the raising aspect, which is the germination of our spirit.

In the raising aspect we are made alive in Christ with the divine life.

In this verse Paul points out that this is through the faith of the operation of God. Faith is not of ourselves; it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8). The more we turn to God and contact Him, the more faith we have. The Lord is the Author and Perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2). The more we abide in Him, the more we are infused with Him as our faith. It is through this living faith in the operation of the living God that we experience the resurrection life, signified by the raising aspect of baptism. Many Christians today neglect the real operation of baptism. Instead, they pay attention to the kind of water used or to the method of placing people under the water. Genuine baptism involves an operation in which we are buried and terminated. This operation involves the exercise of faith. The One who carries out the operation is the Spirit. Whenever we baptize someone, there is the need for the exercise of faith to realize that an operation is taking place to terminate the old being of the one who is to be baptized. We must have faith in the operation of God, the Triune God, who raised Christ from among the dead.

Whenever we baptize a new believer, we must realize that this one is being placed into a divine operation that will terminate him and bury him. We must exercise faith in the operation of the Triune God. By faith we have the reality of the termination and burial of the old man, the self, the flesh, and the natural life. The operating Triune God will honor this faith by making these things real. This burial and termination of the old man through baptism is the real circumcision.

E. Circumcision versus Asceticism

Since the Colossians had received such a circumcision, there was no need for them to practice asceticism. Being circumcised in the circumcision of Christ is versus asceticism (2:20-22). Those who have been buried and terminated and who are now resting in the tomb, have no need of asceticism. There is no reason for them to treat

their bodies severely. This is against the spiritual principle. According to the spiritual principle, we have been terminated and have put off the body of the flesh, the very thing that asceticism attempts to deal with. Every form of asceticism attempts to deal with the lusts of the flesh. According to the teaching and practice of asceticism, treating the body severely eliminates lusts and restricts indulgence. This is the basic principle of asceticism. In India some practice asceticism by sitting on a bed of needles. Whenever they become conscious of fleshly lusts, they press against the needles, thinking that the pain they inflict on themselves will restrict their lusts. This same principle explains ascetic rules about eating delicious foods. According to asceticism, to enjoy food is to indulge the flesh. For this reason, ascetics are taught to choose food that is not palatable.

As we shall point out in a later message, this severe treatment of the body is "not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh" (2:23). The various practices of asceticism are not effective in restricting the indulgence of the flesh. Paul's concept in Colossians 2 was that since the believers in Christ had been circumcised in the circumcision of Christ, which was accomplished by Christ's death and is applied by the Spirit, and since this is the circumcision in which they have been buried and terminated, there is absolutely no need for the practice of asceticism. To mistreat the body in the attempt to restrict the indulgence of the flesh is foolish and of no avail. Truly the circumcision in Christ is versus asceticism.

In this message we have seen that, positively, we have been made full in Christ and that, negatively, we have been circumcised in Him. Therefore, there is no need for us to worship angels or to practice asceticism. Although these practices were prevailing among the Colossians, we should utterly cast them aside. We do not worship angels, and we do not practice asceticism. We are in Christ. In Him we have been made full and are short of nothing. In Him we have been circumcised from every negative thing. For this

reason, we do not need asceticism to restrict the indulgence of the flesh. This was the concept of the Apostle Paul. I believe that his writing concerning this matter in Colossians 2 will be helpful to us today.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-THREE

THE ECONOMY OF GOD'S SALVATION

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:13-15, 18, 20-22; Eph. 2:5, 15

In this message we shall consider the economy of God's salvation as it is revealed in 2:13-15. As we shall see, this economy involves three things: making us alive with Christ, abolishing the ritual law, and stripping off the evil angelic powers.

THE THREE ASPECTS

Colossians 2:13 says, "And you, being dead in the offenses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all offenses." The word dead here refers to the deadness in spirit because of sin. We who once were dead in offenses and in the uncircumcision of the flesh have been made alive together with Christ. This means that God has enlivened us in Christ's resurrection with the divine life. What was accomplished in Christ's resurrection (1 Pet. 1:3) is experienced through our faith. The first aspect in the economy of God's salvation is that He has made us alive together with the resurrected Christ.

In verse 14 Paul goes on to say, "Wiping out the hand-writing in ordinances which was against us, which was contrary to us; and He has taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross." The Greek word rendered "wiping out" can also be translated blotting out, obliterating, erasing, or annulling (a decree of law). The Greek word rendered "hand-writing" denotes a legal document, a bond. Here it refers to the written law. The ordinances, or decrees, refer to the ceremonial law with its rituals, the forms or ways of living and worship. These ordinances God has taken out of the way by nailing them to the cross. This is to abolish the

law of the commandments in ordinances (Eph. 2:15). This kills the heresy of keeping the Judaistic rituals.

In verse 15 Paul continues, "Stripping off the rulers and the authorities, He made a display of them openly, triumphing over them in it." The Greek for "stripping off" can also be rendered "putting off," as in 3:9. The rulers and authorities spoken of in this verse are the angelic rulers and authorities. Because of the heretical teaching of angel-worship at Colosse, the passage here refers to the evil angels. The law was given through angels (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19). Based upon this, the heretical teachers at Colosse advocated the worship of angels (Col. 2:18) as mediators between God and man. Hence, the apostle dealt with this heresy by unveiling the fact that the law, consisting of ordinances, was nailed to the cross (v. 14), and the leading evil angels were stripped off from God. This left Christ as the sole Mediator, who is the Head of all rule and authority (v. 10). This kills the heresy of angel worship.

In verses 13, 14, and 15 the pronoun He refers to God in verse 12. The Greek word for make a display means show or exhibit in the sense of putting to an open shame. God openly shamed the evil angelic rulers and authorities on the cross and triumphed over them in it. The Greek words translated "in it" refer to the cross, but they can also be rendered in Him, referring to Christ.

It is not God's intention that we keep the law, and He certainly does not want us to worship angels. God's desire is to enliven human beings who are dead in offenses. In order to enliven us, He must put His very life into us. When His life comes into us, we are enlivened, made alive.

NO PLACE FOR THE LAW OR THE ANGELS

By mentioning the enlivening of those who are dead in offenses together with the ordinances of the law and the angels, Paul's intention is to point out that the concept held by the Colossians was altogether wrong. The Colossians still regarded the law and the angels very highly. They placed a high value on the ordinances of the law, and they were even worshipping certain of the angels.

Although God has used both the law and the angels, in the economy of His salvation there is no place either for the law or for the angels. Angels are not admitted into the sphere of God's salvation. Every believer has an angel, but these angels do not share in God's salvation. Christ's redemption has nothing to do with angels. In the realm of God's economy in His salvation, both the law and the angels are ruled out. In the eyes of God, the ordinances, rituals, and ceremonies of the law have been crucified on the cross. However, not many Christians realize this. Not only were sin, the natural man, the world, and Satan crucified on the cross; the law was also crucified there. For this reason, in 2:14 Paul says that God wiped out the handwriting in ordinances by nailing it to the cross. Because Paul's vision was so clear, his word was very definite. As evil men were putting Christ on the cross, God was nailing the law to the cross. Although the law had been given by God through angels, God Himself nailed it to the cross of Christ.

Verse 14 is a powerful weapon to counteract the teaching of the Seventh-Day Adventists about the observance of the Sabbath. Observing the Sabbath is one of the ordinances, or rituals, of the law that has been nailed to the cross. According to 2:14, the ordinances have been taken out of the way and nailed to the cross. Hence, the Seventh-Day Adventists need to see that the Sabbath-keeping ordinances have been wiped out. The very thing they treasure God has taken away. Actually, the ordinance of keeping the Sabbath was against us and contrary to us. Because God loves us, He has taken away this ordinance for our sake. Nevertheless, the Seventh-Day Adventists seek to restore the very thing God has removed.

Do not argue with Seventh-Day Adventists about which day, the seventh or the eighth, should be observed. Rather, point out that the keeping of the Sabbath is part of the handwriting in ordinances which has been taken away. We may use 2:14 boldly as a weapon to annihilate the ordinance concerning observing the Sabbath. In God's economy of His salvation, there is no room for the law. Just as sin has been crucified on the cross, so the law has

been crucified also. Both have been nailed to the cross of Christ. God does not want either sin or the law to remain. What He desires is for us to exist together with the risen Christ.

STRIPPING OFF THE RULERS AND AUTHORITIES

We have pointed out that at the time of Christ's crucifixion God stripped off, put off, the rulers and authorities. When Christ was crucified, the leading evil angels attempted to surround God when Christ was on the cross. But God used the cross to strip off these angels. This is Paul's concept in these verses.

In a very real sense, the cross of Christ is the center of the universe. After God created the heavens, the earth, and the billions of items in the universe, an archangel rebelled, and many angels followed him. This archangel became Satan, and his followers became the evil rulers, powers, and authorities in the heavenlies. Eventually, the man created by God fell and became sinful. The rebellion of the angels and the fall of man put God into a difficult situation. God's way to deal with this difficulty is the cross. Firstly, God became a man, thereby putting humanity on Himself. Then Christ, God incarnate, went to the cross and was crucified. During the thirty-three and a half years of His earthly life, Christ walked from the manger to the cross. When He was crucified, many things took place. On the cross God judged sin and the sinful old man. Through the cross, our sinful nature was terminated. At the very time God was judging sin and sinful man, He also nailed the law to the cross. When God was nailing the law to the cross, the evil angels also were present and very active. But, according to verse 15, God stripped them off through the cross.

We have pointed out that, according to 2:15, God stripped off the rulers and authorities. From what or from where did He strip them off? If we would answer this question, we must see that while Christ was on the cross, God was working. At that time, the cross was the center of the universe. The Savior, sin, Satan, we, and God all were there. God was there judging sin and nailing the law to the

cross. As He was doing this, the rulers and authorities gathered around God and Christ. We have pointed out that, according to grammar, the subject of verses 13 through 15 is God. Thus, the He in verse 15 denotes God. God made us alive together with Christ, nailed the ordinances to the cross, stripped off the rulers and authorities, made a display of them openly, and triumphed over them. No doubt, the rulers and authorities had swarmed around Christ as He was being crucified. Both God and Christ were working. Christ's work was His crucifixion, whereas God's work was to judge sin and all the negative things and to nail the law with its ordinances to the cross. The rulers and authorities who had gathered around God and Christ were also working. If they had not pressed in closely, how could God have stripped them off? The words "stripping off" indicate that they were very close, as close as our garments are to our body. By stripping off the rulers and authorities, God made a display of them openly. He openly put them to shame and triumphed over them. What a great matter this is!

WAR AT THE CROSS

Colossians 2:15 portrays the fighting that took place at the time of Christ's crucifixion. Evil men had put Christ on the cross. By His crucifixion Christ labored to accomplish redemption. God the Father was also working to judge sin and to nail the law to the cross. At the same time, the rulers and authorities were busy in the attempt to frustrate the work of God and Christ. The reference to triumph in verse 15 implies fighting. It indicates that a war was raging. While Christ was accomplishing redemption and God was dealing with the law and with the negative things, the rulers and authorities came to interfere. They pressed in close to God and Christ. But at that very juncture, God stripped them off, triumphed over them, and made a display of them openly, putting them to an open shame.

Colossians 2:15 is a small window through which we behold a marvelous sight. At the time of Christ's crucifixion, a battle was raging between God and the

rulers and authorities. But God stripped them off and triumphed over them.

PAUL'S CONCEPT

Paul's concept in these verses is that the law and the angels have been set aside through the cross. The law was nailed to the cross, and the evil angels have been stripped off by means of the cross. Therefore, in God's economy in His salvation there is room neither for the law nor for the angelic rulers. How wrong the Colossians were in following ordinances and in worshipping angels! The law with its ordinances, including the keeping of the Sabbath, had been nailed to the cross. The Colossians were altogether wrong in allowing these things to pervade the church. Furthermore, in the cross God overcame the angelic rulers and put them to shame. What a blunder to be led astray to worship angels!

A PEACEFUL ENVIRONMENT FOR THE ENLIVENING OF HIS CHOSEN ONES

If we see the vision conveyed in these verses, many problems will be solved. For example, no one will be able to convince us to go back to the observance of the seventh day Sabbath. No one will be able to persuade us to be subject to the ordinances God has nailed to the cross. To follow such ordinances is to be blind and in darkness. It is to be ignorant of the Bible or to know it only superficially. Those who advocate Sabbath keeping may appeal to certain verses in the Old Testament. They may try to argue that both the Lord Jesus and Paul went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. However, 2:14 and 16 make it clear that the ordinances, including the observance of the Sabbath, have been abolished. Those who advocate the observance of the Sabbath have never touched the depths of the Scripture. They do not realize that through the cross the ordinances have been abolished. Furthermore, the rulers and authorities who gathered around God and Christ in displeasure at what was taking place on the cross have been defeated. When these evil angels

surrounded God and Christ, God overcame them and stripped them off. Therefore, the law has been nailed to the cross, and the rulers and the authorities have been stripped off from God. What remains now is God's redeemed people who are in a position to be enlivened by Him. Now that the law and the angels have been set aside, God has a clear ground and a peaceful environment for the enlivening of His chosen ones. He now has a proper atmosphere to carry out the pleasant task of enlivening the very ones He chose in eternity past. He delights to put His life into them and to make them alive.

The Colossians needed to see such a vision, and we also need to see it today. Because they lacked this vision, the Colossians were trying to keep the law and were worshipping angels. How foolish!

The aspects of the economy of God's salvation in 2:13-15 are presented in a good sequence. In the economy of His salvation God enlivens us, nails the law to the cross, and strips off the evil rulers and authorities. The law is a frustration, and the rulers and authorities are troublesome. Because God has removed the law and the angels, we, His chosen people, are alone with Him. We are no longer bothered by terms, conditions, or requirements. God is here to enliven us, and we are here to be enlivened by Him. We should forget the law and the angels and allow God to put Himself into us as life.

The law that was used to expose our sinfulness has been nailed to the cross. Furthermore, the angels have been stripped off from God and Christ. Have you ever realized that at the time of the crucifixion God and Christ were so busy? Have you ever seen that the evil rulers and authorities were swarming around God and Christ and that a warfare was raging at the cross? I believe that few Christians have seen these things. Praise the Lord that by triumphing over the angelic powers and stripping them off, God has cleared the ground to enliven His chosen people.

Because of the subtlety of the enemy, the believers at Colosse were returning to the ordinances of the law and even were worshipping angels. What a great heresy! The

principle is the same among Christians today. Christians may follow various ordinances, and those in Catholicism may even worship angels. Those who do not worship angels may still greatly admire them and unconsciously aspire to be like angels. Many sisters especially desire a type of angelic spirituality. But in principle to admire angels is to adore them, to worship them. I can testify that in me there is no place for angels. God has the ground to contact me in Christ. The law and the angels are not between me and Him.

The environment and the atmosphere are very suitable for God to contact us. Furthermore, God is not here to judge us, for He has already judged us on the cross. He is not even here to deal with us, because He has dealt with us already. God is here to accomplish one thing--to enliven us by imparting life into us. As the life-giving Spirit, the Triune God is giving life to us. In the meetings of the church life, we are being enlivened. Concerning this, the law and the angels have no place. We should remind the rulers and authorities that at Calvary God stripped them off and triumphed over them. Based upon God's victory, we can order them to flee. What we need today is not the law or the angels, but the enlivening One, the life-giving One. This is the economy of God's salvation.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-FOUR

CHRIST--THE BODY OF ALL THE SHADOWS

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:16-18, 20-22

In the foregoing message we pointed out that in the economy of His salvation God has enlivened us, has nailed the law to the cross, and has stripped off the rulers and authorities. According to Paul's word in 2:14, the handwriting in ordinances, which was against us and contrary to us, has been taken out of the way. For a certain period of time, the law was in the way. Although God made use of the law, it was rather difficult for Him to move on to carry out His economy with the law in the way. Hence, when Christ was crucified, God came in to take the law out of the way by nailing it to the cross.

A MEMORIAL OF THE NEW CREATION

I hope that many Seventh-Day Adventists, who insist on the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, will come to see the difference between God's economy and the keeping of the Sabbath. According to the Old Testament, the Sabbath was a token of God's creation. After laboring for six days, God rested on the seventh day, which became the Sabbath. Hence, the seventh day became a testimony of the old creation. It testified that creation came from God's hand. As part of the old creation, man is obligated to keep the seventh day. However, the new creation came into existence on the first day of the week, on the day the Lord Jesus was resurrected from among the dead. Through Christ's resurrection, the new creation, including the church constituted of the regenerated believers in Christ,

was produced. Therefore, as the seventh day was a token of the old creation, the eighth day, the first day of the week, is a token of the new creation. For this reason, nowhere in the New Testament are we told that Christians met together to worship on the seventh day. But at least two verses indicate that the saints met on the first day of the week. Acts 20:7 says that on "the first day of the week...the disciples came together to break bread." This indicates that during the time of the Apostle Paul the saints gathered to remember the Lord on the first day of the week. This shows that this day is a memorial of God's new creation. Because as believers we are in the new creation, we no longer are obligated to observe the seventh day. Instead, we come together on the first day of the week to remember the Lord Jesus.

In 1 Corinthians 16:2 Paul says, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him." This verse also strongly confirms the fact that the early Christians met on the first day of the week, not on the seventh day. Because they came together on this day, that was the best time to gather together their offerings to the Lord.

Some Seventh-Day Adventists point out that it was Paul's practice to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. Yes, this was Paul's practice, but his purpose was not to keep the Sabbath or to worship God. It was to take advantage of the opportunity to preach the gospel to the Jews.

Another indication of the importance of the first day of the week in the New Testament is found in Revelation 1:10. Here the Apostle John tells us that he was "in spirit on the Lord's day." The Lord's Day is the first day of the week, the day the Lord was resurrected. As we have pointed out, the early church met on this day. On the Lord's Day, a testimony of God's new creation, John was in spirit to see visions related to God's economy.

Even the types in Leviticus 23 show the importance of the first day of the week. The children of Israel were to bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of the harvest to the priest to

be waved before the Lord (vv. 10-11). We are told specifically that "on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it." The "morrow after the sabbath" is, of course, the eighth day, or, the first day of the week. Furthermore, Leviticus 23:16 speaks of "the morrow after the seventh sabbath." This day was the day of Pentecost, which was also on the first day of the week. These verses are a further indication of the place of the eighth day in God's economy.

We have seen that in God's economy the seventh day is a memorial of the old creation, whereas the eighth day is a memorial of the new creation. Because the Jews are still in God's old creation, they continue to keep the seventh day. But because we, the church, are in the new creation and no longer in the old creation, we are not required to keep the seventh day. Instead, we gather together on the first day of the week, the day which marks a new beginning in resurrection. Hence, those believers in Christ who advocate the observance of a seventh-day Sabbath are short of the proper knowledge of the Bible. For believers in Christ, the memorial day should no longer be the Sabbath; it should be the first day of the week, the day the Lord Jesus was resurrected from among the dead. Through His resurrection on the first day of the week, we were regenerated (1 Pet. 1:3). Now we are no longer in the old creation, but in the new creation.

SHADOWS OF SPIRITUAL THINGS

In this message we need to consider how Christ is the body of all the shadows. In 2:16 and 17 Paul says, "Let no one therefore judge you in eating and in drinking or in respect of a feast or of a new moon or of Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ." The Greek words rendered "in eating and in drinking" may also be translated "in food and in drink." Food and drink signify satisfaction and strengthening. The feasts denote the annual Jewish festivals, which signify joy and enjoyment, and the new moons signify a new beginning

with light in darkness. Furthermore, the Sabbaths signify completion and rest. Feasts are yearly, new moons monthly, Sabbaths weekly, and eating and drinking daily.

All these items of the ceremonial law are a shadow of the spiritual things in Christ, which are the things to come. The body in verse 17, like a man's physical body, is the substance. The rituals in the law are a shadow of the real things in the gospel, like the shadow of a man's body. Christ is the reality of the gospel. All the good things in the gospel belong to Him. The book of Colossians unveils such an all-inclusive Christ as the focus of God's economy.

I was a Christian for years before I gained a proper understanding of 2:16 and 17. Paul's concept is that the various aspects of the ceremonial law are a shadow of things to come, of the spiritual things in Christ, just as a shadow is a figure of a person's body. The festivals, the new moons, the Sabbaths, and the regulations concerning eating and drinking all were shadows. The body, the solid sub-stance, of the shadows is Christ.

THE REALITY OF ALL POSITIVE THINGS

Many things in our environment of daily living are also shadows of Christ. For example, the food we eat is a shadow, not the real food. The real food is Christ. Christ is also the real drink. The clothing we wear to cover us, to beautify us, and to keep us warm is also a shadow of Christ. Christ is the One who truly covers our nakedness, who keeps us warm, and who imparts beauty to us. Christ is also our true dwelling place and real rest. The houses in which we live are a shadow of Christ as our dwelling place. The rest we enjoy at night is also a figure of Christ as our rest. Even the satisfaction we enjoy after a good meal is not the real satisfaction, but a shadow of Christ as the reality of satisfaction.

In verse 16 Paul covers matters related to daily life, weekly life, monthly life, and yearly life. As we have pointed out, eating and drinking are daily, the Sabbaths weekly, the new moons monthly, and the feasts yearly. All

the aspects of our living are shadows of Christ. Eating and drinking signify daily satisfaction and strengthening, and the Sabbath signifies weekly completion and rest. Without completion, we cannot enjoy rest. Rest always comes from completion and satisfaction. When you have finished a certain matter and are satisfied with it, you are then able to be at rest. After God completed His work of creation on the sixth day, He enjoyed rest on the seventh day. I can testify that I can enjoy rest only when my work has been completed and I am satisfied with it. Hence, the Sabbath signifies completion and rest on a weekly basis.

A new moon signifies a monthly new beginning with light in darkness. Just as the new moon marked a new beginning in Old Testament times, so Christ affords us a new beginning with light in darkness today. Recently I heard the testimony of a Jewish brother who was saved a few months ago. Before he came to the Lord, he was in darkness, like all unbelieving Jews today. But now Christ is his new moon with light in darkness.

The feasts signify yearly enjoyment and joy. Three times a year, God's chosen people came together for the annual feasts, which were times of enjoyment, of rejoicing together before the Lord. Although the feasts were enjoyable, they were simply shadows of Christ. He is the real food, drink, completion, rest, new moon, and feast. Daily we eat and drink Him, weekly we have completion and rest in Him, monthly we experience a new beginning in Him, and throughout the year He is our joy and enjoyment. Daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly Christ is to us the reality of every positive thing.

In chapter one Paul shows us that Christ is the portion of the saints, the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, the Head of the Body, the firstborn from among the dead, the One in whom all the fullness is pleased to dwell, and our indwelling hope of glory. In chapter two he goes on to say that Christ is the mystery of God and the One in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. After all this, Paul comes to our

practical living, which involves daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly matters.

The items covered by Paul in 2:16 are related either to the rotation of the earth on its axis, or to the revolution of the earth in its orbit around the sun. Without this rotation and revolution, we would have no way to maintain our physical life. Because of the earth's rotation and revolution, we have days, weeks, months, and years. As we have pointed out again and again, the reality of all these daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly things is Christ.

In verse 17 Paul says that Christ is the body of all the shadows. This means that He is the reality of our food and drink, of our completion and rest, of our new beginning with light in darkness, and of our enjoyment and joy. Every day, week, month, and year we need Christ. All the positive things in our daily life, weekly life, monthly life, and yearly life must be Christ. Christ must become everything to us not merely in a doctrinal way, but in the way of experience. I can testify that Christ is my completion, my rest, my new beginning, my enjoyment, my joy, my food, my drink, and my satisfaction. Although Christ is universally vast, He is also all the detailed aspects of our practical daily living. Day by day, He is our breath and every-thing to us.

NO NEED FOR THE EXPRESSION OF OPINION

In 2:16 Paul says, "Let no one therefore judge you." In verse 18 he goes on to say, "Let no one purposely defraud you of your prize." According to verses 20 through 22, there is no need for us to subject ourselves to ordinances. Since Christ is the body of all shadows, we can be free from the judgment or opinion of those who advocate Gnosticism and asceticism.

From the time I came to this country and began the ministry here, I have told people to forget their doctrines and opinions. According to God's mathematics, only Christ has value. Doctrines and opinions do not matter. What

matters is the Christ who is for our daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly life.

Throughout the years, I have learned not to hold to my opinions or to express them. Others, however, may strongly express their opinions even over things such as the kind of vacuum cleaner to purchase for use in the meeting hall. There is no value in arguing about such trivial things. I may have opinions about such matters, but I have learned not to express them. To argue on behalf of our opinions is altogether a waste of time.

In the church life we should have just one factor, one reason, one element, one source: Christ. Because Christ is our factor, reason, element, and source, there is no need for us to express our opinions or to argue. Although we may have many opinions, we need to learn, by the Lord's mercy, not to express our opinion. Some people may prefer to eat with chopsticks, whereas others may prefer a knife and fork or even their fingers. What difference does it make as long as they take the food into them? There is no need to express an opinion regarding utensils used in eating.

Opinion is the stronghold of the self. Although our opinions may be extremely strong, we can learn in the church life not to express them. This does not mean, however, that we agree with things such as idolatry. We must be strong to oppose that kind of thing. But regarding so many other matters, we need not express our opinion. If Christ is truly everything to us in our daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly life, there will be no need for us to express our opinion. We have Christ as our unique factor, reason, element, and source.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-FIVE

CHRIST VERSUS MYSTICISM

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:18-19; Eph. 4:15-16

Although Colossians is a short book, different parts of it are written from different directions, from different points of view. In chapter one and in the first part of chapter two, Paul writes from a universal direction. But starting from the middle of chapter two, he begins to write from the direction of our practical daily life. In turning from the universal perspective to the practical perspective, he enables us to see the economy of God's salvation.

In His salvation God has no intention to preserve the law; neither does He intend for angels to occupy a prominent position. In the economy of God's salvation, both the law and the angels must be taken out of the way. In the salvation of His people, God does not want to use any indirect means. Instead, He desires to have direct contact with His chosen ones. The fact that God has wiped out the law and stripped off the rulers and authorities means that the way is now clear for God to contact His people directly without interference of any kind of mediation.

All the positive things that remain after the law and the angels have been taken out of the way are shadows of Christ. The heavens, the sun, the moon, the stars, food, and drink are all shadows, figures, of Christ, who is the body, the substance, of the shadows. All that we need for our physical living daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly is a shadow. Only Christ is the reality, the body. It is a serious mistake for believers to go back to the observances of the law. Furthermore, the worship of angels is a great insult to God. In like manner, we insult Him if we respect

physical or material things more than Christ, for all such things are shadows of Christ. To repeat, the law has been taken away, the angels have been stripped off, and the material things are shadows. Therefore, we have the ground to say that Christ is all in all. He is our law, ordinance, observance, angel, universe, sun, moon, star, heaven, earth, food, and drink. He is the reality of all positive matters in our daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly living.

Writing from a universal direction, Paul shows that Christ is the portion of the saints, the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, the Head of the Body, the firstborn from among the dead, the One in whom the fullness of God dwells, the mystery of God's economy, the indwelling hope of glory, the mystery of God, and the One in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. As such a One, Christ is profound, preeminent, all-inclusive, and universal. Nevertheless, He dwells in us to be our hope of glory (1:27). Turning from the universal perspective to the perspective of our daily life, Paul shows us that Christ is the reality of all the positive things for our daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly life. Therefore, Christ is not only all-inclusive universally; He is also detailed practically.

The turn from the universal perspective to the practical perspective is made in 2:14-15. In these verses Paul makes it emphatically clear that in God's salvation God has no intention to have anything between Him and His chosen people. In order to clear the way to enliven His chosen ones, He nailed the law to the cross and stripped off the angels. Although God used the law temporarily and although He ordained angels for His government, He will not allow either the law or the angels to stand in the way of His salvation. Now that the law and the angels have been taken out of the way, God has a clear atmosphere and an unhindered environment to contact the ones He has chosen and enliven them. He not only redeems His chosen ones, but also seeks to enliven them. Today the redeeming and life-giving God can have direct contact with His chosen people.

After making the turn in these verses from the universal direction to the practical direction, Paul goes on to speak of the physical things, of our daily eating and drinking and of matters pertaining to our weekly, monthly, and yearly life. In just two verses he deals with eating and drinking, Sabbaths, new moons, and festivals. He points out that these things are shadows, whereas Christ is the body, the reality, the substance. This means that if we do not have Christ, we do not have reality; we have only shadows. Christ is the reality, the body of all positive things. Hence, in God's economy there are no physical things or material things--there is only Christ. More-over, Christ is not only the image of God, the firstborn of all creation, the firstborn from among the dead, the embodiment of the fullness of God, the mystery both of God's economy and of God Himself; He is even the law, the angels, the food, the drink, the new moon, the Sabbath, and the feasts. Based upon such a revelation, we have the boldness and the assurance to declare that Christ is all in all. This is not our teaching; it is simply a recognition of what Paul says in Colossians. What a mercy that we in the Lord's recovery can see Christ in all these aspects! With Colossians 1 and 2 as our basis, we have the confidence to say that, as the One who is all in all, our Christ is the reality of every positive thing in the universe.

It was crucial for the believers in Colosse to realize this. There was no need for them to accept religious ordinances or the highest products of culture, including mysticism, philosophy, and asceticism. At Corinth there was the problem of fornication, but in Colosse the saints were practicing asceticism in order to restrict the lustful flesh. The Colossians had not seen the vision that Christ is everything. Otherwise, they would not have allowed culture to pervade the church and to defraud them of Christ.

I. LETTING NO ONE DEFRAUD US

In 2:18 Paul issues a warning to the believers at Colosse: "Let no one purposely defraud you of your prize, in

humility and worship of the angels, standing on things which he has seen, vainly puffed up by the mind of his flesh." The Greek word rendered "purposely defraud" is difficult to translate. It may also be rendered "judge you unworthy." It means to judge or criticize in such a way as to deceive. The heretical teachers judged that the saints were not worthy to worship God directly and told them that they had to worship God through the mediation of angels. This was to defraud the saints of their prize, which is Christ. In Christ, our sole Mediator, we can worship God directly.

The Greek expression for "purposely defraud" points to someone who contacts another with the fixed and determined intention of capturing him. It indicates someone who approaches another with the purpose of catching him and of making a prey of him. Even Christians can be used by the enemy to defraud in this way. They may contact others purposely with the intention to capture them.

In Colosse certain ones came to the saints, judging them and criticizing them with respect to particular practices. As verse 16 indicates, they judged the believers regarding eating and drinking, feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths. Verse 18 continues the concept expressed in verse 16. Here Paul tells us that we should not allow anyone to judge us with the intention of defrauding us. All those who seek to defraud you come firstly with a critical spirit to point out things they feel are wrong or mistaken. They may criticize the church or the ministry. They may speak critically of the meetings or of your participation in the church life. The intention of such criticism is to deceive you and then to defraud you by snatching you away from Christ and the church. The meaning of defraud here is to defraud by judging and criticizing. The intention is to deprive you of your prize, which is the enjoyment of Christ and of the church life.

If you check with those who have left the church life, you will find that they have been deprived of the enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ and also of the enjoyment of the

church life. Christ and the church, the Head and the Body, are our enjoyment, our prize. To be deprived of Christ and the church is to be defrauded of our prize.

The evil intention of the Judaizers and Gnostics was to defraud the saints in Colosse of their enjoyment of Christ and the church. The method used to defraud them was to criticize them with respect to such things as new moons and Sabbaths, perhaps criticizing them for not observing the Sabbath. They may have accused them of negligence in this matter, and then they may have argued that they had the scriptural ground to charge them to keep the Sabbath ordained by God. Furthermore, they may have accused them for not observing the new moons and the yearly festivals. No doubt, their words were very persuasive and exerted much influence. Unless we have the proper discernment, such words may sound very convincing. Therefore, it is crucial to see that all the items listed in 2:16 are shadows of which Christ is the reality and substance. Because we have Christ, we do not need to observe the Sabbath, the new moons, or the festivals, and we do not need to submit to regulations concerning eating and drinking. Since we have Christ, what need is there for us to keep the Sabbath? If we have Paul's point of view, it will be very difficult for anyone to defraud us. Although it is still rather easy for young ones to be defrauded, I can testify that, because I have Paul's universal and practical perspective, I am crystal clear and cannot easily be deprived of my prize.

In addition to having Paul's view, we also need to have the proper knowledge. This knowledge will enable us to have the necessary discernment. For example, we need discernment in order to distinguish between an upper case letter I, a lower case letter l, and an Arabic numeral 1. When I was learning English as a young person, I had difficulty distinguishing between these three things. This indicates that even in small matters we need discernment. The principle is the same in spiritual matters. Those who have left the church life in recent years lacked

discernment. They did not have a clear view of God's economy, and they were short of knowledge. Because they followed others blindly, they were defrauded. They were deprived of the enjoyment of Christ and the church.

II. THE HERESY OF MYSTICISM

A. Teaching Self-abasing Humility

In verse 18 Paul speaks of humility with respect to being defrauded of the prize. The heretical teachers of angel worship taught the saints to show humility by considering themselves not worthy to worship God directly. They defrauded the saints of their prize in Christ in the element and sphere of such humility and worship of angels.

Certain Gnostic teachers said that man was too low to worship God directly. They advocated a type of self-abasing humility, some form of self-depreciation which was supposed to show that a person was humble. They taught that those who have such humility will not presume to worship God directly. To be so bold as to worship God without mediation, these Gnostics taught, was a mark of pride. They reminded the believers that they were sinful, fallen beings with fleshly lusts and evil thoughts. They went on to say that those who are humble will not attempt to worship directly the holy and pure God. Through such a show of humility, they seduced the Colossian believers and led them astray to the worship of angels. By this means, they deprived the Colossian saints of their enjoyment of Christ. Instead of enjoying Christ directly as their Mediator, the believers turned to angels. As a result, they were defrauded of their prize.

B. Standing on Things Seen

Those who were defrauding the saints in Colosse took their stand on things which they had seen; they insisted on certain visions they had supposedly seen. The heretical teachers were in the realm of sight, contrasted with the faith in verse 12. They liked to have curious visions. Such

insistence on visual experience resulted in fleshly pride, the vain puffing up by the mind of the flesh.

The principle is the same today. Many believers are fond of curious visions. Some even claim to have had contact with angels. In many meetings held in today's Pentecostalism, certain ones tell of visions they have seen. These so-called visions are often according to their own lusts. It is folly to insist on things supposedly seen in visions. The heretics in Colosse were such visionaries, insisting on what they had seen. The result was that they were vainly puffed up by the mind of the flesh. Although they practiced a self-abasing humility, they actually were very proud.

C. Not Holding the Head

Speaking of those described in 2:18, Paul goes on to say in verse 19, "And not holding the Head, out from Whom all the Body, by means of the joints and bands being supplied and knit together, grows with the growth of God." The heresy of angel worship distracted the saints from holding Christ as the Head. God's economy is to head up all things in Christ through His Body, the church, thereby to make Christ the center of all things. The device of the subtle one is to carry the saints away and to cause the Body to collapse. The heresy at Colosse caused the saints to be severed from the Head. This damaged the Body. Paul's revelation was to uplift Christ and to safeguard and build up the Body. We need to be preserved in Christ for the church life. Then we shall be protected from curious visions and from anything abnormal.

If we are not preserved in Christ, the religious element in our being may give rise to many strange things. Our fallen nature with our reprobate mind is one with the evil one. The evil spirits can still have contact with our reprobate mind. The fallen mind is continually committing fornication with the evil spirits. This causes various kinds of evil things to be transmitted into us, things that may cause us to act in an abnormal manner, even to pray, sing, or praise in strange ways. For this reason, as the Bible

says, we need a sober mind, a mind renewed according to the image of the One who created us (3:10). If we have such a renewed mind, we shall be preserved in Christ and enjoy Him in the church life. The main reason Paul wrote the book of Colossians was to rescue the saints from fraud and to preserve them in Christ for the proper church life.

To be preserved in Christ for the church life is to hold Him as the Head, out from whom the Body grows with the growth of God. To grow is a matter of life, which is God Himself. As the Body of Christ, the church should not be deprived of Christ, who is the embodiment of God as the source of life. By holding Christ, the church grows with the growth of God, with the increase of God as life.

This growth takes place "by means of the joints and bands being supplied and knit together." Joints are for the supply of the Body, whereas bands are for knitting together the members of the Body. In the church some members are joints and others are bands. By means of the joints and bands, the Body grows. This indicates that we cannot grow with the growth of God individualistically. We need to be in the church. Thus, Paul's aim in this book is to preserve us in Christ for the church life.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-SIX

THE EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST'S DEATH VERSUS ASCETICISM

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:20-23

ONE PERSON AND ONE WAY

In His economy God gives us one Person and one way. The one Person is the preeminent, all-inclusive Christ, and the one way is the cross. As the all-inclusive One, Christ is everything to us. He is God, man, and the reality of every positive thing in the universe. God has given us this marvelous Person to be our salvation. The one Person, Christ, is the center of the universe; and the one way, the cross, is the center of God's government. God governs everything by the cross and deals with everything by the cross. Therefore, just as Christ is the focal point of the universe, so the cross is the center of God's government.

In this book Paul points out to the Colossians that nothing should become a substitute for Christ. Christ should not be replaced by ordinances, observances, mysticism, or philosophy. Christ is everything and must not be replaced by anything. In the previous message we covered the matter of Christ versus mysticism. In Colossians mysticism includes Gnosticism and asceticism. Christ is versus all manner of isms. He is versus every kind of replacement and substitute.

We have pointed out that all the positive things in the universe are shadows of Christ. For example, our houses are a shadow of Christ as the real dwelling place. Since Christ is the substance of all the shadows, we should not allow the shadows to be a substitute for the One who is the body, the reality. How foolish to take shadows in place of

the reality! The book of Colossians makes it clear that the all-inclusive Christ is everything to us. God's intention is not to give us thousands of items; it is simply to give us one Person, the all-inclusive Christ.

Midway through chapter two, Paul begins to show us that the cross is God's unique way. God's way is not asceticism. It is not to humble ourselves, to abase ourselves, or to treat ourselves severely. The one way is the way of the cross. By the cross God has dealt with all the negative things in the universe. Furthermore, God is still governing everything through the cross. Therefore, we have one Person and one way; that is, we have Christ and the cross.

NO PLACE FOR ASCETICISM

In this message we shall go on to see that the experience of Christ's death is versus asceticism. In the Christian life there is no place for asceticism, no place for treating the body severely in the attempt to restrict the indulgence of the flesh. Asceticism is not God's way. On the contrary, it is a human invention, a product of man's fallen mind. Hindus and Buddhists may practice asceticism, but Christians should not.

Asceticism is part of the "elements of the world" spoken of in 2:20. These elements are the elementary principles of outward, material things, the childish teachings of externalism. These elements denote the rudimentary teachings of both Jews and Gentiles, teachings that consist of asceticism and of ritualistic observances in meats, drink, and washings. It is an elementary principle of asceticism to mistreat the body or to treat ourselves severely in an effort to suppress the flesh. God's way, the way of the cross, is altogether different.

According to the economy of God's salvation, the cross is God's central way in the universe. However, most Christians see little of the cross in relation to the spiritual world. For the most part, Christians appreciate the physical aspect of the cross, the aspect that can be observed with human eyes. But in verses 14 and 15 there is

a window through which we can see into the spiritual side of the cross of Christ. When Christ was on the cross, He was not only suffering; He was working to accomplish redemption by bearing our sins and by doing the Father's will. God was also working, wiping out the handwriting in ordinances by nailing it to the cross. As we have pointed out, the evil angelic rulers and authorities were busy also, having come to interfere with what God and Christ were doing. But God stripped them off, triumphed over them in the cross, and put them to an open shame. Of course, on the physical side, the Roman soldiers and the Jewish religionists were also very active. Because all this activity was brought to a focus on the cross, the cross became God's eternal, central, and unique way.

I wish to emphasize the fact that God's way is not asceticism. No Christian should practice asceticism. As believers in Christ, we are not a joyless people. On the contrary, we are a joyful people, those who constantly rejoice in the Lord. Why then should we inflict pain on our bodies or mistreat ourselves? How foolish! Our way, the unique way, is the cross. Therefore, the experience of the cross is versus asceticism.

HAVING DIED WITH CHRIST FROM THE ELEMENTS OF THE WORLD

In 2:20 Paul points out that we have died with Christ from the elements of the world. These elements include Jewish observances, heathen ordinances, and philosophy. They also include mysticism and asceticism. The elements of the world are the elementary principles of worldly society, the rudimentary principles invented by mankind and practiced in society. With Christ we have died to these elements of the world. When Christ was crucified, we were crucified also. In His crucifixion we were released from the elementary principles of the world.

Since we have died with Christ from the elements of the world, Paul asks us why as living in the world we subject ourselves to ordinances. In a rebuking tone, Paul asked the

believers in Colosse why they continued to subject themselves to ordinances, referring to the very elementary principles from which they had died in Christ. The world in this verse refers not to the physical earth, but to human society, to mankind. Therefore, Paul was asking the believers why they still subjected themselves to ordinances as if they were still living in human society.

In verse 21 Paul lists some of these ordinances: "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch." These are rules and regulations in material things. These rules refer respectively to things that move, to things that are edible, and to things that are tangible. Handling, tasting, and touching include virtually every kind of action. Because these regulations are related to the practice of asceticism, to submit to ordinances concerning handling, tasting, and touching is to practice asceticism.

Many years ago I met a brother who had been an orthodox Jew before becoming a Christian. In our fellowship together, he related many stories about various Jewish practices. He told me that some orthodox Jews place their shoes in a certain direction when they retire for the night, a practice supposedly based on a verse in the Old Testament. They believe that if they do not place their shoes in the proper direction, they will lose God's blessing. What superstition! I am amazed that the Jews, an intelligent people who value education, could be so superstitious. Those who do not have Christ and the cross are often superstitious and also given to the practice of asceticism.

PASSING THROUGH THE CROSS

As those who have the one Person and the one way, we do not need regulations about where to place our shoes. When we go to bed at night, however, we should pass through the cross. This means that no matter what we have done during the day or what has happened to us, the cross takes care of everything. Suppose in the afternoon you are made unhappy in some way by your wife or

husband. At bedtime you need to apply the cross to your feeling of unhappiness. If you do this, the feeling of unhappiness will disappear. This indicates that our way is the cross, not asceticism or any severe treatment of the self. Realizing that we have already died in Christ, we should go to bed at night with a consciousness of the cross. If we practice going to bed through the cross, lying down with the realization that we have died in Christ, the next morning we shall wake up in resurrection as a new person. We not only have Christ, the unique Person who is versus all things; we also have the cross, the unique way, which is versus all other ways.

Because we have Christ and the cross, there is no place for self-imposed humility. There is no need for us to train ourselves to be humble. I have observed, both in the Orient and in the West, that the most proud people are those who have learned to practice a form of humility. We need not learn such practices. Rather, we should simply take the unique way of the cross.

Driving down the street can be a reminder of the way of the cross. As we drive, we come to many intersections. Have you realized that every intersection is a cross? Some of these crosses may be large and others may be small, but they are all crosses. Only by passing through many crosses can we get to our destination. Speaking of spiritual experience, we also must pass through many crosses before we can reach the New Jerusalem. Just as we cannot travel very far geographically without crossing an intersection, so we cannot progress spiritually without passing through the cross. Only when we arrive at the New Jerusalem shall we cease to pass through the cross, for by that time all the negative things will have been eliminated. Until we come to the New Jerusalem, we need to pass through the cross day by day in our walk with the Lord.

I can testify that it is a healthy spiritual practice to pass through the cross every night when we go to bed. By applying the cross at the end of each day, I rest very well during the night. At bedtime we need to apply the cross to

every problem and to every negative, natural, or sinful thing. We may pray, "Lord, I want all these things to pass through the cross. I do not want to go to sleep with any natural, sinful, negative, or worldly element that has not been dealt with. When I go to bed, Lord, I want to be a person who has been crossed out." We need to be those who pass through one cross after another. I encourage you to daily pass through the intersection of the cross.

Because we have Christ as the unique Person and the cross as the unique way, we do not need asceticism. Furthermore, we do not even need to make up our minds with respect to certain things. Such a practice does not work. What we need to do is simply lie down through the cross at night, have a restful sleep, and then rise up in the morning in resurrection. Praise the Lord that the experience of Christ's death is versus asceticism!

NOT "ORDINANCING" OURSELVES

Let us now look at 2:20-23 in more detail. Verses 20 through 22 are actually one sentence, three verses that make up Paul's question. According to verse 20, Paul asks the Colossians why they subject themselves to ordinances. In Greek the word translated "ordinances" is actually a verb. This indicates that Paul was asking why the Colossians were "ordinancing" themselves. Then in verse 21 Paul lists three ordinances about handling, tasting, and touching. In verse 22 he goes on to say that these are things "which are all for corruption in the using." The Greek words for corruption and using may be rendered destruction and consumption respectively. Here Paul is saying that all material things are destined to decompose and to be destroyed through corruption when they are used (1 Cor. 6:13; Matt. 15:17).

Whenever we use a thing, that thing is eventually destroyed or corrupted through use. For example, whatever we eat is destroyed in the eating, whether it is clean or unclean according to the Levitical dietary regulations.

Since whatever we eat is destroyed in the using, there is no need for us to be subject to regulations about eating. In Acts 10 Peter was still concerned about what was clean and what was unclean. But the voice from heaven told Peter that what God had cleansed he should not regard as com-mon. In Colossians 2 Paul is encouraging the saints not to care about the regulations of asceticism regarding things which are all for corruption in the using. Whatever we use will eventually be destroyed and become nothing. In particular, when food is consumed, it is destroyed. Thus, there was no need for the saints to regulate their eating by ordinances.

A CLEAR VISION

Paul could write such a word because he had seen a clear vision of the all-inclusive Christ as the one Person and of the cross as the one way in God's administration. Therefore, he did not care for regulations about handling, tasting, or touching. He would not be occupied with ordinances. He knew that all material things perish with the using and eventually come to nothing. Paul realized that the believers in Colosse needed to see a great vision of the all-inclusive Christ and of the cross as God's way in His administration. We also need a clear view of Christ and the cross.

ONENESS AND HARMONY THROUGH THE CROSS

Apart from God's one way, we should have no ordinances and no particular ways or practices. The way God has ordained, uplifted, and honored is the cross of Christ. The cross is our only way. Do you know what can solve the problem of quarreling between husband and wife? It can be solved only by the cross. In the same principle, only the cross can enable the leading ones in a locality to be one and in perfect harmony. We all need to pass through the cross. If we do not experience the cross, we cannot have the proper church life. All the saints must learn to daily pass through the cross. By passing through all manner of

crosses, large and small, we shall have oneness and harmony in the church life.

In the church life it is possible to have oneness without harmony. In order to have a sweet harmonious oneness, we all must daily pass through the cross. Do not argue that you are right and that others are wrong. The more you dispute in this way, the less you pass through the cross. To repeat, the way to our destination is through the intersection of the cross. Do not avoid any cross. On the contrary, pass through all the crosses you encounter in the Christian life, in the family life, and in the church life. In married life and in the church life in particular, you need to pass through the cross daily, even hourly. In Ephesians 4 Paul exhorts us not to allow the sun to go down on our anger. This means that we should let go of our anger by passing through the cross. If we have a daily life of passing through the cross, there will be harmony both in the family life and in the church life. Praise the Lord for Christ and the cross! God has given us one Person--the all-inclusive Christ--and one way--the cross.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-SEVEN

CHRIST--OUR LIFE

Scripture Reading: Col. 3:1-4; Rom. 8:30, 19, 21; Phil. 3:21

At the beginning of this message I would like to give a further word on the way of the cross. For this, I would ask you to consult the diagram on the last page of the message.

THE PROCESSED GOD

In eternity past God existed alone. Then, in time, He created all things. At a certain point in history, this creating God, the Creator of all, became a man. This crucial step is called incarnation. By means of incarnation, God put on man with all of creation, for man is the head of creation. The Lord Jesus, God incarnate, lived on earth for thirty-three and a half years. When He was crucified, all creation was crucified with Him. This means that not only did Christ go to the cross, but the very man God had put on Himself with the entire creation went to the cross with Him. Therefore, Christ's death on the cross was an all-inclusive crucifixion. After His crucifixion, Christ was buried in a tomb. The man and the creation which were crucified with Christ were also buried in that tomb. After three days, Christ arose from the dead in His resurrection. Through resurrection and in resurrection He became the life-giving Spirit. Furthermore, in His ascension to the third heaven, He was crowned and became the Head and the Lord over all. Then He descended upon His Body as the all-inclusive Spirit.

Because God, after completing the work of creation, passed through incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and descension, we may speak of

Him as the processed God. The diagram portrays the process through which He has passed. Through incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, He has become the life-giving Spirit. After ascending to the third heaven, where He was enthroned and crowned, and where He was made the Head and Lord of all, He descended upon the church, His Body. In His descension, He is the all-inclusive Spirit. This all-inclusive Spirit has come upon God's elect, who make up the church.

When Christ was incarnated and born in the manger in Bethlehem, He put humanity on Himself. This humanity included us and all of creation as well. Hence, even before we were born, Christ put us on Himself. As Christ passed through human living, we passed through it with Him. Furthermore, when He went to the cross and was crucified, we were crucified with Him. Then we were buried with Him in the tomb. In fact, all of creation was buried there. Thus, Christ's tomb was an all-inclusive tomb. We have also resurrected and ascended with Christ. Now, even while we are participating in the church life, we are sitting with Him in the heavenlies. On the one hand, we are in the church on earth; on the other hand, we are in Christ in the heavenlies. There is a great deal of traffic between the heavens and the church, traffic that moves faster than the speed of light. Actually, to refer to such traffic is to speak from a human point of view. From God's point of view, the heavens and the church are one. Therefore, to be in the church is to be in the heavens.

THE REALITY OF THE COMPOUND OINTMENT

We also need to point out that the all-inclusive Spirit is the reality of the compound ointment described in Exodus 30. As the compound ointment, the Spirit no longer includes only the Spirit of God typified by the olive oil, but also the aspects of Christ's death and resurrection typified by the spices. After the olive oil had been blended with the spices, the oil became a compound, an ointment. Formerly the olive oil was of one essence, one element. But after it

had been compounded with the spices, other elements had been added to it. The ointment produced by compounding olive oil with the four spices signifies the all-inclusive Spirit.

In eternity past the Spirit of God existed with just one element, the element of divinity. But at the time of Christ's incarnation, God put on humanity. During Christ's thirty-three and a half years of human living on earth, more was added to the divine element. Furthermore, through His crucifixion, the essence of His all-inclusive, effective death was added to Him. The same was true of His resurrection. As Christ took these crucial steps, God was processed and compounded with humanity. Just as the olive oil was blended with the spices to be a type, the Spirit of God was blended with the effectiveness and sweetness of Christ's death and with the effectiveness and power of His resurrection. Therefore, our God is now the processed God who descends as the all-inclusive Spirit upon His chosen people and enters into them to make them the church.

THE TWO BIRTHS OF CHRIST

According to the New Testament, Christ has had two births. His first birth took place at His incarnation, and His second birth was in His resurrection. The church came into being through the resurrection of Christ. In His second birth the firstborn Son of God was born with all His brothers, who are the members of His Body, the church. Therefore, the church was born in resurrection, that is, in the second birth of Christ. The church now continues its existence in the all-inclusive Spirit.

ONE PERSON AND ONE WAY

In the foregoing message we pointed out that in God's economy there is one Person, Christ, and one way, the cross. The diagram is actually a chart of this one Person and the one way. Things such as Gnosticism and asceticism have no place here. The teachings of Plato, Socrates, and

Confucius and the practices of asceticism are all outside of Christ and apart from the way of the cross. All religions, including Judaism and Christianity, are outside of the line depicted on the diagram. But in the Lord's recovery we are being brought back to the one Person and the one way. We all need to be recovered from so many different kinds of isms, philosophies, and practices to this one line, to Christ and the cross. Today both Christ and the cross are in the all-inclusive Spirit. Therefore, to be recovered to Christ and the cross is to be recovered to the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit.

In our daily Christian experience we need to know the difference between practicing asceticism and taking the way of the cross. To take the cross is certainly not to cause ourselves to suffer in some way. Some saints may say that to experience the cross is to exercise faith in order to apply what Christ accomplished on Calvary to our situation. But even this may be a subtle form of asceticism. In my early years as a Christian, I appreciated the book, *The Imitation of Christ*. Eventually I learned that a great deal of what that book advocates is actually asceticism.

THE SPIRIT

If we would apply the cross to our situation, we need to contact the all-inclusive Spirit. The effectiveness of the death of Christ is in this Spirit, just as the effectiveness of certain medicines is included in a certain prescribed dose. When a person takes the prescribed dose, he experiences the effectiveness of that medicine. Today the all-inclusive Spirit is an all-inclusive dose. This dose includes the effectiveness of Christ's death and the power of His resurrection. Furthermore, Christ's resurrected and uplifted humanity is also in the all-inclusive Spirit.

According to the New Testament, the all-inclusive Spirit is *the* Spirit. In John 7:39 we are told that the Spirit was not yet because Jesus was not yet glorified. This means the Spirit of God had not yet been compounded to become *the* Spirit, the all-inclusive Spirit. But when Jesus

was glorified, the process of compounding was accomplished, and *the* Spirit came into being. Today it is *the* Spirit who descends upon us and enters into us to indwell our spirit. In this Spirit we have the effectiveness of the death of Christ.

THE APPLICATION OF CHRIST'S DEATH

If we would apply the cross of Christ, we need to open ourselves to the Spirit, contact the Spirit, and allow the Spirit to have a free way within us. Then the Spirit will spontaneously apply the effectiveness of the death of Christ to us. This is what it means to apply the death of Christ. Furthermore, when we open to the Spirit and allow Him to apply the death of Christ to our situation, this experience of Christ's death will bring Christ to us in resurrection. Hence, through the experience of Christ's death, we also experience His resurrection. The more we experience this, the more we can say with Paul, "To me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21).

Due to the influence of tradition, we often use the right terms in the wrong way. The terms are correct, but our understanding of them is mistaken. One of these terms is the cross. When we speak of applying the cross to our situation, we need to have the proper understanding. We need to realize that the effectiveness of the death of Christ is in the all-inclusive Spirit. The reality of the cross of Christ is in the Spirit. Thus, if we open to the Spirit and allow the Spirit to move freely within us, He will flow within us. This inward flowing will bring to us the effectiveness of the death of Christ. Moreover, this application of Christ's death will bring Christ Himself in resurrection. Then, as those who have died with Christ, we shall live with Him in resurrection. It is here that Christ becomes our life in a practical way. We have died with Christ on the cross, and we have been raised up together with Christ. Now, in resurrection, we have Christ as our life. If we spend more time considering the diagram, we shall be helped to realize in what way we have Christ as our life.

RAISED WITH CHRIST

In 3:1 Paul says, "If therefore you were raised together with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God." The word "raised" here refers to the raising aspect of baptism, which is altogether contrary to asceticism. We were raised together with Christ. We are now where Christ is, sitting in the heavens. Hence, we should not practice the things on earth that ascetics do. Rather, we should seek the things which are in the heavens.

LIVING IN THE HEAVENS

We need to live by Christ in the heavens, not by the elements of the world. As those who have died with Christ from the things on the earth, especially to things related to asceticism, as those who have been baptized into His death (Rom. 6:3), and who have been raised together with Christ, we should live in the heavens. But how can we do this? The diagram will help us to answer this question also. By the diagram we see that the heavens are joined to the church; therefore, to live in the heavens is simply to live in the church, for the church and the heavens are one. This is the reason that there should not be any of the elements of the world in the church. Today, to be in the church is to be in the heavens, and to be in the heavens is to be in the church. In our Christian life the church and the heavens are one. As I participate in the church life, I have the sense that I am in the heavens. Many Christians talk about going to heaven in the future, but we are in the heavens daily. Oh, the church is in the heavens today! Here, in this heavenly realm, we have no place for the elements of the world.

HIDDEN WITH CHRIST IN GOD

In 3:3 Paul goes on to say, "For you died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God." Because our life (not our natural life, but our spiritual life, which is Christ) has been hidden with Christ in God, who is in the heavens, we

should no longer care for things on the earth. God in the heavens should be the sphere of our living. With Christ we should live in God.

In verse 4 Paul continues, "When Christ our life is manifested, then you also shall be manifested with Him in glory." In God, Christ, not our self, our soul, is our life. This life is now hidden, but it will be manifested. Then we shall be manifested with this life in glory.

Many Christians take 3:3 for granted. But what does it mean to say that our life has been hidden with Christ in God? Although this is difficult to explain, the diagram will help us to gain some understanding of it. As a result of the process outlined in this diagram, God, man, the heavens, and the church have been brought together. I realize that some Bible teachers do not believe that God, man, the heavens, and the church have become one. Concerning this, we need to have all the riches of the full assurance of understanding. As we consider the diagram, we can say first that we are in God. Because God has been processed, we who believe in Christ are now in God. We are also in the heavens and in the church. To be in God is to be in the heavens, and to be in the heavens is to be in the church. We can also say that to be in the church is to be in the heavens and that to be in the heavens is to be in God. Praise the Lord that we are in God, in the heavens, and in the church. If we realize this, we shall spontaneously understand that our life is hidden with Christ in God. We are with Christ and cannot be separated from Him. In God we are with Christ, in the heavens we are with Christ, and in the church we are with Christ. We have died with Christ, we have been raised with Christ, and we are hidden in God with Christ. All this is possible because we and Christ have become one. Now for us to live is Christ.

Moreover, 1 Corinthians 12:12 tells us that Christ is the Body. Since we, the believers, are the Body of Christ, this reveals our oneness with Christ. We truly are with Christ. Where Christ is, there we are also. With Christ, our life is hidden in God.

IN GOD AND AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD

In verses 1 and 3 we have a matter that deserves our attention. In verse 1 we are told that Christ is at the right hand of God. But according to verse 3, Christ is in God. Where then is Christ, at the right hand of God or in God? I wonder how those who specialize in analytical theology would answer this question. No matter how much we may try to analyze this, our minds are too limited to comprehend it. The Triune God is unlimited, far beyond our understanding. Do not try to understand Him with your limited mentality. At the same time, Christ is both at the right hand of God and in God. However, according to our limited mentality, we cannot reconcile these statements.

Regarding matters such as this, we do not follow the traditional teachings of the so-called historic church; we follow the pure Word of God. Many believers claim to know the Bible, whereas actually their understanding of the Scriptures has been blinded by traditional teachings embodied in creeds such as the Nicene Creed. However, as we have pointed out, we follow the pure and complete Word of God. According to the Bible, Christ is at the right hand of God and also hidden within God. We may not be able to reconcile these statements, but we believe them because of what the Bible tells us.

HIDDEN WITH CHRIST AND MANIFESTED WITH HIM

I appreciate the word "hidden" in 3:3. Today our life is hidden with Christ in God. But one day Christ will appear, and we shall be manifested with Him in glory. Although we shall be manifested with Christ in the future, now is the time for us to be hidden. For this reason, we should not advertise ourselves.

The importance of a hidden life was impressed upon me afresh in my work on the biography of Brother Nee. Although this book has been completed, I am still seeking the Lord's mind whether or not it should be published. The

reason for my hesitation is that it is difficult to print a biography of someone without exposing that person. This is somewhat opposed to the principle of a hidden life. The life of a Christian today should be a hidden life.

At present, even Christ is hidden. Think of how much He is criticized, opposed, and attacked. People rebel against Him to such an extent that it almost seems as if He does not exist. Although Christ is suffering from this attack and rebellion, He continues to be silent and hidden.

In contrast to the practice of Christianity, our life should not be exposed. We should do many things that are not known by others. Our Christian life should be a hidden life, a life hidden with Christ in God. Our church life should also be hidden in God and in the heavens. The practice of today's Christianity is to promote people and their work by advertising them. Such a practice is Babylonian, to say the least. The church life is a life hidden with Christ in God and in the heavens. As long as we are hidden, we are with Christ in God, in the heavens, and in the church. But when we advertise and promote ourselves, we are outside of Christ and are not with Him. When Christ appears, we shall appear with Him. That will be the time of our manifestation with Christ. But now is our time to be hidden and to suffer.

According to Romans 8, we shall one day be glorified with Christ. In Romans 8:19 we are told that the "creation eagerly expects the revelation of the sons of God," at which time it will "be freed from the slavery of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (v. 21). What a wonderful day it will be when we appear with our Christ in glory! At that time, even our vile body will be transfigured into a glorious body. But as we await that wonderful day, we must remain hidden with Christ in God, in the heavens, and in the church.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-EIGHT

CHRIST--THE CONSTITUENT OF THE NEW MAN

Scripture Reading: Col. 3:5-11; Gal. 2:20a; Rom. 6:3;8:13; Eph. 4:22, 25a, 24; Rom. 12:2; Phil. 1:21; Col. 1:27; 1 Cor. 12:13

According to Colossians 3, Christ is our life and the One who is all and in all (vv. 4, 11). In this message we shall consider how such a Christ is the constituent of the new man.

Before Paul comes to this matter, he speaks of putting off a number of things (vv. 5, 9). In the new man everything other than Christ must be put off. In the church as the new man there is no room for anything other than Christ. In categorizing those things which we must put off, Paul speaks of fleshly things, of psychological things, and eventually of the totality of the old man.

I. PUTTING TO DEATH OUR LUSTFUL MEMBERS

In 3:5 Paul says, "Put to death therefore your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and unbridled greedy lust, which is idolatry." In our sinful members is the law of sin, which makes us captives of sin and causes our corrupted body to become the body of death (Rom. 7:23-24). Hence, our members, which are sinful, are identified with sinful things, such as fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and unbridled greedy lust. In 3:6 Paul points out that because of these things "the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience." In verse 7 he goes on to say that the believers once walked in these things when they lived in them.

In verse 5 Paul charges us to put to death our members which are on the earth. This charge is based upon the fact that we have been crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20a) and that we have been baptized into His death (Rom. 6:3). We execute Christ's death upon our sinful members by crucifying them, by faith, through the power of the Spirit (Rom. 8:13). This corresponds to Galatians 5:24. Christ has accomplished the all-inclusive crucifixion. Now we apply it to our lustful flesh. This is absolutely different from asceticism.

Christ's all-inclusive death on the cross is applied to us at the time of baptism. All those who believe in the Lord Jesus should be baptized. In baptism we not only recognize Christ's death, but we also apply it to ourselves. Therefore, in baptism we are placed into the death of Christ and buried.

According to Romans 8:11 and 13, the putting to death of the practices of the body is an action carried out in the power of the Spirit. It is not accomplished by self-effort. Our attempts to put to death the practices of the body are nothing more than asceticism. Although we are not to practice asceticism, we are to put to death the negative things in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. In order to do this, we need to open to the Spirit and allow the Spirit to flow within us. Through the Spirit's flowing, we shall experience the effectiveness of Christ's death. This is not asceticism; it is the operation of the Spirit within us.

A number of saints have read the autobiography of Madame Guyon. This book contains definite traces of asceticism and mysticism, the very things that damaged the church in Colosse. Those who read books written by the mystics must do so with discernment. Although some things in these books are helpful, others are poisonous. Many years ago, we were helped by some of these books. However, we eventually learned that reading such books without discernment can lead seeking Christians into the error of asceticism. Therefore I do not recommend that you read these books without the help of some saints who are

more experienced. Even recently, some, especially sisters, have been damaged by them.

We need to be warned concerning asceticism. We should not impose anything on ourselves in an attempt to deal with the lust of the flesh. On the contrary, our practice should be to open ourselves in fellowship with the Lord and allow the Spirit to have a free way to flow within us, and to apply the effectiveness of Christ's all-inclusive death to the negative things in our being. Asceticism is spiritual suicide; in contrast, what we are speaking of is the application of Christ's death through the flowing of the Spirit.

II. PUTTING AWAY EVIL PSYCHOLOGICAL THINGS

In verse 8 Paul speaks of putting away evil psychological things: "But now, you also, put away all these things: wrath, anger, malice, blasphemy, foul abusive language out of your mouth." If you compare this verse with the foregoing verses, you will see that Paul classified the things of the flesh in one category and the things of the fallen soul in another category. All negative things, whether of the flesh or of the fallen soul, must be put aside. We do this, not by our own energy, but by the power of the all-inclusive Spirit.

II. HAVING PUT OFF THE OLD MAN WITH HIS PRACTICES

In verse 9 Paul goes on to say, "Do not lie to one another, having put off the old man with his practices." This verse indicates that the totality of the old man, the entire being of the old man, is to be put off as if we were putting off an old garment. The total person of the old man must be put away. In this verse Paul speaks of "having put off the old man" because we put off the old man in baptism. Our old man was crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6) and was buried in baptism (Rom. 6:4).

IV. HAVING PUT ON THE NEW MAN

In verse 10 Paul declares, "And having put on the new man, who is being renewed unto full knowledge according

to the image of Him Who created him." To put on the new man is like putting on a new garment. The Greek word for new in this verse means young, new in time. This is different from the word used in Ephesians 4:24, which means new in nature, quality, or form.

The new man is of Christ. It is His Body, created in Him on the cross (Eph. 2:15-16). It is not individual, but corporate. According to the clear vision in Ephesians 2:16, the new man is a corporate entity. This is proved by the fact that it is created out of two peoples, the Jews and the Gentiles. Furthermore, Ephesians 2:16 indicates that the new man created out of these collective peoples is the Body of Christ. Hence, the new man and the Body are synonymous terms and may be used interchangeably.

The fact that the new man is the Body and that the Body is the new man is a strong indication that the new man is not an individual entity, but a corporate entity. Therefore, it is a serious mistake for some versions of the Bible to speak of putting on the new self. The New American Standard Version makes this very error in Colossians 3:10 by adopting the rendering, "have put on the new self." This is a very serious error. It goes beyond interpreting the Bible to actually changing it. The Greek word means man, not self. Thus, it is altogether wrong to talk about putting on the new self. According to Colossians 3:10, what we have put on is the new man, not the new self.

A. Being Renewed unto Full Knowledge according to the Image of Him Who Created Him

In Ephesians 2 we are told that the new man was created, but in Colossians 3:10 we are told that the new man is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him. Although Ephesians and Colossians are sister books, what they say concerning the

new man is not exactly the same. How can we say that, on the one hand, the new man is created and that, on the other hand, the new man is renewed? Because we who belong to the old creation were involved in the creation of the new man, he needs to be renewed. This renewing takes place mainly in our mind, as indicated by the phrase "unto full knowledge." In our spirit the new man has already been created. Before the new man was created in our spirit in resurrection, we did not have the Spirit of God or the life of God within us. Although we had a spirit, our spirit did not contain the divine life. But at the time the new creation took place in our spirit in resurrection, the Holy Spirit with the divine life was added into our being. This addition of the Spirit and the divine life to our spirit produced a new being, the new man. For this reason we can say that in our spirit the new man has been created.

However, there is still the need for renewing in our soul and even in our body. Our mind, which represents our soul, needs to be renewed. Eventually, when our body is transfigured, it also will be renewed. Therefore, our spirit has been regenerated, but our soul is being renewed. On the one hand, in our spirit the new man was created with new elements, the elements of the divine life and the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, in our soul the new man is being renewed.

The problem with the believers in Colosse was not with the spirit, nor with the new creation. Because they had accepted various philosophies, their problem was in the mind. They were in error not with respect to the new creation, but with respect to the mind. Therefore, they were in need of the renewing unto full knowledge.

In 3:10 Paul says that the new man is being renewed unto full knowledge "according to the image of Him Who created him." The image here refers to Christ, God's Beloved, as the expression of God (1:15; Heb. 1:3). It was God the Creator who created the new man in Christ (Eph. 2:15).

In Ephesians 4:24 Paul says that the new man

"according to God was created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." Here there is no mention of the image. We are only told that the new man was created according to God Himself, whereas in Colossians 3:10 we see that the new man is being renewed according to the image of the One who created him. In Ephesians 4:24 the new man is created according to God, but in Colossians 3:10 the new man is being renewed according to the image of God. The renewing of the new man results in full knowledge, and this full knowledge is according to the image of God. In some of the foregoing messages we pointed out that the image in 1:15 refers to the expression of God and to the fullness of God. The image of God is His fullness and expression. This, of course, is Christ Himself.

I do not have the assurance that very many of us have been renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of God. Concerning this, we need much more growth. We are like the Colossians in that the new man has been created in our spirit, but our mind has not yet been renewed unto full knowledge. We need to be renewed in our mind unto full knowledge according to the expression of God, that is, according to Christ as God's image. This means that we need a renewal in our mind according to what Christ is. This can take place only as we are renewed unto full knowledge.

In Colossians Paul uses the phrase "full knowledge" three times (1:10; 2:2; 3:10). The problem with the Colossians was that they had the wrong kind of knowledge. They had taken in philosophies that were not according to Christ. In 2:8 Paul speaks of philosophies that are according to the tradition of men and according to the elements of the world, but not according to Christ. Now in 3:10 he speaks of full knowledge according to the image, the expression, the fullness, of God. Concerning the new man, our mind needs to be renewed unto such a full knowledge according to the Christ who is the expression of the invisible God. Our mind needs to be renewed to such an ex-tent that we have a clear view of Christ as the image of

God. Few Christians have a proper understanding of the Christ unveiled in the book of Colossians. Their minds have not been renewed unto such a full knowledge of Him. As a result, many Christians today have been misled, deluded, and defrauded, just as the Colossians were. The Colossians could be deluded because in their minds they did not have the full knowledge according to God's expression. The same is true of Christians today. Some have been carried away because in their minds they were not renewed unto full knowledge according to the all-inclusive Christ as the image of God.

In Ephesians we see that the new man was created in our spirit with the elements of the divine life and the Holy Spirit. These elements have been added into our being to produce a new creation. In Colossians, however, the new man is being renewed in our minds unto full knowledge according to Christ as the image of God. When our mind is filled with the knowledge of the all-inclusive Christ, our emotion will be influenced. This will cause us to have a greater appreciation of the Lord Jesus. For example, a child may have a greater appreciation for a velvet box than for the diamond ring in the box. In the child's mind there is no knowledge of the value of the diamond ring. But as the child grows, he will have a greater appreciation for the ring. Eventually, he will want to keep the ring and throw the box away.

Love is a matter of the emotion, and the emotion is related to the understanding we have in the mind. If we have little understanding of a certain thing, we shall not have much appreciation of it. This will make it impossible for us to love that thing. But when our mind concerning that thing is renewed, our emotion with its love will be renewed also. When the mind is renewed, the emotion is spontaneously renewed as well. Our experience confirms this. Both in spiritual experience and in human experience, the mind affects the emotion, and the emotion affects the will.

We need to be renewed in our mind in order to have a

proper love for the Lord in our emotion. Many saints are cold toward the Lord because in their minds they do not have much knowledge of Him. The more we have the knowledge of the all-inclusive Christ, the more we shall appreciate Him and love Him. Although we still need a great deal more renewing, we nevertheless have a certain amount of knowledge of the Lord Jesus. This knowledge of Him causes us to love Him. Out of our love and appreciation for the Lord, we exercise our will to decide to be for Him, to follow Him, and to live Him, grow Him, and produce Him. We decide to live for Him and for His testimony. This decision comes out of the emotion, and the emotion is in turn influenced by the proper knowledge of Christ.

The central point of Paul's word to the Colossians concerns the renewing of the mind unto the full knowledge of Christ. The Colossians needed a full knowledge, not according to philosophy, Gnosticism, Judaistic observances, or heathen ordinances, but a full knowledge according to the image of God. As we have pointed out, this image is the wonderful, glorious, all-inclusive Christ. We need a renewing that results in full knowledge according to such a Christ.

When I was a young man, I was captured by the dear Lord Jesus. The more my mind is renewed unto the proper knowledge of Him, the more I love Him. I can testify that, even though I am an elderly person, my love for Him is fresh. In fact, I love Him more today than ever before. As I speak of Him, a fire is burning within me. The renewing that has taken place in my mind unto full knowledge according to the image of God has created appreciation within me for the Lord. This causes me to love Him. When we have such a love for the Lord, we shall say, "Lord Jesus, I want to follow You at any cost. I am willing to pay any price, even the price of my life, to be one with You and be for You. Lord, I want to take You as my life and as my per-son. I want to live You, grow You, and produce You. Lord Jesus, I am here for You and for You alone."

B. Where There Cannot Be Any Natural Persons

In verse 11 Paul goes on to say, "Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all and in all." The word "where," referring to the new man in verse 10, means in the new man. There is no natural person in the new man. Furthermore, there is no possibility, no room, for any natural person. There cannot be Greeks, who are for philosophical wisdom, and Jews, who are for miraculous signs (1 Cor. 1:22). There cannot be circumcision and uncircumcision. Circumcision refers to the observers of the Jewish religious rituals; uncircumcision refers to those who do not care for the Jewish religion. Furthermore, in the new man there cannot be barbarian, Scythian, slave, or freeman. A barbarian is an uncultured person, the Scythians were considered the most barbarous people, the slaves were those sold into slavery, and the freemen were those who had been freed from slavery. No matter what kind of person we may be, as far as the new man is concerned, we must regard ourselves as nobodies. In the new man there is room only for Christ, not for any kind of natural person. Therefore, in the church we all are nobodies.

C. Christ Being All and in All

In the new man "Christ is all and in all." In the new man there is room only for Christ. He is all the members of the new man and in all the members. He is everything in the new man. Actually, He is the new man, His Body (1 Cor. 12:13). In the new man Christ is the centrality and universality.

The word all in verse 11 refers to all the members who make up the new man. Christ is all these members, and He is in all the members. For this reason, in the church there is no room for us. There is no room for any nationality. As those who are part of the new man, we should not regard ourselves as Chinese, Americans, Germans, or any other

nationality. Do not even say that you are so-and-so. Since Christ is all and in all in the new man and you are part of the new man, then you are part of Christ. Each member, each part, of the new man is Christ.

In saying that there cannot be any natural person in the new man, verse 11 is very strong. What a great mistake it is to translate the Greek here as the new self! It is foolish to say that in the new self there is no Greek and Jew, no circumcision and uncircumcision. According to the context, the new man in 3:10 certainly does not denote the new self, for the new man is made up of believers from many different cultural backgrounds. This is not true of the so-called new self. No doubt, the new man here is a corporate man, the church, Christ's Body. Although many different kinds of people make up the church, all are part of Christ. They are no longer the natural person. Christ is everyone in the new man, and He is in everyone in the new man. What a tremendous vision it is to see that Christ is all and in all!

It is crucial for us to see two things: that we need to be renewed unto full knowledge according to the all-inclusive Christ, who is the image of God; and that in the church as the new man Christ is everyone and in everyone. In the church, the new man, there is nothing but Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-NINE

THE LIVING OF THE SAINTS IN UNION WITH CHRIST: RULED BY THE PEACE OF CHRIST AND INHABITED BY THE WORD OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Col. 3:12-17; Eph. 5:19-20

After giving an introductory word in 1:1-8, the book of Colossians unveils Christ as the preeminent and all-inclusive One, as the centrality and universality of God (1:9--3:11). In this section of Colossians, Christ is revealed in a full way. Here Paul does not say that Christ is the Lamb of God, the manna, or the living water. Rather, he tells us that Christ is the portion of the saints, the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, the first-born from among the dead, the mystery of God's economy, the indwelling hope of glory, the mystery of God, and the One in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. As we consider all these aspects of Christ, we shall realize that the revelation of Christ conveyed in Colossians is extraordinary, absolutely different from what is revealed elsewhere in the Scriptures.

In 3:12--4:6 Paul turns to the matter of the living of the saints in union with Christ. In 3:12-15 he speaks of the necessity of being ruled by the peace of Christ, and in verses 16 and 17, of the word of Christ dwelling in us richly. To live in union with Christ means that in our living we are not apart from Christ. In John 15 the Lord tells us to abide in Him, for apart from Him we can do nothing. In the eyes of God, whatever we do apart from Christ has no value. Therefore, if we are separated from the all-inclusive Christ revealed in Colossians, we cannot

do anything. The living of the saints must be in union with Christ. This means that in our living we need to be one with Him.

In 3:10 and 11 we see that in the new man Christ is all and in all. Christ is all the members and in all the members. In the new man there is no room for any natural person. Rather, Christ is everyone and is in everyone. To say that Christ is all and in all in the new man indicates that we are one with Christ and that Christ is one with us. We may even say that Christ is we and that we are He. This points to our union with Christ. Therefore, the living of the saints must be a living that is in union with Christ, a living that is identified with Him. If we live in such a way, we and Christ, Christ and we, are one. We live, and Christ lives in our living.

We need to be one with the Lord Jesus just as He is one with the Father. In John 14:10 the Lord said, "The words which I speak to you, I do not speak from Myself; but the Father Who abides in Me, He does His works." This indicates that the Father works in the Son's speaking. Although the Father and the Son are two Persons, They have just one life and one living. The life of the Father is the life of the Son, and the living of the Son is the living of the Father. On the one hand, the Father's life is the Son's life. On the other hand, the Son's living is the Father's living. In this way the Father and the Son have one life and one living. The principle is the same with Christ and us. Today we and Christ have one life and one living. The Son's life becomes our life, and our living becomes His living. This is what it means to live in union with Christ.

In such a union we and Christ, Christ and we, are one. In a very practical sense, Christ is we and we are Christ, for we live as one. His life is our life, and our living is His living. Therefore, Christ lives in our living. This is the normal Christian living, the living that is up to God's standard and that fulfills the requirements of His economy.

Concerning our living in union with Christ, Paul tells us to let the peace of Christ arbitrate in our hearts and to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. Paul does not

speak of these things elsewhere in his Epistles. Notice Paul's use of the word "let" in verses 15 and 16. This word indicates that both the peace of Christ and the word of Christ are already present. However, we need to allow them to operate within us. We need to let the peace of Christ arbitrate in us, and we must let the word of Christ dwell in us. There is no problem with either the peace of Christ or with the word of Christ. The problem is with us, in particular with our allowing these things to work in us.

I. PUTTING ON SPIRITUAL VIRTUES

Before we consider verses 15 through 17 in more detail, let us look at certain aspects of verses 12 through 14. In verse 12 Paul says, "Put on therefore as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering; bearing one another and for-giving one another, if anyone should have a complaint against any; as the Lord forgave you, so also should you forgive." Having put on the new man, we also need to put on the spiritual virtues listed in these verses. In verse 12 Paul addresses the believers as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved. The new man is God's elect, God's chosen ones. Furthermore, the new man is holy. This means that the new man is neither common nor worldly; rather, he is separated to God. Moreover, the new man is beloved. According to this verse, the new man is chosen, holy, and beloved.

As such a new man, we need to put on all the necessary spiritual virtues: a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and longsuffering. Lowliness is somewhat different from humility. A person may be proud of his humility, but not of lowliness. The heretical teachers at Colosse taught a form of self-abasing humility. But Paul taught spiritual lowliness as well as meekness and long-suffering.

In verse 13 Paul goes on to speak of bearing one another and forgiving one another. The forgiving Lord is our life, and He lives within us. Forgiving is a virtue of His

life. When we take Him as our person and live by Him, forgiving others will be a spontaneous virtue of our Christian life.

II. PUTTING ON LOVE, THE BOND OF PERFECTNESS

In verse 14 Paul goes on to say, "And over all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness." The Greek word rendered perfectness can also be translated completeness. God is love (1 John 4:16). Love is the very essence of God's being, the very substance of the divine life. Hence, to put on love is to be clothed with the element of God's life. Such a love is the uniting bond in the combination of perfectness, completeness, and mature virtues.

III. LETTING THE PEACE OF CHRIST ARBITRATE IN OUR HEARTS

In verse 15 Paul says, "And let the peace of Christ arbitrate in your hearts, to which also you were called in one Body; and be thankful." The Greek term for arbitrate can also be rendered umpire, preside, or be enthroned as a ruler and decider of everything. The arbitrating peace of Christ in our hearts dissolves the complaint mentioned in verse 13.

The relative pronoun "which" in verse 15 refers to the peace of Christ. We were called to this peace in the one Body of Christ. For the proper Body life we need the peace of Christ to arbitrate, to adjust, to decide all things in our heart in the relationships between the members of His Body. Our having been called to the peace of Christ should also motivate us to let this peace arbitrate in our hearts.

In this verse Paul also encourages us to be thankful. We should not only let the peace of Christ arbitrate in our hearts, but we should also be thankful to the Lord. In the Body life our heart should always be in a peaceful condition toward the members and thankful to the Lord.

Paul's word about the arbitrating peace of Christ was no doubt written according to his practical experience. If

we consider our experience, we shall realize that as Christians we have two or three parties within us. For this reason we need an arbitrator. An arbitrator is always needed to settle disagreements or disputes between parties. With respect to a certain matter, one of the parties within us may be inclined one way, whereas another party may be inclined the opposite way. Furthermore, a third party may be neutral. Often we are conscious of three parties within us: a positive party, a negative party, and a neutral party. As Christians, we are more complicated than unsaved people are. Before we were saved, we were under the control of the satanic party. We could indulge in worldly amusements and entertainments without any sense of controversy within. But now that we are saved, one party may encourage us to do one thing, but another party may encourage us to do something else. Hence, there is the need for inward arbitration to settle the dispute within us. We need someone or something to preside over the conferences that take place within our being. According to verse 15, this presiding one, this arbitrator, is the peace of Christ.

Remember the background of the book of Colossians. Various philosophies and isms had invaded the church in Colosse. I do not believe that all the saints in Colosse adopted the same philosophy. On the contrary, I believe that some appreciated pure Greek philosophical thought, whereas others preferred Egyptian or Babylonian philosophy. I doubt that even in the matter of asceticism all the saints had the same point of view. Nothing is more divisive or causes more dissension than opinions regarding asceticism. There was no actual division in the church in Colosse, but no doubt there was dissension. The saints were not truly one. As a result, they were not at peace.

After Paul wrote concerning the all-inclusive Christ and concerning the new man in whom Christ is all and in all and where there is no room for Greek, Jew, or other cultural distinctions, he charged the saints to care for the peace of Christ. Within us we all have something called the

peace of Christ. This is the peace about which Paul speaks in Ephesians 2:15, where we are told that in Himself Christ created one new man out of two peoples. By creating the Jews and the Gentiles into one new man, Christ has made peace. This is the very peace in Colossians 3:15.

Believers with different cultural backgrounds and nationalities have been created into one new man. The oneness of the new man produces genuine peace. Apart from Christ and the church, those of different races and nationalities cannot be truly one. We in the Lord's recovery are one because we are in Christ and in the church. We are in the new man, where there is no Greek, Jew, circumcision, or uncircumcision. In the new man there are no different races, classes, or nationalities. Rather, there is oneness because Christ is all and in all. This oneness is our peace. The peace of Christ in Colossians 3:15 is simply the peaceful oneness in the new man.

We need to understand this matter of the peace of Christ in relation to the background of the Epistle to the Colossians. Various aspects of culture had come into the church life. Certain Jewish believers were in favor of observing the Sabbath day. They also advocated regulations concerning eating. No doubt the believers with a Greek background did not appreciate these things. However, they in turn brought in the kind of philosophy they favored. To be sure, the Jewish believers did not receive this. As a result, there was a loss of the peace of Christ in their experience. Instead of the peace of Christ prevailing, the Greek philosophical concepts and the Judaistic practices were prevailing among the believers. Hence, in Colosse there were at least two parties: the philosophical party and the Judaistic party. Therefore, an arbitrator was necessary. This arbitrator was not any brother in the church, it was the very peace of Christ, which is the oneness of the new man, the Body.

We have pointed out repeatedly that in the new man there cannot be Greek and Jew. Greek philosophy and Jewish observances should not be brought in. In the new

man Christ is all and in all. Furthermore, the oneness of the new man, the peace of Christ, must be maintained.

We should allow the peace of Christ to arbitrate in our hearts. All the parties must take heed to the word of the arbitrator. Do you realize that you have an arbitrator within you? From Colossians we see clearly that the peace of Christ is our inward arbitrator. This arbitrator must settle all the disputes within us. For example, some Chinese brothers may like to visit Chinatown. However, in doing so, they may not have peace, but experience a disagreement within. Therefore, it is necessary for these brothers to pay attention to the arbitrator, to the peace of Christ presiding within them. Whenever we sense that different parties within our being are arguing or quarreling, we need to give place to the presiding peace of Christ and allow this peace, which is the oneness of the new man, to rule within us. Let this peace, this oneness, have the final word.

IV. LETTING THE WORD OF CHRIST INHABIT US

In verse 16 Paul goes on to say, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God." The word of Christ is the word spoken by Christ. In His New Testament economy God speaks in the Son, and the Son speaks not only directly in the Gospels, but also through His members, the apostles and prophets, in Acts, in the Epistles, and in Revelation. All these may be considered as His word.

In this passage, the infilling of spiritual life that overflows in praising and singing is related to the Word, whereas in its parallel passage, Ephesians 5:18-20, the infilling of spiritual life is related to the Spirit. This indicates that the Word and the Spirit are identical (John 6:63b). A normal Christian life should be one that is filled with the Word so that the Spirit may bubble from within us in melodies of praise.

Colossians is focused on Christ as our Head and our life.

The way for Him to exercise His headship and to minister His riches to us is through His word. Hence, the emphasis is on the word of Christ. Ephesians is concerned with the church as the Body of Christ. The way for us to live a normal church life is to be filled in our spirit unto all the fullness of God. Hence, the emphasis is the Spirit. In Ephesians both the Holy Spirit and our spirit are emphasized again and again. Even the Word is counted as the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). In Colossians the Holy Spirit is mentioned only once (1:8), and the human spirit is also mentioned once (2:5). In Ephesians the Word is for washing away our natural life (5:26) and fighting against the enemy (6:17), whereas in Colossians the Word is for revealing Christ (1:25-27) in His preeminence, centrality, and universality.

We have pointed out that in Ephesians the emphasis is on the Spirit, whereas in Colossians the emphasis is on the Word. Ephesians takes care of our living, but Colossians takes care of the revelation of Christ. Paul's concern in Colossians is for the revelation of Christ unto full knowledge. For this, we need the word of Christ.

The word of Christ includes the entire New Testament. We need to be filled with this word. This means that we should allow the word of Christ to dwell in us, to inhabit us, to make home in us. The Greek word rendered dwell means to be in a house, to inhabit. The word of the Lord must have adequate room within us so that it may operate and minister the riches of Christ into our inner being. Furthermore, the word of Christ must dwell in us richly. The riches of Christ (Eph. 3:8) are in His word. When such a rich word inhabits us, it must inhabit us richly. The word of Christ should have free course within us. We should not simply receive it and then confine it to a small area of our being. On the contrary, it should be given a free course to operate within us. In this way the word will inhabit us and make home in us.

I appreciate Paul's skill as a writer. He emphasizes, on the one hand, the peace of Christ and, on the other hand,

the word of Christ. Some of us may think that as long as our spirit is living, everything is all right. Perhaps you have not realized the need for the peace of Christ to arbitrate within you and for the word of Christ to make home in your heart. If we let the peace of Christ work in us and the word of Christ dwell in us, we shall be proper Christians. Instead of our preference, we shall have Christ's arbitration. Instead of our opinion, concept, thought, and estimation, we shall have Christ's word.

Certain saints love the Bible and read it daily. But in their living it is their concept, opinion, and philosophy that move within them, not the word of Christ. They may study the Bible, but they do not allow the word of Christ to dwell in them. Neither do they permit it to move, act, and have its being in them. As a result, what prevails in their being is their philosophy, not the word of Christ. Although they read the Bible, God's word remains outside of them. It is crucial for us to let the word of Christ enter into us, dwell in us, and replace our concepts, opinions, and philosophies. We need to pray, "Lord Jesus, I am willing to let go of my concepts. I want Your word to have ground in me. I am willing to forget my opinion and philosophy. I want Your word to be prevailing in me. I do not want my concepts to prevail any longer."

We cannot separate the word of Christ from His arbitration. The arbitrator settles a dispute by speaking a word. We need to bring our case to the arbitrator and listen to his word. This means that we need to allow the peace of Christ to arbitrate in our hearts and the word of Christ to dwell in us. Then we shall be filled with singing and giving of thanks.

According to verse 16, when the word of Christ dwells in us richly, we shall teach and admonish one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to God. Teaching, admonishing, and singing are all related to the verb dwell. This indicates that the way to let the Lord's word dwell in us richly is by teaching, admonishing, and singing. We should teach and admonish

not only in words, but also in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

V. DOING EVERYTHING IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS

In verse 17 Paul says, "And in everything, whatever you do in word or in work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." The name denotes the person. The Lord's Person is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17a). To do things in the name of the Lord is to act in the Spirit. This is to live Christ.

We have seen that as the new man we are one with Christ and that our living should be in union with Christ. In order to live in this way, we need to allow the peace of Christ to arbitrate within us. This peace should have the last word and should make the final decision. As we allow the peace of Christ to preside in us, we should simultaneously allow the word of Christ to dwell in us and to have free course to work in us. As long as the peace of Christ arbitrates in us and the word of Christ dwells in us, we shall have a proper daily living, as described in 3:18--4:1. We shall be proper husbands, wives, parents, children, slaves, and masters. What we need today is to live in union with Christ, to be ruled by the peace of Christ, and to be inhabited by the word of Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY

THE LIVING OF THE SAINTS IN UNION WITH CHRIST: EXPRESSING CHRIST IN THE HUMAN LIFE, PRAYING WITH PERSEVERANCE, AND WALKING IN WISDOM

Scripture Reading: Col. 3:18--4:6

In this message we shall consider 3:18--4:6. This portion of Colossians contains matters that are crucial for our Christian life. We should not isolate this part of the book from the foregoing chapters and verses. On the contrary, we need to see that it is a continuation of all that Paul has covered. We have pointed out again and again that Colossians reveals who Christ is and what Christ is. Eventually, in 3:10 and 11, we see that Christ is the new man. Because Christ is the new man, we and Christ are one. This is the basic and most crucial point in this book.

In chapters one and two Paul covers many aspects of Christ. Christ is the portion of the saints, the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of creation, the firstborn from among the dead, the One in whom the fullness of the Triune God dwells, the mystery of God's economy, the mystery of God, the indwelling hope of glory, and the One in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. In chapter two Paul goes on to declare that Christ is the reality of all the shadows. Because such a Christ is all and in all in the new man, of which we are a part, Christ eventually becomes us. We and Christ are one. God's ultimate goal in His economy is to gain this new man constituted of the preeminent, all-inclusive Christ wrought into a corporate people. We all need to have such a high view of God's economy. According to this view, we

and Christ are one, for we and He have one life with one living.

Paul's intention in writing the book of Colossians was to impress all the believers with the fact that Christ is every-thing. The Jewish believers should forget their ordinances and observances, and the Gentile believers should lay aside their philosophical concepts. We were not regenerated for the sake of such observances and concepts. We were regenerated for Christ. Now we need to be filled with Christ, saturated with Christ, and permeated with Christ until Christ becomes us.

We have pointed out that in God's economy there is one Person, Christ, and one way, the cross. Through this one Person and one way, God will gain the new man. The new man is Christ constituted into us. On the one hand, the new man is Christ; on the other hand, we, the believers, are the new man. For this reason, in the new man, Christ and we are one.

As those who are part of the new man, we need to let the peace of Christ arbitrate within us and let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. If we do this, we shall spontaneously express Christ in our daily living. This means that we shall live out Christ, for we are one with Him, we have His peace, and we have His word. Therefore, we become the expression of Christ in a practical way.

I. EXPRESSING CHRIST IN HUMAN LIFE

God desires that Christ be expressed through human life. We see this in 3:18--4:1, a sister passage to Ephesians 5:22--6:9, regarding the believers' ethical relationships. In Ephesians the emphasis is on the need of spirit-filled ethical relationships for the expression of the Body in the normal church life. In Colossians the emphasis is that we should hold Christ as our Head and take Him as our life by having His rich word dwelling in us, that the highest ethical relationships, issuing not from our natural life but from Christ as our life, may be realized for His expression.

If we live in union with Christ, Christ will be expressed

through our humanity. Christ is to he expressed in the human life, not in the angelic life. Angels cannot express Christ. The Father has ordained that we, His chosen ones, be the expression of His Son. "Live Thyself, Lord Jesus, through me," should be our prayer (see *Hymns* #403).

If we would be those through whom Christ can live, we need to pass through the first two and a half chapters of the book of Colossians. Then, coming to 3:15 and 16, we need to be those in whom the peace of Christ arbitrates and in whom the word of Christ dwells richly. Then Christ will be expressed in our human living.

Many of those in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Catholicism have a low estimate of human life. They do not care for marriage or for the proper family life. They prefer to remain unmarried, and they aspire to live a type of angelic life. But the angelic life cannot express Christ. On the contrary, Christ needs to be expressed in those who are husbands, wives, parents, children, masters, and slaves. In order to express Christ, we need to have a proper and normal human life.

As an elderly person with eight children and more than twenty grandchildren, I can testify that the Lord knows how to choose the best husband or wife for us and what kind of children we should have. He also knows how to break us and make us transparent so that we can express Christ. Through our family life we learn many valuable lessons from the Lord. I believe that the angels are observing to see whether or not we live out Christ in our family life. It is not as difficult to live out Christ in the church as it is to live Him out at home. But how wonderful it is for a brother or sister to express Christ in his or her married life! No brother or sister in the Lord's recovery should aspire to live like a monk or nun. At the right time, the brothers and sisters should marry and then learn through the experiences of married life to express Christ in their human living.

The living of the saints in union with Christ should result in the expression of Christ in human life. If we see

this, we shall praise the Lord for our human living. Furthermore. we shall have a fresh appreciation for married life. I can testify that I am thankful for my wife, children, and grandchildren. I am grateful for all the lessons the Lord has taught me through them. The more I advance in years, the more I appreciate the lessons I have learned through the course of my human life. In the relationship between wife and husband and between children and parents we need to live out Christ and express Him.

The principle is the same in the relationship between masters and servants. In verses 22 through 25 Paul gives a charge to the slaves. In verse 24 he speaks of receiving "the reward of the inheritance." This point is not made as clear in Ephesians 6:8 as it is here. There is an inheritance for the believers (Rom. 8:17; Acts 26:18; 1 Pet. 1:4). The reward of the inheritance indicates that the Lord uses the inheritance which He will give His believers as an incentive that they may be faithful in their service to Him. The unfaithful ones will surely miss this reward (Matt. 24:45-51; 25:20-29).

II. PRAYING WITH PERSEVERANCE AND WALKING IN WISDOM

A. Persevering in Prayer

In Colossians 4:2-4 Paul turns to the matter of prayer. In verse 2 he says, "Persevere in prayer, watching in it with thanksgiving." To persevere is to continue persistently, steadfastly, and earnestly. In prayer we need to be watchful and alert, not negligent. Such watchfulness should be accompanied by thanksgiving.

If we would express Christ in our human living and preserve the grace we have received from the Lord, we need to persevere in prayer. As we spend time to consider the revelation of the all-inclusive Christ in Colossians, we shall surely receive grace from the Lord. Eventually, we shall see that we and Christ are one, that His peace is

arbitrating within us, and that His word is filling us. Then we shall be able to live Him out and express Him. However, no matter how much grace we receive from the Lord, it will leak away if we fail to persevere in prayer. Only prayer can maintain the grace we receive. Only through prayer can this grace become prevailing and living in our experience. To be sure, the Christian life is a life of receiving grace. But this life needs to be sustained by prayer.

The most important matter in the maintenance of our physical life is breathing. Breathing is even more important than eating and drinking. We can go for days without eating or drinking, but only a few minutes without breathing. Prayer is spiritual breathing. To pray is to breathe.

When some saints hear a word about prayer, they immediately ask how to pray. We should forget about how and simply pray. For example, a child learns to walk by walking. Few parents teach their children to walk. In the same principle, we learn to pray by praying.

In 4:2 Paul charges us to persevere in prayer. This means that we should not merely continue in prayer, but we should strive to continue. Almost everything in our environment is contrary to prayer. In order to pray, we must go against the tide, the current, of our environment. If we fail to pray, we shall be swept downstream. Only prayer can enable us to go against the current. Therefore, we need to persevere in prayer, to pray persistently.

Day by day we need to exercise ourselves to pray. We should even set aside certain times each day for prayer. Do not excuse yourself by saying that you do not have the burden to pray. Pray even when you seem to have no burden, or when apparently you have nothing to say to the Lord. You have much to say to others. Why not go to the Lord and tell Him the very things you tell them? If you do not know what to say to the Lord, pray like this: "Lord, I come to You, but I don't know what to say, and I don't know how to pray. Lord, teach me to pray and tell me what to say. Lord, in this matter have mercy on me." If you do this, you will find that often when you pray in this way,

some genuine prayer will come forth. When you feel that you are burdened to pray, your prayer may not be genuine. But when you go to the Lord in prayer even without a burden, telling Him that you have nothing to say, you will find yourself refreshed in the Lord and able to pray genuinely. When we open to the Lord and admit that we do not know what to say to Him, we breathe in fresh spiritual air, and we are preserved in the Lord's grace.

Paul also encourages us to watch in prayer. We need to be watchful against the enemy. We do not know what will happen in the next few minutes. We need to be watchful because the Christian life is a life of fighting, a life of warfare.

B. Walking in Wisdom

In 4:5 and 6 Paul says, "Walk in wisdom toward those who are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one." To redeem the time is to seize every favorable opportunity to minister life. This is to be wise in our walk. In this evil age, every day is an evil day, full of pernicious things which destroy, spoil, and waste our time. Therefore, we must walk wisely that we may redeem the time, seizing every available opportunity.

To walk in wisdom is to grasp each opportunity to redeem our time. This redeeming of the time is related to the way we speak to others. Often I must confess to the Lord my foolishness in talking to people. By talking to them in a certain way, I wasted time. I did not use wisdom enough to minister life and thereby to avoid friction. Instead, I wasted time by engaging in conversation in which there was no ministry of life. We need to pray that the Lord will grant us wisdom in our contact with others. If we walk in wisdom in speaking to others, we shall redeem our time. We all have missed opportunities to minister life because we spent the time in foolish talk.

The best way to redeem our time is to pray perseveringly, to be watchful, and to walk in wisdom. If we

do these things, we shall grasp all the favorable opportunities to minister life. If we do not persevere in prayer and if we are not watchful, we shall fail to grasp opportunities to minister life. Whenever we contact others without the exercise of wisdom, we waste time. On some occasions we may waste a half hour in conversation where nothing of life is ministered. We all must learn to pray, to watch, and to seek the Lord for His wisdom so that we may redeem our time.

In verse 6 Paul says, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one." In Ephesians 4:29 Paul refers to words that give grace to those who hear. Grace is Christ as our enjoyment and supply. Our speech should convey this grace to others. The word that builds up others always ministers such grace to the hearers. For our speech to be with grace means that Christ is expressed through our words. This means that our words should be the expression and utterance of Christ. Every word must be the expression of Christ as grace.

Our speech should also be seasoned with salt. Salt makes things agreeable and pleasant to the taste. Speech seasoned with salt keeps us at peace with one another (Mark 9:50). If our words are with grace and are salted, they will cause things to be agreeable, and they will also arouse the proper taste in others.

In 4:2-6 Paul covers five important matters: praying, watching, walking in wisdom, redeeming the time, and speech that is with grace and seasoned with salt. It is difficult to determine whether the main point in these verses is prayer or redeeming the time. But no matter which one we take as the focal point, it is a certainty that the proper Christian life requires that we redeem the time. All those on earth today are wasting time and missing valuable opportunities. But we need to redeem every moment and grasp every opportunity. In order to live such a life, we need to be filled with Christ and saturated with Him. We need to be one with Christ and allow His peace to

arbitrate in us and His word to fill us. Then we shall express Him by praying, by watching, and by walking in wisdom. If we are such persons, we shall be those who redeem the time and seize every available opportunity to minister life. Furthermore, our words will not be a cause of trouble. On the contrary, through the thorough dealing of the Lord, whatever proceeds out of our mouth will be a word of grace seasoned with salt. Such a word will make things agreeable and pleasant to the taste. May we all learn these things and practice them.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-ONE

CONCLUSION

Scripture Reading: Col. 4:7-18

In this message we come to the conclusion of the book of Colossians, 4:7-18.

Verses 7 through 17 contain Paul's fellowship, and verse 18 contains his greeting. I have often wondered why such a large portion of this Epistle is given over to this concluding word. Why did Paul not use these verses to say something more concerning the all-inclusive Christ? Considering the revelation in this book as a whole, the space devoted to the conclusion seems out of proportion. After telling us that our speech should always be with grace, seasoned with salt, Paul could simply have concluded this Epistle with the words in verse 18, thus eliminating all the details recorded in these verses. Paul, however, did not do this. Instead, before saying the final word, Paul tells the Colossians that Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister, would make known all that concerned Paul, that he had sent Tychicus together with Onesimus to them for this very thing; that Aristarchus, Paul's fellow-prisoner, greets them; that Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, should be received by them; that Jesus, called Justus, also greets them; that Epaphras struggles on their behalf in prayers; that Luke and Demas send their greetings; that they should greet the brothers in Laodicea, cause this Epistle to be read in the church of the Laodiceans, and read the one from Laodicea; and that they should tell Archippus to take heed to the ministry which he has received in the Lord.

If the book of Colossians did not cover matters which are so weighty, I could understand why Paul would take

the time to mention the things recorded in 4:7-17. But consider the contrast between the lofty aspects of Christ revealed in this book and Paul's fellowship at the end of chapter four. Nevertheless, these verses written by Paul are part of Scripture and cannot be taken lightly. Therefore, it is important for us to understand why they are included at the end of this book.

A PRACTICAL APPLICATION

If we consider these verses in the light of the whole Epistle, we shall realize that they are a practical application of what Paul covers in this book. We may regard these verses as a window through which we can see into the situation among the churches in the Mediterranean region at the time of Paul. What we see is the practical living of the new man. In 3:11 we are told that in the new man "there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all and in all." In 4:7-17 we have a practical illustration of the revelation of the new man given in 3:10 and 11. In these verses different kinds of people are pointed out: Jews, Greeks, circumcision, uncircumcision, slaves, and masters. In 4:11 Paul refers to those who are of the circumcision. Onesimus, who had become a "faithful and beloved brother" (v. 9), was a slave belonging to Philemon, who was the father of Archippus (Philem. 10-13, 1-2). Archippus, therefore, was a master. Hence, Paul's purpose in these verses is to present an illustration of the living of the new man.

THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE NEW MAN

This Epistle was sent from Rome to Colosse. In ancient times this was a long journey. In the geographical region between Rome and Colosse were many different kinds of people. However, in this region near the Mediterranean, the new man had come into being and was living in a practical way. Although travel was not convenient, there was considerable traffic among the churches. There is a

lesson for us here. Although we enjoy all the modern conveniences and means of transportation, there may not be as much traffic among the churches today as there was at the time of Paul. Furthermore, I have to admit that I have never composed a letter containing as many personal greetings as there are in the book of Colossians. Think of how many names are mentioned in 4:7-17: Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Barnabas, Justus, Epaphras, Luke, Demas, Nymphas, and Archippus. Paul also refers to the brothers in Laodicea, the church in the house of Nymphas, and the church of the Laodiceans. (The church in the house of Nymphas was the local church in Laodicea; it met in his house.) All these names indicate that with Paul there was a sense, a consciousness, of the new man.

This new man who was living on earth in a practical way was constituted of those who according to culture and social status were Greeks, Jews, circumcision, uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slaves, and freemen. However, as we have pointed out, the actual constituent of the new man is Christ and Christ alone. Because Christ is the unique constituent of the new man, there should be no differences among the believers who are part of this new man.

Furthermore, there should be no differences among the churches, for example, no difference between the church in Laodicea and the church in Colosse. This is proved by Paul's word regarding the reading of letters: "And when this letter is read among you, cause that it may be read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you also read the one from Laodicea" (4:16). What Paul wrote to the Colossians was also for the Laodiceans, and what he wrote to the Laodiceans was for the Colossians. What fellowship, oneness, harmony, and intimate contact this implies!

In 4:7 Paul says, "All that concerns me, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow-slave in the Lord, shall make known to you." Paul had charged Tychicus to make known to the Colossians all that concerned him. If Paul did not have the consciousness of

the new man, he would not have regarded it necessary to give Tychicus such a charge. Rather, he may have thought to himself, "Why should I tell those in Colosse the things that concern me? They are in Asia Minor, and I am here in Rome, far away from them." Paul, however, had the sense of the new man.

Those in Colosse also had the consciousness of the new man. If they were not conscious of the new man expressed at that time in the Mediterranean area, they would have considered Paul's affairs his own personal business and would not have been interested in hearing of them. But both the saints in Colosse, and Paul and those with him, were members of the one new man in actuality.

A PORTRAIT OF THE NEW MAN

As we read through these eleven verses, we find that they are a detailed portrait of the new man living in the Mediterranean area. The existence and living of the new man in a practical way is a matter of tremendous significance. The Roman Empire covered a vast area and embraced many different peoples. In the attempt to unify the people culturally, the Roman Empire used the Greek language. However, the Roman Empire was not successful in uniting the various peoples. The differences among the nations, races, and social classes remained. The Jews were still Jews, and the Greeks were still Greeks. The distinction between slaves and masters was by no means eliminated. But in spite of all the differences among nationalities, races, and classes, there was on earth in a practical way the one new man created in Christ Jesus. There were not merely local churches in various cities--there was one new man in a real and practical way.

It is shameful for the church in any locality to isolate itself from other churches. How wrong it is for us to have the attitude of standing apart from other local churches, fearing that others may interfere with our affairs or otherwise trouble us. This is utterly contrary to the consciousness of the new man. Any church which holds

such an attitude has a consciousness only of itself, not of the totality of the new man. Those who insist on this attitude cause the new man to be fragmented, to be broken into pieces. Nevertheless, many churches and many individual believers as well have the attitude that they will leave others alone if others in turn will leave them alone. They do not care about the churches in other places, and they do not want other churches to be involved with them. Those who have this attitude lack the sense, the consciousness, of the one new man. Praise the Lord for the portrait of the living of the new man in these verses! By these verses we see the practical expression of the new man.

BELONGING TO THE CHURCH EVERYWHERE

Many saints secretly think more highly of the church in their locality than of the churches elsewhere. They do not have the realization that, although they are located in a specific church, they belong to the church everywhere. I can testify that if you ask me where my church is, I shall reply that my church is everywhere. My church is in whatever locality I am at a particular time. Presently I am in Anaheim. Thus, my church is in Anaheim, but in a few days I may be in another locality. Then my church will be the church in that place.

In 1977 I paid a visit to the church in Tokyo. As the brothers were showing me their new meeting hall, they pointed out that right next door was an available plot of land. I immediately encouraged them to pray about acquiring that property for use by the church. Although I live in Anaheim and am part of the church in Anaheim, my concern at that time was for the church in Tokyo. I encouraged them by saying that the Lord would surely provide them the means to construct a larger meeting hall in Tokyo, even though in that city land is extremely expensive. When I became aware of the need in Tokyo, my heart was full of feeling. The reason for this is that my church is the church everywhere. All the churches on earth make up the one new man.

As we read the conclusion of the book of Colossians, we see that what was in Paul's heart was not simply a particular local church or a certain saint, but the one new man. Paul knew a great many saints. But in the verses devoted to fellowship, he mentions certain ones as representatives of the various peoples who, with Christ as their constituent, compose the new man. In this way he presents a full picture of the living of the new man. My burden in this message is that we would be impressed with this crucial point.

NOT SECTARIAN

If we are conscious of the one new man, we should no longer think that the churches in our country have nothing to do with the churches in other nations. Instead, we shall realize that all the churches are the one new man today. May we look to the Lord that we may not be sectarian in any way. We would not be sectarian either individually as believers or corporately as local churches. On the contrary, all of us, all the saints in all the churches, are just one new man. If at the time of Paul, when travel was not convenient, there could be traffic among the churches, how much more should there be today with all the modern conveniences? By means of the traffic among the churches, we experience in a practical way the living of the new man.

PAUL'S GREETING

After his fellowship, the Apostle Paul greets the saints by his own hand and asks them to remember his bonds (v. 18). He concludes this Epistle with the words, "Grace be with you." This indicates that the saints need grace in order to realize and participate in the all-inclusiveness of Christ as their portion for the practical life of the new man.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-TWO

LIVING CHRIST AS THE CONSTITUENT OF THE NEW MAN

Scripture Reading: Col. 3:4, 10-15; 1:25-27

The book of Colossians can be divided into four sections. The first section is the introduction (1:1-8), and the last is the conclusion (4:7-18). The second section (1:9--3:11) is focused on Christ as the preeminent and all-inclusive One, the centrality and universality of God. This section is the center of the Epistle to the Colossians and contains its subject. The third section (3:12--4:6) covers the living of the saints in union with Christ. In this book we have a full revelation of Christ. Then we are told of the kind of living we should have in union with Christ. If we truly know Christ and experience Him, we shall live in union with Him.

THE NEW MAN WITH CHRIST AS THE CONTENT

In 1:9--3:11 we see seven major aspects of Christ: that Christ is the portion of the saints (1:9-14), that He is the first both in creation and in resurrection (1:15-23), that He is the mystery of God's economy (1:24-29), that He is the mystery of God (2:1-7), that He is the body of all the shadows (2:8-23), that He is the life of the saints (3:1-4), and that He is the constituent of the new man (3:5-11). These aspects of Christ are presented in a marvelous sequence. First we see that Christ is the portion of the saints and last that He is the constituent of the new man. This indicates that the ultimate issue of enjoying Christ as our portion is that we experience Him as the content and constituent of the new man. Whenever we enjoy Christ, there is a definite result, an issue, of this enjoyment. To

say that the enjoyment of Christ as the portion of the saints results in the experience of Christ as the constituent of the new man indicates that the enjoyment of Christ results in the church life. However, we should be careful not to reduce the profoundness of the revelation in Colossians. Paul does not tell us in an elementary way that if we enjoy Christ, the church will come into being. This, of course, is true, but such an understanding falls short of the revelation here. Christ is the all-inclusive portion of the saints, typified by the good land. If we enjoy Christ as such a portion, the result will be the new man with Christ as the content. Ultimately, the Christ we enjoy as our portion becomes the constituent of the new man. In this new man Christ is all and in all. Hence, it is crucial for us to learn to live Christ as the constituent of the new man.

THE PEACE OF CHRIST

If we would live Christ as the constituent of the new man, we need to be ruled by the peace of Christ (3:12-15) and inhabited by the word of Christ (3:16-17). The peace of Christ must arbitrate within our being, and the word of Christ must dwell in us richly. As Christians, we have different backgrounds and different concepts. These differences lead to disagreements among us; therefore, there is the need for an arbitrator. This arbitrator is the peace of Christ. It is crucial that the peace of Christ be allowed to preside in our hearts and to speak the final word regarding any controversy among us.

If we remember the background of the book of Colossians, we shall realize that among the believers in Colosse there were various parties. One party was in favor of Jewish observances, whereas another favored Gnosticism. These different preferences gave rise to conflicting opinions. For this reason, Paul told them to let the peace of Christ arbitrate in their hearts. The arbitrator should not be their opinions, concepts, choices, or preferences; it should be the peace of Christ, to which we are called in one Body.

We have pointed out that the peace of Christ is the very peace to which Paul refers in Ephesians 2:15, where we are told that Christ "abolished in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances, that He might create the two in Himself into one new man, making peace." This peace is the oneness of the new man, the Body. By abolishing the ordinances, Christ has created the different peoples into one new man. Now within us as members of the new man there is something which Paul terms the peace of Christ. Hence, the peace of Christ is the very oneness of the new man composed of different peoples. Apart from the work of Christ on the cross, there can be no oneness among the different peoples. But through His death Christ has made peace; that is, He has produced oneness. This oneness of the new man is now within us. This oneness, the peace of Christ, must now be permitted to arbitrate in our hearts. It should function as a referee to settle the disputes among various parties. We need to set aside our opinion, our concept, and listen to the word of the indwelling referee. There is no need for us to quarrel or to express our opinion. We should simply let the peace of Christ make the final decision.

Suppose several young brothers are living together in a brothers' house. Whenever they have problems living together, they should not argue. Instead, they should allow the peace of Christ to arbitrate in their hearts. They should let this peace be the referee who makes the final decisions. In this way, they will live Christ as the constituent of the new man.

THE WORD OF CHRIST

We also need to allow the word of Christ to inhabit us, to dwell in us, to make home in us. We must be willing to set aside our concepts, our opinions, and give place to the word of Christ. If we want the word of Christ to inhabit us, we need to empty our entire inner being. All of our inward parts--our mind, emotion, will, heart, and spirit--must be empty, available to be filled with the word of Christ. This

word should not only dwell in us; it should also in-habit us, making its home in every part of our inner being. Oh, may every room and corner of our being be inhabited by the word of Christ!

If we would live Christ as the constituent of the new man, the peace of Christ must be the arbitrator in our heart, and the word of Christ must be the content of our inner being. We pray that all the saints in the Lord's recovery will give place to the arbitrating peace of Christ and to the inhabiting word of Christ.

COMPLETING THE WORD OF GOD

We have pointed out that Paul's intention in the book of Colossians is to complete the word of God. This was his main purpose in writing this Epistle. In 1:25 and 26 Paul says, "I became a minister according to the stewardship of God, which was given to me for you, to complete the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from the ages and from the generations, but now has been manifested to His saints." These verses indicate that the word of God completed by Paul is the mystery now manifested to the saints. Furthermore, according to verse 27, this mystery is Christ in us, the hope of glory. The goal of this mystery is to produce the church.

At the time the book of Colossians was written, Judaism had been in existence for centuries, and the church had come into being. Nevertheless, even though the church had come into being, the word of God had not yet been completed. Paul was troubled by the situation at Colosse. The Jewish and Gentile believers were neglecting Christ and the church; they were focusing their attention on such things as Judaistic observances and heathen philosophy. Many people, Jews and Christians alike, claimed to know God and to worship Him. However, Christ was being neglected and the genuine church life was being set aside. Therefore, Paul wrote the Epistle to the Colossians in order to complete the word of God.

In principle, the situation today is the same as that in

Colosse at the time Paul wrote to the Colossians. Judaism and Christianity have been on earth for centuries. Although the Jews have the Old Testament and the Christians have the entire Bible, very few people truly are experiencing Christ for the proper church life. Christ is still neglected, and the church life is still ignored. Hence, there is still the need for the word of God to be completed in a practical way.

What is the completion of the word of God, the completion of the divine revelation? In simple terms, to complete the word of God is to experience Christ subjectively and to enjoy Him in our daily living so that the proper church life may come forth to express God. This revelation is the completion of the word of God.

Christians today are involved in many different kinds of work for the Lord. But where is the experience of Christ, and where is the practice of the church life? Paul knew that neither Judaism nor any other religion could fulfill the desire of God's heart. God's desire is to have the church life produced through His people's personal experience of Christ. God wants an organism, the Body of Christ, brought forth through the experience of Christ. At the time of Paul, there were many Jews and a good number of Christians as well. But as Paul considered the situation, he could have asked, "Where is the experience of Christ, and where is the church to fulfill the desire of God's heart?" We should ask the same questions today.

EXPERIENCING CHRIST

We need to admit that we ourselves are short of the experience of Christ. We have been enlightened to see that God does not want anything other than Christ for the church life. However, in our experience we are still short of Christ. This means that, in a very practical sense, we also are short of the completion of the word of God. We lack Christ for the producing of the church. We know that only one thing matters--Christ for the church. However, we are still short of Christ. Before we can minister Christ to

others, we need to minister Him to ourselves. In order to do this, we need to spend more time pray-reading and fellow-shipping concerning the book of Colossians. If we do this, we shall begin to experience the riches of Christ contained in this book. Then we shall begin to have the adequate experience of Christ for the proper church life.

Because the Colossians did not have the adequate experience of Christ for the church life, things other than Christ crept into the church. It is the same among Christians today. God's people have some knowledge of the Bible, and they know God to a certain degree. But very few experience Christ as the life-giving Spirit in a living and practical way in their daily life. It is crucial that we have the practical experience of Christ revealed in Colossians. We need to daily enjoy the preeminent and all-inclusive Christ who is the constituent of the new man. We all need to pray to have more real and living experience of Christ daily. If we experience Christ in our daily life, we shall have more to share of Christ in the meetings of the church. Eventually, the church life will be enriched through our experience of Christ.

THE PROBLEM OF CULTURE

The problem in Colosse was not sinfulness, as in Corinth; it was culture. Asceticism and philosophy are two of the leading products of culture. Uncultured people are wild, altogether without any form of ascetism. Furthermore, those of a low culture do not have philosophy. The more cultured people are, the more highly developed their philosophy is. The Greeks are strong in philosophy, whereas the Jews are known for their religious observances. Most religious observances are related to the putting down of the flesh and to the suppression of the self. The church in Colosse was composed of both Greeks and Jews. With the Greeks the problem was philosophy, but with the Jews the problem was religious practices. This indicates that various cultural practices had invaded the church life and pervaded it.

In 3:10 and 11 Paul says that in the new man "there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all and in all." To say that there is no room for Greek and Jew means that there is no room for philosophy and for religious observances. If you compare Colossians 3:11 with parallel passages such as 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Galatians 3:28, you will find that only in Colossians does Paul mention barbarian and Scythian. The Colossian believers devoted much attention to matters of culture and did not want to be like barbarians or Scythians. Hence, Paul pointed out that in the church as the new man, there is no room for either the cultured or the uncultured. There is no place for philosophy, asceticism, or observances. In the new man Christ is all and in all. The new man is constituted of Christ, not with any element of culture.

The Colossians were not sinful like some of those in Corinth. However, the believers in Colosse replaced Christ, the constituent of the new man, with various aspects of culture. Some treasured philosophy, whereas others treasured religious observances. These things were allowed to come into the church life as substitutes for Christ. But in the new man there is room for nothing other than Christ.

LIVING BY CHRIST, NOT BY ASCETICISM

This understanding of the constituent of the new man should not be mere doctrine to us. We need to realize that every one of us has his own type of philosophy and asceticism. The fact that we are critical of others proves that we hold on to our own philosophy. Moreover, humanly speaking, it is better to have philosophy and asceticism than to be uncultured. At Corinth there was fornication, but in Colosse the people were cultured and self-controlled. However, their culture and their refinement had become a substitute for Christ. No matter how high their culture was, it was not Christ.

Do not regard your asceticism as something of Christ. You may beautify your asceticism by claiming that it is the

bearing of the cross. But even what is termed bearing the cross or denying the self may actually be subtle forms of asceticism. For example, when a brother's wife gives him a difficult time, he may suppress his anger. This is asceticism. It is neither the bearing of the cross nor the denial of the self. As the brother is suppressing himself, he may say inwardly, "I will not lose my temper. I will not fight with my wife or argue with her." This brother may seem to be victorious. But the praise for this so-called victory should not be given to Christ; instead, it should go to this brother's asceticism. In that particular situation he used his philosophy and asceticism in place of Christ.

In my experience I have learned the difference between the suppressing of the self and living by Christ. Now, instead of trying to suppress myself, I turn to the Lord and say, "Lord Jesus, You are here. I need You to live in me." Then I am not living by my philosophy or asceticism, but by Christ as the life-giving Spirit.

The Christian life is not a life of isms or practices. It is a life of Christ as a living Person. In Galatians 2:20 Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." The actual living of Christ in us is very different from asceticism, suppressing the self, denying the self, and the so-called bearing of the cross. What a tremendous difference there is between God's salvation and religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism! God's salvation is a matter of Christ living in us. In God's salvation there is no room for our efforts and practices. God's salvation is a matter of Christ alone. Instead of trying to deny the self and bear the cross in a religious way, we should simply allow the living Person of Christ to live in us moment by moment. If your wife gives you a difficult time, do not try to do anything. Simply allow Christ to live in you. The Christian life is absolutely a matter of a living Person living in us.

In the Gospels we are told to deny the self and to take up the cross. However, it is easy for us to apply these words according to our natural understanding. But to live

Christ is not according to the natural concept. In the natural concept there is the thought of denying the self and of suppressing the indulgence of the flesh. But there is no thought of Christ as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit being the living Person in our spirit. Having been processed through incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, Christ is now the Spirit in our spirit to be our life in a practical way.

It is possible to have a doctrinal knowledge that the Christian life is Christ living in us. But in our daily living we may actually live according to certain practices. Instead of living Christ, we may endeavor to deny the self or to bear the cross. Hence, we may actually live according to our philosophy and asceticism. This means that in our practical daily life Christ is replaced by our own personal philosophy and asceticism.

CHRIST--ALL AND IN ALL

In the book of Colossians Paul points out that Christ must be all and in all. In the new man there is no room for culture or personal practices. God's intention in His economy is for Christ to be everything. Christ should be our life, our living, our patience, our holiness, our kindness. Christ should be the way we deal with our wife or husband. Moment by moment in our daily living, Christ should be everything we need. Instead of living by certain practices, we should simply live Christ.

It is significant that after covering so many important matters in Colossians, Paul speaks of the peace of Christ arbitrating in our hearts and the word of Christ inhabiting us richly. Whenever we think that our philosophy is better than that of others, we become critical. This was the situation among the Colossians. There was rivalry and criticism between those with a Greek background and those with a Jewish background. This was the reason Paul told them to let the peace of Christ arbitrate in them. He was encouraging the saints to forget their philosophy and culture. Culture and philosophy are not to be the standard

or the referee. The referee is the peace of Christ. We need to drop our cultural practices and allow the peace of Christ to arbitrate in our hearts. It seems as if Paul was saying to the saints in Colosse, "Let the peace of Christ preside in you. You believers in Colosse have been taking philosophy as the standard. You must let the peace of Christ be your standard. You need to drop your culture and your philosophy."

In 3:16 Paul goes on to charge the saints, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Negatively, we must set aside our cultural standards, and positively, we need to be filled with the word of Christ. This means that we must allow the word of Christ to fill our mind, emotion, will, thought, and consideration. Every fiber of our being needs to be occupied by the word of Christ.

God's desire is that we live Christ moment by moment and leave no room for culture and philosophy. Our only practice should be the living Person of Christ Himself. Second, we should lay aside our cultural standards. Our standard should not be any form of culture; it should be the indwelling peace of Christ. Third, we need to allow the word of Christ to fill our entire being. We need to let our whole being be permeated and saturated with the word of Christ. If we do these three things, we shall experience Christ spontaneously. Not only shall we have a lofty revelation of Christ, but we shall also experience Him in a practical way in our daily life.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-THREE

CHRIST VERSUS CULTURE FOR THE NEW MAN

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:2; 3:4, 10-11, 15-16; 4:2

The book of Colossians is not easy to understand. I doubt that very many readers of this book, even among us, have truly seen the revelation it contains. For this reason, many readers concentrate on points such as the comforting of the hearts in 2:2. The focal point of Colossians is not the comforting of the hearts. Rather, the focal point is Christ as the mystery of God. Even 2:2, which speaks of the hearts being comforted, makes this clear: "That their hearts may be comforted, being knit together in love and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, unto the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ." The result of the comforting of our hearts is that we have the full knowledge of Christ as the mystery of God. Therefore, the focal point is not the comforted heart; it is Christ as the mystery of God.

THE ELEMENTS OF CULTURE

It is rather easy for readers of the New Testament to understand what Paul is dealing with in such books as Corinthians and Galatians. In 1 Corinthians, Paul deals with various negative things, even sinful things, which frustrated the Corinthians from the proper enjoyment of Christ and from the church life. In Galatians Paul deals with the law and with the Jewish religion. However, it is not easy to point out what Paul is dealing with in the Epistle to the Colossians. Some expositors have pointed out that Paul deals with such matters as angel worship and asceticism. Although this view is correct, it relates

only to the outward appearance of this book. Actually, in Colossians Paul is dealing with the hidden matter of man's culture. A strong indicator of this is the use of the word barbarian in 3:11, a word not used in either 1 Corinthians 12:13 or Galatians 3:28, verses parallel to Colossians 3:11. Paul's use of the word barbarian in Colossians indicates that this Epistle deals with culture.

The source of the trouble among the believers in Colosse was culture, Jewish culture and Greek culture. I believe that all the churches in Asia Minor had been saturated with Jewish culture, particularly with respect to religious observances, and with Greek culture, particularly related to philosophy. At the time of Paul, the culture in the Mediterranean region included three main elements: Jewish religion, Greek philosophy, and Roman politics. Two of these elements--Jewish religion and Greek philosophy--had invaded the church.

Just as culture exerted a strong influence on the believers in Colosse, culture today exerts a strong influence on us. Unconsciously we are under the influence of the culture into which we were born. It seems that the religious and philosophical elements of culture are part of our being. In many groups in Christianity the political element of culture is present also.

A WARNING CONCERNING HUMILITY AND ANGEL WORSHIP

In 2:18 Paul says, "Let no one purposely defraud you of your prize, in humility and worship of the angels, standing on things which he has seen, vainly puffed up by the mind of his flesh." Here Paul warns the believers not to be defrauded through humility. He does not warn them about fleshly indulgence. Humility is one of the best human virtues. In many ethical teachings, a high value is placed on humility. In certain respects, humility is even a finer virtue than love. But even humility can be used to defraud the believers of the enjoyment of Christ.

In this verse Paul also warns us not to be defrauded

through the worship of angels. Humility is related to ethical philosophy, whereas the worship of angels is related to religion. Angel worship is not crude. On the contrary, it is a refined, cultured, cultivated, and highly-developed form of idolatry. It is much finer than the pagan worship of animals. It is the worship of heavenly beings who are close to God. It was through such beings that the law was given. In 2:18 Paul refers to both philosophy and religion. These aspects of culture can be used by the enemy to defraud us of Christ.

The principle is the same today. Satan, the subtle one, is still using ethics and religion to defraud Christians of the enjoyment of Christ. In saying this, I am not referring to others, such as those in the Catholic religion, but especially to us in the Lord's recovery. Some may agree that humility could defraud them of Christ, but they would not admit to being defrauded of Him by the worship of angels. Although we may not actually worship angels, we may admire them. Moreover, we may admire many things that are not God Himself.

DEFRAUDED BY THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE

If we get into the depths of the book of Colossians, we shall see that it deals not with sin or with the law, but with man's culture. Culture is the unconscious living of every human being. This is true both of primitive society and of advanced countries as well. The principle is the same everywhere. People throughout the world are under the influence of their culture. Those in the Far East may find it difficult to speak spontaneously in public meetings because they are unconsciously influenced by oriental culture. According to the book of Colossians, what defrauds us of the enjoyment of Christ and frustrates the church life is our culture.

The book of Colossians speaks to our need today. Mainly we are not troubled by the sinful things, as in 1 Corinthians, nor by the law, as in Galatians. But we are all unconsciously and subconsciously under the influence of culture. When we came into the church life, we brought our

culture with us. This culture is now undermining our enjoyment of Christ. Culture is the systematic method we have developed to exist and to maintain our being. The stronger our culture is, the more critical we shall be of others. Based upon the culture we have, we develop our type of asceticism, our own practices to restrict the indulgence of the flesh. Our asceticism is the method we devise to restrain ourselves and to keep from doing sinful things.

CHRIST, OUR LIFE

The book of Colossians reveals that in God's economy Christ is everything. Christ is the portion of the saints, the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of creation, the mystery of God's economy, the firstborn from among the dead, the fullness of God, the mystery of God, the One in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden, and the Body of all the shadows. Eventually, this preeminent, all-inclusive Christ is the unique constituent of the new man. Furthermore, as Paul declares in 3:4, this Christ is our Life. The expression "our life" is a strong indication that we are to experience in our daily living the Christ revealed in this book.

For our physical existence, everything depends on our having life. If there is no life in your body, then everything else related to you is terminated. For example, if you have no life, how could you have such things as love or submission? Everything associated with the human living is based on having human life. If the life is terminated, everything else is terminated also. This underscores the importance of Christ being our life. It is vital for us to see that the all-inclusive Christ is our life. According to the revelation of the New Testament, this Christ has been processed to become the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit.

THE PEACE OF CHRIST AND THE WORD OF CHRIST

In 3:15 and 16 Paul charges us to let the peace of Christ arbitrate in our hearts and to let the word of Christ

dwell in us richly. If we allow the peace of Christ to arbitrate in our hearts, this peace will settle all the disputes among us. The saints in Colosse were troubled by different isms, philosophies, and practices. Just as a referee is needed to settle disputes in a game or contest, so the Colossians needed a referee, an arbitrator, to calm down all the differing opinions. It is significant that only in the book of Colossians, a book that deals with culture and its isms and practices, does Paul speak of the inward arbitration of the peace of Christ. This arbitrator calms down all the opinions which have their source in our culture.

When the peace of Christ calms our opinions, the word of Christ, which is to dwell in us richly, replaces them. Instead of our opinions, we then have the word of Christ. The New Testament reveals clearly that the word of Christ is the Spirit. Furthermore, Christ today is the life-giving Spirit. Our Christian life is altogether a matter of Christ as the living Spirit. We do not need isms, philosophies, practices, or observances. We need the experience of Christ as the life-giving Spirit. The brothers need not try to love their wives, nor the sisters to submit to their husbands. Rather, we all should contact Christ and let Him be our love and submission. Christ today as the life-giving Spirit is in our spirit. We need to say, "Lord Jesus, I thank You that You are here. You are in me all the time to be whatever I need." If we would practice this, we need a clear vision that Christ is everything to us. Such a vision will slay our philosophy, asceticism, opinions, and isms. It will even terminate the influence of culture on our experience of Christ. Then, instead of being cultured people, we shall be people occupied with, possessed by, and saturated with Christ.

There is no doubt that our hearts need to be comforted and knit together in love unto all the riches of the full assurance of understanding. But the goal of this comforting of our hearts is that we would have the full knowledge of Christ as the mystery of God. We should not allow the concern with the heart to keep us from the realization that we need Christ, the mystery of God, to be

everything to us. Moment by moment, we need to take Him as our life and Live by Him.

We have pointed out again and again that after Paul tells us that Christ is our life and the constituent of the new man, he charges us to let the peace of Christ arbitrate in us and to let the word of Christ inhabit us. To have a full understanding of what it means for the peace of Christ to arbitrate in our hearts, we need to know the background against which the hook of Colossians was written. At Babel the cultural divisions of mankind came into being. The opinions from our culture are expressed mainly in religious observances and in philosophical ordinances, represented respectively by the Jews and the Greeks. The cultural opinions have divided mankind into many different nations. However, God's eternal purpose is to have a corporate people to be the Body of Christ for His expression. But if mankind remains divided by cultural opinions, how can God's purpose be carried out? It would be impossible. But according to Ephesians 2:15, Christ's death on the cross has abolished all the cultural ordinances and differences and terminated them. Christ's purpose in doing this was to create in Himself one new man and thereby make peace. Hence, the peace made by Christ was produced through the crucifixion of cultural opinions. When the Jews and the Gentiles were created into one new man, peace was made. This very peace, the peace of Christ, is what Paul refers to in Colossians 3:15.

NO CULTURAL DISTINCTIONS IN THE NEW MAN

According to 3:11, in the new man there is no possibility for the various cultural distinctions to continue to exist. Here there is no longer the distinction between the cultured and the uncultured, for in the new man Christ is all and in all. After speaking of this, Paul goes on to charge us, who come from many different backgrounds, to let the peace of Christ arbitrate in our hearts. This peace is the issue, the result, of the death of Christ that terminated the cultural differences. Therefore, whenever the peace of

Christ presides in us, this peace will subdue cultural opinions, religious observances, and philosophical concepts.

GENUINE PRAYER

Often when we pray, we do not enter into genuine prayer. Through experience we can differentiate or discern prayer that is genuine from prayer that is not genuine. Do you know why it is so difficult to pray in a genuine way? The main hindrance is not sin or worldliness; it is cultural opinion. Unconsciously and subconsciously, we are still controlled by our cultural opinions. However, if we persevere in prayer, we shall eventually pray in a genuine way. This means that in our prayer we are released from cultural opinions and enter into the spirit. Whenever we experience genuine prayer, we are outside of our culture; in particular, we are outside of our cultural opinion. During times of genuine prayer, we are in our spirit, and we are one spirit with the Lord. It is at these times that we live Christ.

Furthermore, at such times of genuine prayer the death of Christ works within us in a prevailing way to terminate all the negative things in our being. Spontaneously, Christ's resurrection power also prevails in us. As a result, we are actually one with Christ and identified with Him. This experience during times of genuine prayer gives us a taste of the normal Christian life.

The more genuine prayer we have, the more we shall have the experience of being outside our cultural opinions, of being one spirit with the Lord, and of living Christ. The sad thing is that when we stop praying, we automatically revert to our culture. Then we strive to live according to our own asceticism. When we enter into genuine prayer, we are far away from asceticism and all other isms, for we are one with the living Lord. Furthermore, when we pray in this way with others, we are truly one in the praying spirit. Then we touch the reality of the one new man, where there is no Greek or Jew, barbarian or Scythian, circumcision or uncircumcision. We realize that the new

man is constituted of Christ alone and that in this realm there are no differences of culture. However, when we stop praying, we come back to our natural life with its opinions and striving. Instead of living Christ by being one spirit with Him, we restrict ourselves according to our self-imposed asceticism. In our natural life we make up our minds to do good, and we endeavor to accomplish what we have determined to do. This is the suppression of the self; it is not the living out of Christ.

To pray perseveringly means that we should never depart from the praying spirit. We should remain in a praying condition. To be in this condition is to be out of our opinion and to be one spirit with the Lord, living Him and taking Him as our life and as our person. Spontaneously we are away from everything other than Christ, and we are living by this living Person. Our problem is that we do not remain in such a condition of prayer. This was the reason Paul charges us to persevere in prayer. We must pray perseveringly in order to be preserved in such a praying condition. In other words, our daily living should be the same as our experience in times of genuine prayer. Our experience in prayer should become a model of our daily Christian life.

In these days we are burdened to look to the Lord that we may see the true significance of living Christ. We thank Him that gradually He is showing us what it means to live Him. One aspect of living Christ is that of remaining in a praying condition. When we are in this condition, we are outside of culture. Because we are one spirit with this living Person, taking Him as our life and as our person, there is no striving to live properly. Rather, as we are one with the Lord in spirit, the death of Christ is applied to us, and His resurrection power becomes prevailing in us. Then we spontaneously live Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-FOUR

THE ALL-INCLUSIVE CHRIST

(1)

Scripture Reading: Col 1:12-29

In this message we shall consider the all-inclusive Christ as revealed in Colossians. Most of the saints in the Lord's recovery are familiar with this term, "the all-inclusive Christ." In various messages we have emphasized that the Christ in the book of Colossians is the all-inclusive One. Nevertheless, I do not have much assurance that the all-inclusiveness of Christ has been revealed adequately to the saints. In what way is Christ all-inclusive? In what aspects, items, and matters is He all-inclusive? We need to be able to point out the various aspects of the all-inclusiveness of Christ.

In 1:12 we see that Christ is the portion of the saints. But not even this general term tells us in what aspects Christ is all-inclusive. To say that Christ is our portion is like saying that we have just eaten dinner. What particular courses made up the dinner? Many things can be put together and called a dinner. We may proclaim that Christ is our portion. But in what particular way is He our portion? Concerning the all-inclusiveness of Christ, we need to be more definite and specific.

THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD

According to Colossians, the first aspect of the all-inclusiveness of Christ is that He is the image of the invisible God (1:15). This aspect of Christ's all-inclusiveness involves all the verses from 1:15 to the end of chapter one. In verse 15 Paul says, "Who is the image of

the invisible God, firstborn of all creation." As we read this verse, it is easy for us mentally to insert the conjunction "and" between the words "God" and "firstborn." To do this is to greatly change this verse, for the conjunction would imply that the image and the firstborn are two different things. However, the phrase "firstborn of all creation" actually stands in apposition to "the image of the invisible God." The image of the invisible God is expressed in the firstborn of all creation. Furthermore, the firstborn of all creation is the image of the invisible God. As the image of the invisible God, Christ is the firstborn of all creation.

The image of God denotes the expression of God, just as the image of a person denotes that person's expression. If we did not have an image, we would have no way to express ourselves. Christ is God's expression, God's image. As God's image, Christ expresses God in being the firstborn of all creation. The entire universe is the expression of God.

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE BIBLE

Regarding this aspect of the all-inclusiveness of Christ, it is helpful to have a bird's-eye view of the Bible, God's complete revelation. Although it is true to say that the Bible reveals God, the Bible is not simple in its revelation of Him. Genesis opens with the words, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Heb.). Then in the opening verses of Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, God is revealed as the one who loves Jacob. In the Old Testament God is revealed as the Creator of the universe and as the One who loves Israel. No wonder that the Jews love the Old Testament!

Coming to the New Testament, we see that Matthew begins with the words, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham." The Gospel of John opens like this: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In the last book of the New Testament, Revelation, we read the following: "John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him Who is, and Who was,

and Who is coming, and from the seven Spirits Who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth" (1:4-5a). What a difference there is between these verses in Revelation and the opening words of Genesis! They even far surpass the beginning of Matthew and John. Today we are in the local churches. To the churches there is a dispensation not only from God or from the Word, but from the Triune God: from Him who is, who was, and who is coming, from the seven Spirits, and from Jesus Christ.

In Revelation 1:5 Christ is described as "the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth." The name Jesus implies the incarnation, and the title Christ indicates that the Lord Jesus is God's anointed One. He was the faithful Witness in His human living, and He is the Firstborn of the dead in His resurrection. In His ascension and enthronement He is the Ruler of the kings of the earth, for He is now Lord and Head of all. Furthermore, He will rule over all nations when He comes to reign in His kingdom. Therefore, the description of Christ in this verse covers everything from Christ's incarnation to His eternal kingdom.

The divine revelation in the Bible shows that Christ as the all-inclusive One is for the church. In an even more definite way, the book of Revelation shows that He is for the churches. Hence, the revelation of the Bible is that Christ is for the churches.

CULTURE--A FRUSTRATION TO GOD'S PURPOSE

Through the fall of man, certain negative things have come in to interfere with Christ being for the church. These negative things include Satan, sin, and the world. It is rather easy to realize that such things are a frustration to God's purpose. But something else that is very subtle stands in the way of Christ and the church; this subtle opposing element is culture. Although the word culture is

not found in the New Testament, it is nonetheless a fact that culture is a frustration to God's purpose.

In 1 Corinthians Paul deals with various negative things such as fornication and division. These fleshly things were keeping the believers in Corinth from the proper enjoyment of Christ. In Galatians Paul deals with the law and the ordinances of Judaism, which were frustrating the believers in Galatia from enjoying Christ. In the book of Colossians what keeps the believers from the enjoyment of Christ is culture.

The main elements of the culture in Colosse at the time of Paul were Jewish religion and Greek philosophy. Hebrew culture and Greek culture came together in Asia Minor and formed a mixture. Certain Jews and Greeks in Colosse were brought into the church. When they came into the church life, they brought their different cultural backgrounds with them. To say that we have different backgrounds actually means that we have different cultures. The Jewish believers in Colosse had a background of Jewish culture, and the Greek believers had a background of Greek culture. We know from our own experience that to come into the church life does not necessarily mean that we give up our cultural background. Like the Jewish and Greek believers in Colosse, we may seek to bring into the church life certain aspects of our culture that we consider important and valuable.

We know that we are still under the influence of our cultural background by the way we react when others speak either critically or favorably about our background. For ex-ample, if I speak positively about Jewish culture, the Jewish believers will be happy. But if I speak negatively about their culture, they may be displeased. In the same principle, if I encourage the Chinese saints not to go to Chinatown, they may be unhappy. But if I say a good word about Chinese culture, they will be glad.

Our culture includes not only our nationality, but even our special feeling toward a certain region of the country. The New Englanders favor New England, and the Texans

are proud of Texas. These illustrations show how prevailing is the influence of culture and how difficult it is for us to drop our background.

At Colosse Jewish and Greek culture invaded the church life and permeated it. The church life, however, should be absolutely in Christ, with Christ, of Christ, by Christ, and for Christ. But when culture pervades the church, the church is no longer for Christ. Instead, it is for man's culture. Then, instead of being the church of Christ, it becomes the church of some kind of culture.

Recently, I saw a sign in Chinese characters advertising Taiwan Christianity in Orange County. I was greatly surprised to see such a sign in southern California. The term "Taiwan Christianity" illustrates how culture pervades and shapes the church. After the church is raised up in a certain country, it is easy for the culture of that country to invade the church. As a result, the church is no longer purely in Christ, of Christ, with Christ, by Christ, and for Christ. The book of Colossians was written because the church in Colosse had been pervaded with culture. Philosophy, the elements of the world, and the worship of angels were all aspects of the culture which had invaded the church in that locality.

CHRIST AND CREATION

In dealing with the culture which had pervaded the church in Colosse, Paul points out in 1:15 that Christ is the image of the invisible God, firstborn of all creation. In the following verse Paul goes on to say, "Because in Him were all things created in the heavens and on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or lordships or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and unto Him." In verse 17 he continues, "And He is before all things, and all things subsist together in Him." We need to consider these verses against the background of Greek philosophy and Gnosticism. Gnosticism borrowed from a variety of sources, combining pagan, Jewish, and, later, Christian teachings and practices. It explored the

mysteries which lay behind the outward forms of heathen religions. It taught the existence of two gods or principles--light and darkness, good and evil. It was related to Greek philosophy. According to Gnosticism, man's physical body and the entire material world are evil. Under the influence of this philosophical concept, some of the believers in Colosse thought that the heavens, the earth, and all things related to the material world were evil. Instead of living by Christ, they lived according to this philosophy. Paul argued with them by pointing out that the Christ in whom they believed was the firstborn of all things of the material creation. Paul said that all things, including all material things, were created in Christ, through Christ, and for Christ. Furthermore, all these things subsist together in Christ. This was a serious blow to Gnostic philosophy. Because all things were created in Christ, through Christ, and unto Christ and because they subsist in Christ, we should have a positive view of them. In contrast to the Gnostics, we must not regard them as intrinsically evil.

Christ is the firstborn of all creation in order to express God. We have pointed out that Christ is the image of God. God is invisible. But if we look at God's creation, we shall see that, far from being evil, creation is the expression of the invisible God. In creation we see the expression of God's power and nature. In the words of Romans 1:20, "The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world, being apprehended by the things made, are clearly seen, both His eternal power and divine nature." Christ is the image of God expressed in creation. If we see this, we shall not have a low view of creation. We shall realize that all material things were created in Christ, through Christ, and unto Christ and that they all subsist in Christ for the purpose that God may be expressed.

In this Epistle it seems as if Paul was saying to the Colossians, "Christ is all-inclusive. You should believe in Him, not in your philosophy. According to your philosophy, material things are evil. But according to Christ, all these things are good. Do not say that material things are evil

and dark. Rather, you need to see that Christ is the firstborn among all created things. When you look at the heavens, you should be reminded of Christ. When you consider the earth, you should think of Christ. You should be mindful of Christ even when you look at yourselves." Every aspect of God's creation was created in Christ, through Christ, and unto Christ. All these things continue to subsist in Christ for the expression of God. This expression of God in creation is Christ as God's image.

GOD'S TWO CREATIONS

God has two creations: the old creation and the new creation. Verse 18 refers to the new creation. Here we are told that Christ "is the beginning, firstborn from among the dead." Christ is the Head of the Body, the church, which is God's new creation. Christ is not only the firstborn of the old creation, but also the firstborn from among the dead in the new creation. Both in the old creation and in the new creation, Christ is the first. If the old creation is in Christ, through Christ, and unto Christ and subsists together in Christ, so the new creation is all the more. As the new creation, we, the church, are in Christ, through Christ, and unto Christ. Moreover, we are moment by moment subsisting together in Christ. Are you in the old creation or in the new creation? Outwardly we are the old creation, but inwardly we are the new creation.

We have pointed out that both in the old creation and in the new creation Christ is the firstborn for the purpose of expressing God. After Paul speaks of God's two creations, he says in 1:19, "For in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell." The word fullness in this verse is equal to the image in verse 15. These terms are synonymous. Christ is the image of God and the fullness of God in order to express God. The image is the expression, and the expression is the fullness. This expression is through both the old creation and the new creation. Through these two creations we have the fullness. This fullness is the expression, and the expression is the image.

Verses 15 through 19 are actually part of one long sentence. This sentence reveals that the first aspect of Christ's all-inclusiveness is that He is the image of the invisible God. In the old creation and in the new creation, Christ is the fullness of God, His expression.

CHRIST IN US

We may wonder what such a revelation of Christ has to do with us in a practical way. In 1:26 and 27 Paul speaks of the mystery. This mystery is the image, the fullness, in the foregoing verses. According to verse 27, the mystery among the nations is Christ in us, the hope of glory. Have you ever realized that the Christ who is in you is the image of the invisible God, the fullness of God, the firstborn of creation, and the firstborn from among the dead? Such a Christ is in us. In 1:28 and 29 we see that Paul labored and struggled in order to present every man full-grown in Christ.

We have seen that the first aspect of Christ's all-inclusiveness is that Christ is the image of God. This Christ is in us. But now we need to grow until we are full-grown in Christ. This growth is hindered by culture. What keeps us from growing in Christ is our subtle, hidden culture.

SEEING CHRIST AND LIVING BY HIM

We all have a concept of the physical things in creation. Even such a concept may frustrate us from enjoying Christ and growing in Him. It is crucial for us to realize that we can see Christ in all the items of creation. We need to drop our concept of the heavens, the earth, and the physical things; we need to see that Christ is the firstborn of the old creation and the firstborn of the new creation. Hence, Christ is everything; He is all-inclusive. Seeing that Christ is everything, we need to have the realization that this Christ is in us to be our hope of glory. What we need today is to grow in Him unto maturity.

All the saints hold on to different concepts of the

universe and material things. If those from different cultural backgrounds would discuss these concepts frankly and thoroughly, they would no doubt end up arguing with one another. Most of the time we are polite and conform so as not to offend others. But if we would talk about our different concepts of the world, we would find out that we are still living according to our philosophy. The Americans live according to American philosophy, and the Chinese, according to Chinese philosophy. Although we are in the church life in the Lord's recovery, we remain in our background. Doctrinally we may declare that Christ is in us as our hope of glory. Actually what occupies us inwardly is not Christ, but our philosophy.

If we would have the proper attitude toward physical things, we need to see that the various aspects of God's creation are the expression of God by Christ. The believers with a Jewish background may marvel at the loveliness of God's creation. Using the words of Psalm 8, they may proclaim that the Lord's name is excellent in all the earth. But at the same time believers with this cultural background are appreciating the creation, those under the influence of a different philosophy may despise it. They may consider the material universe as intrinsically evil. In their attempts to convince one another and subdue one another, those with different philosophies may forget Christ. Although they are in the church, they do not hold onto Christ in a practical way concerning the universe. Instead, they hold on to their concepts and ideas.

At this juncture, Paul's word in chapter one is crucial. Paul says that the portion of the saints is Christ, who is the image of the invisible God. This image is the firstborn of all creation. Neither the Greeks nor the Jews are right. The truth is that the heavens, the earth, and all material things are the expression of God by Christ. Furthermore, the church, God's new creation, is also God's expression. In the church we are in Christ, through Christ, and unto Christ, and we subsist in Christ to be God's expression in Christ.

I can testify that this is not a mere doctrine which has

no practical relationship to our daily Christian life. Having seen this vision, my concept of the heavens, the earth, and all physical things, even food and clothing, has changed. I definitely do not preach pantheism. According to the Bible, however, I teach that all physical things were created in Christ, through Christ, and unto Christ. This is true all the more of the church as God's new creation. The church was created in Christ, through Christ, and unto Christ, and the church subsists in Christ who is the very image of God. In the church life in the Lord's recovery, we should live neither according to philosophical thought nor religious teaching, but according to Christ. Christ is in us as our hope of glory, and we are now growing in Him. We shall continue to grow in Him until we reach maturity, at which time our whole being, especially our inner being, will be permeated with Christ.

As we consider the heavens and the earth, our concept of them must be related to Christ. Even when we look at a desk, a house, food, or clothing, we should think of Christ. We see Christ everywhere and in everything. Therefore, we would live Christ, not anything else. The Christ by whom we live is all-inclusive. The first aspect of His all-inclusiveness is that He is the image, the fullness, the expression, of God in the old creation and in the new creation. Thus, our concept of the universe is altogether related to Christ. We would only know Christ and live according to Christ.

In order to describe Christ adequately, we need to use the terms found in the book of Colossians. Christ is the portion of the saints, the image of the invisible God, the fullness of God. He is also the firstborn of creation and the firstborn from among the dead. Furthermore, He lives in us to be our hope of glory. Now we need to grow in Him. May we all realize that the universe is the expression of God by Christ. Throughout the universe we see Christ, the image of the invisible God.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-FIVE

THE ALL-INCLUSIVE CHRIST

(2)

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:2-4, 6-10, 16-22; 3:4, 10-11, 15-16

In 2:3 Paul tells us that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ. In verse 4 he goes on to say, "This I say that no one may delude you with persuasive speech." This indicates that at that time in Colosse the saints were being deluded through persuasive speech.

THE TRADITION OF MEN

In verse 8 Paul says, "Beware that no one carries you off as spoil through his philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ." In this verse Paul gives us a serious warning about being carried off as prey through someone's philosophy and empty words. Such philosophy and empty deceit are according to the tradition of men.

Tradition is related to culture and has its source in culture. There can be no tradition apart from culture. Both religious people and philosophical ones are strong in their tradition. The more cultured we are, the more traditions we have. All peoples have their particular traditions. In ancient times the Jews had their traditions, and the Greeks had theirs. Furthermore, believers today have their Christian traditions, and we all have our individual traditions. The only way to have no tradition is to not have any culture. As long as we have some kind of culture, we

shall have traditions. Some of our traditions may even be self-made and self-imposed. All traditions are according to man, for God does not have any traditions. Therefore, there are no traditions that are according to God.

In 2:8 the phrase "according to the elements of the world" is in apposition to "according to the tradition of men." This indicates that the tradition of men and the elements of the world are identical. The world here refers not to the physical world, but to fallen mankind, the same as in John 3:16. The traditions are equal to the elements, and the men are equal to the world. Hence, the tradition of men is synonymous with the elements of the world.

In this verse Paul points out that philosophy and empty deceit are not according to Christ. The expression "according to Christ" is very important. It indicates that every-thing should be estimated and evaluated according to Christ. As we consider ourselves, our families, situations, and environment, we should evaluate them, not according to the tradition of men, but according to Christ.

NOT INSISTING ON CERTAIN THINGS

Verse 16 says, "Let no one therefore judge you in eating and in drinking or in respect of a feast or of a new moon or of Sabbaths." Here we see the matter of judgments and opinions. We make judgments because we insist on certain things. For example, if we insist on a certain way of eating, we shall make judgments according to what we insist on. On the other hand, we shall be judged by others because of it. If I insist that all the saints eat Cantonese food, I shall be judged by them. But if I do not insist on any particular kind of food, I shall not be criticized with respect to food. The same is true regarding drinking and the observing of days.

To say that we do not insist on anything means that we are neither religious nor philosophical. Those who are religious or philosophical always insist on certain things. Their insisting causes others to judge them and criticize

them. Hence, if we are not to let others judge us, we ourselves should not insist on certain things.

In verse 17 Paul says that the items in the foregoing verse "are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ." We should not care for anything in place of Christ. If we care only for Christ, we shall not be judged.

Four times in chapter two Paul uses the words "no one." In 2:4 he says that we should let no one delude us; in 2:8, that we should let no one carry us off as spoil; in 2:16, that we should let no one judge us; and, finally, in 2:18, that we should let no one purposely defraud us of our prize in humility and worship of the angels.

In verses 20 and 21 Paul asks us why we subject ourselves to ordinances about handling, tasting, and touching, since we have died with Christ from the elements of the world. In verse 22 we see that such ordinances are according to the commandments and teachings of men. We have pointed out that the elements of the world are man's traditions.

DEALING WITH THE SUBSTITUTES

Paul wrote this Epistle because the tradition of men, the elements of the world, were prevailing in Colosse. The saints were being deluded and carried off as prey. Furthermore, they were being judged and defrauded of their prize. The best inventions of culture were deceiving the saints and depriving them of Christ. These aspects of culture were replacing Christ. In the experience of the saints, they had become substitutes for Christ. Therefore, Paul wrote this book to deal with this problem.

In Colossians, a book that is higher in revelation than either 1 Corinthians or Galatians, Paul deals with culture made up of religion and philosophy. For human society, philosophy and religion are necessary and good. If society were without religion and philosophy, people would be barbaric. They would behave like wild beasts. Although religion and philosophy are necessary for human society, there is no place for them in the church life. These two

things are substitutes for Christ. The church needs Christ, a living, all-inclusive Person, not religion or philosophy.

THE FIRSTBORN OF ALL CREATION

Some of Paul's statements in the book of Colossians have troubled theologians and Bible translators. One especially troubling expression is the "firstborn of all creation" (1:15). Although some theologians talk freely about Christ as the image of the invisible God, they are reluctant to expound this troubling phrase. But Paul says that the One who is the image of the invisible God is the firstborn of all creation. Theologians may be happy to point out that as the firstborn from among the dead, Christ was the first to be resurrected. However, very few are willing to point out that, as the firstborn of all creation, Christ is also the first of the creatures. Anyone who follows Paul to make such a statement may be condemned as heretical. Nevertheless, we cannot remove from our Bibles Paul's word which says that Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

In 1:16 Paul tells us that all things were created in Christ. This includes things both in the heavens and on the earth, the visible and the invisible. Even those things which Jews regard as unclean, including turtles, frogs, snakes, and swine, were among the things created in Christ. The first time I read this verse according to the Greek-English Interlinear translation, I was greatly surprised. I said to myself, "Is Paul saying that even turtles and snakes were created in Christ?" No doubt Paul's word includes these creatures also. Colossians 1:16 is a hard blow to Gnostic philosophy. We have pointed out that, according to Gnosticism, the material world, including man's body, is inherently evil. But Paul declares that all things were created in Christ and that Christ Himself is the firstborn of all creation. These statements deal with the concepts of both Greeks and Jews. Since all things were created in Christ, we should not regard

creation as intrinsically evil, nor despise any aspect of God's creation in Christ.

ACCORDING TO CHRIST

Paul's desire concerning the Colossians was that they would not teach others according to the tradition of men, but only according to Christ. It is crucial for us to learn to estimate all things and to evaluate them, not according to our cultural mentality, but according to Christ. For example, our viewpoint with respect to marriage should be not according to our culture; it should be according to Christ. I very much appreciate the expression "according to Christ." We should not allow anything to be a substitute for Christ or to replace Him. Christ and Christ alone is the standard and basis of measurement. This means that we should not evaluate things according to culture, according to tradition or the elements of the world. In the church Christ is the only measurement, standard, and basis. This is a basic principle in the practice of the church life.

In Colosse culture had pervaded the church, replaced Christ, and carried off the saints as a prey. The saints were distracted from Christ, not by sin or worldliness, but by some of the most developed aspects of culture. The principle is the same today. Although we in the church life hate sin, not many of us hate culture. On the contrary, subconsciously and unconsciously we all treasure our culture. We place a high value on our particular cultural background. In the church life Christ is replaced more by culture than by anything else. We live according to culture much more than we live according to Christ.

THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S ECONOMY

After Paul points out in chapter one that Christ is the firstborn of all creation, that all things were created in Him, through Him, and unto Him, and that all things subsist in Him, he tells us that the all-inclusive Christ is

the mystery of God's economy. God intends to work Christ into us. Christ is in us to be our hope of glory. Now we need to grow in Him until we reach maturity and are full-grown. Hence, God's economy is focused on Christ.

THE MYSTERY OF GOD

In 2:2 Paul goes on to say that Christ is the mystery of God. Embodied in Christ is all that God is and has. As the mystery of God, Christ is the embodiment, definition, and explanation of God. All that God intends to do is related to Christ.

THE REALITY OF ALL POSITIVE THINGS

Furthermore, this One who is the mystery and embodiment of God is the reality of all positive things. Referring to the items listed in 2:16, Paul says in verse 17 that these "are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ." Eating, drinking, feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths are all shadows of which Christ is the body, the reality, the substance. Christ is the real food and the real drink. He is also the real feast, the real new moon, and the real Sabbath. As the embodiment of God, Christ is the reality of every positive thing. Hence, there is no room for Jewish religion or Greek philosophy. There is room only for the all-inclusive Christ. Although Paul was once very strong in Judaism, when he received the revelation concerning Christ, he realized that both Greek philosophy and Jewish tradition were nothing. In God's economy only Christ counts for anything.

In 2:6 Paul says, "As therefore you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in Him." The first thing we do concerning Christ is receive Him. Then we need to walk in Him. Christ is not only our life; He is our territory, our realm, our sphere, in which we walk. In their experience many believers have received Christ as Redeemer, Savior, and life. But we also need to receive Him as the mystery of God, God's embodiment, and as the reality of all positive things.

We need to apply the matter of experiencing Christ as the reality of every positive thing to every part of our daily life. As we eat our meals, we should take Christ as the real food. Instead of saying a word of grace in a traditional way, we should speak something higher according to the revelation in Colossians: "Lord Jesus, I do not simply thank You for this food and take it into me. Lord, I take You as the reality of this food." We who believe in Christ should consider all things and evaluate all things according to Christ, who is everything to us in a practical way. If we consider all things according to Christ, our daily living will be changed.

In 2:3 Paul tells us that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ. Then he goes on to warn us about being deluded from Christ through someone's persuasive speech. We must not allow religion or philosophy to delude us and to carry us away from Christ. We should not turn from Christ to any kind of culture. Christ, the mystery of God and the substance of every positive thing, is everything to us: food, clothing, housing, transportation. As we consider all the positive things in the universe, we should evaluate them according to Christ. What a tremendous revelation this is! The Christ we received is not a narrow Christ. On the contrary, He is unlimited, all-inclusive. He is not only our Redeemer, Savior, and life--He is every-thing to us. What a full and rich Christ we have received!

WALKING IN CHRIST

Having received such a Christ, we should now walk in Him. Many Christians think of the Christ they have received only as their Redeemer, Savior, and life. They appreciate Him as the Redeemer who shed His blood for them, and as the Savior who saved them from sin. However, they do not realize that the very Christ whom they have received is the embodiment of God and the reality of all positive things. We need to walk in such an all-inclusive Christ. When you eat, walk in Him. When you

dress yourself, walk in Him. Walk in Him when you converse with your husband or wife.

We need to be those who are filled with Christ, saturated with Christ, clothed with Christ, and fully taken over by Christ. Many of us in the Lord's recovery are not yet saturated with Christ. In the church meetings we may pray in Christ or sing in Christ. But as soon as we get back home, we may neglect Christ altogether and live according to our culture. In the meetings we may proclaim that to us to live is Christ. But in our daily life, especially at home, we may live by the self, not by Christ. What a difference there would be if in our daily living at home we would live by Christ! While a sister is cooking, she may realize that to her to cook in the kitchen is Christ. If we all exercise to live by Christ day by day, we shall live Christ, grow Christ, and produce Christ. In daily life we need to see Christ in all things and walk in Him.

ROOTED IN CHRIST

In 2:7 Paul speaks of being rooted in Christ. We are plants rooted in Christ as the real soil. Christ is the earth in which we grow. Furthermore, Christ is all that we need for growth. He is our fertilizer, our water, and our life supply.

MADE FULL IN CHRIST

In 2:10 Paul goes on to say that in Christ we are made full. However, I doubt that any one of us dares to say that we are full, for we do not yet have the full experience of Christ. The fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily, and we are made full in Him. In our experience, we need to receive Him, walk in Him, be rooted in Him, and then be made full in Him. I hope that in the church meetings there will be many testimonies of how we have been made full in Christ. There should be testimonies of how we have been made full in knowledge, wisdom, patience, kindness, lowliness, humility, love, discernment. We are short of such testimonies because we are short in our experience of Christ. Day by day we are not being made full in Him.

Instead of being full in so many things, we are short of those things. For example, instead of being full of discernment in handling situations, we are lacking in discernment. As you listen to the testimonies of the saints, you can realize that most of us are short in the daily experience of Christ. Many of us still do not realize adequately that the Christ we have received is the all-inclusive One in whom we should walk. But if we walk in such a Christ, having been rooted in Him, we shall be made full in Him.

We have pointed out that Christ is the reality, the substance, of all shadows. Seeing this, we should no longer care for the shadows--we should care for the all-inclusive Christ. Our concern should not be simply to become holy, spiritual, and victorious; it should be to possess and experience the all-inclusive Christ. We need to look to the Lord for mercy and grace to experience such a Christ.

CHRIST AS OUR LIFE AND AS THE CONSTITUENT OF THE NEW MAN

In chapter three we see that Christ is our life and the constituent of the new man. The new man, which is the church, the Body of Christ, is constituted of the Christ who is our life. He lives in us, and we live in Him. Apart from such a Christ, what else do we want? I can testify that I want nothing other than the all-inclusive Christ who is my life and the constituent of the new man.

THE ARBITRATING PEACE OF CHRIST

In 3:15 Paul says, "Let the peace of Christ arbitrate in your hearts, to which also you were called in one Body." In Ephesians 2 we are told that on the cross Christ has made peace. We should allow this very peace to arbitrate in us. This implies that we set aside our opinions. The Greeks must forget their philosophy, and the Jews must forget their observances. Instead of paying attention to philosophy and observances, we should take heed to the indwelling peace of Christ. On the cross, Christ nullified the ordinances and abolished the philosophical concepts.

Christ abolished the differences among peoples in order to create in Himself the one new man. The peace produced through the abolishing of cultural differences should now arbitrate in our hearts. We should let this peace be the referee, the arbitrator, within us. When the peace of Christ arbitrates in us, all opinions will be subdued.

We expect that the churches in the Lord's recovery will gradually increase in number. No doubt, people with different backgrounds will come into the church life. Different people have different opinions. Instead of arguing over these opinions, we should let the peace of Christ arbitrate in us. Let us all say, "Lord Jesus, I love You. Lord, I care not for my opinion or judgment; I care for Your peace. I am not for my preference. I want Your peace to arbitrate in me, to rule in me, and to make all the decisions."

THE INDWELLING WORD OF CHRIST

In 3:16 Paul continues, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." We need to allow the word of Christ to inhabit us. We should not be filled with Jewish tradition or Greek philosophy, but with the word of Christ. We are containers of the word of Christ, not of philosophy or religion. We need to be emptied of all such things in order to be filled with the word of Christ. If we allow the peace of Christ to arbitrate in us and if we are filled with the word of Christ, we shall have the new man in a practical way. All the saints in all the churches throughout the Lord's recovery will be living Christ in the one new man. One day the Christ who is our life will appear in glory, and we shall appear in glory with Him (3:4). But today we need to live by Him. We care for Him as our life and as the constituent of the new man, not for our background, culture, opinion, and judgment. We want His peace to arbitrate in us and His word to fill us.

ALL AND IN ALL

We have pointed out again and again that in the new man there is no room for Jews or Greeks, circumcision or

uncircumcision, cultured or uncultured, slaves or masters (3:11). In the new man there is room only for Christ. Therefore, in the new man Christ is all and in all. He is every part of the new man, and He is in every part. This should not simply be a teaching, but our experience in a practical way day by day. May we all have a full experience of the all-inclusive Christ, the Christ who is everything to us.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-SIX

THE ALL-INCLUSIVE CHRIST VERSUS CULTURE

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:27-28; 2:2b-4, 6, 8-9, 16-19; 3:3-4, 9b-11

It is difficult to speak concerning Christ versus culture, for there is the danger of understanding such a word according to the natural concept. In saying that Christ is versus culture, we are not saying that we should drop our culture and then live without any culture whatever. If we try to drop our culture in this way, we shall simply develop another form of culture, a culture of dropping our culture. Without culture, people would become beasts. Those who do not have Christ certainly need to live according to culture.

GOD'S INTENTION

Concerning this matter of the all-inclusive Christ versus culture, we need to see that according to the full revelation in the Bible God's intention is to work Himself into His chosen people. This intention is the focal point of the divine revelation in the Scriptures. In order for God to work Himself into us, He must be triune. It is a wonderful and marvelous fact that God is triune--the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The Father as the source is embodied in the Son, who is the very expression of the Father. When the Son comes, He always comes with the Father. This indicates that the Father cannot be separated from the Son, nor the Son from the Father. The Son is the embodiment, reality, and expression of the Father. Through the process of death and resurrection, the Son became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), the Holy Spirit

who gives life. Hence, the Spirit is the realization of the Son, even as the Son is the embodiment of the Father.

The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not three Gods, but one God in His tri-unity. Because God is triune, He can dispense Himself into us. God came to us in the Son through Christ's incarnation. Christ died on the cross to redeem us and to terminate the old creation. Then in resurrection He became the life-giving Spirit. On the one hand, Christ is sitting on the throne in the heavens as the Head and Lord of all. On the other hand, as the Spirit He dwells within us to be our life. As the life-giving Spirit, Christ is our life supply, and He is to us the reality of every positive thing.

As the all-inclusive Spirit, the Triune God is working Himself into our being. The deepest part of our being is the spirit, which is surrounded by the soul and the body. Man's physical body contains the soul, and the soul contains the spirit, which is a vessel to receive God and contain Him. Christ as the processed, all-inclusive life-giving Spirit is in our spirit, seeking to spread Himself into all the parts of our soul and eventually to saturate our bodies to make us absolutely the same as He is. When this takes place, our whole being will be permeated with Himself. This is God's salvation according to His economy.

CULTURE HINDERING OUR EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST

Many things hinder the accomplishment of God's full salvation. Two of the more obvious hindrances are sin and worldliness. The most subtle hindrance, however, is culture. Culture frustrates God's chosen people from experiencing Christ and enjoying Him. The all-inclusive Christ is versus culture. However, we are not saying that we should drop our culture and act like barbarians. We are by no means encouraging anyone to act as if we are free of culture. Those who do not have Christ certainly need culture. As children are growing up, they need not only culture, but also the law. But after we have received Christ, we should not allow our culture to limit Christ or to

frustrate us from experiencing Him. Prior to receiving Christ, all people need culture. But after receiving Christ, we should live according to Christ, not according to culture. Do not think that culture is unnecessary. Culture preserves, regulates, and improves people. But after Christ has come into us, in our experience we should begin to live by Christ. The problem is that Christ is limited by our culture.

We have seen that God's intention is to work Christ into His chosen people. God uses culture to preserve people until they receive Christ. Before children receive Christ, they must be trained according to culture and under the law. Never tell little children that they have no need for culture. On the contrary, teach them to honor their parents, to love others, and to share their possessions with others. Eventually, when they attain to a certain maturity, they will decide to receive Christ into them. Then we need to help them grow into Christ and with Christ. Gradually we can help them turn from culture to Christ. Eventually, instead of living according to culture, they will live according to Christ. Young people, do not proclaim that you have dropped your culture. Instead, testify to others that you have received Christ and that now you are living Christ, growing Christ, and producing Christ.

In his subtlety Satan will use good things, even things given by God, to keep us from experiencing Christ. Even the Bible has been used by Satan to frustrate people from the enjoyment of Christ. However, nothing keeps people from Christ more than culture. Culture is a frustration especially to those Christians who truly love the Lord. In fact, the more we love Him, the more culture will hinder us from experiencing Him.

Let us consider as an illustration the case of Peter. Although Peter was a fisherman, he was familiar with Jewish theology. One day, Peter received the inspiration to say that the Lord Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. The Lord replied that Peter received this revelation from the Father in heaven. Then He went on to speak about the building up of the church and about the

cross (Matt. 16:18, 24). In the book of Acts we see that Peter was used by the Lord to establish the first local church, the church in Jerusalem. Although Peter was used by the Lord in this way, he was still limited by his Jewish culture. This is proved by Peter's experience in Acts 10. As Peter was praying, his experience of the Spirit was limited by his cultural concepts concerning Gentiles. Peter thought that the enjoyment of Christ was limited to Jews. As a typical Jew, he thought of the Gentiles, the heathen, as swine. His attitude toward them was a product of Jewish culture. Although Peter was one with the Lord, his experience of Christ was confined by culture. Then in Acts 10 Peter saw a vision of a great sheet "wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air" (v. 12). When a voice said to him, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat," Peter answered, "Not so, Lord: for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean" (vv. 13-14). This vision came to Peter three times. As Peter was considering what this vision might mean, some Gentiles arrived at the place where he was staying and asked about him. God's intention was to expand the enjoyment of Christ to include the Gentiles. For this enlargement of the experience of Christ, there was the need for Peter to lay aside his cultural background.

CULTURE REPLACED BY CHRIST

However, we should not endeavor to drop our culture without such a vision of Christ. But as soon as the vision comes, we must set aside our cultural background and not allow it to replace Christ or to restrict Him. When Christ comes in, our culture must go. But we should not try to drop culture without Christ. Actually our concern is not with culture--it is for the experience of Christ. The point we are making is that since we have received Christ, we should not allow culture to become a substitute for Him. In Christ we have the liberty to set aside our culture in order to enlarge our capacity to enjoy the Lord. All the room within us must be given over to Christ. If our entire inward

capacity is made available to Him, spontaneously the culture within us will be replaced by Christ. However, it is terrible to drop culture apart from Christ. But when Christ comes, we should tell the Lord that we want Him to possess and occupy all the ground within us.

Culture is a great frustration to the experience of Christ. In His recovery the Lord surely has come to visit us. What keeps us from enjoying Him is not mainly sin or worldliness; it is culture. Unconsciously and subconsciously, we are frustrated by culture from the experience of Christ. Many saints have been desiring for years to experience more of Christ. However, their experience of Him has not expanded. The factor that limits the expansion of the enjoyment of Christ is culture. Spontaneously the culture within us keeps us from the real experience of Christ. In the meetings we may declare that Christ is our life and that the church life is glorious. But when we return home after the meetings, we automatically live according to our culture, not according to Christ. The governing principle of our life at home is not Christ; it is our culture. In the meetings all of us may be the same as we share in the same praises and aspirations, but outside the meetings we are different in our cultural concepts and behavior. We may do certain things or refrain from doing those things according to the influence of culture. Hence, our living is regulated and governed not by Christ, but by culture. Those with a Chinese background live according to Chinese culture, and the Americans live according to American culture.

Suppose a certain brother is having problems with his wife. In desperation he prays to the Lord and asks Him how he can become the kind of husband described in Ephesians 5. Another brother may try to encourage him to take Christ as his life and person. However, the first brother may have to admit that even though he has heard a number of messages on living by Christ, he simply does not know how to take Christ as his life and as his person. This indicates that for years this brother has been putting Christ aside and has been living according to his culture.

In times of trouble he is forced to the Lord. But a short while later, he spontaneously reverts to his culture.

The principle is the same with all of us. We have heard messages on Christ as our life and our person. Nevertheless, in our daily life we live according to our culture. As we sing and praise the Lord in the church meetings, we may conform to the atmosphere of the meetings. But at home we live according to our culture. For this reason, we are heavily burdened by the Lord that all the saints in the Lord's recovery may learn in a practical way how to take Christ as their life and person to replace their culture. Once again I say that the point is not that we drop our culture. It is that we take Christ as our life and as our person to replace our culture day by day, hour by hour, and even moment by moment. If we do this, we shall truly live by Christ, not by our culture.

LIVING ACCORDING TO CULTURE INSTEAD OF CHRIST

Perhaps you are wondering what the difference is between living according to culture and living according to Christ. In the church we have those from different cultural backgrounds. According to their culture, some saints are open, frank, and quick. It is very difficult for them to keep anything secret. However, they are lacking in patience. Other saints, with a different background, are reserved and hidden. It is very difficult for anyone to tell what is taking place within them or how they feel about things. Others, with still a different cultural background, may be virtu-ally expressionless. You cannot tell whether such a person is happy with you or displeased with you. Even after those from these different cultures are saved and have begun to seek the Lord, they retain their cultural characteristics and even bring them into the church life. The problem is that in the church they all live much more according to their culture than according to Christ. They love the Lord Jesus, but they still live by their culture. No matter what their cultural background may be, they do not

give Christ very much ground within them. Therefore, the daily church life is occupied by culture instead of by Christ. We are heavily burdened about this. We need to ask where Christ is in our practical, daily church life.

At Colosse the problem was not sin, as in Corinth, or the law and Judaism, as in Galatia. The problem in Colosse was culture. Certain aspects of culture, including philosophy, tradition, and the elementary principles of the world, had been wrought into the saints and were replacing Christ in their daily living. In Colosse culture had become a substitute for Christ. Christ did not have adequate ground in the daily living of the believers. Therefore, Paul wrote the Epistle to the Colossians to deal with this problem.

A VISION OF THE ALL-INCLUSIVENESS OF CHRIST

I believe that the time is right for messages on Christ versus culture to be released. It is vital for us all to see a vision concerning the all-inclusiveness of Christ. Christ must become everything to us in our daily living. The Christ who is the expression of God and the mystery of God's economy now lives in us. The Christ who indwells us is not a small, limited Christ. He is the One who is the image of the invisible God, the embodiment of the fullness of God, and the focal point of God's economy. Such a Christ now dwells in us and is waiting for the opportunity to spread Himself throughout our being. We need to live by Him moment by moment. We should not give any ground in our living to culture. Instead, all the room within us should be given over to the all-inclusive Christ who dwells in us to be our hope of glory. If we see such a vision of the indwelling, all-inclusive Christ, we shall spontaneously drop our culture. Formerly, Christ was replaced by culture. But once we see this vision, the culture within us will be replaced by Christ.

The Christ who is the image of God is the mystery of God's economy and the mystery of God Himself. As the embodiment of God, He is the reality of every positive thing

in the universe. These wonderful words, however, are like a foreign language to most of today's Christians.

We should not be deluded by persuasive speech or carried off by man's philosophy, tradition, or culture. We should care only for Christ. Christ should occupy us, possess us, and take us over. In our inner being there should be no room for philosophy or for the rudimentary principles of the world. Every part of our inward being should be occupied by Christ and with Christ. To us Christ is the real God, the real food, the real drink, the real clothing, and the real Sabbath. He is the reality of every positive thing. Therefore, we would not give ground in our being to anything other than Christ.

NOT DEFRAUDED OF OUR PRIZE

In 2:18 Paul warns us to let no one purposely defraud us of our prize. Our prize is the full enjoyment of Christ. Even those of us who have been in the Lord's recovery for many years do not have the full enjoyment of Christ. We have been defrauded of this. Through seeing the vision of the all-inclusive Christ, we are being brought back to our prize. If we see this vision, no one will be able to defraud us of the full enjoyment of Christ. When we have this enjoyment, we realize that Christ is our reality. A stanza from a hymn on the experience of Christ as reality expresses it this way:

> Christ is our real God, our real Lord,
> Christ is our real life, our real light;
> Christ is our real food, our real drink,
> Our real clothing, and our real might

Hymns, #496

Since Christ is such a reality to us, we should live by Him, not by culture.

CHRIST OUR LIFE AND THE CONSTITUENT OF THE NEW MAN

In 3:3 and 4 we see that the Christ who is the focal point of God's economy and the reality of all the positive

things is our life. Our life is hidden with Christ in God. This means that we today are living in God. As our life, Christ is the constituent of the new man. Because Christ is the unique constituent of the new man, in the new man there is no room for Greeks and Jews, Americans and Chinese, circumcision and uncircumcision, slaves and free men. In the new man the Christ who is our life is all and in all. This is the all-inclusive Christ who is versus culture.

I hope that seeing this vision will stir a deep aspiration within us. We need to pray, "Lord Jesus, I want to be taken over, occupied, and possessed by You. I want to give You my full capacity and all the room in my being. Lord, I don't want to be limited or frustrated in my experience of You. I want to enjoy You without limitation, restriction, or confinement. Lord, I want to have only You, not culture. I want to live by You, not by any kind of culture."

LIVING CHRIST

There is no need for us to make up our minds to live a certain kind of Christian life. Christ today is the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit within us. This Spirit is the processed Triune God who indwells us. We should not try to be loving, kind, or gentle. To do this is not to live Christ. Instead of making up our minds to do certain things, we should simply live by the Christ who is now the life-giving Spirit in our spirit. We should tell Him, "Lord, I don't know what it is to be loving, humble, or kind. Lord, I only care to live You." When a brother is tempted to argue with his wife, he should say, "Lord, do You intend to argue with my wife? If You are doing this, then I shall be one with You in it." In the same principle, when you are about to speak to your children, you need to tell the Lord that in this particular matter you want to live by Him and that you want to be one with Him as He takes the lead to talk to the children. This is living Christ. Making up our mind to act in a certain way is of no avail. It simply does not work. What we need to do is just live Christ.

PERSEVERING IN PRAYER

In 4:2 Paul tells us to persevere in prayer. It is not Paul's intention that we forget all the practical necessities of daily life and simply give ourselves to prayer. He means that we should pray in order to live Christ in all that we do day by day. As we have said, we should pray as we are about to talk with our husband or wife or with our children. In such prayer we may say, "Lord, I am one with You, and You are one with me. Lord, I am about to speak to my children. Lord, will You take the lead in this matter?" This is to persevere in prayer, to pray unceasingly.

Actually, living Christ is a matter of praying. If we would live by Christ, we need to pray. If you intend to go shopping, ask the Lord if He is pleased to go with you. As you are about to purchase a certain item, ask the Lord if He is happy about buying that item. Even in the smallest details we need to inquire of the Lord. To do this is to persevere in prayer and thereby to live Christ. The way to live Christ is by praying to Him all day long.

If we live Christ in this way, Christ will have a great deal of ground in the church life. Then we shall have a church life apart from culture. No matter what our cultural background may be, we shall live according to Christ, not according to culture. Believers from many different backgrounds will be the same, not in culture, but in the living of Christ. This is the proper church life, the Body life in which Christ is expressed. In such a genuine church life, we all are filled, permeated, and saturated with Christ. There is no sin, worldliness, self, flesh, or culture. There is nothing but Christ, the all-inclusive Christ who is versus culture.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-SEVEN

CHRIST IN YOU

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:27; John 14:17, 20, 23, 15:4-5; Rom. 6:3; 8:9-11; 1 Cor. 1:30; 6:17; 2 Cor. 13:5; 2 Tim. 4:22a

God's economy is to work a wonderful Person into our being. This Person is the all-inclusive Christ, the One who is the reality of every positive thing in the universe. Christ is the firstborn of all creation. He is both God and man, for the One who was the eternal God became incarnated at a point in time. Hence, Christ is the real God and the real man. He possesses all the divine attributes and human virtues. He is the reality of love, life, light, grace, humility, patience, power, mercy, wisdom, righteousness, and holiness.

CHRIST FOR OUR ENJOYMENT AND EXPERIENCE

Christ has much to do with creation. Colossians 1:16 says, "In Him were all things created in the heavens and on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or lordships or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him." Furthermore, 1:17 says, "All things subsist together in Him." Just as the spokes of a wheel subsist together in the hub, so all of creation subsists in Christ.

First the work of creation was accomplished, then Christ became a man, the first step of the long process through which He passed. As a man, He lived on earth for thirty-three and a half years. How marvelous that the infinite God lived in a carpenter's home in a small town! God was confined and limited in this way. After passing

through human living with its sufferings, trials, and temptations, Christ was crucified on the cross. His death was a wonderful, all-inclusive death. After His burial in a tomb, He took a tour of the region of death, and then came forth in resurrection. After His resurrection, Christ ascended to the heavens, where He was enthroned, crowned, and made the Lord and the Head of all.

In His resurrection Christ became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b). All that Christ has passed through, all that He is, and all that He has accomplished, obtained, and attained are the ingredients which have been compounded into Him as the all-inclusive Spirit. As this all-inclusive Spirit, He descended upon His Body on the day of Pentecost. In this Spirit, we have God, man, incarnation, human living, redemption, the effectiveness of Christ's death, the power of His resurrection, resurrection life, ascension, enthronement, headship, and lordship. This is the all-inclusive One whom God desires to work into us for the fulfillment of His economy. This dispensation of the all-inclusive Christ into us is for God's purpose and eternal plan. This is our Christ, the One we love and enjoy.

The Bible reveals that God is triune: He is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. If we read the Bible carefully, we shall see that the Father is in the Son (John 14:10) and that the Son is even called the Father (Isa. 9:6). Those who have seen the Son have also seen the Father. Furthermore, the Son has become the Spirit of reality. This indicates that the Son is realized as the Spirit. When the Triune God reaches us, He is the all-inclusive Spirit. Our Christ is such a Spirit for our experience and enjoyment today.

IN CHRIST

First Corinthians 1:30 tells us that of God we are in Christ Jesus. Formerly, by birth, we were in Adam. But God, the Father, has transferred us out of Adam into Christ. When we believed in the Lord Jesus and called on His name, we were transferred from Adam into Christ. This is the reason that after we believed into Christ, we

were baptized. In the words of Romans 6:3, we have been baptized into Christ Jesus.

CHRIST LIVING IN US

Although it is a wonderful and glorious fact that we are now in Christ, this is nevertheless just a matter of position. This position does give us the right and privilege to participate in all that Christ is. But with this right and privilege, we need to experience Christ living in us. Now that we are in Christ, Christ wants to live in us. This is not a matter of position, but a matter of experience and enjoyment. For us to be in Christ is a matter of position; for Christ to be in us is a matter of experience and enjoyment. How much we enjoy Christ depends upon how much He lives in us.

If we were not in Christ, Christ could not be in us. According to the New Testament, Christ's being in us is based upon the fact that we are in Him. In John 15:4, the Lord Jesus said, "Abide in Me and I in you." If we abide in Christ, He will abide in us. Once again we see that to be in Christ is a matter of position, whereas to have Christ in us is a matter of experience and enjoyment. My burden in this message is not to tell you that we are in Christ. It is to point out that Christ is in us. Simply knowing that we are in Christ does not give us the experience of Christ or the enjoyment of Christ. However, this position does give us the right and privilege to claim the enjoyment and experience of Christ.

We should have the confidence to say that we are in Christ wholly, absolutely, and thoroughly. Concerning our position in Christ, we may be assured that we are in Him entirely. For example, anyone who is an American citizen is a citizen wholly, thoroughly, and absolutely. His citizenship is not partial or conditional. However, how much this person enjoys America is relative to how much of America has gotten into him. He is in America, but how much of America is in him? A person from another country may become a naturalized American citizen. Thus, he is

altogether an American by citizenship. However, he may still have within him a great deal of his native country. This indicates that although he is in America, not that much of America has yet entered into him. Inwardly, he still loves many things of his native country. In the same principle, we are in Christ absolutely, but He is in us just relatively and conditionally. Actually, according to our experience, we do not have very much of Christ in us. To a very large degree, we are still occupied and possessed by our culture. Although we may have been in the church life in the Lord's recovery for many years, there is still room for much more of the church to be in us. The same is true with Christ. Al-though we may have been in Christ for a long time, in experience we still do not have very much of Him in us.

OCCUPIED BY CULTURE

We need a clear understanding of what it means to say that Christ is versus culture. Although Christ is in us, we are occupied more by culture than by Christ. We are filled with many things other than Christ. These things include our likes and dislikes, our preferences and choices, and our sin and worldliness. The more Christ as grace is ministered into us, the more those things which occupy us are discharged. However, although many sinful and worldly things may be discharged rather easily, our culture still remains, no matter how much grace is ministered into our being.

Anything that is in us apart from Christ Himself frustrates us from the genuine experience of Christ and enjoyment of Him. This is especially true of the culture within us. Through the years we have been in the church life, many things have been discharged from our being, as grace has been added into us. Nevertheless, one thing remains in us in a very subtle way, and that thing is culture.

It is difficult to discern the culture in us and to condemn it. Because we do not recognize our culture for what it is, we do not easily discern it. Although we may condemn the sinful and worldly elements in us, we

probably do not condemn our culture. Our culture may be very strong, but we may not be conscious of it. We may even think that we are not under the influence of culture. But every living person has a culture. As long as you are alive and no longer a baby, you have a culture.

SELF-MADE CULTURE AND INHERITED CULTURE

We have not only the culture of our particular country, but also our self-made culture. Unconsciously and subconsciously, we all have some kind of self-made culture. This culture is constituted not only of certain practices by which we carry on our daily living; it also becomes the standard for our living. Whenever we have such a standard, we are under the influence of our culture. Culture does not merely refer to things such as our way of eating. In particular, culture implies certain standards. Within us we have a mental picture of the kind of person we think we should be. This is our self-made culture, the standard we have for our daily living.

When God called Abraham, He did not give Abraham a map. Rather, the Lord's presence was Abraham's living map. Most of today's Christians, however, prefer to have some kind of "map" to direct them day by day. This "map" is drawn unconsciously according to the standards they have for their living. Day by day, they "drive" according to this "map." Whenever we have such a "map," we automatically set the Lord aside, for He is replaced by our standards. Because we have our self-made standards for the Christian life, there is no need to seek the Lord, to contact Him, or to trust in Him. Instead, we live according to our standards. Some may claim that they daily pray to the Lord and ask Him for help. Yes, they may pray for the Lord's help, but the kind of help they want is that which enables them to fulfill their standard. This is far different from asking the Lord to lead us according to Himself. Instead, we have our standards and then ask for the Lord's help to reach them. This is what it means to live according to our self-made culture.

Along with our self-made culture, we have the culture which we have accumulated unconsciously through the influence of our environment and background. From childhood, many have been trained to be honest, humble, gentle, and kind. Such a culture is part of their very being, and they live by it spontaneously. Those with such a culture may love the Lord and may be in the church life. However, instead of living Christ, they live by their culture. We may live either by the culture we have inherited or by the culture we make for ourselves. In either case, our being is occupied and possessed by culture, not by Christ.

Because we regard our culture as good, we do not condemn it. Who would condemn the standard he has for a good married life? Instead of condemning our culture, we treasure it and appreciate it. We place a high value on the good things we have inherited. Spontaneously we live by our culture. Even though the grace which has been ministered to us in the church life causes many things to be discharged from us, our culture still remains. Satan, the subtle one, uses our culture to frustrate us from enjoying Christ and experiencing Him. Now that Christ has come into us and lives in us, we must rise up to condemn the inherited or self-made culture which hinders us from experiencing Him. We should condemn our culture as much as we condemn the sinful and worldly things. Because our culture is part of our very constitution, we need the heavenly light to shine upon us to expose it. Under such a shining, we shall say, "Satan, I condemn your subtlety. Before Christ came into me, I needed to live by culture. Now I need to live by Christ. Therefore, I hate the culture within me and condemn it, for it keeps me from enjoying Christ."

LIVING BY THE MINGLED SPIRIT

It is crucial for us to see that God wants nothing but Christ. If we see this vision, we shall set aside our standard and aspire to be one with the Lord in our spirit

moment by moment. The all-inclusive Christ is now in our spirit. First Corinthians 6:17 tells us that he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit. In 2 Timothy 4:22 Paul says, "The Lord be with thy spirit" (Gk.). Our standard should not be the culture we have inherited or the culture we ourselves have made. Our standard should be the oneness with the Lord in our spirit. Do not try to be a good wife or husband. Instead, simply be one spirit with the Lord. Then you will live Christ because Christ will actually be living in you.

God has placed us into Christ. If we see that our culture frustrates us from experiencing the indwelling Christ, we shall realize that as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, the Lord indwells our spirit and that we are one spirit with Him. We need to live by this mingled spirit as the standard. If we allow Christ to live in us day by day, we shall spontaneously live by Him. In this way, Christ will replace our culture.

CHRIST, NOT CULTURAL STANDARDS

The problem with the saints at Colosse was that most of them had been deluded and carried off from Christ to philosophy and religious observances. They set up this philosophy and these observances as their standard and lived by it. This standard kept them from the enjoyment of Christ and the experience of Christ. This was the reason Paul charged them to let no one purposely defraud them of their prize (2:18).

The principle is the same today. The enemy within us is subtle. We have certain standards, either the standards we have inherited or those we have made for ourselves. Because these standards are good, we do not condemn them. Nevertheless, these good standards are not Christ Himself. God does not want something good produced by us; He wants Christ and Christ alone. In the eyes of God, only Christ counts for anything. God's intention is to work Christ into us so that we may have the full enjoyment of Him. When Christ has the free course within us to become

our enjoyment and experience, our culture will be dealt with.

The time has come for all of us in the churches to hear this message, to see this vision, and to condemn our cultural standards. Then we shall realize that what God wants is Christ and that Christ today is the life-giving Spirit mingled with our spirit. Instead of living according to a certain standard, we should simply live by the Christ who dwells in our spirit. As we live in the spirit, we should let Christ have a free course throughout our whole being. Then we shall enjoy Him, experience Him, and be delivered from our culture.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-EIGHT

CHRIST LIVES IN ME

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:27; 3:4; Gal. 2:20a; John 14:19-20; 15:4-5

Although the book of Colossians is short, it contains many things which are mysterious. The thought in this Epistle is deep. For this reason chapters one and two are difficult to memorize and recite.

As we read chapter one, we must pay close attention to Paul's terminology. In verse 12 he says that the Father has qualified us "for a share of the portion of the saints in the light." In what way has the Father qualified us for this? According to 1:13, He did this by delivering us out of the authority of darkness and transferring us into the king-dom of the Son of His love.

In 1:15 Paul goes on to say that Christ is the image of the invisible God, firstborn of all creation. According to verses 16 and 17, all things were created in Him, through Him, and unto Him, and all things subsist together in Him. Furthermore, as the firstborn from among the dead, He is the Head of the Body, the church (v. 18). In verse 19 Paul tells us that all the fullness was pleased to dwell in Him. The word "fullness" here denotes a living person, not a thing, for an impersonal substance or thing cannot be pleased about something. This fullness was pleased to dwell in Christ, in the all-inclusive One who has reconciled all things to Him (v. 20).

GOD'S ECONOMY

Beginning with verse 24, Paul goes on to speak of God's economy. What is God's economy? We may have been Christians for years without knowing what God's economy

is, or without even asking Him to reveal His economy to us. God's economy is related to the dispensing of Himself into us; however, it involves even more. The Greek word for economy, *oikonomia*, implies the thought of arrangement or administration. Hence, God's economy is an administrative arrangement. In some places, as in 1:25, the Greek word is best rendered "stewardship." God's economy is His administrative arrangement, His stewardship, to dispense His riches into us. Just as wealthy families have an arrangement to distribute the wealth of the family to its members, so God has an arrangement in His economy to dispense His wealth into His children. Praise the Lord that we are members of God's household! God's economy is to dispense the unsearchable riches of Christ into all those chosen by God that they might become His children and members of the universal, divine family. As children of God, we are under His administrative arrangement by which He works Himself into our being.

THE GOAL OF GOD'S DISPENSATION

The goal of God's dispensation of Himself into us is the one new man. The ultimate consummation of the new man will be the New Jerusalem. Today the new man is a miniature of the eternal New Jerusalem. The difference is not in nature or essence, but only in size or degree. Today we enjoy the new man as the issue, the result, of God's economy. But in eternity we shall enjoy the New Jerusalem as the ultimate issue of God's dispensing of Himself into us. It is necessary for all of us in the Lord's recovery to know God's economy in this way.

THE GROWTH OF LIFE

My burden in this message is to point out that the fulfillment of God's economy does not depend on our effort. Rather, it depends on the growth of life. The focal point of God's economy is not our doing; it is life growing. Hence, it is crucial for us to see what it means to grow and how to

grow. God does not need our doing. Anything that we do in ourselves means nothing. However, God wants us to grow.

In order for something to grow, it must, of course, have life. A table cannot grow, because it does not have life. However, a plant will grow because it is full of life. For example, my wife planted a tomato plant in our backyard. I am amazed how much this plant has grown and how many tomatoes it has produced. Because that tomato plant grew so much, there was the need of stakes to support it and to direct its growth. There was the need for an economy to manage this tomato plant.

I would remind you that after God created man, He put him into a garden, a place of growth. God did not put man into a school, where he could be educated, or into a factory, where he could manufacture things, but into a garden, a place where life could grow. Our need today in the church is for growth, and in order to grow we must have life.

THE HIGHEST REVELATION OF CHRIST

Now we come to a crucial question: What is our life? Probably we all would answer this question by saying that our life is Christ. What, then, is Christ? The life that grows in the church and which is needed for the growth of the church is Christ. But what is this Christ? The answer to this question is found in Colossians. According to this book, Christ is the fullness of God, the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, the firstborn from among the dead, the One in whom all the fullness is pleased to dwell, the mystery of God's economy, the mystery of God, the reality of all positive things, and the constituent of the new man. For years we have pointed out that Christ is life, but perhaps we have not adequately paid our attention to what Christ is. In short, the Christ who is our life is everything, the reality of every positive thing in the universe. This is the revelation in the book of Colossians.

Colossians contains the highest revelation of Christ in the New Testament. No other book tells us that Christ is

the firstborn of all creation or that He is the mystery of God. Colossians reveals that Christ is the mystery of God's economy and the mystery of God Himself. According to this book, Christ is everything to us.

LIVING BY CHRIST, NOT BY CULTURE

If we see that Christ is everything, we shall spontaneously realize that we are nothing and nobody. In the words of Galatians 2:20, we have been crucified with Christ and Christ lives in us. He is the One who is patient, kind, loving, and full of life.

However, instead of living Christ, many of us unconsciously strive to improve ourselves. For example, a young brother who is about to get married may make up his mind to be an ideal husband. To do this is to live either according to our self-made culture or according to the culture we have inherited. Sometimes in conferences saints may testify that after that conference they will never be the same. Because such a statement is according to culture, a few days after the conference that person is the same as before. How easy it is to impose a cultural standard on ourselves!

The culture we impose on ourselves is actually a form of asceticism. Suppose a certain brother finds his wife difficult to bear, even though she is a dear sister in the Lord. This brother vows that, whatever the cost, he will be a good husband to his wife. He will bear with her, even if it is with gnashing of his teeth. This brother is living according to asceticism. Every time we make a decision to improve or to be different, we are living according to culture instead of according to Christ.

God's intention is to dispense Christ into us so that He may be our life and our everything. God wants Christ to be our righteousness, holiness, humility, and patience. Since Christ is everything, there is no need for us to decide to do anything or to be anything. Instead, we should simply turn to the Lord and say, "Lord, thank You. You are my life and my everything. You are the real God and the real man.

When I need love, You are love. When I need humility, You, Lord, are humility. Whatever I need, You are."

God does not want us to try to be good husbands or wives, parents or children. God only wants one person--Christ. However, we should not preach this to our children prematurely. Instead, we should first preach to ourselves, telling ourselves that God does not want our self-improvement, but that He only wants Christ. He has dispensed Christ into us to be our life and our every-thing so that we may live Him and that He may dwell in us. There is no need for us to strive to be loving. Our love is limited. But Christ is love, unlimited love, and He lives in us.

GIVING CHRIST THE GROUND WITHIN US

We need to see the heavenly vision that in His economy, God wants nothing except Christ. Christ is wonderful. As the One who is God and man, He has passed through incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement. All that Christ is and all that He has obtained and attained have been com-pounded into the all-inclusive Spirit. Now as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, He lives in us. How foolish not to give all the ground in our living to Him! Although we may love Him, we may still limit and restrict Him by our efforts to be good Christian husbands or wives. In our-selves, we still try to be humble, patient, kind, and loving. As long as we do this, there is no way for Christ to live in US.

In John 14, the Lord Jesus spoke of His death and resurrection. Speaking of the disciples' experience after His resurrection, He says in verse 19, "Because I live, you shall live also." It was after His resurrection that the Lord could live in His disciples and they could live by Him, according to Galatians 2:20.

Christ wants to live in us. When He lives in us, we live by Him. But where are the Christians today who give Christ the free course to live in them? Very few Christians

do this. Even we in the Lord's recovery do not give Christ the sufficient ground to live in us. Instead, we try to be humble and loving. We try to be a good husband or wife, a good brother or sister. Thus, the ground within us is occupied by ourselves and by our self-effort. Although we may fail in our efforts, we repent, pray, ask for the Lord's cleansing, and then try once again. We may even welcome the opportunity for a new beginning afforded by a new day, week, month, or year so that we may try once again to be a proper Christian. We may comfort ourselves at the end of the day with the thought that in the morning we shall have a fresh opportunity to try again. We may do the same thing at the end of a week, month, or year. Especially at the end of the old year and the beginning of the new year, we may promise ourselves to have a new beginning. We may thoroughly clear the past, regret our shortcomings, repent for our mistakes, ask the Lord's forgiveness for our wrong-doings, and then try to have a new beginning. We may say, "Let the past be the past. With the new year I can have a new beginning." Nevertheless, before long we find that our best efforts still result in failure.

Because we all have this tendency, I am burdened that we would see that God does not want us to try to be proper Christians--He only wants us to live Christ. We should forget about trying to be a good husband or wife and care only to live Christ. Let us love Him, contact Him, and be one with Him. How near and available He is! He is within us and is one spirit with us, waiting to be given the opportunity to live in us. If we would give Christ the ground to live in us, we should cease from all our efforts. Instead of asking the Lord to help us in our efforts, we should pray, "Lord Jesus, I can do nothing apart from You. How foolish I have been in trying so hard! Now, Lord, I see the vision that I cannot do anything without You. Lord, I thank You that You dwell in me. I ask You, Lord, to work within me. Lord, I praise You that You are my life and that You are waiting for the opportunity to live in me. Lord, I thank You that I am in You. Now I am willing to give You

all the ground to do everything and to be everything in me." This is what it means for Christ to live in us.

After praying to the Lord in this way, we should turn to Satan and tell him to no longer tempt us to try to do anything apart from Christ. Say to him, "Satan, don't tempt me in this way anymore. I assure you that I cannot do anything apart from Christ. Don't try to get me to do anything."

THE NEED TO SEE THE VISION

In the church meetings, we may enjoy singing, "Christ liveth in me, Christ liveth in me." However, when the meeting is over, we are the ones who live, not Christ. Instead of Christ living in us, our inward being is occupied with ourselves. But if we see the vision of Christ living in us, we shall stop all our doing. How blessed it is to do nothing and to let Christ live in us! The Lord does not want us to try to improve our behavior. He does not want us to try to be a good husband or wife. The Christian life is Christ living in us. In such a life, we and Christ have one life and one living. Christ lives in our living. Oh, we desperately need to see this vision! We need to pray, "Lord, show me the vision that God only wants one Person. He wants Christ to live in me." This vision will spontaneously terminate all of our efforts and doings. It will turn us from our trying to the indwelling Christ.

CHRIST--OUR UNIQUE STANDARD AND PRINCIPLE

When we cease from our own doing, we shall no longer have any standards or principles apart from Christ. Christ will be our standards and our principles. For example, instead of having a standard that determines what is a good husband or wife, we shall have Christ as our standard. Likewise, instead of having standards concerning kindness, humility, and love, our only standard will be Christ. When Christ becomes our unique standard and principle, He will have the free course to live in us. Then we shall enjoy Him and experience Him.

LETTING CHRIST LIVE IN US

The book of Colossians reveals that God wants Christ and Christ alone. In this Epistle, Paul points out that God does not want anything of man's culture. God does not care for philosophy, religion, ordinances, observances, or any kind of ism. God wants only the wonderful, preeminent, all-inclusive Christ, the One who is all in all. Although Christ is all-inclusive, He dwells in us as our life. As the indwelling One, He is waiting for the opportunity to live in us. He is living, real, practical, and available. On the one hand, on the throne He is the Lord of all; on the other hand, He is the life-giving Spirit in us. Both in the Christian life and in the church life, Christ is everything.

If we see this, we shall stop all our doing. In the church life, God does not want us to be doing so much; He simply wants Christ to live in us and grow in us. If I have a vision of Galatians 2:20--that it is no longer I, but Christ who lives in me--I shall never assume that I can do anything. I shall spontaneously cease from all my trying, for I shall realize that I am nothing and nobody and that Christ is everything. As the One who dwells in us to be our life, He is everything to us. He is our holiness, our power, and our wisdom. But He needs to be given the opportunity to be everything in us. If we give Him the ground, He will come in to be everything and to do everything. This is what it means to let Christ live in us.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-NINE

TO LIVE CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:13; 3:4; John 6:57; 14:19; 15:4-5

When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He did not live by His human life. Although, as a man, He was a perfect and complete individual person with a life of His own, He lived by the life of the Father, not by His human life. Since the Father's life is divine and eternal, the Lord Jesus lived by the divine life. He and the Father had one life and one living. The Son lived by the Father's life because the Son's intention was to express the Father. Since the Son is the image, the expression, of the Father, and since He lived by the Father, the Son expresses the Father in a full way. The Son lives, but it is the Father who is expressed.

In John 6:57 the Lord Jesus said clearly that the living Father sent Him and that He lived because of the Father. The Father sent the Son, and the Son lived on earth through, because of, or by, the Father. I prefer to say simply that the Son lived the Father, for the Father was the Son's life.

The Bible reveals that the Son is a seed who is to be reproduced in the believers. According to John 12:24, the one grain of wheat needs to fall into the earth and die in order to produce many grains in resurrection. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He lived the Father's life. Now, after His resurrection, He has become our life. He wants us to live His life, not our own natural life. As individuals, we all have our own life. But in His economy, God does not intend that we live our natural life; He intends that we live Christ. As Christ lived the Father, so we should live Christ.

CULTURE VERSUS CHRIST

We have pointed out that Christ is versus our culture. Our self-made and self-imposed culture, as well as the culture we have inherited, may be excellent, but as long as it is not Christ Himself, it is a hindrance to our experience of Christ, to our enjoyment of Christ, and to our living by Christ. In order to see this clearly, we need a heavenly vision. If we try to drop our culture without seeing that Christ is our life and our everything, we shall succeed only in exchanging one kind of culture for another. To be uncultured is also to have a culture. Those who are cultured have a culture, and those who are uncultured also have a culture, although of a very different kind. If we realize this, we shall see that it is of no avail simply to decide to drop our culture. Apart from Christ, whatever we are and whatever we do is related to culture in some way. Every human being has culture. The culture may be developed or undeveloped, high or low, but it is nonetheless a culture. At the time the book of Colossians was written, the Greeks had their culture and the Jews had theirs. Throughout the thousands of years of history, every race and nationality has had its particular kind of culture. The crucial point here is that every kind of culture is versus Christ and that Christ is versus every kind of culture. Any culture, no matter what kind of culture it is, is versus Christ. Apart from Him, every human product and development is part of culture.

GOD'S INTENTION IN HIS ECONOMY

We should not try in ourselves to do anything about the culture within us. What is of vital importance is that we see the vision of God's economy. God's economy is to work the living, all-inclusive Person of Christ into us. According to the revelation in the book of Colossians, Christ is the portion of the saints, the firstborn of all creation, the image of the invisible God, the Head of the Body, the firstborn from among the dead, the One in whom all the fullness is pleased to dwell, the mystery of God's economy, the mystery of God, the reality of all positive things, and

the constituent of the new man. Christ is everything: He is life, light, power, might, strength, righteousness, holiness, kindness, and every other divine attribute and human virtue. Because Christ is everything to us, He is all-inclusive. God's intention in His economy is to work this all-inclusive One into us. As the all-inclusive One, Christ has the highest attainments. He has ascended to the heavens and has been exalted to the highest place in the universe. He is now sitting at the right hand of God. Christ has been enthroned, and He has become the Lord and Head over all. Furthermore, He has obtained everything, for all things have become His. This Person with all He has attained and obtained is the very One that God desires to work into our being. Do you truly believe that such an all-inclusive living Person has been wrought into you? I doubt that very many Christians, including those in the Lord's recovery, actually believe this.

THE NECESSITY OF CHRIST BEING OUR LIFE

The all-inclusive Christ is to be our life (3:4). If Christ does not become our life, then all He is and all He attained and obtained remain objective. He is He, and we are we. In that case He has nothing to do with us in a practical way, nor we with Him. Therefore, in our actual daily experience, Christ must be our life. However, we may have the doctrinal knowledge from the Bible that Christ is our life without living by Christ in a practical way day by day. Instead of living by Christ, we live too much of the time by our natural life.

We all should be willing to admit that we love our own life, our natural human life. We may claim to hate our life, but actually we love it very much. Even as you testify of your hatred for your natural life, deep within, you still appreciate your life and consider it better than that of others. For example, deep within, a sister may feel that her life is better than her husband's life. Of course, a brother will have similar feelings toward his wife. We all are alike in thinking highly of our natural life.

REFINING THE NATURAL LIFE

In addition to appreciating our natural life, we all are in the habit of using it, that is, of living according to it. Over the years we have become accustomed to living by our own life. Moreover, we have even endeavored to refine the natural life. Through the training we have received at home, our natural life has been somewhat refined. It has been refined further through education and religion. We must admit that the natural life has even been refined by our participation in the local church. A brother who has been in the church for several years truly is much more refined than he was before coming into the church life. Some of the most refined people in this country are to be found in the church life. However, instead of carrying on such a refining work, the church should terminate and bury the natural life. But most of us have not been buried by the church; instead, we have been refined. Before you came into the church life, you may have been like unpolished copper. But now that you have been refined by the church life, you are like shiny, polished copper. Although polished copper may look like gold, it is not gold. Likewise, although our natural life may be refined and polished, it is still not Christ. In the churches, there is too much refined copper and too little gold. There is too much of the natural life and not that much of Christ.

Christian preachers often give people the wrong kind of advice. They may be like doctors who prescribe the wrong medicine. In the early years of my ministry, I would tell those who were about to get married that they needed to be balanced and subdued. I told them that the Lord would use their husband or wife and their children to subdue them. I regret having given out that kind of teaching, for it leads to the refinement of the natural life, not to living by Christ. In my early ministry I could not clearly discern between gold and copper that had been refined and polished. Now I see that no matter how much copper is refined and polished, it will not become gold. In the same principle, refining our natural life will not transform it into Christ.

What God desires is that we live Christ. He has no intention merely to refine our human life.

When we do not live Christ, we live according to our own philosophy. When I told the saints that in their married life they needed to be balanced and subdued, I was ministering philosophy to them, not the riches of Christ. My philosophy at that time was a mixture of the Bible and certain ethical teachings according to which I had been raised. Thus, what I shared with the saints concerning married life was culture; it was not Christ. In certain respects my philosophy was quite good. I could defend it by appealing to those verses in the New Testament which charge wives to submit to their husbands, and husbands to love their wives. It seemed to me that in some ways my philosophy was better than that of Confucius. Confucius never taught that a wife needs to be balanced by her husband and that a husband needs to be subdued by bearing the burden of his wife and children. If we consider the matter of married life apart from Christ, we may agree with this philosophy. Nevertheless, even if this philosophy is right, it is not Christ, and it serves only to refine the natural life.

MINISTERING CHRIST

Even we in the church life have been short of the heavenly vision concerning God's desire that we live Christ. Because the vision has not been clear, we have spent a good deal of time refining our human life instead of living Christ. Therefore, I am burdened to point out that the local church should not be a place where the work of refinement is carried out. Rather, the church should be a place where Christ is ministered. When the young people come to me for fellowship about marriage, I now tell them that they need to experience Christ as their grace. I no longer tell them that they need to be balanced and subdued according to God's sovereign arrangement in their married life. I wish to tell all the saints that our unique need is Christ. Christ lives in us, and we are one spirit with Him. Oh, our need today is for the indwelling Christ!

If we would enjoy Christ and experience Him by being one spirit with Him, we should turn from all the standards, rules, regulations, and principles we have made for ourselves. To tell others that they need to be balanced and subdued is to fellowship with them according to a standard. Today I do not minister standards--I simply minister Christ. I would encourage all the saints to no longer set up standards and regulations, but continually contact Christ as the life-giving Spirit. If you are a slow person, do not try to be quick; if you are quick, do not try to slow down. Instead of trying to balance yourself, just live Christ. Let Christ be your standard, regulation, principle, and goal.

REMAINING IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF PRAYER

If we would experience Christ and live Him, we need to remain in an atmosphere of prayer. Many of us can testify that by prayer we are brought into the spirit, where we are one with the Lord and take Him as our life. This experience is so precious that when we are enjoying it, we do not want it to end. We like to remain in spirit to be one with the Lord. However, as soon as our time of prayer is over, most of the time we revert to our natural way of living. We are no longer in an atmosphere of prayer. Automatically we begin to try once again to be holy, spiritual, and victorious. Whenever we fail, we repent, confess to the Lord, and resolve to try again. This is not the way to live the Christian life. On the contrary, our daily living should be the same as our experience in genuine prayer. When we pray ourselves into the spirit, we are one with the Lord, we enjoy His presence, and we spontaneously live Him. With-out exerting any effort, we are holy, spiritual, and victorious. We have no problems and no anxieties. I believe we all have had experiences like this in prayer.

These experiences of genuine prayer should be the model for our daily experience with the Lord. This means that our experience in our daily life should be the same as that in prayer. However, most of the time we live according to the natural life, not according to Christ. To

live Christ it

is necessary to persevere in prayer, to pray with-out ceasing. We need to stay in the atmosphere of prayer. Here we are one spirit with the Lord. He is our life, we live Him, and we are spontaneously holy, spiritual, and victorious. We have no thought of balancing ourselves. Instead of standards, principles, and regulations, we have Christ experientially and in a practical way. Whenever we are in such an atmosphere of prayer, we are one with Christ, and He is our life. This is what it means to live Christ.

The teachings I gave out many years ago about being balanced and subdued did not minister Christ, and they did not bring the saints into direct, living contact with Christ. Instead of refinement, we need a kind of living in which Christ is lived out directly. God has not given us holiness, victory, or spirituality. He has given us Christ as a living, all-inclusive Person. What God desires is this Person, not any virtues or attributes. Therefore, our need is to contact this living Person in prayer. Then we need to remain in an atmosphere of prayer. If we do this, we shall live Christ spontaneously. Furthermore, we shall be freed from our culture without trying to adjust or correct ourselves. Everything other than Christ will fade away. Christ will be whatever we need: life, light, grace, comfort, health, strength, humility, patience, kindness, meekness. When we have Him, we have all the divine attributes and the human virtues. Furthermore, in our experience the Bible becomes living and full of light.

CHRIST LIVED OUT FROM WITHIN US

My burden in this message is that our eyes would be opened to see that what God wants is Christ lived out from within us. His concern is not that we be balanced, but that we be one with Christ and live Christ. God wants us to live Christ. You may be a young person, but you should live Christ, not the life of a typical young person. To be balanced, subdued, or refined is not the way to live Christ. The way to live Christ is in prayer to contact Christ as the life-giving Spirit within us. As we pray ourselves into an

atmosphere of genuine prayer, we shall live Christ spontaneously. I can testify that this is real and that we all can experience it.

The way to experience the indwelling Christ is to pray in a genuine way. We do not need to pray for a better job or home. That kind of prayer hinders us from experiencing Christ. We need the kind of prayer which brings us into contact with the Lord, prayer that causes us to be one with Him in our spirit. If we pray in this way, we shall enjoy Christ, experience Him as our life, and live Him.

Instead of trying to be a certain kind of person and instead of trying to live up to certain standards and regulations, we should simply contact Christ, be one with Him, and live Him. Our goal should be to know Christ and Christ alone, not to know what to do or where to go. As we enjoy the Lord and experience Him, He will be our life and we shall live Him. How marvelous! This is what Paul means in Philippians 1:21: "For to me to live is Christ."

In order to live Christ, we need to pray without ceasing. As soon as we stop praying, we stop living Christ. I wish to point out again and again that only in an atmosphere of prayer is it possible to live Christ. Therefore, every aspect of our daily living must be brought into such an atmosphere, where we and Christ are truly one. In this atmosphere Christ is real, substantial, practical, and even touchable. It is in this atmosphere that Christ is our life in a practical way. Here we live Him and enjoy all He is to us. This Christ is unsearchable and unlimited. In our experience we are one with Him, we contact Him, and we enjoy all His riches. In this way we spontaneously live Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FORTY

OBJECTIVE REVELATION, SUBJECTIVE MINISTRY, AND PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:15-19, 25-29; 2:2b, 6, 9, 18, 23

Although the book of Colossians is short, the revelation it contains is higher than that in any other book in the Bible. The Bible may be compared to Mount Zion, which has a number of peaks. The highest "peak" in the Bible is Colossians.

A COMPARISON

If we compare Colossians with the Gospel of John, we shall be helped to realize how high is the revelation in Colossians. Most of us appreciate the Gospel of John because it is a book of life. It is also a book of the mystery of life. Although the Gospel of John is mysterious, the revelation it contains cannot compare with the revelation in Colossians. John's Gospel opens with the words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In 1:18 John goes on to say, "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." Colossians does not tell us that the Word was God, but it does speak of Christ as "the image of the invisible God" (1:15). Paul's utterance and expression here are marvelous. Then, in apposition to this clause, Paul continues in the same verse by speaking of Christ as the "firstborn of all creation." This indicates that the "firstborn of all creation" is synonymous with "the image of the invisible God." This proves that the firstborn of all creation is the very image of the invisible God.

John 1:3 says, "All things came into being through Him,

and apart from Him nothing came into being which has come into being." Compare this with Paul's word in Colossians 1:16 and 17: "Because in Him were all things created in the heavens and on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or lordships or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and unto Him. And He is before all things, and all things subsist together in Him." It is rather easy to recite John 1:3, but it is difficult to recite Colossians 1:16 and 17, verses which are far more complicated. According to Colossians, the very Christ whom we have received as our Savior and our life is the image of the invisible God. Furthermore, the One who is the image of God is the firstborn of all creation because in Him, through Him, and unto Him all things have been created. Furthermore, we see from 1:17 that Christ is before all things and that all things subsist together in Him. This word points to Christ's eternal preexistence and to the fact that all things exist together by Christ as the holding center, just as the spokes of a wheel are held together by the hub at their center. Such a revelation as given in these verses is beyond our ability to understand fully.

In 1:18 Paul goes on to say that Christ is the Head of the Body, the church, and that He is the beginning, the first-born from among the dead. Then in verse 19 we read, "For in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell." The fullness has more than one aspect. Therefore, Paul is careful to point out that all the fullness, the fullness with its various aspects, is pleased to dwell in Christ. The different aspects of the fullness include the fullness in the firstborn of all creation, the fullness in Christ's being before all things, the fullness in creation's being in Him, through Him, and unto Him, the fullness in being the firstborn from among the dead, and the fullness in His being the Head of the church. All this fullness was pleased not only to dwell in Christ, but also to reconcile all things to Himself. Where else can we find a revelation to compare with this?

In contrast to the Gospel of John, Colossians does not

use simple words, expressions, and sentences. The sentences in this Epistle are complicated and often include many phrases and clauses. In fact, all the verses from 1:9 through 20 should be regarded as a single sentence. This is much different from the simple expressions in the Gospel of John: "I am the bread of life," "I am the light," "I am the door."

COMPLETING THE WORD OF GOD

In 1:25 we see that Paul became a minister according to the stewardship of God "to complete the word of God." The word of God is the divine revelation. No doubt Colossians is part of the completion of God's revelation through Paul. Without this Epistle, the divine revelation would not be complete. Because Colossians is part of the completion of the divine revelation, the revelation in this book is exceedingly high and rich. Because this revelation is so high and because Paul's writing is complicated, not many Christians have a proper understanding of this book. We believe that now, at the close of this age, the Lord is opening this book for the sake of His purpose.

A REVELATION OF WHO CHRIST IS AND WHAT CHRIST IS

In chapter one of Colossians we have a high revelation of who Christ is and of what Christ is. Actually, this book reveals more concerning what Christ is than who He is. Most Christians, however, only know who Christ is; they have little knowledge of what He is. But if we would know the all-inclusive Christ, we must know what He is as well as who He is. It is easier to know who Christ is than to know what He is. In Colossians 1 we see that Christ is the portion of the saints (v. 12), the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, the Head of the Body, the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead, and the One in whom all the fullness was pleased to dwell. Is this fullness related to what Christ is or to who Christ is? It is difficult to say. It seems, however, that Paul personified

the fullness. This indicates that he considered the fullness a Person, for the fullness was pleased to dwell in Christ and to reconcile all things. These are the functions of a living Person, not of a thing. As we consider the aspects of Christ unfolded in chapter one, we find that some are related to who Christ is, whereas others are related to what He is.

THE GOAL OF THE SUBJECTIVE MINISTRY

The revelation of Christ given thus far in Colossians is altogether objective. For example, Christ is objectively the image of God and the firstborn of all creation. However, in verses 24 through 29 we have the stewardship, the economy, the dispensation, through which the objective Christ is dispensed into us. The Christ revealed objectively in verses 15 through 19 is ministered into us in a subjective way through the ministry of God's steward in verses 25 through 29. Therefore, in Colossians 1 we have both the objective revelation and the subjective ministry. The goal of the subjective ministry is to dispense the Christ of the objective revelation into us. If we had verses 15 through 19 without verses 25 through 29, we would have only the objective revelation, not the subjective ministry. We need the subjective ministry in order for the all-inclusive Christ revealed objectively to be supplied to us.

The subjective ministry of the objective Christ is the completing of the word of God. Hence, the completing of God's word is not mere doctrine; it is a matter of ministry. Through the subjective ministry, the objective Christ becomes the very Christ in us, according to verse 27. In verses 25 through 29 Christ is no longer merely objective, for He is now the subjective Christ dwelling in us to be our hope of glory. He has become subjective because He has been dispensed into us through the ministry of the steward. Now the objective Christ has become the subjective Christ, the Christ living in us.

It is rather easy to speak of the objective Christ, but it is difficult to minister this Christ into the saints so that He becomes subjective to them. For this, Paul had to labor,

struggling according to God's operation which operated in him in power (v. 29). Paul labored, struggled, agonized, so that the saints could have Christ ministered into them and so that they could experience Him. Paul's goal in his labor was to "present every man full-grown in Christ." His aim was to minister Christ to others so that they would become perfect and complete by maturing with Christ in full growth. First Paul endeavored to minister Christ into the saints. For this reason in 1:27 he speaks of "Christ in you." Then he went on to struggle on behalf of the saints to present "every man full-grown in Christ." On the one hand, Christ had to be in the saints; on the other hand, the saints had to mature in Christ. This requires a great deal of labor, even struggling according to the divine operation.

It is not easy to help the saints experience the Christ revealed in chapter one of Colossians. In 2:1 Paul spoke of the great struggle he had on behalf of the believers in Colosse and Laodicea. If we desire that others enter into the practical experience of the all-inclusive Christ, we also need to labor on their behalf.

After presenting the objective revelation of Christ, Paul went on to speak of the need for the subjective ministry of Christ. By means of this ministry the objective Christ revealed in 1:15-19 is dispensed into the saints to dwell in them as their hope of glory. Furthermore, there must be the labor, the struggle, to present the saints full-grown in Christ. To minister Christ into others is difficult, but to present others full-grown in Christ is even more difficult. It is crucial that we experience Christ living in us and also that we have the genuine experience of becoming full-grown in Him.

THE EXPERIENCE

OF THE ALL-INCLUSIVE CHRIST

In chapter one we have touched upon the objective revelation of Christ and the subjective ministry of Christ. Now in chapter two we have still another matter--the practical experience of the objective Christ who has been

subjectively ministered into us. Hence, we have the objective revelation, the subjective ministry, and the practical experience. Colossians 2 is devoted to the full development of the practical experience of the all-inclusive Christ.

Our Need to Be Happy in Heart

Related to this development, Paul says that he struggled on behalf of the saints so that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love. Paul realized the importance of being comforted in heart and made happy in heart. I can testify that if our heart is not happy, it is very difficult to experience Christ. For example, one day I became unhappy because of the way I was treated by a certain airline and by the prospect of having to wait several hours for a flight. Not wanting to remain in my unhappiness, I prayed, "Lord, make me happy as I wait three hours for another flight. " I realized at that time, as I do now, that it is difficult to experience the all-inclusive Christ unless our heart is happy. When our heart is unhappy, experientially Christ seems far from us. If you want to experience the all-inclusive Christ, do not allow yourself to remain angry with your husband or wife. You need to pray that the Lord will take away from you any kind of unhappiness. Knowing the importance of a comforted heart, Paul struggled on behalf of the saints that their hearts would be warmed so that they could have the "full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ."

Walking, Rooted, and Built Up

In 2:6 and 7 we find more concerning the practical experience of Christ. Verse 6 says, "As therefore you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in Him." To experience Christ in a practical way, we must first receive Him and then walk in Him.

In verse 7 Paul continues, "Having been rooted and being built up in Him, and being established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving." Although we have been rooted in Christ, we must go on to be built

up in Him and to be established in the faith. All these matters, including abounding in thanksgiving, are related to practical experience.

Philosophy, Tradition and the Elements of the World

Verse 8 says, "Beware that no one carries you off as spoil through his philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ." This verse speaks of three negative things: philosophy and empty deceit, tradition, and the elements of the world. These negative things are versus Christ. We need to beware lest we be carried off as spoil by such things. In verse 9 Paul explains that in Christ "dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Since we have such a Christ, what need do we have for philosophy, the tradition of men, or the elements of the world?

Humility, Religion, and Ordinances

In 2:18 Paul issues another warning: "Let no one purposely defraud you of your prize, in humility and worship of the angels, standing on things which he has seen, vainly puffed up by the mind of his flesh." The prize here is Christ as our enjoyment. Paul warns us not to allow anyone to defraud us of our enjoyment of Christ through such things as humility, the best of human virtues, and the worship of angels, a refined form of religion.

In verses 20 and 21 Paul goes on to speak of ordinances. Here he says, "If you died with Christ from the elements of the world, why as living in the world do you subject yourself to ordinances: do not handle, do not taste, do not touch." As Paul points out in verse 22, these are things "which are all for corruption in the using."

CULTURE--AN ENEMY OF THE EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST

In 2:8, 18, and 20, Paul mentions a number of matters: philosophy, tradition, elements of the world, humility, angel worship, and ordinances. Actually, all these items can be summed up in one word--culture. Philosophy is one of the highest products of man's culture. Tradition also is related to culture. In fact, tradition comes from culture, and culture is embodied in tradition. If there is no culture, there is no tradition; and if there is no tradition, there can be no culture. Furthermore, the elements of the world, which are rudimentary principles of basic teachings, are also aspects of culture. Humility is a virtue found among the most cultured of people. The more refined and cultured a person is, the more humble he is. But the more uncultured and barbarous a person is, the less humble he is. Thus, humility is intimately related to cultural refinement. Furthermore, the worship of angels is found among people of high culture. Those with a rather low culture may worship beasts, but those who are more highly cultured may worship angels. The worship of angels is actually a refined form of idolatry, a practice still to be found in today's Catholicism. Some people may even justify the worship of angels by arguing that it is better than the worship of animals. Finally, man's ordinances are related to his culture. Ordinances are rules related to our way of living. For example, table manners are ordinances. The more cultured people are, the more ordinances they have. The more cultured a person is, the more he will say, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch."

Although the word culture is not found in Colossians, actually this book was written to deal with culture, a real enemy to our experience and enjoyment of Christ. All people appreciate their culture and value it. For this reason, it is a hindrance to the experience of Christ.

In the section of Colossians dealing with the practical experience of Christ, Paul lists many things that frustrate this experience. The items mentioned in Colossians are very different from those listed in 1 Corinthians, where

Paul deals with division, jealousy, fornication, and law-suits. In Galatians Paul deals with the law as a frustration to the experience of Christ. But in Colossians he comes to

the deeply hidden and subtle matter of culture. Christians condemn fornication and divisiveness and for the most part realize that the law is over. But who repudiates culture as a hindrance to the enjoyment of Christ? Even among us there are very few who condemn culture for this reason.

The church in Colosse had been invaded by a mixture of Jewish and Greek culture. Elements of Gnosticism and asceticism had made inroads into the church life. Both Gnosticism and asceticism are products of highly-developed cultures. Those who practice asceticism, the severe treatment of the body, are usually refined, cultured people.

We need to keep in mind that the book of Colossians was written not to deal with sin or the law, but to deal with culture. The Christ revealed in Colossians cannot be experienced unless the cultural hindrances have been exposed and dealt with. We may hold on to our culture and experience the Christ revealed in other New Testament books. But the experience of the all-inclusive Christ unfolded in Colossians requires that we repudiate the frustration presented by our culture.

In Colossians Paul first presents the objective revelation and then the subjective ministry. Coming to the practical experience of Christ in chapter two, he points out that the most subtle hindrance to the enjoyment of Christ is our culture. Concerning the objective revelation of Christ, the book of Colossians gives us the highest revelation. In the same principle, concerning the practical experience of Christ, this book points out the most subtle frustration. May we all be impressed with the fact that if we would have the practical experience of the all-inclusive Christ, we must deal with our culture.

LIVING CHRIST

Some of those who see the importance of laying aside culture may claim that they have already done so. The

American saints may claim to have dropped their American culture, and the Chinese believers may claim to have dropped their Chinese culture. Nevertheless, they may not have dropped their self-made culture, the culture they themselves have developed. Actually, by dropping our culture we may simply devise another culture--a culture-dropping culture. In such a case, we replace our culture, not with Christ, but with a non-culture culture. The crucial point is not that we drop our culture--it is that we live Christ. The issue is not culture versus no culture; it is culture versus Christ. We need to care for Christ and live by Him. Therefore, the important thing is not that we attempt to drop our culture negatively; it is that we live Christ positively.

Children must be raised according to certain cultural standards. Otherwise, they will be wild and unruly. It is a serious mistake for Christian parents to tell their children that they do not need culture, but only need to enjoy Christ. Children need culture until they are old enough to experience Christ and live by Him. Anyone who has not received Christ must have culture in order to live properly. Today's society needs culture. The more cultured people are, the less they need to be controlled by the police or by the law court. I wish to make it emphatically clear that I am not saying that we should merely drop our culture. Instead of trying to lay aside culture, we should concentrate on gaining Christ. The more we have of Christ, the less we shall need to live by culture.

Actually, everything we have apart from Christ is some form of culture. For example, to eat with a knife and fork is a matter of culture, and to eat with chopsticks is also a matter of culture. We all have our own kind of self-made and self-imposed culture. This means that we all have our particular way to live. You live according to your way, and I live according to mine. To live according to our way is to live according to our culture. As we have pointed out, this is the greatest frustration to the enjoyment of Christ and its ultimate enemy. Therefore, let us care more and more

for the experience of Christ and for living Christ in a practical way day by day.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-ONE

SELF-MADE AND SELF-IMPOSED CULTURE AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:27-29; 2:2b-4, 6-8, 16-18; 3:10-11

AN EXTENSIVE REVELATION OF CHRIST

The book of Colossians reveals Christ in a very extensive way. This extensive revelation is much greater than all that most Christians have seen of Christ. Christians realize that Christ is God and that He became a man, lived on earth, died on the cross for our sins as our Redeemer, was buried, was resurrected on the third day, ascended to heaven, and has been enthroned as the Lord and Head of all. Now Christ is the sovereign Lord of lords and King of kings. One day He will come back to rule over the earth and to set up His kingdom. A great many books have been written concerning all these points. Of course, such a general revelation of Christ is true, but it is narrow. It does not match the extensive revelation of Christ found in Colossians.

According to the Bible, Christ is extensive, and the revelation of Christ is also extensive. Like the universe, Christ is immeasurable. For this reason, the revelation regarding Christ is without limit. In Ephesians 3 Paul speaks of the breadth, length, height, and depth. Christ is the breadth, length, height, and depth of the universe. Since He is so extensive, how could we be content with a narrow revelation of Him? We are foolish if we limit ourselves to a narrow revelation of Christ.

Certain people have advised me not to go beyond the general theology of today's Christianity. They recommend

that I simply preach and teach in a general way. More than thirty years ago, I saw that Christ is the life-giving Spirit, and I was burdened to minister this to others. Some intimate friends were offended and began to warn me in love and eventually to oppose me. Some admitted that the Bible reveals that Christ is the Spirit. Nevertheless, they told me that I should not teach this, in order to keep from offending other Christians. I replied, "Since you admit that the Bible reveals that Christ is the Spirit, please give me the liberty to minister on this matter. You may be afraid of Christianity, but I am not. If Martin Luther had maintained an attitude like yours, how could the Reformation have taken place? The Catholic Church held the concept of salvation by works. Luther, however, saw that salvation is not by works, but by faith. And he was bold to declare this according to the Bible."

We should not be held back by the narrow view of Christ held by many Christians. Christ is exceedingly extensive; He is unlimited. The Bible even speaks of "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8). Although Christ's riches are unsearchable, many Christians limit Him by their theology and teachings. They have only an elementary understanding of Him. Christ, the Savior in whom we believe, is not limited. He is inexhaustible, all-inclusive, limitless. No one can say how great He is. Since He is without limitation, the revelation concerning Him must also be without limit. In this matter the book of Colossians is crucial. Without this book, it would be difficult to realize that the revelation of Christ is unlimited and extensive.

In 1970 some opposing ones in Hong Kong rose up to declare that the Christ in whom we believe is the Creator, but to deny that He is also a creature. They were confident that they were right, and they condemned us for saying that Christ is both the Creator and the first among the creatures. I asked them how Christ could be a man if He were not a creature. Is man not a creature? If Christ were not a creature, how could He have a body of flesh and

blood? How could He have been nailed to the cross if He were only the divine, spiritual Creator? It is very dangerous to have just a little knowledge. It keeps us from seeing the extensive revelation of Christ in the Scriptures. One reason the book of Colossians was written was to present such an extensive revelation of Christ.

THE CHURCH INVADED BY CULTURE

When the book of Colossians was written, Asia Minor was a cultural melting pot. In Asia Minor there was a blending of Greek culture and Jewish culture, in particular of Greek philosophy and Jewish religion. Through Paul's ministry, churches had been established in that region. It was very difficult for these churches to with-stand the invasion of Jewish religion and Greek philosophy. The church in Colosse was like an island in the ocean of Jewish and Greek culture. Eventually, the cultural tide swept into the church and pervaded the church life. Hence, the church was permeated with Jewish concepts and Greek philosophical ideas. In particular, a form of Gnosticism was brought into the church life. According to Gnosticism, material things are intrinsically evil. There were various regulations concerning the handling of material things. Because the church in Colosse was pervaded by such philosophical ideas, Christ was replaced, and the saints did not live by Him. Instead, they lived by their philosophical concepts.

ALL THINGS CREATED IN CHRIST

To confront the Gnostic concept that matter is evil, Paul put forth a most extensive revelation of Christ. Whereas the Gnostics claim that material things are inherently evil, Paul pointed out that all things were created in Christ, through Christ, and unto Christ and that they are now subsisting in Christ. Paul was bold, and his teaching meant the death of Gnostic philosophy. He boldly pointed out that all things, including animals and reptiles regarded by Jews as unclean, were created in Christ,

through Christ, and unto Christ. Furthermore, all these things are now subsisting in Christ. What a shock this must have been to the Jewish mentality, which had been trained to distinguish the clean from the unclean. Remember Peter's reaction to the vision that he saw in Acts 10. When Peter saw the sheet containing all manner of wild beasts and creeping things and heard the voice telling him to kill and eat, he said, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." Nevertheless, according to Paul's word in Colossians, all these things were created unto Christ and subsist in Christ.

Many scientists recognize that in the universe there is some kind of power that holds all things together. This holding power, which is the hub, the center, of the universe, is Christ. Because Christ is this holding power, all things, including snakes, scorpions, and frogs, subsist in Christ. Without Christ, the universe and everything in it would collapse. We are upheld, not by the earth, but by Christ. Our existence is maintained by Christ in whom all things are held together.

ROOM ONLY FOR CHRIST

Paul presented such an extensive revelation of Christ in order to help the saints to be free from their cultural concepts. According to Acts 10, in the eyes of God there is no difference between animals and reptiles that are clean and those that are unclean. In his reluctance to obey the voice to kill and eat, Peter was still acting according to his cultural preference. Such preferences cause us to be divisive and make it impossible for us to realize the one new man. In the new man there is no room for Jew or Greek, for circumcision or uncircumcision. There is no room for barbarian or Scythian. In the new man, all the room is for Christ. Christ is all and in all. This means that Christ is every part of the new man and is in every part. The goal of this extensive revelation of Christ is that we would all live Christ. If we live Christ, it will make no

difference what kind of food we are served. We would not say, when visiting certain places, that because we are Christians we can-not eat certain things. Such preferences are apart from the living of the new man.

PAUL'S CONCERN WITH CULTURE

The book of Colossians reveals Christ in an extensive way in order to deal with our culture. Culture is a very subtle and hidden substitute for Christ. We all condemn sin, but we do not condemn culture. Recently the Lord showed me that whereas 1 Corinthians deals with sinful things and Galatians deals with religion and the law, Colossians deals with culture. Philosophy, tradition, and the elements of the world are all aspects of culture. Likewise, the various isms such as asceticism and Gnosticism are aspects of culture. Then I began to pay more attention to the parallel between 1 Corinthians 12:12 and 13, Galatians 3:27 and 28, and Colossians 3:10 and 11. If you read these verses carefully, you will notice that in 1 Corinthians 12:12 and 13 and Galatians 3:27 and 28 there is no mention of barbarians or Scythians. But Colossians 3:11 mentions the circumcision, the uncircumcision, the barbarians, and the Scythians. This is an indication that in Colossians Paul is dealing with culture. The Scythians were the most barbarous of people. According to M. R. Vincent's comments on 3:11 in his *Word Studies in the New Testament*, the Scythians offered human sacrifices, scalped and sometimes flayed slain enemies, and even used the skulls of their victims for drinking cups. The barbarians spoken of in this verse included all those other than Greeks and Jews. This is a strong indication that in Colossians Paul is concerned with man's culture. Even circumcision and uncircumcision, although related to religion, are also related to culture.

Not many Christians throughout the centuries have been able to get fully into the book of Colossians. On the one hand, they have not seen the extensiveness of the revelation of Christ in this book. On the other hand, they

have not seen that this book was written to deal with culture. It is important for us to realize that within us the ultimate substitute for Christ is our culture.

LIVING MORE BY CULTURE THAN BY CHRIST

By the Lord's mercy and grace, we in the Lord's recovery do not care for our culture. Some may think that they are free from culture. But without exception every one of us has his personal and individual culture, a self-made and self-imposed culture. Furthermore, those who have been in the church life for a number of years may have a local church culture. After they came into the recovery and began to meet with the saints in the church, some spontaneously began to conform to the church life. Some refrained from using makeup or going to movies, not because they were living Christ, but because they were conforming to the church life. Some may cut their hair in a certain way for the same reason. Others may testify that they do certain things because they love Christ and the church. However, it is one thing to love Christ and another thing to live Christ. It is possible to cut your hair because you love Christ without living Christ in this matter. Probably very few saints in the Lord's recovery attend movies. Why is it that they do not go to movies? Is it because they love Christ and the church, or is it because they live Christ? We should be able to say, "The reason I do not go to movies is that I live Christ. Because Christ does not do this, I do not do it either. Christ is my life within and my living without. I live by Christ, not by conforming to the church life." We all should be able to declare that we do not have any regulation or conformity--we only have Christ. We should contact Him unceasingly and live in oneness with Him. He lives in us, and we live in Him. In this way we and Christ are one. We do certain things or refrain from doing certain things not merely because we love the Lord, but because we are living Him.

Even those who love the Lord very much and seek Him

live much more by culture than by Christ. If you analyze your daily living, you will probably discover that most of the time you live not by Christ, but by culture. Some may not pray at all for a period of weeks. However, because they love Christ and the church, they still come to the meetings. Is this a kind of living that is the living by Christ? Surely not. Such a living is according to culture, perhaps even local church culture, but not according to Christ.

It is quite possible that the most cultured and refined people are those in the local churches. Many have become very refined through their years in the church life. The church life is the best cultural refinery. I have no doubt that the best husbands and wives are to be found in the local churches. Many can testify that their married life has been greatly helped by their years in the church life. However, even our good married life may be due much more to the church life than to living Christ.

The matter of losing our temper may be used to illustrate how the church life may refine us. Perhaps you are a person with a quick temper. But after you have been in the church for a number of years, you may find it much more difficult to lose your temper. The reason is that the atmosphere of the church does not encourage anyone to lose his temper. Thus, you are kept from losing your temper by the atmosphere of the church life, not by your living Christ.

The Lord Jesus now wants to confront the hidden frustration caused by our culture. We must admit that we do not live Christ very much. We are frustrated from living Christ not mainly by sin or the world, but by our virtues and our refined human living. The very refinement of our human life hinders us from living Christ. Day by day we live much more by our refinement than by Christ. The Apostle Paul could say, "To me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). We, however, cannot say this as long as we live mainly by our culture, including the culture of the church life, and not by Christ. The church life culture has pervaded the local churches.

My purpose in pointing out the culture in the church

life is not to give ground to dissenting ones to criticize the church life. I appreciate the church life very much, and I can testify that there is no better place to live Christ. Nevertheless, in these days the Lord is speaking to us about culture so that we may be delivered out from even the highest culture in order to live Christ in an absolute way.

CULTURE AS A HINDRANCE TO THE BUILDING

In this message I am especially burdened to point out the fact that we all have a self-made and self-imposed culture. This culture is a substitute for Christ. Probably you do not realize how strong your self-made culture is. This culture separates us from others and keeps us from being built up with them. Our culture may be like a steel cell, in which we are confined. We all have such a strong self-made and self-imposed culture. Certain saints may be excellent and very precious. Nevertheless, they are full of self-made culture. For example, a certain brother may be frank and not at all political. This frankness, however, may be a matter of culture, not of Christ. Others may be very kind and gentle; they never offend anyone. This also may be an aspect of their culture. We all have our own culture. If others live according to our culture, we are happy. But if they do not live according to our culture, we may be offended.

A brother and his wife may have difficulty living in oneness because they have different cultures. The brother expects his wife to live according to his culture, and the wife hopes that her husband will live according to her culture. This difference of cultures becomes a source of trouble in their married life. As one with more than fifty years' experience in married life, I can testify that the happiest married life comes about when neither one expects the other to live according to his culture. But when each party makes demands on the other, there will be difficulty. Thus, the problem is that we all have our own

culture and expect others to live by it. This self-made culture is a great frustration to the experience of Christ. The most hidden and subtle substitute for Christ is our culture.

CULTURE AND OPINIONS

In the past I have often spoken of the problems caused in the church life by opinions. Recently I heard that in a certain place some sisters were strongly opposed to the piano, but equally strong in favor of guitars. Such opinions come from our culture. Culture is the source of opinion. If our culture has been dealt with, we shall not have opinions about pianos or guitars. We shall care only for Christ. To be without opinion means to be without culture. If you hold on to your culture, it will be very difficult not to be opinionated. Your culture causes you to be opinionated. I am one very strong in my opinion. But throughout the years I have been dealt with by the Lord. Now it does not matter to me whether we have a piano, guitars, neither, or both. Likewise, it does not matter to me what kind of food the saints eat. However, if we have culture instead of Christ, surely we shall care much about this kind of thing. How we need the Lord's salvation! The most hidden and subtle frustration to living Christ is our culture. This stronghold of culture within us must be torn down by the Lord. Then we shall have no culture, only Christ. In various situations and circumstances we shall no longer have opinions according to our culture; we shall care only for Christ. If others want to play the piano or guitar, we shall not have any feeling about it. If they do not use any instruments, we shall have no feeling about that either. Because we have been rescued from our culture, we shall care only for Christ and for living Christ.

LIVING CHRIST IN SPIRIT

The way to be free from our self-made and self-imposed culture is not to deliberately try to drop our culture. If we do this, our efforts to drop our culture will become another

kind of culture, an anti-culture culture. We need to see that the way to be free from culture is simply to continually live Christ in spirit. We all have been constituted with culture according to our race and nationality and even according to the church life. The church life now plays an important role in our culture. We must condemn any culture that replaces Christ. Our need is to live Christ, to live by this all-inclusive Person in our spirit.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-TWO

THE EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:27-28; 2:6-8, 13, 20, 19; 2:4, 8,16, 18

In the book of Colossians a number of important phrases or expressions point to our experience of Christ. Some of these phrases are "Christ in you" (1:27), "full-grown in Christ" (1:28), "walk in Him" (2:6), "according to Christ" (2:8), "made alive together with Him" (2:13), "died with Christ" (2:20), "holding the Head" (2:19), "out from Whom" (2:19), and "grows with the growth of God" (2:19). These nine expressions give us a complete picture of the proper experience of Christ. In this regard, we need to pay special attention to the prepositions in, according to, with, and out from. Furthermore, it would be a great help to pray-read all the verses related to these points.

In addition to all these positive points, Paul gives the Colossians some negative points, in particular, four warnings. In 2:4 he says, "This I say that no one may delude you with persuasive speech." In 2:8 Paul issues this warning: "Beware that no one carries you off as spoil through his philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ." The third warning is in 2:16, where Paul says, "Let no one therefore judge you in eating and in drinking or in respect of a feast or of a new moon or of Sabbaths." Finally, in 2:18 Paul says, "Let no one purposely defraud you of your prize, in humility and worship of the angels, standing on things which he has seen, vainly puffed up by the mind of his flesh." Notice that in each of these verses Paul uses the words "no one." If we would have the real experience of Christ, we must

take heed to all these warnings and beware that no one delude us, carry us off, judge us, or defraud us of our prize.

CHRIST APPLICABLE IN OUR EXPERIENCE

In 1:27 Paul speaks of "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Do you realize that Christ is in you? The Christ who is in us is the extensive, immeasurable, unsearchable One. How marvelous that such a Christ dwells in us! We need to become full-grown in such a Christ, to walk in Him, and to be according to Him. Having died with Christ and having been made alive with Him, we should hold Him as the Head out from whom the whole Body grows with the growth of God. All these matters indicate that Christ is near, available, and applicable. Otherwise, how could Christ be in us, and how could we be full-grown in Him? Unless Christ were applicable, we could not walk in Him, be according to Him, or die and be made alive together with Him. Neither could we hold Him as the Head out from whom the Body grows with the growth of God. All these points are related to the subjective experience of Christ. Furthermore, these points are neglected or altogether lacking among today's Christians, where there is little emphasis on walking in Christ, being according to Christ, or holding Christ as the Head.

THE ALL-INCLUSIVE LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT

If Christ were merely objective to us, He could not be in us, and we could not be full-grown in Him. None of the other positive points of the experience of Christ covered in Colossians could be our experience. What other person is capable of being in us and of making it possible for us to die with Him, to live in Him, and to walk according to Him? The unique person qualified for all these nine points is the Spirit. This term, *the Spirit*, is of tremendous significance. John 7:39 says, "But this He said concerning the Spirit, Whom those who believe in Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

Although the Spirit of God was in existence, *the Spirit* was not yet because Jesus had not yet been glorified. In the Epistles the term *the Spirit* is used frequently. It denotes the processed all-inclusive Triune God. Ultimately, the Triune God reaches us as *the Spirit*.

To reach us the Triune God had to pass through the process of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. By incarnation God came into man. Then for thirty-three and a half years the Lord lived on earth as a man. Jesus, the embodiment of the Triune God, lived for years in the house of a poor carpenter. Imagine, the almighty, infinite God living day by day in a carpenter's home! Eventually, the Lord Jesus was put to death. But on the third day, having passed through death, conquering and subduing it, He came out of death and entered into resurrection. By incarnation, divinity was brought into humanity. But by resurrection humanity was brought into divinity. Through incarnation God was brought into man, and through Christ's resurrection man was brought into God. Through Christ's resurrection, the Triune God, mingled with man, became the Spirit. This Spirit includes God, incarnation, humanity, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection. Redeemed and uplifted humanity is in this Spirit. The all-inclusive life-giving Spirit is the Triune God reaching us in a final and ultimate way. This is the Spirit. Furthermore, the very Christ today is this Spirit. Therefore, it is easy for Christ to be in us and for us to be in Him. It is also possible for us to become full-grown in Him, to walk in Him, and to be according to Him.

THE EXPERIENTIAL CHRIST

On the one hand, Christ is in us; on the other hand, we are in Christ. Consider the air in the atmosphere as an illustration. We are in the air, and the air is in us. Both are necessary if we are to remain alive. Today the processed Triune God as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit is our air. This air is in us, and we are in this air and even walk in

this air. Moreover, we can be people according to this air who grow in this air with the growth of God. The all-inclusive Christ is, therefore, the experiential Christ. He is a Christ who can be in us, and a Christ in whom we can walk. We can live, walk, move, and have our being in Him.

ACCORDING TO CHRIST

In all that we do, we should be according to Christ. We should not be according to philosophy, ethics, culture, or religion. We should not in any way be according to the old man. Rather, we are here to be according to the processed, all-inclusive life-giving Triune God. This, however, should not be a mere doctrine. For example, a brother should not deal with his wife according to culture; he should deal with her according to Christ, according to the processed Triune God.

If we would live, behave, and have our being according to the all-inclusive, life-giving, processed Triune God, we would all be like Paul the apostle. Paul became a person who was not according to his forefathers, the law, tradition, Judaism, or the teaching of Gamaliel. He became a person who was absolutely according to the processed Triune God. His Epistles were written not according to anything other than the all-inclusive, life-giving, processed Triune God. How different are Paul's writings from today's Christian writings!

Our daily walk should be according to the processed Triune God. For example, when a brother gets a haircut, he should do so not according to any particular standard, but according to the processed Triune God.

Do you know where the all-inclusive, life-giving, processed Triune God is today? He is in our spirit. In our spirit He is the all-inclusive One, the life-giving One. In our spirit He is the processed Triune God. If we live according to the processed Triune God in our spirit, every type of culture will be gone. Only the all-inclusive life-giving Triune God will remain. The Christian life and the church life are without culture, but according to the processed

Triune God. If we live according to the processed Triune God, there will be no need for us to try to drop our culture. Culture will be gone automatically.

With the all-inclusive life-giving Triune God we have the experience of dying with Christ and of being made alive together with Him. Here we experience being members of the Body, living in oneness with Him and holding Him as the One out from whom we receive the supply to grow with the growth of God. This is the Christian life and the church life. This is the life that overcomes sin and that brings us the reality of holiness, spirituality, and victory. Here we have all we need: patience, humility, righteousness, love, kindness, holiness, life, light, power, strength, might, and every other positive thing. All the divine attributes and all the human virtues are in this life. Christ as the all-inclusive, life-giving, processed Triune God is everything to us. When we have Him and live according to Him, we do not need regulations. We have the extensive Christ who, in our experience, is everything to us.

WORDS OF WARNING

Not Deluded with Persuasive Speech

Turning now to Paul's words of warning, we see that in 2:4 he indicates that we should take heed that no one delude us with persuasive speech. What a tragedy and a pity that among today's Christians so many have itching ears! They have the appetite to listen to eloquent speech and persuasive words. But if we truly experience Christ, we shall have no interest in such speech. On the contrary, we shall find sugar-coated messages very unpleasant. In the church life we care only for Christ, not for persuasive speech.

Not Carried Off as Spoil

In 2:8 Paul says, "Beware that no one carries you off as spoil through his philosophy and empty deceit." We should

not allow anyone to carry us off as spoil through philosophy. We should care not for theory or philosophical thought, but for the all-inclusive Christ.

Not Judged by Others

In 2:16 Paul tells us to let no one judge us "in eating and in drinking or in respect of a feast or of a new moon or of Sabbaths." If we are those who are filled with the all-inclusive Christ, we shall not give ground for others to judge us. However, if we insist on particular or peculiar practices, we shall be criticized. If we are occupied with Christ and not particular in other matters, others will have no reason to judge us. In the churches we should all be common; no one should be particular. This means that we should not care for anything in place of Christ.

A certain brother in the church may be very good; however, because of the influence of his self-made culture, he may also be rather peculiar. If this brother would truly walk in Christ and have his being according to Christ, he would not be peculiar. Instead, he would be common, ordinary. All the saints in the church should be constituted with Christ. If this is the situation, then we shall meet Christ when we contact them. In each one there will be the expression of Christ. This is possible only when we are the same with respect to caring only for Christ and are no longer peculiar or particular concerning other things.

Many saints love the Lord Jesus and the church, but because they are so peculiar in their being, it is difficult for others to bear them. The church life is frustrated and even damaged by those who insist on their peculiar opinions, opinions that are according to their culture. This exposes the fact that they are short of Christ.

However, I have the assurance that what the Lord has been speaking to us about culture is not in vain. I believe that what He has spoken will bring us into the experience of Christ. Eventually, all the peculiarities will disappear, and only Christ will remain. Oh, let us grow in Christ until we become full-grown in Him! Let us also walk in Him,

having our being in Him and realizing that we have died with Him and are now alive together with Him. Let us also be one with our Head, out from whom we receive the supply to be knit together and to grow with the growth of God. God's goal is that we have such a Christian life and church life. I believe that before long such a wonderful situation will be expressed on earth.

Not Defrauded of Our Prize

Paul's last warning is that we should let no one purposely defraud us of our prize. The prize is the full experience and enjoyment of Christ. Any kind of culture, religion, opinion, or peculiar teaching can defraud us of this prize. We should stay with the experience of Christ so that we may have the full enjoyment of Him, not caring for any religious or ethical practices.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-THREE

IDENTIFIED WITH CHRIST BY BEING GRAFTED INTO HIM

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:11-13, 20; 3:1; 1:27-28; 2:19; Matt. 28:19; Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3-5; 11:17; John 15:4-5

In 1:27 Paul speaks of Christ in us, and in the following verse, of presenting every man full-grown in Christ. These verses indicate that, on the one hand, Christ is in us and that, on the other hand, we are in Christ. According to John 15:4 and 5, first we are in Christ, then Christ is in us.

The two expressions, Christ in us and we in Christ, imply a divine, two-way traffic, a traffic which is a universal mystery. What a mystery that we are in the Triune God and that the Triune God is in us! We can bear strong testimony to the fact that we have entered into the Triune God and that the all-inclusive, life-giving, processed Triune God has come into us.

THE PROCESSED GOD

Some Christians are offended when we speak of the processed God. They would say, "Isn't God eternal, infinite, almighty, and unchanging? How can the eternal, infinite God be processed?" Instead of arguing with people about this point, we should simply present the facts from the Word of God. The Bible reveals that one day God became flesh. John 1:14 says that the Word became flesh. Does this not point to a process? If there were no process involved with the incarnation, how could the eternal, infinite God have become a finite man? After thirty-three and a half years, this processed One went to the cross and was crucified. Some may be amazed to hear that it was God who was crucified. However, we need to remember

that the

One who was crucified was God incarnate. After His crucifixion, Christ was buried. Then He passed through death and came forth in resurrection. Was that not also part of a process? Christ was buried with a physical body like ours. But when He came out of the tomb in resurrection, He had a spiritual body. His physical body had been transfigured into a spiritual one. Certainly this indicates a process. Therefore, we can say with assurance that our God has been processed. He was processed through incarnation to become a man, and then He was processed through resurrection to become the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45).

BAPTIZED INTO THE NAME OF THE FATHER, SON, AND SPIRIT

Our God today is not merely the Creator revealed in Genesis 1:1. He is the processed God, as revealed in Matthew 28:19. Matthew 28:19 is more complicated than Genesis 1:1. Genesis 1:1 simply says that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. But Matthew 28:19 tells us to baptize people "into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." This verse speaks of the one name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The name of God here is Father-Son-Spirit. Due to the poverty of our language, we may be forced to use the term "person" in speaking of the Father, Son, and Spirit, referring to Them as the three Persons of the Trinity. We have done this in the opening lines of one of our hymns (*Hymns* #608):

> What mystery, the Father, Son, and Spirit,
> In person three, in substance all are one.

However, we should not press this term too far, lest we unintentionally endorse the doctrine of tritheism, the belief that the Father, Son, and Spirit are three Gods. We definitely do not believe in tritheism; we believe in the one true God, whose name, according to Matthew 29:19, is

Father-Son-Spirit. This is the processed God into whose name we are to baptize people.

The English word "baptize" is an anglicized form of the Greek word *baptizo*, which means to dip, or immerse, an object in water. In baptism, we are immersed in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit. However, many Christians argue about the method of baptism or about the kind of water used, yet they have little or no comprehension of the spiritual reality symbolized by the water. Because our relationship with the Lord is mysterious and spiritual, the Bible uses the physical symbol of baptism to signify our union with the Triune God. Being immersed in the water of baptism signifies that a believer is being put into the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

The name in Matthew 28:19 denotes the sum total of the divine Being. Hence, the name is equivalent to the person. To be put into the name is to be put into the person. To baptize a believer into the name of the Triune God is to immerse him into all that God is. To have the name is to have the person. To baptize people into the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit is to baptize them into a wonderful Person. The water used in baptism signifies the wonderful Person of the Triune God. Whenever we baptize people, we should tell them that the water into which we immerse them symbolizes the Triune God. When we immerse them into the water, we are actually putting them into the Triune God.

Matthew 28:19 does not tell us to disciple the nations and baptize them into a certain kind of water. The Bible does not specify what kind of water should be used. We are simply to baptize people in water which signifies immersing them into the Triune God. What a difference it makes to realize that in baptism people are put into the Triune God!

BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST

In Galatians 3:27 Paul says, "For as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." The Christ in Galatians 3:27 is equal to the Father, Son, and Spirit in

Matthew 28:19. Therefore, to be baptized into Christ is to be baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Many years ago a certain person tried to argue with me about baptism. Acknowledging that we respected the Bible and baptized people in water, he asked me in what name we baptize the believers. Was it in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit, in the name of Christ Jesus, or in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ? He went on to say that the name makes a great difference. I asked him to explain the difference between Christ in Galatians 3:27 and the Father, Son, and Spirit in Matthew 28:19. He replied that Christ is merely the Son. Then I went on to say that instead of arguing, we should simply enjoy the Father, Son, and Spirit, Christ Jesus, and the Lord Jesus Christ. I said that Christ is all-inclusive, that He is not only the Son, but also the Father and the Spirit. I also told him that we may baptize one person into the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit; another, into Christ; and still another, into the Lord Jesus Christ or into Christ Jesus. There is nothing wrong with baptizing people in this way. When we compare Matthew 28:19 with Galatians 3:27, we see that to baptize people into Christ is to baptize them into the Father, Son, and Spirit. We do not care to argue over terminology; we care only for the living Person, for the all-inclusive, life-imparting, processed Triune God.

BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST'S DEATH

In Romans 6:3 Paul asks, "Are you ignorant that as many as have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" Have you ever wondered why Paul says that those who are baptized into Christ Jesus are baptized into His death? We have been baptized into a living Person. How then can we be baptized into His death? Why are we not baptized into His resurrection? If I had been the author of Romans 6:3, I would have said that those who are baptized into Christ are baptized into His resurrection. If you had a choice, would you not prefer to be baptized into resurrection instead of into death? But Paul

says definitely that those who have been baptized into Christ have been baptized into His death.

The resurrected Christ still bears in Himself the effectiveness of His death. Otherwise we could not be baptized into His death by being baptized into Him. The fact that we are baptized into Christ and into His death indicates that Christ and His death are one. Drinking tea can be used as an illustration. When we drink tea, we drink both tea and water. Because the water and the tea are one, the water carries the element, the reality, of the tea. In like manner, the resurrection of Christ carries the element of His effective death. Thus, when a person is baptized into Christ, he is spontaneously baptized into the death of Christ. It is impossible to separate Christ's death from Christ Himself. The being of the resurrected Christ includes the element of His effective death. The effectiveness of Christ's death is one of the ingredients of His all-inclusive being. To be baptized into Christ is to be baptized into His death.

There is a tremendous difference between death in Adam and the death of Christ. I loathe death in Adam, but I appreciate the sweetness of Christ's death. His death is dear and lovable, and I long to abide restfully in it. How wonderful that a believer baptized into the all-inclusive Christ is also placed into the death of Christ! In the words of a hymn written by A.B. Simpson, "Oh! it is so sweet to die with Christ!" Rest and victory are found in Christ's death.

THE HEAVENLY AIR

We have seen that to be baptized is to be placed into the Triune God, into Christ, and into the death of Christ. How is it possible for Christ to be the spiritual water in which we are immersed? Christ can be such water because in resurrection He was processed to become the *pneuma*, the life-giving Spirit. As the *pneuma*, Christ is the heavenly air. To baptize someone into such air is much easier than to baptize him into water. Everybody knows that water

comes from rain and that rain comes from moisture in the air. Christ today is the spiritual air full of moisture. When we baptize people into Christ, we baptize them into Him as the heavenly *pneuma*, into the all-inclusive, life-giving, processed Triune God.

IN CHRIST

The way to get into Christ is to be baptized into Him. All believers should have the assurance that they have been baptized into the Triune God. We can boldly testify that because we have been baptized into Christ and into His death, we are now in Christ.

BURIED WITH CHRIST THROUGH BAPTISM INTO DEATH

In Romans 6:4 Paul says, "We have been buried therefore with Him through baptism into death that as Christ was raised from among the dead through the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Here Paul introduces the thought of burial; he says that with Christ we have been buried through baptism into death. Which comes first, death or burial? In the natural realm, a person dies first and then is buried. But Paul's word indicates that we are first buried, and then enter into death. According to the Bible, we, the believers, are buried into death. However, we are not buried into death directly; this takes place with Christ and through baptism.

Suppose a certain person repents and believes in the Lord Jesus. He should then be baptized into Christ. To baptize this new believer into Christ is to put him into the death of Christ. When he is baptized, he is actually buried. This burial results in death. This is what it means to be buried with Christ through baptism into death.

Every candidate for baptism is a person in the process of dying. Through baptism such a person is put to death. Having been identified with Christ and with His death, he is immersed in water and is buried. Through baptism, he enters into the actual experience of death with Christ.

A NEW PERSON IN RESURRECTION

This burial has a glorious consequence. As Christ was raised from among the dead through the glory of the Father, we also may walk in newness of life. This indicates that after baptism we become a new person in resurrection. When we are immersed in the water, we enter into death. But when we come out of the water, we enter into resurrection. We all need to have such a wonderful realization and understanding of baptism.

GROWING THROUGH BAPTISM

In Romans 6:5 Paul goes on to say, "For if we have grown together with Him in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection." We have grown together with Christ in the likeness of His death, that is, in the baptism mentioned in verse 4. Now we see that we shall also grow in the likeness of His resurrection, that is, in the newness of life, also mentioned in verse 4. The important point is that to be baptized is to grow. One who has been baptized has grown in the likeness of Christ's death and now is growing in the likeness of His resurrection.

GRAFTED INTO CHRIST

The growth in Romans 6:5 can be illustrated by the grafting of a branch from one tree into another tree. Through grafting, two lives become one. Hence, the process of grafting signifies our spiritual identification with Christ. We are identified with Christ, made one with Him, by being grafted into Him.

In Romans 11 Paul uses the example of branches from a wild olive tree grafted into a cultivated olive tree (vv. 17, 24). In order for grafting to take place, both trees must experience cutting. This cutting signifies the experience of being put to death. Apart from this cutting, grafting cannot take place. In His crucifixion, Christ was cut, and He still bears the marks of this cutting. This means that within the being of the resurrected Christ, there is an opening into

which we, the wild olive branches, can be grafted. However, if we would be grafted into Him, we also must be cut. Then we are joined to Him at the very place where both He and we have been cut. In a sense, the two cuts embrace each other. Through such an embrace, the grafting is accomplished, and the two trees become one.

Immediately after the process of grafting has been completed, the branch from the wild olive tree begins to grow in oneness with the cultivated olive tree. Furthermore, the cultivated olive tree grows with the branch from the wild olive tree. Both trees grow together as one tree with one life and one living. The life in this tree is a new life in which two natures have been mingled together.

To be baptized is to be grafted into Christ. This baptism involves growth. After a person repents and believes in the Lord Jesus, he grows with Christ first in the likeness of His death and then in the likeness of His resurrection. By the growth which takes place in baptism we get into Christ.

GROWING IN CHRIST

Now that we are in Christ, we are growing in Him. In Colossians 1:28 Paul speaks of presenting every man full-grown in Christ. By warning others and teaching them in all wisdom, Paul helped them to grow. We should do the same thing in the church life today. After a person has been baptized, he needs to be nourished in order to grow to maturity.

CHRIST IN US

Because we are in Christ, Christ is also in us. This fact is also illustrated by grafting. After the branch from a wild olive tree is grafted into a cultivated olive tree, it is part of the cultivated olive tree, and it grows in it. The life juice from the cultivated olive tree enters into the branch from the wild olive tree. In this way, the cultivated olive tree grows in the branch from the wild olive tree. In like manner, since we have been grafted into Christ, He now dwells in us and is growing in us.

A CYCLE BY WHICH WE GROW

In 1:27 Paul says that Christ is in us and in 1:28, that we are in Christ. First we are put into Christ, then Christ is in us. The more we get into Christ, the more He comes into us; and the more He comes into us, the more we get into Him. This becomes a cycle by which we grow in life. When we grow in this way, spontaneously our culture, including philosophy, asceticism, and the elements of the world, fall away.

Baptism is the reality of circumcision in the Old Testament. According to 2:11-12, baptism was our experience of circumcision, a circumcision not made with hands "in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ." Through baptism, our whole being was circumcised. Since we have experienced such a circumcision, we have no need for asceticism. The more Christ grows in us and we grow in Him, the more asceticism and all aspects of culture will fade away. Then instead of living by our culture, we shall live by Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-FOUR

HAVING BEEN ROOTED IN CHRIST TO GROW WITH THE GROWTH OF GOD

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:6, 7, 19; 1:28; Eph. 4:15-16, 13

Because we have been grafted into Christ, we have entered into Him. Our entrance into Christ is related to life and to the growth of life. We do not enter into Christ in the same way that we walk into a room. Walking into a room has nothing to do with either life or growth. However, entering into Christ involves the process of growth. In Romans 6:5 Paul says that "we have grown together with Him in the likeness of His death." Now we are growing with Christ in the likeness of His resurrection.

GRAFTING AND GROWTH

In the foregoing message we pointed out that it is in baptism that we grow together with Christ in the likeness of His death. Baptism is not a lifeless ritual; it is an experience that is very much related to life and growth. When-ever we baptize believers, we should help them realize that in baptism they will grow together with Christ, because they have been grafted into the crucified and resurrected Christ. Christ's crucifixion provided an opening in Him for us to be grafted into Him, and His resurrection ushers us into the process of growth. Now that we have been grafted into Christ, we should grow in Him day by day.

In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul also speaks of growth. In verse 9 he points out that the believers are God's farm. In verse 6 he says, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the growth" (Gk.). This implies that the saints are plants

in God's farm. In the church, God's farm, we are plants growing.

The concept of growing like plants is also found in Romans 11, where Paul uses the illustration of grafting a branch from a wild olive tree into a cultivated olive tree. In the eyes of God, we all are plants, or trees. In Romans 6:5 Paul uses a particular Greek word to indicate growth. It is very difficult to find an English equivalent for this word, which means to grow by being planted or grafted. Both planting and grafting are for growth. A tree is planted in the soil so that it may grow. Likewise, the purpose of grafting is growth. Recently, a brother pointed out a marvelous definition of this Greek word found in *Commentary on Romans* by Frederick Louis Godet. According to Godet (p. 243), the word denotes "the organic union in virtue of which one being shares the life, growth, and phases of existence belonging to another." Through the organic union of two plants, accomplished by grafting, the one plant partakes of the life and characteristics of the other plant. What a wonderful way of growth! Applying this definition to our spiritual experience, we may say that we have been grafted into the "tree" of the all-inclusive, life-giving, processed Triune God, who is the all-inclusive Spirit. Having become one with Him through grafting, we now partake of the life and characteristics of this all-inclusive One, and in this way we grow.

ROOTED IN THE LIVING LAND

In the book of Colossians there are implications that believers are to grow like plants rooted in the soil. In order to understand the Bible, we need to understand both the direct meaning of the words and also the implications. Sometimes the revelation expressed through the implications of a verse is deeper than that conveyed in the direct statements. This is true of Colossians 2:6 and 7. Verse 7 speaks of our "having been rooted" in Christ. This implies that, in God's eyes, we are plants. Those who have been baptized into Christ are plants rooted in Christ.

The phrase "having been rooted and being built up in Him" is related to those who are walking in the preceding verse. We are to walk in Christ, having been rooted and being built up in Him. This means that we are to walk by having been rooted in Christ. If we have not been rooted in Him, we cannot walk in Him. As living plants, we are walking plants. We walk by being rooted in Christ. What wonderful, mysterious plants Christians are! We are plants who both walk and grow.

Some may think that it is not logical to say, on the one hand, that we can be rooted and, on the other hand, that we walk. How can one who has been rooted in Christ also walk in Him? The answer is that the land in which we are rooted is a living land. Since we have been rooted in a living, moving land, we live and move in Him. Hence, it is not actually that we do the walking, but it is the land which moves. Praise the Lord that we are rooted in Christ who is the living land! Because the land moves, we can move also. According to the implication of these verses, it is proper to speak in this way.

We should not think that we are the ones walking in the land. If we try to walk, we shall stumble and fall. Then we may be defeated by Satan and led astray. We should regard ourselves as plants rooted in Christ as our living land. As those who have been rooted in Him, we walk as He moves. This is to walk in Him.

Colossians 2:6 says to walk *in* Him. This adverbial phrase modifies the word walk. It indicates that we cannot walk in Christ unless we have been rooted in Him. Thus, we walk in the living land in which we have been rooted.

As we consider 2:6 and 7, we see that to grow in Christ is to walk in Him. We have pointed out that "having been rooted and being built up in Him" is related to the word walk. This phrase gives us the meaning of walking in Christ. Because we have been rooted in the moving Christ, we walk in Him.

The fact that walking in Christ is a matter of growing is

indicated by the word rooted. Plants are rooted in the soil for the purpose of growth. If a tree is to grow, it must be properly rooted. Without roots, a tree will die, for it has no way to absorb moisture from the soil. A tree is able to grow, however, when it absorbs moisture through its roots.

Although the rooting is for the growing, 2:6 does not speak of growing, but of walking in Christ. However, the implied significance of these terms is that genuine growth consists of our walking in Christ. We do not grow by walking in ourselves; we grow by walking in Christ. We have seen that if we would walk in Him, we must first be rooted in Him as the living land. Then we walk as He moves and acts. Such a walk is genuine growth.

GROWING WITH THE INCREASE OF GOD

My burden in this message is to help the saints see what the genuine growth in life is. Growth is not a matter of becoming refined instead of crude. To grow in life is to grow with the growth of God. It is to grow with the increase of God. True growth is the increase of God, the addition of God. In Himself, God does not need to grow. He is eternal, perfect, and complete. However, there is the need for God to grow in us. How much of the Triune God do you have within you? Do you not need more of the increase, the addition, of God within you? We all need the increase of God. We need to grow with the growth of God; that is, we need God to increase, to grow, in us. I repeat, in Himself God cannot grow and does not need to grow, but it is necessary for God to grow in us.

In order to have genuine growth, we must first be rooted in Christ, our good land. This implies that Christ is our soil, our earth. Otherwise, how could we be rooted in Him? We are plants rooted in Christ as the soil. Therefore, Christ, the processed, all-inclusive Triune God, is our land. Praise the Lord that we have been planted! Having been planted into Christ, we are now rooted in the living Christ who is our good land.

From 1:12 we see that Christ is the portion of the

saints. As we have previously pointed out, the Greek word rendered portion actually means a lot, a tract of land. Christ as our portion is our lot. This means that He is the good land to the saints. After the children of Israel entered into the land of Canaan and took possession of it, they all received their portion, their allotment, of the land. Today our lot is Christ. This lot, this portion, is the soil in which we are rooted.

Christ is the fertile soil in which we, the plants, are growing. This soil is living and moving. Because we have been rooted into Christ as such a living soil, we move when He moves, for we walk in Him. Thus, our walking is not actually ours; it is His. Such a walking in Christ as the good land is also our growing. To grow is to walk in this way. Therefore, when we walk in Christ, we grow in Him.

As a tree grows, it absorbs water and nourishing elements from the soil in which it is rooted. A tree grows by absorbing the riches from the soil. As these riches are absorbed by the tree, they become the increase of the tree. The tree grows with the increase of the riches from the soil. In like manner, we are living plants rooted in Christ as our soil. Christ is moving, and because we are in Him, we walk as He moves. However, those Christians who have no heart to seek the Lord do not walk when Christ moves. They do not cooperate with Him in His moving. But as those who love the Lord and pursue Him, we should always cooperate with Him and say "Amen" whenever He moves. We should be very active and aggressive in Him. Through this experience of walking in Christ we absorb the riches of Christ.

Our walking in Christ is the cooperation we render to Him in His activity. By cooperating with Him in this way, we spontaneously absorb His riches into our being. What we absorb of Christ into us--the element of the riches of Himself as the soil--becomes the increase of God within us. Our land is Christ, and Christ is the embodiment of the Triune God. Therefore, the land is the Triune God. This means that when we absorb the riches of the soil, we

absorb the riches of the Triune God. Actually, we absorb the Triune God Himself. Through this absorption, we take more of God into us. This increase of God within us is what we mean by the growth of God.

We are living plants rooted into the Triune God. Now our roots are absorbing the riches of the Triune God into us. As a result, God is added into our being. This addition of the riches of the soil within us is our growth.

About three years ago, we planted some trees around our house. In these three years, the trees have grown very much. This growth has been the increase of the riches of the soil. By the roots of the trees, the riches from the soil have been brought into the trees and absorbed by them. The trees are continually absorbing the riches of the soil. In this way these riches become the very element for the increase of the trees. In this way the trees grow. This is a picture, an illustration, of the genuine growth in spiritual life. It also shows us the way to grow.

We praise the Lord that after years of wandering without a goal, so many of us are now rooted in Christ. It is a blessing to be rooted in Christ in the church life. Once we have been rooted in the church, we are not easily uprooted. We cannot even uproot ourselves. Some who tried to give up the church life because something had made them unhappy found that their efforts were not successful. They had been rooted, and they could not be up-rooted. Instead of trying to uproot ourselves, we should be subdued by the Lord and allow Him to live in us.

When we realize that we have been rooted in Him, we shall automatically walk in Him. According to 2:6 and 7, the rooting must precede the walking. Having been rooted in Christ, we now walk in Him. We simply remain in Christ, and He does the walking. Thus, His walking becomes our walking.

Spiritual things cannot fully be explained. Only through experience can they be apprehended adequately. From our experience we realize that when Christ moves, we walk in Him. Then the roots embedded in the soil absorb the riches

of the Triune God into our being. Through the addition of God in us, we then grow with the growth of God.

HOLDING THE HEAD

In 2:19 we have the words "holding the Head." What does it mean to hold Christ as the Head? For the Body to hold the Head means that the Body does not allow itself to be separated from the Head. If we truly hold Christ as the Head, we shall not be separated from Him by anything. When we live by our culture instead of by Christ, we separate ourselves from Christ as the Head and are defrauded of our prize, which is the enjoyment of Christ.

Those Christians in Colosse who were embracing Gnosticism and living by it were being severed from the Head. They were being defrauded, deprived, of the enjoyment of Christ. However, if we are rooted in Christ and walk as He moves, we shall spontaneously absorb the riches of Christ into our being and grow with the growth of God. This growth is by holding Christ as the Head.

Colossians 2:19 speaks of the supply and of the Body being knit together. When the Body is supplied and knit together by holding the Head, the Body grows with the growth of God. The phrase "out from Whom" in this verse is important. It indicates that the Body grows out from the Head, for all the supply comes from the Head. In one sense, Christ is the Head; in another sense, He is the soil. As we absorb the riches of the soil, we hold the Head. Likewise, to receive the supply from the Head is to absorb the riches from the soil.

In order to have proper growth as Christians, we need to realize that God has placed us, as living plants, into Christ. Now we should say, "Lord, I want to remain in You and walk whenever You move." By walking in Christ, we absorb the riches of the soil into our being. Then, through the increase of these riches within us, we grow. Absorbing the riches of the soil is equal to holding Christ as the Head.

We grow with the increase from the soil; we also grow as the Body with the supply out from the Head.

NOT ALLOWING CULTURE TO BECOME A SUBSTITUTE FOR CHRIST

In the Epistle to the Colossians, Paul tells us to beware of philosophy, tradition, and the elements of the world. This means that we should beware of culture in every form: racial culture, national culture, and self-made and self-imposed culture. We should not allow culture to become a substitute for Christ. Although there is no need for us to deliberately try to drop our culture, we should stop appreciating it. In the past we treasured our culture, lovingly embracing it. But if we see that culture can be a substitute for Christ, we shall no longer treasure it or appreciate it so highly. Instead, we see that we are living plants rooted in Christ. Since we are rooted in Him, we should not allow anything to replace Him. We should simply walk in Him as the living land and grow by absorbing the riches of the soil into us. In this way the riches from the soil, who is also the Head, will be ministered into us. As a result, all the Body will grow with the growth of the Triune God. Automatically, our culture will be replaced by Christ.

Continually we should simply walk in Christ, not appreciating our culture and not treasuring it. The more we walk in Christ, the more we shall absorb the riches of the soil, the rich supply of the Head. Then, holding the Head, we shall experience the genuine and proper growth in Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-FIVE

THE EXTENSIVE REVELATION OF THE ALL-INCLUSIVE CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Col. 3:11, 15-16

In this message we shall give a general word regarding the extensive revelation of the all-inclusive Christ. Many of us have seen the all-inclusiveness of Christ, but have not seen the extensiveness of Christ. The book of Colossians emphasizes Christ's extensiveness. Paul's purpose in writing this book was to show the extensive revelation of Christ.

Christ is universally extensive. No scientist can tell us the dimensions of the universe. In Ephesians 3 Paul speaks of the dimensions of Christ as the breadth, length, height, and depth. Like the universe, Christ is immeasurable. Such a Christ is our universe. The immeasurable Christ spoken of in Ephesians 3 is not only the all-inclusive Christ; He is also the extensive Christ, the One who is universally extensive.

THE PORTION OF THE SAINTS

In presenting a revelation of the extensiveness of Christ, the book of Colossians uses a number of unique expressions. For example, in 1:12 we see that Christ is the portion of the saints. The Greek word rendered portion means an allotment. After the children of Israel entered into the good land, the land became their lot, their portion. The good land flowing with milk and honey was an all-inclusive type of Christ. As our good land, Christ is our portion, the portion of the saints.

This portion is also the image of the invisible God (1:15). In 2 Corinthians 4:4 Paul uses the term "the image

of God"; however, in that verse he does not say that Christ is the image of the invisible God. According to 1:15, the invisible God has a visible image.

In verse 15 the term "Firstborn of all creation" stands in apposition to "image of the invisible God." That there is no conjunction connecting these terms indicates that these terms are synonymous. The image of the invisible God is the Firstborn of all creation, and the Firstborn of all creation is the image of the invisible God.

THE REALITY OF ALL POSITIVE THINGS

According to the principle in the Bible, the first in a certain category often includes all the other items in that category. The book of Revelation says that Christ is the Alpha and the Omega. This does not mean, however, that Christ is only these two letters and not all the letters in between. Because He is the first letter, He is also all the other letters. The principle is the same with respect to the slaughter of the firstborn in the book of Exodus. The firstborn of the Egyptians represented all the Egyptians. Likewise, when the Bible says that Christ is the Firstborn of all creation, it implies that Christ includes every item of the creation. This concept is confirmed in Colossians 2, where Paul says that such things as eating, drinking, feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths are shadows and that Christ is the body, the substance, of these shadows. Based upon this illustration, we may go on to say that Christ is our clothing, transportation, housing, and everything to us. But this is altogether different from equating every material thing with Christ. That is pantheism. According to the Bible, we can say that Christ is our food, drink, clothing, and dwelling place. But we cannot turn this around and say that our literal food, clothing, and houses are Christ. That would be the grossly heretical doctrine of pantheism. Nevertheless, we have the biblical ground to say that Christ is the reality of every positive thing in the universe: He is the door, the light, the life, the Shepherd, the pasture. All these aspects of Christ are either mentioned or alluded to in the Gospel of John. Therefore,

we can say that Christ is everything to us, the reality of all positive things.

In 1:16 and 17 Paul says, "Because in Him were all things created in the heavens and on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or lordships or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and unto Him. And He is before all things, and all things subsist together in Him." Here we see that all things were created in Christ, through Christ, and unto Christ. Furthermore, all things are now subsisting together in Christ. The One in whom, through whom, and unto whom all things were created and in whom they subsist is the image, the expression, of God. Thus, God is expressed in the creation of all things in Christ.

In 1:18 we see that Christ is not only the Firstborn of all creation, but is also the Firstborn from among the dead. This refers to God's new creation. The old creation came into being by God's creating activity, whereas the new creation came into being through the resurrection of Christ. Christ is the first both of the old creation and of the new creation, which is the church, the Body of Christ. In the church as God's new creation, Christ is everything. According to 3:10 and 11, Christ is in all the members of the new man and is all the members.

THE RECONCILIATION OF ALL THINGS

In 1:19 and 20 Paul continues, "For in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile all things to Him, making peace through the blood of His cross--through Him, whether things on the earth or things in the heavens." The fullness of God was pleased to dwell in Christ and to reconcile all things to Him. Elsewhere in the New Testament we see that reconciliation involves God's chosen people, but here we see the reconciliation of all things to God. All things were created in Christ, through Christ, and unto Christ. But through man's fall, all these things were lost. Therefore, there is the need for all things to be reconciled to God in Christ. Through Christ's

redemption, the reconciliation of all things has taken place.

Notice that verse 20 does not say "all people," but says "all things," referring to all things which, according to verses 16 and 17, were created in Christ and now subsist in Him. Through Christ's redemption, all these things were reconciled to God. These things include not only human beings, but also all the creatures.

When the book of Colossians was written, the Gnostic concept of the intrinsic evil of matter had a strong influence in Colosse. According to this concept, some thought that everything related to the material world was evil. But Paul pointed out that the very things the Gnostics regarded as evil were among those created in Christ. Furthermore, they are included in the things which have been reconciled to God through the death of Christ. All things have been reconciled to God, "whether things on the earth or things in the heavens." What an extensive Redeemer Christ is, and what an extensive reconciliation He has accomplished!

In speaking of reconciliation here, Paul's intention is to emphasize the fact that Christ is the Redeemer not only of mankind, but of all things. Consider the picture of the ark built by Noah. The ark not only saved the eight members of Noah's family, but also saved animals of every kind. In Acts 10 Peter's concept of God's salvation was narrow because of the influence of Judaism. Likewise, our concept of Christ's work of reconciliation has been limited by the influence of traditional teachings. When I was young, I learned that Christ is our Redeemer. But one day I was troubled by these verses in Colossians which speak of the reconciliation of all things. I asked myself if this included the creatures. Yes, Christ's extensive reconciliation includes all such things.

THE HUB OF THE UNIVERSE

In 1:17 Paul says that all things subsist together in Christ. Scientists recognize the fact that there is some kind

of power in the universe which holds everything together. This scientific fact fits Paul's concept of all things subsisting in Christ. Christ is the center that holds everything together, the hub that holds all the spokes. Everything in the universe, living and non-living, subsists in Christ as this hub. If we did not have Christ as the holding center, everything in the universe would collapse. Apparently we exist on this globe, the earth, but actually we are existing in Christ. All things subsist in Him. This is a further aspect of the extensiveness of Christ.

THE EXTENSIVE ONE AS OUR LIFE AND AS ALL IN ALL IN THE CHURCH

Another aspect is found in 2:16 and 17, where Paul says that eating, drinking, feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths are "a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ." Paul's word indicates that Christ is the reality of all positive things. He is our real food, drink, clothing, dwelling place, transportation, sun, moon, and earth. Hence, Paul's simple word in these verses has tremendous implications. It implies the extensiveness of the all-inclusive Christ.

Then in 3:4 Paul goes on to tell us that this extensive Christ is our life. Although Christ is universally extensive, He is nonetheless our life in a specific and particular way. Praise the Lord that the extensive Christ has become our personal life! Universally, He is extensive. But in our personal experience, He is our life.

Furthermore, in 3:10 and 11 we see that in the church, the new man as God's new creation, the extensive Christ is all and in all. He is all the members of the new man, and He is in all the members. With 3:11 as our basis, we can say that Christ is all of us. What an extensive, all-inclusive Christ is revealed in the book of Colossians!

THE EXTENSIVE ONE VERSUS CULTURE

In the various books of the New Testament, Christ is revealed for definite purposes. In 1 Corinthians the revelation of Christ is to deal with the problems in the

church, problems which included fornication and divisiveness. In the book of Galatians Christ is revealed in contrast to Judaism with the law. Because the Galatians had been distracted to the law and circumcision, Paul showed them that Christ replaces the law, that God's Son is versus man's religion. Now in the book of Colossians Christ is revealed as the extensive, all-inclusive One because the saints had been carried away with a cultural blend of Jewish religion and Greek philosophy. This mixture had become very prevailing in Asia Minor and had even invaded the church life and pervaded it. Thus, the revelation of the all-inclusive, extensive Christ is given in order to deal with the problem of culture.

Colossians 3:11, 1 Corinthians 12:13, and Galatians 3:28 are parallel verses. But Colossians 3:11 specifically mentions the circumcision, the uncircumcision, the barbarian, and the Scythian. The terms circumcision and uncircumcision are related to religion, whereas barbarian and Scythian are related to culture. In ancient times those who were uncultured were regarded as barbarians. The Scythians were the most savage of the barbarians. Colossians 3:11 indicates that the purpose of the extensive revelation of Christ in this book is to deal not with sin or with the law, but with culture.

CULTURE REPLACING THE EXTENSIVE CHRIST

God's intention is that we as His chosen people become saturated, permeated, filled, and clothed with Christ so that we may live Christ. God wants Christ to be our life and our living, to be everything to us in our daily walk. This is God's eternal plan and His present economy. However, culture replaces Christ. In His creation of man, God intended to be everything to man: his life, joy, entertainment, provision, protection. But through the fall man lost God and thereby lost the factor which gave meaning and purpose to his life. Therefore, today people live on earth without any sense of meaning or purpose.

They have lost God as the factor which gives life its meaning and purpose. Having lost God, man turned to culture as a replacement for God in his living. Every aspect of man's culture is a replacement for God. Of course, culture, in actuality, is a substitute for Christ. According to God's ordination, man cannot truly live without Christ. Without Christ, our existence on earth is meaningless and purposeless. Today millions of people are living not by Christ, but by their culture. If they were deprived of their culture, they would have no way to live.

In His salvation God saves us not only from sin, judgment, the lake of fire, the world, and the self; He also saves us from everything which replaces Christ, including our culture. Because culture replaces Christ in a practical way in our daily living, it is hateful in the eyes of God.

THE EXTENSIVE CHRIST REPLACING CULTURE

What kind of Christ can replace our culture? The Christ who replaces culture is the extensive Christ, not the limited Christ known by most Christians. All real Christians believe that Christ is God incarnated as a man, that He died on the cross for our sins, that He was resurrected, that He ascended to the heavens where He is now sitting as the Lord of lords and King of kings, and that He will return to earth and establish His kingdom with the believers as co-kings. Although all this is true, it is a narrow, limited view of Christ. Such a limited Christ will not in actual experience become the replacement for our culture. Can such a Christ become our food, clothing, and dwelling? The Christ who can replace our culture and become everything to us is the all-inclusive, extensive Christ.

Although we had lost God, Christ has brought us back, reconciled us, to Him. Now we once again have God as the factor which gives meaning and purpose to our existence. As we have pointed out repeatedly, the book of Colossians was written in order to reveal the extensive, all-inclusive Christ who deals with our culture and even replaces our culture. There is no need for us to observe ordinances about

eating--we are eating Christ. We do not need to keep certain days, feasts, or new moons--Christ is our new moon, feast, and Sabbath. Since Christ is ever the same and since He is the reality of every day of the week to us, every day is the same. But if we insist on having ordinances concerning food and days, others will judge us with respect to these things. If we care only for the all-inclusive Christ and live according to Him instead of according to culture, no one will have ground to judge us. Christ is the meaning and purpose of life. We all need to see an extensive revelation of such an all-inclusive Christ.

Recently, after hearing a message on how culture replaces Christ in our experience, a brother testified strongly that he wanted to drop all his culture. However, it is not possible for us to do this. If we try to do it, we shall simply develop another type of culture, a culture-dropping culture. But should someone say that there is no need to drop culture, this concept will lead to yet another type of culture. Instead of trying to deal with our culture, we should simply live Christ.

Just as culture has become the replacement for God, so Christ can become the replacement for culture. We have seen that after man lost God through the fall, man's culture replaced God in his life. Christ's redemption not only redeems us from so many negative things, but also redeems us from culture. Instead of trying to be free from our culture, we should simply be reconciled to Christ and take Him as the factor which gives our life meaning and purpose. We should pray, "Lord Jesus, from now on I will take nothing other than You as my goal and purpose. Lord, You only are my standard and the factor which gives my existence meaning and purpose. I don't want to live out anything other than Yourself. Lord, I want to live You and You alone." When we live Christ, we are spontaneously delivered from culture, and automatically the Christ by whom we live replaces culture. This is the revelation in the book of Colossians.

We must admit that even we in the Lord's recovery,

who love the Lord very much and seek Him, actually live much more by our culture than by Christ. For example, certain sisters may refrain from using makeup not because they are living Christ, but because they are conforming to the common practice in the church life. Some may claim that they do not use makeup because of their love for Christ and the church. This may be true. However, to love the Lord Jesus is one thing, and to live Christ is another. We may do many things because we love the Lord and yet, in those very things, we may not actually live Him.

In the church life it is possible to live by certain habits or customs, in other words, by a certain culture developed in the church, instead of by Christ. For example, a certain brother may feel that he should not attend movies. However, what keeps him from going to the movie theater is not that he is living Christ; it is that he is living according to a certain practice common in the church life. We need to have the assurance that our reason for not doing certain things is that we live Christ. We need not have a rule about staying away from movies. We should simply have the experience of living Christ in the church. If we truly live Christ in the church, then when we refrain from doing a certain thing, it will not be because we regard that thing as wrong; it will be because we are living Christ. Our need today is not only to love Him, but also to live Him.

It is common for husbands and wives to exchange words with each other. When a brother's wife expresses a concept different from his, he may begin to argue immediately and refuse to give in. In the early years of my married life, my attitude was to never give in when my wife expressed a concept different from mine. My practice was to take my position as the head and expect my wife to be submissive. Although I did not put this into words outwardly, it was nonetheless my attitude and practice.

Later I learned that, as a leading one in the church and as a minister of the Word, it was not right for me to argue with my wife. Therefore, I tried to suppress my anger and not to argue. Because I loved the Lord, I tried my best not

to quarrel with my wife. However, I was not living by Christ. Instead, I exerted a tremendous amount of self-effort.

SIMPLY LIVING CHRIST

Today I can testify that, through the Lord's grace, I no longer try to suppress myself. I simply live Christ. As Paul said, "To me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). Christ is my culture, my goal, and the meaning and purpose of my human life. In my daily walk all the room is for Christ. For this reason, there is no room for sin, the world, the flesh, or the self. Since my whole being is for Christ, there is also no room for culture. I simply live Christ, and not a limited Christ, but an extensive Christ, the One who fills all and is in all.

Christ descended from the heavens to the earth and then, in the interval between His death and resurrection, He descended into Hades. In resurrection He ascended from Hades to earth and then, in His ascension, from the earth to the heavens. As a result of such a universal traveling, Christ fills all things. Thus, He is the extensive One. As such an extensive One, He is our life, and we may live Him. In the book of Colossians Paul presents such an extensive Christ in order to impress us with the fact that this Christ should replace our culture. Do not try to drop your culture. All your efforts to do so will be in vain. Simply live Christ, and Christ will replace your culture with Himself.

We should not treasure any type of ism, for all isms have to do with culture. Instead of living according to an ism, we should live Christ, a living Person, who is the portion of the saints, the image of the invisible God, the First-born of both the old creation and the new creation, the One in whom and unto whom all things were created, and the One who is our life in the new man. Such an extensive Christ is the replacement for our culture.

In the book of Colossians, Paul's concern is not mainly with sin, the world, or even with the self. His concern is

with culture, which becomes the factor that replaces God to give meaning and purpose to life. Now that Christ has reconciled us to Himself, we should live Him and allow Him to replace every aspect of our culture. Therefore, in Colossians we see the revelation of the extensive Christ. We need to take this Christ as the meaning, purpose, and goal of our life; we need to live by Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-SIX

WALK IN CHRIST, HAVING BEEN ROOTED AND BEING BUILT UP IN HIM

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:6-8, 16-17

The central and underlying thought of the book of Colossians is that, according to God's ordination, Christ should replace all the elements and factors of our natural human life with Himself. These elements and factors may be summed up in one word--culture. Our human living is constituted of the various aspects of our culture, which is composed of a number of factors and elements. We have seen that the book of Colossians deals with these factors, elements, components, constituents, of our human living. This book reveals the extensive Christ who is the replacement for all these elements in our human living.

PHILOSOPHY, TRADITION, AND THE ELEMENTS OF THE WORLD

In 2:8 Paul says, "Beware that no one carries you off as spoil through his philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ." Philosophy is a primary factor in culture. Furthermore, culture cannot exist without tradition. The terms culture and tradition are almost synonymous. The elements of the world spoken of in 2:8 are the elementary principles, the elementary teachings. Philosophy, tradition, and the elements of the world are all components of culture. All these things are versus Christ. This verse indicates that Christ has come to replace philosophy, tradition, and the elements of the world. Hence, this verse presents a vivid contrast between

Christ and philosophy, tradition, and the elements of the world. If a person does not have Christ, he will surely have these three cultural elements. But once we receive Christ, these things should be replaced by Christ.

CHRIST AND THE SHADOWS, ORDINANCES, AND CULTURAL DISTINCTIONS

In 2:16 and 17 Paul goes on to say, "Let no one therefore judge you in eating and in drinking or in respect of a feast or of a new moon or of Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ." In verse 16 Paul mentions four items as illustrations: eating and drinking, feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths. These items represent everything in our human living. In particular, the items mentioned are all related to Judaism, with its regulations about eating and drinking, about the observing of days and new moons, and about the Sabbaths. Hence, verse 16 speaks of various observances which were components of Jewish life. But as Paul says in the following verse, all these things "are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ." Therefore, in these verses we have another contrast, the contrast between the shadows and Christ.

In verses 20 and 21 Paul continues, "If you died with Christ from the elements of the world, why as living in the world do you subject yourself to ordinances: do not handle, do not taste, do not touch." In Romans Paul says that in Christ we are dead to sin, whereas here in Colossians he says that we have died with Christ from the elements of the world, that is, from the factors of our natural human life. Here Paul is telling us that we have died with Christ from our culture. Then he goes on to ask, since this is the case, why we still subject ourselves to ordinances about handling, tasting, and touching. In these verses we have yet another contrast--the contrast between the Christ with whom we have died and the ordinances, which are components of our culture.

In 3:10 Paul speaks of the new man and then in verse 11, referring to the new man, he says, "Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all and in all." Here we have the contrast once again between culture and Christ. Paul's use of the terms barbarian and Scythian indicates that this verse is dealing with the different cultural distinctions. Christ is versus all such distinctions.

CHRIST REPLACING CULTURE

Christ has come in to replace all the aspects of culture mentioned in 2:8, 16-17, 20-21; and 3:11. Christ must come into our human living to replace philosophy, tradition, and the elements of the world. He must replace eating, drinking, feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths. He must replace the ordinances and all the cultural distinctions. When all these things have been fully replaced by Christ, only Christ will remain. This clearly reveals that in Colossians Christ is the replacement for all cultural factors and elements. He must come into our living to replace everything with Himself. This is the divine revelation in the holy Word. Oh, may our eyes be opened to see that every factor, element, and aspect of our natural human life is versus Christ. In God's economy the extensive Christ must come in to replace all these elements, factors, and aspects. Eventually, for eternity, only Christ will remain.

Christ is the basic factor in the composition of the Bible. We can truly say, therefore, that the Bible is written with Christ. The letters of the alphabet are symbols of Christ. For this reason in the Bible Christ says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega" (Rev. 22:13). If He is the first letter and the last, He must also be all the other letters. In our human living, Christ should be the entire alphabet. If He is our alphabet, He will automatically become every word, sentence, paragraph, and chapter, and ultimately, the whole book. God's economy is that our entire human living be written, composed, with Christ as the unique factor. For

this reason, the book of Colossians unfolds the extensive Christ, the Christ who comes in to fill every part of our living. Therefore, the dictionary of our Christian life should have just one word: Christ. But at the bottom of the page there should be a small footnote saying, "and the church." This is the revelation in the book of Colossians.

TWO CONDITIONS

With this revelation as our basis, we come to the crucial matter of walking in Christ (2:6). Verses 6 and 7 do not say "walk in Him, and be rooted and be built up in Him." On the contrary, these verses say "walk in Him, having been rooted and being built up in Him." "Having been rooted" and "being built up" are, respectively, perfect and present participles which describe how we should walk. We can walk in Christ because we have been rooted in Him and because we are being built up in Him. These two conditions must be fulfilled if we are to walk in Christ. Our walk in Christ is based on two conditions: that we have been rooted in Him and that we are being built up in Him.

The wording of these two verses is simple, however, we may take these verses for granted and not truly understand them. In these verses there are three basic words: walk, rooted, and built.

In Colossians Paul covers the matters of the objective revelation of what Christ is and the subjective ministry by which Christ is dispensed into the believers. The objective revelation of Christ and the subjective ministry of Christ together give us the practical experience of Christ. In this message and in the messages to follow we are particularly concerned with the practical experience of Christ. The objective revelation of the Bible unfolds the extensive and all-inclusive Christ, and the subjective ministry dispenses this very Christ into us to become the replacement for every element of our natural human living. If we see this, we shall then be able to understand what it means to walk in Christ.

WALKING IN SOMETHING OTHER THAN CHRIST

The Greek word for walk means to live, act, move, and have our being. It implies everything in our daily living. To walk in Christ is to live, move, act, and have our being in Christ. We should not live, walk, move, act, or have our being in anything other than Christ. For example, when a sister goes shopping, she should do so in Christ. However, not many sisters go shopping in Christ. Instead, they may decide apart from Christ to go shopping or to purchase certain items. Hence, in the matter of shopping, many sisters do not live and move in Christ. The same may be true of brothers when they get a haircut. In the practical matter of getting a haircut, the brothers may not live and move in Christ.

A certain brother may testify that he loves the Lord and the church and that he is wholly for the Lord's recovery. However, in many matters he may not behave in Christ, but may behave in his disposition, preference, or choice. For example, a brother may pretend that, as the head of his family, he has everything in order. He may try to give the impression that he exercises his kingship at home. Whenever a brother performs in such a way, he is not walking in Christ. This is an illustration of the fact that in many ways we in the Local churches do not actually walk in Christ, although we surely love the Lord and His recovery.

To walk in Christ means not to have any substitute for Christ. Because of man's fall, culture replaces God in man's life. Man was made for God and needs God to be his life, his enjoyment, and everything to him. But because man lost God, he invented culture as a substitute for God. Now in His economy God has ordained that Christ, His Son, should accomplish redemption, bring man back to God, and then replace all the substitutes with Himself. We have seen that the various factors and elements of our human life are all replacements for Christ. But the factors and elements that have become substitutes for God must now be replaced by Christ. In order for this to be our experience, we need to walk in Christ.

In the matter of shopping we should simply live Christ and not care for anything other than Christ. Do not consider what items are on sale or how much you have in your checking account. Instead, simply live Christ and care for Christ. If a brother lives in oneness with the Lord, he will walk in Christ whenever he gets a haircut. Spontaneously he will know how his hair should be cut. Christ is not only the sphere, the realm, in which we walk, but He is also every factor and element of our human life. To have Christ in this way in our experience is to walk in Him.

I appreciate the fact that so many brothers love Christ and the church and are absolute for the Lord's recovery. Nevertheless, instead of walking in Christ, they walk in their dignity. They may condemn pride, but they treasure their dignity. A brother who is a leading one in the church life may enjoy acting dignified. Even young brothers, those recently married, may behave according to their own sense of dignity instead of walking in Christ. With their wives, they may exercise themselves to maintain their dignity as husbands. They may become very unhappy should their wives do anything to dishonor their dignity. They may regard such behavior as an insult to their headship and a lack of respect for their dignity. Their attitude is that God has ordained them to be the head over their wives and that their wives should respect them and honor them. Therefore, instead of walking in Christ, they walk in their dignity.

Instead of walking in Christ, others walk according to the tide of their emotions. When the tide is low, they are cold, silent, and unconcerned for the needs of others. But when the tide is high, they become active and very talkative. They talk according to their mood, not according to Christ. Many saints walk in their moods instead of in Christ. If they feel happy, they are willing to help others. But if they do not feel happy, they become withdrawn and disinterested, unconcerned about those around them. This indicates that, although these saints may love Christ and the church, they do not walk in Christ.

According to the extensive revelation of Christ in the book of Colossians, we should not walk in anything other than Christ. This means we should not walk in philosophy, in tradition, or in the elements of the world. Neither should we walk in certain observances or ordinances.

It is also easy to walk in our habits instead of in Christ. By nature, we all live, walk, and have our being in our habit, not in Christ. During times of prayer, we may pray ourselves into the spirit and, at those times, have our being in Christ. But as soon as prayer is ended, we turn back to living and walking in our habit. Thus, instead of walking in Christ, we walk in our culture.

How much have you walked in Christ today? How much of your talk, actions, and attitudes have been in something other than Christ? We must admit that instead of walking in Christ, we walk in many other factors or elements of our living that are replacements for Christ. But according to the book of Colossians, we should walk in the extensive Christ, in the Christ who is universally vast and who is everything to us. We do not need philosophy--Christ is our philosophy. We do not need tradition--Christ is the best heritage. We do not need the elementary principles--Christ is every principle to us. What we need to do is to take Christ as everything and walk in Him.

We have to admit that even in the local churches nearly all of us walk in something other than Christ. We love the Lord and His recovery, but we live, walk, and have our being in things that are not Christ Himself. Because a certain brother walks in his timidity, not in Christ, he is not willing to speak the truth to others frankly in love. However, this illustration should not be taken to mean that we should walk in boldness instead of timidity. The point is that we should walk in Christ. Very few saints among us walk in things that are sinful. But a great many walk in things that are good, moral, and ethical. They walk according to their own manner of life. If we truly walk in Christ, there will be times when we shall boldly rebuke others. According to Galatians 2, Paul openly rebuked

Peter when Peter withdrew from eating with the Gentiles. The point here is not that we should go around rebuking others. It is that all our behavior should be in Christ.

We need to live and act in Christ. The young people should not say that they cannot help being young, and the old ones should not say that they cannot keep from being old. Whether we are young or old, we all must live and act in Christ. In the church there are no young ones or old ones, no timid ones or bold ones. There is only Christ, who is all the members of the new man and in all the members. Therefore, we all should walk in Christ and not live according to any element of culture. I repeat, not only should Christ be our sphere, the extensive realm in which we walk; He should also become all the elements and factors of our daily living.

We admit that it is not easy to walk in Christ. After charging us to walk in Christ, Paul immediately adds the words, "having been rooted and being built up in Him." If we would walk in Christ, we must fulfill the conditions of having been rooted in Him and being built up in Him. Our basis for walking in Christ is that we have been rooted in Christ. On the one hand, we have already been rooted in Christ; on the other hand, we are in the process of being built up in Him. The rooting, which has been accomplished, is one condition for walking in Christ. Being built up, which is taking place, is another condition. For being rooted, Paul uses the illustration of plants rooted deeply in the soil. As an illustration of our being built up in Christ, Paul uses the example of stones.

AN ORGANIC PROCESS

No matter how old or young we may be, we all have been deeply rooted in our culture with the many factors and elements which make up our daily living. Just as we have been rooted in our culture, we should now be rooted in Christ. Being rooted is a matter of life. For a plant to be rooted in the soil involves an organic process. Apart from such a process, no plant can become rooted. The deeper a

plant's roots extend into the earth, the more far-reaching is the organic process. As a plant's root system develops, the life of the plant spreads and develops. To be rooted in Christ is to experience such a development, spreading, and activity of life.

Using once again the illustration of grafting, we may say that we, branches from a wild olive tree, have been grafted into Christ as the cultivated olive tree. Grafting also involves the process of organic growth. Without such a process, the two trees cannot grow together. Through grafting, the trees are knit together and their lives are mingled. This mingling produces organic growth. In this growth the grafted branch, the branch from the wild olive tree, becomes deeply rooted in the cultivated olive tree.

The principle is the same with both grafting and planting. In order to transplant a tree successfully, there must be room in the soil for the tree's roots to grow and develop. If the roots are watered and have room to grow, they will spread deep into the earth. The principle is the same in our relationship with Christ. On the one hand, we have been grafted into Christ; on the other hand, we have been planted into Christ, even transplanted into Him. Whether we speak from the standpoint of grafting or planting, there is the need for growth that is inward and downward. The downward growth of the roots may take place very slowly, whereas the upward growth may occur quickly. Some saints grow like mushrooms. A great deal appears above the earth. However, they lack the downward growth of the roots beneath the soil.

ROOTED IN CHRIST TO WALK IN CHRIST

If we have been rooted in Christ, we shall spontaneously walk in Christ. For example, if a sister becomes deeply rooted in Christ, eventually the way she does her shopping will be affected. But if a sister undergoes a sudden change in her way of shopping, I would not have much confidence in that change. It may indicate a mush-rooming type of growth, not the growth which comes from

being deeply rooted in Christ and walking in Him. Remember, being rooted in Christ is the condition for walking in Him.

If the saints contact the Lord and spend time in the Word with much prayer, they will become deeply rooted in Christ. If a sister does this for a period of time, her shopping will be done in Christ, not in something other than Christ. I do not have any confidence in a change of behavior which results from making a decision after hearing a message. My confidence is in what issues from becoming deeply rooted in Christ through contacting the Lord and spending time in the Word with much prayer. When we are rooted in Christ, there is no need for us to make up our minds about certain things, for spontaneously we shall walk in Him.

In a previous message we raised the question of how plants can walk. Colossians 2:7 speaks of being rooted. This refers to plants. But 2:6 speaks of walking. This refers to persons. Then are we considered plants or persons? The answer is that for our daily living, we are persons, but for our being rooted in Christ, we are plants. In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul says that we are God's farm, God's husbandry (v. 9, Gk.). Furthermore, Paul says that he planted and Apollos watered, but God gives the growth (v. 6, Gk.). Thus, in the matter of growth, we are like plants. But in our daily walk we, of course, are not like plants; we are people. We may say that we are people-plants: people in walking and plants in being rooted in Christ.

The only way to become deeply rooted in Christ as the soil is to contact Him as the soil and to daily absorb the water in the Word. The more we contact the soil and absorb the water, the more we shall grow. First we grow downward, then upward. After we have grown downward for a period of time, we shall automatically cease to walk in things other than Christ. Instead, because we have been deeply rooted in Christ, we shall live, walk, act, and have our being in Christ.

As we walk in Christ, we are built up in Him. We have

already been rooted in our culture and built up in it. Even children are deeply rooted in their culture. But as they walk in their culture, something of this culture is built up within them. Everyone is built up in certain things. On the one hand, we are rooted in our culture; on the other hand, we are built up in certain aspects of our culture.

BUILDING UP THE EXPRESSION OF CHRIST

Paul's concept is that Christ, the all-inclusive and extensive One, must become the replacement for every factor and element in our human living. Therefore, we must walk in Christ. But walking in Him requires that we be rooted in Him. Just as we have been rooted in culture, we must now become rooted in Christ. Having been rooted in Him, we shall spontaneously walk in Him. While we walk in Him, the expression of Christ will be built up in us. Eventually, this expression will become the Body, the corporate church life, the habitation of God in spirit on earth today. If we claim to be walking in Christ but lack the expression of Christ, our claim is false. Walking in Christ requires that we be in the process of being built up in Christ. This means that while we are walking in Him, the expression of Christ must be built up in us.

According to our experience, we know that when we contact the Lord and daily get into the Word with much prayer, we fulfill the condition of walking in Christ, for we are rooted in Him. Then as we walk in Him, daily the expression of Christ is built up in us. This makes it possible for others to see Christ lived out of us. Eventually this living out of Christ will produce the corporate expression of Christ, the church life. This is the proper way to have the Christian life.

Our living should not be according to anything other than Christ. The most subtle substitutes of Christ are the various elements of our culture. Now Christ must come in to replace all these substitutes with Himself. If this is our experience, we shall not have anything other than Christ in our daily living. We shall live, move, act, and have our

being in Christ. For this, there are two conditions: being rooted in Christ and being built up in Christ to become the expression of Christ. The expression of Christ, Christ lived out of us, will eventually become corporate. This is the church as the Body and the new man. When the church becomes in reality such a new man, that will be the time for Christ to come back. May the Lord have mercy on us and grant us His grace that we may live Him in the church in this way.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-SEVEN

ROOTED AND BUILT UP IN CHRIST WITH THE PROCESSED GOD

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:2, 7, 19; 4:2; Eph. 4:13

We have pointed out that the book of Colossians first gives us an objective revelation of the extensive and all-inclusive Christ. Then it presents the subjective ministry, the stewardship, by which the all-inclusive Christ is dispensed into us. Finally, it tells us of the practical experience of the Christ who has been ministered into us. Therefore, in Colossians we have the objective revelation, the subjective ministry, and the practical experience.

THE ALL-INCLUSIVE ONE IN OUR SPIRIT

We who experience Christ have a close, deep, intimate, and subjective relationship with Him. But we need to ask three questions: Who is Christ? What is Christ? Where is Christ? Because Christ is so much, it is difficult to say adequately who He is and what He is. To begin with, Christ is the very God. According to Colossians, He is the Firstborn of all creation. The Bible indicates that Christ is the reality of many different kinds of trees: the fig tree, the olive tree, the vine tree, and the cedar tree. Christ is also the real ox, lamb, lion, eagle, and dove. Furthermore, Christ is our real food, water, milk, honey, air, sunshine, rain, dew, and snow. Eventually, Christ becomes our all-inclusive land, a land in which we have mountains, hills, valleys, fountains, brooks, streams, stones, iron, and brass. Because Christ is such an all-inclusive One, when He was on earth He could use various objects in nature as illustrations of Himself.

Concerning where Christ is, we need to realize that, although He is omnipresent and, in particular, is at the right hand of God in the third heaven, He dwells in us (1:27). However, it is not easy to realize that Christ is actually in us. We are complicated people, with many chambers, many inward parts. Proverbs 20:27 speaks of man's inward parts, his inner chambers. These chambers include the mind, emotion, will, heart, soul, inner man, and hidden man. First Peter 3:4 speaks of the hidden man, and Ephesians 3:16, of the inner man. We may believe that Christ is in us, but in what chamber of our being is He to be found? Second Timothy 4:22 indicates that the Lord is in our spirit.

Now we must go on to ask what the spirit is and how it differs from the heart and the soul. The Chinese version uses the strange term "heart-spirit." However, there is no such thing within us as the "heart-spirit." How regrettable that the translators of the Chinese version used such a term in speaking of the human spirit! Although the translators were scholars, they were mistaken in this point. Others claim that the spirit and the soul are the same. On the one hand, the human spirit is not the heart; on the other hand, it is not the soul. The mind, emotion, will, soul, and heart are included among man's inward parts, but not one of them is the spirit. The human spirit is in the center of man's inward parts. For Christ to be in our spirit means that He is in the center of our being, in its very depths.

The spirit, where Christ dwells in the believer, is different from the body and from the soul. The Bible reveals that man is tripartite, composed of spirit, soul, and body. Since the spirit is different from the soul, we must be very definite in speaking of where Christ is within us. We need to say, according to the Bible, that Christ is in our spirit. In the words of 1 Corinthians 6:17, we are one spirit with the Lord. The Lord is the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), who is one with our spirit. Therefore, these two spirits are one. The Lord not only indwells our spirit, but

He has even made Himself one with our spirit. In this way, the two spirits--the life-giving Spirit and our spirit--become one spirit. How close and intimate is our relationship with the Lord! He and we, we and He, are one spirit. What relationship could be closer and more intimate than this? Surely such a relationship is the ultimate in closeness and intimacy. If we would experience Christ adequately, we need to realize that we have such an intimate relationship with Him.

LIVING IN ONE SPIRIT WITH THE LORD

However, to realize this is one thing, and to practice it is another thing. We may know that we are one spirit with the Lord, but in our daily living we may not practice living in one spirit with Him. Instead, we may confine the Lord to our spirit and live according to our thought, feeling, and choice. We may insist on the freedom to choose whatever we like, to think our own thoughts, and to allow our affection to run its own course. We may not want to be bothered by the Lord in our spirit. For this reason, in our actual daily living, we may limit Him to our spirit. We may even go so far as to deny our spirit, living as if we had no spirit, but had only a body and a soul. For example, if we want to be angry or talkative, we may do so according to our preference. We simply do not practice living in one spirit with the Lord. When we pray-read, we may praise the Lord that we are one spirit with Him. But in so many practical matters we may utterly neglect the Lord in our spirit.

THE MYSTERY OF GOD

The first part of 2:7 says, "Having been rooted and being built up in Him." The antecedent of the pronoun Him is Christ in the preceding verse. According to 2:2, this Christ is the mystery of God. This brings us to another question: what is the mystery of God? Since Christ is the mystery of God, to be rooted in Christ is to be rooted in the mystery of God. All Christians are familiar with the name Christ, but not many understand the term the mystery of

God. God is a mystery. Furthermore, God has a history, a story. What is the history of God, the story of God? God is infinite and eternal, without beginning or ending. According to His good pleasure, He created the heavens and the earth and all the billions of items in the universe. Therefore, God accomplished the work of creation. Christ is the story of God, the history of God. This means that Christ is not only God Himself, but is also God's history. God's history refers to the process through which He has passed so that He may come into man and that man may be brought into Him.

Genesis 1:1 tells us that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. But Matthew 28:19 speaks of baptizing believers into the name of the Father, the Son, and Spirit. We know that the Father, Son, and Spirit are the God spoken of in Genesis 1:1. However, the difference is that at the time of Genesis 1:1, God had not yet been processed through incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. The word in Matthew 28:19 was spoken by the Lord after He had entered into resurrection, having passed through incarnation, human living, and crucifixion. After His resurrection, He charged His disciples to disciple the nations and to baptize them not into the name of the Creator, whom we may call the unprocessed God, but to baptize them into the name of the Father, the Son, and Spirit. This is to baptize the believers into the processed God. The processed God is God available to His chosen people, and His people can be baptized into Him. Although it is not possible to baptize believers into God as He is revealed in Genesis 1:1, we can baptize them into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit; that is, we can baptize them into the processed Triune God.

Today the processed Triune God is the Spirit. At the time of John 7:39, the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified. He had not yet passed through death and entered into resurrection. Now that Christ has passed through death and has entered into resurrection,

the Spirit is here. This Spirit is Christ, and Christ is the story of God, the mystery of God. As the story of God, Christ is the processed God, God processed to become the all-inclusive Spirit, who now dwells in our spirit and is one with our spirit.

ABSORBING THE RICHES OF CHRIST

The Christ in whom we have been rooted is this all-inclusive Spirit. This means that in our spirit we have the processed Triune God as our source. This source is a fountain springing up within us. The all-inclusive Spirit who indwells us contains the elements of divinity, humanity, incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection. We have been rooted in Him, in this marvelous source, who is the processed Triune God as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit.

A tree rooted in the soil absorbs into itself all the rich elements from the soil. As these elements are absorbed into the tree, they become nourishment to the tree. The tree then increases, grows, with these elements. Apart from absorbing the riches from the soil, it would not be possible for the tree to grow. The more deeply a tree is rooted into the earth, the more it absorbs the rich nourishment from the soil. The principle is the same with our growth in Christ. We have been deeply rooted into Christ as the soil, the all-inclusive, life-giving, processed Triune God who dwells in our spirit. Now we are absorbing the riches from Christ as the soil into our being. As a result, we are being built up with what we have absorbed of the riches of Christ. What we absorb into us becomes the material with which we are built up.

INCREASING IN SPIRITUAL STATURE

Paul's use of the words "being built up" in 2:7 do not refer in a direct way to the building up of the Body of Christ. Rather, this expression denotes an increase in our spiritual stature, which can be compared to a person's increase in stature as he grows physically. The only way a

child can grow physically is by assimilating nourishing food. In the same way, we grow spiritually by assimilating the rich nourishment of Christ. This is what it means to be built up in Christ, as mentioned in 2:7. First Paul tells us that we have been rooted in Christ. Then he goes on to say that we are being built up in Christ. No tree can grow up without first being rooted. The growing up of the tree is also the building up of the tree.

If we are lacking in spiritual stature, it is of no avail to speak of the building up of the Body. In Ephesians 4:13 Paul says, "Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The Body of Christ has a stature, and this stature has a full measure. We all need to grow until we arrive at the full measure of the stature of the Body of Christ. For us to be built up does not first mean that we are built up as the church, the Body. It means that we are built up in the Lord and experience an increase of stature. Hence, in Colossians 2:7 to be built up actually means to grow up. First we are rooted into Christ as the all-inclusive Spirit, and then we grow up in Him. We build ourselves up by growing up. Our being built up depends on our assimilating into our being the riches of Christ as the soil. Having assimilated these riches into us, we shall grow and be built up. When we are fully grown, we shall be built up. Therefore, to be built up simply means to grow up. In order to grow, we need nourishment. Our growth depends on how much nourishment we assimilate into us by being rooted in Christ. Because we are rooted in Him, we absorb into us the riches of the all-inclusive Spirit. Then we grow with the nourishment we derive from these riches.

GROWING BY ABSORBING THE RICHES FROM THE HEAD

According to 2:19, by holding the Head we grow with the growth of God. Out from the Head, the Body grows with the growth of God. God here is the processed Triune

God, as in Matthew 28:19. Out from the processed Triune God as our source, the Body grows by absorbing the riches from the Head. The Body does not grow with biblical knowledge, but grows with the growth of God. In Himself, God is infinite, perfect, and complete. Therefore, in Himself God cannot grow. But in us God can grow and He needs to grow. We grow by the growth of God in us. Because we have so little of the Triune God within us, we need the addition of God for our spiritual growth. We grow with what we absorb from the Head.

The vital and crucial point is that we grow by absorbing the riches of Christ. In order to absorb His riches, we must be rooted into Him as the all-inclusive Spirit. Remember that this Spirit dwells in our spirit. The soil is not our mind, emotion, or will; it is the all-inclusive, processed Triune God dwelling in our spirit. The source of the riches we need for our growth is the processed Triune God in our spirit. Just as we go to a faucet to get water, so we must turn to our spirit to get the riches of the Triune God.

EXERCISING THE SPIRIT

In order to become more deeply rooted into the processed Triune God, we need to exercise our spirit, not our mind, emotion, or will. However, our environment does not favor the exercise of the spirit. On the contrary, everything in our environment works to keep us away from the spirit. For example, throughout most of the Lord's Day, a brother's wife may be very pleasant to him. But just before the Lord's table meeting, she may speak an unkind word to him. In his reaction to her unkindness, he is immediately drawn away from the spirit. In the midst of such a situation, the brother needs to exercise his spirit and call on the name of the Lord Jesus. By this exercise of the spirit, he will become more deeply rooted into Christ as the soil and automatically absorb more of the riches of the all-inclusive Spirit. This will produce more growth.

We need to continually exercise our spirit. This is the

reason that toward the end of the book of Colossians, Paul charges us to persevere in prayer (4:2). However, if, instead of exercising our spirit, we exercise our mind, emotion, and will, Satan will keep us from enjoying the all-inclusive Spirit in our spirit. Satan, the subtle, evil one, uses the environment to keep us out of the spirit. Thus, we need to exercise our spirit continually by calling on the name of the Lord in order to become more deeply rooted into the all-inclusive Spirit. Then we shall absorb the riches of Christ, grow in Christ, and spontaneously be built up in Christ. As a result, we shall walk in Him. If we understand this, we shall know what it means to walk in Christ by absorbing His riches and by being built up with what we have absorbed. This is the practical experience of Christ we all need.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-EIGHT

THE RECEIVING OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Col 2:1-6; John 1:1-4, 11-18

In 2:6 Paul says, "As therefore you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in Him." Walking in Christ is based on receiving Christ. Walking in Him comes out of receiving Him.

Many Christians think that to receive Christ is simply to believe in Him. Receiving Christ, however, is not as simple as this. In order to understand what is the proper, genuine, and adequate receiving of Christ, we need to know the Christ whom we are to receive. According to our concept and according to traditional doctrine, Christ is rather simple. Many believers only realize that Christ, the Son of God, is the Savior who loved us and died for us. If we believe in Christ, we are saved. However, the receiving of Christ in a book such as Colossians involves a great deal more than this. We have pointed out that Colossians affords us an extensive revelation of the all-inclusive Christ. This Christ is more vast than the whole universe. According to Ephesians 3, Christ is the breadth, length, height, and depth. The Christ whom we have received is immeasurable. He is universally vast.

Although we have received Christ, our receiving of Him goes beyond an initial receiving of Him once for all. On the contrary, we shall continue to receive Him eternally. Receiving Christ can be compared to breathing. Just as breathing is a continual process, so our receiving of Christ should take place continually. Regrettably, however, a great many Christians have had only the initial receiving of Christ. They do not receive Him continuously. Many believers can tell you that at a certain time in the past

they received Christ. But they have not continued to receive Him. If we do not receive Christ continually, we shall not enjoy the full benefit of the Christ we have received initially. Many Christians have not continued to receive Christ. Hence, we must realize that our receiving of Him must be consistent and continual.

THE MYSTERY OF GOD

The Christ we have received according to 2:1-6 is the mystery of God spoken of in 2:2. The fact that Christ is the mystery of God indicates that He is not simple. Rather, he is immeasurable and mysterious. To be sure, God is not simple. He is unlimited, infinite, eternal. How, then, could Christ, the mystery of God, be simple? As the mystery of God, Christ is the immeasurable, infinite, and eternal God.

Although God is eternal, He also has a history. Of course, to say that God has a history is to speak in human terms for our understanding. In the beginning, in eternity past, God had a good pleasure, the desire of His heart. The more living a person is, the greater is his desire for pleasure. Thus, as the most living One, God has the greatest desire. God is living, aggressive, and energetic. As such a living One, He has a good pleasure. Based upon this good pleasure, which is the desire of His heart, God made a plan. The biblical term for this plan is purpose. God is purposeful; He has an eternal purpose based on His good pleasure. This purpose is to have a group of living beings to be His corporate expression.

MAN CREATED WITH A RECEIVER

In order for such a group of beings to come into existence, God created the heavens, the earth, and billions of items. The center of God's creation is man, who was created with a receiver, the human spirit. Just as a radio receiver has the capacity to receive radio waves, so our spirit has the capacity to receive God. Suppose a person from a primitive part of the world is shown a transistor radio for the first time and is told that it can give forth sounds transmitted through the air. If the radio is properly

tuned, that person would be amazed at the sounds. But if the receiver does not function, he may argue that there are in fact no radio waves in the air. A transistor radio may have a beautiful casing, but if the receiver does not work, the radio is useless. Millions of people today are like broken transistor radios. Outwardly they appear very good, but their spirit has been damaged. The receiver within them does not function properly. This is the reason that atheists proclaim there is no God. Because their receiver does not function to substantiate God, they say God does not exist. If a broken radio receiver is repaired, the radio will work once again. In like manner, when our damaged receiver, our human spirit, is regenerated, it can function to substantiate God.

According to Zechariah 12:1, God stretched forth the heavens, laid the foundation of the earth, and formed the spirit of man within him. In this verse the spirit of man is ranked with the heavens and the earth. This shows the crucial significance of the human spirit. The spirit of man was created purposely and specifically to be a receiver to take God in. In order for man to exist with a spirit to receive God, there was the need of the earth and of the heavens. The heavens are for the earth, the earth is for man, and man, with his spirit, his receiver, is for God. Through His work of creation, God produced the environment necessary for the fulfillment of His purpose.

INCARNATION, CRUCIFIXION, AND RESURRECTION

Before God could be received by man, He had to first become a man. Therefore, creation was followed by incarnation. In the process of incarnation, God became a man, born of the virgin Mary in a very humble way. According to Isaiah 9:6, the child born to us was the mighty God. This means that the infant born in that manger in Bethlehem was the mighty God Himself. As a child, He grew up in Nazareth, in the despised region of Galilee. He did not live in the mansion of a rich man, but he lived in the house of a poor carpenter. Imagine that Jesus, the mighty God incarnate, lived in a carpenter's house in

Nazareth for about thirty years! The Creator of the whole universe lived on earth in such a way. This is a vital part of God's history.

To this day, the Jews do not believe in the incarnation. Rather, they would proclaim that their God is not that small. However, we believe and declare that our God became a small man and lived on earth for thirty-three and one half years. According to Isaiah 53 and the four Gospels, the Lord Jesus was a man without form or comeliness. Furthermore, the very One who said, "Let there be light" and caused light to shine out of darkness was the One who worked for years as a carpenter.

At the end of His life on earth, the Lord Jesus was crucified. We need to realize that the One who was crucified was God Himself. In a hymn written by Charles Wesley there are these lines:

Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

God was crucified and hung on the cross for us. Afterward, He was buried in the tomb and took a tour through Hades, the region of death. Although Satan did everything possible to hold Him, on the third day He arose from the dead and came out of the tomb in resurrection. Now, in resurrection, He is the life-giving Spirit. By incarnation God became a man, and in resurrection He became a life-giving Spirit.

After His resurrection, Christ appeared to His disciples a number of times. He was manifested to them on the day of His resurrection, when they were meeting in a room behind closed doors. Suddenly, He appeared with a body of flesh and bones. Thinking that He was a ghost, the disciples were frightened. He said to them, "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (Luke 24:39). Eight days later He appeared again, especially for the benefit of Thomas, who had said that unless he could see in His hands the print of the nails, put his finger into the print of the nails, and thrust his hand

into His side, he would not believe (John 20:25). After appearing, the resurrected Christ suddenly disappeared again. Later, when some of the disciples, under the leadership of Peter, were fishing, He was manifested once more and asked them if they had anything to eat. When they replied that they had nothing, He told them to cast the net on the right side of the ship. They did so and caught a multitude of fishes (John 21:6). Then the disciples enjoyed a good breakfast with the Lord, after which He disappeared again. On another occasion, He held a conference with them on a mountaintop, the place He had appointed. Finally, the disciples witnessed the ascension of the resurrected Christ. Ten days later, He descended upon them in a wonderful way as the all-inclusive Spirit. As we all know, through their preaching of the gospel, thousands were added to them.

As we consider all the aspects of God's history, we see that the history of God is Christ. As the history of God, Christ is the mystery of God. Because the Jews do not have Christ, the God in whom they believe does not have such a history. Apart from Christ, there is neither the history of God nor the mystery of God.

As Christ is the history of God, so the church is the history of Christ. As the history of Christ, the church is the mystery of Christ. In the church we are a continuation of this history.

We have pointed out that the Christ we have received is the mystery of God and the history of God. The Christ we have received is God with His wonderful history. As the all-inclusive One, Christ includes divinity, humanity, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, glorification, and enthronement. He includes all the divine attributes and human virtues. This is the One we have all received.

FULL KNOWLEDGE AND FULL ASSURANCE

In 2:1-2 Paul says that he had a great struggle for the saints that "their hearts may be comforted, being knit together in love and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, unto the full knowledge of the mystery of

God, Christ." We also need the full assurance of understanding, the full knowledge of Christ as the mystery of God. However, not many even among us have this full knowledge. We need the full knowledge with the full assurance of understanding that we have received the wonderful, unlimited, immeasurable, extensive Christ.

The Christ in Colossians is much more extensive than the Christ in whom most Christians believe. God has given us a gift more extensive than the universe. If we have the full assurance of understanding concerning Christ, we shall say, "Lord Jesus, You are everything to me. You are the mystery of God. Because You are everything, I don't want anything that is not You, and I don't need anything." As the mystery of God, the all-inclusive Christ includes incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, glorification, divinity, and humanity. He is the reality of all the positive things in the universe: food, drink, feasts, new moons, holy days, Sabbaths, clothing, housing, transportation, light. The Apostle Paul was struggling on behalf of the distracted, deluded Colossians to help them have a full knowledge of such a Christ. Paul seemed to be telling them, "Colossians, you have the all-inclusive Christ. Why do you turn to Gnosticism, Judaism, and asceticism? Why do you become subject to so many ordinances? You have the all-inclusive, extensive One, the One who is the mystery of God. May your eyes be opened to see this One you have received." Oh, we all need a vision of such a Christ!

RECEIVING CHRIST A LITTLE AT A TIME

We thank the Lord that we all have received Christ initially. As we have indicated, this receiving is also continual; it is much more than once for all. Just as we breathe continually, we need to receive Christ continually, even for eternity.

In a previous message we pointed out that one condition for walking in Christ is to be rooted in Him. Being rooted in Christ is equal to receiving Christ. A large tree absorbs moisture through tiny root hairs. Absorption depends on being rooted; it depends on receiving. Do not

try to receive too much of Christ at one time. What we need is a continual receiving. In principle, it is correct to say that the more we receive of Christ, the better it is. But in practice we should not try to receive too much at once. We eat our food a little at a time. In like manner, we receive Christ also a little at a time.

We have seen that the Christ we receive is the mystery of God and history of God. Probably, in our initial stage of receiving Christ we did not have this realization concerning Christ. But as we go on with the Lord, we realize that Christ is all we need. Since He is everything to us, we should continue to receive Him without ceasing.

PRAYER AND THE EXERCISE OF THE SPIRIT

Now we come to the extremely important matter of how to receive Christ. Receiving Christ requires the exercise of our spirit. In order for a transistor radio to receive radio waves, the receiver must be working properly. Likewise, although it is good to improve our behavior, the important thing is that we tune, or adjust, our spirit. Our spirit must be clean, open, and properly adjusted.

The unique way to exercise our spirit is to pray. As we exercise our spirit in prayer, our aim should be to contact the Lord, not first to pray for certain people or things. Simply contact the Lord and allow Him to burden you to pray for certain ones. Do not go to the Lord with your mind filled with things to pray for. If you try to contact the Lord in this way, you will close your spirit. We should come to the Lord with a spirit fully open, worshipping Him, praising Him, and thanking Him. Then we shall know what to pray for, and we shall have much to utter to the Lord in prayer.

As we receive such a heavenly transmission from the Lord, we not only receive the riches of Christ, but we also experience His fullness. This means we are filled to the brim. The fullness is related to the riches. However, we may have the riches without the fullness. Whether or not the riches of Christ become the fullness to us depends on

whether or not we are filled with these riches to the limit of our capacity. If the riches exceed the demand, the riches are the fullness. But if they are less than the demand, they obviously are not the fullness. The riches of Christ, being universally extensive, are never less than the demand. Whatever may be our capacity to receive, the riches of Christ will exceed our capacity. The riches are always able to fill us to overflowing. A certain man may be very rich, even a billionaire. But if his wealth is only sufficient to give one dollar to every person on earth, his riches cannot be regarded as fullness. He does not have sufficient riches to make everyone abundantly wealthy. The riches of Christ, however, are universally extensive. They are sufficient to fill everyone to his capacity.

John 1:14 says that the Word became flesh, full of grace and reality. According to John 1:16, we all have received of His fullness grace upon grace. According to John 1, the One whom we have received is the eternal Word, the Word who was with God and who was God, the Word through whom everything came into being. In this Word is life. One day, this Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, full of grace. This is part of God's history, an aspect of His mystery. The mystery of God is Christ, who is full of grace. No demand can exhaust His fullness; no capacity to receive of Him can exhaust His supply. Christ's fullness can never be diminished by our need or by our capacity. The Christ we have received is a Christ of fullness. Therefore, we need to keep on receiving Him by exercising our spirit to have direct contact with Him. As we pray from our open, adjusted spirit, we shall receive the unlimited source as our supply. Then we shall have the fullness, and in this fullness we shall be rooted and built up. Then we shall walk in Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-NINE

FULL GROWN IN CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:27-29; Eph. 4:13

The book of Colossians reveals that the all-inclusive, extensive Christ should replace every factor, element, and aspect of our natural human life. To a great degree, our human living is composed of culture. Humanly speaking, culture is very good. Every society is preserved and maintained by culture. If people did not have culture, there would be much more work for the police department and the law courts. At present, the work of the police and the courts is a supplement to the culture of a society. When a person does not conduct himself properly according to culture, the police may intervene. Every nation, society, and community is preserved by culture, the law, and the police.

THE PROPER USE OF CULTURE

If, after reading these messages on Christ versus culture, Christian parents tell their children that they no longer need culture, this will be a serious mistake. Without culture, children would act like animals. Children must be raised according to the standards of culture. Before they are of a proper age to receive Christ, the children must be built up in culture. The more the children are trained according to culture, the better it will be for them. The children must be trained to honor their parents, to love their brothers and sisters, to behave properly toward their neighbors, to be good students in school, to obey all laws, and to respect their teachers and other adults. Because children are too young to behave according to Christ, they must be taught to behave according to culture. If we did not have culture, we would be barbarians.

The use of culture can be compared to the function of

the law in the Scriptures. The law was decreed by God. Romans 7:12 says that "the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good." Used rightly, the law kept God's chosen people in custody until the coming of Christ. Rich families in ancient times had custodians who exercised custody over the children. In like manner, culture keeps children in custody today. However, as the book of Galatians indicates, the law was misused by the Judaizers. Now that Christ has come, the law should deliver God's chosen people to Christ. But the Judaizers misused the law, even over-using it. Instead of allowing the law to release God's chosen people and to give them over to Christ, the Judaizers used the law to keep people from Christ. The concept of the Judaizers even crept into the church to distract some of the genuine Jewish believers in Christ back to the law. Although culture is right and necessary, it is also subject to misuse and can actually keep people from Christ. Culture should be used to keep the children until they are able to receive Christ and live according to Christ. Children need to be preserved by culture while they are growing up.

As Moses gave the commandments to God's chosen people, parents must give commandments to their children. But when the children are able to realize their need for Christ and repent, we should minister the rich Christ to them and help them to receive Him. We should tell our children that the culture we gave them was only good for a certain time and that now they need to receive Christ. Hence, culture is used by God through parents to keep their children in custody until the time comes for them to receive the Lord. It is important to see this proper use of culture.

FILLED WITH CHRIST

Now that we have received Christ, He, the all-inclusive, extensive One, must replace every aspect of our culture with Himself. We have seen that fallen man uses culture as a substitute for God. First, such a culture is a substitute for God. Then Christ comes in to replace this substitute with Himself. Since we are no longer children,

we need

Christ to replace every element of our culture. This does not mean that we should despise culture. Rather, it means that we should love Christ. If we are filled to the brim with Christ, there will not be any room in our being for anything else. Every part of us will be occupied by Christ and with Christ. Then in our experience we shall have the fullness of Christ. We shall be filled with Christ to the extent of our capacity. The Christ who fills our being will replace our culture with Himself. This is the revelation in the book of Colossians.

Because Christ is extensive and all-inclusive, with Him there is no scarcity. If we have such a Christ in our experience, we shall not need anything else. There is no need that He cannot meet, and no capacity to receive Him that He cannot fill. Since we have the all-inclusive Christ, we do not need Judaism, Gnosticism, or asceticism. We have the all-inclusive and extensive Christ with His fullness. He could fill the whole universe, and still He would not be exhausted. We do not need anything, ancient or modern, in place of Christ. We do not even need our self-made and self-imposed culture. I am concerned that many among us still live according to their self-imposed culture. These saints are always imposing restrictions on themselves and living according to them. There is no need for us to remain in the custody of our self-made culture. Instead, we should stay in Christ and in the freedom we have in Christ. We need to be filled to the brim with Christ. This is the under-lying concept of the book of Colossians. Christ, the extensive One, must replace every element of our natural human life. This requires that we not hold on to anything of our culture, for that would produce a mixture. Let us allow the pure Christ to fill our being and replace every aspect of our natural human life with Himself.

DENYING THE SELF

Some saints may be rather proud of their pleasant disposition or of their natural virtues, such as humility, patience, and kindness. If you have such a disposition and such virtues, you should neither hate them nor treasure

them. Instead, you should allow the extensive Christ to replace even your good disposition and your virtues. God does not want us to live out our natural being with its virtues. If you live according to your disposition and your virtues, you will not be able to say with Paul, "To me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). On the contrary, you will have to admit that to you to live is your natural being. In the church as the new man, there is no room for any kind of natural person. In the new man Christ must be all and in all (3:11).

We have pointed out that we should neither hate our natural being nor treasure it. To hate our being is to practice asceticism, a form of suicide. Instead of trying to hate the natural being, we should follow the Lord's word to deny ourselves. To deny the self is to ignore the self, to forget it, to pay no attention to it. Suppose as you are walking down the sidewalk, someone stops you and begs you for money. Again and again, he pleads with you to give him money. You should neither hate this person nor love him. Rather you should pay no attention to his request. Eventually, realizing that he can get nothing from you, he will go away. This illustrates the attitude we should have toward the self. The self is greedy, always begging for things. Instead of either hating the self or loving it, we should simply refuse to pay attention to it.

ATTRACTED BY CHRIST AND POSSESSED BY HIM

However, if we would keep from paying attention to the self, we must concentrate on something better than the self. This is the reason we need a vision of the extensiveness of Christ, the vision presented in the book of Colossians. If we see this vision, we shall concentrate our entire being on the extensive Christ, who will then fill us and occupy us. Because we are filled with the extensive Christ, we shall have no need of Judaism, Gnosticism, mysticism, or asceticism. Our being will be occupied with the vast, unsearchably rich, extensive Christ. Spontaneously this Christ will come in to replace every aspect of our natural human life with Himself.

The book of Colossians presents a vision of the

wonderful, extensive, all-inclusive Christ. Once we see this vision, our entire being will be attracted by this Christ and will be possessed by Christ and occupied with Him. Then gradually the extensive Christ who occupies our attention will replace every element of our natural human life. He will even replace with Himself our kindness, our humility, and our love for our parents. At best, our natural virtues can be compared to polished copper, but Christ is gold. He far surpasses in value anything we possess by nature. The more we experience the Christ who exceeds everything and replaces everything in our natural life with Himself, the more we shall be able to declare, "To me to live is Christ." We shall not live humility, kindness, or patience. To us to live will be the Christ who has taken full possession of us and who occupies us and fills us with Himself. That such a Christ should replace all the elements of our natural human life is the message of the book of Colossians. If we understand this underlying concept, Colossians will be an open book to us.

A GLORIOUS MYSTERY

If we have the full assurance of understanding concerning the extensive Christ replacing every aspect of our natural life, we shall realize what it means to become full grown in Christ. In 1:25 Paul says that he became a minister according to the stewardship of God. The goal of Paul's stewardship was to dispense the extensive Christ into God's chosen people. This extensive Christ is a mystery, especially to the Gentiles. In 1:27 Paul says, "God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." This mystery is full of glory, and this glory has riches. The glorious mystery full of riches is Christ in us.

ANNOUNCING CHRIST

In 1:28 and 29 Paul goes on to say, "Whom we announce, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man full grown in Christ; for which also I labor, struggling according to His

operation which operates in me in power." In verse 28 Paul does not say that he preaches Christ; he says that he announces Him. Announcing something involves a greater degree of assurance than simply preaching that thing. For example, when the leading ones make announcements at the close of a meeting, they do not preach to the saints. The announcements are made with assurance. Likewise, Paul did not simply preach Christ--he announced Him. I also desire to announce the extensive, all-inclusive Christ.

WARNING EVERY MAN

In verse 28 Paul says that he warned every man. After some are convinced and subdued by our announcing of Christ, they need to be warned. Hearing of the all-inclusive Christ, they may want to be filled with Christ and to live Christ. But many negative things may rise up in opposition to this. The enemy is like a crouching beast, waiting for an opportunity to pounce on us and to keep us from living Christ. If you were to love the world and care for worldly amusements, having no heart to be filled with Christ or to live Christ, the enemy would not pay much attention to you. But if you are one who loves the Lord and seeks to live according to Him, you will face opposition.

Years ago, certain of the children of the Christian leaders in my home town became very worldly and pursued worldly enjoyment. After a church had been raised up in that place, a number of these young people turned to the Lord and to the church. In many cases, their parents rose up against them, even though they had not opposed them for their worldliness. But when these young people came to the church to seek after Christ, they encountered fierce opposition. This shows that the enemy is crouching, waiting for an opportunity to attack those who pursue the Lord.

At the time Paul wrote to the Colossians, Greek philosophy and Judaism were among those things which were distracting the believers. Those in favor of Greek philosophy sought the opportunity to convert the believing Gen-tiles back to Greek philosophy. Likewise, the Judaizers wanted to seduce any Jews who had believed in

Christ. Because Greek philosophy and Judaism were endangering the believers, Paul warned every man. In the short book of Colossians, Paul gives a number of warnings. In 2:4 he says, "This I say that no one may delude you with persuasive speech." In 2:8 he says, "Beware that no one carries you off as spoil through his philosophy and empty deceit." In 2:16 Paul warns the Colossian believers to let no one judge them in eating, drinking, or in respect of feasts, new moons, or of Sabbaths. In verse 18 Paul says, "Let no one purposely defraud you of your prize." Paul realized that many things were there to be utilized to lead the believers astray from Christ and the church life. The same is true today. Believers may not be opposed for their worldliness, but they will be opposed if they turn to the Lord's recovery and pursue Christ in the church.

CHRIST LIVING IN US

To be full grown in Christ is to be filled and saturated with Christ. We remain ourselves, but we are permeated, saturated, and filled with Christ. Then our living spontaneously is Christ. We should not simply say, "Christ lives in me." We must be absolute with the Lord to allow Him to live in us day by day. If your husband or wife gives you a difficult time, do not defend yourself or vindicate yourself. Simply let Christ live in you. However, we must admit that it is easy to talk about this, but it is difficult to practice it.

The proper Christian life is not a matter of ethics, morality, or improved character or behavior. The Christian life is Christ living in us. We should live according to Christ, not according to our natural mildness, humility, or frankness. We need to live Christ. Christ must saturate us, permeate us, and fill us. Then in our living He will be expressed from within us.

Our relationship with Christ can be illustrated by the grafting of a branch from a wild olive tree into a cultivated olive tree. Christ is the cultivated olive tree, and we are branches from the wild olive tree. First, we are cut off from the wild olive tree and then placed into the cultivated olive

tree, in the spot where an incision has been made. After this, the branch from the wild olive tree is bound to the cultivated olive tree. This is grafting. Through the process of grafting, the life juice in the cultivated olive tree flows into the branch from the wild olive tree, permeates it, saturates it, and fills it. Eventually, the branch will bear fruit. Likewise, we are branches grafted into Christ as the cultivated olive tree. If we are permeated, saturated, and filled with the life juice from the cultivated olive tree, we shall be able to say, "To me to live is the cultivated olive tree." When a branch reaches this stage, it will be full grown in the cultivated olive tree. This illustrates what it means to be full grown in Christ. To be full grown in Christ is to be saturated and filled with Christ. It is to have every part of our being occupied with Christ. This is the full growth in life and maturity in Christ, the issue of the life revealed in the book of Colossians.

A FULL-GROWN MAN

The Greek word for full grown in 1:28 is the same as that used in Ephesians 4:13, where Paul says, "Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ is simply a full-grown man. Eventually, this maturity will issue in the Body, the corporate expression of Christ. We all need to grow and become full grown so that Christ may have a corporate full-grown man, the Body, as an organism to express Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY

CHRIST REPLACED IN EVERY WAY

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:2b-4, 6-8; 1:27; 3:3-4; 2:6-7a; 1 Cor. 1:5, 7a, 9, 22-24; 2:2; Gal. 1:14-16a; 2:20a; 4:19; 5:2, 4

In the book of Colossians Paul sets forth not only the revelation of the all-inclusive Christ, but also the experience of Christ. As we consider this book, we need to see both the revelation and the experience. In this message we shall see that in the experience of Christians, Christ has been replaced in every way.

THE REVELATION OF CHRIST

The revelation concerning Christ in Colossians is both all-inclusive and extensive. Colossians reveals that Christ is everything. Christ is the Firstborn both of the old creation, the universe, and of the new creation, the church (1:15, 18). The new creation is not as extensive as the old creation, the universe. The church is all-inclusive, but it is not extensive. For Christ to be the Firstborn of both the original creation and the new creation means that He is both extensive and all-inclusive. In the new man there is room only for Christ; Christ is all and in all (3:11). This shows His all-inclusiveness. However, the fact that He is the Firstborn of all creation indicates His extensiveness. In the words of Ephesians 3, Christ is the breadth, length, height, and depth.

The revelation of the all-inclusive and extensive Christ is found adequately, fully, definitely, and clearly in the Epistles of Paul, in particular in the book of Colossians. In 1:25 Paul says that he became a minister according to the

stewardship of God to complete the word of God. Colossians was written to complete the word of God, to complete the divine revelation in the Scriptures. Without Colossians, the divine revelation in the Scriptures would not be complete.

The completion of the Word of God found in Colossians is the mystery of God's economy--Christ in us, the hope of glory (1:27). This means that without Christ in us as the hope of glory, God's revelation would have no completion. We thank the Lord that His revelation is completed, recorded, and presented to us.

DISTRACTED FROM CHRIST

For centuries, Christians have had this revelation in their hands. However, it has been neglected. Although Christ has been revealed adequately, definitely, emphatically, and fully, in the experience of Christians He has been replaced by many other things. Although there are millions of Christians in this country, not many have paid adequate attention to Christ in us, the hope of glory. This has been true even among us. In particular, culture has replaced Christ. In 1961 I wrote the hymn, "Not the law of letters, but the Christ of life" (*Hymns*, #541). But in this hymn I did not say anything about culture. When I wrote it, I did not see that culture was the strongest and most subtle replacement of Christ in our experience. Nevertheless, more than forty-five years ago, I saw that God does not want anything other than Christ. Although this vision is very clear, I must confess that I still do not live Christ adequately. From time to time, I have been distracted from Christ to other things.

Have you ever asked yourself how much you live Christ day by day? For the most part, we live Christ only when we are praying in the spirit. By this we see how little we actually live Christ. In our daily living Christ is replaced by other things. In particular, things that are good in our eyes become replacements for Christ. For example, Christ

may be replaced by your humility. Spontaneously and unconsciously, you live your natural humility instead of Christ. Inwardly, a naturally humble person may be proud of his humility, especially when he compares himself with others. But this humility of which he boasts is a replacement of Christ. Actually, such humility is not a virtue in the eyes of God. Because it replaces Christ, it is something very unpleasant. Day by day, Christ is replaced by many things. He may be replaced by our diligence, frankness, and honesty. Instead of living Christ, we may live these natural attributes or characteristics.

CHRIST REPLACED BY GIFTS AND KNOWLEDGE

In the New Testament three books portray the replacements of Christ: 1 Corinthians, Galatians, and Colossians. First Corinthians deals with gifts and knowledge. In 1 Corinthians 1:7 Paul said that the Corinthians came behind in no gift. Furthermore, they had much knowledge, including spiritual knowledge. Nevertheless, they were carnal. Their knowledge did not help them adequately, and their gifts did not build them up. Paul told them that when he first came to them, he determined not to know anything among them except Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). Paul realized that the Corinthians were occupied with knowledge and gifts. For this reason, he emphasized the crucified Christ. This indicates that the Corinthian believers needed to live a crucified life, a life of the cross.

In 1 Corinthians 1:22 Paul said, "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom." To the Jews, the crucified Christ was a stumbling block, and to the Greeks, He was foolishness. Neither the Jews nor the Greeks cared for such a Christ. They preferred a Christ of splendor to a Christ crucified. However, Paul told them that he did not want to know anything among them except Christ and Him crucified.

In the book of 1 Corinthians Paul eventually indicated that to have the church life we need the experience of

Christ crucified. The church life must be a crucified life. What the Corinthian believers needed was to live a crucified Christ and not pay their attention to knowledge and spiritual gifts.

In Corinth Christ was replaced by knowledge and gifts. In the charismatic movement today, Christ is also replaced by the gifts. Where in charismatic meetings is Christ emphasized and realized properly? Today Christ is still being replaced by knowledge and gifts. Of course, He is also replaced by the various forms, rituals, and ordinances of religion.

CHRIST REPLACED BY RELIGION

In the book of Galatians we see that Christ was replaced by Judaism. Judaism was a religion in which people worshipped the true God according to His holy Word. This religion included the law, which had been given by God through Moses, and also circumcision, the ordinances, and the traditions. Paul advanced in this religion and surpassed his contemporaries. But one day, when he was on the way to Damascus, the Lord Jesus appeared to him. At that time, God revealed the living Christ into Paul (Gal. 1:16a). Thus, in the book of Galatians we have a clear record of how Christ was replaced by the Jewish religion with the law, circumcision, and the traditions.

When the book of Galatians was written, not only had the Jews replaced Christ with such a religion, but even many saints had been influenced to turn from Christ to the law and circumcision. According to Galatians 5:2, if we are circumcised, Christ will not profit us at all. Those who seek to be justified by the law are actually "brought to nought from Christ" (v. 4). This means that if we try to be righteous by keeping the law, we shall be severed from Christ, and He will be of no effect to us. This indicates clearly that the law can replace Christ and keep God's people from Christ. Furthermore, circumcision annuls the grace of God.

The law had been given by God, and circumcision and many rituals had been ordained by God. The Jews used all

these things apparently for God. However, the law, circumcision, and the ordinances, the components of the Jewish religion, replaced Christ and were used to distract the believers from Christ. The saints in Galatia were distracted from Christ to certain God-given and God-ordained things. In their case, Christ was replaced by religion.

CHRIST REPLACED BY CULTURE

According to the book of Colossians, Christ is replaced by culture. Any culture is a composition of a number of items. Western culture, for example, is a composition of Hebrew religion, Greek philosophy, and Roman politics. When the book of Colossians was written, the culture in the region of Colosse included Hebrew religion, Greek philosophy, asceticism, mysticism, and Gnosticism. Although the word culture is not used in this book, culture is nonetheless strongly indicated or implied. In 3:11 Paul says that in the new man there is no Greek or Jew, no circumcision or uncircumcision, no barbarian or Scythian. These terms indicate both religious and cultural distinctions. Circumcision and uncircumcision refer to religion, whereas barbarian and Scythian refer to culture. Thus, the book of Colossians indicates that the ultimate replacement for Christ is our culture.

As we consider the three books of 1 Corinthians, Galatians, and Colossians, we see many replacements for Christ. Christ is replaced by knowledge and gifts, by religion with its law and ordinances, and by culture. Among the Corinthians, Christ was replaced by knowledge and spiritual gifts. The same is true among Christians today. Some people think that charismatic meetings are quite living. But are these meetings living because of Christ or because of something else? If we are not careful, various things may come in to replace Christ in our experience. If Christ is not replaced by knowledge or gifts, He may be replaced by religion or culture. We may use some man-made law or ordinance to replace Him. Certain

isms may come in to be a substitute for Him. Our self-made and self-imposed culture may also replace Christ in our daily living. Because there are so many different substitutes for Christ, we can say that in the experience of Christians throughout the centuries, Christ has been replaced in every way.

CHRIST REPLACED BY OUR NATURAL CHARACTERISTICS

In our daily living Christ is often replaced by our natural characteristics. Suppose a certain brother is quick, and another is slow. The quick brother automatically lives according to his natural quickness, and the slow one, according to his natural slowness. The quick one will often make mistakes, but the slow one will often cause delays. In one case Christ is replaced by quickness; in the other, He is replaced by slowness. Whether you prefer the quick one or the slow one, it is a fact that Christ is replaced by both our natural quickness and our natural slowness.

LIVING CHRIST

Recently in a meeting a brother stood up to declare that he intended to drop his culture. Later I pointed out that the attempt to drop our culture will only produce another type of culture--a culture-dropping culture. There is no need for us to drop our culture. What we need to see is that culture is a replacement for Christ and that we should live Christ. The more we live Christ, the more our culture will be replaced by Christ. Formerly our culture was a replacement for Christ. But now as we live Christ, Christ replaces our culture with Himself.

There can be no doubt that Christ is fully revealed in the Bible. But who among the Lord's people truly lives Christ? We need to ask ourselves how much we live Christ. Sometimes the saints talk about the best way to have the church meetings. However, our concern should not be with the way of meeting; it should be with the living of Christ. Do we care to live Christ in a genuine way, or do we just want to have a certain kind of meeting? The meetings of

the church should not be a performance, but should be an exhibition of our daily living.

We thank the Lord for all He has shown us concerning the revelation of Christ in Colossians. Now we must go on to experience Christ and to live Him. What we need is not more doctrine, but more experience of Christ. Again and again, we need to be encouraged to live Christ day by day. Wherever we are, at home, at school, or at work, we need to live Christ. Paul could say, "To me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). How many of us can give such a testimony? When we are tested by the Lord concerning this, we need to humble ourselves and confess that we do not live very much by Christ. How we need to receive grace to live Christ day by day! If we live Him consistently and adequately, all the replacements for Christ will be gone.

If we have light concerning how Christ is replaced in our daily living, we shall confess to the Lord that instead of living Him we live so many other things. We may say to Him, "Lord, I confess that I have not lived very much by You. I live a clean life, even a pure life, but I do not live Christ. Although I have been careful not to sin and not to be wrong with others, I have not lived You." Years ago, I spent much time to confess my failures and wrongdoings; however, at that time I did not confess my lack in living Christ. But recently most of my confession has concerned one thing--my shortage in living Christ. We all need to make such a confession to the Lord.

TWO UNIQUE COMMANDMENTS

In the New Testament there is a unique commandment to unbelievers: Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus. Those who perish will perish because they do not believe in the Lord. Just as there is a unique commandment for unbelievers, so there is a unique commandment for believers: To live Christ. If you are not a believer, you need to repent and believe in Christ. But if you are a believer in Christ, you now need to live Christ. Unbelievers do many different things in place of believing in Christ. Likewise,

believers may do many things instead of living Christ. The unique sin of unbelievers is their unbelief, their not believing in Christ. But the unique sin of believers is their failure to live Christ. We need to confess this sin and condemn it. We may be humble, honest, sincere, faithful, diligent, and, in many respects, very scriptural. However, if we do not live Christ, we are still under God's condemnation. God does not want honest, sincere people--He wants us to be Christ-people, those who live Christ. A genuine Christian should be a Christ-man, not merely a virtuous man.

It is crucial for us to see that in our living there should be no replacements for Christ. In particular, we see from Colossians that Christ should not be replaced by any kind of culture. We all have a strong culture, both the culture we have inherited and the culture we have made and imposed on ourselves. To live by this culture is to live by something other than Christ Himself. When we live by our culture, we may not do anything sinful. On the contrary, our living may be very good, but it is not Christ. We must condemn the practice of living by such things as humility, love, and diligence instead of Christ. God's desire is that we live Christ.

CHRIST DWELLING IN US SUBJECTIVELY

The book of Colossians presents both the objective aspect of Christ and the subjective aspect. On the one hand, this book reveals the extensive, all-inclusive Christ objectively. On the other hand, there is the definite indication that this Christ dwells in us subjectively. We have already referred to 1:27, where Paul says that Christ in us is the hope of glory. The extensive, all-inclusive Christ is actually dwelling within us. How subjective this is! According to Paul, the Christ who is the mystery of God's economy is not merely the Christ at the right hand of God in the heavens, but also the Christ who is within us. According to God's economy, Christ must be dispensed into us for our subjective experience. If He were only on the throne in the heavens, we could not experience Him. We

could look to Him, trust in Him, pray to Him, and rely on Him, but we could not experience Him. Praise the Lord that the extensive Christ lives in us to be our hope of glory! This is the focal point of God's economy, the center of God's dispensation.

Some Christians do not believe that Christ is in us. They claim that He is on the throne and is represented in us by the Holy Spirit. This is a twisting of God's holy Word, which clearly says that Christ is in us. What right does anyone have to say that Christ is only in the heavens and not also in the believers? What ground does anyone have to twist God's Word to mean that Christ is merely represented in us by the Spirit? Those who deny that Christ actually dwells in us oppose us for teaching that Christ today is the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17). The Bible clearly and definitely says that Christ is in us. If Christ were not the life-giving Spirit, how could He indwell us to be our life?

HIDDEN WITH CHRIST IN GOD

In 3:3 and 4 Paul says, "For you died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God. When Christ our life is manifested, then you also shall be manifested with Him in glory." Colossians 3:3 says that our life is hidden with Christ in God. To be with Christ in God means that we are one with Christ. In the words of 1 Corinthians 6:17, he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit. We are with Christ in God because we and Christ are subjectively one.

Colossians 3:3 is a deep, mysterious verse. With Christ we are hidden in God. Is it not a mystery that we are with Christ and that we are hidden in God? This is not something merely objective; it is also very subjective.

CHRIST, OUR LIFE

In 3:4 Paul goes on to say that Christ is our life. Nothing is more subjective to us than our life. Our life is actually we ourselves. How can you separate a person from the life of that person? It is impossible! A person's life is

the person himself. Thus, to say that Christ is our life means that Christ becomes us. This is subjective to the uttermost.

WALKING IN CHRIST

In 2:6 and 7 Paul says, "As therefore you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in Him, having been rooted and being built up in Him." After we receive Christ, we should walk in Him. This is to live, act, behave, and have our being in Him. This also is subjective. If Christ were only on the throne, how could we walk in Him on earth? We can walk in Christ only if He is subjective to us in our experience.

Colossians 2:7 speaks of having been rooted in Christ and of being built up in Him. These expressions are related to our walking in Christ. We walk in Him, having been rooted in Him and being built up in Him. This implies that we are plants rooted in Christ. We need to see more of what it means to be rooted in Christ and to be built up in Him in order to walk in Him.

Our burden in this message has been to point out that Paul's intention in Colossians is to help the saints realize that there should not be any replacements for Christ. Rather, everything else must be replaced by Christ. Christ is in us as our life, and we need to walk in Him. If we have been rooted in Christ, and if we are being built up in Him, we shall walk in Him. We shall live, behave, and have our being in Him. This is to live Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-ONE

HAVING BEEN ROOTED IN CHRIST AND BEING BUILT UP IN HIM

(1)

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:7a, 19; 3:10-11; 1 Cor. 3:6, 9; 6:17; Eph. 2:21; 4:13b, 15-16

A BOOK OF EXPERIENCE

Many readers of the New Testament consider Colossians a book of doctrine. However, Colossians is also a book of experience. The extensive, all-inclusive Christ revealed in this book is subjective to us, for He dwells in us as our hope of glory (1:27), and He is our life (3:4). Nothing can be more subjective to us than our own life. In fact, our life is us. To say that Christ is our life means that Christ becomes us. How could Christ be our life without actually becoming us? It would be impossible.

Some Christian teachers oppose the revelation we have seen concerning the subjective experience of Christ. According to them, we deify ourselves, we make ourselves God. They claim that we teach that the self becomes the same as God and that this is self-deification. Although we definitely do not teach that we become God Himself or that we shall ever be worshipped as deity, it is nonetheless true that Christ dwells in us and that He is our life. He becomes us in our experience. As Paul says, "To me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). We have pointed out that Christ cannot be our life without becoming us. Life is our very being. Hence, for Christ to be our Life means that He becomes our being. For Christ to become our being is for Christ to become us.

To us, Christ is both objective and subjective. We know

Christ both according to doctrine and according to experience. On the one hand, our Christ is on the throne in the heavens. On the other hand, He is in our spirit. We worship the enthroned Christ in the heavens, but we experience, enjoy, and partake of the indwelling Christ in our spirit. We are one with Him in a very subjective way. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:17, "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." Christ is subjective to us to such a degree that He and we, we and He, have become one spirit. To be one spirit with the Lord is greater than to have gifts and miracles. Now that we have become one spirit with the Lord, in our daily life we need to experience being one spirit with Him.

Some years ago I stayed with some saints who talked a lot about Colossians 1:27. Although they could speak of the indwelling Christ as the hope of glory, they had very little experience of Christ. To them, the indwelling Christ was merely a doctrine, not a reality. In their practical daily living, they were ethical and religious, but they did not live Christ. Even their love was a natural, ethical love, not the expression of Christ lived out from within them. In these believers you could see religion and ethics, but you could not see much of Christ. This is true of many Christians today. They know Christ in doctrine, but they have very little genuine experience of Him. However, when Paul wrote the book of Colossians, he wrote both according to doctrine and according to experience.

In 2:7 Paul speaks of having been rooted and being built up in Christ. Both being rooted and being built up are subjective and experiential. We need a clear understanding of what it is to be rooted in Christ and to be built up in Him. We should neither take 2:7 for granted, nor avoid it because we find it difficult to understand. Instead, we should dwell on this verse, pray-reading it and studying it until we receive light.

TWO CONDITIONS

Having been rooted in Christ and being built up in

Christ are both related to walking in Christ (2:6). If we would walk in Christ, we must meet two conditions: we must be rooted in Him, and we must be in the process of being built up in Him. On the one hand, we have already been rooted in Christ; on the other hand, we are being built up in Him. When these conditions are met, we shall be able to walk in Christ. In experience we all need to know what it means to be rooted in Christ and to be built up in Him.

PLANTED INTO CHRIST

In order to be rooted in Christ, we must first be planted into Him. In a number of places, the Bible speaks of planting. In the song of Moses we read these words: "Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in" (Exo. 15:17). Psalm 92:13 says, "Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God." In Jeremiah 2:21 the Lord says of His people, "Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed," and in 32:41, "I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul." In Matthew 15:13 the Lord Jesus said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up." According to John 15, the Lord Jesus regarded Himself as a vine and the Father as the husbandman, the One who planted the vine and cares for it. In 1 Corinthians 3:9 Paul says that we, the believers, are God's farm (Gk.). He also declares, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the growth" (1 Cor. 3:6, Gk.). Now in Colossians 2:7 we see that we have been rooted into Christ. Christ is the land, the soil, and God has planted us into Him.

According to the Scriptures, Christ is the unique tree into which we have been grafted and also the land, the soil, into which we have been planted. We have been both grafted into Christ and planted into Him. Hence, the good land with the soil is equal to the tree. This is another indication that Christ is everything to us. Since Christ is

both the tree and the good land, we can say that we have been grafted into Christ and also that we have been planted into Him. According to John 15, God the Father is the Planter, the Husbandman, whose Son, Christ, is the universal vine. This Christ is also the good land with the soil. We have been grafted into Christ as the vine and planted into Him as the soil. Colossians 2:11 speaks of circumcision, a type of cutting. This is related to being grafted into Christ. As we have pointed out, 2:7 speaks of having been rooted in Christ. This is related to being planted into Him. In this message our concern is not with the aspect of grafting, but with the aspect of planting.

As those who have been planted into Christ, we have been rooted in Him. Just as the tiny root hairs absorb the riches from the soil, so we absorb the rich nourishment of Christ. We are trees, and Christ is the soil into which we have been planted and in which we are rooted. Now we are absorbing His riches into us, and we grow by the nourishment we receive from these riches.

ONE UNIT IN LIFE

In 1 Corinthians 3:6 Paul says that he planted, Apollos watered, and God gave the growth. This indicates that the believers are plants and that Christ is the soil. Now we need to ask in what part of our being this planting has taken place. Certainly it is neither in the mind nor in the physical body. Rather, it is in our spirit. The experience of being planted into Christ and rooted in Him takes place in our spirit. First Corinthians 6:17 says, "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." When a plant is rooted in the soil, it becomes one with the soil. First the plant gets into the soil; then the nourishment in the soil comes into the plant. In this way, the plant and the soil become one in life. The nourishing element in the soil corresponds to the life in the plant, and something within the plant corresponds to the element in the soil. We may say that there is a fellowship between the plant and the soil. In this fellowship those factors in the plant and in the soil which correspond

to each other become one in life. Thus, the plant and the soil become one unit in life.

In our spirit we have the experience of being planted into Christ, for here we are joined to Him and become one spirit with Him. The Lord, who is the soil in which we are rooted, is the Spirit. If He were not the Spirit, there would be no way for us to be planted into Him. Praise Him that He is the Spirit and that we have been created with a spirit! If we had only a body and a soul but had no spirit, it would not be possible for us to be planted into the Lord as the life-giving Spirit. However, because the Lord is the Spirit and because we have a spirit, there is a correspondence between us and Him. When we were regenerated, Christ as the life-giving Spirit became one with our spirit. As John 3:6 clearly indicates, regeneration takes place in the spirit. When we were regenerated, we were rooted in Christ as the soil. This is the reason Paul uses the perfect tense in 2:7. We were planted and rooted in Christ when we were regenerated in spirit.

According to 2:6 and 7, we must be rooted in Christ before we can walk in Him. In order to walk in Christ, we must absorb the rich nourishment from the Spirit who dwells in our spirit. However, if we remain in the soul--in our mind, emotion, or will--we shall not receive nourishment or supply. We need to turn to the spirit, to the very place where we have been regenerated and planted into the divine Spirit.

The transaction that took place between the divine Spirit and our spirit at the time of regeneration remains forever. We may say that our spirit has married the divine Spirit and thus the two spirits have entered into an eternal union. With this marriage there can be no separation, no divorce. Although the natural mind may not like this marriage, our spirit appreciates it. Whenever we face difficulties in our daily living, we should not remain in the natural mind, but turn to the spirit. However, we often prefer to remain in the mind, emotion, or will. If we stay in the soul instead of turning to the spirit, we shall not be

able to walk in Christ. To walk in Him we must be rooted in Him in a practical way in our experience. Only when we remain in the spirit are we actually rooted in Christ and thus able to walk in Him. We have been planted into Christ. But when we turn to our spirit, we have the experience of being rooted in Him. Having been rooted in Christ, we are able to walk in Him. In this way we experience Christ as the good land with the rich soil that affords us the nourishing life element. The more we are rooted into this soil, the more we absorb the nourishment of Christ into our being. This is not the objective Christ in doctrine; it is the subjective Christ in our experience.

GENUINE GROWTH

As a result of being rooted in Christ and absorbing His riches into us, we grow in Him, just as trees grow by absorbing nourishment from the soil. In order for a tree to grow, it must receive some substantial nourishment. The nourishment in the soil becomes the substance by which a tree grows.

Not many of today's Christians realize what genuine growth is. True growth is not the result of acquiring more doctrinal knowledge. It is the result of turning to the spirit, remaining in the spirit, and absorbing the nourishing element of Christ. Only by assimilating this element can we grow spiritually. The more this rich element is added into our being, the more we grow.

Colossians 2:19 says that by holding the Head the Body "grows with the growth of God." To grow with the growth of God is to grow by having God Himself added into us. This takes place only when we are rooted in Christ as the soil. God Himself with His element and substance is the rich nourishment in Christ. If we remain rooted in our spirit, we absorb this element, and this causes us to grow with the growth of God. We grow with the addition, the increase, of God into us. This is altogether a matter of the genuine experience of Christ in our daily life.

We have seen that if we would walk in Christ, we must be planted and rooted in Christ, the divine Spirit in our spirit, and remain in Him. Whenever we find ourselves out of the spirit, we need to turn back to the spirit and stay there. By remaining in the spirit, we are rooted in Christ in a practical way and thereby absorb the rich nourishment into our spirit. As this nourishment flows into our inner being, it causes us to grow with the growth of God. Growth takes place as God is added into us, for the rich nourishment in Christ is actually God Himself. From our experience we know that as we are rooted in Christ, we grow and, spontaneously, we then walk in Him.

BUILT UP INDIVIDUALLY AND CORPORATELY

Colossians 2:7 also speaks of being built up in Christ. As we grow in Christ, we are being built up in Him. Years ago, I considered the building up in 2:7 to mean the building up with the saints. But this is not the meaning here. Rather, the meaning is that we ourselves need to become built up. For example, as a tree grows, it builds itself up. The same is true of children. They become built up by growing. The building up of the Body depends upon the individual and personal building up of all the members. If a particular member has not been built up, it will not be possible for him to be built up in the Body. To be built up in the Body we first must be built up in ourselves. When we have become built-up members, we shall then be able to be built up with others in the Body. Therefore, the building up in 2:7 is not that of the Body corporately, but the building up of the members individually. In Ephesians 4:16, on the contrary, we have the building up of the Body in a corporate way.

It is important to see that if we have not been built up individually, we shall not be able to be built up with others corporately. The building of the meeting hall in Anaheim illustrates this. The material used in the construction of the hall was first built up in itself; then it was used with

other pieces of material to form the meeting hall. Redwood, for example, was used in the exterior. But a tender sprout of a redwood tree could not be used for this, could it? The redwood trees first had to grow and be built up in themselves by absorbing the riches from the soil. Only then could they become the proper building material. The same is true of us. We need to remain in our spirit absorbing the rich nourishment of Christ. As we absorb this element, we shall grow, and by this growth we shall then be built up. Then it will be possible for us to be built up with others in the Body.

If we would walk in Christ, we need to absorb His riches by being rooted in Him and to be built up as individual members of the Body. We need to sink our roots into Christ deeper and deeper so that we may absorb more of His riches. Then we shall grow and be built up in Him. Having fulfilled these two conditions, we shall then be able to walk in Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-TWO

HAVING BEEN ROOTED IN CHRIST AND BEING BUILT UP IN HIM

(2)

Scripture reading: Col. 2:7a, 19; 3:10-11; 1 Cor. 3:6, 9; 6:17; Eph. 2:21; 4:13b, 15-16

In reading or studying the Bible, it is easy to take things for granted. We may read a verse such as 2:7, which speaks of having been rooted in Christ and of being built up in Him, and we may assume that we understand it, when actually our understanding is very superficial. The same may be true even of verses such as John 3:16. On the one hand, we have some understanding of this verse. But, on the other hand, we may take very much for granted. Furthermore, in reading the Bible we may have the tendency to avoid difficulties. We may prefer not to dig into certain verses, pray about them, and ask the Lord to open them to us. As we consider a number of verses from Colossians, 1 Corinthians, and Ephesians, we should not take things for granted, and we should not avoid any difficulty presented by these verses. In particular, my burden is for us to see the implications in these verses.

ROOTED, GROWING, AND BEING BUILT

In 2:7 Paul speaks of having been rooted and being built up in Christ. The word rooted is very rich in its implications. To be rooted is altogether a matter of life. A plant that has been rooted in the soil grows in the earth and even into the earth. It is a living organism which grows in the soil. If, on the contrary, a dead stick is thrust into the earth, that stick cannot be said to be rooted in the soil.

As the roots of a plant spread into the soil, they absorb the riches from the soil. The nourishment that is absorbed into the plant becomes the very element by which the plant grows. In order for a plant to grow, it must receive through the roots a certain substance or element. It is by this substance that the plant increases in size.

As believers, we have been rooted in Christ. This implies that we are living organisms, not lifeless and rootless sticks thrust into the soil. Because we have been rooted in Christ, we now may absorb the riches of Christ into us. These riches, absorbed from Christ as the soil, become the very element which enables us to grow.

Colossians 2:7 speaks of having been rooted in Christ and of being built up in Him. The more a plant grows, the more it builds itself up. A tree, for example, builds itself up by absorbing into itself nourishment from the soil. This implies organic activity. Through this activity the nourishment from the soil is absorbed into the tree.

It is significant that in 2:7 Paul puts being rooted and building together. The reason for this is that being rooted is for growing, and growing is genuine building. Growth is not only for building, but is actually the building itself. As a tree grows, it builds itself up. The same is true of human beings. As all mothers realize, the more their children are nourished with healthy food, the more they grow, and by growing, they are built up. The organic activity that takes place within them causes them to grow. This growth is the building of their physical bodies.

Being rooted brings in the growing, and the growing is the building. If we do not grow, we cannot have any building. We grow by absorbing the rich, nourishing element of the soil. Having been rooted in Christ, we now are being built up in Him. We have been rooted in Christ, and we grow by absorbing His riches into us. This leads to growth, which is the building up of ourselves in Christ.

HOLDING THE HEAD

In 2:19 Paul speaks of "holding the Head, out from

Whom all the Body, by means of the joints and bands being supplied and knit together, grows with the growth of God." Holding the Head is equal to abiding in Christ. Of course, to hold the Head implies that we are not detached, or severed, from Him. At the time Paul wrote to the Colossians, they had been somewhat detached from Christ by their culture. Culture can be a form of insulation which keeps us from Christ. To hold the Head is to remain in Christ without any insulation between us and Him.

The words "out from Whom" in verse 19 indicate that something is coming out from the Head to cause the Body to grow. The growth of the Body depends on what comes out of Christ as the Head, just as the growth of a plant depends on what comes into the plant from the soil. If a plant does not absorb nutrients from the soil, the plant can-not grow. Likewise, if we do not receive what comes out from Christ as the Head, the Body cannot grow. Holding the Head is, therefore, equal to being rooted in Christ as the soil.

GROWING WITH THE GROWTH OF GOD

In 2:19 Paul says that the Body "grows with the growth of God." With God Himself there can be no growth, for He is complete and perfect eternally. Nevertheless, the Body still needs to grow with the growth, the increase, of God in us. The more God is added into us, the more we grow. This is what it means to grow with the growth of God.

In order for any living organism to grow, there must be some element which causes it to grow. We must have some-thing with which and by which to grow. For example, if children do not eat, they cannot grow. The way we grow spiritually is to have God added into us. This means that we grow with the addition, with the increase, of God, by having God added into our very being.

The little word "with" in 2:19 is important. With what does the Body grow? Does it grow with doctrine or Bible knowledge? No, the Body grows with the growth of God. We grow with the increase of God within us. God in

Himself is perfect and complete, but there is still the need for Him to increase within us.

As I was praying over 2:19, the Lord showed me that although He is eternally perfect and complete, I did not have that much of Him within me. I realized my need for God to grow in me, to have Him added into me. At that time I was enlightened to see the meaning of Paul's expression in 2:19, "grows with the growth of God." We all need God to be added into us more and more. We need to have Him grow in us, to increase in us.

As we consider 2:19, we must realize that the word God is not merely a term, and God Himself is not simply the object of our worship. God is rich in every way. He is rich in glory and in all the divine attributes. He is rich in love, kindness, mercy, light, life, power, and strength. Oh, God's riches are endless! Now this rich God is adding Himself into us. This is implied by the phrase, "grows with the growth of God." God's riches are the element and substance by which we grow.

THE NEW MAN

In 3:10 and 11 Paul speaks of the new man, where there "cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all and in all." In the new man Christ is all the members, and He is in all the members. There is no room for the natural man. There is no room for Americans or Chinese, for British or French, for you or me. In the new man Christ is all. In the church as the new man, Christ is everything. This implies that He is every brother and every sister. This also implies that every brother and sister must be constituted of Christ. In the new man there cannot be Jewish members and Gentile members; there can only be Christ-members. If we would be constituted of Christ, Christ must be added into us more and more. We must be permeated with Christ, saturated with Christ, and have Christ organically wrought into our being. Eventually, we shall be replaced by Christ. Then, in reality, He will be all

and in all. He will be every member, every part, of the new man.

The new man does not come into existence by taking Christians from various countries and bringing them together. That would be a new organization, not the new man. The new man comes into being as we are saturated, filled, and permeated with Christ and replaced by Him through an organic process. The new man is Christ in all the saints permeating us and replacing us until all natural distinctions have been eliminated and everyone is constituted of Christ.

Christ as all and in all in the new man should not be mere doctrine. Rather, the rich, substantial Christ must actually be wrought into us organically until He replaces our natural being with Himself. This can take place only as we remain rooted in Him and absorb His riches into us. These riches will then become the substance, the element, which will saturate us organically. Then Christ will become us, and we shall become constituted of Christ. This is not only to grow with Christ, but it is also to be built up in Christ.

ABSORBING THE RICHES FROM THE SOIL

Both the growth and the building depend on being rooted. This is why Paul uses the perfect tense to say "having been rooted." Christ, the good land, is the portion, the allotment, of the saints. As the good land, He Himself is the rich, fertile soil. Having been rooted in Him, we must daily absorb the rich nourishment of Christ into us to be the element that causes us to grow. All day long tender roots should absorb the riches of Christ as the soil. The more we absorb these riches, the more we shall be saturated by Christ and organically replaced by Him. This is to grow and to be built up in Christ.

PLANTED INTO CHRIST

In 1 Corinthians 3:9 Paul says that the saints are God's farm (Gk.). In 1 Corinthians 3:6 he says, "I have planted,

Apollos watered; but God gave the growth" (Gk.). These verses indicate that the believers are God's plantation and that Paul was a helper of the divine Husbandman. God is the real Farmer, and Paul was one of His co-workers (2 Cor. 6:1). Working together with God, Paul planted the believers into Christ. Christ is the soil. The context of 1 Corinthians indicates this. In 1 Corinthians 1:9 we are told that we have been called into the fellowship of the Son of God, and, in verse 30, that of God we are now in Christ Jesus, who has been made to us wisdom. He is righteousness for the past, sanctification for the present, and redemption for the future. To be put into Christ is to be planted into Him. Through Paul's preaching of the gospel and ministry of the Word, many were planted into Christ. Thus, Paul could say that he planted. Later, Apollos came to water what Paul had planted. Although Paul planted and Apollos watered, it was God who gave the growth.

HOW GOD GIVES THE GROWTH

Now we must go on to ask in what way God gives the growth. He gives the growth by getting into us. The more God is added to us, the more growth He gives. As we have seen, without the increase of God within us, there cannot be any growth. The growth of the Body depends on the growth of God, the addition of God, the increase of God, within us. Therefore, God gives the growth by giving Himself to us in a very subjective way.

Since God gives growth in this way, we need to take time to absorb Him. A well-known hymn exhorts us to "take time to be holy." Actually, our need is to take time to absorb God. As we daily take time to eat food, we should daily take time to absorb the Lord, take time to assimilate the riches of Christ. Our contact with the Lord should not be rushed. If we are in a hurry, we shall not be able to absorb much of His riches. We need to allow adequate time for prayer. This will enable us to absorb more of the riches of our God.

As we have pointed out, God is not simply a term nor an

object of worship. He is real, rich, and substantial, and we need to absorb Him. Our God today is the processed, all-inclusive Spirit, and we have a spirit with which to absorb Him. Thus, we must exercise our spirit to stay in His presence to absorb Him. This takes time. Although we all have experienced absorbing the riches of God, our experience is not yet adequate. For this reason, we must spend more time to absorb Him. Do not spend so much time in your mind, emotion, and will, but spend more time in your spirit to adore the Lord, to praise Him, to offer thanks to Him, and to speak to Him freely. As you fellowship with Him in this way, you will absorb His riches, and He will add more of Himself into you. The more God is added into us, the more growth He gives to us. This is the way God gives the growth.

Only God can give growth. In my ministry the most I can do is to plant or water. I cannot give growth to anyone, for I cannot give God. Only God can give you Himself. Without Him, we cannot have growth. God Himself is our food, and we need to seek Him at His dining table, where we need to take time to eat Him slowly. Then more of Him will be added into us. This addition of God into us is the growth He gives. For God to give us growth actually means that He gives us Himself.

ONE SPIRIT WITH THE LORD

One of the greatest verses in the Bible, 1 Corinthians 6:17, says, "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." The implications of this verse are marvelous and far-reaching. We, the believers, are one spirit with the Lord. How tremendous! This implies that we are in Him and that He is in us. It also implies that we and He have been mingled, blended organically, to become one in life. To be one spirit with the Lord implies that we and He are a living entity. We simply do not have words to explain the significance of this verse. To say that we are one spirit with the Lord definitely does not mean that we are deified. How-ever, it certainly does imply the mingling of divinity with

humanity. In the words of #501 in *Hymns*, "God mingled with humanity lives in me my all to be." To be one spirit with the Lord means that we are blended with Him organically and mingled with Him in life. We urgently need more experience of this. We need to remain rooted in Christ and absorb all that He is into us. Then we and He, He and we, will be blended together in life organically to be one spirit. How profound! How wonderful!

When we are one spirit with the Lord, we cannot be affected by anything negative. Sin, the world, Satan, and Hades have nothing to do with us, for we are one spirit with the Triune God. This should not merely be a doctrine. In our experience this must be living and organic. Our spiritual being, our inner man, the regenerated spirit, must be permeated with the Lord and mingled with Him to form a single, living entity. This will result in growth and building.

THE GROWTH OF THE BUILDING

In Ephesians Paul also speaks of growth and building. In Ephesians 2:21 he says, "In Whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord." This verse refers to the universal church. In the eyes of God, the universal church is a building. This building is growing by absorbing the riches of Christ.

ARRIVING AT A FULL-GROWN MAN

In Ephesians 4:13 Paul speaks of arriving at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Christ's Body is His fullness. This fullness has a stature, and the stature has a measure. Thus, the fullness of Christ is the Body of Christ, His expression. We arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ by growth and building which come through the eating of Christ. As we eat Christ, more of Christ is added into us for growth and building. Eventually, we shall have the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. This

measure is the full growth of the new man. For this reason, Paul speaks of arriving at a full-grown man.

GROWING UP AND BEING BUILT UP

In Ephesians 4:15 and 16 Paul goes on to say, "But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, Who is the Head, Christ, out from Whom all the Body, fitted and knit together through every joint of the supply, according to the operation in measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love." The concept here is similar to that in Colossians 2:19. We must hold to the truth in love so that we may grow into the Head in all things. Out from the Head in whom we have grown we have nourishment, as indicated by the word supply. Through the supply which comes out from the Head, the Body grows and builds itself up in love. Much is implied here. The focal point of the implications of Ephesians 4:15 and 16 is that we should be rooted in Christ and absorb His nourishment into our being to become the element and substance with which we grow and are built up.

First, we grow individually, then corporately. Individual growth becomes corporate growth. Hence, not only are the members built up individually, but the Body is built up corporately. Our physical bodies illustrate this. Your body is built up through the growth of the individual members. If the members do not grow, the body cannot grow. Without growing, the members of the body cannot build themselves up. This would make it impossible for the body as a whole to be built up. Therefore, the building of the body depends on the building up of the individual members of the body. If all the members grow and build themselves up individually, the body will be built up corporately.

After a church has been in a locality for a certain period of time, friction may develop between the saints, even among the leading ones. How can the church be built up if there is such friction? Along with the friction, there must

also be growth. This growth will nullify the effect of the friction. I can testify that throughout the years in the church life, there has been considerable friction caused by the enemy. But the growth in Christ has canceled out all this friction. Therefore, we can be happy together and truly one. The shortages among us are filled by the riches of Christ. Then we grow both individually and corporately. This is the genuine building of the church. The building up of the church is based upon the building up of the individual members. Furthermore, the building of the members depends on their growth, which, in turn, depends upon being rooted in Christ and absorbing the riches of Christ to become the very element with which the members grow.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-THREE

IN CHRIST MADE FULL, CIRCUMCISED, RAISED, AND MADE ALIVE TOGETHER WITH HIM

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:8-15

Colossians 2:8-15 forms a complete section of the book. This section begins with a word of warning: "Beware that no one carries you off as spoil through his philosophy and empty deceit" (v. 8). This section is also followed by another warning: "Let no one therefore judge you in eating and in drinking or in respect of a feast or of a new moon or of Sabbaths" (v. 16). The warning in verse 8 is based on the verses which precede it. According to these verses, Christ is the mystery of God, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (vv. 2-3). In verse 6 Paul says that as we have received Christ, we should walk in Him. In order to walk in Christ, we must fulfill the two conditions mentioned in verse 7: we must be rooted in Him and be in the process of being built up in Him. Then we must beware that no one carries us off as spoil from the very Christ who is the mystery of God and in whom we should walk. We have received the wonderful Christ who is the mystery of God with all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Now, having been rooted in Him and being built up in Him, we should walk in Him.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE SOIL

The section of Colossians which includes 2:8-15 is rather complicated. It contains a number of important points. Many of these points are related to Christ as the good land, as the rich soil in which we have been rooted.

The expression "having been rooted" in verse 7 implies that there is soil. Verses 8 through 15 are a full description of Christ as the soil in which we have been rooted. Having been rooted in the soil, we grow with the elements we absorb from the soil. We know that Christ as the soil is in our spirit. Now we must go on to see, from verses 8 through 15, a description of the very soil in which we have been rooted. These verses present a full description and definition of the soil.

The first aspect of this very special soil is found in verse 9: "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." We have been rooted in the One in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily. We should not allow anyone to carry us away from such a soil. To be carried away from this soil is to be uprooted from it. When the book of Colossians was written, some were trying to uproot the believers from Christ. The believers had been rooted in Christ as the good land, as the One in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells. Instead of allowing anyone to carry us away from this soil, we must stay rooted in it.

In 2:10 Paul continues, "And you in Him are made full, Who is the Head of all rule and authority." Here we see more concerning the substance of Christ as the soil. One aspect of the soil is that of the fullness of the Godhead; another aspect is that Christ is the Head of all rule and authority. In Christ as the good land we have a number of different elements. The first element is all the fullness of the Godhead, and the second is the Head of all rule and authority.

In verses 11 through 15 we find more elements. Verse 11 says, "In Whom also you were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ." The soil also includes the circumcision of Christ, which denotes cutting and killing. In the soil there is, therefore, a killing element. Verse 12, which says that we were buried together with Christ in baptism, indicates that the soil also contains the element of burial. In Christ as the soil there is

a substance which causes us to be buried. After burial, we are raised up. In verse 12 Paul speaks of God who raised Christ from among the dead. This expression indicates that in Christ as the soil there is an element which causes us to be raised up. According to verse 13, we also are made alive. There is an element in the soil which gives us life, enlivens us. In 1 Corinthians 15:45 Paul speaks of the life-giving Spirit. In Colossians 2:13 he uses the same Greek term for life-giving, only in the past tense. As the soil, Christ has made us alive; He has given us life.

In verses 14 and 15 Paul continues, "Wiping out the handwriting in ordinances which was against us, which was contrary to us; and He has taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross. Stripping off the rulers and the authorities, He made a display of them openly, triumphing over them in it." Here we have more elements that are found in Christ as the soil. The wiping out of the handwriting in ordinances is an element in the soil. The same is true of the stripping off of the rulers and the authorities, the making of a display of them openly, and the triumphing over them in the cross. As the soil, Christ includes all these marvelous elements. Praise Him that He is such a rich soil! We have been rooted in this soil. Day by day, our roots need to sink deeper into Christ as the unique soil.

MADE FULL IN CHRIST

When we are rooted in Christ as the soil, the first thing to take place is that we are made full in Him (2:10). The phrase "made full" implies a great deal and requires an amplified translation in order to bring out its real significance. The Greek word implies completion, perfection, satisfaction, and full accomplishment. In Christ as the soil we are filled, completed, perfected, satisfied, and thoroughly supplied. We have pointed out that the first element of the soil is the fullness of the Godhead. As we absorb into our being the rich nourishment from the soil,

we enjoy this fullness. Then this fullness makes us full, completes us, perfects us, satisfies us, accomplishes everything for us, and thoroughly supplies our every need.

At this point, we need to consider further the meaning of fullness. What is the fullness spoken of in 2:9? As Colossians 1 indicates, the fullness is the expression of God. This expression is related to the image of God (1:15). As the image of the invisible God, Christ is both the Firstborn of all creation and also the Firstborn from among the dead (1:15, 18). The Godhead is expressed first in the old creation and then in the new creation, the church. Because all things were created in Christ, through Christ, and unto Christ. and because all things subsist together in Christ, there is the expression of the Godhead, the divine Being, in the old creation. The new creation is the church, the new man, in which Christ is all and in all (3:10-11). The fullness of God is thus the expression of God in the old creation and in the new creation. This expression of God, the fullness of the divine Being, is the image of the invisible God. We have pointed out previously that in 1:15 the phrase "Firstborn of all creation" stands in apposition to the expression "image of the invisible God." This indicates that the Firstborn of all creation is equal to the image of the invisible God. Christ is expressed in the items of the old creation. The same is true of the new creation, since Christ is the Firstborn from among the dead. Christ, the Beloved of God, is the image of the invisible God expressed in the old creation and in the new creation. This expression is the fullness of the Godhead.

This fullness is inexhaustible. Such an inexhaustible fullness is the first element of the rich soil in which we are rooted. God has planted us into a rich land. The first aspect of this land is the fullness of the Godhead, the expression of God in the old creation and in the new creation. Thus, the fullness implies the expression of God in the old creation and in the new creation. Having been planted into such rich soil, we absorb nourishment from the soil. The first element of the riches of the soil is the fullness. In this

fullness we have been made full. Thus, we are short of nothing.

Paul wanted the Colossian believers to realize that since they had been made full in Christ, they had no need to worship angels. Christ was the Head of all rule and authority, and angels were just one item of God's creation. In the fullness we are made full, complete, and perfect. Everything necessary is accomplished, and we are supplied and satisfied. Oh, this fullness is all-inclusive. It includes righteousness, justification, holiness, sanctification, and whatever we may need. Having been planted into this fullness, we should simply absorb nourishment from it. As we do so, we shall find that we have no lack. The experiences of crucifixion and resurrection are in the fullness. Praise the Lord that we may enjoy the universal, eternal, extensive, all-inclusive fullness! This fullness dwells in Christ bodily. Since Christ is the good land in which we have been rooted, we have been rooted in this fullness; in it we have been made full, complete, and perfect. We have no need whatever.

Before we were rooted in Christ as the good land, we did not have anything positive. Instead, we were involved with the flesh, the ordinances, and power of darkness. But now that we have been rooted in the good land, the fullness has become ours, and we are supplied with every positive thing. In this all-inclusive and extensive fullness, we have everything. We have God, we have an uplifted humanity, and we have divine attributes and human virtues. Do you need life? It is found in this fullness. Do you need love or patience? They also are included in the fullness. Because this fullness is all-inclusive, it accomplishes everything for us, it fully satisfies and supplies us, and it makes us full, perfect, and complete. How rich is the soil in which we have been rooted! It supplies us with everything, and we have no lack. We have the all-inclusive, inexhaustible fullness. In this universe there is such a thing that Paul in Colossians calls the fullness. This fullness dwells in Christ bodily. In Him, the embodiment of the fullness of the God-head, we are made full.

THE FLESH, THE ORDINANCES, AND THE RULERS AND AUTHORITIES

On the negative side, however, as 2:11-15 indicates, we have the flesh, the ordinances, and the rulers and authorities. Young and old, male and female, cultured and uncultured--we all are troubled by these three categories of negative things. We all have the flesh, we all have some type of ordinances, and we all are subject to the evil authorities in the atmosphere. Sin, worldliness, and offenses have their source in these negative things. Praise the Lord that in Christ as the soil we have the element of circumcision which puts the flesh to death! In Christ as the soil there is killing power. This killing element can be compared to salt, which when added to soil can kill corruption. In the soil of the good land in which we are rooted is the "salt" of circumcision. This element does not cause anything to grow, but it is effective in killing germs. It cuts the flesh and kills it.

After the killing, we have burial. In Christ as the soil there is an element which causes us to be buried. Furthermore, there is another element which raises us up. Thus, first the elements in Christ as the soil bury us; then they raise us up. In Christ as the soil we are put to death, buried, raised up, and given life. The killing and the burial take the negative things away from us, whereas being raised takes us away from the negative things. Then the element in the soil which gives life makes us living. Therefore, in Christ as the soil there are elements which kill us, bury us, raise us up, and make us living.

According to 2:14, the handwriting in ordinances, which was against us and contrary to us, has been wiped out. It has been nailed to the cross. In the soil there is also the element of the wiping out of the ordinances.

We all have certain kinds of ordinances concerning the way we conduct our daily life. These ordinances may not be in writing, but they are inscribed in our mentality. Perhaps you have never realized this, but ordinances hinder your growth in life. In order for you to grow properly, they need

to be wiped out, nailed to the cross. I can testify that as I absorb nourishment from Christ as the soil, my ordinances are wiped out. Today we do not need ordinances. We simply need to assimilate the riches from the soil that we may grow and be built up.

In the soil there is also an element which strips off the rulers and authorities and triumphs over them (2:15). This element is victorious over the evil spirits in the atmosphere. Both believers and unbelievers realize that there is something evil surrounding them. People try to be good, but something causes them to do evil. They are enveloped with an evil atmosphere. If we try in ourselves to combat the power of darkness in the atmosphere, we shall be defeated. But there is an element in Christ as the soil which defeats the evil spirits. As we stay rooted in the soil and absorb its rich elements, the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies will be stripped off. There is an element in the soil which strips off the power of darkness. We have been planted into this soil, and now we must enjoy all its riches.

In 2:10-15 Paul uses a number of verbs in either the past tense or the perfect tense in order to point to various accomplished facts. These facts should also become our experiences. According to our faith, the items in verses 10 through 15 are facts. But as we contact the Lord who is the all-inclusive Spirit in our spirit, these facts become our experience. We should not stop with simply believing the facts. We must take time to enjoy the Lord as the all-inclusive land so that these facts may become our experience.

TAKING TIME TO ABSORB THE LORD

If we take time to enjoy the Lord, we shall take adequate time to absorb Him. We have heard a number of messages concerning who the Lord is, what He is, and where He is. We have also learned how to exercise our spirit to contact Him. But now we must take sufficient time to absorb Him. We should not be lazy or indolent in

this matter. From my experience I can testify strongly that when we take time to enjoy the Lord, all the elements of the rich soil are absorbed into us.

Immediately after I was saved, I came to love the Lord and began to seek Him. As a seeker of the Lord, I longed to be victorious. I read books which taught me to reckon myself dead to sin. However, although I tried this, it did not work very well in my experience. For many years, I was groping to find the way to be victorious. Eventually I came to see that the crucifixion with Christ spoken of in Romans 6 can be experienced by us only in the Spirit, as revealed in Romans 8. A number of experienced saints in the Lord can testify that this is true. If we wish to be victorious, we must take time to absorb the Lord. As we absorb Him into us for our enjoyment, we shall have the fullness, the circumcision, the burial, the raising up, the impartation of life, the wiping out of the ordinances, and the stripping off of the power of darkness. Day by day we may enjoy the rich Christ by absorbing Him into us.

I am thankful that the Lord has opened 2:7 to us, showing us that we have been rooted in Christ as the rich soil. I am also thankful to see from 2:8-15 the kind of soil in which we are rooted. If you see that we have been rooted in Christ as the rich soil, you will be comforted and encouraged. Do not be troubled by your weaknesses. Consider the rich soil in which you are rooted. In this soil do you not have the fullness, the circumcision, the burial, the raising up, the giving of life, the wiping out of the ordinances, and the stripping off of the powers of darkness? Forget your situation, your condition, your failures, and your weaknesses and simply take time to enjoy the Lord. Take time to absorb Him, to assimilate the rich elements from Him as the soil. If you take time to absorb the Lord, you will be able to testify that in Christ you have no lack.

Every morning we need to take an adequate amount of time to absorb the Lord. Although even ten minutes is good, it is best to spend thirty minutes to enjoy Him at the start of each new day. If you spend thirty minutes to

absorb the Lord and to enjoy Him in the morning, you will not be bothered by negative things during the day. The "flies" and "scorpions" will not pester you, for the elements in the soil will repel them. However, if you fail to absorb the Lord in the morning, you are apt to be troubled by "flies" and "scorpions." Many saints can testify that absorbing the Lord in the morning supplies them with the best insect repellent. However, we should spend time with the Lord not only in the morning but also throughout the day. If we have a good time with the Lord in the morning, afternoon, and evening, not only shall we be supplied with the most effective pest control, we shall also enjoy a feast. However, if we are not faithful to take time to absorb the Lord, our condition will gradually deteriorate. Our experience confirms this. Let us turn from our thought, emotion, and intention and open ourselves to the Lord, exercising our spirit to say, "O Lord Jesus, I love You, I worship You, and I adore You. Lord, I give myself to You. I give You my heart and everything concerning this day." As you contact the Lord in this way, do not be hurried. Take time, the more the better. As you spend time contacting the Lord, spontaneously you will absorb into you the riches of the soil. The fullness, the circumcision, the burial, the raising up, the imparting of life, the wiping out of the ordinances, and the stripping off of the authorities will be yours. All these facts in the book of Colossians will become your experience.

ONE SPIRIT WITH THE LORD

Whereas the facts are in Christ, the experience is by Christ. We experience these things as we contact the Lord and are one with Him in a practical way. Recently I have been praying to the Lord every morning, "Lord, grant me the grace to live one spirit with You. Lord, I have no doubt that You are one spirit with me. But, Lord, I ask You to remind me that I am one spirit with You." The more we live one spirit with the Lord, the more we experience the all-inclusive and extensive Christ revealed in Colossians.

All those things that are facts in Christ thus become our experience by Him and with Him. Oh, let us absorb Him, enjoy Him and experience Him! Praise Him that we have been rooted in a rich, fertile soil filled with the divine attributes and uplifted human virtues! Everything we need is in this soil, in this good land in which we have been rooted. For the practice of the church life, let us stay rooted in this soil and absorb all its riches.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-FOUR

IN CHRIST AND ACCORDING TO CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:8-15; 2 Cor. 3:17; 2 Tim. 4:22a; 1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:4

In 2:8-15 Paul's emphasis is that the believers are in Christ and should be according to Christ. It is a fact that we are in Christ. In verse 10 Paul says, "And you in Him are made full." In Christ we also have been circumcised, raised up, and made alive (vv. 11-12). Paul's writing is structured around the basic concept that everything is in Christ. If the expression "in Him" were removed from 2:8-15, the very structure of Paul's composition would collapse.

In 2:8 Paul says, "Beware that no one carries you off as spoil through his philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ." Notice the expression "according to Christ." Paul's desire is that we would all live and have our being according to Christ. To be led astray from Christ is to have our being according to something other than Christ, in particular the tradition of men and the elements of the world. These two matters cover everything that is not according to Christ. Today believers and unbelievers alike live, walk, behave, and have their being either according to the tradition of men or according to the elements of the world. It is very difficult to find a person who has his being according to Christ. Nevertheless, the Christian walk should be a walk according to Christ. We praise the Lord for all the riches we have in Christ. Now we must go on to live and have our being according to Christ.

FACTS AND EXPERIENCE

In 2:8-15 Paul lists a number of important spiritual facts. It is a fact that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily. Christ is the Head of all rule and authority. We have been circumcised in Christ, buried in Him, raised up with Him, and made alive in Him. All these are facts. It is a fact that the ordinances in writing have been wiped out and that the powers of darkness have been stripped off. All these facts are related to the matter of what is in Christ. However, if these facts would become our experience, we must be not only in Christ, but also according to Christ. The expression "in Him" refers to the facts, whereas the expression "according to Christ" refers to experience. All those who are saved have the position of being in Christ. As saved ones, all the facts we have mentioned are ours. We have the right, the title deed, to all these facts. But whether or not our daily living is according to Christ is altogether another matter. We may have the assurance to declare that we are in Christ, but we probably do not have the boldness to say that our daily walk is according to Christ. Do you have the confidence to testify that your daily living is according to Christ? We are in Christ, but we do not have our being according to Christ. To a large degree, we live according to the tradition of men and the elements of the world. We have the facts, but we are short of experience.

CARRIED AWAY FROM CHRIST

In Colossians 2 Paul indicates that the Christ we have received is the mystery of God, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. Now we need to walk in Him, having been rooted in Him and being built up in Him. After giving such a word, Paul charges us to beware that no one carries us off as spoil. Having seen the wonderful fact that we have received Christ as the mystery of God and have been rooted in Him, we must now take heed lest we be carried off from such a Christ. If you cannot say that you walk according to Christ, this indicates that, in a

practical way, you have been carried off from Him. You have received Christ and have been rooted in Him, but as far as your daily living is concerned, you have been carried away from Him. To fail to have our daily walk according to Christ means that we are severed from Christ. As long as we are severed from Christ, it does not matter whether we are far removed from Him or only a little bit away from Him.

For the most part, our daily walk is according to the tradition of men and the elements of the world and not according to Christ. Tradition is the main component of culture. Without tradition, culture could not exist. We inherit culture from the traditional practices of our family, society, and country. Spontaneously and unconsciously, we live according to the cultural traditions we have inherited. Furthermore, we live according to the elements of the world, that is, the elementary principles of culture. Traditions are the practices of culture, whereas the elements are the basic principles of culture. Even we who love Christ and seek after Him are still dominated by these two things. I hate any aspect of my daily living that is according to the tradition of men or the elements of the world and not according to Christ. I do not want to have my being according to Chinese tradition or according to the ethical teaching of Confucius. Many times I have prayed, "Lord, forgive me for living according to the tradition of men instead of according to Christ." God's desire is that we walk according to Christ. For example, a sister may be very submissive, following either the teaching of the Bible or an ethical standard that is according to her culture. Such submission, however, may not be according to Christ. God does not want any behavior that is not according to Christ.

Many saints, after they have been in the church for a period of time, begin to walk according to what may be called the local church way of life. In a sense, the church life refines our humanity. The humanity of those in the local churches is very high. However, it is possible for us to walk according to our refined humanity and not according

to Christ. Instead of living Christ, we may conform to certain standards or practices. For example, a sister who has been in the church life for a while may decide to stop using makeup. But her decision may not necessarily be made according to Christ. Instead of walking according to Christ in this matter, she may simply be conforming to the local church way of life. Another example is that of a brother who chooses to have short hair instead of long hair. If this brother were not in the church life, he might prefer to have his hair long. But because he is in the church, he chooses to wear his hair short. In this matter, however, he also may be conforming to a certain way of life instead of living according to Christ. In the church life, we should not be conformists; we should live, walk, and have our being according to Christ. God's intention is not to have a group of clean, neat, refined people. His desire is to have a group of people who have their being according to Christ. It is not sufficient just to be in Christ; we must also walk according to Christ. To be in Christ is a matter of position, but to walk according to Christ is a matter of experience. We should dress ourselves and style our hair according to Christ, not according to the tradition of men or the elements of the world.

God's desire is that our daily walk be according to Christ. As long as we do not live according to Christ, we have been carried off from Him. Just as even a thin piece of insulation can stop the flow of electricity, so even the slightest separation from Christ can cause us to be carried away from Him. There is no need to indulge in worldly things in order to be carried off from Christ. Even if you attend the church meetings without walking according to Christ, you will be separated from Him in a practical way. In the matter of being carried off from Christ, you are no different from Christians who indulge in worldly entertainments. We have been saved, regenerated, and rooted in the all-inclusive and extensive Christ. However, it is very easy for us to be carried off from Him. Where are the Christians today who truly walk according to Christ

and not according to man's tradition? Virtually all believers have been carried away from Christ and live according to some kind of tradition. Where are those Christians who live simply, solely, and uniquely according to Christ?

The believers in Colosse were not carried off from Christ by sinful things. They were carried away by the good traditions of culture and by the elements of the world. Many Christians are like the Colossians. Although they may live according to high standards and follow the best practices, they may not have their daily living according to Christ.

WALKING ACCORDING TO SPIRIT

Romans 8:4 is a verse that is parallel to Colossians 2:8 in the sense that it tells us to walk according to spirit. To walk according to spirit is to walk according to Christ. If you walk daily according to spirit, you will automatically walk according to Christ. If you walk in this way, you will do certain things or refrain from doing things, not because you are conforming to the practice of the local churches, but because you are walking according to Christ.

In the New Testament there are some crucial verses concerning the Spirit. Second Corinthians 3:17 tells us that the Lord is the Spirit; 2 Timothy 4:22 indicates that the Lord is with our spirit; 1 Corinthians 6:17 says that he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit; and Romans 8:4 charges us to walk according to spirit. The Spirit mentioned in 2 Corinthians 3:17 (the Greek is better rendered "the Spirit" rather than "that Spirit") is the very Spirit spoken of in John 7:39, the Spirit which was not yet until Jesus was glorified. After His resurrection, the Lord became the Spirit who gives life to all who believe in Him. Today the Lord is the Spirit, and we have this Spirit in our spirit. Praise the Lord that we are one spirit with Him and that we may walk according to spirit!

AN ALL-INCLUSIVE COMMANDMENT

The commandment to walk according to spirit is all-

inclusive. It includes what the Bible says about husbands loving their wives, about wives submitting to their husbands, about children honoring their parents, and about parents caring for their children. All the necessary virtues, such as humility, kindness, honesty, faithfulness, and love, are included in the walk according to the spirit. God does not want us to endeavor to be virtuous, loving or submissive. He only wants us to walk according to the spirit. Oh, it is crucial for us to see this!

The book of Colossians reveals that Christ is all-inclusive and extensive. In Him we have everything, for in Him we are made full, perfect, and complete, and we are supplied and satisfied. Now we must go on to see that, for our practical experience, this all-inclusive and extensive Christ is the Spirit. Those who do not care for the experience of Christ will deny that Christ is the Spirit. But we who care for the experience of Christ must see that the New Testament reveals clearly that the Lord is now the Spirit. As the Spirit, the Lord is in our spirit. Thus, we know what the Lord is--the Spirit--and we know where He is--in our spirit. The Lord wants us to be able to locate Him. Knowing that He is the Spirit in our spirit, it is easy for us to contact Him. Should someone ask you where is the Christ about whom you talk so much, you should answer that He dwells in your spirit.

APPLIED IN OUR DAILY LIVING

We need to apply the matter of walking according to spirit in every aspect of our daily living. For example, the brothers who live together need to apply this to their conversation with one another. One brother may be accustomed to speaking according to his mind, whereas another brother may talk according to his emotion. Both brothers must learn to talk according to the spirit. When they rise up early in the morning, they should exercise to talk not from the mind or from the emotion, but from the spirit. The brothers should pray, "Lord, grant me the grace to speak from my spirit." However, instead of doing this,

the brothers may live according to the tradition of men and the elements of the world. Although they may not quarrel with each other, they may live according to their humanity which has been refined by the church life and not live according to Christ.

A very important area in which to walk according to our spirit is our married life. It is difficult for husbands to remain in the spirit with their wives. It is easy for them to be either in the mind, the emotion, or the will. One of the most difficult things for a brother to do is to turn to his spirit in the presence of his wife. But we brothers need to learn to walk according to spirit in relating to our wives. If a brother's wife treats him well, he may be happy. But if she is not pleasant to him, he may be offended. Instead of turning to the spirit, he may choose to stay in his emotion. But whether our wives are kind or unkind, we need to stay in our spirit. If your wife rebukes you, stay in the spirit. If she speaks well of you, stay in the spirit. If you stay in the spirit, you will walk according to Christ in your married life.

Wives also need to learn to be in the spirit when they are with their husbands. This is even more difficult than for a husband to be in spirit with his wife. Many sisters can be in the spirit with almost anyone except their husbands. When they are with their husbands, they are usually in the emotion, not in the spirit. We need the Lord's mercy and grace to be in the spirit with our husband or wife. We must confess that, to a large degree, our married life is not according to Christ. Let us look to the Lord that He would grant us the mercy and grace to have our married life according to the spirit. This is basic and crucial for the church life. The married life is the foundation of the family life, the family life is the basis of our daily life, and our daily life is the basis of the church life. This shows the crucial importance of our married life. If we can live according to our spirit in our married life, a great many difficulties will disappear.

It is vital that we learn to behave according to our spirit

at home. A brother may be careful to be in spirit with the saints, but not with his children. Actually, we should be more exercised to be in spirit with our children than with the brothers and sisters. If in our daily life at home we are exercised to live, walk, and have our being according to the spirit, our living will be according to Christ, not according to the tradition of men or the elements of the world. If our daily walk is according to the spirit, we shall spontaneously know what to say and what to do. There will be no need for regulations or a code of behavior. The Spirit in our spirit will be our unique, living regulation. When we walk according to the divine Spirit mingled with our human spirit, we shall have our being according to Christ. Then not only shall we be in Christ, but we shall also be according to Christ. May the Lord grant us the grace to go on from simply being in Christ to living according to Christ. Praise the Lord that we are in Him. Now He is waiting for us to satisfy the desire of His heart by walking according to Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-FIVE

NOT DEFRAUDED OF YOUR PRIZE OF THE ENJOYMENT OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:16-19; 1:25-28

We have pointed out a number of times that Paul's ministry was a ministry of completing the word of God. In 1:25 he says, "I became a minister according to the stewardship of God, which was given to me for you, to complete the word of God." If the Epistles of Paul were removed from the Bible, there would be a great gap. The word of God simply would not be complete. The divine revelation was completed through the ministry of Paul.

Of all the books written by Paul, the ultimate book, the consummate book, is Colossians. This book is filled with matters which are high and profound. We may compare it to a gold mine filled with riches to be dug out.

EXPERIENCING THE EXTENSIVE CHRIST

In the book of Colossians, Christ is revealed not only as the all-inclusive One, but also as the extensive One. He is universally extensive. This is indicated by the fact that in 2:16 and 17 He is presented as the body, the substance, of all the shadows. Christ is the reality of all the positive things in the universe. This makes Him extensive as well as all-inclusive.

According to the revelation in the book of Colossians, the extensive, all-inclusive Christ is everything to us. Although Christ is universally extensive, He should be our daily experience. We should experience Him in our daily living and in our daily walk. The extensive, all-inclusive Christ must become real, practical, and experiential to us day by day. On the one hand, in Colossians Paul presents

the revelation of the extensive Christ. But on the other hand, he speaks of our experience of such a Christ in a detailed way.

Concerning the revelation of Christ, Paul uses terms such as "image of the invisible God," "Firstborn of all creation," "Firstborn from among the dead," "the mystery of God." But concerning our daily experience of Christ, Paul speaks of such common, ordinary matters as eating and drinking (2:16). Even in such matters we need to experience Christ. For example, you may experience Christ as you are enjoying a cup of tea or even a glass of water. If we ask ourselves whether or not we enjoy Christ in the small matters of our daily living, we shall realize that we are short of experience. If you do not enjoy Christ in your eating and drinking, and if you do not enjoy Christ as the real clothing while you are dressing yourself, you have been defrauded of your prize of the enjoyment of Christ. This is an extremely serious matter.

DAILY, WEEKLY, MONTHLY, AND YEARLY ENJOYMENT

Colossians 2:16 says, "Let no one therefore judge you in eating and in drinking or in respect of a feast or of a new moon or of Sabbaths." In writing these words Paul wisely refers to matters related to our daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly enjoyment. Eating and drinking are daily matters, keeping the Sabbath is a weekly matter, observing the new moon is a monthly matter, and enjoying certain feasts is a yearly matter. In referring to these matters, Paul indicates that whatever we enjoy daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly should be the enjoyment of Christ. Otherwise, we are being defrauded of Christ and carried away from Him. For example, when you eat your lunch, you need to realize that your physical food is a shadow of Christ as the real food. Christ is the body, the substance, of this shadow. We should know this not only doctrinally, but also experientially. When you are invited to go to a restaurant

for a meal, you should not go there only to enjoy the shadow, but go to enjoy Christ.

According to 2:16-17, material things are a shadow of Christ. The "things to come" in verse 17 are the things concerning Christ as our enjoyment. Thus, Christ is the body, the substance, the reality, of all the shadows. As such, He must be the reality of our daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly enjoyment.

It is significant that after speaking of Christ as the body of the shadows, Paul goes on to say, "Let no one purposely defraud you of your prize" (v. 18). According to the con-text, the prize is the enjoyment of Christ as the body of the shadows. The enjoyment of Christ is truly a prize.

DEFRAUDED OF THE SUBJECTIVE ENJOYMENT OF CHRIST

Some of the saints in Colosse were Jews, and others were Greeks. Both paid a price in turning to Christ. Having paid a price, they could receive the enjoyment of Christ as their prize. Both the Jewish and Gentile believers had suffered much because of their faith in Christ. Therefore, they could have the subjective enjoyment of Christ as their prize. The same is true of us today. Many saints have suffered persecution because they have turned to Christ and to the way of the Lord's recovery. But now they may enjoy Christ as their reward, as their prize. This prize is not only the objective Christ, but in particular it is the subjective enjoyment of Christ. Colossians 2:16 and 17 indicate this. These verses reveal that Christ is not only objective, but that He is also the One for us to enjoy daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly. The Christ we experience daily in matters of eating and drinking is a very subjective Christ. The same is true of the Christ we experience as our weekly completion and rest (the Sabbath), as a new beginning in darkness (the new moon), and as our yearly enjoyment (the feasts). Therefore, according to verse 18, to be defrauded of our prize is to be deprived of the subjective enjoyment of

Christ. Daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly we should enjoy Christ. We should not allow anyone to defraud us of this prize.

The Colossian believers, however, were being defrauded of their prize of the enjoyment of Christ. The Jewish believers were distracted from Christ by the Judaizers, whereas the Gentile believers were carried off by certain philosophical concepts. Both were defrauded of the daily experience and enjoyment of Christ. Furthermore, they had lost the weekly, monthly, and yearly enjoyment of Him. This indicates that the Jewish and Gentile believers alike had been led astray, deprived of the very prize for which they had paid such a price. As we have indicated again and again, this prize is the subjective experience of Christ daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly.

We need to check whether we experience and enjoy Christ in a practical way daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly. It is very possible that we, like the Colossians, have also been defrauded of our prize. Satan, the Devil, may defraud us of Christ, and we may not even realize it. Once I had my briefcase, which contained my passport, stolen from beside my chair while I was talking to someone in an airline company office. However, at the time of the theft I did not realize what was happening. I was defrauded of my briefcase, but I was totally unconscious of the fact. In like manner, we may not be conscious of the fact that the enemy has deprived us of the enjoyment of Christ. We may have lost the daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly enjoyment of Christ and not even realize it.

BACK TO CHRIST

In His recovery the Lord is bringing us back from religion and everything other than Christ to Himself. God's economy is to dispense Himself into us for our enjoyment. God wants Christ to be not only our Savior and not even just our life, but also to be our daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly enjoyment. But as we consider the situation among the vast majority of Christians today, we see that this enjoyment has been lost. Instead of enjoying

Christ,

believers are occupied with religion, so-called worship services, and theological teaching. There is very little enjoyment of Christ in a practical and living way. No doubt it is necessary for the Lord to have a recovery. We need to be brought back to Christ Himself. In particular, we need to be recovered to the continual enjoyment of Christ in a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly way.

My burden is not to give more messages on doctrine. My concern is that the saints experience Christ in a practical way. If such is not our situation, then we have subtly been defrauded of Christ as our prize by the enemy. We need to enjoy Christ in all the small details of our daily living.

THE COMPLETION OF THE DIVINE REVELATION

By the Lord's mercy, we may live a very upright life. But although we may be kept from sin, we may still be very much short of Christ. In many respects, our daily living may be excellent. But still we must ask a crucial question: How much do we experience Christ and enjoy Him? It is not our goal only to have a proper daily life. Our goal must be Christ. We are here to gain Christ and to experience Him. I appreciate the fact that the standard of our daily walk is quite high. If everyone in this country had such a standard, the situation of the whole nation would be much improved. But we cannot be satisfied simply to have an upright daily life. This is not God's goal. For the sake of God's purpose, we need to experience Christ and enjoy Him. How much enjoyment of Christ do you have in your daily life? If you do not have much enjoyment of Christ, then in your experience the word of God has not been completed in full. You stand in need of the ministry of Paul, in particular of the book of Colossians.

According to 1:26, the word of God completed through the ministry of Paul was "the mystery which has been hidden from the ages and from the generations, but now has been manifested to His saints." This mystery is Christ

in us, the hope of glory (v. 27). Although we may have considerable knowledge of the Bible, we do not have the completion of the divine revelation unless we adequately experience Christ daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly. Our need is for the subjective Christ to become our enjoyment to complete the divine revelation within us. If we are short in the experience and enjoyment of Christ, we are also short concerning God's revelation. His revelation needs the experiential Christ as its completion.

FULL GROWN IN CHRIST

In verse 28 Paul said that he announced Christ, "warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom" in order to "present every man full grown in Christ." The way to be full grown in Christ is to experience Christ and enjoy Him daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly. Those who experience Christ and enjoy Him in this way will become full grown. They will be full, complete, and perfect; they will not lack anything.

THE CONTINUAL ENJOYMENT OF CHRIST

In our daily living it is easy for us to be more concerned about our behavior than about the enjoyment of Christ. As those who love the Lord and seek Him, we have a natural desire to uplift our behavior. We earnestly desire to have an upright daily life. Whenever we fail the Lord in our daily walk, we are full of regret and we confess to the Lord and ask Him to forgive us and cleanse us. Although we may be very exercised in matters like this, we may not care adequately for the enjoyment of Christ. Oh, we need to enjoy Christ in our daily living!

We have seen that we need to enjoy Christ in the daily matters of eating and drinking. The fact that we eat and drink a number of times during the day indicates that we should not be content to enjoy Christ just once a day. Eating and drinking are shadows. If we eat and drink more than once a day, then we should also enjoy Christ more

than once a day. We should experience Christ not only daily, but many times throughout every day.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:17 Paul says, "Pray without ceasing." To pray in a genuine way is to enjoy Christ. I regret to say that much of our prayer is not genuine, for we often do not enjoy Christ as we pray. When-ever we pray properly in the spirit, we enjoy Christ. To pray unceasingly actually means to enjoy Christ without ceasing. We need to enjoy Christ continually. However, not many of us have been helped to live a spiritual life in the way of constantly enjoying Christ. For this we need to pray that the Lord would grant us the grace to enjoy Him daily and throughout every day.

REMINDERS OF CHRIST

In Paul's word about shadows we have a hint as to how we may enjoy Christ in a practical way. Since such things as eating and drinking are shadows of which Christ is the substance and reality, we need to be reminded whenever we eat and drink that the real food and the real drink are Christ. When you eat your food, you should simultaneously eat Christ. When you drink some beverage, you should also drink Christ. As you put on your clothing, you should be reminded that Christ is the real clothing, and you should experience Him as such. As you put on your material clothing, you should also put on Christ. It is easy to enjoy Christ in this way. Whatever we do day by day should remind us of Christ as the reality of that thing. Even our breathing should remind us of the necessity of breathing Christ spiritually.

If we follow the practice of taking Christ as the reality of all the material things in our daily life, our daily walk will be revolutionized and transformed. It will be full of Christ. When we eat and drink, we shall take Christ as our spiritual food and drink. Everything we do will remind us to contact Christ, to enjoy Christ, to experience Christ, and to have Christ as our everything. To practice this day by day is truly to enjoy Christ.

ROOTED IN CHRIST TO ABSORB HIS RICHES

Further help concerning the practical enjoyment of Christ is found in 2:7. According to this verse, we have been rooted in Christ. This word implies the existence of soil. Christ is the rich soil in which we are rooted. In a fore-going message we pointed out that this rich soil contains many marvelous elements: the fullness of the Godhead, the headship of Christ, Christ's circumcision, His burial, being raised up with Christ, the wiping out of the ordinances, and the stripping off of the rulers and authorities. Colossians 2:9-15 is a description of the elements of the soil implied by the words "having been rooted" in 2:7.

We are rooted in Christ, who is the rich, fertile soil. Having been rooted in Him, we should go on to absorb His riches. As a tree absorbs nourishing elements from the soil through its roots, we also should absorb the riches of Christ into us. The elements absorbed into a tree from the soil enable the tree to grow. Thus, a tree's growth depends upon the nourishment it absorbs through its roots. Since we have been rooted into Christ, we should remain in Him in a practical way day by day. In our experience, we need to stay rooted in Christ. However, if we forget Christ in matters such as eating and drinking, we are not rooted in Him in our experience. When we eat our food, we may not remember Christ. After our meal, we may spend some time in prayer. But even at the beginning of our prayer, we may not actually and experientially be rooted in Christ, for we may pray many unnecessary things. But in His mercy and patience, the Lord waits until we begin to pray in a genuine way. Then in our experience we absorb Christ's riches. However, when our time of prayer is finished, it may happen that we do not go on to assimilate what we have absorbed of Him. According to the Lord's words in John 15, it could be that we do not abide in Him.

In the morning many saints spend time with the Lord. However, even though they spend a certain amount of time with Him, they may not absorb much of His riches.

The

reason is that they are in too much of a hurry. If we would absorb the riches of Christ into us as our nourishment, we should not be rushed. We cannot absorb anything if we are in a hurry.

We should not only absorb the Lord in the morning, but we should be like trees continually absorbing the riches of the soil. This means that we must learn to practice the continual enjoyment of Christ. We should let every physical thing be a reminder of Christ, for all these things are shadows of which Christ is the substance. The clothing we put on each day should remind us of Christ. We should put Him on in our spirit and by our spirit. Drinking a glass of water should remind us to drink Christ by the exercise of our spirit. To follow this practice is to be rooted in Christ and to absorb His riches.

TENDER ROOTS

If we would absorb the riches of Christ as the soil, we need to have tender, new roots. Do not let yourself get old, but be fresh and renewed day by day. Pray to the Lord, "Lord, I want my consecration to be fresh, and I want to open to You anew. I want my roots to be tender that I may absorb Your riches. Lord, don't let my roots get old." If our roots are tender and new to absorb the riches of Christ, we shall grow automatically with the riches we assimilate. This is to enjoy Christ and to experience Him subjectively daily and hourly. This will keep us from being defrauded of our prize. But if we do not remain rooted in Him to absorb His riches, in a subtle way the enemy will defraud us of the practical and continual enjoyment of Christ.

HEEDING PAUL'S WARNING

Although there are millions of Christians on earth today, almost all of them have been defrauded of their prize of the enjoyment of Christ. They believe in Christ, have received Him, and perhaps have even paid a price to follow Him, but, like the Colossians, they have been deprived of the enjoyment of Christ. All Christians,

including us, need to heed Paul's warning not to allow anyone to defraud us of our prize. We should not allow anyone to carry us away from the enjoyment of Christ. Christ is the body, the reality, of all the positive things in the universe. As we enjoy the positive physical things, we should be reminded to enjoy Christ. If we do this, our daily living will be full of the enjoyment of Christ. Then we shall be rooted in Him, absorb His riches, and grow in Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-SIX

HOLDING THE HEAD, OUT FROM WHOM ALL THE BODY GROWS WITH THE GROWTH OF GOD

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:16-19; 1:18a; 2 Cor. 3:17a; 2 Tim. 4:22a; 1 Cor. 6:17

Colossians 2:18 and 19 say, "Let no one purposely defraud you of your prize, in humility and worship of the angels, standing on things which he has seen, vainly puffed up by the mind of his flesh, and not holding the Head, out from Whom all the Body, by means of the joints and bands being supplied and knit together, grows with the growth of God." The phrases "standing on things which he has seen" and "not holding the Head" are related to being defrauded. If we do not hold the Head but stand on things which we have seen, we shall be defrauded of our prize of the enjoyment of Christ. We should not allow ourselves to be defrauded by anyone standing on things which he has seen and not holding the Head. Whenever we ourselves fail to hold the Head, we are defrauded of our prize.

ENJOYING CHRIST AS THE REALITY OF ALL POSITIVE THINGS

It is important to understand, in an experiential way, what it means to hold the Head and how to hold the Head. We should not take 2:19 for granted, assuming that we know what it is to hold the Head. Instead, we should dig into this verse and inquire of the Lord concerning its meaning. Then we shall be enlightened.

To understand properly what it means to hold the Head, we need to consider 2:16 and 17, where Paul tells us that Christ is the body, the substance, the reality, of all

the shadows. Eating, drinking, Sabbaths, new moons, and feasts are all shadows of things to come, whereas Christ is the body, the reality, of these shadows. Based upon this fact, Paul warns us not to allow anyone to purposely defraud us of our prize. His warning in 2:18 and 19 is based upon the fact, revealed in verses 16 and 17, that Christ is the reality of all positive things. Those who seek to defraud us are the ones who stand on things which they have seen and who do not hold the Head. Thus, there is a connection between Christ as the body of the shadows and holding the Head. In other words, the very Christ who is the reality of all positive things is the One who is the Head of the Body. If we would know what it means to hold the Head, we must know what it is to enjoy Christ as the reality of all positive things. Without enjoying Christ in this way, we cannot experientially hold Him as the Head. With this as the background, we can now say that to hold the Head is simply to enjoy Christ as the reality of all positive things.

The genuine Christian life is a life of enjoying Christ. We need to enjoy the Lord all day long. We have seen that in speaking of eating, drinking, Sabbaths, new moons, and feasts Paul refers to matters of daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly enjoyment. Actually, we eat and drink several times a day. In Paul's use of illustrations in 2:16, he covers the whole span from the hourly enjoyment of Christ to the yearly enjoyment of Him. This indicates that we should enjoy Christ continually. When I drink a glass of water, I should remember to drink Christ. When I eat my food, I should enjoy Christ as the real food. Whenever we enjoy Christ in this way, we automatically hold Him as the Head. Thus, the best way to hold Christ as the Head is to enjoy Him. There is no better way to hold Christ than to eat Him. Just as we hold food by taking it into us and eating it, so we hold Christ by eating Him.

In 2:16-19, Paul takes a great leap, from Christ as everything for our enjoyment, which is on the ground floor, to Christ as the Head, which is the top floor of our experience. As we enjoy Christ as food, drink, air, and every-thing to us, we are uplifted by a divine elevator to

the very height, where we hold Christ as the Head. But if

we stop enjoying Christ, we immediately stop holding Him as the Head. Only when we enjoy Him do we also hold Him. This is not a doctrine learned from theology books. It is a fact of Christian experience. From my experience throughout the years I have learned that to hold the Head is to enjoy Christ continually. We are vessels made to contain Him, and we hold Him by eating, drinking, and breathing Him. By this we see that holding Christ as the Head is a very subjective matter.

BODY-CONSCIOUS

In 2:17 Paul says that the body is of Christ, but in verse 19 he speaks not of Christ, but of holding the Head. The reason for the change in terminology from Christ to the Head is that our enjoyment of the Lord causes us to become conscious of the Body. If we are those who enjoy Christ continually, we shall not continue to be individualistic. The saints who are individualistic are those who do not consistently enjoy the Lord. The more we enjoy Christ, the more we become Body-conscious. We should touch the Lord in the morning, but in the evening we should come to the church meetings. It is not normal to enjoy the Lord during the day and neglect the meetings of the church, which is His Body. Even if your environment does not allow you to attend all the meetings, inwardly you should have the sense that your whole inner being is with the saints in the church meeting. This consciousness of the Body comes from the enjoyment of Christ.

What we enjoy of Christ day by day is actually something of Him as the Head. This is the reason that when we enjoy Christ, He causes us to become conscious of the Body. According to our experience, we know that the more we enjoy Christ, the more intense is our desire for the Body. However, if we fail to contact the Lord for a period of time, we shall automatically neglect the church life or lose interest in the meetings. The less we contact the Lord, the more critical we become of the church or of the saints. We have an eye for the faults and shortcomings of others. This shortage of the enjoyment of Christ opens the door for the

enemy, Satan, to come in to make us critical of other members of the Body. But if we begin again to enjoy the Lord, the door will gradually close. Eventually, if we are constant in our enjoyment of Christ, the door will be completely shut. Then, instead of criticizing the church, we shall praise the Lord for the church life, and we shall testify how much we love it. What brings about such a change is not admonition or correction, but the recovery of the enjoyment of Christ.

The dear, precious One whom we enjoy as our food, drink, and breath, is the Head of the Body. Because Paul had a thorough realization of this, he could leap from Christ as the reality of all positive things for our enjoyment to the matter of Christ as the Head. Since the Christ we enjoy as our everything is the Head of the Body, the more we enjoy Him, the more we become Body-conscious. This indicates that the enjoyment of Christ is not an individualistic matter. It is a Body matter. We need to enjoy Christ as members of the Body in a corporate way.

LOVING ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE BODY

In 2:19 Paul speaks of "all the Body." The enjoyment of Christ keeps us one as members of the Body. The more we enjoy Christ, the more we love the other members of the Body. The enjoyment of Christ causes us to love everyone in the church life. Even those whom we find it difficult to love become dear and precious to us. However, if we do not keep on enjoying Christ, we shall despise certain ones in the church. Actually, the church and the saints remain the same; it is our attitude that changes. But if the supply of Christ is ministered to us and we begin to enjoy Him again, all the members of the Body will once again become lovable to us. We shall have the pleasant realization that, as members of the Body, we love all the other members.

It is the enjoyment of Christ which causes Him to be the Head in our experience. Christ cannot be our Head subjectively and experientially unless we enjoy Him. You may be told again and again that Christ is the Head of the Body, but you will not have any consciousness of Him as

the Head unless you enjoy Him regularly. The more you enjoy Christ, the more you will realize experientially that the very Christ you enjoy is the Head of the Body. This realization will make you conscious of the Body and cause you to love all the members of the Body.

BROUGHT INTO RESURRECTION

In 1:18 Paul says, "And He is the Head of the Body, the church; Who is the beginning, Firstborn from among the dead." The fact that Christ is the Firstborn from among the dead indicates that He is the Head of the Body in resurrection. Before His resurrection, Christ was not yet the Head of the Body. Ephesians 1 indicates that after His resurrection and ascension, Christ was made the Head over all things to the church. Hence, Christ's headship is in resurrection.

Because Christ's headship is in resurrection, the enjoyment of Christ spontaneously brings us into resurrection and saves us from our natural being. We all are natural. If we are not brought into resurrection through the enjoyment of Christ, we shall remain in our natural person. Praise the Lord that the enjoyment of Christ brings us into resurrection! The more we enjoy Him, the less natural we are. Once again, this is not a mere doctrine, but a fact of Christian experience.

BROUGHT INTO THE HEAVENS

The enjoyment of Christ also brings us into the Ascension. The more we enjoy Him, the more we are in the heavenlies experientially. This means that through the enjoyment of Christ, we become heavenly. Not only are we no longer natural, but we are no longer earthly. The enjoyment of Christ causes us to be both in resurrection and in ascension. The more we enjoy Christ, the more we are in the heavens. Therefore, to hold Christ as the Head is to be in the heavens in our experience. It is also true to say that to be in the heavens is to hold the Head. Experientially, holding the Head and being in the heavens are one and the same.

If in our experience we temporarily abandon Christ and do not continue holding Him as the Head, we shall sense that we are earthly. For example, suppose a sister does not hold Christ as the Head in the matter of shopping. Then at least temporarily, during the time she is shopping, she has given up the Head.

The same may be true in our married life. When a husband and wife are exchanging words, they certainly are not in the heavenlies in their experience. To say the least, they are earthly, for when they are arguing, they are not holding Christ as the Head. Whenever we are earthly, we are not holding the Head. But if in our married life we consistently enjoy Christ, we shall hold Him as the Head and be in the heavens in our experience. Then we shall be a heavenly people. Nothing will be able to pull us down from the heavens to the earth. Unfortunately, in our experience we quickly make this descent. Even a single word or unpleasant look can cause us to fall from the heavens to the earth. How quickly in our daily living we may cease from holding the Head!

According to 3:1-4, our living should be in the heavens, where God's throne is. On the one hand, Christ as our Head is in our spirit; on the other hand He is in the heavens, not on earth. Only when we are in the heavens do we hold Him as the Head. To enjoy Christ is to hold the Head, and to hold the Head is to be in the heavens.

OUR NEED TO BE IN SPIRIT

How in our experience can we be in the heavens? We can be experientially in the heavens only by enjoying Christ, the Head, as the life-giving Spirit in our spirit. Second Corinthians 3:17 says, "Now the Lord is the Spirit" (Gk.). If Christ were only the Head and not the Spirit, there would be no way for us to contact Him or hold Him experientially. But although Christ's position is that of the Head, in our experience He is the life-giving Spirit. According to 2 Timothy 4:22, the Lord, who is the Spirit, is now with our spirit. How wonderful! In the heavens, Christ

is the Head, but in our spirit, He is the Spirit. Therefore, to hold Christ as the Head is not only to enjoy Him and to be in the heavens, but it is also to be in our spirit. If we would hold the Head, we must be in spirit.

In 2:18 Paul uses the expression "vainly puffed up by the mind of his flesh." The mind is part of the soul, and the flesh is related to the physical body. Anyone who is puffed up by the mind of the flesh does not hold Christ as the Head, for he is in his fleshly mind, not in the spirit. Whenever we are in the mind or in the flesh, we are not holding the Head. But when we turn from the flesh and from the mind to the spirit, we automatically hold Christ as the Head. If we linger in our fleshly mind, we shall not be able to touch Christ or hold Him. But if we turn to the spirit, we shall hold the Head, who is the life-giving Spirit in our spirit.

We have seen that to hold Christ as the Head involves three things. To hold the Head we must enjoy Christ, we must be in the heavens, and we must be in our spirit. From our experience we know that these three matters go together. When we enjoy Christ, we are in the heavens and in our spirit, not in the mind or in the flesh. To be in the spirit is experientially to be in the third heaven. According to the Bible, the Holy of Holies is both in the third heaven and in our spirit. Whenever we turn to the spirit, we are in the heavens enjoying the Lord. This is the way to hold the Head.

ABSORBING THE RICHES OF CHRIST FOR THE GROWTH OF THE BODY

As we enjoy Christ and hold Him as the Head, we absorb His riches. According to 2:19, something proceeds out from the Head which causes the Body to grow with the growth of God. When we enjoy Christ in the heavens and in our spirit, we hold the Head and absorb His riches. Then out from the Head something will proceed to produce the growth of God in us. This means that more of the element of God is added into our being and thereby into the Body. This causes the Body to grow with the growth, the increase, of God.

As we hold the Head, we absorb the riches of the extensive, all-inclusive Christ. These riches are the elements of God, the very elements that proceed out from the Head and become in us the increase of God by which the Body grows. Eventually, the Body will be the one new man in which Christ is all and in all. Because Christ is the unique constituent of the new man, He is every member of the new man and in every member.

To hold Christ as the Head is to enjoy Him continually, to be in the heavens, and to remain in our spirit. Through holding Christ as the Head, we become conscious of the Body. Experiencing the Body life, we absorb the riches out from the Head. These riches are the very elements of God which become in the members of the Body the increase of God by which the whole Body grows. There-fore, the growth of the Body is the product of enjoying Christ, holding Him as the Head, and absorbing His riches.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-SEVEN

HAVING DIED WITH CHRIST FROM THE ELEMENTS OF THE WORLD AND HAVING BEEN RAISED WITH CHRIST TO LIVE WITH HIM IN GOD

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:20-23; 3:1-3; 2:11-12

In chapter two Paul says that Christ is the mystery of God and that in Him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. Now that we have received such a Christ, we should walk in Him, having been rooted and being built up in Him. To walk in Christ is to have our living and our being in Him. In 2:9 and 10 Paul goes on to say that in Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily and that we in Him have been made full. In Christ we have been completed, perfected, supplied, and satisfied. Furthermore, in Christ we were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, we were buried with Him in baptism, and we were also raised together in Him (vv. 11-12). According to verses 14 and 15, the hand-writing in ordinances which was against us has been wiped out, and the rulers and authorities have been stripped off. All these things are true in Christ.

ROOTED IN CHRIST AS THE RICH SOIL

All the matters mentioned above are elements of Christ as the rich soil in which we are rooted. The first element of this soil is the fullness of the Godhead. Other elements include circumcision, burial, being raised, the wiping out of the ordinances, and the stripping off of the powers of darkness. Since we have been rooted in Christ, we may now absorb all these rich elements into our being.

In the eyes of God, believers can be likened to plants.

For this reason Paul could say, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God made to grow" (1 Cor. 3:6, Gk.). Paul also said that we are God's farm, God's plantation (1 Cor. 3:9, Gk.). We have been planted into Christ who is the good land with very rich soil.

ENJOYING CHRIST TO BECOME BODY-CONSCIOUS

Verses 16 through 19 form a distinct section in Colossians 2. The matters in verse 16--eating, drinking, feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths--are all shadows, of which Christ is the reality, the substance. The "things to come" are the things related to Christ. In verses 18 through 19 Paul speaks of not being defrauded of our prize and of holding the Head. We have pointed out that, experientially and practically, to hold the Head is to enjoy Christ as the reality of all positive things. The result of holding the Head in this way is that we become Body-conscious. Whatever we enjoy of Christ is related to Him as the Head. This is why, when we enjoy Christ, we are actually holding the Head. We enjoy Christ as food, drink, Sabbaths, new moons, and feasts. But the Christ we enjoy in all these aspects is the Head who causes us to become conscious of the Body. The One we enjoy is not only Christ to us; He is the Head of the Body. Therefore, the issue, the consequence, of enjoying Christ and holding Him as the Head is Body-consciousness.

CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

To enjoy Christ, holding Him as the Head, is to absorb in-to us the rich elements of Christ as the soil. Two of these elements are the experience of having died with Christ and of having been raised with Him. In 2:20 Paul indicates that we have "died with Christ from the elements of the world," and in 3:1 he says that we were "raised together with Christ." The New Testament clearly says that we have been crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20). When I was a young believer, I tried my best to figure out how this could be true. How could we have died with Christ when

He was crucified more than nineteen hundred years ago? Certain books point out that when Christ was crucified, He included us. Brother Nee used Hebrews 7 to illustrate this. According to Hebrews 7:9 and 10, "Levi also, who receives tithes, has been made to pay tithes; for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchisedec met him." This means that when Abraham offered one-tenth to Melchisedec, Levi, the descendant of Abraham, who was in Abraham's loins at the time, also offered tithes. If Abraham had died childless, Levi would have died also. This illustration helped me to see how we were included in Christ when He was crucified.

EXPERIENCING OUR CRUCIFIXION WITH CHRIST

Seeking for further help in understanding the fact of our crucifixion with Christ, I read books which encouraged me to reckon myself dead. However, in my experience reckoning did not work. The more I tried to reckon myself dead, the more alive I became. Years later, my eyes were opened to see that the very Christ who was crucified on the cross became in resurrection the life-giving Spirit. When we believed in Christ, the life-giving Spirit came into our spirit. Now the two spirits are one (1 Cor. 6:17). Whenever we call "Lord Jesus," the life-giving Spirit comes. This indicates that Jesus is the name and the Spirit is the Per-son. The Spirit as this Person is now in our spirit. What-ever He has experienced is now our history. He has passed through crucifixion and has entered into resurrection. Having come into our spirit to make us one with Him, He causes even these experiences to become our history. Hence, it is in the spirit that we participate in Christ's death on the cross. This is not a matter of reckoning; it is a matter of union, of identification. When the Spirit came into us to become one with us, the Spirit brought with Him the effectiveness of Christ's death. Therefore, through the compound Spirit in our spirit, we participate in the death of Christ. Day by day, we may experience the effectiveness of Christ's death.

The compound, life-giving Spirit is an all-inclusive drink containing many elements. By drinking the Spirit, we spontaneously take in all the elements included in the Spirit. The effectiveness of Christ's death is one of the elements in this Spirit. This is what enables us to experience Christ's crucifixion. As the Head, Christ today is the all-inclusive Spirit in our spirit. In order to hold Him as the Head, we must be in spirit.

THE VINE, THE SOIL, AND THE HEAD

In Colossians 2 Paul speaks of being rooted and of holding the Head, and in John 15 the Lord Jesus speaks of abiding in the vine. Abiding in the vine is equal to being rooted in the soil, and being rooted in the soil is equal to holding the Head. On the one hand, Christ is the vine in which we abide; on the other hand, He is the soil in which we are rooted. But He is also the Head. Christ is the vine, the soil, and the Head. We abide in Him as the vine, we are rooted in Him as the soil, and we hold Him as the Head. In every case the principle is the same: we absorb Christ's riches into us. As branches, we absorb the life juice from the vine; as plants, we absorb the riches of the soil; as members of the Body of Christ, we absorb the nourishing element from the Head. By absorbing the riches of the Head, the Body grows with the growth of God (2:19). As we have indicated, the riches we absorb include crucifixion, being buried, and being raised up with Christ. When we hold Christ as the Head, we absorb all these elements into us.

AN EXPERIENCE MOMENT BY MOMENT

In 2:20 Paul says, "If you died with Christ from the elements of the world, why as living in the world do you subject yourself to ordinances?" The Greek word rendered "if" may also be translated "since." Since we have died with Christ, we should not live in subjection to ordinances. It is a fact that we have died with Christ. But although Christ died more than nineteen hundred years ago, our

participation in this death takes place moment by moment in the present as we are enjoying Christ, holding Him as the Head. Our experience of Christ's crucifixion is not once for all. On the contrary, it is a moment by moment matter. Perhaps last night you experienced Christ's crucifixion. But today you are not happy with your husband or wife, so you purposely come down from the cross in order to argue and vindicate yourself. You have been provoked, and you can no longer bear to remain silent. Last night you were in the death of Christ, but now you are very much alive in yourself. In one of his hymns, A. B. Simpson says, "Oh! It is so sweet to die with Christ." Last night this was sweet to you, but now you do not wish to remain in Christ's death. This indicates that whenever we are not in the spirit, we are not in the experience of the death of Christ. But when we are in spirit, we are dead with Christ. Whenever we are not in the spirit, we are in ourselves, living according to our natural life. From our experience we know that when we hold Christ as the Head in spirit, we have the experience of being crucified with Him. At such a time, we can declare to all, even to the Devil, that we have died with Christ.

WATCHING AND PRAYING

In 4:2 Paul says, "Persevere in prayer, watching in it with thanksgiving." If we would stay in the spirit, we need to watch and pray, even to pray without ceasing (1 Thes. 5:17). Only by praying without ceasing can we stay in the spirit. Many years ago I did not appreciate the Lord's word about watching and praying (Matt. 26:41). But in recent years I have come to see the importance of this word. We need to watch whether or not we are in the spirit and to pray that we may be preserved in the spirit. Are you tempted to exchange words with your husband or wife? Watch! Do you intend to go shopping for a certain item? Watch to see whether you are shopping in the spirit or in the flesh. We need to be on the alert that we may stay in the spirit.

We also need to pray, "Lord, grant me the preserving

grace to remain in the spirit. Lord, keep me in spirit." If we stay in the spirit, we shall experience the death of Christ in the all-inclusive, compound Spirit. There is no need for us to reckon or even to believe that we have been crucified with Christ. All we need to do is to abide in the spirit by watching and praying. In the spirit we experience the death of Christ and are released from all the elements of the world.

NO LONGER IN SUBJECTION TO THE ELEMENTS OF THE WORLD

According to 2:20, we have died with Christ from the elements of the world. The elements of the world are the elementary principles of religion and philosophy. Both the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers tried to bring elements of the world into the church life. We also may be subject to such elements. Unconsciously we may still be under the influence of our religious background. The elementary principles we inherited from religion are elements of the world.

In Colossians Paul implies that anything we cling to other than Christ experienced by us is an element of the world. For example, a certain sister in the Lord may be nice, kind, and disciplined. She had such a character even before she was saved. Now that she has become a believer, she brings this character into the church life. Others may appreciate her character, not realizing that it is natural. But whenever this sister lives according to her natural character, she is living according to the elements of the world, not according to Christ. Another sister in the church may have a character that is rather unrefined. Compared to the first sister, she is crude and undisciplined. But day by day she exercises to watch and to pray and thereby to remain in the spirit. Gradually, others notice a change in her living. It is difficult to describe her way of living. It is not altogether accurate to say that she is nice, kind, or disciplined. She is not living according to the elements of

the world, but according to Christ. There is a vast difference between this kind of living and living according to one's natural character. The elements of the world are useful in society, but there is no place for them in the church. When we remain in our spirit, we spontaneously experience the death of Christ included in the all-inclusive Spirit. In this death we are dead to the elements of the world.

We need to see that such things as natural kindness are simply elements of the world. Under the light of such a vision, we shall hate even our kindness because it is not of Christ, but an element of the world. Then we shall seek to remain in our spirit to enjoy Christ and to participate in His death. We shall even be able to tell Satan, "I am no longer living according to natural kindness. Satan, you have been deceiving me for years, keeping me under subjection to the elements of the world. Now I see that in Christ I have died from all these elements. In the spirit I enjoy Christ, hold the Head, and participate in His death. In this death I am released from the elements of the world."

When we hold the Head by remaining in our spirit, we absorb all the rich elements of the compound Spirit. One of these elements is our crucifixion with Christ. Only in the spirit are we free in a practical way from the elements of the world. Only when we are in the spirit can we declare that we have nothing to do with religion, philosophy, culture, or natural virtues. When we are in the spirit, we can hate these things, because we recognize that they are worldly and not of Christ. There is no way to abandon the elements of the world unless we are in spirit. If we try to do this apart from the spirit, our efforts will be in vain. When we stay in the spirit by watching and praying, we have the experience of being dead with Christ to the elements of the world.

RAISED UP WITH CHRIST

The principle is the same in being raised with Christ. If we stay in the spirit, we shall have the sense deep within

that we have been uplifted, raised up with Christ. Sometimes the saints speak of being "down." We are "down" because we are not in the spirit. Whenever we are in spirit, we are raised up. However, it is not possible to raise ourselves up. The more we try to do this, the lower we shall sink. But if we simply turn to the spirit and call on the name of the Lord Jesus, we shall be raised up with Christ.

SETTING OUR MIND ON THE THINGS WHICH ARE ABOVE

In 3:1 Paul says, "If therefore you were raised together with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God." Notice that Paul does not speak of "things which are in the heavens," but of "things which are above." These things are high, superior things. Our natural virtues, however, are low and inferior. In 3:2 Paul continues, "Set your mind on the things which are above, not on the things which are on the earth." What are the things above? As a child I was taught that the things above are the various features of heaven--the mansions, the pearly gates, and the golden street. However, if we follow the principle of interpreting the Bible by the Bible, we shall see that this is not the meaning of "the things above" in these verses. According to the New Testament, the things above include Christ's ascension, His enthronement, and His being made the Head, the Lord, and the Christ. In Acts 2:36 Peter says God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ. In Hebrews 2:9 we are told that the Lord Jesus has been crowned with glory and honor. In Ephesians 1:22 we see that in ascension Christ has been made Head over all things to the church. In Revelation 5:6 we see that Christ as the Lamb with seven eyes is now on the throne executing God's government. Such things are the things above.

In writing to the Colossian believers, Paul was charging them to no longer pay attention to Judaism, Gnosticism, or asceticism, all of which are elements of the world, things which are low and inferior. As those who

have been raised up with Christ and who are now living with Christ in God, they should seek the things which are above and set their minds on them. Christ has been crowned and enthroned; He has been made the Lord and the Head over all things. He is even now the Lamb with seven eyes executing God's government in the universe. These are the things above, the high, superior things, and we should set our mind on them.

Setting our mind on the things above will help us to experience Christ. The Christ whom we may experience is not only our food, drink, Sabbath, new moon, and feast. He is not only our daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly enjoyment. Our Christ is the One crowned and enthroned, the One who is the Lord and the Head, the One carrying out God's governmental administration. How much richer our enjoyment of Christ would be if we set our mind on these things!

LIVING IN GOD

We in the churches in the Lord's recovery talk much about the enjoyment of Christ. But our concept of enjoying Christ may not be high enough. According to our concept, Christ is our food, drink, clothing, transportation, and dwelling place. No doubt, all this is true. Nevertheless, our enjoyment of Christ still needs to be uplifted. We need to realize that our life is hidden with Christ in God. This means that our sphere of living should not be the earth, but should be God Himself. In 3:3 Paul clearly says that our life has been "hidden with Christ in God." Paul does not say that our life is hidden with Christ in heaven, for that would be to emphasize something too material. Instead he says that our life is hidden with Christ in God. Whenever we are in the spirit, we are raised up and have the sense that we are in God, far above everything and everyone. At such a time, we are living in God. But when we are not in the spirit, we have the sense that we are still living on earth. God is high, far above everything and everyone, even far above the heavens. When we are in the spirit, we are living in God.

We have seen that, according to 2:16-19, to enjoy Christ is to hold Him as the Head. When we hold the Head, we absorb all the rich elements of Christ into our being. Two elements of these riches are the facts that we have died with Christ and have been raised up with Him. When we remain in the spirit holding the Head, we can proclaim that we have died to everything other than Christ. We have died from all the elements of the world. We can also proclaim that we have been raised with Christ and are now hidden with Christ in God. We shall have the boldness to testify that our realm, our sphere, is not the earth, but God. Praise Him that we have died from all the elements of the world and have been raised up to live with Christ in God! Do you have the boldness to say that you are now living in God? You will have this boldness if you are in the spirit. But you will not have it if you are in the flesh living on earth. Only when we hold the Head by abiding in the spirit do we have the experience of being dead to the elements of the world and of being raised to live with Christ in God.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-EIGHT

SEEK THE THINGS ABOVE AND SET YOUR MIND ON THEM

Scripture Reading: Col. 3:1-3; Heb. 2:9a; 4:14-16; 7:25; 6:19-20; 8:1-2; Acts 2:36; Eph. 1:20-23; Rev. 4:1, 2, 5; 5:6

In 3:1 Paul tells us to seek the things which are above, and in verse 2, to set our mind on the things which are above. In this message we shall consider what it means to seek the things above and to set our mind on them.

THE RICHES IN COLOSSIANS

Paul wrote the book of Colossians in a very concise way. In only four chapters he presents many riches. In 1:12 he indicates that Christ is the portion of the saints. The One who is our portion is the image of the invisible God, Firstborn of all creation and also the Firstborn from among the dead (1:15, 18). Paul also tells us that Christ is the mystery of God (2:2) and that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him bodily (2:9). As the mystery of God and the embodiment of the Godhead, He is the reality, the body, the substance, of all positive things (2:16-17). The more we enjoy Him as this reality, the more we hold Him as the Head of the Body and thereby become Body-conscious. Then we shall experience Him as our life (3:4) and as the constituent of the new man (3:10-11). In the new man, Christ is all the members and in all the members. In this Epistle Paul mentions all these great matters without defining them. However, he does indicate that those of us who enjoy Christ and partake of Him, those who are being constituted into members of the new man, have our life hidden with Him in God. Now we should seek the things which are above and set our mind on them.

Although Paul charges us to seek the things above and set our mind on them, in Colossians he does not define what these things are. However, in other New Testament books, namely, Hebrews, Ephesians, and Revelation, there are some windows through which we can see into the heavens and come to know what is taking place there. If we look through these windows, we shall know what are the things above.

FROM THE FULLNESS TO THE NEW MAN

Paul and John wrote along very similar lines. In Colossians Paul presents the Christ who is the fullness of the invisible God. After mentioning aspect after aspect of such a Christ, he speaks of the new man. Between Christ as the fullness of God in chapter one and the new man in chapter three we have the experience of Christ and the enjoyment of Him. The issue of our experience and enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ is the church as the new man. Hence, the new man comes out of our enjoyment of Christ as the fullness of God. As we enjoy Christ daily, He is wrought into us, constituted into our very being. In this way, Christ becomes our constituent. Day by day, Christ is being constituted into us. Eventually, we all shall be thoroughly constituted of Him. As a result of being constituted of Christ, we become the new man. In this new man there is no place for any natural person; there is room only for Christ. Christ is all and in all in the new man. To repeat, in the new man Christ is all the members and is in all the members.

The only way Christ can be all and in all in the new man is for Him to constitute Himself into us. The process of being constituted of Christ takes place through our enjoyment of Christ. We need to say, "Lord Jesus, I love You, I treasure You, and I enjoy You. Lord, I am here on earth for You and for You alone." The more we open to the Lord and contact Him in this way, the more He infuses Himself into us and fills us to the brim. As we call on the

Lord, praise Him, and offer Him our thanks and adoration, we are filled with Him. Through such an enjoyment of Christ and experience of Him, we are gradually constituted of Christ. It is as we enjoy Him that He constitutes us of Himself.

Eating and digesting food is a good illustration of how Christ is constituted into our being through our enjoyment of Him. Through a process of digestion and assimilation, the food we eat becomes part of our constitution. If we realize this, we shall be careful of what we eat. Some dietitians say that we are what we eat. If we eat an extraordinary amount of any one particular food, we shall become a constitution of the elements of that food. Years ago, I noticed that the daughter of our family doctor in Taiwan had developed a yellowish complexion. The doctor explained that this coloring was the result of eating too many carrots. His daughter had eaten so many carrots that she was eventually constituted of them to the point that it affected the color of her skin. This case is evidence of the fact that the food we eat becomes our constitution. The principle is the same in our experience of Christ. As we enjoy Him by eating Him, He is constituted into us.

A HEAVENLY TRANSMISSION

At this point we may ask how we can enjoy Christ and have Him constituted into us when He is in heaven and we are on earth. The answer lies in the fact that there is a transmission taking place from Christ in heaven to us on earth by means of the all-inclusive Spirit. By means of this transmission, the electricity from the heavenly power plant flows into us, just as electricity flows from the power plant into our homes and into the meeting hall. Hallelujah for the transmission from the third heaven into us! "There's a Man in the glory Whose Life is for me"(*Hymns*, #505). Christ is the Man in the glory, but His life is for us. We all need a vision of the heavenly transmission from the glorified Christ into us. Furthermore, we need to stay open

to this transmission so that it will not be cut off. Even a small amount of insulation will cause this transmission to cease. Between Christ as the fullness of God and the one new man, there is our experience of the heavenly transmission. May there be no insulation to hinder this divine transmission.

FROM THE FULLNESS TO THE NEW JERUSALEM

John's writing is like Paul's in this matter. John 1:16 says, "For of His fullness we all received, and grace upon grace." The fullness of Christ is the very fullness of God. Of this fullness we have all received grace upon grace. Ultimately, the issue of our receiving of Christ's fullness will be the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem revealed through John's ministry will be the ultimate consummation of the new man revealed through Paul's ministry. On the one hand, Paul begins with the fullness and goes to the new man; on the other hand, John goes from the fullness to the New Jerusalem.

CROWNED WITH GLORY AND HONOR

In Hebrews, Ephesians, and Revelation there are windows through which we can see the things above. The first aspect of the things above is found in Hebrews 2:9. According to this verse, we see Jesus crowned with glory and honor. On earth, He was crowned with thorns. But on the throne in heaven, He is crowned with glory and honor. As the One crowned with glory and honor, Christ is far more precious than Judaism or Greek philosophy. To set our mind on such things is to set it on "the things which are on the earth" (Col. 3:2). Judaism and Greek philosophy are things on the earth. Let us look away from these things and look to the resurrected and ascended Jesus who is enthroned and crowned with glory and honor. Since we have been raised with Christ, we should seek the things above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God (3:1). Let us forget our natural virtues and look at the Lord

Jesus. Instead of appreciating our natural attributes and character, we need to appreciate the One crowned with glory and honor. According to Paul, our attention must be concentrated on the Lord Jesus. We should not be attracted by anything else.

LORD AND CHRIST

In Acts 2:36 we find another aspect of the things above. Here Peter declares, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth, has been exalted by God to be the Lord over all and the Christ. How marvelous! If the believers in Colosse truly had realized this, they would not have been distracted by Judaism or Greek philosophy. Today Jesus is God's Christ, God's anointed One, the Lord of all.

HEAD OVER ALL

In Ephesians 1:20-23 Paul says that God raised Christ from among the dead; seated Him at His right hand in the heavenlies, far above all rule, authority, power, lordship, and every name; has subjected all things under His feet; and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church, His Body. The power exercised by God in raising Christ from among the dead has made Him Head over all to the church. Christ has been crowned with glory and honor, He is the Lord of all and the Christ of God, and He is the Head over all things to His Body, the church. To be sure, the vision of such a Christ should cause us to forget our natural virtues and characteristics, all of which are things on the earth, not things which are above.

THE FORERUNNER

In Hebrews 6:19 and 20 we see that the Lord Jesus is the Forerunner, the Pioneer, who has cut the way into glory within the veil. To be within the veil is to be in glory. As our Forerunner, our Pioneer, Christ is now in glory.

THE HIGH PRIEST

The book of Hebrews also reveals that Christ is our High Priest, the One who "sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Heb. 8:1). In Hebrews 4:14 we are told that we have "a great High Priest Who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God." As our heavenly High Priest, "He is able to save to the uttermost those who come forward to God through Him, seeing He is always living to intercede for them" (Heb. 7:25). When we call on the Lord and have fellowship with Him, we sense that something from the heavens is being transmitted into us. Often this divine transmission causes us to be beside ourselves with joy. Since we have such a High Priest interceding for us, we should "come forward with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace for timely help" (Heb. 4:16). The things which are above include the ministry of intercession of our High Priest. Because of His intercession, we may receive mercy and grace for our timely need.

Because of Christ's intercession in the heavens, we are also stirred up to seek the Lord. Our path is under the direction of the transmission from the heavens, the transmission which comes from the intercession of Christ. When we are tempted to pursue some worldly entertainment instead of attending the church meeting, this heavenly transmission may direct us to the meeting. Many of us can testify that we have been under the direction of Christ's intercession. The intercession of our High Priest is another aspect of the things above.

THE HEAVENLY MINISTER

Furthermore, according to Hebrews 8:1 and 2, Christ is also a Minister of the "true tabernacle" in the heavens. Christ is our heavenly Minister. When we are asked what church we go to and who our minister is, the best answer is to reply that our church is in the heavens and that our

minister is the heavenly Jesus, who is ministering in a tabernacle pitched by the Lord and not by man. This tabernacle, this sanctuary, is the third heaven, the heavenly Holy of Holies. Praise the Lord that the Holy of Holies in the heavens is connected to our spirit! Therefore, in experience, our regenerated spirit is also the Holy of Holies. Our spirit is thus connected to the third heaven, where Christ is ministering on our behalf.

THE LAMB ON THE THRONE

In the book of Revelation we see even more of the things which are above. What we have in this book is not merely a window, but an opened heaven. Heaven was opened to John, and he saw "a throne set in heaven, and One sitting upon the throne" (Rev. 4:1-2). This throne is not simply the throne of grace, but is the very throne of authority, the throne of the divine administration. In Revelation 4:5 John goes on to say, "And out of the throne come forth lightnings and voices and thunders; and seven lamps of fire are burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God." John also tells us that in the midst of the throne he saw a Lamb: "And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing as having been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth" (Rev. 5:6). John's vision in chapters four and five of Revelation is related to God's administration today. From John's vision we realize that heaven is neither silent nor without activity. On the contrary, from His throne God is carrying out His administration over the entire universe. The Lamb, the Redeemer, the very One slain on the cross for our sins, is now on the throne and has seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God.

THE ADMINISTRATION IN HEAVEN AND THE EMBASSIES ON EARTH

The first vision in the book of Revelation is of the seven golden lampstands, which are seven local churches (1:12,

20). Thus, the first vision is of the churches on earth, whereas the second vision is of what is taking place in the heavens. When considered together, these two visions indicate that what is happening in the churches on earth is related to the activity in the heavens. Just as an electric meter indicates that the transmission is still flowing from the power plant, so the Lord's move in the churches corresponds to the action on the throne in heaven. This means that what takes place in the local churches should be under the direction of the throne of God in heaven. In order for the recovery to be the *Lord's* recovery, it must be under His direction. As long as there is a transmission coming from the heavens, there will be the divine flow in the churches. Praise the Lord that according to the book of Revelation, the churches are going on under the direction of the heavenly administration!

The Lord Jesus, the One crowned with glory and honor, the One who is the Lord, the Christ, the Head, the Forerunner, the High Priest, and the heavenly Minister, is executing God's operation in the heavens. He is the Lamb with seven eyes, with the seven Spirits of God, carrying out God's administration through the local churches. Actually, the churches are God's embassies. For this reason, the world situation is not under the control of any earthly head of state, but under the churches through which God is executing His administration. Just as the American embassy in a particular country is an extension of the United States, so the churches as God's embassies are an extension of the heavens. Our headquarters, our administrative center, is in heaven. When I am asked about the headquarters of the Lord's recovery, deep within I say, "The headquarters of the Lord's recovery is in heaven."

We should not be distracted, as the Colossians were, by Judaism or Greek philosophy. Look toward heaven, where there is a throne on which God is sitting and where the Lamb with seven eyes is standing to execute God's administration through the churches as His embassies. Because the churches are God's embassies, the enemy

hates them. In Revelation 4 and 5 we have a vision of our central government, and in Revelation 1 through 3 we have a vision of the local churches as the embassies. Through the seven Spirits there is a transmission going on from the heavenly headquarters into the embassies. Through the seven Spirits what is in the headquarters is transmitted into the churches.

TURNING OUR ATTENTION TO THE THINGS IN HEAVEN

Now do you have some understanding of the things which are above? If we know these things, we shall see that the Lord Jesus has been crowned with glory and honor, that God has made Him both Lord and Christ. The fact that Christ is Lord of all means that the whole earth is the Lord's. The enthroned and glorified Christ is also the Head, the Forerunner and Pioneer, the High Priest, the heavenly Minister, and the Lamb on the throne of God's administration. From the throne in the heavens, the divine transmission brings the things above into the local churches.

Seeing a vision of the things which are above will revolutionize our daily living. It will cause us to turn our attention from the things on earth to the things in heaven--to the glorified and enthroned Jesus, to the heavenly High Priest, to the Head over all things to the church, to the One executing the divine government. Let us seek these things and set our mind on them.

We have pointed out that our natural virtues and characteristics are elements of the world. This is true, for example, of our self-imposed humility (2:23). Instead of caring for our own virtues, we should care for the Lord Jesus as the crowned One, the Head, Forerunner, High Priest, and Minister. We should care for the throne in heaven from which Christ, the Lamb with seven eyes, is executing God's administration through the local churches.

I can testify that day by day I am strengthened by the divine transmission which flows from the throne in heaven

to the churches on earth. The more I minister in the churches, the more I am supplied and the more I rest. Something from heaven is transmitted into my spirit.

FORGETTING EARTHLY THINGS

In 3:1 and 2 Paul tells us not only to seek the things which are above, but also to set our mind on them. This means that we need to forget earthly things--culture, religion, philosophy, and the natural human virtues. Instead, let us lift up our eyes to the heavens and set our mind on the wonderful, excellent things, the things that are above. These are the things which can cause us to be transformed, for they transmit a heavenly element into us. Let us learn to open our spirit and our whole being to the heavens and keep the "switch" turned on so that the transmission from the divine power plant may flow into us unceasingly. Do not be distracted by religion, philosophy, or anything else. Focus your attention on the things above and stay open to the heavenly power plant. Then the riches of Christ's heavenly ministry will be transmitted into you, and you will be transformed and constituted of Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-NINE

ONE POSITION, ONE LIFE, ONE LIVING, ONE DESTINY, AND ONE GLORY WITH CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Col. 3:1-4; 1 John 4:15, 13; 1 Cor. 6:17

Colossians 3:1-4 implies that with Christ we have one position, one life, one living, one destiny, and one glory. Because we and Christ have one position, we are where He is. We and Christ also have one life, even the same life. The life He has we have also. Moreover, we have one living with Christ. Our living is His living. When we live, He lives, for He lives in our living. If we have one living with Christ in a practical way day by day, then whatever we do, He does also. This means that when we talk, He talks. If we do something different from what Christ is doing, we do not have one living with Him. For example, if we become angry and Christ is not angry, we do not have one living with Him at that particular time. In such a case, our living is not His living. We should refrain from losing our temper not because we are trying to obey a biblical command, but because we sense that the Christ who lives in us is not losing His temper. If we simply try to control our temper, we are religious. But if we do not lose our temper because we are living with Christ, then we are one with Him in life and in living. Praise the Lord that we have one position, life, and living with Christ!

We also have one glory and destiny with Christ. Glory is our future and our destination. The Lord Jesus is now in glory. However, He is in glory in a way that is hidden from mankind. If you ask the people in the world where Jesus is, they will reply that they do not know. But we know where He is--He is in glory. One day Christ will be in glory no

longer in a hidden way, but in an open way, in the way of manifestation. Then everyone on earth will know that the Lord Jesus is in glory. Christ's destiny is to be openly in glory. This is our destiny as well. We can say, "Glory is our destination. We are heading for glory. Our destiny is not simply heaven--it is to be in glory." Since glory is our destination, we shall eventually have one glory with Christ. It is not possible for us to describe this glory now because we have not yet entered into it. I believe, however, that when we are in glory, we shall be beside ourselves with joy and ecstasy. We may want to dance, shout, and praise the Lord. In glory we shall realize how exciting our God is. When we are in glory with Christ, we shall be excited also.

IN CHRIST, IN THE FATHER, IN HEAVEN

Our position is that we are in Christ. Because we are in Him, we are where He is--at the right hand of God (3:1). In John 17:24 the Lord Jesus prayed, "Father, I desire that those whom You have given Me may also be with Me where I am." To be where the Lord Jesus is, is not a matter of geography. The Lord is in the Father, and He prayed that the disciples, who were not yet in the Father, would be brought into Him. The Lord prayed, therefore, that they would be where He is.

It is crucial for us to realize that our position is not only in Christ, but also in the Father. In the Gospel of John we are told clearly that the Son is in the Father (10:38; 14:10). This means that the Son's position is in the Father. Since our position today is that we are in the Son, in Christ, we also are in the Father. The Father, of course, is in heaven. Hence, our position also is that we are in heaven. In saying this, however, we have a different understanding from that held by many Christians. Often when Christians say that we shall be in heaven, they mean that we shall be in heaven outside the Father. But when we say that we shall be in heaven, we mean that we shall be in heaven in the Father. There is a great difference here. We are in Christ, in the Father, and therefore in heaven.

If we stop here, we shall have nothing more than a mere doctrinal understanding of our one position with Christ. We shall only know the fact that we are in Christ, in the Father, and in heaven. What makes this real is that we are one spirit with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17). It is when we are in the spirit that we are in Christ, in the Father, and in heaven practically and experientially.

Consider as an illustration how the lights in the meeting hall are connected to the power plant by the flow of electricity. Apart from this electrical flow, the lights are related only to the meeting hall, not to the power plant. But by the flow of electrical current, they are connected to the power plant. Likewise, by the transmission we experience in our spirit, we are connected to the heavenly power plant. Praise the Lord that a transmission is going on from heaven to our spirit! When we experience this transmission, we are truly in Christ, in the Father, and in heaven. Our spirit is directly related to heaven. The heavenly transmission begins in heaven and ends in our spirit. Because we may experience and enjoy this unique transmission, there is no need for us to go to heaven in order to be in heaven. Simply by being in our spirit where we experience the transmission from heaven, we are in heaven. Just as the lights in the meeting hall are connected to the power plant by the flow of electricity, so we are connected to heaven by the divine transmission which flows from the throne of God in heaven into our spirit.

When I was a young believer, I tried my best to understand, according to the Bible, how I could be in heaven. To my realization, I was on earth and was by no means in heaven, no matter how happy I may have been in the Lord. Now I realize that, because of the transmission from the throne of God in heaven into my spirit, when I enjoy the Lord here on earth, I am simultaneously in heaven.

In 3:1 Paul says that since we were raised together with Christ, we should seek the things which are above. This verse indicates clearly that we have one position with

Christ. How could we seek the things which are above if we were not above also? To seek the things above we must be in heaven where these things are.

IN HEAVEN OR ON EARTH?

We need to ask ourselves, then, whether we are in heaven or on earth. In answering this question we need to be careful. The proper way to answer is to say that when we are in spirit we are also in heaven, but when we are not in spirit we are on earth and, experientially, even under the earth. According to our experience, we know that in spirit we may be in heaven one minute and then, because we do not remain in our spirit, we may immediately plunge down to the earth. For example, during your time with the Lord in the morning, you may be in the heavenlies, having prayed yourself into the Spirit. But at the breakfast table your wife or husband may say something to bother you, and immediately you are drawn out of the spirit into the flesh. No longer are you in heaven; you are now on earth. This indicates that only when we are in spirit are we in heaven. Whenever we are outside the spirit, we are earthly.

In 3:1 Paul charges us to seek the things which are above. The way to seek these things is to turn to the spirit and call on the name of the Lord. Our experience tells us clearly that we touch the heavens by turning to our spirit, for our spirit is the receiving end of the divine transmission, whereas the throne of God in heaven is the transmitting end. Thus, by turning to our spirit, we are lifted into heaven. Then in our experience we are in Christ, in the Father, and in heaven. Then in the spirit we are one in position with Christ, seeking the things which are above.

ONE LIFE WITH CHRIST

In 3:3 and 4 Paul twice speaks of life, indicating thereby that we have one life with Christ. In verse 3 he says that our life "has been hidden with Christ in God." In verse 4 he goes on to speak of when "Christ our life is manifested." To understand what kind of life this is, we

need to first read the verses, then check with our experience, and also com-pare these verses with others.

According to our experience and according to the Word, life here is Christ's life becoming our life. If it were merely Christ's life, it could not be called "our life." The very fact that it is "our life" indicates that it refers to something which has become ours. However, the life here is not our natural life, the life inherited from Adam. Such a life could never be that which is hidden with Christ in God. God would never allow the natural life inherited from Adam to be hidden in Him. The only life that can be hidden with Christ in God is the divine life, the very life of Christ. It is this life which has become our life. Paul's use of the expression "our life" indicates that we and Christ, and also God Himself, have one life. We should not think that God has one life, that Christ has another life, and that we who believe in Christ have yet another life. Rather, God, Christ, and the believers have one life. The life of God is the life of Christ, and the life of Christ has become our life. We can declare that we have the very life Christ has, the life hidden within God. What a wonderful life this is!

It is very easy for us to understand the matter of the Christian life in a natural way. We see a sister who is gentle, quiet, and kind, and we think that because she has such characteristics she is full of life. Seeing a brother who is an eloquent and powerful speaker, we may take his power and eloquence as signs of life. However, in both cases what we see may be the natural life, not the life that Christ has, the life hidden with Christ in God.

THREE CHARACTERISTICS OF CHRIST'S LIFE

Perhaps you are wondering how to discern between the natural life and the life Christ has, the life hidden in God. First, Christ's life is a crucified life; second, it is a resurrected life; and third, it is a life hidden in God. These three characteristics distinguish the life Christ has from our natural life.

A Crucified Life

A certain sister may be nice, gentle, and kind; however, all this may be in the natural life, a life that has not been crucified. This is proved by the fact that when she is insulted or mistreated, she breaks down and cries. Her tears indicate that she is living in the natural life. Her life is not a crucified life.

When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He always lived a crucified life. Although He was severely criticized and insulted, He did not weep for Himself. Instead, He could say, "Father, I thank You that this is according to Your will." His life was a crucified life.

Referring to the example of the eloquent brother, we see that such a brother may also be in the natural life. He may exhibit his eloquence according to the natural life, a life that has not been crucified.

If a person is truly one in life with Christ, his life will be a crucified life. The life we have received of the Lord Jesus is not a raw, unprocessed life; it is a crucified life, a life that has been processed and thoroughly dealt with. If we truly know this life, we shall not weep when we are insulted. Instead, we shall thank the Lord and even praise Him in a genuine way.

Sometimes when we are in the flesh and others insult us, we may say "Amen" or "Hallelujah!" However, our "Amen" and "Hallelujah!" is fleshly. If we are truly living a crucified life when others insult us, we shall not say anything. Those who are on the cross say neither "Amen" nor "Hallelujah!" They do not say anything at all. The life we should live today should be such a crucified life.

A Resurrected Life

The one life we share with Christ is also a resurrected life. Nothing, including death, can suppress it. Furthermore, in resurrection there are no tears. Suppose a sister begins to cry when she is criticized for the way she cleaned a room in the meeting hall. Is this the resurrected life? Certainly not! In the resurrected life there is no place

for weeping. But if this sister lives a resurrected life while she is cleaning in the meeting hall, she will not be troubled if someone criticizes her work. This is another difference between the resurrected life and the natural life.

A Hidden Life

If our natural life has not been dealt with, our service in the church will not last long. If we serve in the natural life, we shall be easily offended, and eventually we shall stop serving. But if our life in serving is a life that is crucified and resurrected, nothing will be able to defeat it.

Furthermore, the life Christ has is a life hidden in God. As we have pointed out, only the divine life can be hidden in God. I appreciate this word hidden (3:3). The life Christ has is not a showy life; it is a hidden life. If you serve by this life, you will not want to be seen by others. On the contrary, you will prefer to serve in secret. Our natural life is the very opposite of this, for it is fond of making a show. Today's religion appeals to this element in the natural life. For example, it is a common practice in raising funds to give public credit to those who donate large amounts, whereas little or no mention is made of those who donate a small amount. Religion nourishes the natural life, but in the church the natural life is put to death.

Whatever we do in the church should be done by a life hidden in God. In Matthew 6 the Lord Jesus speaks of doing things in secret, not before men (vv. 1-6, 16-18). Even in presenting our offering to the Lord, we should be hidden. In all that we do we should live a hidden life, a life hidden with Christ in God.

ONE LIVING WITH CHRIST

Let us now consider the matter of having one living with Christ. It seems that there is no indication of this in 3:1-4. The word living is not even used. But Paul does tell us to seek the things which are above and to set our mind on them. This refers to our living. Seeking the things above and setting our mind on them are matters of our living. We

are not to live in an earthly way or in a worldly way. Instead, we should live in a heavenly way, seek the things which are above, and set our mind on them.

CHRIST'S TWO MINISTRIES

At this point we need to see that the Lord Jesus has two types of ministries, His ministry on earth before His resurrection and His ministry in heaven. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He carried on a tremendous ministry and did a great deal. In the course of this ministry, He accomplished redemption for us. According to Hebrews 1:3, having finished His ministry on earth, the Lord sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Although His earthly ministry has been completed, His ministry in heaven is still going on.

Christ today is ministering in a higher and more extensive way. As the High Priest, He intercedes for us and cares for all the churches, transmitting into them the heavenly supply. Christ is more busy now than when He was on earth. On earth He cared mainly for His disciples. But in heaven He is caring for a great many churches and for millions of saints. Not only does He intercede for us as the High Priest, but He ministers on our behalf as the heavenly Minister. Furthermore, according to Revelation 5, He as the heavenly Administrator is executing God's universal government. He is the Lamb with seven eyes carrying out God's administration. As the High Priest He intercedes; as the heavenly Minister, He ministers; as the Redeemer with the seven eyes of God, He administers the government of God for the accomplishment of God's purpose. These are the things above on which we are to set our mind.

JOINING THE LORD IN HIS HEAVENLY MINISTRY

To seek the things which are above and to set our mind on them is to join ourselves to the Lord in His ministry in heaven. We need to join ourselves to the very One who is interceding, ministering, and executing God's administration. Our living should be a kind of living in

which we seek these heavenly things and set our mind on them. This means that we live in such a way as to join our heavenly Christ in His priesthood, ministry, and administration. If we all live in this way, the church life will be greatly up-lifted.

Paul's concept in the book of Colossians is that we should turn from everything earthly--from Judaism, Gnosticism, and asceticism--to the things above. We need to join ourselves to these things by setting our mind on them. Let us cooperate with Christ in His ministry in heaven. In our living our concern should be Christ's heavenly priesthood, ministry, and administration. We should be concerned that the churches are supplied with the transmission from heaven. If this is our concern, we are seeking the things above and setting our mind on them.

Because Christ is interceding for a particular church, we also may become burdened to pray for that church. We then ask the Lord to transmit His heavenly supply into the saints in that locality. Whenever we receive news of a need in a certain place, we should immediately pray, joining ourselves to Christ in His intercession for that need. If we do this, we shall be setting our mind on the things above.

We are here on earth not for our employment, education, family life, or health. We are living for God's economy, purpose, and administration. We are one with Christ in His heavenly priesthood and thus we have one living with Him. If we all have one living with Christ in a practical way, all negative things will be under our feet. Hallelujah, we have one living with Christ!

Our standard needs to be uplifted. We are not here to seek earthly things, but to have a living that is one with Christ's living. Christ today is living as the High Priest, the heavenly Minister, and the universal Administrator. We need to join Him in His living and have one living with Him.

ONE DESTINY AND GLORY WITH CHRIST

We also have one destiny and one glory with Christ. We

are not aimless; we are people with a destiny and a goal. We are running the race with a definite goal in view.

Our destiny is glory. Today we are hidden in God, but when Christ is manifested, we shall be manifested with Him in glory (3:4). When we are manifested with Christ, we shall be on display to the whole universe. Even the demons will see us glorified. However, today we should not make a show, but should remain hidden in God, waiting for the time when we shall arrive at our destination and enter into glory with Christ. Then, at the appointed time, the time for a divinely-ordained display, there will be the manifestation of the sons of God in glory.

We can have one position, life, living, destiny, and glory with Christ only because we are one spirit with Him. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:17, "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." Because we are one spirit with Him, we surely have one position, life, living, destiny, and glory with Him.

ONE WITH THE TRIUNE GOD AND MINGLED WITH HIM

Our life is the Christ who dwells within us, and this life is hidden with Christ in God. On the one hand, this life is Christ in us; on the other hand, it is with Christ in God. Here we see a mingling involving God, Christ, and us. We are one with the Triune God and mingled with Him. Where He is, we are also. Furthermore, the life, living, destiny, and the glory of the Triune God all are ours.

Our opposers will say that this is heresy. However, it is altogether according to the Scriptures. With the Word of God as my basis, I can testify that we who believe in Christ have one position with the Triune God, one life with Him, one living with Him, and one destiny and glory with Him.

First John 4:15 says, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." What is this if not the mingling of God and man? God abides in us, and we abide in Him. Certainly, this refers to the mingling of the believers with the Triune God.

Furthermore, 1 John 4:13 says, "Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit." Praise the Lord that we are one with the Triune God and mingled with Him! With Him we have one position, one life, one living, one destiny, and one glory.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY

CHRIST AS ALL THE MEMBERS AND IN ALL THE MEMBERS IN THE NEW MAN

Scripture Reading: Col. 3:5-11; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Gal. 3:27-28

In the second chapter of Colossians we see that Christ is the mystery of God (v. 2), the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead (v. 9), and the reality of all positive things (vv. 16-17). As the One who is the very embodiment of God, Christ is the reality of all positive things for our enjoyment. When we enjoy Him in this way, we immediately realize that He is the Head of the Body (v. 19). In 3:4 Paul goes on to say that Christ is our life. In the foregoing message we pointed out that we are one with Christ in position, life, living, destiny, and glory.

EXPERIENCING CHRIST AS OUR LIFE

We need to give particular attention to the matter of life in 3:4. Paul says that Christ is our life. Nothing is more intimately related to us than our life. Actually our life is we ourselves. If we did not have life, we would cease to be. To say that Christ has become our life means that Christ has become us. If Christ does not become us, how can He be our life? Our life cannot be separated from our person. Since Christ is our life, He cannot be separated from us. Because our life is ourself and because Christ is our life, we may say that Christ has become us. However, to say this is neither to deify ourselves nor to teach "evolution into God."

We should not stop with the doctrinal knowledge that Christ is our life. Christ must be our life in a practical and

experiential way. Day by day, we need to experience Christ as our life. Christ should be our life within, and we should have one life and living with Him.

Human words cannot express adequately what it means for Christ to be our life. This is a matter we can under-stand, but we are short of utterance concerning it. But even though we cannot define it fully, we can experience it. We are not even able to thoroughly define or describe our physical life. We all have life, but we cannot explain what it is. If even our physical life is mysterious, how much more is this true of Christ as our life! God is the Creator of life, the unique source of life. Although we cannot define life or understand it fully, we certainly can experience it and enjoy it. Just as we cannot deny the fact of our physical life, so we cannot deny the fact that Christ is our life. Hallelujah, I have Christ as my life! Because we have another life--Christ as our life--we can live another kind of life. This life is Christ in us as our hope of glory (1:27). Christ is our life today and our hope of glory for the future.

THE ENJOYMENT OF THE NEW MAN

In 3:10 and 11 Paul goes on to speak of the new man. The new man comes out of Christ as the mystery of God for our enjoyment. When we enjoy Christ as the mystery of God, the embodiment of God, and the reality of all positive things, the issue, the result, is first the Body of Christ. Then we have the realization and experience that Christ is our life and that we are living with Him. Eventually, the outcome is a corporate man--the new man.

Recently, brothers from more than fifty churches met together for fellowship. As we were meeting together, I had the sense that we were one new man, not a society or an organization. We admit that we are still quite short of Christ in our experience. But even the amount of Christ we do have enabled us to have a good enjoyment of the new man. We have a similar experience when brothers from different countries meet together. Even though we speak different languages and need translation in order to

communicate, we still have the sense that we are one new man. Even with our present experience of Christ, we have some realization of the corporate new man. This new man is the issue of our experience of Christ as the reality of all positive things, the embodiment of God, and the mystery of God. If there are some among us with no experience of Christ and no enjoyment of Christ, they will be a hindrance to our fellowship. But all of us have some enjoyment of Christ. Our languages may be different, but our enjoyment is the same. It is this enjoyment that enables us to understand one another and to experience the one new man. The enjoyment of Christ issues in the new man.

In Colossians 2 and 3 we have Christ as the mystery of God. This Christ becomes our enjoyment, and this enjoyment results first in the Body and then in the new man. The sequence here corresponds to our experience. When we enjoy Christ as the reality of all positive things, we become Body-conscious. This indicates that the enjoyment of Christ issues in the Body of Christ. Then as we go on to experience Christ as our life and have one living, destiny, and glory with Him, the issue is not just the church as the Body of Christ, but the church as the one new man. To repeat, when we experience Christ as the reality of all our daily necessities, the result is the Body life. But when we experience Christ as our life, the issue is the one new man.

LIVING TOGETHER WITH CHRIST

If we enjoy Christ as the reality of all positive things, we shall take Him as our food, drink, clothing, transportation, and housing. If we go on to enjoy and experience Him as the mysterious life within us and live together with Him, we shall seek the things above, the things in heaven, where Christ is interceding, ministering, and administrating God's economy. Christ in heaven is very active, even more busy than when He was on earth. He is interceding for us, shepherding all His churches, and ministering on behalf of millions of saints. As the High Priest in heaven, He is interceding for us. Because we have

such a high priest, we may "come forward with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace for timely help" (Heb. 4:16). As He intercedes for us, Christ is ministering the heavenly life supply into us. He is the heavenly Minister ministering in the heavens (Heb. 8:1-2). According to Revelation 5:6, as the Lamb on the throne, Christ is executing God's universal administration. Because Christ is so active for us in the heavens, we should seek the things that are above and set our mind on them. Yes, we need to enjoy Christ as our food, drink, clothing, and everything for our daily existence. But we must go on to seek the things above.

To seek the things above and to set our mind on them is to live Christ, to have one living with Him. When Christ prays in heaven, we should pray on earth. This means that there is a transmission between the Christ praying in heaven and us praying on earth. By means of this transmission we may pray in oneness with Him. We respond on earth to Christ's praying in heaven. None of us should be unemployed. We all have the responsibility to respond to Christ's heavenly transmission. We need to live together with Christ by seeking the things which are above and setting our mind on them. Christ is in heaven interceding, ministering, and administrating, and we are on earth responding to Christ's activity in heaven.

Young people, do not think that you are too young to cooperate with Christ's heavenly ministry. Even high school students can seek the things which are above. C. H. Spurgeon began to minister in his village when he was just seventeen, and when he was nineteen he was invited to speak to a Baptist congregation in London. Even as a young man, Spurgeon sought to carry out on earth the work Christ was doing in heaven. If Spurgeon could begin serving the Lord as a young person, the young people in the churches today can do the same.

We all can experience Christ as our daily necessities and also enjoy Him by seeking the things which are above. The more we enjoy Christ as the reality of the positive

things in our daily life, the more this enjoyment will bring us into the church life, into the Body life. But we must go on to enjoy Christ as our life and live with Him, having the same living with Christ. Christ today is living in the heavens to intercede for the churches, to minister the heavenly life supply to the saints, and to carry out God's administration. However, most Christians do not respond to Christ's living in the heavens. They are like radios that are not turned on and tuned in to receive the transmission of the radio waves in the atmosphere. Although Christ is in heaven ministering and transmitting, many Christians are not responding to His ministry or receiving His transmission. We thank the Lord that a number of those in the local churches today have their receivers open and operating. When they sense that Christ is praying in heaven for a certain matter, they join Him to pray on earth for that very matter. For example, sensing that the Lord is praying for the church in Accra, Ghana, they join in to pray for the church there. To pray together with Christ in this way is to have one living with Him.

PUTTING TO DEATH, PUTTING AWAY, PUTTING OFF, AND PUTTING ON

Seeking the things above and having one living with Christ issues in the church as the new man. According to the sequence in Colossians 3, we first experience Christ as our life and live together with Him. Then, according to 3:5-9, we put to death our members which are on the earth and put off the old man with his practices. Following this, we put on the new man (v. 10). In verse 5 Paul charges us to "put to death"; in verse 8, to "put away" certain negative things; and in verse 9, to "put off the old man with his practices." According to verse 5, we are to put to death the lusts of the fallen body. According to verse 8, we are to put away the evil things of the fallen soul. Finally, according to verse 9, we are to put off the old man as a whole. To put off the old man is like putting off an old garment. Only by living together with Christ can we accomplish these things.

When we live together with Christ, we can put off the lusts of the flesh, put away the evil aspects of the fallen soul, and put off the totality of our old being. Then, positively, we can put on the new man. By living together with Christ, by experiencing Him as our life and seeking the things which are above, we put away all the negative things and put on the new man. We put on the new man only by living with Christ, by enjoying Him as our life and seeking the things above.

OCCUPIED WITH OUR MASTER'S ENTERPRISE

If we seek the things above and have one living with Christ, we shall be wholly occupied with the enterprise of our Master. Our heart will be with Him in heaven, where He is interceding for the churches, supplying the saints, and administrating God's government. This will be our concern, our desire. If we take Christ as life and seek the things which are above in such a way, the lustful members will be put to death, the evil elements in the fallen soul will be put away, and the old man will be put off. Furthermore, we shall automatically put on the new man.

To us, Colossians should not be only a book of doctrine, but should be a book of experience. Although the Christ revealed in this book is profound, extensive, and all-inclusive, we can still experience Him. We can enjoy Him as our daily necessities, take Him as our life, and live together with Him. Furthermore, we can seek the things which are above and set our mind on them. Do you not aspire to be one with the Lord in the heavenlies and to have a heart that is one with His heart? Do you not long to be one with Him in His priesthood, ministry, and administration? I would encourage all the young people especially to care for God's purpose by seeking the things which are above and living together with Christ.

We expect that through the enjoyment of Christ the one new man will come forth and be expressed in a practical way. We do not want the new man merely in doctrine, but in reality and in practice. The new man does not come by

way of organization. Something organized may be a society or a religion, but it is not the new man. The new man comes forth only by our taking Christ as our life and living together with Him.

It is wonderful to enjoy Christ as the reality of our daily necessities, but it is even more wonderful to take Him as our life and live together with Him. I can testify that the more we live Christ and take His concern as our concern, the happier we are. My only concern is the Lord's recovery with all the churches and all the saints. My desire is that the saints would experience Christ and grow in life. I have no other burden, no other concern. I am fully occupied with God's purpose. Because I am filled with Christ's concern, I am very happy. There is no room in me for negative things. Being occupied with the Lord's interests makes me very healthy.

I am happy that there are so many young people in the Lord's recovery. The recovery certainly has a glorious future. We all need to care for the Lord's interests. While He is praying in heaven, we respond in prayer on earth. Thus. we experience the transmission between Christ and us, a transmission that will make us happy and full of joy. Christ works in the heavens, and we work on earth. In this way, we not only enjoy Christ as the reality of our necessities, but we also take Him as our life and have one living with Him.

Our living with Christ is not aimless; it has a definite purpose. This purpose is to be one with Christ in His intercession for the churches, in His ministry of the heavenly life supply to the saints, and in His administration of God's government. We have pointed out again and again that the result of living together with the Lord in such a way is the new man. We cannot produce the new man by organization. The new man is the spontaneous issue of our taking Christ as our life and living Him.

The desire of God's heart is to have the new man. This was His plan in eternity past, and this was the reason He created the universe and accomplished redemption for us

in Christ. The preaching of the gospel and the new creation are likewise for the new man. The time has come for God to have the new man expressed on earth. If we take Christ as our life and live together with Him, the new man will come forth to satisfy God's desire.

CHRIST BEING EVERY MEMBER

In the new man Christ is every member. Concerning this, Paul says in 3:11, "Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all and in all." This means that in the new man there is no place, no room, for any natural person. There is no place for regional, cultural, or national distinctions. For example, in the new man there cannot be Chinese or Americans, Californians or Texans. Likewise, in the new man there is no room for Jew or Greek, for religious ones or nonreligious ones, for cultured ones or uncultured ones, for freemen or slaves. There is no room for any race, nationality, culture, or social status. In the one new man there is room only for Christ. Christ surely is all the members of the new man.

Perhaps you are wondering how Christ can be all in the new man. For this to be a reality, we must take Christ as our life and live Him, not ourselves. If Christ is the living of all the saints, then only He will be in the new man. Those from America will no longer live an American life, and those from Japan will no longer live a Japanese life. All the saints, whatever their nationality may be, will live Christ. Then in a way that is real and practical, Christ will be all the members of the new man. Christ will be you, and Christ will be me. Because we all live Christ, not ourselves, Christ will be all of us, every member of the new man.

In the local churches we are not concerned with helping others improve their natural life. We would rather help them to crucify their natural person and bury it so that they may live Christ. The death of our natural person will usher us into resurrection, where we can take Christ as life. I can testify that the more I experience crucifixion

with Christ, the more I take Christ as my life in resurrection and live Him.

No matter how much opposition we receive from religion, I have the assurance that the new man will come forth. The saints are learning to live Christ, and they are becoming constituted of Him. Meeting after meeting, Christ is being wrought into the saints. I can testify of certain brothers whom I have known for years that they are being gloriously constituted of Christ. They are truly experiencing the Lord's transformation. Nothing makes me more joyful than to see the saints taking Christ as life, living Him, and seeking the things which are above for the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose.

CHRIST IN EVERY MEMBER

In 3:11 Paul says not only that Christ is all, but also that He is in all. In other words, on the one hand, Christ is all the members, and on the other hand, He is in all the members. Since Paul says that Christ is all, why is there the need for him to say that Christ is in all? If Paul did not say that Christ is in all, only that He is all, then we may think that in the new man Christ is needed and that we are not needed. We should not think that, because Christ is all the members in the new man, we are nothing and are not needed. On the one hand, the Bible does not say that in the new man there is no place for the natural person because Christ is all the members. Yet, on the other hand, Paul says that Christ is in the members. The fact that Christ is in the members of the new man indicates that the members still exist.

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

Now we can rejoice and say to the Lord, "Lord Jesus, when I take You as my life and live together with You, You are me. I am altogether one with You. But, Lord, I am still here, for You are in me. I am here, but I am here with You." According to our experience, we all can give such a testimony. When we live Christ and are one with Him, we say, "Lord Jesus, this is not me--it is You." However, at the same time, we have the sense that we are with the Lord and that He is in us.

In the new man Christ is everyone and He is also in everyone. How wonderful! This is to experience Christ not only as the reality of our daily necessities, but to have Him as our life and to be one with Him in the divine enterprise. When we are one with Him in this way, He becomes us, and we live with Him in us. We live, but we live not alone, but with Christ in us. I believe that the Lord's intention is that day by day we have more experience of this, taking Christ as our life, living together with Him, seeking the things which are above, and coordinating with Him for the carrying out of God's eternal purpose. Then we shall all be able to say that to us to live is Christ and that Christ lives in us.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-ONE

ONE WITH CHRIST IN THE THINGS ABOVE

Scripture Reading: Col. 3:1-3; Heb. 4:14; 7:24-26; 8:1-2

In writing Epistles such as Ephesians and Colossians, Paul first presents a revelation, mainly of Christ and the church, and then speaks concerning our Christian walk. The first three chapters of Ephesians cover the revelation concerning the church. The second three chapters are concerned with the walk worthy of God's calling. Likewise, the first two chapters of Colossians present a profound revelation of the all-inclusive and extensive Christ, whereas the last two chapters cover the proper Christian walk.

In Colossians 1 and 2 Paul covers many aspects of the all-inclusive Christ. He shows us that Christ is the portion of the saints, the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation, the Firstborn from among the dead, and the mystery of God. According to 1:27, such a Christ dwells in us as our hope of glory.

Colossians 3:1 says, "If therefore you were raised together with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God." Paul's use of the word therefore in this verse indicates that chapters three and four are the outcome of chapters one and two and are based on those chapters. After presenting so many marvelous truths concerning Christ, Paul tells us to therefore seek the things which are above, where Christ is.

In 3:3 Paul says that our "life has been hidden with Christ in God." Notice that Paul does not say that our life is hidden with Christ in heaven. Rather, he tells us that our life is hidden in God, in the living, divine Person. This

indicates that God Himself is the realm, the sphere, in which we should live and walk.

FIVE CRUCIAL MATTERS

In this message we shall see that we are one with Christ in the things above. In the following messages we shall consider the renewing of the new man, the arbitrating peace of Christ, the word of Christ inhabiting us, and persevering in prayer. If we are one with Christ in the things above, we shall have the renewing of the new man. Then, in a practical way, the new man will be realized through the arbitrating peace of Christ. Then we shall have the word of Christ inhabiting us, and we shall persevere in prayer. These five points are crucial aspects of chapters three and four of Colossians. If these points were removed from Colossians 3 and 4, these chapters would be lacking in substance.

These five important matters have much to do with our Christian walk. They are very different from the ethical teachings commonly given to Christians. According to those ethical teachings, believers are charged to improve their behavior, to be good neighbors, to be submissive, and to be loving. There is no doubt that those things are in the Bible. However, they can easily be understood according to the natural concept. Man's natural mind would never conceive of matters such as being one with Christ in the things above, experiencing the renewing of the new man, or having the peace of Christ arbitrating in us. Of course, in the book of Colossians Paul has something to say about husbands and wives, masters and slaves, parents and children. But his word is related to the new man, the peace of Christ, the word of Christ, and persevering in prayer.

OUR INABILITY TO MEET GOD'S REQUIREMENTS

Married brothers know how difficult it is for husbands to truly love their wives, and married sisters know that it is difficult for wives to be genuinely submissive to their husbands. It is extremely difficult to be a proper husband

or wife. It is even difficult to be a human being. Since man was created to express God and represent Him, to be a proper human is to be God's expression and representation. But it is difficult to represent another person or an organization; how much more difficult it is to represent God. If it is difficult to be a proper human being, it is all the more difficult to be a Christian, especially a Christian who lives Christ. Paul could say, "To me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). Who among us can say that we are able to live Christ? If we see God's standard, we shall feel like giving up, for we shall realize that in ourselves we cannot meet God's requirements. Although it is impossible for us in ourselves to meet God's standard, with Christ this is possible. When we have the realization that we cannot meet God's requirements, we can open to receive grace. Grace is the Triune God coming into us to express Himself, to represent Himself, and to live Himself in us and through us. Experiencing the grace of God in this way is altogether different from trying to improve our behavior or attempting in ourselves to meet God's requirements.

In the Life-study of Exodus we pointed out that in His salvation God does not want us to do anything or to be anything. Instead, He wants to do everything for us and to be everything to us. This is indicated by the fact that after God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, He changed their diet. When God's people were in Egypt, they had an Egyptian diet and ate the Egyptian meat, fish, onions, cucumbers, leeks, and garlic. This caused them to become Egyptian in their constitution. They were a composition of the Egyptian food they had eaten. But in Exodus 16 God provided manna for the children of Israel to eat. Their diet was to be changed from Egyptian food to heavenly food. Manna is a type of Christ as our life supply. If we eat Christ as typified by manna, we shall be constituted of Christ. In this way, our constitution will be changed, and our flesh will be dealt with genuinely and thoroughly.

We should not think that in ourselves we can be a

proper husband or wife. However, the One who has come to live in us is able. This One is Christ, our hope of glory.

WITH CHRIST IN GOD

In chapter three Paul goes on to tell us that we are with Christ in God. First, Christ is in us, but eventually we are with Christ in God. Furthermore, according to 3:4, the Christ who dwells in us is our life. Inwardly we have Christ as our life, and outwardly we have God as our realm and sphere. Sometimes I have the sense when traveling in a car that actually I am traveling in God. He is the realm in which we live and walk. The Christ who dwells in us is life, but the God in whom we are hidden with Christ is the realm of our living. We should be able to testify that we are living not on earth nor even just in heaven, but in God.

In ourselves it is not possible for us to be in God. We can only be hidden in God with Christ. Many have been helped to see that through Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, God has been wrought into us. But not as many see clearly that we have also been brought into God. Since God is in us and we are in Him, there is two-way traffic between God and us. On the one hand, Colossians tells us that Christ is in us. This indicates that God has been wrought into us. Because Christ is in us, God has been wrought into us. But in chapter three we are told that we are with Christ in God. This indicates that we have been brought into God. Therefore, God is now in us as our life, and we are in God as the realm of our living.

We should praise the Lord not only that the Triune God is in us, but also that we are in the Triune God. Christ came by incarnation to bring God into us, and He went back to God by crucifixion and resurrection to bring us into God. Concerning this two-way traffic, we should not be restricted by the natural concept. It is crucial for us to see that Christ came both to work God into us and to bring us into God.

Since we have been brought into God and are hidden with Christ in God, God should be the realm of our living.

If we live and walk in God, we shall be heavenly. However, in the book of Colossians, Paul does not speak of heaven, and he does not use the word heavenly. Instead, he mentions the things above. We need to seek the things which are above and set our mind on them.

NOT DISTRACTED BY THE ELEMENTS OF THE WORLD

The word therefore in 3:1 indicates that we need to look back at chapters one and two, since Paul's word in chapters three and four is based upon what he has covered in the first two chapters. According to Colossians 1 and 2, the Colossians had been distracted and were paying their attention to the elements of the world (2:8). These elements included Judaistic observances, Gnostic philosophy, mysticism, and asceticism. Paul wanted the Colossian believers to see that all these isms are elements of the world and that the saints should not be distracted by them. Since Christ has been wrought into us to be our life, and since we have been brought into God, where our life is hidden with Christ, we should no longer be occupied with the elements of the world. Instead, we should remain in God and seek the things above. God is our sphere. Since He is the realm in which we live and walk, we should no longer care for the elements of the world.

PECULIAR PEOPLE

From Paul's writings we can see that Christians are peculiar people who do not need religious teachings or ethical admonitions. What makes Christians peculiar is that we have Christ in us as our life and we have God, the living Person, as our realm. Confucius was ethical, but he was not peculiar in this way. We should praise the Lord that we are not common, but peculiar. The young people may need to testify to their parents that they are young people with Christ in them and that they are with Christ in God.

If we see the vision, the revelation, that Christ is in us

as our life and that we are in God as our sphere, we shall be changed. We would realize that we have no need for religious or ethical teachings. What need do we have for the elements of the world, for Judaism, Gnosticism, mysticism, or asceticism? We are not common--we have Christ, and we are in God. How good it would be for a husband and wife to testify to one another that they are peculiar because they have Christ and are living in God. If a husband and wife would have such a realization and speak about it to each other, there would be no room for quarreling or for the expression of opinion. Oh, may we all realize that according to the Bible, Christ is in us as our hope of glory and that with Christ we are hidden in God! Now we must live and walk in God. What revelation could be higher or more precious than this? Day by day may we enjoy and experience having Christ in us and being with Christ in God.

THE TWO MINISTRIES OF CHRIST

With this as a foundation, we are now prepared to consider what it means to be one with Christ in the things above. The things above are related to the second of Christ's two ministries. The first aspect of Christ's ministry was His ministry on earth. Lasting thirty-three and a half years, this ministry began with Christ's incarnation and was concluded with His crucifixion. During the years He was on earth, Christ accomplished much in His ministry. Through His death on the cross, He accomplished redemption for us. All Christians are familiar with the earthly ministry of Jesus and value it very highly, for it is through this ministry that we have been saved.

As important as Christ's earthly ministry was, it is not the main aspect of His ministry. The primary part of His ministry is His ministry in heaven. By His earthly ministry He redeemed us, saved us, and regenerated us. But by His heavenly ministry, He is building the church. The Body of Christ needs the heavenly ministry of Christ, the ministry of Christ above, in order to be built up.

Today Christ is more busy in heaven than He was when He was on earth. Years ago, I was taught by some that when Christ finished His redemptive work, He ascended to heaven where He is now resting, waiting until His enemy is made His footstool. According to this teaching, Christ's work is finished, and He has nothing more to do. Although I accepted this teaching at first, I later learned that it presents only part of the truth. Yes, as far as Christ's earthly ministry for redemption is concerned, the work is finished, and He is at rest. There is no need for Him to do anything further in order to redeem us. However, the Lord's goal is not merely to redeem us and regenerate us; His goal is to have the church, the Body, the Bride. This goal is more difficult to attain than the goal of accomplishing redemption. Christ's work on earth for redemption took, at most, thirty-three and a half years. But His work for the building up of His Body has been going on for more than nineteen centuries, and still it is not complete. Christ certainly has much to do in heaven.

INTERCEDING AND SUPPLYING

Perhaps you are wondering what the Lord Jesus is doing in heaven to reach the goal of building up His Body. According to the book of Hebrews, Christ today is the High Priest and the heavenly Minister (2:17; 4:14; 7:26; 8:1-2). As the High Priest, He is interceding for us, and as the heavenly Minister He is supplying us with the riches of God. In His intercession Christ brings us with our need to God. In His ministry He brings the riches of God to us.

Christ's heavenly ministry has much to do with our practical daily life. We have already pointed out that it is difficult to be a good husband in the church life. Realizing their shortcomings, many brothers may confess to the Lord that they simply are not able to be a proper husband. Whenever a brother admits his need to the Lord in this way, immediately the Lord as the High Priest intercedes for him and brings his need to God. Then, as the heavenly Minister, He supplies all that is necessary to be a good

husband. Toward God, Christ is the High Priest for us; toward us, He is the heavenly Minister for God. Because Christ intercedes for us and ministers His riches into us, a brother may find that as soon as he confesses that he cannot be a good husband, he has the sweet sense and deep conviction within that he can be a good husband. This sweet, inward assurance comes from Christ's heavenly ministry, from His prayer for our need and from His ministry of the rich life supply into us.

I encourage you to tell the Lord that you simply are not able to do certain things. This will stir Him to pray for you. For example, out of defeat you may confess, "Lord, I simply am not able to be holy." Immediately, He will intercede for you and minister His riches into you. Thus, there will be a spiritual transmission, transaction, and traffic between God and you because of Christ's ministry as High Priest and Minister. As a result of Christ's heavenly ministry, you will have the sense within that although, in yourself, you cannot be holy, it is still possible for you to be holy in Him.

RENEWED BY SEEKING THE THINGS ABOVE

The things above mentioned in Colossians 3 are the things related to the heavenly ministry of Christ, to Christ's ministry as our High Priest and God's Minister. We should not be occupied with earthly things and with the elements of the world, but should realize that we are hidden with Christ in God. We should then seek the things above and set our mind on them. We should set our mind on Christ's intercession and on His ministry for the building up of His Body.

As we seek the things above, the new man will be renewed in a full way. In a very practical sense, the new man comes into existence through our seeking the things which are above. Therefore, if the new man is to be expressed on earth, we need to see Christ as our High Priest and heavenly Minister and also experience the two-way traffic between the heavenly Christ and us.

RESPONDING TO CHRIST'S HEAVENLY MINISTRY

We need to be those who respond to Christ's heavenly ministry. For centuries, Christ has tried without adequate success to get a people to respond to His ministry in the heavens. By His mercy and grace, there is on earth today a group of people in the Lord's recovery responding to Christ's heavenly ministry. Let us be those who tell the Lord that we are one with Him in this ministry. Day and night, we need to respond to the Christ who is above all. When I respond to the Lord, saying, "Amen, Lord," I have the conviction deep within that Christ is interceding and ministering, that He is transmitting His riches into me and infusing me with the element of God. Because of this trans-mission and infusion, I am filled and stirred for the Lord's interests. Sometimes I am so beside myself with joy that I hardly know what to do. This is what it means to seek the things above.

If we seek the things above and are one with Christ in the things above, we shall not care for religion, philosophy, or ethical teachings, all of which are elements of the world. Rather, we shall care only for Christ's intercession for His Body and for the transmission of His riches into His members. I have the full assurance that many of the saints in the local churches are experiencing the transfusion of the riches of Christ. Because we have such a transfusion, we do not need ethics, culture, or religion. We simply need more and more oneness with Christ in His heavenly ministry. Praise Him for His intercession, for His ministry, and for the traffic between heaven and earth!

We need to be impressed with the fact that the Christ who is in heaven is very busy. Consider how many local churches He takes care of throughout the world. Christ's ministry in heaven is all for the goal of building up the Body and forming His Bride. However, Christ's ministry in heaven requires our response. We need to become on earth the very reflection of that heavenly ministry. When we seek the things above, we respond to the Lord's heavenly minis-try and reflect it. Our experience testifies of this. If

in our prayer we are willing to forget insignificant matters and care for the things above, we shall become conscious of the traffic between us and Christ in heaven. We shall sense a current flowing back and forth between Him and us. By means of this kind of prayer, the divine riches are transfused into us. This enables us to be one with others and to be right with everyone. This also issues in the renewing of the new man. Through the heavenly transmission and transfusion, the new man comes into existence in a practical way. Hence, the new man is not produced by teaching; the new man is produced by the heavenly traffic, transaction, and transfusion.

WHERE WE NEED TO BE

My burden in this message has been to point out where we all need to be--one with Christ in His heavenly ministry. We all need to keep ourselves one with Christ in the things above. We should not be distracted by ethical admonitions of any sort. All such admonitions are elements of the world. We should be concerned only with Christ and His ministry in heaven. The Christ who is seated in heaven is working, interceding, and ministering. Let us be one with Him in these things. This is to be one with Christ in the things above. Whenever we are one with Him in the things above, we experience a divine transfusion. Then we are brought into God, and God is brought into us. This comes from the interceding and ministering of the all-inclusive Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-TWO

THE RENEWING OF THE NEW MAN

Scripture Reading: Col. 3:5-11; Rom. 12:2

The last two chapters of Colossians cover various aspects of the Christian walk. The first aspect is that we seek the things above and set our mind on them. Paul's charge to seek the things above is based on the revelation presented in chapters one and two. This means that our seeking of the things above must be based on the revelation of the Person and work of Christ. In Colossians 1 and 2 Christ is revealed in a marvelous way. Furthermore, the work Christ has accomplished for us is also presented in a full way. In these chapters Christ is revealed as the all-inclusive One. Based on this revelation of Christ's Person and work, we may seek the things which are above. As we have pointed out, these things refer to Christ's heavenly ministry, to His ministry as the High Priest, Minister, and Administrator of God's economy.

CORRESPONDING TO CHRIST'S HEAVENLY MINISTRY

Christ is not idle. He is interceding, ministering, and executing God's administration. We on earth should respond to Christ's activities in heaven. Although Christ in His earthly ministry fully accomplished redemption for our salvation, He has not yet completed the building up of His Body. For the building up of the Body, His ministry in heaven is necessary. It is not the desire of Christ simply to have a large group of saved people; He wants the saved ones to be built up together as His Body. Christ desires a Body, a building, a bride. In order to have the Body built

up, Christ must carry on the work of His heavenly ministry.

Between Christ in heaven and us on earth there is a divine transmission, a heavenly current. If we are receiving this transmission, we shall respond to Christ's work in heaven. However, if in our experience we are not continuously connected to Him or if we allow insulation to build up between us and Him, the transmission will cease. It is most pitiful that among many genuine Christians today the connection with the heavenly Christ in their experience has been severed. They are genuine Christians, but they do not experience the divine current, and there is no fellowship between them and the Lord. We hope that the situation among us will be absolutely different from this. Instead of being cut off from the heavenly Christ, in our experience we need to continually receive the divine transmission. Day and night, we should be infused with a supply from heaven, and experience the transaction between the heavenly Christ and us. We should continually respond to Christ's interceding, ministering, and executing of God's administration.

To seek the things above means that we correspond to Christ's heavenly ministry. According to Colossians 3, corresponding to Christ's heavenly ministry by seeking the things above is the first aspect of our Christian walk.

THE NEW MAN CREATED AND RENEWED

The second aspect of the Christian walk revealed in Colossians 3 is the renewing of the new man. In 3:10 Paul says, "And having put on the new man, which is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him Who created him." On the one hand, Paul speaks of the creation of the new man; on the other hand, he refers to the renewing of the new man. Since the new man has already been created, why is there still the need for the new man to be renewed? How can the new man be both created and renewed? We have seen that the creation of the new man

took place in our spirit. When our spirit was regenerated, the new man was created. Hence, the regeneration of the spirit is actually the creation of the new man. However, as far as the soul is concerned, the new man still needs to be renewed. It is crucial that this renewing take place especially in our mind, the leading part of the soul. Before we were regenerated, our human spirit was part of the old creation. Then at the time of our regeneration, God the Spirit came into our spirit with the divine life and divine nature. This means that the Spirit of God regenerated our spirit with the elements of the divine life and divine nature. In other words, when we were regenerated, God the Spirit brought the divine life and nature into our spirit. Before regeneration we did not have anything divine. But at the time of regeneration something divine--the life and nature of God--was added into our spirit. By receiving the life and nature of God, we were born of God and became sons of God. Now we are not merely sons of man, but we are also sons of God. Moreover, we are not God's sons-in-law; we are His sons in life.

Because the divine life and nature have been added to our spirit, our regenerated spirit has become part of the new creation. The difference between the old creation and the new creation is that the old creation has nothing of God in it, but the new creation does have something of God added to it. The reason the regenerated spirit is part of the new creation and of the new man is that the life and nature of God has come into it. In our spirit we have something divine--God's life and nature.

At the time of regeneration the life and nature of God were added into our spirit, making it the new creation; nevertheless, the soul with its faculties of mind, emotion, and will remains in the old creation. Thus, there is the need for the divine life and nature to spread from our spirit into our soul and to saturate the soul. This process of spreading and saturating is what we call transformation. In Romans 12:2 Paul charges us to "be transformed by the renewing of the mind." Since the mind is the leading part of the soul, the renewing of the soul depends on the

renewing of the mind. As the divine life and nature spread from our regenerated spirit into the mind, emotion, and will, our soul will be renewed. This renewing of the soul is actually the renewing of the new man.

Even though we have been regenerated, we are often inclined to live according to the old man, that is, to live according to the old creation. However, deep in our spirit we have the aspiration, the desire, to live in newness of life. This desire comes from the new man in our spirit seeking to spread the divine life and nature into our soul. This spreading is the renewing of the new man.

Not many Christians have seen that the renewing of the new man depends on our seeking the things which are above. If we do not seek the things above and set our mind on them, it will be difficult for us to be renewed in soul. But whenever we set our mind on the things above, our inner being is renewed spontaneously. Our experience testifies of this.

Paul admonished the Colossian believers to seek the things which are above because they had been distracted to earthly things, to the elements of the world such as Judaism, Gnosticism, mysticism, and asceticism. As long as they were distracted by these things, they could have nothing to do with the things above. This was the reason Paul charged them to forget Judaism, Greek philosophy, Gnosticism, mysticism, and any kind of culture and to seek the things above and set their mind on them. The things above do not include any religion, philosophy, or culture. Instead, they include Christ's priesthood, ministry, and administration with all His activities. It is crucial for us to realize that Christ is our Head and that we are the members of His Body. Christ and we together form a universal man. As the One in heaven, He is the Head, and as those on earth, we are the Body. As the Head is working in heaven by interceding, ministering, and administrating, we, the Body, are working on earth responding to the

heavenly ministry of Christ and reflecting what He is doing in heaven. What a tremendous matter this is! Instead of caring for earthly religion, worldly philosophy, and the other elements of the world, we should seek the things above and set our mind on them. If we turn to the heavenly Christ with all His activities and set our mind on these things, the renewing of the new man will take place automatically.

What we think about day by day indicates where our mind is set. At the time Paul wrote to the Colossians, the mind of the Judaizers was set on their religion, and the mind of the Gnostics was set on their philosophy. Our mind, however, should be set not on religion, philosophy, or culture, but on Christ and His heavenly ministry. The more we set our mind on the things above--on Christ and His heavenly ministry--the more the divine elements in our spirit will saturate our soul and renew our soul. All that is in our spirit will have free course to spread throughout our inner being. Through this saturating and spreading, the soul is renewed.

If we had only Romans 12:2 but not Colossians 3, it would be rather difficult to understand what it means to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. But as Colossians 3 makes clear, this renewing is related to seeking the things above and setting our mind on them.

Let us not care for earthly things such as religion, philosophy, ethics, or culture. These things are needed by society and are helpful in society. However, they are a hindrance to God's economy and a frustration to its accomplishment. In God's economy there is no need for religion, philosophy, or culture. God's economy is His dispensation of Himself into us. As long as we in the Lord's recovery have God's dispensation, we do not need religion or culture. Just as those in the New Jerusalem will not need either natural light or man-made light, we in the church today do not need religion or culture. However, religion and culture are necessary in society. Outside the church they are definitely needed for the preservation of

society. But in the church we have God's dispensation and therefore have no need for religion or culture. Day by day, God is dispensing Himself into us. How wonderful!

The Christians at Colosse were not clear about the difference between culture and God's economy. This lack of clarity opened the way for religion, philosophy, and culture to creep into the church life and frustrate the accomplishment of God's economy. In principle, the situation is the same among Christians today. Consider how much religion, philosophy, culture, and all manner of isms have hindered God's dispensation! Therefore, it is crucial for us to see that in the Lord's recovery we have a unique need--our need is for the living God to dispense Himself into our being continually.

During the years the Lord's recovery has been in this country, many saints have experienced God's dispensation. At first, the messages concerning God's economy were like a foreign language to them. But now the truth and experience of God's economy are part of their living. In fact, many are now able to minister along the same line. There has been considerable progress even among the young people because of the renewing by the divine life and the divine nature. The divine elements have been saturating the saints. This saturation makes a real difference. Years ago, a brother may have lost his temper in a certain way. But now when he loses his temper, he is different. In many respects the behavior may be the same, but there is a difference in nature. Something divine has been wrought into the inner being of the saints. This is not a mere change in behavior; it is a change in nature. Through such an inward change, the new man spreads from our spirit into our soul and actually increases within us. May the Lord preserve all the saints in the way of life that the new man may increase more and more.

I wish to emphasize the fact that even though the new man has been created in our spirit, there is still the need for the new man to be renewed throughout our whole inner being. This requires that the new man spread in the divine

life with the divine nature throughout our being. Then we shall be fully renewed.

RENEWED UNTO FULL KNOWLEDGE

According to 3:10, the new man is being renewed "unto full knowledge." Some translations say "in full knowledge" instead of "unto full knowledge." However, the Greek preposition should be rendered "unto." This rendering indicates that full knowledge is the issue of renewing, its result, not the means of being renewed. For example, children grow unto knowledge, but they do not grow by means of knowledge. The more children grow, the more they know. However, it is not true to say that the more they know, the more they grow. If parents consider the growth and development of their children, they will see that they do not grow by means of knowledge. Rather, they grow unto knowledge, increasing in knowledge as they grow and develop.

This principle of growing unto knowledge applies to our spiritual life. If we seek the things on earth instead of the things above, we shall not have the renewing of the new man. This means that we shall not experience the growth of the new man. It is extremely difficult for the new man to grow as long as we seek earthly things. But when we seek the things above, the new man grows within us. The result of this growth is full knowledge. Therefore, the new man grows unto full knowledge. Years ago, the new man within you had not grown very much. This made it difficult for you to know spiritual things. But now that the new man has grown within you, it is much easier for you to understand spiritual things. This indicates that growth issues in knowledge. This is the reason Paul says that the new man is being renewed unto full knowledge.

When I was a young Christian, I read books on discerning the spirit from the soul. However, I could not discern the difference between soul and spirit, no matter how hard I tried to analyze the matter and discern it

according to my natural mind. But as I grew in life, it became easy to discern between soul and spirit. This illustrates the fact that spiritual things cannot be known through the exercise of the natural mind. They can be known only through the growth of the new man. The growth of the new man within us issues in true spiritual knowledge.

At birth, a baby has all the necessary physical organs. However, if these organs are to function properly, the baby must grow. In order for the infant to become complete in function, there is the need of growth. The more the child grows, the more the functions will be developed and perfected. Eventually, at maturity, the functions will be full and complete. The principle is the same with the growth of the new man within us. When the new man was created in our spirit, it was complete as far as organs are concerned. But because it has not yet been completed in function, there is the need for growth and renewing. Growth and renewing issue in knowledge. Actually, the full knowledge in 3:10 is equal to function. The growth and renewing of the new man results in the function of the new man. Without knowledge, we cannot function. The use of our organs depends on knowledge. As the members of our physical body function according to knowledge, so the new man functions as it is renewed unto full knowledge. For the renewing of the new man to result in knowledge means that the renewing results in function. As long as the new man is short of growth and renewing, it will be lacking in function. This means that even though the new man has been created, it is not yet complete in function. For this, the new man must grow, develop, and be renewed. Then, as a result of this renewing, it will become perfect in function.

We have seen that the Colossians were distracted from the things which are in heaven by earthly things such as religion, philosophy, and culture. In writing this Epistle, Paul was seeking to bring them back from the elements of the world to the things which are above. He wanted them to set their mind on the things above so that the new man could spread from within their spirit into their mind and

eventually saturate their whole being with the divine element. This saturation would issue in full knowledge, the completion of the function of the new man.

ACCORDING TO THE IMAGE OF GOD

Now we must go on to see that this renewing is according to the image of God, the One who created the new man. In other words, the renewing of the new man is according to Christ, who is the image and expression of God. When we set our mind on the things above, the way is open for the new man to spread the divine element from our spirit into our soul. This spreading of the divine element within us is according to Christ, who is the image of God, God's expression. The more renewing that takes place in our soul, the more we shall be able to express God. In other words, the more renewing we experience in the soul, the more we shall have of the image of Christ.

Although we have been regenerated, we may have very little of the image of Christ in our mind, emotion, and will. Instead, we may cling to the image of the old Adam. But if we set our mind on the things above, the divine element in our spirit will spread into our soul. This spreading will be according to Christ as the image of God. As a result of the spreading of the divine element, we shall have the image of God and become His expression.

CHRIST AS ALL THINGS AND IN ALL MEMBERS

In 3:11 Paul goes on to say, "Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all and in all." According to this verse, in the renewing of the new man there is no room for any natural man--no room for Greek or Jew, for religious or unreligious, for cultured or uncultured. In the renewing of the new man, Christ is all and in all.

In Greek the first "all" is neuter gender and denotes things. But the second "all" is masculine gender and denotes persons. Therefore, in the renewing of the new

man, Christ is all things, and He is in all the members. This indicates that in the renewing of the new man, Christ truly is all-inclusive. On the one hand, He is in all the persons, the members of the new man; on the other hand, He is all things in the renewing of the new man.

Perhaps you are wondering what are all the things in the renewing of the new man. At least, all things must include all virtues and attributes. Love, patience, and humility are all excellent virtues. All these virtues are Christ Himself. In the renewing of the new man, Christ is all the wonderful virtues, all the good things, and all the positive attributes.

REALIZING THE LIFE OF THE NEW MAN

How can we, the New Testament believers, realize the life of the universal new man in a practical way? Among those Christians who set their mind on the things on earth, there is no renewing of the new man and no possibility of having the life of the new man in a practical way. But when we set our mind on the things above, spontaneously the new man grows and is renewed within us. This causes our whole being to be renewed and transformed. Then wherever we may be, we can have the practice of the new man. Recently I heard of a young brother in the Navy who visited a number of churches in the Far East. He enjoyed good fellowship with the saints. To be sure, this brother experienced the life of the new man. Although he was from the United States, he could be merged in the spirit of fellowship with so many saints from the Orient.

If we are not willing to set our minds on the things above and thus do not open the way for the new man to increase within us, it will be very difficult for us to experience the life of the new man in a practical way. But if we set our mind on the things above, the new man will spread from our spirit into our soul. Then no matter where we may be with the saints, we shall realize the life of the new man.

Colossians is definitely a book on the all-inclusive Christ. However, in this book Paul also speaks of the new

man. The practical life of the new man comes out of the revelation of Christ and the experience of Christ. When we have the revelation of Christ with the adequate experience of Christ, the new man will appear among us in a practical way, and we shall realize the life of the new man.

God's goal is to have this one new man, which ultimately will consummate in the New Jerusalem. Therefore, the New Jerusalem will be the final consummation of the one new man. When we are in the New Jerusalem, we shall enjoy the life of the universal one new man. Today we may have a foretaste of this enjoyment by setting our mind on the things above and giving a free way for the new man in our spirit to spread into our whole being.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-THREE

THE PEACE OF CHRIST ARBITRATING IN OUR HEART

Scripture Reading: Col. 3:12-16; Eph. 2:14-18

In Colossians 3 and 4 there are a number of points, arranged in an excellent sequence, related to the proper Christian walk. If we would have a proper Christian life, we first need to set our mind on the things above. As we have pointed out, these things are related to what Christ is doing in heaven. As the High Priest, Christ is interceding for us. As the heavenly Minister, He is dispensing the riches of life into us. As the divine Administrator, He is executing God's economy. Christ's ministry in heaven is for the building up of His Body. He desires to build up the church so that He may have His bride. In our Christian walk we need to set our mind on the things above.

"SWITCHING ON" TO THE DIVINE TRANSMISSION FOR THE RENEWING OF THE NEW MAN

Following the setting of the mind on the things above is the renewing of the new man. Apparently there is no connection between setting our mind on the things above and the renewing of the new man. Actually, according to our experience, these two matters are closely related. The renewing of the new man is fully dependent on our setting the mind on the things above. The reason for this is that a spiritual transmission is involved. When we set our mind on the things above, we open our being to what is taking place in heaven. We also respond to Christ's ministry in heaven and reflect it. Simultaneously, the all-inclusive life-

giving Spirit flows into us. This transmission may be illustrated by electricity. On the one hand, electricity is in the power plant; on the other hand, it is in our homes. Between these two ends, the power plant and our homes, a transmission is taking place. This transmission is called the flow of the current of electricity. The current of electricity is actually electricity itself in motion. In the same principle, between Christ in heaven and us on earth, there is a divine transmission, the flowing of the life-giving Spirit. By means of this transmission, heaven and earth are brought together. Those with experience realize that this is not a dream or a religious superstition. It is a divine, heavenly, and spiritual reality. The heavenly electricity is flowing, and it joins heaven and earth.

The all-inclusive life-giving Spirit is the issue of Christ's redemption. Galatians 3:14 indicates that Christ has redeemed us so that we may receive the Spirit. Christ accomplished redemption not merely to save us from sin, but even the more to impart Himself into us as the life-giving Spirit. Praise the Lord that in the universe there is a wonderful, heavenly, divine "electricity"--the life-giving Spirit! When we open our being and set our mind on the things above, this Spirit transmits the riches of the divine life into us. All we need to do is "switch on" and the heavenly current flows. The way to "switch on" is to set our mind on the things above. This causes the heavenly transmission to function in our experience to bring the divine essence of Christ into us. The more this essence is added into our being, the more we experience the renewing of the new man.

Renewing is different from teaching. We may be taught about God without having anything of the divine substance added into our being. Renewing depends on the transmission of the divine substance into us. The more the divine element is added to us, the more we are renewed. Most of today's Christians do not experience this renewing. What they have is merely teaching. By the Lord's mercy, our aim in His recovery is not to pass on mere teachings,

but to help the saints to experience the divine transmission. In the ministry we wish to share the revelation from the Word of God. Then as the saints have the hearing of faith and open to the Lord, "switching on" by setting their mind on the things above, they will be supplied by the heavenly transmission. At times we may be sad or depressed. But if we open to the heavenly transmission, we shall be filled with joy. We may even want to shout and praise the Lord. The reason for this change is that the heavenly transmission brings the divine element into our being. This is what produces the renewing, which affects our mind, emotion, and will. It is crucial for us to see the connection between the renewing of the new man and setting our mind on the things above.

THE NEED FOR PEACE TO ARBITRATE IN US

According to the sequence of chapter three of Colossians, after the setting of the mind on the things above and the renewing of the new man, we have the peace of Christ arbitrating in our heart (v. 15). Do you know what the peace of Christ is? This term is used just once in the New Testament. Elsewhere, in Romans and in Philippians, Paul speaks of the God of peace. Moreover, at the beginning of his Epistles he invariably has a word about grace and peace. But in Colossians 3:15 he tells us that the peace of Christ should arbitrate in our hearts. We should not assume that we understand what it means for the peace of Christ to arbitrate in our hearts. Instead of taking this word for granted, we should exercise to get the proper understanding.

According to the context of Colossians 3, when we set our mind on the things above, the divine element is transmitted into us for the renewing of the new man. As the new man is being renewed, we should allow the peace of Christ to arbitrate in our hearts. The renewing of the new man is actually the spreading of the new man within us. As the new man spreads, we need to let the peace of Christ arbitrate within us.

It is very easy in the church life to offend one another or to make one another unhappy. In the matter of arranging chairs in the meeting hall, a brother may be unhappy if the arrangement is not according to his opinion. But if we open to the Lord when we are offended and tell Him that we love Him, something heavenly will be transmitted into us. Then spontaneously we shall be happy with the one who offended us. This is an example of the peace of Christ arbitrating in our heart.

This arbitrating peace preserves the oneness in the church life. The divisions caused by different opinions are a serious damage to the church life and cut the new man into pieces. But the arbitrating peace of Christ brought in by the heavenly transmission keeps us in oneness and preserves the new man.

I can testify that often, when I have been unhappy with someone in the church life, I have contacted the Lord and called on His name. Many times I say, "Lord Jesus, I thank You for Your presence, for Your anointing, and for everything You have been to me." When I give thanks to the Lord in this way, the divine transmission begins to work. After a few minutes, I may be so full that I am beside myself with joy. Then spontaneously I begin to count the one who made me unhappy better than myself. When I see him the next time, I have no problem with him. Because I experience the Lord's transmission and arbitration, I do not have problems with any of the saints in the Lord's recovery.

When a local church is first established, the saints may experience a church-life honeymoon. But just as there is no permanent honeymoon in married life, there is no permanent honeymoon in the church life. Friction develops eventually between the saints. This friction causes the wrinkles Paul speaks of in Ephesians 5. If we do not have the peace of Christ arbitrating in us, wrinkles will continue to develop. But if the heavenly transmission supplies us with the divine element, the wrinkles will be removed metabolically. Then instead of friction there will be the arbitrating peace of Christ.

VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL PEACE

As fallen people, we were God's enemies, and there was no peace between us and God. Furthermore, there is no peace among the various peoples on earth, especially between the Jews and the Gentiles. On the cross Christ redeemed us, reconciled us to God, and made peace between us and God. Furthermore, through His death on the cross, Christ abolished the ordinances concerning the different ways of living so that there might be peace among the races and nations (Eph. 2:15-16). Because Christ has abolished the ordinances, He has made peace not only between us and God, but between believers of different races and nationalities. I am pleased that in the Lord's recovery we have believers from so many different nations and regions. All races are represented. Christ has broken down the middle wall of partition. Furthermore, according to Ephesians 2:14, Christ Himself is our peace. With Christ as our Peacemaker, we now have vertical peace--peace between us and God--and horizontal peace--peace with one another.

If we were not Christians experiencing the transmission of the divine substance into us, there would be no way for our conflicting opinions to be dissolved. Rather, the differences of opinion would increase. The result would be enmity, strife, and, ultimately, fighting. But when we set our mind on the things above and experience the divine transmission, the peace of Christ arbitrates in our hearts. Praise the Lord for every visitation of the peace of Christ! This peace which visits us is actually a wonderful Person, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. This very One is the peace who carries on a work of arbitration within us to keep us at peace with God and with one another.

To say that the peace of Christ arbitrates within us means that it solves the problems caused by quarreling, fighting, or complaining. Such problems often arise between husband and wife. A husband may criticize his wife in a certain way, and she may react by criticizing him. An argument ensues with a bitter exchange of words. After

a brother has such an argument with his wife, he may sense a call from the Lord deep within to pray and confess. Then the brother may pray, "Lord, forgive me for arguing with my wife." The Lord may also indicate that he should go to his wife and apologize. When he asks her to forgive him, he experiences the peace of Christ arbitrating in the relation-ship between him and his wife.

THE RULE OF PEACE

FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE NEW MAN

For the peace of Christ to arbitrate in our hearts, it must rule in us. It must be enthroned as the ruler and decider. I believe you all have experienced that Someone has been enthroned in you to rule you and make the final decisions. Let us take as an example a brother who is offended by one of the elders. In my early ministry, I would have encouraged the offended brother to love the elder and not to be offended by him. However, from experience I learned that the more I did this, the more the offended one accused me of taking sides with the elder. Eventually I learned that the best thing is simply to pray that the Lord will have mercy on the brother who has been offended. In His mercy, the Lord will come to him and cause him to set his mind on the things above so that once again he can experience the divine transmission which gives rise to the arbitrating peace of Christ. Then, ruled by the peace of Christ, the brother will admit that even though the elder might have been wrong, he himself was wrong to a greater degree. Immediately he will confess to the Lord, receive grace, and have love for that elder. Through the arbitration of the peace of Christ, our problems are solved, and the friction between the saints disappears. Then the church life is preserved, and the new man is maintained in a practical way.

The church life as the life of the new man is preserved not by mere teachings, but by setting our mind on the things above and allowing the heavenly transmission to impart the divine element into us. Then we shall have the

renewing of the new man and experience the peace of Christ ruling within us. The peace of Christ is actually Christ Himself in a particular aspect. Hence, the arbitrating of the peace of Christ is Christ working within us to exercise His rule over us, to speak the last word, and to make the final decision. In the case of the brother offended by the elder, Christ's word is to love that elder, to seek him out for fellowship, and to enjoy the Lord with him. This is Christ enthroned as peace ruling, deciding, and uttering the last word.

In order to have a proper Christian walk and preserve the church life, we need the arbitrating peace of Christ. Otherwise, there will be no way for friction to be dissolved. Only the heavenly Christ, the One who is interceding, ministering, and administrating, can solve our problems and resolve the friction. If a brother and his wife set their mind on Christ in the heavens, they will experience the divine transmission. Then the peace of Christ will arbitrate in them.

In meeting after meeting and in message after message, we desire to minister Christ to the saints. As the saints see the revelation of Christ and experience the arbitrating peace of Christ, the church life will be preserved in freshness.

When the peace of Christ is enthroned in our hearts to be the unique umpire within us, we shall have peace with God vertically and with the saints horizontally. We praise the Lord that we are enjoying peace, and in this peace the church life as the new man is preserved! As the peace of Christ presides in our hearts, the renewing of the new man takes place continually. If we stay under the ruling of the enthroned peace of Christ, we shall not offend others or damage them. Rather, by the Lord's grace and with His peace, we shall minister life to others. The oneness in a local church and among the churches is not maintained by human endeavoring. It is maintained only by the arbitrating peace of Christ. The management and maintenance of the Lord's recovery are not our

responsibility. All the churches and the recovery as a whole are under the arbitrating peace of Christ. In us Christ is the supplying grace and the arbitrating peace.

We need to allow the arbitrating peace of Christ to be enthroned in us first. Do not ask the Lord to exercise His sovereign rule over your wife or husband. Instead, pray, "Lord, be enthroned in me and exercise Your rule over me." If instead of praying for yourself to be ruled by the Lord, you ask Him to rule others, the Lord may say, "Let Me first set up My throne in you. Let Me rule you, subdue you, and make the final decisions for you." If we allow the enthroned peace of Christ to arbitrate in our hearts, our married life, family life, and church life will all be preserved in oneness.

May we be encouraged to set our mind on the things above so that the heavenly transmission may bring the divine substance into our being for the renewing of the new man. Then Christ in the particular aspect of peace will arbitrate in our hearts, and the Lord will have a way to build up the new man and prepare the bride for His coming.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-FOUR

THE WORD OF CHRIST INHABITING US

Scripture Reading: Col. 3:15-18; Heb. 1:1-2a; Rev. 2:1, 7a

ONENESS--A NECESSARY CONDITION FOR GOD'S SPEAKING

Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God." Immediately after speaking about the peace of Christ arbitrating in us, Paul goes on to tell us to let the word of Christ dwell in us. Why does Paul mention the peace of Christ before the word of Christ? The answer to this question is related to the basic principle revealed in the Bible that God's speaking requires oneness. Whenever God's people are divided, His word becomes rare. God does not speak where there is division. Division causes God's speaking to diminish, even to cease altogether.

When the children of Israel were in the wilderness, God spoke in the tent of meeting. The tent of meeting was a sign of the oneness of God's people. The twelve tribes were arranged around the tent of meeting, and God spoke to the people from within the tent of meeting. Any Israelite at that time who wanted God's speaking had to come to the tent of meeting, the place of oneness.

The temple built in Jerusalem was the continuation of the tent of meeting. When God's people were divided into the northern and southern kingdoms, God's speaking was found only in the south, because that was where the temple was located. Because there was no temple in the north,

God's speaking through the priesthood was not found there. God's speaking through the priests came out of the Holy of Holies, the center both of the tabernacle and of the temple.

GOD SPEAKING IN THE SON AND THROUGH THE BODY

The book of Hebrews opens with these words: "In many portions and in many ways, God, having spoken of old to the fathers in the prophets, has at the last of these days spoken to us in the Son" (Heb. 1:1-2a). As the Son of God, the Lord Jesus not only spoke the word of God, but He Himself was even called the Word (John 1:1, 14; Rev. 19:13). God spoke in His Son and not merely through Him. Wherever the Son was, there the Word was also. Furthermore, when the Son spoke, God spoke in the Son's speaking. The Son came to express God, to define God, and to speak forth God. In His very being and Person, the Son was the Word of God.

The evil intention of the Jewish religionists was to terminate the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth, by crucifying Him. But after His crucifixion, the Lord entered into the realm of resurrection, and in resurrection He became the Head of the Body. Before His crucifixion and resurrection, the Lord Jesus was restricted by the flesh. It was not possible for Him to be universal. But through death and resurrection He was enlarged from an individual to a corporate man. On the day of Pentecost Christ came down as the all-inclusive Spirit upon His disciples to make them members of His Body. This Body, a corporate man, includes the resurrected Christ as the Head and the millions of believers in Christ as the members. Now, just as my whole body speaks whenever I speak, so the Body of Christ speaks whenever Christ speaks as the Head. Today the Son of God is no longer merely an individual; He is a corporate, universal man. For this reason, all the members of the Body can speak the word of God. Even young people

can go to their parents or classmates and speak to them on God's behalf.

We all were saved through the hearing of God's word. When I was saved in China more than fifty years ago, God Himself did not come to speak to me directly. Rather, I heard God's word through a member of His Body. This is one example of the fact that God today continues to speak in His Son who has been enlarged to become a corporate man, the Body of Christ. How wonderful that we all are part of the enlargement of Christ, part of a universal man of which Christ is the Head and we are the members!

If we are truly one with other members of the Body of Christ, we shall be able to speak God's word. However, if we are not one with the saints but are filled with murmuring, complaining, and gossiping about others, we shall not be able to speak the word of the Lord. Speaking God's word requires oneness. Where there is no oneness, there can be no speaking. If we allow the peace of Christ to arbitrate in us to maintain oneness and harmony, we shall be able to speak the word of God.

Christ died on the cross to make peace by accomplishing redemption and reconciling us to God. This peace is vertical, the peace between us and God. Christ died also to create horizontal peace, the peace between us and others. For this, Christ abolished all the ordinances, the different ways of worship and living. By abolishing the ordinances, Christ has made peace horizontally among the different peoples. In doing this, He nullified the effect of Babel. At Babel mankind was confused, confounded, divided, and scattered. There the corporate man created by God was divided. But by His death on the cross Christ cancelled the confusion and division of Babel. He has made peace both vertically and horizontally. Thus, on the day of Pentecost, Christ could come down upon the believers as the uniting Spirit and bring forth the church in a practical way. At Pentecost those who spoke many different languages became one.

Although Christ nullified division to produce oneness,

today's Christianity has destroyed the oneness and produced division. For this reason, in divided Christianity there is no speaking from God. Instead of hearing God's speaking, many who sit in the chapels, cathedrals, and denominational buildings hear someone talk about social life or politics. This certainly is not the speaking of God in the Son through the Body. The reason for this lack of speaking is the lack of peace and oneness. Because there is no oneness, there is no center, no oracle, for God's speaking.

NO SHORTAGE OF GOD'S WORD

We thank the Lord that the situation in His recovery is altogether different from this. We have an abundance of the Lord's speaking. Consider how much of the word of God has been released among us in the recovery during the past years. The reason there is so much of God's speaking in the recovery is that here we have genuine oneness. We experience this oneness and the harmony in the Spirit not only when the churches come together for a conference, but also in the meetings of the various local churches. In the meetings we have the Lord's speaking, and we are edified, nourished, and enlightened. When the peace of Christ arbitrates in us and keeps us in a situation full of oneness and harmony, we become the place of God's speaking, His oracle. Deep in my spirit I realize that the meetings are an oracle, a place where God can come in to speak.

Now we see the connection between 3:15 and 16. The peace of Christ arbitrates in us to keep us in a proper condition to receive God's word. The arbitrating peace of Christ is for God's oracle, the place of His speaking.

For a proper Christian walk we need to set our mind on things above. When we do this, we "switch on" to the heavenly transmission, the divine current of "electricity" which flows from the throne in heaven to us on earth. This transmission causes the renewing of the new man, for it brings a new element, the divine substance, into our being. Following the renewing, we have the arbitrating peace of

Christ. The very element of Christ transmitted into us becomes the essence of the peace which rules in us. This arbitrating peace not only solves our problems, but also dissolves them. It enables us to be kept in oneness and to be preserved in a harmonious condition. It also opens the way for the word of God to come with the bountiful supply. Because we have the arbitrating peace, in the Lord's recovery there is no shortage of God's word.

FUNCTIONS OF THE WORD OF GOD

Enlightening

Now we must go on to consider how the word of God functions within us. First, the word of God enlightens us. If we did not have the Word, we would be in darkness. But because God's word is full of light and it enlightens us, it can make us very clear about many different things.

Nourishing

Second, the word of God is food, full of nourishment. This means that God's word nourishes us while it enlightens us. I can testify that throughout the years I have been adequately nourished through the word of God. It truly has been food to me in my experience.

Quenching Our Thirst

The word of God also quenches our thirst. Thirst is even more serious than hunger. Usually a person can go longer without eating than without drinking. If we do not have water, we simply have no way to live. How good that the word of God is not only food, but also the water of life! The word of God enlightens us, feeds us, and quenches our thirst.

Strengthening

Another aspect of the function of the word of God within us is that of strengthening. The word of God strengthens us. Christians are weak because they are

thirsty and undernourished. No one who is hungry and thirsty can be strong.

If we experience the word of God nourishing us and strengthening us, we shall be strong not only in spirit, but also in our soul. In other words, we shall be strong psychologically as well as spiritually. Furthermore, God's word will even strengthen us physically. I can testify that my body is healthy not only because I eat the proper physical food, but also because I take the word of God as my spiritual food. God's word in my spirit makes my spirit strong and happy. This strength and happiness help me to be healthy physically. It is a fact that when we are happy spiritually and psychologically we shall be healthy in body.

The word of God makes us strong in spirit and also in soul. Strengthened in spirit and soul, we shall be healthy in body. The word of God is the best cure; it strengthens us and it heals us.

Washing

The word of God also washes us. It washes our being organically and metabolically. When God's word enters into our fibers organically, it washes us metabolically.

Building Up

Furthermore, the word of God builds us up. As members of the church, the Body, we all need to be built up. Because we are peculiar, it is difficult for anyone to deal with us, much less to build us together. However, the word of God can touch us inwardly and make it possible for us to be built up in the church. Because we are peculiar in ourselves, we cannot be built up in this way unless the word of Christ inhabits us. Although the peace of Christ arbitrates within us, it is not the peace which builds us up. The peace keeps us in the proper situation for the building work to be done by God's word. Because it is the word of Christ which builds us up, I bear a heavy burden to release God's word. The more the word of God is released among us, the more building up there will be.

Completing and Perfecting

The word of God also completes and perfects. Elsewhere we have pointed out that a baby is complete in organs, but not in functions. In order for a child's bodily organs to function properly, the child needs to grow. Perfection always comes by the way of growth. The more a child grows, the more his functions are completed and perfected. The same is true in spiritual experience. As members of the Body, we all should function. But if we would function, we first need to be perfected by the word of God. Because God's word nourishes us, we have growth. Then through the growth, the functions come forth. The nourishment we receive from the word of God completes us and perfects us as members of the Body. For this reason, we say that the word of God perfects us.

Edifying

The last function of the word of God we shall consider in this message is its function of edifying us. There is a difference between being built up and being edified. Being built up is related to the church corporately. Being edified involves being built up individually, primarily in the matter of virtues. We all need to be edified, or built up in a personal way, for we all lack certain virtues. For example, we may be short of such virtues as patience, wisdom, humility, or kindness. The word of God truly edifies us in the matter of virtues. The more we have of the word of God, the more virtues we shall have. Our kindness, patience, wisdom, and humility will all be increased by the word of God.

All of us need to be edified in virtues through God's word. Some of us are characterized by quickness and others, by slowness. In certain situations quickness is a virtue. If a group of brothers need to hurry to be on time for an important appointment, quickness is a virtue. But in taking care of someone who is very ill, slowness may be a virtue. We need to be edified so that we may be able to act either quickly or slowly.

In certain situations we need to speak in a free, bubbling way. But in other situations we should be very restricted in speaking, even silent. In the right situation speaking in a bubbling way is a virtue, but in other situations it is not. The same is true of quietness. In matters such as these we all need edification.

Only the word of God can edify us and cause us to be properly balanced, discerning, and moderate. Concerning quickness and slowness, we need to be moderate. We should be moderate even in our love. Some saints love others according to their emotional tide. When the tide of love is high, they love others excessively. But when the tide is low, they do not show love for anybody. They seem to be like statues, altogether without feeling. First we need to be edified personally in the matter of virtues. Then we shall be built up together with others in the church life.

We have seen that the word of God enlightens, nourishes, quenches our thirst, strengthens, washes, builds up, perfects, and edifies. What a great need we have for the word of God!

ALLOWING THE WORD OF CHRIST TO HAVE FIRST PLACE

In 3:16 Paul charges us to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. The Greek word rendered dwell means to be in a house, to inhabit. This indicates that the word of Christ should be able to make its home in us.

If a certain place is to become our home, we must have the freedom to make all necessary arrangements. If we want to keep a certain item, we may do so. But if we want to throw something else away, we are free to do that as well. If we do not have this kind of freedom, it is not possible for us to make that place our home. In like manner, if the word of Christ is to make its home in us, we must give it the full liberty, freedom, and right. We need to pray, "Lord, I offer my whole being to You and Your word. I give You access to every part of my inner being. Lord, make my inner being a home for Yourself and Your word."

We all must confess that many times the Lord's word has come to us, but we did not give it adequate room within us. Instead, we limited the word of God and restricted it. Sometimes we do receive God's word, but we do not give it the freedom to make its home in us. Let me ask you, in your experience is the word of Christ first, or are you first? I do not believe that anyone can say that first place is always given to God's word. Sometimes we may give preeminence to the word of Christ and allow it to be first. However, much more often we ourselves are first. In a secret way we keep the first place for the self. Outwardly we may act as if the first place is reserved for the word of God. But secretly the first place is for us.

Suppose you are reading Matthew 19:16-22, where the Lord Jesus tells the young man to sell all that he has, give to the poor, and follow Him. As you read this portion of Scripture, the Lord may tell you to give away certain things. That would be a test of what is first--the self or the word of God. Many of us have learned from experience how difficult it is for us to give first place to the word of God. For this, we need the Lord's grace. We need to turn to the Lord and say, "Lord, I cannot do this, but, Lord, You can. Lord, I trust in You for this."

We need the arbitrating peace of Christ to preserve us in oneness that the Lord may speak to us. Then we need to give first place to the word of God. If we do this, we shall experience the functions of the word of God: enlightening, nourishing, quenching our thirst, strengthening, washing, building, perfecting, and edifying. What benefit we receive from the word of God!

FILLED WITH JOY

In 3:16 Paul speaks of "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God." This indicates that when we are filled with the word of God, we should be filled with joy. If we receive God's word and yet have no joy, something must be wrong. When we receive the word of

God, we actually receive the Spirit. Receiving the Spirit should stir us up and cause us to be joyful and to sing.

THE RESULT OF ALLOWING THE WORD OF CHRIST TO INHABIT US

In 3:17 and 18 Paul continues, "And in everything, whatever you do in word or in work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. The wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord." Here we see the result of allowing the word of Christ to inhabit us. If a wife is filled with God's word, she will spontaneously submit to her husband. If a husband is indwelt by the word of God, he will automatically love his wife. Virtues such as love and submission come from the word of God which dwells in us.

The matters pertaining to the proper Christian life in Colossians 3 are arranged in an excellent sequence. First Paul tells us to set our mind on the things above. When we do this, we receive the heavenly transmission and experience the renewing of the new man. Then Christ becomes the arbitrating peace within us to dissolve our problems. Furthermore, God's word fills us and inhabits us. Out of this inhabiting word of God will come love, submission, and all other virtues needed for human living. This is the way to have our Christian walk.

PRAYING WITHOUT CEASING

In the next message we shall go on to see that such an excellent situation is maintained by persevering in prayer. If we would maintain the excellent condition produced by setting our mind on the things above, experiencing the heavenly transmission and the renewing of the new man, having the peace of Christ arbitrate within us, and being indwelt by the word of God and thereby having the virtues required for daily life, we need to pray without ceasing.

LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-FIVE

PERSEVERING IN PRAYER

Scripture Reading: Col. 4:2-6; Heb. 4:14-16

In the foregoing messages we have covered four important aspects of the Christian walk revealed in chapters three and four of Colossians: setting our mind on the things above, the renewing of the new man, the peace of Christ arbitrating in us, and the word of Christ inhabiting us. If we have these four things, we shall have a proper Christian walk. Husbands will love their wives, wives will submit to their husbands, children will obey their parents, parents will care for their children properly, and even masters and slaves will have the right kind of relationship. Everything will be normal in the Christian life, and the glory of God will be among us.

After covering all these matters, in 4:2 Paul charges us, "Persevere in prayer." To persevere in prayer is to continue persistently, steadfastly, and earnestly.

As human beings, we all persevere in certain matters, often in negative things. In married life a husband and wife may persevere in the exchange of words. Once an argument begins, neither the husband nor the wife may be wiling to give in. During my many years in the church life, I have observed many cases where the saints persevered in the expression of their ideas, concepts, or opinions. No matter what the situation, they were not willing to change their opinion. These negative examples show that we do know what it means to persevere.

PRAYER AND WARFARE

According to Paul's word in 4:2, the thing that requires

our perseverance is prayer. We need to persevere in prayer because prayer involves a battle, a fight. Two parties, God and Satan, are hostile to each other. The meaning of the name Satan is adversary. Satan is both the enemy without and the adversary within. On the one hand, he is the enemy trying to defeat God; on the other hand, he is the adversary within God's realm seeking to cause damage. As the adversary, Satan opposes God from within God's realm, God's kingdom. This is the reason the Bible clearly indicates that even today Satan has access to the place of God's throne. In the book of Job we see that Satan can stand before the throne of God and accuse people before Him (Job 1:6-12). It is difficult for us to understand why God allows His enemy such freedom. According to Revelation 12:10, Satan accuses us day and night.

Although the battle raging in the universe is between God and Satan, another party is involved. This third party consists of God's chosen and redeemed people, the ones who will actually decide the outcome of the battle. If we take sides with Satan, God will lose, even though He is almighty. As the infinite, all-powerful Creator, God will not lower Himself to fight against one of His creatures. Thus, it is necessary for another of God's creatures--man--to fight against Satan. In a very real sense, God needs us. Without us, He would not have a way to carry on the battle against Satan. He must maintain His status as the Creator. For this reason, He needs us to carry on the actual work of warfare.

In order to fight on God's side against Satan, we need to persevere in prayer. This perseverance is needed because the course of the whole world is away from God. To pray is to go against the current, the trend, in the fallen universe. Persevering in prayer is like rowing a boat upstream. If you do not persevere, you will be carried downstream by the current. No doubt, to persevere in this way, either in rowing or in praying, requires a great deal of energy. The entire universe is under Satan's influence and is contrary to God's will. Hence, there is a strong current in the world

in opposition to the will of God. As those who take sides with God, we find that the whole universe is against us and, in particular, against our prayer.

Many of the experiences we have with respect to prayer day by day prove that Satan opposes our prayer in every way possible. For example, a telephone call may come just when you are at a very important point in your prayer. You have prayed yourself into the Spirit, and you are touching the heavens. Then, at that very moment, the telephone may ring. You may answer the telephone only to learn that someone has dialed the wrong number. Your praying spirit may be seriously damaged by the irritation this causes you. When we try to pray, we may also be disturbed by our children, by callers at the door, or by any animal pets there may be in the house. Because there is so much resistance to our prayer, we definitely need to persevere in prayer.

Some sisters claim that they have very little time to pray. In their attempt to make excuses for themselves, they may point to all the responsibilities they must fulfill day by day. However, these same sisters may have plenty of time to gossip on the telephone. They find it extremely easy to talk on the telephone, but very difficult to pray. To them, praying is like climbing a mountain. It is tiring and takes tremendous energy. But they do not find it exhausting to gossip. This illustration indicates that resistance to prayer lies not only outside us, but even within us. This is the reason we all find it difficult to pray.

A VOW CONCERNING OUR PRAYER LIFE

In light of the fact that there is great resistance to praying, let us now consider in a very practical way how to per-severe in prayer. Before you try to persevere in prayer, you should first make a deal with the Lord concerning your prayer life. Pray to Him in a definite way and say, "Lord, I mean business with You about this matter of prayer. I call heaven and earth to witness that from this time forth I will have a life of prayer. I will not be a prayerless person. Rather, I will be a praying person." If you do not have such

a prayer to the Lord, you will not be able to persevere in prayer. We need to say to Him, "Lord, I am desperate about this. I offer myself to You so that I may have a prayer life. Lord, keep me in the spirit of prayer. If I forget this or neglect this, I know that You will not forget it. Remind me again and again about prayer." This kind of prayer may be regarded as a vow made to the Lord. We all need to make a vow to Him concerning our prayer life. We should tell the Lord, "Lord, I know that if I forget this vow, You will not forget it. From the very beginning, Lord, I want to clearly hand the responsibility over to You. Lord, don't let me go. Remind me to pray."

SETTING ASIDE DEFINITE TIMES

After we make such a deal with the Lord concerning prayer, we should set aside definite times for prayer. For instance, you may reserve ten minutes every morning. During this time, prayer must be the top priority. Our attitude should be that prayer is our most important business and that nothing should be allowed to interfere with it. If we do not have this attitude, we shall not be able to have a successful prayer life. No matter how many things we have to do each day, we can reserve at least a few minutes here and there for prayer. We may pray a little in the morning. Then again at noon, after work, and in the evening we may have other times for prayer. By setting aside definite times during the day, we may be able to have a half hour re-served for prayer.

When you are observing a set time for prayer at home, take the telephone off the hook. This will help eliminate distractions. Prayer time is not the time for telephone calls. Furthermore, you should not pay attention to those knocking at your door. The time you have dedicated to the Lord for prayer should be used only for prayer, not for anything else. Regarding this, you need to be strong and persevering.

In order to have more time for prayer, we should try to save time during the day. For example, perhaps we can

reduce the time spent in personal grooming or in conversation with others. Unnecessary talk weakens our praying spirit, damages the praying atmosphere, and occupies time that can be used for prayer. The battle over prayer is continual. Probably it will last until eternity.

What I have been sharing about prayer is not mere doctrine. It comes from years of experience. As far as prayer is concerned, I must admit that I have had much failure. I do not boast of great success in my prayer life. Rather, I have suffered many failures because of the opposition of the enemy, the distractions around me, and even the hindrances within me. I have surely learned that prayer is a battle. Because it is a battle, a fight, we must persevere in it.

THE BENEFITS OF PRAYER

Persevering in prayer has many benefits. By prayer we set our mind on the things above. In fact, prayer is the only way to have our mind set on the things in heaven. When we set our mind on things above by praying, we shall not pray for trivial matters. Instead, our prayer will be occupied with Christ's heavenly intercession, ministry, and administration. Because Christ is interceding for the churches around the world, we also pray for the churches. Let the Lord take care of all the small matters in our living. Our responsibility is to seek first the kingdom of God and God's righteousness. Since the Father knows our need, He will take care of us and meet our need.

When we set our mind on the things above during our times of prayer, we become a reflection of Christ's ministry in the heavens. Through our prayer, Christ, the Head, is given a way to carry out His administration through His Body. When we pray, we are a heavenly ambassador on earth with the extension of God's kingdom. However, when we are gossiping, we are not a heavenly ambassador at all. Only when we pray do we become an ambassador of the heavenly kingdom on earth in a practical way.

When we pray, we enter into the Holy of Holies and approach the throne of grace. Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us therefore come forward with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace for timely help." Prayer is the way to come forward to the throne of grace. Coming forward to the throne of grace, we receive mercy and grace to meet our timely need. When we pray, approaching the throne of grace, mercy and grace will become a river flowing in us and supplying us. How rewarding this is! Receiving the flow of grace in prayer is actually more important than having our prayers answered. Whether or not our prayer is answered is secondary. The primary thing is that grace flows like a river from the throne and into our being.

To receive this river of grace is to have our spiritual battery charged with heavenly current. The heavenly current, the divine electricity, is the Triune God as grace flowing out of the throne and into us. The supply and enjoyment this brings is unspeakable.

Christians today are weak because their spiritual batteries are not charged. Because they are short of prayer, they are short of the heavenly transmission. Again and again during the day, we need to be charged with the divine electrical current. This surely is a reward for persevering in prayer.

Another benefit of praying is related to fellowship with the Lord. We all love the Lord's presence and anointing, and we all love to have fellowship with Him. But how can we enjoy the Lord's presence and have fellowship with Him? The only way is to pray. When we pray, we enter into fellowship with the Lord and become conscious of the fact that we are truly one spirit with Him and that He is actually one spirit with us. The more we pray, the more we experience being one with the Lord, and the more we enjoy His presence and have fellowship with Him. What a marvelous reward!

It is always difficult at first to have a proper prayer life. But if you practice this for a long period of time, it will get

easier and easier, for you will realize the rewards of praying.

We have seen that for a normal Christian walk we need to set our mind on things above, have the renewing of the new man, have the peace of Christ arbitrating in us, and allow the word of Christ to inhabit us. These four matters, however, all require prayer. To practice them and to experience them we need to pray. Prayer ushers us into the reality of these four things and keeps us in this reality.

WATCHING WITH THANKSGIVING

In charging us to persevere in prayer, Paul tells us to watch in it with thanksgiving (4:2). This indicates that if we are not thankful to God for anything, we must be lacking in prayer. All day long we need to thank God. We need to be those who continually offer thanks to Him. If we are constantly giving thanks to the Lord, do you think it will be possible for a brother to argue with his wife? Surely not! Arguments between husband and wife are a sign of prayerlessness. They argue because they are lacking in prayer. The sign of a praying person is thankfulness. If you are one who perseveres in prayer, you will always be thankful to the Lord. This giving of thanks to Him will preserve you in your life of prayer.

In 4:2 Paul does not say to persevere in prayer and to watch. He says, "Persevere in prayer, watching in it with thanksgiving." We watch in prayer by the giving of thanks. If we continually offer thanks to the Lord, the adversary will not be able to carry us off from our prayer life. Prayer is maintained by watching in it with thanksgiving.

GRACE AND WISDOM

In 4:6 Paul says, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one." If we are praying people, we shall utter thanks to the Lord, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, our speech will be with grace. Out of our mouth will flow thanks to God and grace to others. In this way we

shall know that we are praying people. However, if our speech is lacking in grace, we must be short of prayer. When we become aware of the lack of grace, we need to pray again and be charged with the divine electricity. Then our mouth will be filled with grace.

In 4:5 Paul says, "Walk in wisdom toward those who are without, redeeming the time." This is a result of persevering in prayer. If we pray without ceasing, offer thanks to God, and have speech filled with grace, we shall spontaneously become very wise and know how to redeem the time. In our daily living no time will be wasted. If we are filled with thanks to God and with grace toward others, we shall have the wisdom to walk in a way which glorifies God and builds up others. Then our time will be redeemed.

Concerning persevering in prayer, I wish to say once again that we need to be willing to make a deal with the Lord, even to make a vow to Him, that we shall be a praying people. If all the saints in all the churches make such a deal with the Lord, the recovery will be greatly enriched and uplifted. Furthermore, the saints will enjoy the Lord, His presence, and His instant and constant anointing. All day long, they will enjoy the smile of the Lord's face. As we persevere in prayer, the living Person of Christ becomes our experience and enjoyment.